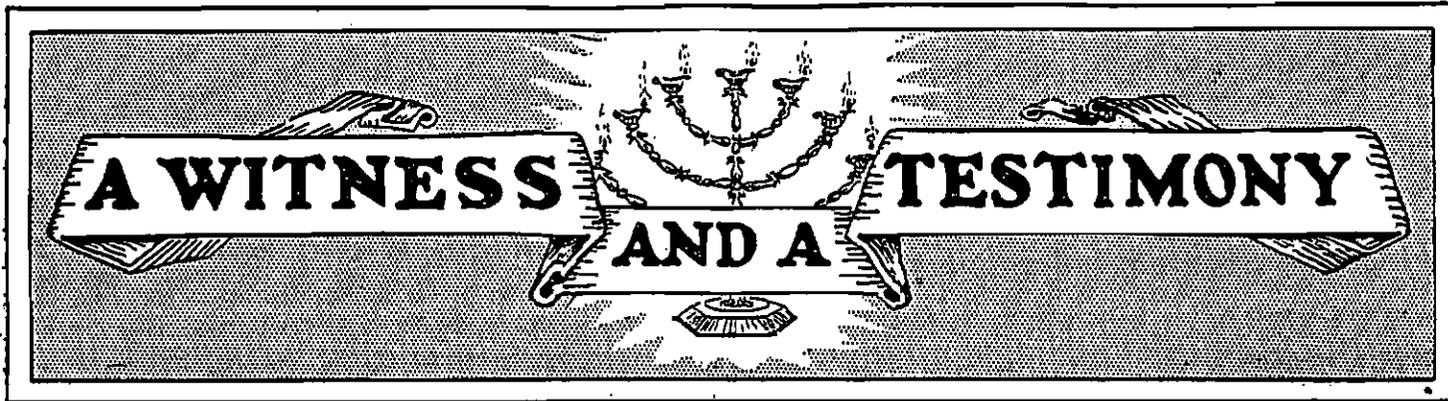


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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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1949



A bi-monthly ministry by which it is sought to lead the Lord's people into a greater fulness of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The paper is maintained by the offerings of those who value it.

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The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

IV. The Kingdom of God

WE have tried to impart to you something of our strong feeling that we are at a very critical point in the spiritual history of this universe. To anyone who is observing the movement of these times, very little argument or evidence is needed to be brought to them that the movement is a very ominous one. So far as the work of God on this earth is concerned, it is a very serious situation. In different forms, under different names, and in varying degrees of intensity, the whole system of evil—that which is opposed to God—is becoming greatly accentuated; and it is perfectly clear that the effort is greatly increasing to press God out of this world. The place of God, so far as these things are concerned, is to be lessened here; even in those countries which have been called Christian, paganism is gaining the upper hand rapidly, and the mention of God is greatly decreasing. That of course we can see in other parts of the world in very much more intensified forms. What was once an innate tendency, more or less passive, has now become positive and is increasingly so. All this is a tremendous moving together of the one kingdom behind all, to raise the final issue—who is going to be the reigning lord of this creation? I could follow that very much more closely, raising many questions such as that of religious liberty, the freedom of mankind, and so on. But you see the direction of things, and the evil activity, by whatever name it goes. The one upshot of it all is this question of world dominion. We can see

clearly that it is resolving itself, not into a number of issues but into one issue—which kingdom is going to prevail? That is a more pressing matter to-day than ever it was in the history of this world.

All the Lord's people on the earth to-day stand related to that great issue. So far as we are concerned, we are being brought by the Lord to face it, and it is in that connection that all that has been said and will yet be said in these meditations has its significance.

The Kingdom of God God's Domain

So we stand back from the details to try and focus this thing; and we note that we are set in no less a realm than that of the Divine purpose in creation. What is that? We can only speak of it in very broad terms. We say, then, that it is all gathered up into one phrase—the kingdom of God. We are so familiar with the phrase that I think we may have failed really to grasp what it means. Well, to begin with, the kingdom of God is *God's* domain; and the domain of God expresses Himself. It must be that. The principle running through the whole Bible is that. Wherever God will be, that sphere must be conformed to Himself, it must take its character from Him, it must express His own mind, it must express what He is Himself. The kingdom of God is God's domain which is expressive of Himself, which takes its character from Him, in which everything to the smallest detail speaks of God, shows what God is like.

The Blessedness of the Kingdom

It speaks of God, and therefore, taking its character from Him and becoming expressive of Him, it is filled with the blessedness of God; I know of no better word than that. You know there is a little fragment, which unfortunately is mistranslated in our version, "the gospel of the blessed God" (I Tim. i. 11), which is, literally, 'the gospel of the happy God.' You can retranslate what is called the Sermon on the Mount in that way, not, "Blessed are" these and those and those, but "Happy" The Sermon on the Mount is, as you know, the setting forth of the moral foundation of the Kingdom, and it all represents a very blessed state of things, so that, when God's kingdom is really established and spread over all, it is full of the blessedness of God. It is not just an imperious, despotic reign and rule of God the All-Terrible. The kingdom of God is a very blessed kingdom, and everybody in it is a very blessed, a very happy, person; and that lies back of the very existence of creation—the intention of God to extend His kingdom.

The Extension of the Kingdom on this Earth

This may, in part, be a speculation, because we do not know the condition of other planets and worlds. It may be that that very blessed state always exists there, seeing that God created all. It may be that this planet is the prodigal, that it has swung out of its spiritual orbit and lost the Kingdom and has to be restored. That is speculation because we do not know, therefore we have to use this phrase 'the extension of the Kingdom' with a certain amount of reservation; but I think we are not wrong in using it in this way—that God, so far as this world was concerned, was set upon extending His kingdom; that this world is the extension of the kingdom of God which we have just defined, and that God created it to be in some particular way a representation and expression of His kingdom; in its spiritual character, to give a manifestation of Himself. There is a great deal gathered into that, of course, which we cannot stay to speak about. The very fact that it was upon this earth that God became incarnate—with all that followed, God being in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself—and all the wonderful revelation that has been given to us as to what God is going to do on and by means of and toward this earth, does at least suggest that the kingdom of God has some particular and peculiar application to the world in which you and I live.

But our present purpose is to indicate the intention of God which has been made unmistakably clear by revelation—that the kingdom of God is the object and motive lying behind this creation; and the kingdom of God is that of which we have spoken—His domain, taking its character from Him, and filled therefore with the blessedness of God Himself.

But the kingdom of God is the sphere which is ruled by God—not under delegated government, but under His own personal government; and therefore infinite wisdom, infinite love and infinite power are the governing factors of His kingdom.

Infinite wisdom a governing factor in the kingdom of God; wisdom far, far outstripping all the accumulated wit and understanding and knowledge of man to fathom; yes, infinite wisdom. Infinite love, for God is love; and infinite power. Well, that lies behind. That is the kingdom of God in the meaning of this creation.

The Kingdom on Earth Entrusted and Betrayed

(a) The First Adam

But we move to that terrible scene when that kingdom, for its realisation, had to be entrusted to man. Seeing that it is a moral kingdom—not just a mechanical one, not something brought about by the sovereign determination of God irrespective of man's response—man had to co-operate by his own free will. We know how God committed the interests of His kingdom to man—in a sense, made man the custodian of His great purposes; and then the tragedy of the great betrayal, where man failed Him and betrayed His interests into the hands of a hostile one of whom we have spoken in our previous meditations, who had purposed in his heart to usurp God's place, and who, finding that that did not work, determined that he would have a counter kingdom to God's. Man betrayed the trust into the hands of that rival, so that, for the time being, the kingdom of God, so far as this creation is concerned, was suspended. But God did not abandon His intention because of the betrayal; so that, although the whole race which should have been the sphere of the realization of that Divine kingdom had been betrayed into those other hands, God moved in relation to His intention to take out of that race a people.

(b) Israel

We know the movement of God—first one man, then a family, a tribe, a nation; an elect nation in which all the meaning of the kingdom of God was to be illustrated in principle. It

is a very wonderful thing to recognise fully the significance of that elect nation, that chosen people, that nation out from the nations but not reckoned among the nations. Why did God choose Israel?—in order to give in the midst of the nations a demonstration, an illustration, of the kingdom of God; a temporal and partial, but nevertheless a very true, expression of the kingdom of God, where the government is theocratic, and where God, having things according to His own mind and being able to express Himself, shows what a blessed thing it is for man to live under that government; for there is that side of Israel's history which is a wonderful, even if imperfect, expression of what God means His whole domain to be. You hear of a land flowing with milk and honey and all that there was therein; you see that people really settled in the great days of their national history, with overflowing wealth, with prosperity, with everything abounding unto them in that Divinely-chosen land of unexampled productivity. It was indeed the centre of the earth, selected by God because it could, in a temporal way, set forth something of what things could be like if God were all. In the greatest days of Israel's history—the time of Solomon—the land was overflowing with wealth. Read those chapters telling of the gold and the silver and the precious stones and all the fulness that there was in that kingdom. It is a wonderful story. Why? Simply because God is seeking to show in temporal and imperfect terms, but in such a way as to be better than anything else known in the history of this world, what the whole domain of God will be when His kingdom is established; and so He chose a nation, in order that in that nation—as far as could be in conditions such as those which exist spiritually in this universe—there should be some faint reflection and indication of what the kingdom of God is, where God is all in all.

But that nation failed; they too betrayed God—and into the hands of the same enemy; for the cry of the prophets throughout was against the idolatry of Israel, and idolatry is, in principle and background, control by the evil powers in this universe. God was betrayed again; but He was not defeated, He did not give up. He was moving in relation to His original intention.

The Kingdom Secured Spiritually in the Last Adam

We go on through His movements to the greatest event of all—the advent of His Son. 'The final Adam to the . . . rescue came';

with Him and in Him the Kingdom. And He was not now dealing with temporal things, with earthly conditions. In the first place He was going to the root of the matter, to the primary causes, not the secondary, as we saw in our previous meditation; getting right back behind everything, in His Cross dealing with principalities and powers and the whole world system of evil rulership. We have yet to see more about that.

But from that point we find the new movement in relation to the Kingdom. It is not merely temporal and earthly; that is, it is not just a matter of time and of things here. It is that ultimate realm of the Kingdom. The new movement from that time is a spiritual one in relation to the Kingdom. The kingdom of God has come. Where has it come? It has come in Christ. And where is Christ? He has come into a Body, a spiritual Body, the Church which is His Body. That is the new elect, and yet the eternally elect, nation for this purpose; not an earthly thing, not a thing of time, not a thing now of temporal matters such as gold and silver and precious stones. Let the religious systems, whether called by Christian titles or not, be interested in what is ornate and luxurious on this earth, to make an impression; that is not the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. xiv. 17). This kingdom is spiritual, and it is now embodied in the Christ corporate; He Himself being Head of His Body the Church, the eternally elect Body. This is not some after-thought of God, something that has arisen because everything else has failed. God is not a God of dispensations, a God of then and now, but He is in the eternal Now. With Him a million years hence are as yesterday. He, from the beginning, foresaw, foreknew, foredetermined, predestinated. Those are the great words we come upon when we come to this particular vessel of His eternal purpose. So, in the fulness of time, Christ personally comes, and then constitutes for Himself a Body, and in that Body the kingdom of God from eternity is constituted.

God All in All

How? On what ground? That is God's first sphere of domain where He is all in all, where the devil has no place, nor man as such. That is the great meaning of the Cross at which we are trying to get, where no systems of men are the ruling things, where God is all in all. You must remember that that is the end toward which everything is moving. It is moving

through and by Christ in the first instance, and then through Christ through His Church, back to God complete. ". . . he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; . . . that God may be all in all" (I Cor. xv. 24-28).

That is the setting in which we are found. God is all in all, to begin with. Is He? Well, that is the whole battleground of our inner life. It was that point which we reached in our previous meditation. There we shall resume later on, if He wills. But it is the question, first of all, of God being all in all, the Lord being Lord, and there being no other lordship—the lordship of our will, our likes, our dislikes, our preferences, our prejudices, our selectivenesses, and all that belongs to us—that rises up and disputes the place and way and will of God. No other feature must have lordship, but He must be Lord of all. I do not expect literally to see Jesus Christ riding on a white horse with a name written on His garment, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." I believe that is a symbol of the great spiritual truth that He will ride in majesty as Lord of Lords; He will trample down every other lordship and bring it into subjection to Himself, and—metaphorically, but none the less very truly—ride forth triumphantly as King. That is the end, and that absolute supremacy which He has attained He will hand up to the Father, for the Father's ultimate satisfaction in accordance with the purpose which He purposed before the foundation of the world. The whole question of the kingdom of God is resolved in the very first instance into an inward matter in the case of every believer, as to whether He is Lord.

I said just now that that is the battleground in which we find ourselves continually; but, blessed be God, it is not all defeat! There is the mighty energy of the Spirit of God that makes it possible for us to cry—"when I fall, I shall arise" (Micah vii. 8). That is not the assertion of self-assurance and self-sufficiency, but of faith that knows there is a power that worketh in us. The mighty energy of the Spirit of God is working the powers of the Kingdom in us, the powers of a coming age.

The Kingdom of God Within and in the Midst

And those powers are firstly spiritual, to bring this about. You and I, in this terrible conflict between the two kingdoms which is focused in our very souls—you and I, frail, faulty, a thousand times failing and slipping and blundering and erring—are nevertheless being carried on by a power and an energy

that is not our own, that will bring us finally to the place of absolute ascendancy over the powers that are set against us. God is working that out in us; it is His kingdom. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, is within you. It is an inward matter; that is where it begins. And it is in the midst of you—which expresses the corporate setting of the Kingdom; in the midst of the Church, a people secured and constituted by God and in whom first of all His absolute lordship shall be established.

I must add a word about the other aspect—that the Church is a people in whom the blessedness of God is known. Well, there is a sense in which that is true, but not true enough of us yet. The pressure and the intensity of this great spiritual warfare does register upon us, it does take its toll. This persistent determination of the enemy to wear us out leaves its mark, and we are not too characterised by the blessedness of God's kingdom. But it does break out sometimes. We sing some of those songs of Zion together, we speak of the great day of Christ's soon appearing, we remind ourselves of all the wonders of His Cross—'Oh, the sweet wonders of that Cross'—and when we dwell upon these things the glory of His kingdom does well up; it shows itself from time to time. Perhaps that is one of the great blessednesses of Christian fellowship. We gather in meetings and in the Spirit, and the real nature of the Kingdom does come up and show itself. It is there, and more or less it is abidingly there, consciously there, all the time; but we are conscious too that we are up against things, we are in a grim fight. Yet in this kingdom we have to know more and more of the blessedness of God, the happiness of God. We must rebuke ourselves for what contradicts that and remind ourselves that, after all, we are a very happy people. "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord" (Ps. cxliv. 15).

The Church to Administer and Manifest the Kingdom

But then the matter does not end there. Israel were a chosen nation, not to be an end in themselves, but to display to all the nations what the kingdom of God is, and to administer that kingdom in the midst of the nations. There were times when other nations got the benefits of Israel. When they were not against Israel, when they were amenable or favourable, great blessings came to them because of Israel, and so it has been since then. I am not at all sure that we have not derived a great deal of blessing in this country because of the attitude

in past years toward that nation—even in their rejection. “I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse” (Gen. xii. 3); and that holds good. But in a very direct way, when Israel were according to God’s mind, in line with Him, people were blessed because of them. And the Church is not an end in itself. We find in “Revelation” the end—the city is in its place of administration, and it is the nations that are deriving the benefit. The light of the nations, the leaves for the health of the nations, the water for the life of the nations, issue from that city. The Church, then, is to be so constituted as to be God’s instrument of administration and manifestation of His kingdom.

The Practical Issue—Ascendancy over the Kingdom of Darkness

But while we are set in that as the ultimate, and all the practical questions and challenges and issues bound up with that have to be brought home to our hearts, the whole matter resolves itself for the time being into one of registering all that is meant by the kingdom of God, the mighty sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ, not now so much upon kings and rulers of this earth as upon those principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness, those spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies. That is where we are brought to, and if I were to gather into one statement what I believe to be the Divine intention in our present meditations it is this—to seek to bring us, as amongst that people, to the place where we count infinitely more in the spiritual realm than we now do, where we have to be reckoned with by the powers of evil back of this world system. It is there that value to God is decided in this dispensation.

Now you can reject all that we are saying and still be saved. In order to be saved, all that you need is to “believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts xvi. 31). With that you can go to heaven, you can be delivered from condemnation and from hell, without having any of this that we are talking about. Well, if that is all you want, you can have it. But I ask you this, are you as concerned to be useful to God as you are to be saved? That is another question. The matter of your value to God is decided here—what account are you to Him in the realm of the spiritual forces in this universe which are opposed to Him? How much account does the devil take of you? How much are you a menace to his kingdom? Not, how many ser-

vices and meetings are you taking, how many addresses are you giving, how much running about are you doing; not all those etceteras in Christian activity; but how much impact do you register upon that dark, evil kingdom? It is just there that your value to God is decided. Well, if the devil gives you a very bad time and has made you know you are a marked man, a marked woman, take comfort; it shows you are of some value to God. But we do not always remember that. We have terribly bad times under the hand of the devil and get under them, we think how terrible and wicked he is, we get occupied with that, and forget—perhaps it is a kind of humility—that we must mean something, after all. That is where things count with God in this dispensation. It is not how many structures you can put up nor how big an organisation you can create on this earth, it is not anything in the temporal realm at all. It is, in all, through all, by all, how much is counting against the kingdom which is opposed to the kingdom of God? That is the challenge which we must seriously face.

The Kingdom Present in Principle Now

The kingdom of God is something very much more vital than we have realised. Oh, what a pity that men have so systematized this thing as to rob it of its real spiritual value! Some tell us, for instance, that the Kingdom is for a coming age, that this is not the Kingdom age. That is not true. The kingdom of God is a present issue, the supreme issue of this whole creation; and it is concerning that that all the forces of darkness, under whatever name they may be working on this earth, are converging under one evil, spiritual government and overlord—to make it impossible for the kingdom of God to be established and extended in this creation. Well, Christian people know it. The big question in missionary magazines now is whether we can go on with our work in many places, whether we must withdraw, whether there is any prospect for extending in the future. Doors are closing. But what about God’s kingdom? Is He Lord? Is He going to be pushed out of His universe? Well, the picture that the Word of God gives at the end is not that, but just the opposite. That is the battle we are in. It is a spiritual one, after all. The Lord bring home to our hearts the seriousness of the challenge, and help us to see that now it is a personal matter—the kingdom of God is a personal matter.

T. A.-S.

The Lord in the Midst

"Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not fear evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; O Zion, let not thy hands be slack. The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. iii. 14-17).

I AM thinking particularly of that 17th verse, full of rich and precious promises. It is always a safe means of understanding and applying the promises of God if we remember that, in the first place, they relate to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He, as we know so well from the prophecies of Isaiah, is the true Israel, and all the promises of God find their best and final fulfilment in Him. That helps us because, on the one hand, we might sometimes doubt whether the promises were meant for us: but if they are true in Him they are meant for us if we are in Him; or, on the other hand, we are apt to apply our imaginations to the interpretation of these promises: but as we look at the Lord Jesus and see how they were fulfilled in His case we are helped to understand the spiritual meaning in them.

Salvation By Divine Working Within

"The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save." At first glance, we might say that that cannot refer to the Lord Jesus because He did not need saving. I think this promise is not concerned with salvation from sin. "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments." That matter is settled by the time this point is reached in the Lord's dealings with His people. While we may rejoice that He is mighty to save in the initial sense that we need saving from our sin and sins, we make a mistake if we think there is nothing else to be saved from. In the case of the Lord Jesus there was much from which He needed to be saved.

But the point is that salvation is by Divine working within. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save" (A.V.). Of course, His presence within is based on righteousness. He is there because sin is dealt with, so far as we are concerned, by the precious Blood. He is not there on any less

ground than that He finds that, as the righteous Lord, He can dwell there; but, being there, He is there to be mighty to save within us. In the case of the Lord Jesus, when He was a baby Joseph had to take precautions for His safety and to look after Him, but I think you will find without exception that, as soon as that phase had passed, all the Lord's deliverances were not by somebody helping Him from outside—not even God—but were from within. They were, in the first place, by reason of God's presence within. Two apparent exceptions to that are when they were going to hurl Him over the cliff at Nazareth, and when they took up stones to stone Him. In both of those cases, He just walked through them and went away. Even in such perilous situations He was not plucked away out of the midst, His enemies were not suddenly stricken with blindness. In a sense, God did nothing. It was the majesty of the Lord's presence, it was an inward power, that rebuked those that would attack Him. In every other case, I think you will find that God's answer to the need of His Son for deliverance was in effect to say, 'I am in the midst of you; therein lies your safety.'

(a) Deliverance from Satan

Think of His need of deliverance from Satan, when early in His public life He had to meet a concentration of diabolical assault in the wilderness. What did God do for Him there? In an outward sense, God did nothing. God did not feed Him, to answer the temptation to make the stones into bread. Every one of those temptations was met, and the Lord delivered, by virtue of an inward life. The Word of God dwelling within was His answer. Never think that the Lord beat Satan in an argument of words because He was clever and knew the right answer. He certainly applied the correct Scripture, but if you have the Spirit of Scripture in your heart, even if you cannot quote it you may triumph; it is the Spirit that matters. The Lord Jesus found, by the Word of God dwelling in Him, that Satan was defeated every time.

(b) Deliverance in Physical Realms

There there was deliverance in physical realms. You remember that by the well our Lord Jesus was weary, He was thirsty, He was hungry. When the multitude were hungry, He gave them to eat; when the Israelites were thirsty, God made water come out of the rock.

But the deliverances of the Lord Jesus were never God's miracles like that for Him. And yet when the disciples came back, they found that He was not weary; and, though the water was never drawn out of the well—as far as I can see, the Samaritan woman never gave Him to drink—He was not thirsty; and when they pressed Him to eat, He was not hungry; and His answer was, 'This is a spiritual matter; I have found, in doing the will of God, deliverance even from purely human and physical needs.' And I am not sure that we have not a great deal to learn about that. I would not for a moment suggest that physical weakness or sickness is necessarily the result of some spiritual disorder, but I feel that the first approach any of us should make, even to our physical needs, is to ensure that we are in the will of God, being confident that, for the fulfilment of His will, God has strength for us. It is an inward answer to an outward need.

(c) Deliverance from Discouragement

Discouragement? 'Well,' you say, 'Spirit-filled people are never discouraged.' But Elijah was Spirit-filled, and he knew discouragement. And so did the apostle Paul; more than once the Lord had to appear to him and say, 'Fear not, Paul.' We can go even beyond them, and speak of the Man Christ Jesus. While little is said in the Gospels of the emotions that went on in that holy breast, listen to the prophet's words concerning Him—"I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and vanity" (Isa. xlix. 4). Whether or not the Lord really thought that at any time, He could have thought it. He was in just such a position as we are in when we feel it. What is God's answer? To give Him some token to turn the discouraging circumstances into bright and rosy ones? No, God's answer is an inward one. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save." If you depend upon outward encouragement for deliverance from depression, you will not get very far. The Lord Jesus went right through, refusing to accept the evidences of discouragement, because of an inward renewal by the power of God.

(d) Deliverance from Death

So we could go on. I am sure we should all be surprised if we realised how many of the human emotions that we regard as just our frailty, and indeed almost as sinful, and of which we are ashamed—how many of those emotions passed through the breast of the

Lord, though maybe in purer forms. The point is that He was never overcome by them. Temptations always broke themselves upon Him, He never yielded. Even death itself could not overcome Him, and God's answer to death was not, mark you, a miracle from the outside. The disciples had expected, probably, that the Lord would be delivered miraculously out of the hands of wicked men; He was not. Not even when the scoffers suggested that He should come down from the Cross did God intervene. How easily God could have delivered! Legions of angels were waiting for the word; but nothing happened. He died—and yet in His case there was the mightiest triumph over death ever known. How? From within; God Almighty, by His eternal Spirit, quickened His Son and raised Him from the dead.

"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save," and Romans viii. 11 says that the same Spirit is in us for the same purpose—"If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Praise His Name! Then the promise so abundantly fulfilled in Jesus Christ is to us. Let us take note of how it happened. How many miracles there were in the life of the Lord Jesus, but never a miracle to help Him! Oh, we wish the Lord would do miracles to help us! And yet the greatest miracle of all is the power of God in a human life by the Holy Spirit—He Who never succumbed, never faltered, never failed, was never defeated, He is in you. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee . . ."

The Lord in the Midst Rejoicing

In the second place, He is there not only for salvation, but for rejoicing. Israel is to rejoice, Zion is to shout and be glad. But her rejoicing is only an echo and a reflection of the Lord's rejoicing. "The Lord . . . in the midst of thee . . . will rejoice over thee with joy." How true that was in the case of the Lord Jesus!—God rejoicing over Him with joy. There were three great occasions in His life when that was revealed and manifestly declared. In the first place, when He was born all heaven rejoiced. What songs, what praises, when that infant came into the world! not just because an infant was born, but because something had happened, in that this One had said, "Lo, I am come; . . . I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psa. xl. 7-8), and heaven was rejoicing over that spirit; that was what pleased God.

And then you remember that when He came to be baptized the heavens were opened and God said, "I am well pleased." It was not an easy thing for the Lord to be baptized. It is amazing how baptism is withstood—withstood by the devil, we say. But it was John the Baptist who tried to hinder the Lord from being baptized. John the Baptist was no weakling. I do not know what it must have needed to override him, but it was no easy thing. There was a tremendous strength about the Lord that refused to be put off. Sometimes it is our friends, not our enemies, who hinder us. John tried to hinder the Lord, and the Lord said, 'No; I choose to go this way of humbling, this way of the utter devotion of Myself to the will of God.' And a voice came from heaven—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii. 17)—God rejoicing with joy over His Son. The third occasion, in the Mount of Transfiguration, was in a sense a similar one, in that the Lord Who, on coming into the world chose to do the will of God, and at His baptism sealed that choice and devoted His life to that will, now had finished all that related to His human life so far as it was found in Himself. He was proved to be a perfect man, to have fulfilled the will of God in all things, and the glory of God shone out from His very person. Heaven was opened to Him. I believe that Jesus Christ might have stepped from that mountain straight into heaven, and He would have been well received there as far as He was concerned. He turned to Moses and Elijah who were there and said, 'No, there is something else to do; I am going right through with this matter of doing the will of God, not merely for Myself but for all who shall be redeemed; The Cross is My choice, not the glory at the moment.' Because of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the Cross (Heb. xii. 2), and a voice came from the excellent glory, "My Son, in whom I am well pleased." What a Son! God could not keep silent. "He will rejoice over thee with joy."

You notice, then, the special occasions when God was pleased with His dear Son. Of course, He was pleased all the time, all the time God rejoiced over Him; but it was not in the great moments of His ministry when He held the multitudes enthralled with His words, when men marvelled at the grace which came out of His lips; it was not in those great triumphs of His power when the sick were healed, the lepers cleansed and the dead raised. Of course, God was pleased with Him then. But the supreme moments were when in His

heart was found the profound determination to love and to do the will of God. How different are our standards! We feel if we were great preachers, if we could do mighty things, how glad God would be! There are baptisms, public and private, into which we go; there are mountains, not only of transfiguration but of choice, to which we are brought; and let us believe that, as in the case of God's dear Son so in our case, when we choose the will of God even though it mean the Cross, when we reject the glory that we are entitled to in favour of humiliation and shame on behalf of others for God's sake, the same thing is true—"He will rejoice over thee with joy." The Lord gets more joy out of your life than you think if you have a heart like that. The Lord gets more joy out of some of His suffering saints than out of some of the successful ones.

The Lord Silent in His Love

(a) The Silence of Satisfaction

And then the last—"he will be silent in his love" (R.V.M. for "he will rest in his love"). That silence I think means three things. In the first place and chiefly, it means the silence of satisfaction, and that is why it is a true translation to say "he will rest in his love." The silence of satisfaction, the silence of the Sabbath day. When God had His whole creation before Him according to His own mind in a way which could bring satisfaction in the deepest sense to His heart, He rested on the seventh day—not the rest of weariness but the rest of absolute satisfaction. Alas, as far as Adam was concerned, how short-lived was that joy! How soon was the silence broken! But now the last Adam has come, and He provides for the Father that which could not be improved upon—that which is perfect, not merely in God's mind to satisfy His idea of what is good, but also in His heart to fill Him with deepest, deepest satisfaction (can we say it of God?) too deep even for words. He is silent in His love.

'Well,' you say, 'I can believe that about the Lord Jesus. It is very wonderful.' But we are seeking to see that Zeph. iii. 17 applies to us too. The Lord in the midst of *thee* is able to save; He will rejoice, not only over His Son, He will rejoice over *thee* with joy; and in Christ, as we are found truly abiding in Him, it is also said concerning *us* "He will be silent in his love"—the rest of satisfaction.

(b) The Rest of Love

Then it means the rest of love. There is no

other rest. You get out of love with anybody, out of love with the Lord, out of an atmosphere and attitude of love, and you will be a restless person always, no matter how right you are. It does not matter what may be said on your side or against the other side; you get out of love and you get out of rest. You never find rest till you get back into a spirit of love. But how wonderful to think that He should find His rest in loving us!

(c) The Silence of Confidence

It is the silence also of confidence. The Lord Jesus said on one occasion when a voice came from heaven, "This voice hath not come for my sake, but for your sakes" (John xii. 30). He did not need God to be saying all the time, 'That is right, I am pleased with You.' When heaven seemed silent, the Lord Jesus knew that that silence was the silence of confidence. God was trusting Him. To what extent that confidence was tested, we can only barely imagine. When it came to the awful moments of the Cross His experience must have been like that of the psalmist when he cried "Be not thou silent unto me" (Psa. xxviii. 1). God *was* silent—silent because He had deep confidence that His Son could be trusted. When you have a little boy who is trying to please you, you encourage him, pat him on the head and say, 'That is very good, thank you very much.' When the boy grows up, he gets less and less patting on the head, and less of those little words of encouragement; yet the father's heart is finding much deeper satisfaction. Does that explain the Lord's dealings with us? We want to be treated as little children all our lives, and to have the Lord patting us on the back all the time; but He is silent, and the devil says, 'He is silent because He is against

you, because He is displeased with you.' God's Word says that He will be silent in His love.

Those of Whom These Things Are True

Just in closing, may I say that I feel the verses that follow are particularly helpful, because they say of whom these wonderful things are true. They are true of the Lord Jesus, but they are true of you and me—not because we are perfect; on the contrary, this promise was given to a people of whom it is said, "I will make them a praise and a name, whose shame hath been in all the earth" (Zeph. iii. 19). Is that what you feel like? We do sometimes, don't we? 'A shame in all the earth.' In Israel's case it was their own fault. It may be so in ours, or it may not; but even if it is our fault, even if it is true that we have been seen by all in our failure, in our poverty, in our meanness; if our shame is in all the earth; even if we absolutely deserve it and everything that is said about us is true; this promise is still true for us. The devil will always try to rob us of the promises of God. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord and search our hearts, but do not let us be robbed of the promises. Even if your shame is in all the earth, this is what the Lord says about you—"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, he will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." Oh, that the Church of God realised that! That is our supreme vocation—to provide satisfaction for the heart of God, to be those here on this earth who so live in fellowship with Christ that God may look down from heaven and find His heart's joy in beholding them and be silent in His love. When He is silent, let us trust Him and never doubt He is indeed in the midst.

H. F.

Prophetic Ministry

V. Why the Prophet's Message is Not Apprehended

Reading: Acts xiii. 27, 15; 2 Cor. iii. 14-18; Isa. liii. 1.

WE are taking this clause—"The voices of the prophets"—and seeking to get behind the statement of which it is a part, in order to recognise the spiritual principles which govern this tremendous issue. We have pointed out that the prophets were read, as it says here, every Sabbath. It was the fixed custom to read the law and the prophets every Sabbath, and I might also point out that it was not just at one particular time in the day that this was done, but all day through the Sabbath the law

and the prophets were being read in the synagogue. And yet it says that the very rulers themselves, as well as the dwellers in Jerusalem who attended the temple, heard that reading of the prophets so continuously, but never heard the voices of the prophets. Because they failed to hear that inner something which was more than just the audible reading of what the prophets had said, they lost everything that was intended for them, as this thirteenth chapter of Acts shows. The Apostle left them and turned to the Gentiles, who had an ear ready to hear. That is a matter of no

small consequence and seriousness, and therefore it does become very necessary for us to seek to hear the voices of the prophets, really to know what the prophets were saying.

“ . . . because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets.” Why did they not know? Why did they not hear?” There is one basic answer to that enquiry which is going to occupy us just now, and which brings us down to foundations, really to the root of things.

The Offence of the Cross **(a) A Suffering Messiah**

The answer to that enquiry is this—because they were not willing to accept the Cross. That is what went to the root of the whole matter. Firstly, they were not willing to admit of a suffering Messiah. They had their own minds well made up as to what kind of Messiah their Messiah would be and as to what He would do and as to the results of His advent, and anything that ran counter to that fixed mentality was not only not accepted, it was an offence. They could not admit into the realm of their contemplation that their coming Messiah would be a suffering Messiah. The prophets were always speaking about the suffering Messiah. Isaiah, at that point in his prophecies which we know as chapter liii, presents the classic on the suffering Messiah, and yet he opens by saying—“ Who hath believed our message? ” I think we need not stay to gather further evidence that that was their attitude. Right the way through it was just that. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, was dealing with that very thing. Towards the end of the letter he spoke about the offence of the Cross, and he set that over against the Judaisers, who were dogging his steps everywhere and seeking to prejudice his ministry, and at whose hands he was suffering. He bore branded on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Why? Because of his message of the Cross. He said, ‘ If I were willing to drop that, I could escape all this suffering; it is the offence of the Cross which is the cause of all the trouble.’ And all the way through we see the Jews’ unwillingness to admit of a suffering Messiah.

(b) The Way of Self-Emptying

But then it went further than that. It became not only a national issue but a personal one. They would not accept the principle of the Cross in themselves; and so you find that representative individuals of the nation, who came to the Lord Jesus from time to time, were presented with the offence of the Cross,

and off they went, not prepared to accept it. Nicodemus was very interested in the Kingdom which the Messiah was going to set up, which he was expecting and anticipating, but it became a personal matter of the Cross. Before the Lord was through with him, He had brought the serpent lifted up in the wilderness into the full view of Nicodemus. That was an offence. Another man, who has become known to us as the rich young ruler, went away very sorrowful because of the offence of the Cross. It was no use for the Lord at that time, before the Cross had actually taken place, to speak in precise terms about it to other than His disciples, but He applied the principle, which is the same thing. He applied the principle to this young man. ‘ If, as you say, you are interested in the Kingdom and in eternal life, this is the way—the way of emptying, utter self-emptying.’ “ He went away sorrowful; for he was one that had great possessions ” (Matt. xix. 22). The Lord said, “ How hardly (with what difficulty) shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! ” (Luke xviii. 24). The offence of the Cross finds them out.

Now here, with the Jews as a whole, they were making the kingdom of God an earthly thing on the principles of this world—and do not let us blame them without blaming ourselves. This is our battle right up to date. It is a matter that finds us all out at heart. Oh, you may not be expecting that through your preaching of Christ a temporal kingdom will be set up and you will get a literal crown to wear and a throne to sit upon—that may not be your outlook or mentality; but are we not, almost every day of our lives, in trouble because the Lord hides from us everything that He is doing and starves our souls of their ambition to see things, to have things? Is that not the basis of a great deal of our trouble? We want to see, we want to have, we want the proofs and the evidences. We do really, after all, want a kingdom that can be appraised by our senses of sight and hearing and feeling, a palpable kingdom, the answer in tangible form to all our efforts and labours; and the opposite of that is a tremendous strain upon faith and sometimes brings us to a very serious crisis. Why does not the Lord do this and that, which we think He ought to do? It is simply this soul-craving to have proof and demonstration; and this is why, if there is anything built up in Christian work which is obvious, big, impressive, where there is a great thing being organised and a great movement on foot and all is in the realm of something that can

be seen, crowds of Christians flock after it; or if there are manifestations, things that seem to be clear proofs, the crowds will be found there. The enemy can carry away multitudes by imitation works of the Holy Ghost in the realm of demonstrations and proofs. We are so impressionable, we must possess, and that is exactly the same principle as governed the rulers. They were not prepared for the principle of the Cross to be applied in this way—that the Cross means utter self-emptying, being brought to an end of everything but the Lord Himself.

The Prophets' Theme—Knowing the Lord

Now you see that does bring us to the matter of the voices of the prophets. What was the one thing the prophets were always talking about? It was about knowing the Lord. The thing that was lacking amongst the Lord's people in the days of the prophets was the knowledge of the Lord. There were plenty of people who were prepared to have the Lord for what He could do for them, but as for the Lord Himself . . . ah, that was another matter. What is the Lord after with you and with me? Is He first of all wanting us to do things? The idea of what is of God to-day is chiefly associated with the things which are being done for Him, the work we are engaged in, and so on—that is, with what is objective and outward. But the Lord is not first of all concerned about how much we do. He is far more concerned that, whether we do little or much, every bit of it should come out of a knowledge of Himself. Any amount can be done for the Lord in Christian work and activities, just as you do other work, but it may not proceed from your own deep knowledge of God. The Lord is concerned above all else that we should know Him. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding, and knoweth me" (Jer. ix. 23-24). May not that explain the very principle of the Cross that is being applied to us? The Lord does not satisfy and gratify; along many lines He seems to be saying again and again No, to quite a lot that we crave for; and, being denied, we often come to the point where we would give up everything and allow the biggest questions as to our relationship with the Lord. And yet all the time, by His denials and withholdings or delays, what He is after is to deepen our knowledge of Himself. What matters with the Lord before anything and everything else is

not that we should be in any place doing a lot of Christian work (do not let that stop you serving the Lord) but that we should be there as one who knows the Lord. Our opportunities for serving Him will spring out of our knowledge of Him; He will see to that. The Lord the Spirit is arranging His own work. He knows where need exists, and when He sees someone who can meet that need He can make the contact.

Knowledge of the Lord Basic to all Usefulness

That is a principle in the New Testament—in the life of the Lord Jesus Himself. That meeting between Christ and the woman of Samaria was not just a casual happening, a pretty story. No, you have principles. The Holy Ghost wrote those narratives, and involved principles in every incident. Here is One Who has water to give that the world knows not of, and here is a thirsty woman. God sees to it that the one in need is brought into touch with the One Who has the supply. That is a law. If you have not got the supply, it is very largely empty work that is done for the Lord; and the principle of the Cross works out along many lines, in many ways, testing, trying, emptying us, in order to bring us to the place where we know the Lord, and where our joy in the Lord and our enthusiasm and our Christian life is not just the result of a momentum produced by doing lots of things, running about from meeting to meeting, giving addresses, being occupied on the crest of a wave of engagements in Christian work. The Lord does not want it to be like that. I am not saying that you will never be on the crest of a wave, that you will never have your hands full; but the Lord's way of making us useful servants is to deal with us in such a way as to make us know Him, so that, whether occupied in Christian work in an outward way or not, we are there with a knowledge of the Lord. What is so necessary for us is an increasing measure of the preciousness of the Lord to our own hearts, so that, whether we are able to do anything or not, He is very precious to us. That is what He wants.

That is very simple, but it is basic to everything. You are there in some place where you cannot be always talking about the Lord, where you can do very little; but if the Lord is precious to you, that is service to Him, and in you He has available a vessel for anything more that He wants. I am sure the Lord will never bring us out and entrust us with responsibilities until He is very precious to us where we are, though many other things that we

would like are being denied and withheld from us. It is the principle of the Cross.

Nicodemus comes with all his fulness. He is a man with a great fulness—a ruler of the Jews, in high standing, in a place of influence, and much more. He represents a fulness of a religious kind. Then the Lord virtually says to him, ‘You have to let it all go and start all over again like a newborn babe; you are concerned about the kingdom of heaven, but you cannot bring any of that into the Kingdom.’ To the rich young ruler He says, in effect, ‘You cannot bring your riches in here.’ You may have a lot of natural wealth—intellectual, financial, influential, positional, but that does not give you any standing in the kingdom of heaven at all. The wealthiest, the fullest, the biggest here in this world has no more of the glance of the Lord in their direction than the poorest and the weakest. All are brought down here—you must be born again, you must start from zero in this matter of the kingdom of heaven. The Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, it is a matter of spiritual measure; and you start spiritual measure by being born of the Spirit. It is utterly spiritual from the very first breath, something that was not before, something new. Spiritual measure is just knowing the Lord—that is all. Our standing in the kingdom of heaven is simply a matter of knowing the Lord, and if we are going to gain higher place it is going to be, not by preferences at all, but by the increase of our spiritual measure. People who count in heaven are spiritual people, and what counts is the degree of their spirituality, and spirituality is knowing the Lord. We may take it that the Lord applies Himself utterly to that matter of bringing us to know *Him*. That is the thing that really does count.

The Cross Basic to all Knowledge of the Lord

They could not hear the voices of the prophets because the prophets were talking about a suffering Messiah, and there was something inside the people which had closed the door; they were predisposed against anything like that, and so they could not hear. Even the disciples of the Lord Jesus were in that position. When He began to refer to His Cross they said, ‘Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee’ (Matt. xvi. 22). A suffering Messiah?—oh no! But they did come to the place where the Cross had its very deep application, where it meant an end of everything for them. The Lord precipitated that whole question, and you see them after His crucifixion—they have lost their Messianic

Kingdom, they have lost everything, they are stripped and emptied; and then what happened? They began then to know, just began to know, and their knowledge grew and grew; but it was of another order entirely. So you find in the rest of the New Testament that in their own history and in their instruction of others two things go together like the negative and the positive of an electrical circuit—there can be no current without both. The negative is the application of the principle of the Cross which says No, No, No!—an end—death to yourself, death to the world, death to all your own natural life. But the positive is the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, mightily present but always hand in hand with the Cross. With those two acting always together, the negative and the positive, the Cross and heavenly purpose and heavenly power and effectiveness, you find that there is movement on to an ever-growing knowledge of the Lord.

We cannot have the knowledge of the Lord—the most important thing in the mind of God where we are concerned—except on the ground of the continuous application of the Cross, and that will go right on to the end. Do not imagine that there will come a day when you have done with the Cross, when the principle of the Cross will no longer be necessary and when you have graduated from the school where the Cross is the instrument of the Lord. It never will be! More and more you will come to recognise the necessity for that Cross. If you are going on into greater fulness of knowledge and therefore greater fulness of usefulness to the Lord, you must take it as settled that that principle of the Cross is going to be applied more and more deeply as you go on. Oh, God write that in our hearts! for surely we all know the need of the Cross; and those who have known most about it are conscious most of its need still. We have seen the terrible tragedy of people who knew the message of the Cross in fulness, and who after many years have been a positive contradiction to that very message—marked by self-assertiveness, self-importance, impatience, irritability, other people being unable to live with them. Are you one of those habitually irritable people? I do not mean one of those persons who sometimes is overtaken in a fault. The Lord is patient with the upsets that come here and there along the way, but are we habitually irritable, short-tempered, difficult to live with? That is a denial of the Cross, and that has wrecked the life and work of many a missionary. That is a simple application, but it applies in so many ways.

The Cross will be applied right on to the end, and, altogether apart from our faults and the things in our constitution and nature which have to be dealt with, in this coming to know the Lord for still greater usefulness we go from death to death on that side of things. We think of some known to us. We marvel at the way the Lord has been able to use them, the large place into which He has put them, what riches He has given them; but of late they have been plunged into depths of death never known before. It is evidently unto something more, something greater still. It is like that; the knowledge of the Lord requires it in an ever-growing way.

Knowledge and Usefulness Safeguarded by the Cross

But, moreover, there is no safe place apart from the constant application of the principle of the Cross. Safety absolutely demands it. Nothing is safe in our hands. The more the Lord blesses, the more peril there is. The greatest peril comes when the Lord begins to use us. You say, 'That does not say very much for our sanctification.' It certainly does not say very much for eradication. Well, here is Paul. Did that man know anything about the Cross? Would you say he was a crucified man? Well, if he was not, who was? Did he know the Lord? And with all that he knew of the Cross and the Lord, did he know that he needed the Cross in principle to be applied right on to the end? He will definitely place it on record—" . . . that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch " (2 Cor. xii. 7). And mark you, he is saying that because of the great revelation that had been given him. He was caught up into heaven. It is a most perilous thing to be entrusted with Divine riches, so far as our flesh is concerned. The only safe place is where the Cross is still at work touching upon all that is ourselves, our independence of action.

Take all these apostles—take Peter, a man who would act so independently, who liked to do things on his own and do what he wanted to do. We find it cropping up constantly. He is the man who acts without stopping to ask anybody. We have no hint that he ever got into fellowship with his brother disciples and said, 'I am thinking of doing so and so; I would very much like you to pray with me about it, and to tell me what you think; I have no intention of going on unless there is one mind among us.' Peter never did that

sort of thing. He got an idea, and off he went. The Lord summed him up very well when He said, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst 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" (John xxi. 18). That was Peter before the Cross was inwrought in him. But see him afterwards. Why, in those early chapters of Acts, do we read "Peter and John," "Peter and John," "Peter and John"? Well, they are moving together now, there is relatedness. Is it an acknowledgment that Peter felt his need of co-operation and fellowship, that he had seen the perils and disasters into which independent action led him even when his intentions and motives were of the best?—These are just glimpses of how the Cross touches us in our impulsive, independent nature, our self-will, our self-strength. The Cross has to deal with all that to make things safe for God, and to keep us moving in the way of increasing knowledge of the Lord which, as we have said, lies behind all our value to the Lord, all our usefulness, all our service.

The Cross Opens the Way to Full Knowledge of the Lord

The Cross is the only way to spiritual knowledge. Important as study of the Word of God may be in its own realm as laying a foundation for the Holy Spirit to work upon, you never come to a knowledge of the Lord simply by studying the Bible. The Holy Spirit may use what you know of the Bible to teach you much, to explain your experiences, to enable you to understand what the Lord is doing, but you never get this kind of spiritual knowledge merely by study and by teaching.

You must be prepared to let the Cross be applied to your life so that you are broken and emptied and fairly ground to powder, bringing you to the place where, if the Lord does not do something, you are finished. If that is the way you are prepared for, you will get to know the Lord. That is the only way. It cannot be by addresses or lectures. They have their value, but you do not know the Lord spiritually along those lines.

The full knowledge of the Lord is reserved to us who live in this dispensation, because the latter is governed by the Cross. Peter himself had something to say about this:—

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you: searching what time or what manner of time

the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into" (I Pet. i. 10-12).

There you have two orders—prophets and angels—who did not know certain things which are revealed to us. The prophets knew a lot, but they were searching diligently to know something they could not discover. ‘What does this mean?’ they must have asked themselves; ‘the Spirit of God is making us say these things, but what do they mean?’ They sought diligently to know that which was reserved for us. Why could they not know? Because full knowledge is based upon the Cross, and the Cross had not taken place then. And angels, too, desire to look into these things. Can it be true? We thought angels knew everything! Surely angels have far more knowledge and intelligence than we have about these things? They do not know. “Which things angels desire to look into.” Why do they not know? Angels have had no need of the Cross; the Cross has no meaning for them personally. It is on the basis of the Cross that full knowledge is entered into. Does that need any further argument?

The Cross Secures Positive, not only Negative, Results

Oh, then, this is it. The Holy Spirit, in order both to bring us to the full knowledge of the Lord and by means of that growing knowledge to make us useful to the Lord, must constantly work by means of the Cross in principle; and my closing word is this. The work is not all negative; the Lord works on a positive basis. You may think that the Lord is always saying No, that He is always against you, that the Cross is suppressive; but no, it is a positive instrument in the hands of the Spirit of God. God is working on a positive line, and the fact is that if ever the Holy Spirit brings us into a new knowing of the meaning of the Cross He is after something more. That is the law of the Spirit of life. You must remember that the Lord Jesus, in His resurrection, was not left just where He was before. Before He died He was on this earth, and then He died; and the full statement is “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working

of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all” (Eph. i. 19-21). The resurrection carries Him through to the “far above all,” and the principle of resurrection is always that of rebound—we may go down very deep, more deeply than ever we have known before, but the Spirit of God is intending that that shall issue in our being higher than ever before. So do not be afraid when you are feeling very empty, very finished, very much at the end. Ask the Lord that if this is truly the working of His Cross it shall be successful in what He intends where you are concerned; and if it is successful, you will be on higher ground afterward than ever you have been before.

The Need for a Definite Transaction with the Lord

We have said from time to time that the Cross does involve a crisis. For some this may be an overwhelming experience, the biggest thing that has happened in your life, even bigger than your conversion. It was so for some of us as we moved from the apprehension of the substitutionary aspect of the Cross, where we saw only what Christ had done *for* us, to the apprehension of our union with Christ in death, burial and resurrection. Whether or not you have a big crisis which divides your life in two, you must have a point of transaction with the Lord where you recognise that the Cross is in principle an utter, all-inclusive reality that, sooner or later, is going to run to earth the last vestige of that self-life which is the ground of Satan’s power. It is best to have this understanding at some point—‘I rejoice in the fact of Thy death for me, and I am saved on the ground of that death and my faith in it. But I died in Thee—that was Thy thought about me as a son of Adam. I could not bear to have all that that means brought to me at once, but I recognise that it has to be worked out as grace enables, and that sooner or later I shall have to come to an utter end; I commit myself to all Thou dost mean by the Cross.’ A transaction of that kind is necessary. Do not begin to kick when the Lord begins to work it out. He takes you at your word, but He is doing it with the definite object in view of getting you to a higher and fuller knowledge of Himself. Out of that growing knowledge of Him, the growing preciousness of the Lord, all real service will issue. It is not what we *do*, but what we *have* that is the secret of service.

T. A-S.

Christ and His Bride

“Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. v. 25-27).

THE Father appointed all things for His Son. Those ‘all things’ were to be the joint inheritance of His Son and His Son’s bride, the Church. That comes out very clearly in the New Testament. That bride was in the race of mankind, created as we are told in the book of Genesis. That bride would have to be of a certain order, a certain character, a certain kind, to be suitable to that Son. She would have to be a very special bride, she would have to be made for Him most suitable.

Then we have the story of Adam and Eve, and we know what happened through their surrender to Satan. Something spiritual happened in them, a change took place in their very nature. God had made them, firstly, for union with Himself; then for communion with Himself; and then for likeness to Himself; and in dependence upon Himself; leading to the last thing, absolute and implicit faith in Him. Those are the five things which characterise the Church according to God’s mind—(1) union with God, vital union, the union of one life; (2) communion with God, intercourse, fellowship, oneness of mind; (3) likeness to God, in His own image and after His likeness, taking character from Him, He giving His character and His nature to the Church; then (4) dependence upon Him so complete that there is no life apart from Him. (It is one of the great tests of marriage union—and I should say, taking it from a man’s standpoint, a most difficult one—for a wife to be absolutely dependent upon a man for every penny. There is a revolt against that in our times; but God meant it to be like that with His Church—just absolute dependence, having nothing apart from Him, drawing everything from Him.) And that means (5) perfect faith in Him. Those five things must characterise the bride of Christ.

Now the thing that happened when Satan carried the day with those two changed all that. It broke the union; it brought an end to the communion; it marred the likeness and made impossible its full expression; independence came in—for theirs was an independent act: Satan had tempted them to act on their own, without any relationship to God at all—

and that all meant that faith in God was destroyed. It was something that happened in the nature. It was not just an act, but something that entered into their very nature; and so that is how we find the race.

Now the Lord lays His hand upon one and another of those who are to form that bride. He brings them to the place where they have to make this decision and take this position—‘I die to all that which happened long, long ago; I die to broken union, to interrupted communion, to spoiled likeness, to all independence and unbelief. I repudiate it, I put it all away; I say that belongs to a creation which I hate, and I want that to be done with, dead and buried. In Christ union is restored, communion begins again, the likeness, conformity to the Son, is taken up by the Holy Spirit; I am from this time utterly and wholly dependent upon the Lord, not to live unto myself but henceforth “unto him who for their sakes died and rose again” (II Cor. v. 15), and henceforth my faith is in Him.’

“Christ loved the church,” and He gave Himself, for one thing, to purchase her; for the other thing, to effect that death of herself, on her behalf. We cannot kill ourselves, but the Lord Jesus has done it for us. He has died to all that other condition for us, and has risen to all this thought of God for us. So that in His death we died to all that happened in Eden, and in His resurrection we rise to all that God ever intended that bride to be. “Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it . . . that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.”

That brings us to this further stage, that we are together as the Church, as the bride, on resurrection ground, and ours is no longer an independent life, even as Christians. We are dependent upon one another in Christ, because Christ has committed Himself to the Church, and we come into a greater fulness of Christ in a related way with one another than we should if we were just isolated individuals; we get a greater fulness of Christ in our fellowship together. So we need the Church, because Christ comes to us in the Church, and this dependence upon the Lord is shown by our spiritual dependence upon one another, upon fellowship, upon the communion of the people of God. In Christ we are one, providing Him with what the Father ever intended Him to have—a glorious Church.

For Boys & Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XIII)

"God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." (1 John v. 11, 12.)

IN our last story we were speaking about the eggs of the bird called the Emperor Penguin. I think you will be interested to know a little more about the habits of this bird and how she cares for her eggs.

I expect most of you have seen either a live penguin or a picture of one, but probably this was the more common variety of penguin, a little fellow with a blue-black coat and a white shirt-front, whose average weight is about 16 pounds. But the Emperor is a great, dignified person with long curved beak and bright orange headwear, and weighs about 6½ stones—as much as a healthy boy of about 13 years old. She does not sit upon her eggs, as most other birds do. She can care for only one egg at a time, and this she 'nurses,' resting the egg upon her feet and pressing it closely to a patch of bare skin in the lower part of her body. You will remember that I told you the eggs are laid in mid-winter, in the coldest and bleakest conditions known anywhere on earth, and it is not surprising that many of the eggs or the young chicks perish. Not more than about one egg out of every four laid produces a chick that comes to full growth. And because so many parents lose their eggs, they are always eagerly looking around to try and steal one from another bird; and so a continual campaign goes on throughout the colony where they live. Even the most careful parent must go down to the water's edge from time to time to search for food, and in doing so she has to leave her egg unattended. The moment she moves, a dozen other penguins near by are ready to pounce on the egg and seize it for themselves, and, when the real parent returns, the egg has gone—either broken in the fight or captured by another owner. Most of the parent birds have to be content in the end to have no egg and no chick. But many of them try to get over the disappointment in a curious way—they nurse a lump of ice instead, shaped roughly like a proper egg and about the same size! Our explorers saw one bird drop an ice egg, which was immediately seized by another bird but forsaken later on when a real egg became available. It looks therefore as if the birds know the difference between a real egg

and a false one.

And so in that desolate spot the fight for existence goes on, and the parent birds hopefully try to hatch chicks out of lumps of ice. What a pitiful story it is! Expending labour and love wholly in vain! You may laugh at the foolishness of it—but be quite sure that you are not doing the same thing!

You know, of course, what is the all-important difference between the true egg and the ice egg. The ice egg may look very much like a real one on the outside. The penguin may treat it just like a real one; she may think or pretend that she is doing some good by nursing it; but nothing that she or anyone else can do will ever alter the fact that it is only a lump of dead ice, and a living chick cannot come out of that. But how different is the real egg! In it is life, and, if properly cared for, that life will grow and develop, and in due course be seen as a living chick which, all being well, will become a full-grown Emperor. *It is the presence of life that makes all the difference.*

Now this matter of life is of tremendous importance in the things of God. It is a great mistake to think that everybody walking about in the world to-day is 'alive.' They are 'alive' to us, but not necessarily to God. The first people whom God created, Adam and Eve, were 'alive' to Him; He could walk with them and talk with them (Gen. iii. 8), and take delight in them (Gen. i. 28, 31). But when they sinned (as you can read in Gen. iii) they 'died' to God—that is, although their bodies did not immediately become dead in the sense in which we understand that word, a great separation in spirit came between themselves and God, and man became a 'fallen,' sinful, changed being in whom there remained no good thing. This does not mean that God ceased to love and to care for man, but it does mean that He could now receive nothing from man which could be acceptable to Him. And everyone since born of Adam's race has been born "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1), and no matter what anyone may do and however hard he may try, he is 'dead' to God and that is the end of the matter. He is like an ice egg, that can never produce anything. There is nothing possible for God under those conditions.

But thank God there is a way of hope. There was one Person—Jesus Christ—born into

this world Who, though very much like all others on the outside, was nevertheless quite different inwardly. It soon became evident that there was a nature and a power in Him that was not in any other person on earth. His touch, His words, His life, accomplished things which no others could do. He explained the difference in this way—"Ye have not life in yourselves" (John vi. 53); "I am the resurrection and the life" (John xi. 25); "I am the Living one" (Rev. i. 18); "the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John vi. 63). "In him was life" (John i. 4)—not simply the life of man but the life of God Himself. This is what the Bible calls 'eternal life.' *In the midst of a world full of people, He was the only One Who was really alive!* The secret was that He was the sinless Son of God, Who had come forth from God in order to make a way whereby other people, who were 'dead' to God, might be enabled to share His life and thus become 'alive' to God. The one way to this was by the offering up of that holy life of His upon the Cross as a sacrifice for the sins of men. Then in His resurrection He took up that life again, and, having gone back to heaven, He sent forth the Holy Spirit to bring that life into men who saw their need and were ready to receive Him. Ever since then, countless multitudes of 'dead' people have been "born again" by receiving into their hearts the Spirit of the Living One Himself, and thus His words have been fulfilled, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John x. 10). These "born again" ones are no longer like ice eggs but like real ones—they now have the life of God within them, and if that life is allowed to have its way and to develop, there will come forth something which bears the very features of Jesus Christ Himself, and God will have that in which He can rejoice.

I want to ask you very seriously—are you like an ice egg or a real egg? Here is the way of knowing—"He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (I John v. 12).

But we must go further. You will see that, with God, life is not just a 'thing'—it is a Person: it is His Son. No one can have life without having the Son. And if what we do for God is to have any value in His sight it must in some way be the expression of that Son; otherwise all that we do will be only like nursing an ice egg—it will bring forth nothing for God. There is any amount of so-called Christian work to-day which looks like the real

thing, but it is not. Much effort and enthusiasm and sacrifice—many meetings—much saying of prayers and listening to addresses—trying to be good, trying to be religious—and yet it may all be dead. "Dead works" the Bible calls those painful efforts and duties (Heb. vi. 1). Why are they dead? Because, for some reason or other, Jesus Christ the Living One is not in them. Bring Him into them, and what a difference there will be! Instead of merely trying to do your best for God, open your heart anew to His Son and ask Him to live His own life and do His own work through you. Instead of trying to say prayers, ask Him to put His own desires into your heart—then prayer will become alive! Instead of reading the Bible as a weary drudgery, ask that Jesus Christ may be in you as the power to understand, and that you may find Him in every page, and you will be amazed how even the 'dry' parts—like "Leviticus" and "Proverbs"—become wonderfully alive and full of helpfulness. Even your daily tasks—let the Living One into every part of your life and you will be astonished what a difference it will make! Everything will live! And not only so—you will be able to do things you could never do before, for *He* will do them through you and there is nothing too hard for Him. The one great rule of Paul's life was this—"to me to live is Christ" (Phil. i. 21). That means that he had no interest in anything in which Jesus Christ had no part. He did not waste his time in any work that Jesus Christ did not give him to do. He did not make his own plans and then ask God to bless them. He had this understanding with the Lord—that the Lord should take complete charge of every part of him and should live His own life through Paul, choosing for him where he should go and what he should do. This resulted often in suffering and difficulty for Paul, but his attitude was—"I want every part of my life to bring forth something for God's pleasure, and therefore, whatever it costs me, I want the living Lord to live His life in me." Paul had no time to waste trying to hatch out ice eggs! For him, it was Jesus Christ or nothing. Alas, many a man has spent his life in so-called Christian work, and at the end it will be found to have been mostly "dead works" because Jesus Christ was not really the centre and life of most of it; and all his good intentions will not have made any difference to the result. Everything will be determined by whether the Living One was in it or not.

Now may I ask how it is with you? If

you look into your own life, at all the things you are doing, do you see any ice eggs that have no life in them and therefore can never produce anything for God? Are there any parts of your life from which the Living One is shut out? If so, why go on like that? Get rid of the ice eggs! Change them for real eggs! Even a rather stupid Emperor seemed to know the difference between the two and chose a real egg when she had the chance. Are you not as wise as a penguin?

I should like to encourage you with one final word. A penguin's egg, when hatched, produces a penguin; and in just the same way, the life of Jesus, when developed, reproduces the nature of Jesus. The young penguins, you remember, are hatched out in the coldest place on earth, and, though many die, some of them overcome and live. The living Lord Jesus has

already overcome every enemy and every trial that can ever come to Him, and now not even death itself has any dominion over Him. Those in whom He lives can also be "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. viii. 37). He can make them "overcomers." And that is better even than being an 'Emperor'! Are you one? You can be, if you know Jesus Christ as your very life. Let His life have free scope in you and everything that God wills for you becomes possible.

The boy or girl who can most truly say "to me to live is Christ" will certainly be the first to reach the South Pole.

I give my heart to Thee,
Thy dwelling-place to be;
I want Thee ever in my heart,
O, live Thy life in me.

G. P.

"Behold, My Servant"

II. The True Servant and the Grace of God

"Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa. xlii. 1).

IN our previous meditation, when we had seen the passing on into the Church of the great vocation, and were speaking about the electing of the Church in relation to the eternal purpose, we reminded you that, seeing that it is the Church as the Body of Christ that is the eternally predestined instrument for the fulfilment of the purpose of God (that very great purpose of God being brought through sovereign grace into that Church, that spiritual Body) we are therefore individually in the election to service. By our very calling, the great purpose becomes ours. In our very apprehending by Christ, the greatest purpose of all ages comes to rest upon us, we are found in it.

The Purpose to be Served

Two things remain to be said in that particular connection before we proceed with other matters. One is as to the purpose. What is the purpose of the ages? Well, it is made perfectly clear in revelation through Paul that the purpose is to sum up all things in Christ—the universal fulness of God's Son, first gathered into Him, and then mediated by Him through all ages to come. Into that we, by grace, are introduced. That is why we have been brought into the fellowship of God's Son. That is the meaning of our ever having been saved, saved with a vast, timeless, universal

purpose, and that becomes the service of our lives.

What Service Is

The second thing is just that. What is the work of the Lord? What is Christian service from God's standpoint? It is contributing to the fulness of Christ. It is in the measure of each several part ministering to that end, that all things shall be summed up in Christ, and that He shall be the fulness of all things. That great Divine goal has many ways and many means of attainment, and it is not a matter of whether you or I are serving the Lord in the same way as someone else. That is not the point at all. We standardise and departmentalise Christian work, and we think of the activities of ministers and missionaries and suchlike functions, and we call that the work of the Lord, we think of that when we speak of going into Christian service; but while I do not say that that is not the work of the Lord, it is a very narrow and a very artificial way of viewing things. The work of the Lord is, and can be, no more than contributing to the fulness of Christ and ministering of that fulness to Him and from Him. How you do it is a matter of Divine appointment, but that is the work of the Lord. So it is not necessarily a matter of whether I am in what is called the ministry, a missionary or a Christian worker, in this particular category or that, or whether I am serving the Lord in the way in which certain others are serving Him. That

is quite a secondary matter. We would all like to be doing what certain people are doing, and doing it in the way they are doing it. You might aspire to be an apostle Paul—probably if you understood a little more you would not! But you see, whether Paul is doing it along his Divinely appointed line, in his Divinely appointed way—or Peter—or John—or this one or that one—the object comes first, the way afterward. The service of the Lord—whatever may be the means, the method—is ministering *to* the fulness of Christ, and ministering *of* that fulness, and you may be called upon to do that anywhere. It can be done just as much out of public view as in public view. Many who have ministered to the Lord and by whom He has been wonderfully ministered are those of whom the world has heard and read nothing. This, you see, is a ‘Body’ matter, and a body is not all hands, not all major members and faculties. A body is comprised of numerous, almost countless, functions, many of them remote and very hidden, but they all minister in a related way to the whole purpose for which the body exists, and that is a true picture of the service of God.

So think again. While we would not put you back from aspiring to the fullest place of service, nor say that you are wrong in desiring to be a missionary, to go forth into the world in a full-time spiritual capacity, remember that even before the Lord puts you into that specific work you are a minister all the same, for ‘minister’ is not a name, a title, a designation, but a function; and the function is contributing something to the fulness of Christ, and ministering something of that fulness. So it comes back to us as a question—What am I ministering of Christ, what am I contributing to that ultimate fulness? If it be by leading the unsaved to Him, I am adding to Christ, so to speak. That is all it means, but that is what it means. I am building up Christ. If I am encouraging the saints, I am ministering to Christ and of Christ. That is “my servant . . . in whom my soul delighteth.” In whom does God delight as His servant? Those who minister to His Son, and that is the beginning and the end, however that may be done by Divine appointment. Having said that, let us go on a little further with this matter of the servant.

The Beginning of Service the Servant Himself

“Behold, my servant.” God calls attention to the servant in whom His soul delighteth. The beginning of all service in relation to God is the servant himself. What makes a servant

of God? We think of a servant of God being made by academic training, Bible teaching, by this or that form of equipment, and we think when we have all that, when we have been through the course and have in our minds all that can be imparted of that kind, we are the Lord’s servants. But that is not the way the Lord looks at it at all.

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

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

You know that ‘man of God’ was the great designation given to some of the prophets of old. Elijah on one occasion, having been

hidden by God at the brook Cherith, found the brook to dry up; and the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Arise, get thee to Zarepath . . . behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain thee" (I Kings xvii. 9). Elijah went, and you remember how he found the food situation. She was gathering two sticks to bake her last cake for her son and herself, and then to die. But the barrel of meal did not fail: the Lord was faithful to His word. But then, after that, it came to pass that the woman's son fell sick, and so sore was the sickness that there was no breath left in him. The woman made her very pathetic appeal to the prophet. He took the child up to his own chamber, and called upon the Lord, and saw the child revive, and he presented him alive to the mother, who said, "Now I know that thou art a man of God; and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." What were the credentials of his ministry?—that he had the secret of life triumphant over death. He had the word of life, and the word of life is not always the mere usage of Scripture. You can use the Scripture and it may have no effect at all, or you can use it and it may have a mighty effect. A great deal depends upon who uses the Scripture. It is the man of God who can use it in that way and be attested as the true servant of the Lord. It is the spiritual power of life that is in the man that makes him (to use Paul's words to Timothy) an approved servant of God. "O man of God."

"Behold, my servant." Do you grasp the point? It is with you and with me that the Lord is concerned; it is with what we are, it is with our personal knowledge of Himself. It is that we may have within us the secrets of the Lord, that it may be true of us as it was of the Lord Jesus and of others that the key to the situation spiritually is in our hands. We, as Elijah, hidden away in secret, have been in touch with God. There is a background. God had said to Elijah, "Hide thyself"; and he was a long time hidden before the word of the Lord came, saying, "Go, show thyself" Someone has remarked that for every servant of God there must be much more of the hidden life than of the public life. How true that is! The Lord will take pains to ensure that the secret history, the spiritual history, of every true servant of His is looked after. With all the eagerness to get out to do the work—and may it not abate!—with all our enthusiasm to be active, all our desire and craving to be serving, let us remember the first thing is the servant, not the

service. The first thing, the beginning of all service, is the instrument. We see that the servant comes firstly into the Lord's view, that He may have one to whom He may draw attention in a right way and say, 'Look at that servant of Mine, and see My work, see My grace, see My power, see the traces of My hand.' When the Lord has brought us to the point where that is possible, then certain features will come out.

The Marks of a True Servant

(a) Glorifying in the Grace of God

The first feature of the God-approved servant, the true servant of God, is his glorifying in the gospel of the grace of God on personal grounds. It is not, after all, such a far cry from Isa. xlii. 1—"Behold, my servant"—to Isa. lxi. 1—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"—to proclaim the year of grace. Glorifying in the gospel of the grace of God—yes, on personal grounds.

Let us look at the letters to Timothy and Titus. These are the letters of service, the letters of one great servant of God to another servant of God, one great man of God to another man of God.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Saviour, and Christ Jesus our hope" (I Tim. i. 1). That phrase "God our Saviour" is peculiar to these pastoral letters; you find it nowhere else, and in these letters it occurs seven times. Do you not think it is significant that, not to an unsaved person and not to a newly converted person, but to a servant of the Lord fairly fully fledged (for, as you notice in the next verses, the Apostle is saying that he left Timothy at Ephesus to look after things; he was in pastoral responsibility, and the Ephesian responsibility turned out to be no small thing; and similarly in the case of Titus), Paul, now well-advanced in life and service, writes to Timothy and to Titus in places of responsibility, in this way—"God our Saviour," repeated seven times. That word Saviour was not a word used by Paul with some extraordinary new meaning in it. It was one of the common words of everyday life among the Greeks at that time. It was the word on the lips of the soldier who had come back from battle and had been delivered from being

killed, and he said he had known salvation. It was the word of the sailor who had been rescued from the deep when his ship had gone down, and he said he had been saved. It was the word of the physician who had brought someone back from a desperate illness, and he called it their salvation. A common word—it is found in all sorts of places. Paul spoke the common language which everybody knew and understood; he was not embellishing this with something profound, he was right there in the simplicities—God Who has saved us, our Saviour; the common salvation.

“*And Christ Jesus our hope.*” Well, that is a beginning word for believers, for the drowning sailor, for the soldier besieged or encompassed, for the invalid gripped by the deadly fever—hope for them all. It is very beautiful, as you follow through this letter, to see how much Paul dwells in that realm.

“*. . . according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. I thank him that enabled me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service; though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief: howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Christ Jesus show forth all his long-suffering, for an ensample of them that should thereafter believe on him unto eternal life*” (I Tim. i. 11-16).

“*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne in its own times*” (I Tim. ii. 3-6).

That is all glorifying in the gospel of the grace of God—and very late on in Paul's life. My point, while being perhaps very simple, is a very important one—that nothing is to cast any shadow over our glorying in the grace of God; and there are quite a lot of things that do that, I find. A lot of people become taken up with what is called advanced truth, and they become heavy, almost morose, they are burdened about this great teaching, and lose all their glorying in the grace of God. Nothing should ever be allowed to bring a shadow on

this glorying in the grace of God on the part of a servant of God. Paul maintained that glorying right to the very end, and here he is saying to Timothy, by example as well as by precept, ‘However many worries there are at Ephesus, however many the problems in the churches, however much you may be aspiring to a higher life, however much you may feel your own unworthiness and weakness, never lose your glorying in the gospel of grace.’ That is really the import of it all—to bring Timothy back to this. ‘There are many things in yourself and in men's attitudes toward you (they will despise your youth), in your sufferings physically (your oft infirmity), there are plenty of things to bring a cloud over your life, but never allow anything to eclipse or becloud the great wonder of the grace of God in salvation.’ Perhaps some of us need to recover a little more of that.

Christ was a very great teacher, but He was also a great preacher of the grace of God, and here it is declared—He took up the very words from Isa. lxi and applied them to Himself at Nazareth, declaring that the very purpose of His coming and of the anointing of the Spirit was to preach the gospel, the good news, to proclaim the year of grace. Paul was a great teacher; next to the Lord Himself, there has been no greater in the dispensation; but with all that he knew, all that he was, all his profound understanding of spiritual things, he maintained to the end his glorying in the simple basic reality of the grace of God in salvation.

I believe—and I am saying a very serious and responsible thing when I say it—that the Lord will allow anything rather than that we should get away from grace. I am going to say something now that I think may be very terrible in your hearing; if we have got away from grace the Lord may even allow a fall, and maybe a terrible fall, into sin in order to bring us back in a personal way, so that on personal grounds the supreme note in our lives should be the grace of God. I say, He will allow anything rather than that we should get off the ground of the grace of God. That is one thing He does demand, and will have—a true, adequate, apprehension and acknowledgment of the grace of God. We have no other ground on which to stand, from which to move. It is all the infinite grace of God, the mystery of His grace to us.

(b) Humility

Such an apprehension produces humility, and of all the graces flowing from grace, humility is the greatest. The opposite of humility is

the greatest evil—that is, pride. There never was a greater sin than pride. It brought Satan from his high estate, and the angels that fell with him, and it brought the whole race crashing down in the awful fall. It necessitated God's Son taking the lowest place, suffering, dying—pride brought all that tragedy about. Humility is of great price in the sight of God, and it is a right apprehension of the grace of God that produces humility.

(c) Assurance

Grace produces assurance, and what is the use of any servant going out to serve the Lord who has not assurance? The enemy tries to destroy our testimony by robbing us of our assurance. He has destroyed many a ministry in that way. If we really apprehend grace, it brings great assurance. Thank God for His grace, grace which chose when I did not choose, grace which has kept when many times I would have given up; grace that has done so much gives me assurance that it will complete the work. Grace started and grace will finish, and that brings confidence. Get off the ground of grace and you will be off the ground of assurance.

(d) Joy

And a sufficient apprehension of the grace of God brings joy, it must bring joy. If we get away from the ground of works—that miserable ground of what we are, what we can or cannot do—on to the ground of His infinite, redeeming, keeping, perfecting grace, we are bound to get on to the ground of joy. You cannot explain the joy of Paul to the end on any other ground at all. You take the sum of all his sufferings and trials and disappointments and problems; those who owed everything to him spiritually at length turning away from him, the very churches for which he had hazarded his life having no more room for him, close friends of missionary travels forsaking him; and yet full of joy, and to the very end of his life exhorting the saints to rejoice in the Lord. Why? It can only be because he has such a tremendous hold on sovereign grace. Grace will accomplish the work, grace will perfect what grace began.

The True Servant's Theme and Testimony— Grace

Arthur Porritt, the biographer of Dr. Jowett, has a notable chapter entitled "His Gospel," in which he seeks to analyse the message of the great preacher. "The supreme note of his preaching," he says, "was the

proclamation of the all-sufficiency of Redeeming Grace in its relationship to the worst . . . The eternal love of God was his basal doctrine of Christianity, and he proclaimed the illimitable love of God with unwearied insistence. . . . To the literature of Redeeming Grace, Jowett made a rich contribution by his sermons and books. It was the 'big theme' to which, above all others, he returned again and again, as if, of all truth, it was the one facet that entranced him. . . . To Jowett, Redeeming Grace was the fulcrum of the evangelical message. 'With all my heart,' he said, 'do I believe that this Gospel of Redeeming Grace is the cardinal necessity of our time.' 'I cannot do anything better than magnify the grace of God.' 'One could preach twenty sermons on it.' Grace was Jowett's sovereign word. He was always probing its depths to discover some new aspect of its unsearchable riches. Each discovery he heralded with satisfaction."

Here is a specimen of his preaching of Grace—"There is no word," he once declared, "I have wrestled so much with as grace. It is just like expressing a great American forest by a word. No phrase can express the meaning of grace. Grace is more than mercy. It is more than tender mercy. It is more than a multitude of tender mercies. Grace is more than love. It is more than innocent love. Grace is holy love, but it is holy love in spontaneous movement going out in eager quest toward the unholy and the unlovely that by the ministry of its own sacrifice it might redeem the unholy and the unlovely into its own strength and beauty. The grace of God is holy love on the move to thee and me, and the like of thee and me. It is God unmerited, undeserved, going out towards the children of men, that He might win them into the glory and brightness of His own likeness."

Dr. Jowett, wherever he went, drew the multitudes. My point for the moment is this—if that was so, and that was his theme, it shows what people need, it shows to what the heart responds. There is nothing that can take the place of the gospel of the grace of God. If you think that when you get into 'Ephesian' realms you get on to some higher ground, look into the Ephesian letter and underline the word 'grace,' and you will find "Ephesians" is full of grace. You cannot get away from it, however high and far you go. Rather it is the other way. The greater the revelation and the more the wonder and the vastness of Divine purpose comes to your heart, the more you go down and worship for the grace of God. No teaching ought ever to carry us away from the

grace of God.

But I did say this—the true servant glories in the grace of God *on personal grounds*; not as a subject, not as a theme, however entrancing and wonderful; not as something in the Bible, not as something that has worked miracles in lives in India and in China and in London; but as something by which he himself is living to-day, and which is working wonders in him to-day. That is where Paul was con-

stantly coming in with his personal pronoun. "I obtained mercy . . ."; "unto me . . . was this grace given." It is right back there on personal grounds, and the Lord will keep it there. Oh, do not go out with a theme; go out as a man, a woman, who embodies the grace of God, and is never, never tired of extolling that grace. It is the hall-mark of a true servant of God.

T. A.-S.

"I will follow thee, Lord; but . . ."

"Another said, I will follow thee, Lord; but first . . ." (Luke ix. 61).

THERE was a lot of "following" going on just at that time. A glance at the concordance will show how often the word "follow" occurs. In the movement, this man made his spontaneous announcement to the Lord. His proviso or reservation was the point which drew forth the famous statement of which such wide use has been made. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." What the Lord meant by unfitness was having a But. How many of us have been caught, or nearly caught, in the trammels of a But! It is sometimes an "If" or an "If only." It would be easy to follow or serve the Lord *if only* . . . 'Lord, *if only* you would remove this difficulty, this painful factor; *if only* you would change my place or put me somewhere else; *if only* you would do this for me, or give me that; then—well, I would do so much more for you.'

This lack of enthusiasm on the part of Christ

over people making gestures has more in it than the single instance indicates. In the light of all that we now know, we can see several things.

Firstly, we cannot follow the Lord on our own initiative, anyway. Unless there is the dynamic imparted by His personal call, we shall never get very far with it. There were several instances—notably Peter's—of unsolicited declarations as to following Him, and He was most discouraging in every case, and on one occasion at least would not allow it. But, if the Lord calls us, it is refusing Divine power if we do not obey. Let us not think that we can do as we like about this, and *when* we like. It is His like, or it is nothing.

Then, for us to bargain with the Lord on the matter by having a But, an If, or any kind of a proviso, is to prove ourselves unfit because we have failed to see that this matter is so utter, so desperate, so eternally immense and vital as to allow of no second considerations. It is all a matter of love, not doing the Lord a favour, or ourselves a good turn.

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The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

V. The Power and Challenge of the Kingdom of God

"But I tell you of a truth (I tell you very definitely, emphatically, positively), There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God" (Luke ix. 27).

"The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts i. 1-3).

THERE are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." ". . . by the space of forty days . . . speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." The theme with which the Apostles were being occupied by the Lord during the forty days after His resurrection—the theme of the risen Lord—was the kingdom of God.

The Battle of Two Kingdoms in our Lord's Earthly Life

Looking back into the years of His life from the Jordan to the Cross, we can see that, in His own personal case during that time, the battle of two kingdoms was going on. Along various lines and through various instrumentalities, influences were being brought to bear upon Him. He was moving within a circle of forces and activities the object and direction

of which was to get Him to have a kingdom. At the very beginning, the conflict with the adversary in the wilderness during the forty days and nights headed right up to that issue. "The devil . . . showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. iv. 8-9). His own disciples were constantly pressing upon Him with their Messianic mentality and expectation, making it very difficult for Him in this way—that He knew they were as yet such children spiritually that it would be a disaster to disillusion them too quickly and disappoint their expectations and hopes. Those expectations, hopes and visions, and all that they included for these men, were for the Lord like barbed wire all the time pricking Him. He could hardly say anything of a disillusioning character but at once the disciples were offended, questioning, thrown all over the place, even to revolt. The crowd, the hysterical multitude, on one occasion would come and take Him by force and make Him king. There is something at work, coercing. He was fighting that something all along, putting it back, rejecting, repudiating; and it was no easy thing. At the last, as He stood before Pilate, when the accusation against Him was that He said that He was a king, Pilate said, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" and Jesus said, "My kingdom is not out from this world system: if my kingdom were out from this world system, then would my servants fight . . . but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John xviii. 36). It was the

repudiation of a kingdom; which meant that inwardly He was standing for another. It was not the repudiation of *the* Kingdom. He was fighting all the way along against a false for a true, against a temporal for a spiritual; but the powers that existed were seeking to precipitate this other matter, to get Him involved in a kingdom which was not His real one. You can easily see what an involving it would have been. Suppose He had capitulated, accepted a kingdom out from this system, put Himself on this level; well, a little thought at once betrays the sinister nature of the pressure, the offer. No, He was not accepting the framework which embodied the kingdom of Satan—that is what it amounted to. Within the kingdom out from this system Satan, the prince of this world, was established, and the Lord was not accepting that at all. Through all these temptations, even though they might come through the lips and by the mistaken zeal of a beloved and devoted disciple of the inner circle—no other than Simon Peter himself—He was adamant. On that very matter of His going up to Jerusalem and being delivered into the hands of men to be crucified, when the human counsel is “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee,” the instant rejoinder is, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Matt. xvi. 21-23). He sees Satan entrenched in the very suggestion, and that is not the kingdom the Lord will accept. There would be a kingdom which He would have, but not of that kind.

The Kingdom Recaptured for God Through the Cross

So to the Cross, along the line of repudiating a kingdom after that order; and there, in the Cross, He went behind the framework, behind all the form and the system, and dealt with the prince of this world, and cast him out. How He cast him out we have been seeking to see in these meditations; He cast him out *morally*. “The prince of this world cometh: and he hath nothing in me” (John xiv. 30), so he is morally put out. And, casting out the prince of this world there in the Cross, He captured—let us rather say, recaptured—the Kingdom which had been betrayed by Adam into that usurper’s hands; recaptured it as the last Adam, the second man, the Lord from heaven; and, having recaptured it in and by His Cross (a matter about which we have yet to say more) He rose, and His theme was the kingdom of God—the fulfilment of His emphatic statement, “There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.” They saw it on the day of Pentecost, the recaptured Kingdom in the

hands of this victorious Christ Who knew how to refuse quick returns—a thing which we know very little about morally; and because He was able to let go, He secured all.

That is a law of tremendous value in spiritual life—being expert in letting go. We have seen the other one expert in laying hold—‘I will, I will, I will.’ There again we shall have more to say. But now in the hands of this One, the Kingdom recaptured is brought in on the day of Pentecost in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit the Life and Power of the Kingdom

But note, the point for us is that it is a reformed kingdom, that is, its constitution is altogether different from and other than that which was in the minds of the Apostles and was offered to Him by Satan. It is another kind of kingdom, essentially spiritual. It comes in by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in charge of the Kingdom. He precipitates this thing and He keeps the reins in His hands in the projecting and the developing; the expanding and the establishing, of this kingdom. Everything is spiritual, and we find therefore that the Kingdom is, from first to last, essentially an *inward* thing. The Lord’s words about the kingdom of the heavens being within you were very, very truly proved on the day of Pentecost and afterward—it was the Spirit within that was the nature, the power, the life, the energy and the everything of this kingdom.

The Spontaneous Challenge of the Kingdom of God Through the Church

If that is the course and nature of things, what really is the heart of it all? Well, the heart of it is this, that when from the day of Pentecost men and women went out into this world in the good of what it meant that the kingdom of God as an actual reality had come, and that it was an inward fact, the thing which characterised them was that there was, by their very presence here in this world, an impressive and overwhelming impact of the kingdom of God upon that other kingdom lying behind the framework of this world system. It just happened. Their very presence disturbed, challenged, provoked that other kingdom, and the fact of these two kingdoms being in such deadly opposition became a manifest reality simply because those believers were there; and, mark you—this is something to be marked—their predominant note in preaching was not the salvation of men from sin (which was the result of something else) but it was the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. Everywhere they bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus, and

they proclaimed Him as Lord. When it came to dealing with exercise of heart under conviction and with the enquiry, 'What shall we do to be saved?' then the interpretation or the application was that this Lord is also Saviour. You can be saved by Him because He is Lord. You can be forgiven because He is Lord. Let me say again—it is not just because He is officially Lord, but because He is morally in the position to forgive. Leave that again for a minute.

What I want to concentrate upon and keep to is this, that there needs to be recovered the spontaneous challenge of the kingdom of God in the Church. We may be preaching the gospel of salvation—let no one think for one moment any discrediting or weakening of that is intended—but that must come out of the established lordship of Jesus Christ in the preacher and in the Body representing Christ. It must be that—that Jesus is Lord—not as an item of a creed or of doctrine, but as something which has become an inward power. The lordship of Jesus Christ as an inward power, both in the life and in the Church, has to be registered in a spiritual way, not first upon men. I do not know whether you are able to follow further than I am saying; but why the vast amount of the preaching of the gospel to the unsaved without effect? Does that not exercise you, or is that a question which ought never to be raised? It is true, is it not? The gospel is preached and preached and preached with little effect. Is the gospel weaker than it was in those days? Is the Holy Spirit withdrawn from the earth? What is the explanation? Is it that the Lord is different, His gospel is different, or His Church is different? Ah, I think it must be the last. It cannot be the others. What is the difference?

The Church is taking up something and giving it out, very largely as objective teaching; of course, knowing something of the blessedness of being saved, of the good and joy of what the Lord Jesus is in terms of salvation. That is all very good, it gets so far, but somehow or other there is a tremendous margin of ineffectiveness; and the reason may be—I put it in that way—that first of all the preaching is to men, the registration is upon men, and there is not that which comes from behind spontaneously. The kingdom of God is not something worked up, properly arranged in addresses and sermons, it is not a theme, a subject, but it is the mighty power of the Holy Spirit coming from behind. You are there as the Lord's witness, and there is something more than the power of the enemy present; the power of God is there too. The kingdom of God has come. The kingdom of God is an over-

whelming thing. That is the meaning. It is in this realm that the weakness of so much preaching lies. Now, we will go on with our preaching of salvation, we will proceed with our approach to men and women about this matter of salvation; we must, more than ever. But remember, if we come without the kingdom of God—not as a subject but as a power coming through us, so to speak, as from behind, coming right through and registering itself, not upon men and women in the first place but upon those forces behind in which the whole world lies—we shall be largely ineffective. It is very true that no one can believe, no one is free to turn to the Lord—however much they may crave to do so—unless the Lord does something to release them. This strong man has to have his house broken into by a stronger than he; and who is stronger than he? This kingdom has to be raided by another kingdom greater than itself. And so, although the Lord had given the disciples the sphere of their activity and the commission to go out into it, He said, "But tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke xxiv. 49). "John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts i. 5). "Until then, do not attempt the commission or you will fail, and the other kingdom will prevail over you."

You see the point for us. It all centres in that, it is all summed up in that. What is our real business here? Is it to propound doctrines, expound truths, give out volumes of interpretations of Scripture? No! Whatever place that may have for edification, for instruction, it will all be unprofitable so far as real spiritual effectiveness is concerned, unless the kingdom of God is coming through—that is, unless there is the real registration of the fact that Jesus is raised from the dead and is Lord. It is no use saying that, unless you say it in the power of the Holy Spirit. "No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. xii. 3). That does not mean that you cannot use the phrase "Jesus is Lord," but there is something more in saying than using words. When God said, "Let light be," there was light—and that is the kind of saying that we are thinking of—a saying which is a fiat, an impact. One man may say, "Jesus is Lord," and while it is quite true, the doctrine is correct and sound, nothing happens. Another man in the power of the Holy Ghost declares the lordship of Jesus Christ, and you feel something, you are conscious of something coming through of God. Now, this is not the privilege only of Apostles in the ecclesiastical or official sense. This is for the Church, and you and I are the Church in representation. Oh, that our prayer

should be the impact of the Kingdom upon that other kingdom! That is what my heart cries for; for prayer should not be a list of petitions, a lot of things asked for, but there should be something done behind things. In all our teaching, though it may not be instantly seen, there should nevertheless be a steady work going on which is producing lives in the power of this kingdom—people becoming factors to be reckoned with by the enemy. It is the only justification of all our teaching, that those who receive it shall themselves become in turn factors which are marked by the enemy; of whom, as we have said before, the demons can say, "Jesus I know, and—so and so—I know." It ought to be that we are known to the enemy by name as people to be reckoned with, to be taken account of, and not included in the category of those who do not count—"but who are ye?" (Acts xix. 15).

The matter which occupies the risen Lord is the kingdom of God. It is the thing with which He would occupy His servants. The kingdom of God—not some framework of a temporal system, but the kingdom of God—is not in word, but in power; not in eating and drinking but righteousness in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv. 17). That is the kingdom of God; and you and I, dear friends, are in the very happy position of being included in that former statement of the Lord—"There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." That is our privilege—to see the kingdom of God, and for the kingdom of God to come through us with a sense of Divine power. That is the heart of things. I have said already that all the rest we are talking about in these meditations gathers round that.

The Importance and Power of Letting Go to God

You say, 'Well, I believe that is true, and all my heart responds, and I pray God that it may be so where I am concerned. I want it to be, but nothing happens. How can it be?' That is just what we are getting at; and I have hinted already how it can be. It is intensely practical. When I said that the Lord Jesus was the greatest expert at letting go, I touched the heart of this matter. We have said again and again that everything is centred and focused in the human will. Let me ask here (though I shall have to refer to it again later on more fully), have you not many times discovered that your real power—the power which delivered you, the power which lifted you up and set you on high—came when you let go? You were holding on—and I am not saying that you were holding on to something that

was necessarily wrong; you were simply holding on. It may have been something given to you by God, and your own natural possessiveness had got hold of it, and you were holding something of God to and for yourself, and saying 'hands off' to everybody else. There is no question that Isaac was given of God to Abraham; he was a perfect miracle, impossible unless God had given him. And then we read, "God did prove Abraham." He said, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest" (and, He might have said, whom I gave thee) ". . . and offer him . . . for a burnt-offering" (Gen. xxii. 2, etc.). Abraham did not say, 'Thou gavest him to me, do not contradict Thyself and take him away again; Thou didst make all Thy promises to hang upon him; I am not going to give him up!' He gave him up and he got him back; got him back with a whole kingdom by which he became "heir of the world"—that is the statement (Rom. iv. 13). He has the kingdom by letting go—the foreshadowing of this Son of God Who let go. They would take Him by force and make Him a king; He let go. He got His kingly place with increase, but He got it in a realm where Satan could not touch it; it was beyond the power of death. If He had accepted that thing which was offered Him it would have been subject to death. Here in resurrection He has it, and death has no power over it. But He got it like that—by letting go to God. You see, it is intensely practical. Oh, how can this be? By getting yourself out of the picture! That is why it cannot be—because self is in the picture! Self-will, self-interest, self-realisation. That is the kingdom of Satan, and God is not going to give you His kingdom on that ground. That was the ruin and the loss of the kingdom of God for man. You cannot restore it; like cannot overcome like. Something different, other, is needed; and whatever that self may mean, it has to get out of the way if the kingdom of God is to come in.

This is practical. I have to be quite sure that I am not in this, that some secret ambition of mine, some motive of mine, is not at work. Oh, how subtle are our hearts! You and I perhaps are ready to be utterly for the Lord. We mean well, and we mean it thoroughly. We would sing really with our hearts and with our voices at full strength, 'None of self, and all of Thee,' and we would mean it, and there would be no uncertainty so far as we are concerned. And yet God knows that we are all the time defeated in our very sincerity by secret motives, and nothing but a test position can prove whether we actually mean it. So He brings us to a test—to a

prospect, and then a disappointment. How do we re-act? Is our sorrow, our pain, for the Lord or for ourselves? Are *we* disappointed, or is it really only the Lord for Whom we are concerned and we are not in it at all? You see what I mean—a test situation to find out after all whether it is ‘None of self, and all of Thee.’ We can never discover it except in practical ways along the line of very practical testings. The Lord knows it all right, but it is not enough that He knows it. You see, in order for us to come in, we have to come in intelligently and co-operatively. That is the point of every test: The Lord could do a thing with a stroke, it could happen mechanically. But we are in a moral world, and God acts towards man on moral ground. Man has a will that constitutes him a morally responsible person, and so he must exercise his will in co-operation with God.

You remember the words in Deuteronomy viii. 2—“Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not.” Our Version does not convey the full meaning. The words as quoted might raise a question as to whether the Lord knows what is in our hearts without trying us out. We cannot have any doubts about that. No, the real meaning is this—“that he might make thee know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not.” It was necessary for Israel to come to the place where they knew their own heart and repudiated what was contrary to the revealed will of God; and that was the battle of the forty years. The Lord had shown that His

purpose for them was the promised land. They were discovering that in their hearts Egypt still had a place in opposition to the land; and the Lord was calling upon them to recognize what was in their hearts and to repudiate Egypt—repudiate it as much in the wilderness as they had repudiated it when they had fled from it. It is an inside thing. Until their hearts were wholly toward the land and for the land, the Lord could not get them into it. That is where Joshua and Caleb were—they *wholly* followed the Lord. Why did they go in when all the others of their generation failed? Because they had completely and finally and utterly slain Egypt, not objectively but subjectively, and embraced the land as God willed. These others were being tested, day after day, year after year, on that ground—‘Do you really mean that you want to follow the Lord?’ You say, Yes—but do you? Let us try it out!’ The Lord was doing that, to make them know what was in their hearts.

I say, this kingdom of God within is very practical, explaining the Lord’s dealings with us. When we recognize the laws and principles of that kingdom there must come the test, when we give up our Isaac, not because we know we are going to get him back again but knowing that perhaps the Lord will really require him of us and that he will not be given back to us. There is the battle and the victory. None of us has fully got there yet, and that is why the Kingdom has not fully come where we are concerned; but inasmuch as we triumph in that matter, the Kingdom is coming through—power and salvation are coming through; and also, I believe, rest for our own hearts’ deliverance. The Lord show us the meaning of this word.

T. A. S.

CHRI¹⁰STIAN suffering, whether it be in the form of persecution because of a Christ-like life, or whether it comes to us in the form of the trials and testings which are the natural accompaniment of a Christlike life, such as illness, sorrow, or losses, is always used by a God of Love to refine our lives. It burns out the dross, makes for humility, purifies and increases our faith, and enriches our lives. And, like the goldsmith of old, God keeps us in the smelting furnace until He can see the reflection of the face of the Lord Jesus in our lives. God is not so much interested in how much work we do for Him, as He is in how much we resemble His Son. Sometimes we think that if God would remove the present affliction or handicap which to us seems to be a limitation to our usefulness to Him, we could do far more efficient work for Him.

Our first answer to that would be that God knows what He is doing, and it is not for us to question His dealings with us.

Our second answer is that, all things being equal, we might be able to do more work for Him. But God is not interested in the quantity of our work, but in the quality. We may not be able to turn out as much work for the Lord as some other saint, but if the furnace of affliction has produced in us a more Christlike character, the service we do render is of far more value than the service of the saint who does not have so much of the Lord Jesus in his life.

The third answer is that God is building Christian personality for eternity, which is far more important to Him than the amount of service one might render to Him in this brief life. —

Breaking the Satanic Siege

Reading: Isaiah xxxiii. 13-17.

THE promise of seeing the king in his beauty was never intended to refer to, some mystical vision given to us in solitary and quiet meditation. It was especially related to a fierce and desperate conflict, a saving revelation in the midst of terrible warfare. The context of these verses shows that the promises were given during an awful siege of Jerusalem. Sennacherib had brought his great Assyrian host against the city to destroy it. Previously the Assyrians had invaded the land and had wrought great devastation. Hezekiah had bribed them to leave him and return to their own country, but later the pledge was broken and they renewed the invasion. Help was sought from Egypt, but sought in vain, so that at the time of this prophecy God's people were shut up in Jerusalem, surrounded and hemmed in by vast hostile armies. The city was attacked from every side, and there seemed little or no prospect of relief.

The spiritual analogy is very clear. For the people of God to-day there are spiritual enemies which press in on every side and threaten to overwhelm them. For us, also, the siege is on.

A Testing Experience

Now such an experience is calculated to discover the true state of those involved. Under such a fiery test the sinners in Zion were afraid. Sin makes us weak in the day of battle. If there is something wrong in our relationship with the Lord we shall have no ability to stand up to the enemy. The sinners in Zion tremble and lose their strength; they cry, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" It is a bad time, this time of siege, for those who are not right with the Lord.

But there are those in Zion who need not fear, and it is to them that these reassuring promises are given. They would not repudiate the title of sinners, for they do not claim to be perfect. When they are searched down in the depths of their being they, too, are convicted of their own unworthiness. But they are walking in the light, they are proving the present power of the Blood for cleansing; they are obedient in every matter, and that in a whole-hearted way. They are practising holy living in every part of their lives, in walk, in speech, in heart, in hands, in eyes and in ears. There is no chance of spiritual victory without this fundamental honesty of walking in the light with the Lord. If any one of these members offends there is no rest until the matter is con-

fessed, cleansed by the Blood, and adjusted. This is not the final attainment of holiness but is a daily proving of Christ in every matter, and that is God's minimum requirement of us. Feet, lips, hearts, hands, eyes and ears must be in the present good of the sanctifying power of the Cross, or these promises are not for us. We shall not see the king in his beauty, but only the ugliness of defeat. On the other hand, for those who walk in humble fellowship with God there is no possibility of defeat. They will withstand the siege, will triumph in it, and will finally break it. Thank God that we, too, may be found among them, for there is instant cleansing and adjustment by the cleansing Blood of God's dear Son.

See, then, what is prophesied of such, even in the fierce challenge and hopeless circumstances of this dreadful Satanic siege.

Abiding in Christ

"He shall dwell on high." The first promise is one of perfect safety. He has absolute ascendancy. There are hordes of enemies all around, and many diabolical engines of war are being prepared against him, but he is above it all. "He shall dwell on high." The place of his defence, his citadel, is in the rock. Thank God that none of us need be disturbed by the raging and fury of the oppressor. In Christ, praise His name, we are above it all. They were in Jerusalem. Nobody could take that city by mere force. It was a high rock fortress, impregnable and secure. In David's day it was still held by the Jebusites, who had successfully defied for centuries the conquerors of the rest of the land. These Jebusites boasted that anybody could hold Jerusalem; soldiers were not needed, for even the blind and the lame could defend it. The Lord delivered the city to David and his men, but it still remained a place of defence in the munition of rocks, providing perfect safety so long as one stayed inside it. So in Isaiah xxxvi we have the strange spectacle of Rabshakeh and these proud and mighty Assyrians arguing persuasively with the Jews. If they were a vast host and the Israelites few and weak, why remonstrate and cajole? Why not crush them and destroy them, why not enter and sack the city? The truth of the matter is that they could not. So Rabshakeh came in his king's name to reason with the men of Jerusalem, seeking to deceive them, to turn them against Hezekiah and to trick them into surrender. He exposed his own tactics when he urged, "Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria,

Make your peace with me, and come out to me" (Isaiah xxxvi. 16). That is the object of all the enemy's wiles, all the arguments which he marshals, all the threats which he makes, all the seductive promises which he offers; they all have one end in view. He cannot get at the people of God so long as they abide in the rocks, above him, so he seeks to entice them out of their cover. "Come out to me"; if we do that we shall be beaten, for we have no safety apart from abiding in Christ. If we forsake our position of humble trust in Christ, if we are moved from our attitude of faith by fear of the consequences, or if we are enticed on to ground which is not that of the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ, we are bound to be defeated. That is why Hezekiah ordered the people not to listen and not to answer. Faith cannot afford to reason with the enemy; we must not even consider his suggestions; our safety consists in abiding in Christ at all times. Let us thank God, then, for the quiet confidence which we may rightly have, even in the most bitter assault. However intense the siege—"He shall dwell on high." The enemy may argue with us but he cannot destroy us, he cannot even harm us, so long as we stay where God in His grace has placed us—in Christ, far above all, dwelling in the Rock.

Feeding on Christ

"His bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." This second promise is a very vital one, for the real danger in an impregnable fortress is that the besieged may be starved into submission. The enemy does more than merely to reason with us to forsake our cover; he sets to work to cut off our supplies, in an attempt to make us so inwardly weak and dispirited that we will surrender the spiritual position to him. If he cannot crush those who are standing true to the Lord he will try to wear them out by cutting off the abundant resources of Christ so that they will never reach us. If we are to be subjected to intense and prolonged spiritual hunger and thirst we shall never maintain our position of ascendancy. That is why we are tempted to neglect our quiet times; a starved Christian is a defeated Christian—or soon will be. That is why it is so easy to be sidetracked in the things of God, to be unduly taken up with theories, doctrines, controversies; or even work, at the expense of true feeding upon Christ. That is also the reason for much of the prejudice against the ministry of the Word, or even against the ministers themselves; Satan is seeking to deprive God's people of their spiritual resources in Christ. Spiritual life and victory cannot be maintained by interests or activities, but only

by full supplies of heavenly meat and drink from Christ Himself. If we are to withstand the enemy's assaults effectively we must enter into the good of this further promise, "His bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." Thank God there is an abundant supply in Christ for us all to be maintained constantly in spiritual health and vigour. This is more than a crisis of blessing in a meeting or a conference; it speaks of a personal drawing upon Christ for daily bread and for the water of life.

Hezekiah realized the supreme importance of this matter of supplies. During the period of respite between the first challenge and this siege he got busy to ensure the water supplies of Jerusalem. He closed up and dammed the normal sources which lay outside the city, and diverted the water through an underground tunnel which he had carved through the rock. Inside the city they prepared the pool of Siloam, and then brought the water into it by the underground route which was prepared for the purpose. It was a hidden, but abiding source of water supply which could not be tampered with by the Assyrians, and was recorded as an outstanding feature of Hezekiah's might, ". . . how he made the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city" (2 Kings xx. 20).

What a striking symbol of the resources which Christ has made for us—a well of water within! Satan cannot hinder that. He may keep the Lord's children from hearing preaching, he may keep them from outward opportunities of fellowship (though we must do our best to see that he does not), but let us remember this—he cannot cut off the inner supply; Christ is our life. If we see that the communication is maintained during times of peace we shall be ready for the siege when it comes. Provision has been made for the worst possible conditions; if only we abide in Christ we may prove that whether we gather in fellowship together or whether we are set aside alone in a wilderness the promise is secure, "His bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure."

Seeing the Enthroned Christ

And next—"Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty." Do not confuse this promise with the further one—"they shall behold a land that reacheth afar." It is not in the distant land that we shall see the king, but right at our very side. It is true that we shall see Him in the glory, but we must learn our spiritual lesson from the actual import of the promise as it was given through Isaiah. Jerusalem's need was not of a distant king to be glimpsed from afar, but of present encourage-

ment during their ordeal by the presence of the king among them. Much as we may be encouraged by the prospect of one day seeing the Lord, we both need and are offered a present vision, "We behold . . . Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour (Hebrews ii. 9). We are not alone in the siege, for the king is among us. We do not have to imagine or wonder where He is; we may see Him for ourselves. Hezekiah, the king, was not in a distant country, but was there in Jerusalem, moving about among his people. Their eyes saw him. But they did not see him in his beauty. At this time he was clothed in sackcloth (Is. xxxvii. 1); not in regal splendour, but in the garb of contrition and humiliation. The promise is therefore given of a glorious change when, all limitation and mourning put away, the king might appear again in his true attire—"the king in his beauty." We need to see the Lord in something more than sackcloth. It is true that He bore for us the humiliation and the shame, He was indeed humbled and broken for us and for our salvation. We never wish to forget that. But when the devil is seeking to crush and destroy us, when all the fierce pressure of his evil assault threatens to overwhelm us, we need to see more than that. We need to appreciate not only the shame of the Cross but its consequent glory—the King, not in His sackcloth but in His beauty. I can imagine no greater encouragement to the beleaguered Israelites than to discover that Hezekiah had put off his mourning and was calmly seated in majesty upon his throne, as though all were peace and prosperity. They only had the promise that it would later be so, whereas we have the assurance that even now this is the case. "He, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews x. 12). "Looking unto Jesus . . . who . . . endured the cross, despising the shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews xii. 2).

I suppose that when Hezekiah was not in sackcloth he was clothed in armour, a warrior king. The promise, however, pointed forward to a day when there would be no more need for armour, and the king could resume his peacetime splendour. It might be right for him to be in armour then. His people were fighting, they were all in the midst of fierce conflict, and so it would be seemly that the king should take his place among the soldiers who were ready to resist the enemy. As the battle raged and the foe resumed his attacks, it might bring encouragement to the people to know that their king was in the midst, sharing their efforts and their dangers, but it would also bring not a little anxiety as to the ultimate

issue. It might be helpful for us to know that the Lord Jesus was sharing our struggles, and fighting with us, and indeed we often think of Him in that way—thine eyes shall see the king in His armour! He has an armour and a sword; but we must seek the vision of faith which beholds Him as the One who has fought the fight, defeated the foe, and is now robed as the mighty Conqueror. We are often so impressed by the forces of evil and the intensity of the battle that if we see the Lord at all we seem to see Him struggling, as it were, in our struggles, and beset by our dangers. We are fighting, so we imagine that the Lord is also having to fight to maintain His position. In the strain of the conflict we wonder what the issue will be. So it might have been for the Jews to have seen Hezekiah in his fighting apparel. The promise offers something better than that. Their eyes shall see a more blessed sight than that, even the king triumphant and assured, crowned and wearing his coronation robes.

What does this mean spiritually? It means that the battle is, in fact, over. The issue is decided! The Lord Jesus is not fighting—He is reigning! The promise is that our eyes shall see Him, not only in His humiliation, nor even in His conflict, but in His final triumph. So far as He personally is concerned the matter is decided, and He Who is with us is found in all the resplendent majesty and glory of a battle fought and won, of an issue finally and for ever settled, and of a throne secured. He is even now "crowned with glory and honour"—"the king in his beauty." Such a vision is essential for us to triumph in our own personal experiences. Real faith is needed for us to appropriate such a promise for, as has already been pointed out, this is not a vision resulting from quiet and easy conditions, but one to be experienced in the midst of the heat of a Satanic onslaught. Now the devil always wants us to look away from the Lord. His objective is often to get us preoccupied with his own might and activities, as indeed the besieged Jews might well have been with the hostile armies encamped all around them. Their eyes must not see the foe, except as in relation to this central vision of the king in his triumph. We cannot ignore that there is an enemy, and that it is our duty to stand against him; but we must beware of succumbing to his very wiles by concentrating too much attention on him, striving and struggling with him as though the dispute between his throne and the throne of Christ were not finally settled in the Cross. Our 'stand' is not for the obtaining of that victory, but for the assertion of it as a fact. The greatest need, and the most impor-

tant factor in this evil day is to keep our eyes on the glorified Lord; in the midst of pressure and strife we must look away from that which seems to be the cause of our trouble, or from those who are making difficulties, away from Satan himself to the One at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The devil does not greatly mind our talking about him, nor is he necessarily perturbed by our praying about him. What brings about his defeat is our glorying in the risen Christ, our joyful assertion of the triumph of Calvary, our singing the praises of the King in His beauty. That drives him away in despair. The devil can no more bear the pure atmosphere of the praises of the Lamb than we can bear the foul atmosphere of evil men who serve and worship Satan. The secret of victory, then, is to keep in view the glorious triumph of Christ—"Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty."

Claiming the Far Distances for Christ

"They shall behold a land that reacheth afar" (a land of far distances). Though the King is to be our first and central vision, there is much more to be seen in the light of His triumph. We must look out as well as up. The danger is that, being shut up in the munition of rocks and made so conscious of the furious siege of the enemy, we are apt to allow our vision to become limited to the small circle in which we are found. Jerusalem's chief function is to be the governing centre of the whole land, and so its inhabitants must look out to the farthest bounds of that land. It is not enough to hold our own, to see that the enemy does not break into our own little fortress; our vision must embrace all the land, and the purpose of God in far-reaching distances. The extraordinary aspect of this promise is that it spoke of those very regions which had been devastated by the Assyrians—the land of far distances. All the promises of God, all the purpose of God, were bound up with that land, and the devil had wasted it and forced God's people into the narrow confines of one beleaguered city, threatening to overwhelm them even there, and boasting meanwhile that all the rest was his. Until they see the king in his beauty, that indeed is the case; but now in the light of that central vision of victory they must look out and claim the whole land for God. It is not enough for the siege to be lifted; even the far distances must be possessed in the name of the Lord.

This is the secret of spiritual triumph—to see a land of far distances in the light of a vision of the all-conquering King. When our eyes have gazed upon Him in the glory of His universal victory we are able to look out and affirm

that the territory around is not the enemy's but the Lord's. By faith we claim the whole inheritance for Him. We must not allow ourselves to be limited to our own small realm, but must have a heart for the whole purpose of God in the earth, and a vision which embraces lands of far distances.

The Raising of the Siege

When faith adopts this attitude, and the promise of the full expression of Calvary's triumph is appropriated, the sequel is startling. "Thine heart shall muse on the terror: where is he that counted, where is he that weighed the tribute? Where is he that counted the towers? Thou shalt not see the fierce people . . ." You have seen what was invisible, except to faith, and now you turn to that which was previously so painfully clear—and it has disappeared. While you have been occupied with the Lord, and enlarging your vision to the distant ranges, the enemy has been temporarily forgotten. Now you look for him, and where is he? The Assyrians had been so very much in evidence, but working on the ground of His people's faith God has now completely dispersed them.

The scenes described in these verses have been depicted in actual engravings which have been unearthed. They represent the fall of captured cities, with the soldiers bringing out the spoil while scribes sit at tables to count; weigh and record the various items. Others are engaged in surveying, counting the towers, etc., so that a boastful report may be made of the greatness of the conquest. It seems that the Assyrians were so confident of victory in this case that they had already assembled these scribes, and set in motion the organization for assessing the tribute, counting the towers, and adding to their own fame by describing the downfall of Jerusalem. "Thine heart shall muse on the terror." The Israelites had seen it all, and had trembled at the arrogant confidence of these fierce warriors. All hope seemed to have been lost. Now they turn from the vision of the king and the land, remembering with sinking hearts what they may expect to see all around, only to discover that the dreaded enemy has disappeared. While they have been glorying in the Lord and rejoicing over the land of far distances the Assyrian hosts have melted away. Thus was the siege broken. The Israelites did not fight; the Lord fought for them. As they took by faith the position of spiritual ascendancy, the Lord dealt with their enemies, smiting the armies with a terrible plague, and sending Sennacherib in haste back to Nineveh, only to meet his death there. The Lord did it. They maintained their faith attitude, and so not only was the

siege broken around Jerusalem but the whole land was freed and the vast hosts of Assyrians suffered calamitous defeat.

It is thus that the Satanic siege is broken. "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty." If God's people will keep the risen and glorified Christ in view, and have their whole lives governed by that vision, victory is certain.

We, too, shall look out for the dreaded hosts which surround us and not find them. The Lord can deal with our enemies. He sent only one angel—it was enough! He needed only one night! And He has promised to make us more than conquerors, on the same basis, if we really lay hold by faith of this fourfold promise.

H.F.

Prophetic Ministry

VI. The Kingdom and Entrance into it

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor, the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts xiii. 27).

"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. xi. 11-15).

"The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it" (Luke xvi. 16).

I THINK we can recognise that the common link between Acts xiii. 27 and Matt. xi. 13 is "all the prophets." In the one case they heard not the voices of the prophets; in the other it is said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

The Prophets Prophesied of the Kingdom

First of all, we must understand the meaning of this whole statement in Matt. xi—"all the prophets . . . prophesied until John." What did they prophesy? Of course, they prophesied many things, and an inclusive and governing thing in their prophecies was concerning the coming King and the Kingdom. So much was that true that the matter of the Kingdom is taken for granted in the New Testament. When you open the New Testament and begin to read in the Gospels, you find that no explanation is given. The Kingdom is not introduced as something of which people were unaware. You find from amongst the people those who came to the Lord Jesus and used the very phrase, and you find the Lord Himself, although the matter was not mentioned by some who came to Him, using the phrase 'the Kingdom' without any introduction or

explanation. Nicodemus was a case in point. We have nothing in the narrative to indicate that Nicodemus said anything at all about the Kingdom. He started by saying, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God." There was nothing about the Kingdom in that. The Lord Jesus interrupted there and said, "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Evidently that was the thing that was in the mind of Nicodemus, and the Lord knew it. You see, it is a thing taken for granted in the New Testament; and although later, as we find in the book of the Acts and subsequently, the true heavenly explanation is given, or there is some teaching concerning its true meaning, the Kingdom is something that is already very much in the minds of the Jewish people, and of course it has come from the prophets. The prophets had a lot to say concerning the Kingdom, and some of them had something very definite to say about the King. We will not draw upon that. It is a statement which you can easily verify.

What did the prophets prophesy? Well, inclusively, concerning the King and the Kingdom. What was the culmination of the prophets in that comprehensive connection? It was John the Baptist. He gathered them all up; he was, so to speak, the inclusive prophet. What was John the Baptist? Well, he was the terminal point between all that had been and that which was now going to be, between the Old Testament and the New. That is the statement here—"all . . . prophesied until John." Until John; now—from John. What was the message of John? "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iii. 2). But alongside of that, the great outstanding note of John is, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" Those are not two different things; they are one. "The kingdom . . . is at hand": "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

The Kingdom Present in Christ

What was the issue, then, from John's time—the issue which sprang into new meaning,

new force, because it had become an immediate one; no longer that of prophecy but now the issue of actuality? It was the kingdom of heaven. "The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached." The prophets had prophesied it; now it is preached as having come and having come with "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world."

What, then, is the kingdom of heaven? We have just led up to this step by step, and when we answer this final question we shall see clearly what it was these Jewish rulers and dwellers in Jerusalem never saw, though they heard the prophets week by week.

I am going to press the challenge of this again. I feel that it is a very solemn thing that ever the kingdom of heaven should have come near to anyone. You see, the Lord is going eventually to judge everyone, on their opportunity. The opportunity has been given—and contact is opportunity. The very availability of the Kingdom is opportunity. What is done with opportunity? The Lord Jesus walked in the midst of this nation three and a half years. His very presence among them was their opportunity, and what a terrible, terrible consequence followed their failure to make good their opportunity! Now there may be someone in this category who reads these words. Through reading them, if never before (surely we could hardly say that), there has been available to you the gospel of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of the fact of the Lord Jesus and His Cross. To have ever had that within your reach is enough to settle your eternal destiny. Of course, this was very much more in the case of these people, and their condemnation was so much the more. But the principle is this, that, if the kingdom of heaven is come near—within the compass and range of your life, to your knowledge—that is the ground upon which your eternal destiny may be settled. The prophets prophesied in their hearing, and yet because of something in their own makeup, because of some reaction from themselves, the rulers and the people never heard what they were hearing; they never recognised that here was something which had great implications, and that they must find out what those implications really were. They did not take the attitude, 'If there is something here which concerns me, I must know what it is.' You could hardly ask for less than that, could you? and the very absence of that kind of reaction to the presence of the gospel, as I have said, may be the ground upon which judgment will take place. It did in their case, and a terrible judgment it was! What a judgment, these two thousand years of Jewish his-

tory! "Your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. xxiii. 38). Was there ever a story of more awful desolation than the story of the Jews since then? But, even so, that is only a parable of desolation, something here on this earth. What must desolation in the spiritual and eternal sense mean—forsaken of God, and knowing it? It is a solemn message, and of course it paves the way to this other part, the "violent" entering into the Kingdom. This is something to take seriously, something about which you cannot afford to be careless or indifferent.

What is the Kingdom? The answer to that can be given in three or four quite brief statements. What did the kingdom of heaven prove to be? I repudiate that system of interpretation which claims that a literal, earthly, temporal kingdom was offered to the Jews at this time. I do not believe it. It would have been a poor sort of thing for the people of whom we read in the Gospels to have had the kingdom in their hands—not much glory or satisfaction to God in them! Look at Palestine today, and see what kind of kingdom it would be in the hands of those people! What is possible for the world when that kind of thing gets the kingdom? I repudiate that interpretation of a temporal kingdom being offered to Israel by Jesus at that time. What did the kingdom of heaven which was preached in the days of John the Baptist prove to be and to mean, as the Lord Jesus interpreted it, and later the Apostles?

What the Kingdom is—(a) A New Life

First of all, the kingdom of heaven was a new life, altogether other than that which men knew anything about in all their history from Adam onward. That is what the Lord meant in His own first reference to the Kingdom when speaking to a soul about that soul's need. "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," because it is another life that has to come in as by a birth. It is not just the energising of an old life. It is not just the swinging over of an old life into new interests, turning from one line of interest to another, from one system of occupation to another; once you were all out for the world, and now with the same life and interest you are all out for Christianity. No, it is another, different life, a life that never was, given from God Himself. The very essence of the kingdom of heaven is that it is a heavenly nature in a heavenly life, given as a distinct gift at a crisis. Another life—that is the Kingdom, to begin with.

(b) A New Relationship

It is a new relationship, a relationship with God which is not simply that now we become interested in God—that God becomes an object of our consideration and we swing over from one state of relationship to another because now we have taken up Christianity. No, it is a relationship which is that of this very life itself, bringing with it an altogether new and different consciousness, so far as our relationship to God is concerned. The great truth of the Gospels, especially as emphasized in the Gospel by John, is that a new revelation of relationship with God has come by Jesus Christ. "I manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world" (John xvii. 6). That name, of which He is always speaking, represented a new relationship—"Father"; not in the sense of that general and universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, but a specific, new relationship which comes only by the entering in of the Holy Spirit into the life as a definite, crisis act. "God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). When did that happen with you? What was the very first lisp of your new life? "Father!"—uttered out of a new consciousness. Not God afar off, unthinkable, all-terrible, of Whom you are afraid; no, "Father!" "Born of the Spirit," an entirely new relationship.

(c) A New Constitution

Then the kingdom of heaven is a new constitution. I am not thinking now of a set of laws and regulations; but of a new constitution so far as you and I are concerned—constituted anew, with an entirely new set of capacities which make possible things which were never possible before. It ought to be recognised—and I would have all of you lay it to heart anew—that the child of God, the member of the kingdom of heaven, is the embodiment of a miracle, which means that there are supernatural possibilities and capacities in every such one. What tremendous things go on in the history of a child of God, which, when we see fully and clearly at last, we shall recognise to have been nothing less than Divine miracles again and again! We do not know all the forces which are bent upon the destruction of a child of God, and how much his preserving through to the end represents an exercise of the almighty power of God. Some of us know a little about that—that our very survival is because God has exercised power over other immense hostile powers, and that we are kept by the power of God; and it takes the power of God to keep us!

The inception of the life of the child of God is a miracle. How can a man be born again? There is no answer to that question except that God does it. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John vi. 52). That is, how can the child of God be supported throughout, without anything here to help, to succour, to nourish? There is no answer to that either, except that God does it; and if He does not, the child of God, because of the extra forces centred upon him or her for destruction, will simply go under. The consummation of the life of the child of God will be equally a miracle. "How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?" (I Cor. xv. 35). The answer to that is the same—God alone is going to do it.

The whole matter is a miracle from start to finish. It is a new constitution, having in it possibilities and capacities which are altogether above and beyond the highest level of human abilities, that is, above and over the whole kingdom of earth and nature.

(d) A New Vocation

Further, it is a new vocation. It is something for which to live, something in which to serve, something to bring into operation. It becomes the sphere and the means of a new life ministry and purpose. The very consciousness of a truly born-again child of God is like this—"Now I know why I am alive! I have been wondering all along why I was born, and I have grumbled about it and felt I was hardly done by in being brought into this world without being consulted as to whether I wanted to come; but now I see there is some purpose in it; I have something to live for!" A truly born-again child of God goes off and tells people that, after all, it is worth being alive. He has discovered behind everything else, that which has Divine intent and meaning, and which never came in as an active thing until he was born anew and entered into the Kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is a new vocation, a new sense of life purpose. It gives to life a meaning. That is the Kingdom.

Is that not altogether a different idea from that which would make the Kingdom a place with certain laws and regulations—"You must" and "You must not"—something objective? "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 21), and it is after this kind.

**(e) A New Gravitation—
to Heaven, not Earth**

It is moreover something from above, and that surely implies that it is transcendent in every way. It is something that lives, and it brings life up on to a higher level. That is, if

the new life comes from above, from heaven, it will always gravitate back to its source, and if this new life works in us, it will be lifting us, pulling us upward to God. It will so work that we shall feel first of all that this world is not our home. It was our home; everything for us was here until that happened; we saw nothing beyond. Now we do not belong to it, we belong somewhere else; and in some strange way we are steadily moving further and further away from this earth. We find that we become less comfortable here every day. You are in the Kingdom if you have something like that experience. If you can be comfortable and happy and content to go on here you ought to have grave doubts as to where you are regarding the Kingdom. But if you are increasingly conscious that the distance is growing inwardly between you and all that is here, then the Kingdom is truly at work, the kingdom of heaven has come.

The Kingdom Come but also Coming

Now, another thing; the Kingdom has come, but it is always coming. We have entered, but we ought to be always entering. There is a little word at the end of the letter to the Hebrews—"Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken . . ." (Heb. xii. 28). The literal tense there is—"Wherefore, being in the course or process of receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken . . ." It has come, but it is coming; and it is at that point that I think we all need to recognise a difference, to discriminate between two things—between conversion and salvation. Have you ever made that distinction? There is all the difference between conversion and salvation. Conversion is a crisis, something that happens perhaps suddenly, in a moment, and is done. Salvation? That is something that has commenced; and you find the New Testament speaks about "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (I. Pet. i. 9), thus indicating that salvation is still future. Some people have built a false doctrine upon this, teaching that you cannot know you are saved until you are at the end, because it is spoken of in the future tense. But we are saved, and we are being saved. We have entered the Kingdom by conversion, but salvation is a far greater thing than conversion. Oh, salvation is a vast thing, and is only another word for the Kingdom—the Kingdom coming all the time. A spiritual babe who has just received Divine life has not got everything, except potentially. It has conversion, it has new birth. Would you say that a little babe has everything it is intended to have? Potentially, in the life, all is there. But how much more there

is to be known of what that life carries with it and implies and will lead to, and of all the capacities that are there! That is the difference between conversion and salvation. The Kingdom is a vast kingdom—"His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom" (Dan. iv. 3). "Of the increase of his government . . . there shall be no end" (Isa. ix. 7). 'No end' simply means eternally expansive. Can you make just a geographical matter of that? Surely not. It must be spiritual—the vast inexhaustible resources of God for His own people. It will take eternity to know and explore all those resources, the dimensions of His kingdom.

The Kingdom Suffers Violence

Now then, having in that very imperfect way presented what the prophets were talking about and what you and I have come into touch with; see what can be missed. Let us look at these other words—"The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it" (Luke xvi. 16). "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12). It "suffereth violence." That does not simply mean that it permits of violence. It really means that it calls for violence, and it is men of violence that take it by force. Luke puts it "entereth violently." Here is the spirit of citizenship in that kingdom—"by force." Why? This is not merely an appeal to be in earnest—though it certainly includes that, seeing what a tremendous thing this kingdom is, and what an immense loss will be suffered if we do not take it seriously. But you see, the Lord Jesus is speaking as in the midst of things which are constantly opposing. There is a whole organised system, expressing tremendous prejudice. He said to them on one occasion, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter" (Matt. xxiii. 13). There is everything, from devil and men, to obstruct; to enter in requires violence. If you can be hindered, you will be hindered. If you are going to be easy-going, you will give to antagonistic forces all the ground that they want to put you out. That is why I pointed out that it is not only a once-for-all entering into the Kingdom, but it is a continuous entering. The Kingdom is so much bigger than conversion. If you are going to be saved at all, you will have to mean business for that. You will have to make it a desperate matter, because there will be everything to stop you. But the King-

dom means a very great deal more than merely getting into it, more than being converted. There is a great deal more in the purpose of God for our lives than ever we have imagined, and if we are to enter into that, violence has to characterise us. We must desperately mean business and come to the place where we say, 'Lord, I am set upon all that Thou dost mean and want; not what I see, but what Thou dost mean in Christ. I am set upon that, and I am not going to allow other people's prejudices or suspicions or criticisms to get in my way; I am not going to allow any man-made system to hinder me; I am going right on with Thee for all Thy purpose. I am going to do violence to everything that would get in the way.' It calls for violence, and we have to do a lot of violence to get all that God wills for us. Oh, how easily many lives are side-tracked, simply because they are not desperate enough! They are caught in things which limit—things which may be good, that may have something of God in them, but which none the less are limiting things, and do not represent a wide open way to all God's purpose. The only way for us to come into all that the Lord means—not only what we have seen but into all that He has purposed—is to be desperate, men of violence; men who say, 'By God's grace, nothing and no one, however good, is going to stand in my way; I am going on with God.' Have that position with the Lord, and you will find that God meets you on that ground.

No men—not even Paul himself—knew all that they were going to know. Paul was constantly getting fuller unveilings of that unto which he was called. He received something fairly strong and rich at the beginning; then later, he was shown unspeakable things (II Cor. xii. 4). He was growing in apprehension. But why? Because he was a man of violence. God meets us like that. "With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward" (Psa. xviii. 26, A.V.). That, in principle, means that God will be to you what you are to Him. He will mean business if you mean business. There is a vast amount in the Kingdom that we have never suspected—do believe that. There is more for all of us to know than anybody on this earth knows—far more than the very greatest saints, the most advanced Christians, know of the purpose of God. Paul intimates that. In his

Philippian letter he makes it clear that, even at the end of his life, he has yet to apprehend, he needs still to know. "That I may know . . ." (Phil. iii. 10). There is far more to know. Do you believe that? Are you going to allow your life simply to be boxed up within the measure that you know, or within the measure of other people? No—it is the measure of Christ that is God's end. ". . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 13). No movement, no society, no evangelical organisation, no church on this earth has come to that yet, but that is the objective in view. But I tell you that God requires, in order to bring us to fulness, that we be men of violence, that we really mean business, that we say to everything that gets in the way—and oh, the plausible voices, which nevertheless are subtly influenced by prejudices!—"Stand thou aside, I am going on with God, I am going to allow nothing to stand in the way."

"The gospel of the kingdom is preached." Can you imagine those Judaisers speaking to the people about Jesus? 'Be careful, mind you don't get caught; our advice to you is to steer clear of that, don't get into too close touch with Him!' All that was going on. Paul was up against it all the time. He was tracked down throughout all his journeys by these very people who, following on his heels, said, 'Be careful, it is dangerous!' The Lord Himself experienced the same kind of thing; and He said—"the kingdom . . . suffereth violence." It calls for violence; you will not get in to begin with, and you will certainly not get in in growing fulness, unless you are one of those people who do violence to everything that stands in the way of God's full purpose as revealed in Christ. You will not even know what that purpose is, God will not be able to reveal to you the next part of it, unless He finds that you are one after this kind—entering in violently. Are you like that? Well, there is everything to be lost if we are passive; there is everything to be gained if we mean business. The Lord make us men and women like that, lest we be numbered among those of whom it is said that they "have ears to hear, and hear not" (Ezek. xii. 2).

T.A.-S.

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Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XIV)

“Power belongeth unto God” (Psalm lxii. 11).
 “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. xv. 57).

ONE of the most thrilling incidents recorded in our book concerns Capt. Scott's ship the “Discovery” which he used on his first visit to the Antarctic. At one period the sea in which the ship was anchored became frozen and continued so for many months, so that the “Discovery” remained there, fixed immovably in very thick ice. It was anticipated that with the return of warmer weather the ice would break up and the ship would be set free, but for some unexplained reason this did not happen, and the ship remained imprisoned. This continued for so long that the position of the whole expedition became very serious. Everything was attempted that offered any hope of release. Twenty miles of ice lay between the ship and the open sea. A vain attempt was made to saw a channel from a half-way point. Explosions in the ice were tried, but with no result. The explorers almost despaired of freedom. But one day there came a change in the situation. A shout from one of the men brought all the rest racing from their hut to the slopes above the bay where the ship was lying. This is how Capt. Scott described the scene:—

‘The ice was breaking up right across the Strait, and with a rapidity which we had not thought possible. No sooner was one great ice floe borne away than a dark streak cut its way into the solid sheet that remained, and carved out another, to feed the broad stream of pack ice which was hurrying away towards the open sea. I have never witnessed a more impressive sight. The wind had fallen to a dead calm, and not a sound disturbed the peaceful stillness about us. Yet in the midst of this peaceful silence was an awful, unseen agency rending that great ice-sheet as though it had been naught but the thinnest paper. We knew well by this time the nature of our prison bars; we had not plodded again and again over those long dreary miles of ice and snow without realizing the formidable strength of the great barrier which held us bound; we knew that the heaviest battleship would have shattered itself ineffectually against it, and we had seen a million-ton iceberg brought to rest at its edge. For weeks we had been struggling with this mighty obstacle; but now without a word, without an effort on our part, it was all melting

away, and we knew that in an hour or two not a vestige of it would be left and that the open sea would be lapping on the black rocks below us.’

Can you imagine the excitement and the relief? The ship had been like a city besieged by an army. There was no way out until the surrounding ice had been broken. Man's utmost strength proved pitifully unequal to the task; but to the power of God working through nature there was no difficulty at all. “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke xviii. 27).

We often find ourselves in a similar position of difficulty. Our ‘ship’ becomes frozen in, through circumstances arising which make it impossible for us to do even what we believe God wants us to do. It sometimes seems as if the circumstances have acquired an uncanny wisdom—as if things and events, which in themselves certainly have no power to think and to plan, have suddenly become capable of planning and scheming, and are working together with the one purpose of hedging us in so that we cannot move. And that is often truer than we might suppose; there frequently is such a plan in operation, and a clever mind and powerful hand at work upon our circumstances, with the very object of hindering us. The mind and hand belong to Satan. He uses events and things in the world to hinder the work of God and to hold in captivity those who seek to serve God. His grip upon a human life is first known when the person concerned seeks to escape from the bondage of sin. How strong are Satan's chains! how great and thick the doors and bars of the prison in which he holds the sinner! how thick and unbreakable is the ‘ice’! No amount of human effort can ever set free from such captivity; it will fail as completely as the efforts of the explorers to free their ship. A greater power is needed—and, praise God, it is available through Jesus Christ.

But even when we have found deliverance from the power of sin we are by no means at the end of these ‘besiegings’—rather the contrary. Satan will do his utmost to keep us shut in so that we cannot do the will of God. Our ship is frozen in again and again! Unfortunately, at such times we often fail to understand what is happening, and we set about trying by our own efforts to break the ice. Perhaps in our case the ice consists of an awkward person who will not allow us to do what we feel God wants us to do, and we try to persuade him to change his mind—and he

will not. Perhaps some circumstance has arisen that blocks our path, and we try to alter it—and cannot. Perhaps it is some duty that falls to us just at a critical moment and threatens to prevent us from going somewhere that the Lord wants us to go, and we try to put the duty on to someone else—and can find nobody to take it. Perhaps so common a thing as a change of weather threatens to hinder the work of God; perhaps sickness arises; perhaps we suddenly feel too tired to do what we are sure God wants us to do. Oh, there may be many different things that ‘freeze our ship into the ice’ and make it impossible for us to move her. What are we to do? Try and saw through the twenty miles of ice? Try and blow holes in it with the poor weak explosions of our own efforts? We shall make no progress that way. We need another kind of power altogether—the power of God. You may like to know that in the New Testament (which was written originally in the Greek language) the Greek word used to describe that power is *dunamis*, from which comes our English word ‘dynamite.’ Far better to have God’s dynamite at work than ours!

The Bible contains many stories that show us the power of God in action, breaking in pieces the doors of brass; and cutting in sunder the bars of iron (Isaiah xlv. 2). At the Red Sea the children of Israel were shut in between the sea and the Egyptian army, and could do nothing to free themselves. Moses said to them “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you to-day.” (Ex. xiv. 13). And by God’s power the waters of the sea were divided and the way of escape made. At Jerusalem, when Jehoshaphat and his people were threatened by overwhelming hosts of their enemies and had to say “we have no might . . . neither know we what to do,” God’s message to them was, “Ye shall not need to fight . . . stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you” (II Chron. xx. 12, 17); and the mighty power of God destroyed the enemies, and His people were freed. Again at Jerusalem, when Hezekiah and his people were besieged by the Assyrians and could do nothing to release themselves, they cried to the Lord to deliver them, and His answer was, “Be not afraid . . . of the king of Assyria . . . He shall return unto his own land . . . for I will defend this city to save it . . .” (Isaiah xxxvii. 7, 35). And without Hezekiah’s army doing anything whatever, without a sound and with the greatest ease, the ‘ice’ was broken up and disappeared! We read (verse 36), “the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000. So Sennacherib king of Assyria

departed . . .” What a simple solution of an ‘impossible’ problem! Truly there is nothing too hard for the Lord! Many years later, Peter was shut up in prison, chained to the soldiers that guarded him. His friends outside longed for his release but what power had they to break up the ‘ice’ that held him fast? It was another ‘impossible’ situation. So they prayed. And that very night Peter was set free by an angel, the gates of the prison opened of their own accord, and he found himself at liberty. The ‘ice’ had melted and the ‘ship’ was released, and nobody but God had done anything—except by prayer! (Acts xii. 1-19). How easy for God, but how impossible for men!

Now let us specially note some matters.

I. How does God show His power?

Generally in a way that does not appear very wonderful or sensational. Things ‘just happen.’ The awkward person may simply change his mind; the difficult circumstance may just disappear; some unexpected friend may turn up just at the critical moment and relieve us of that awkward duty; the threatening change of weather may not take place; the sickness may pass; our tiredness may just be forgotten. Nothing very sensational about any of these things—but our own efforts could not accomplish them. They represent the operation of the mighty power of God. Without a sound, without effort, the ice has gone and our ship is free!

II. Why and when does God show His power?

I have already said that it is the mind and hand of Satan that so often produce the difficulties that bind us in. Why does God allow this, seeing that He could, if He wished, destroy Satan and his work in a moment? It is because He wants us, His people, to learn the way of victory over Satan. The difficulties are therefore allowed for our instruction. And thank God, victory over Satan is not gained by our struggling against him. There is One Who has already done that, and gained a full and final victory over him. In His Cross the Lord Jesus Christ utterly overcame him, and is now seated in heaven, in the place of all authority and power, able and willing to share His victory with any—even the least and the weakest—who trust in Him. So for us, deliverance from Satan and all his work comes by claiming Christ’s victory, not by struggling for our own. “Christ (is) the power of God” (I Cor. i. 24). And in answer to our claim, God works.

III. For whom does God show His power?

His Word tells us that “the eyes of the Lord run to and from throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of

them whose heart is perfect toward him" (II Chron. xvi. 9). A "perfect" heart. That is not a heart that never sins, but one that is complete or undivided—wholly set upon God in reverence and love, in confidence and humble dependence; and a heart that wants only God's will—that does not even want the ice to be broken up and the ship to be released unless that can be for God's glory; a heart that does not vainly struggle to do everything for itself but brings all its needs to God in earnest prayer. No one can have such an attitude towards God if they have not first of all found peace with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then asked that their heart might be cleansed from all selfish and sinful desires and that they might be filled with the Holy Spirit. Have you done this?

IV. If God's power, not our own, does the work, is there nothing at all for us to do?

Yes, there is one thing we must do—we must work *the work of faith*. We read that "God

worketh for him that waiteth for him" (Isaiah lxiii. 4. R.V.). "Waiting" for God. That does not mean just being lazy, waiting until something happens. It means a continual attitude of faith and prayer, standing before God continually and asking that the victory of Jesus Christ may be granted to us in our time of need. Our deliverance may not come at the moment when we first pray. We must continue waiting in faith. And "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. vi. 9).

Do you see the way of releasing your 'ship' from the 'ice'? The boy or girl who knows how to claim the mighty victory of Calvary over all the power of Satan will certainly find release that others will never know, and will arrive at the 'South Pole' while others are still a long way behind, vainly trying by their own feeble little explosions to break the ice that holds up their progress.

For the Lion of Judah shall break every chain,
And give us the victory again and again.

G. P.

"Behold, My Servant" (III).

Reading: Isa. lii. 13-15; liii. 1-12.

"Behold, my servant . . ." (Isa. lii. 13).

"Behold, the Lamb of God" (John i. 29).

"Behold, the man!" (John xix. 5).

"Behold, your King!" (John xix. 14).

WE are going to be quite brief and simple in what we say in the fourfold connection of service represented here—so very full and altogether defeating every attempt at bringing out its depth, its wonder, its glory; but our hope is that, altogether apart from what is said, we shall be touched in our hearts by the spirit of service breathed by these four designations.

The Servant

"Behold, my servant." It does not need a great deal of insight to see that those four designations correspond to what is in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah's prophecies. (In passing, it is much to be regretted that what has been called the fifty-third chapter should begin at the question, "Who hath believed our message?" In the original text the new section begins at verse 13 of what is Chapter lii—"Behold, my servant"—and should run right on as we read it; and then all that follows is the servant seen from different standpoints, and those different standpoints are the four which we have mentioned—"My servant," "the Lamb of God," "the Man," "your King.")

Matthew, when he quotes Isa. xlii. 1—"Behold, my servant"—uses the Greek word for bond-slave—"Behold, my bond-servant"

or "bond-slave" (Matt. xii. 18)—which at once gives a different complexion to the whole matter of the servant and His service; for when it comes to the bond-slave—the indentured, branded bond-slave—you know that all personal rights and liberties have been abandoned. For such, there are no personal rights and no personal liberties, they have been surrendered. The idea, therefore, of the servant of the Lord as represented by the Lord Jesus is that of a bond-slave, and this implies utter self-emptying: (And can it be otherwise with any other servant of the Lord? Surely it is impossible for us to assume any higher position in our service to the Lord than He took.) So Paul, when he says "taking the form of a bond-servant" links with it—he "emptied himself" (Phil. ii. 7).

You see, He was reversing the whole course of evil. The Cross—which is but the point at which this self-emptying reaches its fulness and finality of expression and demonstration—is the culmination of an undoing and an emptying of something which had no right. By letting go His rights, He undid false rights. The whole course of evil, of sin, began with Satan and is written in the history of man, who, at the instigation of Satan, sought to have personal fulness of rights and liberties, taking it out of the hands of God and having it in his own hands. Satan began it, even in the very height of his glory, and it was a tremendous thing that he lost. We will not go back in detail to those descriptions of him in person,

position and office before his fall—the covering cherub occupying the position which those custodians of the very mercy-seat within the tabernacle later occupied, “the anointed cherub that covereth: . . . thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire” (Eze. xxviii. 14), and so on. And he sought more than that. What more was there to have but the very throne of God, equality with God, and in that false ambition and aspiration to have the very place of God within himself, to be the central object of worship? Satan brought into man’s nature all that which we know exists within ourselves of desire to have things our way, to be regarded as something: or, to put it the other way, all that hatred for being nothing and being emptied. You know what human nature is now. All this that we in our lifetime have seen and known in world affairs is simply the outworking of that original evil—to have within your own power the dominion, the god-ship, the worshio. To undo it all, the Lord Jesus emptied Himself—and that is service; to undo that. It is not only the bringing of God into His place, but also the bringing back to God of everything that has been taken from Him. That is the spirit of service.

It works out this way—that, in order to get everything for God, we have no ground of our own to stand on. If God is going to be all in all, as He ultimately is going to be, it will be by this way of the Cross; firstly, by the Son’s emptying of Himself; and then by our being emptied. Our emptying is not in the same realm as His, for we have not His rights and His glories and His fulness, but still it is an emptying, and God only knows what that means in its full measure. We know a little of the way of the Cross in our own lives, finding ourselves all the time being emptied and poured out, every bit of ground of selfhood taken away to give God His full place. “Behold, my servant,” “my bond-slave.” That means utter self-emptying.

The Lamb

“Behold, the Lamb of God”—and that only carries what we have said to its final step. If the very essence of servant-hood is obedience unto another, the repudiation of all one’s own rights, then the Lamb says that that obedience is unto death. “. . . taking the form of a bondservant . . . becoming obedient even unto death” (Phil. ii. 7-8). You pass at once from the slave to the Lamb, the Lamb obedient unto death. “As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa. liiii. 7) in complaint, in revolt, in objection, in retaliation, in resistance, in excuse, in self-pity. No!

“. . . becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.”

“Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” The *sin*—not the sins—of the world; the whole world’s sin. What is the whole world’s sin? It is Adam’s sin; it is disobedience through unbelief. That is the world’s sin. Paul argues that out in his letter to the Romans—the unbelief, the disobedience, from the very beginning. He, the Lamb, takes away the sin of the world, the whole world’s disobedience, in His obedience. He compasses all disobedience in His one act of obedience by which He sanctifies them that believe once for all. He takes away the sin.

If you want that illustrated, you have the simplest and most familiar of illustrations. “Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” Where did that Lamb first come into view, in type, in figure? In Egypt, on the Passover night. “The Lord spake unto Moses . . . They shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household” (Ex. xii. 1, 3). Now, there was no virtue in the actual animal or its blood. The blood of lambs, rams, bulls, goats, had no virtue; but the virtue was typically in their obedience which was so utter as to be unto death. The deep doctrine here is that life springs out of death. The death of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb meant the life of the believer through faith. While death swept through the land, life was theirs through faith. “Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin”—the unbelief and the disobedience.

You know that is pressed all the way through with Israel. In the brazen serpent—“if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived” (Num. xxi. 9). It was the obedience, it was the faith, that was virtuous—not the serpent. The faith of the Son of God led Him to death in His Cross—faith in God Who raiseth the dead. He looked through the Cross and was obedient unto death, believing in the God of resurrection. So, life through His faith. The Apostle says, “That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God” (Gal. ii. 20); the virtue of His faith over against the world’s unbelief; the virtue of His obedience over against the disobedience of the whole world. The Lamb of God bore away the sin of the world.

The Man

“Behold, the man!” I expect there was a sneer on Pilate’s face when he said that. Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and a purple garment. It was all done in mockery and for ignominy, and as He came out these

words in Isa. lii. 14 were literally fulfilled—“Like as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men).” Pilate doubtless waved his hand in the direction of Jesus and said, derisively, “Behold, the man!” You see the Cross bringing His manhood down to shame and degradation. They despised Him; His visage was marred more than any man; there is no man in the whole race who is such an object of contempt as He; “more than any man . . . more than the sons of men.” This very word reminds us of a title which He chose for Himself and loved to use of Himself—“the Son of man.” Why did He use it? Because it related Him to the race, it brought Him into kinship with man. And here in the Cross, as man in this deplorable, ignominious state, He shows what man is like in the sight of God, what the race has come to. That men could bring Him to this shows what men are like. Here He is on the one hand representing the deplorable spiritual state to which sin has brought man, and He has entered into that in a kinship with all men—“Him who knew no sin he made sin on our behalf” (II Cor. v. 21). He has entered into our deepest degradation, in order to be the redeeming kinsman. It is a wonderful change of scene from this man Whose visage is marred more than any man, to the Man in the glory or on the Mount of Transfiguration. All that shame and despicableness was necessary in order that He might bring us to this other; it was needful to bring the representative man to that dishonour in order that we might be changed into the likeness of His glorious manhood. “Behold, the man!” What do you look at? It is a sorry and terrible picture of a man that is here. Was there ever service like that—to God, and to the race?

“Behold, the man!”—a man despised, rejected. But the prophet carries it further. “We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” That was the attitude of Job’s friends. ‘God has done this! This is what you deserve at the hands of God!’ That was how man viewed it. A little later the prophet says, “It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he (the Lord) hath put him to grief: . . . thou (the Lord) shalt make his soul an offering for sin.” The Lord brought Him down there in order to exalt us. He, as in His own manhood, touched the very depths of sin’s outworking.

“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” That word ‘iniquity’ carries within its meaning an alliance with Satan. The iniquity of Israel was that they went into alliance with false gods and the gods of the heathen, which are demons. That is the great

iniquity of Israel. “He hath laid on him the iniquity.” See what Satan would do with the Son of God, how he would degrade Him! That is the work of the devil, and men have done it at his instigation; but, in the risen, ascended, glorified Christ, the deepest, direst work of Satan is destroyed by the Cross. That is service to God.

The King

“Behold, your King!” Again, Pilate, of course, was mocking; as far as a man in his predicament could, he was making a joke of it. “Behold, your King! . . . Shall I crucify your King?” It is remarkable how the sovereignty of God is active, even behind a man’s joke. There was far more truth in this than Pilate ever intended. “Your King!” Of course, with the Jews, ‘Messiah’ and ‘king’ were synonymous terms. Their Messiah was to be king, and their king was to be Messiah. They were refusing Him as their Messiah, and therefore as their king. But note how Divine sovereignty transformed the Cross from what men intended it to be—the gibbet of a rejected Messiah—into the throne of a triumphant Christ. He does reign from His Cross, as you and I know. It is by the Cross that He has triumphed. It is by the Cross that He has gained His great ascendancy in our hearts and drawn from the nations through many generations men to worship Him as King. Pilate said, “Behold, your King!”, and the Jews replied ‘Crucify him! he is no king of ours!’ But God saw to it that in that very hour He ascended a spiritual and moral throne which has shaken this universe to its utmost bounds. Through the door which was opened then and there we are able to look in the book of the Revelation, and we see in chapter i the Man; and then we see the Servant, the Lamb; then we see the King. “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” yet the Lamb in the midst of the throne. The government, the throne, the kingship are held together from Calvary onward.

Well, that is servanthood, and service, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned. I am not suggesting that we can serve in the same fulness and in the same way. We cannot serve atoningly, but we can serve in the same spirit; and service to God does involve the same principles—utter self-emptying, having nothing of our own, obedience even unto death, allowing ourselves to be marred and broken and humbled and despised; but, blessed be God, “if we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (II Tim. ii. 12). The Throne stands at the end of the way of the Cross.

A Way of Growth

II. Heart-Revelation of "the Mystery"

"... making known unto us the mystery of his will..." (Eph. i. 9).

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

"This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. v. 32).

"... that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. vi. 19).

WE have traced through the letter to the Ephesians this characteristic word—"mystery." What is its meaning?

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

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

Two Mysteries

The word 'mystery' is used in several connections in the New Testament, but there are two major connections. You may say that they include the others. Firstly, there is the mystery of Christ. We read the phrase—"the mystery of the gospel"—but that comes within this; that is a part of the mystery of Christ. And secondly, there is the mystery of iniquity. What does the mystery turn out to be when you look into the New Testament? Well, in each case—the mystery of Christ and the mystery of iniquity—you will find it is an incarnation of a great spiritual and supernatural

being entering into man form. That is perfectly clear and simple with regard to Christ. God was in Christ—that is the mystery. In the days of His flesh, no one understood that mystery, it was something hidden. They felt there was something mysterious about Him, something that was different, 'other,' superior. They could not get to the bottom of Him, as we say; they could not quite understand Him. 'There is something about this Man we cannot understand, He is different, He defeats all our attempts at explanation. There is a mystery about Him.' "The world knew him not" (John i. 10). It is the mystery of God in Christ, God appearing in the form of man, God made in the likeness of man.

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

The Twofold Mystery of Christ

But when you come to Christ, you find that the mystery is twofold. Firstly, it is Himself, as we have said; God in Christ personally, so that Christ is God incarnate. But then you find, by what has been revealed to and through Paul, that Christ takes a Body; not a physical body, but a spiritual Body—"the church which is his body" (Eph. i. 22-23); and the Church being His Body again becomes the mystery of Christ; that is, here is God in Christ indwelling a company of people, the elect, the Body of Christ; and the letter to the Ephesians is particularly taken up with that aspect of Christ—that you have here a body of people called the Church, in whom God in Christ dwells. There is a mystery about this people, about this particular Church, there is something here that is supernatural, something here that is spiritual. It is not just a society of people called Christians, a number of people who gather together in the Christian faith and believe certain doctrines. There is something more than that about them. If only you knew it and could understand it, in the deepest and innermost reality of their being they are super-

natural; they are not merely natural people, they are not earthly people. There is something hidden within them which you cannot account for on any other ground, and you have to say, 'It is God, it is the Lord.' When you meet these people, when they are gathered together even in a small company, if you move in there you find something extra to the people, something more than what they are; you meet the Lord. There is a mystery about this, and the mystery of Christ of which Paul is speaking here is not just the mystery of Christ personal, but it is the mystery of Christ corporate, of Christ in His Body the Church.

So Paul is speaking about that mystery, and he is saying, 'Now, this is a heavenly thing, a spiritual thing; this is not something that is on this earth, which you can explain as you can explain other earthly things. This is something heavenly, and you cannot explain that by earthly standards at all.'

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

The Mystery Known Only by Revelation

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

What is Ephesian ground? It is this. Paul says that there was revealed to him this mystery; it was made known to him. And now he tells these people that he prays for them. They are Christians, there is no doubt about that; but he says that he prays for them "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you (Christians) a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory

of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. i. 17-20). All that has to do with the true, eternal vocation and destiny of this Christ corporate. The knowledge of *Him* is not the knowledge of Christ as a separate person. It is the knowledge of Christ now in all that He means in a corporate way. That is the knowledge he prays they may have; and having prayed thus for them he moves to the matter of spiritual enlargement. He comes eventually to that great point in the fourth chapter—"till we all attain . . . unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." How do you attain unto fulness? What is spiritual enlargement? It results from the eyes of your heart being enlightened as to the true meaning and nature of Christ as expressed in His Body the Church. The point is that you see it, that it breaks on you by revelation. Then you are at once out of a Corinthian position, out of a Galatian position, out of a merely earthly Church with its ordinances, ceremonies, etc. You are in a heavenly position, and now you are going to grow.

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

The Church Heavenly and Corporate

Now, reverting to what I said above concerning the true meaning and nature of the Church, I wonder if you have noticed in "Romans," "Corinthians" and "Galatians" the connection of baptism? In Romans vi. baptism results in walking in newness of life. "We were buried . . . with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." That is very simple; that is the beginning; through the spiritual meaning of baptism you simply walk in newness of life, you have a new life. When you come from "Romans" into "Corinthians" you find that union with Christ crucified means that the mixing up of the old life with the new has to be dealt with; you have a new life, but you must not mix the

old life in with it. So "Corinthians" teaches that you must live altogether and only in the new life, and not bring in the old with it. See II Cor. v. When you move into "Galatians," Paul says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (III. 27). In "Galatians," baptism is the putting on of the new man completely; and to indicate that it is an advance upon the Corinthian position, he follows immediately by saying "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus." You put on the new man. The Corinthian divisions are ruled out; baptism in relation to the Galatian position means that we know no man after the flesh. But still in "Romans," "Corinthians," and "Galatians," it is as though we were living as Christians in a new life unto the Lord here, on the earth.

You come into "Ephesians" and you read—"God . . . even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (II. 4-6). Now here, the 'us' is corporate. When you come into "Ephesians" you come on to the ground of what I will call a corporate baptism. It has an individual application, but "Ephesians" views the Church as a whole as a baptized thing. It is as though this whole Body of Christ, the Church, has corporately been baptized, and is no longer an earthly thing at all; it is a heavenly Body. Everything here in this first half of the Ephesian letter is corporate. It was the Church that was foreknown, foreordained, predestinated. It only becomes an individual and personal matter by personal challenge to us in relation to the whole, but it is the Church that is in view, and 'we' who were quickened and raised are a corporate thing; so that, in "Ephesians," baptism sees *the Church* placed in the heavenlies through death and Divine quickening and raising together with Christ. It is something very much fuller than just individual Christian life. You may be baptized as an individual; but you must recognize that God never thinks of you just as an individual in that sense; He never regards you just as one isolated person. He looks upon you from the standpoint of the whole Body and says, 'When you were baptized, you were not only baptized as an individual; you were baptized as part of the Church, and in your resurrection you are seen from heaven in your relatedness to the Church.' Therefore the higher position of "Ephesians" is this—that now, being quickened and raised

together with Christ and seated in the heavenlies is a matter of relatedness to other believers, and in that relatedness you are going to find your fulness. You are never going to find spiritual enlargement just as an isolated, separate individual, but in relation with other believers. "God setteth the solitary in families" (Psa. lxxviii. 6), and there is no doubt about it, whether or not you understand or accept the doctrine of it, you can prove very quickly in experience that our spiritual enlargement does come by way of true spiritual and heavenly relatedness with other believers. That is proved by the fact that it is not always easy for Christians to live together for very long. It sounds a terrible thing to say; but you have a lot of other factors to reckon with. If you were ordinary people in this world, you might get on very well, but being Christians you have to meet the whole force of Satan working upon any little bit of natural life he can find. So he makes for difficulty between Christians that they would not find if they were not in a heavenly position. They are meeting forces in the heavenlies. There are the rub and friction and all the cross currents that try to divide Christians but which do not try to divide other people, because there is so much bound up with true spiritual oneness amongst the Lord's people—so much for the Lord, and so much against Satan. Satan is going to break up that spiritual oneness if he can. He knows what that means for him, and the Lord knows what that means for Himself—and hence the special and extra difficulties when it is a case of Christians living together, especially for a long time.

Now what is the upshot? When these difficulties arise we must say, 'It is evidently necessary for me to get a new spiritual position, to get on top of this. If I am not going to give it up and leave, I must come to some spiritual enlargement; I have to know the Lord in a new way, to have more grace, love and patience.' That is spiritual enlargement, and it comes by relatedness. (Of course, that is only one way; there are many others by which spiritual enlargement comes by relatedness.) If only we can keep together in prayer, there is spiritual enlargement.

You want spiritual enlargement? Recognize that your baptism is not only an individual and personal thing, but from God's standpoint of fulness it is a corporate thing. You may in "Romans" be baptized individually to walk in newness of life, but when you come to "Ephesians," it is corporate; the Church was baptized, it is a baptized Church; a crucified and risen Church, and a Church in the heavenlies that is of spiritual account; not

something here; and there you come into the realm of God's great fulness—"strong to apprehend *with all the saints* what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness

of God" (Eph. iii. 18-19). That is fulness, but notice, that is corporate. We must ask the Lord in the terms of the Apostle's prayer that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened. When we see, it is done. What we need is to see, that we may *know* the hope of His calling.
T. A-S.

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Prophetic Ministry

VII. The Contrast Between the Old Dispensation and the New

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts xiii. 27).

IN a way, that verse is the key to the whole of the book of the Acts, for this book really is an interpretation and exhibition of the principle that is at the heart of that whole statement—that is, that there is the Bible with its verbal statements, its record of utterances and activities of God through men, and it can be read and re-read for a lifetime, as it was in the case of the people referred to here, and yet the real significance may be missed. In other words, there is in it something more than the actual verbal statements. You may have the statements, the letter, the volume, the whole record, and you may know it as such, as these Jewish rulers did, and yet you may be missing the way, you may be moving on a plane altogether other than God intended. This book of the Acts, from beginning to end, shows that there was something more in the mind of God when He inspired men of old to speak and to write than is discernible in the actual words which they used, and which requires the activity of the Spirit of God if it is to be heard and grasped and understood, and if it is going to work out as things worked out in this book—in power, in effectiveness. There is much of the Old Testament in the book of the Acts and in the New Testament as a whole. The prophets are very much quoted. but see the difference between the effect of the

words as used in the book of the Acts and the effect upon those who merely heard or read the actual utterances of the prophets. The Holy Ghost has come; and He is not making another Bible, He is using the old one; but it is a new book with a new meaning and a new effect, and you are amazed at times at the way in which He uses Scripture. You never saw that it meant that; it is something altogether beyond a former apprehension, although you knew that Scripture quite well in a way. But there is a difference, and it is a crucial one.

So these people in Jerusalem and their rulers heard every Sabbath the prophets, but heard not their voice. They missed something—the voice of God coming through, the meaning of God in what was being said as differing from the mere statements. It is possible for a company to be gathered together and for one to be speaking the word of the Lord, and for some merely to hear the words and go away and say, 'He said so and so,' and repeat what was actually said in verbal statements. It is at the same time possible for others to say, 'I never saw it like that before; I knew that passage of Scripture, but I never saw that!'—and something, not only of a fresh recognition but of living value, has been detected. That is the difference between the words of the prophets and the voice of God through the words of the prophets. So, as I have just said, this verse in chapter xiii is, in a way, a key to this whole book. It makes this discrimination, which is so very important, between the letter and the spirit, between the statements and the Divine

meaning in the statements. One is death and gets nowhere. The other is life and goes right through.

All Prophecy Points to the Lord Jesus

Well, having said that, let us glance at the book of the Acts. We go right back to the first chapter with this principle in mind. I think it might be well for us to be reminded that, speaking broadly, the whole Bible (but for a few verses) closes upon a comprehensive, accumulative statement about this very matter. In Rev. xix. 10, we are told that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." What does that mean? It simply means this—that all the way through the Bible, from the beginning onward, there has been a predictive element in this sense, an element of implication, something implied beyond the actual words said at the time. In it all there has been a pointer onward. It may be an historic incident, something quite local and immediate in itself as to time, place and persons concerned, but in no part of the Bible is only the local and present in view. There is something more—there is an implication, there is a pointer onward; and if you could see where all these pointers point to, you would find it was Jesus. He is implied in everything, everywhere.

When we speak of prophecy, do not let us limit our thoughts to certain times and certain men of the Old Testament. True, we have been, and are very often, occupied with the prophets whose books are included in the 'prophetic' section of the Old Testament, but we have to expand beyond that. Moses was called a prophet (Deut. xviii. 15), and Samuel was a prophet (I Sam. iii. 20), and even David in the New Testament is called a prophet (Acts ii. 30). The spirit of prophecy embraces more than a certain class of men whom we designate prophets. The spirit of prophecy goes right back, as far back as Enoch; no, further back than that—to Genesis iii. 15, concerning the seed of the woman; that is the spirit of prophecy. So, bearing in mind that prophecy is something so far-reaching and all-inclusive and bearing upon the Lord Jesus, we are able to see, I hope, something of Divine meaning as more than verbal statement.

The Holy Spirit's Hidden Meaning in the Scriptures

"They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6).

We pointed out in a previous meditation how much the prophets were occupied with this matter of the Kingdom. These disciples of the Lord Jesus had their whole idea of the

Kingdom from the prophets, and so their question is based upon a certain kind of mental apprehension of the teaching of the prophets. They had deduced certain things from what the prophets said, and they bring this question even at this late hour—"Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, *"It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had said these things, as they were looking"*—He restored the Kingdom, ascended His throne? No—"he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

Everything begins there in the way of spiritual understanding, because this statement of the Lord Jesus indicated that a new dispensation was being inaugurated which was different from that which they had anticipated from the teaching of the prophets. This was the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and they were going to discover that the Holy Spirit had meanings about the Old Testament prophets they had never imagined were there. Not until the Holy Spirit took hold of the Word of God did they know the prophets at all. And then we shall see that when He really did take hold of the Scriptures and begin to apply them and open them up and give the Divine meaning, things happened which not only were unexpected but were utterly contrary and opposed to the fixed mentality of the disciples, and which required a complete shattering of their mentality, the abandonment of established positions on their part. It is tremendously challenging if the Holy Spirit gets hold of the Word of God and then gets hold of us. There are going to be revolutionary changes in our whole outlook and procedure, and this book is just full of that.

The Coming of the Spirit— a New Order Introduced

It is the dispensation or the stewardship of the Holy Ghost. The words 'dispensation' and 'stewardship' mean an economy, an order, how things are done in this regime. We find that, in this dispensation, the Holy Spirit having come, He began to change things because He was in charge. You may become a member of the staff of a business, and when you arrive you find things are done in such and such a way. Times are set and fixed like this; this is how things are done in this regime. And then a new Managing Director arrives, and he sees this prevailing order, and he registers at once that it is an imperfect system, that

it is not producing the fullest results for which the business exists. He begins quietly but very strongly to take charge and things begin to change, and the old set people who have been in that regime for years do not like these changes, and they begin to kick. They will not have it, they revolt and begin to fight against this new order. Some, who are open-spirited, who are not so fixed and settled, begin to see his mind, his vision, and although they stumble on difficulties from time to time, and come up against the implications of this tremendous change—like Peter, over the visit to Cornelius (Acts x)—and it wants just a little battle to get over the old prejudice, nevertheless, they have their battle, get over their difficulties, and fall into line, and so the great change takes place with wonderful results. Things begin to happen; the original purpose of the business is now beginning, in a wonderful way, to be realised and fulfilled.

That is exactly what happened when the Holy Spirit came in on the day of Pentecost. There was an existing, fixed, established order, but it was not reaching God's end. It was not, as we say, 'delivering the goods.' The Holy Ghost came, with all the full knowledge of the Divine mind; He entered in and began His work of realizing the real Divine concept; He took hold. So He divided the people. Some would not have the new order—these that dwelt in Jerusalem and their rulers. Well, all right, they lose it all. But others came into the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, "joined to the Lord . . . one spirit" (I Cor. vi. 17), with wonderful results. But the point is, first of all, it is a new dispensation; and next, the Holy Ghost is in charge.

A Vital Contrast—The Letter and the Spirit of Scripture

His being in charge has to be recognised, with all that it means; and, being in charge, by His activities He reveals and evolves the very object of God from all eternity, and seeks to bring it out in this dispensation; and the cleavage—well, it was an historic cleavage then, but it is a cleavage which is spiritually going on all through the dispensation. It is a dividing between men of the letter and men of the spirit. That movement, that tendency, toward a fixed position is constantly recurring, bringing that which is of God into bondage, into imprisonment, within organized limitations which frustrate the whole counsel of God. I have an article here—I wish I could read it all; I cannot—but there are some things in it which express what is in my heart better than anything that I could say myself. It is written by a Member of Parliament.

'There are many classifications into which men and women may be divided—as upper, middle or lower class; rich, well-to-do and poor; religious, sceptical and atheist; . . . and so forth and so on. But, as I think, the only categorisation which really matters is that which divides men as between the Servants of the Spirit and the Prisoners of the Organisation. That classification, which cuts right across all other classifications, is indeed the fundamental one. The idea, the inspiration, originates in the internal world, the world of the spirit . . . the idea having embodied itself in the organisation, the organisation then proceeds gradually to slay the idea which gave it birth. In the field of religion a prophet, an inspired man, will see a vision of truth. He expresses that vision as best he may in words. Upon what his disciples understand of the prophet's message, an organisation, a church, will be built. The half-understood message will crystallise into a creed. Before long the principal concern of the church will be to sustain itself as an organisation. To this end any departure from the creed must be controverted and, if necessary, suppressed as heresy. In a few score or a few hundred years what was conceived as a vehicle of a new and higher truth has become a prison for the souls of men. And men are murdering each other for the love of God.

'One moral to be drawn, it would not be wholly facetious to suggest, might be that the first rule for any organisation should be a rule providing for its dissolution within a limited period of time. . . . When we are members of an organisation, as such, our attitude to it should be one of partial detachment. We must be above it even while we are in it. We should reckon on being in almost perpetual rebellion within it. Above all we should regard all loyalties to organisation as tentative and provisional. We must be Servants of the Spirit, not Prisoners of the Organisation. We must keep in touch with the sources of life, not lose ourselves in the temporary vehicles.'

'This world is a bridge. Ye shall pass over it, But ye shall build no houses upon it.'

Is that not just what you have in the Acts and all the way through—the crystallising of our apprehension of truth, our interpretation, the partial perception, the statement in the letter, something fixed, embodying that which was of the Spirit of God in the beginning, but not allowing it to go beyond those bounds now? Anything more, anything other than that, is called heresy; this is the last word.

It may be embodied in an organisation, in what is called a church, a sect, a denomination, and if you go beyond that, well, it is all wrong. The great difference between men of the organisation and men of the spirit is what you have here in the Book of the Acts.

The Lordship of the Spirit Essential to Progress

The point is this: the fulness of Divine purpose demands that the Holy Spirit is continually in charge, that He is allowed to be completely in the place of government, and that we do not put anything in the place of the Holy Spirit, not anything at all—not a church, not a fixed order—so that at any point or in any way we could say, 'That is not what we teach, that is not what we have been brought up to believe, that is not what our church believes and teaches.' To do that is to put something in the way of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost must be in charge and must be free. It was on those very points that the Apostles themselves had firstly their battles and then their enlargements. We shall see that as we go on. The full Divine purpose is going to take shape when the Holy Spirit is in charge with us; and there is something infinitely greater than times and seasons.

Be careful about times and seasons; they have a wonderful and pernicious way of bringing you into limitations. Let us watch, observe, take note; but be careful. Things are happening, for example, in Palestine. Lots of people are dwelling in times and seasons. But they have done that all the way through the centuries. We were told that the times of the Gentiles ended when General Allenby entered Jerusalem; that a new Cæsar had arrived to reconstitute the Roman Empire when Mussolini set up his great empire in Rome! That sort of thing has been going on for centuries, and it is all based upon times and seasons. The difference is this—not that there are no times and seasons, not that there are not movements in the plan of God which have their particular characteristics and can be noted, but there is something infinitely greater than that. It is the heavenly and not the earthly aspect you are dealing with in the book of Acts. That is why I stayed at that point—"When he had said these things . . . he was taken up." It became a heavenly matter from that point.

Later the apostle Paul will use a phrase like this—"The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Cor. ii. 10). "The Spirit searcheth . . . the deep things of God": that is something transcendently greater than times and seasons; and if the Holy Spirit really is in charge, there is no fathoming what God has to reveal. "Things which eye saw now, and ear heard not, and which entered not into

the heart of man." It is out there, into that vast realm, that the Holy Spirit would bring us, and we must be very careful that we do not clamp down on the Holy Spirit with man-made, man-constituted institutions. We must keep out in the open with the Spirit, and it is there that our surprises will begin—yes, and our very real discipline.

The Prophets' Ultimate Meaning Spiritual and Heavenly

Those referred to in Acts xiii. 27, or those of whom they were typical, had a kind of apprehension of the Scriptures. Oh, there was no doubt at all about their devotion to the Word of God; that is not the point. They were fundamentalists of a rabid kind, as far as the inspiration of the Scriptures was concerned. They stickled for the Scriptures, they dotted all the 'i's and crossed all the 't's.' Many among them were particular about the smallest detail in the realm of outward observances, even to the point of fussy fastidiousness. Because the law ordained that a tithe of all the fruit of the land was the Lord's, they tithed meticulously even their mint and other herbs—but at the same time overlooked the things that were inward and which mattered much more to the Lord, such as judgment, mercy and faith (Matt. xxiii. 23). That was their apprehension, their mentality, their position. They saw everything on the horizontal. It was a matter of the exact technique of Scripture. The result?—well, they were perpetuating an earthly system with the Word of God. Their 'church' was the 'church of Israel,' the 'Israelitish church'—and you can put in the place of Israel any other denominational title that you like. That church had its own particular forms, its vestments, its ritual, its liturgy, and all according to the Scriptures. It had its reading of the prophets every Sabbath. It had the whole system; but it was right down here on this earth and as dead as anything could be. It was purely formal, it was not getting through to God's end at all. It was failing to realise the eternal counsels of God—scriptural, in a sense, though it was. When the Holy Ghost came, He did not sweep away the prophets, the Old Testament. He took them up and showed that there was something more than all that earthly, perfect technique of the Word of God, with all its accompaniments—without which all that other would have to be set aside; and it is going to be set aside. It fails to reach God's end, therefore it passes out—and that is the issue of the book of the Acts, the great transition. There is a Divine meaning back of all that, and when you have the Divine meaning, you can dispense with the other, it can go. If you have the thing in the really spiritual sense and

realm, in the living and heavenly way, it does not matter about the other; that just drops out and falls away.

That is what happened in the book of the Acts. You can hardly see the point at which it happened, but there is such a point. The Apostles did go on attending the temple and the synagogues for a little while, and then they ceased to do so. They were continuing for a time, but then it was as though they were steadily, quietly, moving out, and eventually they were out; something had happened. They had come into the real thing and the initial thing had gone. The one led to the other, but it served its purpose. They came into the heavenly good and meaning of it all; it was not a matter of technique now.

There are many who will say about the fixed orders and rituals, 'Of course, we do not regard this as everything, it is only symbolic; we do remember that it indicates and implies and points to something else, and it is that something else we are thinking of.' Yes, but is it not true that, when the Holy Ghost comes, as He came then, and gets possession, and you go on with Him, more and more the emphasis of the merely outward and earthly and temporal aspects of Christianity fade away, and you become wholly or increasingly occupied by the glory of the reality? The Jesus of history gives full place to the Jesus of the Spirit, of heaven. That is exactly what is meant by the voices of the prophets.

So, on the day of Pentecost, you start with Joel. Everybody in Jerusalem was saying, "What meaneth this?" They were all bewildered, without any understanding or perception; and Peter, with the eleven, opened his mouth and said—"This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel" (Acts ii. 16). "This is that . . ." What a crushing blow it was to tradition, what an upheaval it created in Israel—this, with its implications of Jesus of Nazareth! And the Apostle went on; he quoted a lot from the Old Testament. He quoted David. That sermon of his on the day of Pentecost was just full of Old Testament quotations. But whoever saw that, whoever knew that that was the meaning of it! You see the point. It is something that really must come to us here with tremendous force, because even New Testament Christianity can be reduced again to an earthly system of exact technique. You can write your manuals on New Testament procedure. You can have it exactly according to the letter. It is all on the horizontal, it becomes legalistic, it ties up the Holy Ghost. Although the intention was to be more exactly according to Scripture, that the Lord might have a fuller way, it does not

always result in that. The whole thing must be baptised in the Holy Ghost and lifted clean off the earthly level, and become something absolutely heavenly.

Our Responsibility to Yield to the Spirit

Now I think we can rightly say that when the disciples asked, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" they were seriously and genuinely exercised. The Scriptures must be fulfilled; what was written must happen. I think the disciples were very much occupied with this, burdened and perplexed; they wanted to know how things were going to work out. The Lord said, in effect, 'Do not worry about that; the Holy Ghost is coming and He will take all responsibility for everything—times and seasons and everything else; He is coming with the whole purpose of God in His hands and He will work it out; you can be at rest, it is all right.' Those who get this earthly idea and conception of a system become terribly worried and burdened to work it out—the awful responsibility of this 'New Testament Church,' of having things exactly as the Scriptures say! If the Holy Ghost were in charge, the burden would go. *He* is doing it. All that we are called upon to do is to get into the hands of the Holy Spirit, get completely free from all this harness, free to the Spirit of God. Matters will work out all right. And even if the Holy Spirit comes up against some stones in us and for a time there is some conflict, He is more than equal to that situation, more than equal to Peter and his never having eaten anything unclean. When the Lord gave Peter that vision of the sheet let down with all manner of fourfooted beasts and creeping things and said, "Rise. Peter; kill and eat," Peter in effect quoted Scripture to the Lord; he quoted Lev. xi, with its commandment concerning the unclean beasts which must not be eaten. 'Lord, here is Scripture for my position; my position is soundly founded upon the Word of God!' What are you going to do with that? Now, listen—I am not saying or even implying that the Holy Ghost will ever call upon us to do something contrary to the Scriptures. He never will. But He will very often show us that the Scriptures mean something that we never saw them to mean. Lev. xi had a meaning Peter had not seen. He had taken the letter and the literal meaning of those things. He never saw the Divine, spiritual meaning at the back of that. Cornelius had never received the Holy Spirit, and therefore an angel spoke to him. Peter had received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and it was the Spirit Who was speaking to Peter. The Holy Ghost had this matter in hand, and was dealing with

the difficulties in Peter, even in his fundamentalism, to lift him off a merely temporal, earthly ground to a heavenly. Peter was living under an open heaven; and there are tremendous changes when you get there. It does not all happen at once.

The Holy Spirit 'Upon' and 'In'

Just one further word for the present. You notice here that there was a double operation of the Holy Spirit. In chapter ii, the Spirit lighted 'upon' them. These cloven tongues as of fire sat upon them; and then it says, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." 'Upon' and 'in.' I do not want to be technical, contradicting what we have been saying about too much technique, but there is a meaning in the 'upon' and the 'in.' The coming 'upon' is the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in relation to God's eternal purpose. That is, the Holy Spirit has come as the custodian and administrator of the eternal counsels of God, the purpose of God from eternity, and coming like that He imposes (I trust that is not the wrong word to use) the purpose of God upon the vessel. He gathers the vessel into the purpose in a sovereign way. It is as though He circled around and took charge of the vessel in an outward way and said, 'This is the vessel of the eternal purpose of God.' He took charge of it, came 'upon' for that. But then He entered 'in' also, and they were filled, and this had a further meaning. It meant this, that the inward life of the vessel must correspond to the outward purpose. That is tremendous. You see, the old dispensation was not that, and that is what the prophets were dealing with all the time. The outward form was there. Israel had their temple, they were offering their sacrifices, they were going through all the ritual, but their inward life was far from corresponding to that. God had to say, through the prophets, 'Away with your sacrifices, I do not want them!' (c.f. Isa. i. 10-14). The Lord Jesus took that up. "*Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God*" (Heb. x. 5-7). Formalism never does the will of God; merely external system, however much it corresponds to the technique of the letter, never does the will of God; and the Holy Ghost was having none of that. He did not come in sovereignty to take up a lot of new people in a new dispensation and give them forms and order and make them do things

in this way and that in an outward way. He was going to have the inner life of the Church corresponding to the purpose.

You find before long that He very severely comes upon anything that does not correspond. Ananias and Sapphira will know you cannot carry on in an outward way, pretending all is right. The Holy Ghost has seen inside the contradiction, and is not allowing it to pass.

Many want the coming 'upon' because they want to feel the power, feel themselves taken up, manipulated and moved. There has been a lot of that sort of thing which does not carry with it an inward correspondence. So the Lord's end can never be reached fully while there is any lack of true consistency between the purpose of God and the life of the people called to that purpose. "I beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Eph. iv. 1). Oh, I do beg of you to have continuous dealings with God on this matter of the indwelling Spirit—not just for purposes of service, or power, but for purposes of life.

One of the great, sad tragedies of many Christians and many servants of God is this, that they can believe and give expression to things which are positively false, and propagate those things and do harm to other Christians by propagating them, and yet the Holy Ghost never seems to be able to make them aware that they are not telling the truth. Such a solemn fact ought to drive us to the Lord with earnest appeal—'Oh, Lord, it is no good my being engaged in Thy work, doing a lot of things for Thee, prominent among men, perhaps, and well known for my Christian service, and yet, after all, the Holy Ghost cannot correct me within, put me right, give me a bad time when I say something not true. If anything that I say does not correspond with the truth, or if my inward life is a contradiction of it, save me from saying it.' The Spirit within is to adjust us to the purpose of God. If we habitually, constantly, fall into ways which are not according to the Spirit, so that we become known for that kind of unpleasantness, we had better ask the Holy Spirit to do a deeper work in us; it is a contradiction. It is no use our having the deep things of God, and yet people know us as most difficult to get on with, always making life unpleasant for others. It will not do, it is a contradiction of the indwelling Spirit. He does not want us to have the system of things merely outwardly. We must have the inner life to correspond. So He came 'upon' to possess for the purpose of God, and He came 'within' to see that everything in the inner life corresponded to that purpose.

T. A-S.

Reading II Kings ii. 23-25.

THE many attractive stories about Elisha are so concerned with his gracious character and ministry that it almost seems a pity to record the stern condemnation which he pronounced on the way to Bethel. It would be quite wrong, however, to regard this outburst as being mere loss of temper because of the provocation of the lads' mockery. It is something very different from that. This incident is as much a part of Elisha's spiritual ministry as any of the others, and indeed has a vital relation to all the rest. The man of the Spirit must not only be gentle, he must be energetic; and he must be particularly energetic in withstanding unbelief.

I think that we must consider these verses in the light of the rest of the chapter. It is perfectly clear that Elisha's ministry depended upon a certain governing fact which was all-important, namely, the translation to glory of his master, Elijah. There would have been no triumphal ministry of life, no blessings and no deliverances, apart from this fundamental fact. Elijah's translation to glory was the crucial experience upon which was based the whole subsequent ministry of the Spirit exercised through Elisha. Everything depended upon that moment, and upon Elisha's personal association with it, ". . . if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so" (II Kings ii. 10). How everything conspired to rob Elisha of that vision!

The spiritual counterpart is surely very plain. The value, the impact, the living power of our testimony is dependent upon one fact, the fact that the Lord Jesus lives triumphant over death, and has been exalted to the Throne of Glory. Like Elisha, we have no spiritual power for ministry, no "double portion" of the Spirit, if we are not personally related to this fact; and like him, we shall find that there are continual attempts to deprive us of that vision. We are nothing in ourselves. Our 'faith' is nothing in itself. Our message is nothing if it is only a matter of words. The vital energy of all spiritual ministry is governed by our union with the Lord in glory.

Challenges to the Vision

1. Discouragement

The early verses of this chapter reveal a very real conflict over the matter of the all-governing vision. Elisha travelled from place to place in company with his master, each new advance bringing a fresh call for determination if the

true purpose of the journey were to be fulfilled. Elijah himself seemed to discourage his servant by suggesting that he should not complete the journey—"Tarry here, I pray thee. . .". While he doubtless wanted Elisha to go the whole way and expected him to do so, nothing could be taken for granted or made easy. Elisha must be resolute. Moreover, in each place the sons of the prophets—godly men—did their utmost to deter him from his pursuit of the vision which was to prove so vitally important. At every turn he was challenged over this matter of the glorifying of his master; he found that all sorts of unexpected people seemed to be trying to keep him from the vision; numerous situations seemed to be devised especially for distracting his attention.

Is not this our experience? Do we not find a combination of circumstances tending to rob us of the all-important vision? That vision means power—power over all the power of the enemy—so everything is directed against it. Experiences both pleasant and unpleasant, things good and bad—how much there is in every day of our lives which seeks to draw away our gaze from the Lord in the Glory! Even the Lord Himself sometimes seems deliberately to discourage us, or at least He withholds those little extra helps to faith which we feel He might well give. This vision is for those who refuse to be put off. Elisha was determined that he would not miss it. Let us be equally positive.

2. Doubting

We next find that even after he had seen Elijah ascend to glory he was beset by perplexities as to this very matter. The sons of the prophets which were at Jericho said to him, "Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." "Lest peradventure . . ." Elisha knew very well what had happened, and yet he seems to have been shaken by these plausible arguments. Even when we have had the vision, we shall find doubts creeping into our minds, subtle insinuations that perhaps after all it was not real. At first Elisha withstood their unbelief—"Ye shall not send"—but at length they had their way. How persistent is unbelief! He had seen Elijah go up to the Glory, and yet here are the whispering doubts which will not be silenced. They urged him till he was ashamed, seeking to move him from his own steadfastness. At last he agreed that they

should send.

Now, you see, here are all kinds of questions, not as to the person of Elijah, but as to his position. They do not doubt that Elijah is alive, but they cannot believe that he is in the Glory. He might be somewhere else. He might even need strong men to help him! They insist, therefore, upon a vain and futile search, expending all their concentrated energy and wasting Elisha's valuable time, while they try to find an earthly location for the man who has gone up on high. Where is the Lord? Is He on some mountain or in some valley? He is neither on a height nor in a depth, but has ascended to heaven. Elisha was held up for three days by this search of unbelief. We also are held up when we lose assurance as to Christ's heavenly position in the Throne. We try to find Him here and there; we look for earthly and visible proofs of His presence; we demand evidence as to where He is or what He is doing; and all the time we are really actuated by unbelief. It is no time, Elisha, for vain pursuits and queries, but rather for a dogged assertion of a fact, the Divine fact which is the very basis of all your faith. "Lest peradventure . . ." There are no 'peradventures' for the man who has seen the risen Christ. There is only disappointment and delay when we give place to doubts about the Lord, exploring here and there to find proofs of His presence with us. All progress must be in the power of the heavenly vision. When the sons of the prophets gave up their vain search Elisha was free to proceed with his ministry.

3. Denial

Now we come to the third challenge, which is the subject dealt with in our reading. This is the most serious attack. The offenders were not just playful children. Little children would not have been conversant with the matter at issue. They were young lads, hooligans, who were responsible enough for God to condemn them, and who were sufficiently aware of the facts to know the story of Elijah's ascension to heaven. (The words used in the original to describe them correspond exactly with "a little maid" in II Kings v. 2—and she was old enough to be very discreet and responsible.) When they cried contemptuously after Elisha they were not just calling him names but mocking him in relation to his testimony concerning Elijah's translation. They were saying, in effect, 'If Elijah has really ascended, you go up too, and show us how it is done!' So the whole purpose of their ridicule was to deny the central feature of Elisha's life and ministry—the glorifying of his master. The 'bald head' was a term of reproach, probably due to the

simple and unimpressive figure of this new prophet. He was so lacking in outward evidences of power and yet he claimed to owe everything to the most amazing and glorious event which had ever taken place. It all seemed so absurd. They despised Elisha as a mere nobody, wending his solitary way up to Bethel, and regarded him as fair game for their ridicule. I wonder whether they called him bald head in contrast to Elijah, who was a hairy man. There was something imposing about Elijah; he was a frightening figure, so manifestly endued with Divine power that nobody ever dared call out after him. It seems that Elisha was of a different appearance, and so they mocked his apparent insignificance, denying that there could be any connection between him and the Throne of Glory.

This is precisely the challenge which we all have to face—the challenge to reconcile what we are with what we say our Master is. This large band (there were forty-two mauled by the bear) represents a concentration of unbelief, denying and ridiculing our claim to be associated with the King on the Throne. Let us forget the human element and think of them as voices, pursuing us with contemptuous denials of the power of His resurrection. They represent the multiple attacks of unbelief, stridently denying that we have seen the risen Lord and have received a double anointing from Him. 'Look at your weakness and insignificance,' they seem to say; 'how utterly absurd it is for a man like you to claim relationship with the Throne of Heaven.' "Go up, thou bald head."

The Results of Doubt (a) Indecision

Now supposing that Elisha had not acted as he did. Supposing he had been apologetic or tolerant in his attitude towards this mocking denial. He would very soon have been overtaken by indecision. When we begin to harbour doubts about the Lord, if we allow any problems or perplexities to weaken our practical relationship with the enthroned Christ, indecision is bound to follow. Elisha was moving forward with purpose in a definite direction. If he had not resisted the clamour of unbelief he would never have gone on to Bethel, nor to any of the other places in which his ministry proved so vital, for the only meaning of that ministry was that it was based upon the exaltation of Elijah. Spiritually it is as though it was not so much his own ministry as a carrying forward to its proper fulfilment of that which had been begun by his master here on the earth; it was his privilege to do the "greater works" now that Elijah had

ascended. If, therefore, any doubts existed as to the whereabouts of Elijah it is obvious that his successor would be paralysed as to his ministry. If we have the double portion of the Spirit it is only through the exaltation of Christ. To doubt that fact is to falter and faint in our testimony. Bald head or not, weak and despised maybe, we must go straightforward with the conviction that our lives are in direct relatedness with the Lord on the Throne.

The mockers saw no evidence of this glorious fact as they looked upon the prophet, but he himself had the inner assurance. One might have thought that after that glorious vision, and the subsequent experiences of power at Jordan and Jericho, Elisha could never be tempted to doubt. We would think so, if we did not know something of the assaults upon our own faith. We may have had a spiritual revelation of the power of His resurrection and known something of the power of the Throne working through us, but our footsteps may still be dogged by a horde of unbelieving spirits with their challenge as to the reality of that vision. If once we admit such a doubt, indecision will be the inevitable outcome.

This is where a robust, aggressive attitude of faith is needed. Elisha did not yield to the doubts, he did not parley with them; he turned round on them and cursed them in the name of the Lord. This is the violence of faith. Until we adopt such a positive attitude of resistance to every voice of unbelief we shall be found undecided and faltering in the way. God confirmed Elisha's curse. It is foolish, after all, to explain this incident as a loss of temper. When you lose your temper at those who poke fun, you deliver yourself into their hands and they only jeer the more. In this case the curse had an immediate and fearful effect, for God was in it. God was with Elisha when he condemned the voices, and He acted swiftly in judgment. And when we turn on our spiritual foes—not on men, but on the spiritual resistance—when in the name of the Lord we condemn the tongues which rise up in judgment to deny our union with the risen Christ, God acts swiftly and sets us free to go on our way.

(b) Self-Consciousness

A further peril of such an experience is self-consciousness—either in terms of self pity or else in a wrong kind of self reliance. If the Lord is really on the Throne, having all power, why am I a weak and solitary figure trudging on from Jericho to Bethel? If the power of His resurrection is mine, why are things so difficult and people so antagonistic? If this claim of mine is true, surely there should be

a kind of triumphal guard of honour all along the way; men should recognise and acclaim me; my progress should be made amid the plaudits of the multitude. Instead of that I am dogged by a mob of hooligans crying, "Go up, thou bald head." It really does seem that things are all wrong and that the Lord has forgotten me!

On the other hand, this self-consciousness may find expression in wrong kinds of anxiety. If Elisha's ministry was not the continuance of Elijah's; if the latter was not translated so that what he had begun might be fulfilled through Elisha; if, indeed, the whole matter of Elijah's exaltation was just imagination, then Elisha must get busy and plan his own course. The moment we cease to have an attitude of complete dependence on the risen Lord our own flesh gets active to plan for ourselves. Elisha must walk in a way of utter faith if he is to know 'the power of His resurrection'—and so must we. From one place to another on the outward journey Elijah had been the one to decide every movement. He it was who said 'I go from Gilgal to Bethel, Bethel to Jericho' and so on to Jordan. He was not there by Elisha's side now and his voice was no longer heard, but spiritually it was as though he still made every decision. Back again Elisha went, from Jordan to Jericho, Jericho to Bethel, and later on to Gilgal. It was really Elijah's ministry which was being fulfilled. But if Elijah had ceased to be, if the going up to the Glory was a myth, Elisha would have had to mark out his own independent way. Thus it is that unbelief has a double peril; it makes us undecided and it also urges us to precipitate action. Every new situation seems to provoke us to act. We must take the matter in hand, we must discuss it, we must deal with it, we must justify ourselves as the Lord's servants and do something! Yes, if there is no Lord in the Glory we must! You will have to stand up for yourself if you have no exalted Master to stand up for you. But if the Lord is truly on the Throne His servants may go calmly on, through good report and evil report, when things are happening and when it seems there is nothing. This journey is not our responsibility, it is His. I am not a prophet just in my own right, but related to the Prophet in the Glory. "Go up, thou bald head." Elisha silenced the accusing voices, proving in an act of power that his master had indeed gone up, and that no questions will be permitted as to that supreme fact.

(c) Contradiction

I think that another effect of permitting these voices to continue their blasphemous denial

would have been a serious inconsistency in Elisha's course. We become a contradiction when we lose sight of the Lord in the Throne. Elisha, you see, was going up to Bethel. Bethel, the house of God, is the place of His supreme authority, the place where only He has a voice and where everything else must be silent unto Him. If Elisha had attended to the other voices he might have been in the way to Bethel, but he would have been a contradiction to the spiritual meaning of the place. To be truly related to Bethel, not merely in outward location but in conformity of spirit, he must maintain his attitude of whole-hearted submission to the Lord. In Bethel there is no place for the flesh, and if it disputes the Lord's authority it must be cut off in His name. That is why Elisha cursed the mockers; to do anything less than that would be quite inconsistent with the true significance of Bethel. In the matter of the utter supremacy of Christ we must not for one moment give place to the devil.

It is worthy of special note that the biggest challenge arose at this place, for in spiritual experience we so often find that it is when we press on to seek only the glory of Christ in His house that we enter into a realm of bitter and relentless conflict. The gates of Hades match themselves in conflict against the church of Christ, the Son of the living God. Probably every fresh exercise among the people of God with regard to Bethel has experienced the same

kind of contemptuous opposition. "Go up, thou bald head."

Elisha's whole future ministry depended upon his reaction to these questionings. He was gentle and unassertive in himself, and he was patient and kindly in his dealings with needy men, but he was violent when it came to matters of unbelief. Assailed by questions, doubts or temptations connected with the absolute authority and glory of his master, he was unyielding. If Bethel is in view then the judgment of heaven must be called down upon every fleshly and satanic contradiction to it. It is worse than useless for us to have the outward form of the house of God if we are not living spiritually in the good of it. Unbelief makes for inconsistency; it admits some justification for the voices which deny our vital experience of the power of the risen Lord. Faith, however, condemns the denial, proves that where we are concerned the matter is not only in word but in power, and leads straight on to the blessedness of Bethel and a ministry of abundant life.

Faith must be violent. The vision of the glorified Christ will be bitterly assailed, and every possible doubt and question will be raised about our relationship with Him. We shall never get on if we pay heed to unbelief or are soft about it. We must be ruthless. The Lord who confirmed Elisha's curse with swift judgment will also deliver us and lead us on in "the power of his resurrection."

H. F.

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IV Some Qualifications Basic to Service

Reading: Acts xvi. 1-3.

Qualifications Not Natural but Spiritual

TIMOTHY was a young man—it would seem that he was little more than a boy—when Paul first found him. In addition, he was of a very timid and shrinking disposition and temperament—anything but self-assertive and self-sufficient; he was one who could easily be put down by anyone who was assertive. Because of his youth and of his timid disposition he could easily be despised; and perhaps also because evidently he was not physically robust. "Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" Paul later wrote to him (I Tim. v. 23). Young, shrinking, timid, physically weak; yet the Apostle looked at him—and Paul was not one to act impulsively, without thought and care and discernment—and said, 'I want that lad with me.' Then we find that young man's name joined with the name of the great Apostle—may we not say, with the name of the greatest of the Apostles? Their names are joined in association in the superscription of both the letters to the Thessalonians, of the second letter to the Corinthians, of the letter to the Philippians, of the letter of the Colossians, and then there are two whole letters written by the Apostle to Timothy himself; so that Timothy was connected with each of the four groups of Paul's letters. Then, after Paul's release from the first imprisonment, Timothy is found with him going on a journey, and Paul leaves him at Ephesus in charge of the church there.

If you were seeking a 'call'—as it is termed today—to a church, for various reasons you would not have chosen Ephesus, especially if you knew your own weaknesses as Timothy knew his. But Paul put him there in charge of the church because there was very serious need; some very difficult situations needed dealing with. That is the church where Timothy had to set things in order, in accordance with all that the Apostle gave him in those two letters which he addressed to him there.

Why? If we look to see why Paul did it, we see no natural grounds at all to justify either the choosing of him in the first place or the appointing of him to that great responsibility. Paul must have seen something, however; and I think we are able to discern some of the things that accounted for it.

Devotion to the Lord

There is no doubt that one thing characterised Timothy, and that was genuine devotion to the Lord. That is the first thing—real devotion to the Lord. You see, there are tremendous possibilities where there is that foundation. There may be many deficiencies and weaknesses, but real devotion to the Lord is a ground upon which the Lord can build big things and do a great deal.

Energy in the Things of the Lord

Another thing about Timothy clearly was his energy; out of his devotion sprang his energy in the things of the Lord. I leave you to trace the life of Timothy from the day Paul took him away. See what Paul says about him, and see where he is and what he is doing and everything else that you can trace, and you will find that what I am saying has plenty of support. He was not in any way slothful. Paul was at one time far away from him and in need, and he sent for him to come, and to bring with him the cloak and the parchments that Paul had left at Troas (II Tim. iv. 9-13): We can have no doubt that Timothy hastened to reach the Apostle as quickly as he could. There is this mark of the businesslike about Timothy, of real energy.

Unselfishness

I think another thing is perfectly clear—his absolute unselfishness (c.f. Phil. ii. 19-22).

These three things amount to this—that Timothy, with all his natural handicaps and disadvantages, was a young man who meant to be no second-rate servant of the Lord. He was on stretch to be the fullest that it was possible for a man to be for God, and you know that it is remarkable and very true that the spiritual value of a man or a woman can more than make up for a great deal of natural lack. How often we have to say of someone, 'Well, there is this and there is that about them, they are not this and they are not that, and those features would really rule them out; but their spiritual value more than makes up for all that.' I am sure that is how it was with Timothy, and that is what Paul saw—that here was one who, from his conversion in early life, was utterly for God, who really meant business. There is no 'survival of the fittest' here. A young man like this—no natural leader: with these men at Ephesus trying to ride over his head (Paul said,

“Let no man despise thy youth”): with all that weakness and handicap—he is the man for the task, he is the man who is drawing out from the Apostle all that is in the two epistles written to him. How greatly a man with many limitations can count for the Church’s good for many centuries to come because there are some things about him which entirely supersede all his natural limitations! I think that is the message here.

Greatness is a Matter of the Heart

If you look at it the other way round, there are plenty of people full of assumption and presumption who are always pushing themselves forward—always ready to be in the limelight, to do the talking, and so on—who are fairly sure of themselves and have no hesitation and certainly no shrinking, but you do not always find the real spiritual values there. Such people are self-sufficient. But, on the other hand, what we have been saying is a tremendously encouraging thing, because I suppose most of us feel that if the Lord were looking for a good and capable servant we should not expect Him to look in our direction; and yet, you see, “The Lord looketh on the heart” (I Sam. xvi. 7), and if He really sees that we mean business,

that there is a selfless devotion to Himself, and real energy, these things will count with Him; they give Him ground upon which He can build, and He will act accordingly.

If all that we have said of Timothy as to his natural disqualifications were true, and if Paul had been looking for the naturally robust type, he would not have looked a second time in Timothy’s direction; he would have said, ‘That will let me down.’ But no; it comes about that this young man of whom these things are evidently true, who does need a good deal of encouragement, support, reassuring, nevertheless for some reasons—there are reasons for it—becomes in this way, for all time, linked with the great Apostle Paul. Do you not think that it is remarkable that Paul should link Timothy’s name with his like that? “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus . . .” It says something very encouraging—that there are certain things which make a tremendous amount possible with the Lord, but when you look to see what those things are, there is not necessarily anything natural at all. It is purely spiritual value. Anything is possible when the Lord has in us spiritual measure. It outweighs everything else.

T. A-S.

A Way of Growth

III. Subjection to Christ as Head

“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full” (Col. ii. 9-10).

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. i. 18).

“Who is the head of all principality and power” (Col. ii. 10).

“ . . . not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col. ii. 19).

“ . . . where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. iii. 11).

Christ’s Absolute Headship

COL. i. is the greatest and most magnificent statement in the Bible concerning the Lord Jesus, and, in a word, it sums up all things in Christ. It is a very wonderful unveiling of the place which Christ occupies in relation to all things, and of course that is the standpoint from which everything has to be viewed as to

the Lord Jesus—His relationship to all things; and what the Apostle is seeking to make very clear, because of that which had arisen to call forth this letter, is that Christ is at no point, in no way, second in God’s universe. He does not come in the slightest degree below the place of absolute pre-eminence, however great might be the position accorded Him by those against whom the Apostle was writing. They were quite prepared to say very good and great and wonderful things about Him, and to accord Him a very high place; and yet that place was less than absolute pre-eminence. So the Apostle wrote this letter in the first place to reveal and declare that the Lord Jesus is in every realm supreme.

You notice the above passages touching upon His headship, and that headship is seen in the several connections as complete. There are no two heads or three heads in God’s universe; only one head is possible, and Christ occupies that in every realm. So it is stated here—“that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.” You cannot get outside of that. When you say ‘all,’ that is final. He is head over all things.

Our Position in that Headship

Chapter ii brings us firstly to our position in that headship. Verses 9 and 10 are a statement of our position. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full." Now, that is a positional fulness. That simply means that, by our being in Christ, we come into the place of fulness, and we are made to stand in the fulness of Christ; we are positioned there.

Our Progress in the Position

But when you pass to verse 19 of chapter ii, it is a matter of progress, progress in the position and by reason of that relatedness. "Holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God." "In him ye are made full," but in Him you have got to increase. That is not a contradiction. Made full by reason of your position, but increasing in that fulness by reason of your spiritual progress. Progress is a matter of making good all that is in your position. We see in Ephesians the correspondence between that letter and the book of Joshua. When the people came into the land, they were in the land flowing with milk and honey, they were in the place where all the fulness dwelt, but they had to do something about it; and so we find that it was a matter of making good all that was theirs, progressing in the fulness into which they had been placed positionally; and that is exactly what is here. "Increaseth with the increase of God" is a matter of going on in that position to appropriate, apply and make ours the fulness which we have inherited in Christ; or, to put it more closely to the figure of the Body and the Head here in this letter, it is taking everything from the Head.

Now the temptation which was being presented to these Colossian believers was to let go of Christ as supreme, and the Apostle made it perfectly clear that to let Christ's supreme position go was to let the fulness go, and that only as they held fast, not simply to Christ personally—all these people were prepared to hold fast to Christ and not to let Him go—but also to Him as Head, and so recognized that everything came from the headship of Christ, only so would they come experimentally to His fulness.

The Practical Application of Christ's Headship

That is a statement, but what it means is shown in Chapter iii—

"If then ye were raised together with Christ,

seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory."

That is the practical application of headship. "Ye died"—that is necessary to put Christ in His place. "Ye were raised together with Christ"—not apart from Him; not leaving any place for self-government, self-direction, self-sufficiency, self-assertiveness, or any other expression of self at all. "Ye died"; your own headship of your life died with you. All other governments of your life died when you died. You died to all other authorities, to all other rule; to every other kind of direction, government, headship in principle; you died to all except to the headship of Christ; and, being raised, you were raised with Christ. It is "together with Christ"; and now in resurrection it is Christ Who is Head of the Body, the Church.

While this has a personal and individual application, it is the Church which is in view again. This elect body of people called the Church died to all other governments, just as Israel were set aside and buried in Babylon. It was the crucifixion—the death and the burial—of Israel when the captivity took place. They were sent away, out of the place of covenant blessing, the place where the Lord was, the place of the inheritance, the place where everything had been provided for their very existence. They were sent right out of it and were for that time dead and buried, simply because they had let in other headships. Idolatry was the cause; that meant that another headship, that of Satan mediately through the gods of the nations round about, had taken God's place, and God would not tolerate any other headship of any kind at all. So he slew them and buried them in Babylon, and when there was a raising from that grave of a company that came back, it was under the absolute headship of the Lord, and that alone. That is the principle of it. It was a corporate thing, a corporate resurrection, and under one head. From that time, whatever Israel became, however they failed, never again was idolatry found among them. There is that about it; it cured them of idolatry—that is, of another headship. You see the principle.

Now here it is the Church, an elect people, having died and been buried to all other headships; and to be in the Church in resurrection carries with it that which is not optional at all. It is not an option—whether we like it or not,

whether we will have it or not—it is an established thing, that you cannot be truly in the *meaning* of the Body of Christ and have any other government than the government of Christ, any other headship than the headship of Christ. It is implicit in resurrection. So then, "If . . . ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God." Here Christ as Head is seated at the right hand of God. That means He has taken the seat of absolute authority. There is nothing more to be done about this, nothing to be added to it. It is finished, it is final. He sits down in the complete authority which is His. He is on the Throne. And that is the position of the Church, and the Church in every part has to be brought to that place where all direction, all government, all decisions, are taken from the Head, everything is referred to the Head, the whole life has to come right under the Head. There is to be no self-will, no self-choice, no self-direction, nothing at all that comes out

from any other quarter. There is no division in the mind of God between our natural will and the will of Satan—they are the same. Satan has put his very will into the fallen creation. It is a self-willed creation working against God, and it comes from the devil. So everything now has to be transferred to the Head and taken from the Head if there is going to be any spiritual enlargement.

It is practical. "Ye died"; "ye were raised"; "Christ who is our life." Those are statements of fact, utter and absolute. Therefore "seek the things that are above"; therefore "put to death your members which are upon the earth . . . seeing that ye have put off the old man . . . and have put on the new man" (Col. iii. 5-10). You see the things that are to be put away because you put on the new man. It is a new position with a new government altogether in all matters, and a complete subjection to Him at every point. That is the way to progress in the fulness to which we have been brought positionally.

T. A.-S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XV)

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Prov. iii. 5, 6).

NO ship can ever reach the Antarctic Continent without first passing through a great belt of what is known as pack-ice. This is ice which forms over the sea around the coasts during the winter, and then for one reason or another is broken up and carried by the wind and currents out to sea, like floating rafts—or 'floes' as they are called. Quite a long time before approaching land a ship encounters this enormous field of moving ice, and must somehow find a way through it.

The floes are sometimes quite small in area, and sometimes very large. The ice may be thin—or many feet in thickness so that no ship can break it. Under the influence of the wind and the sea the floes at times pack closely together; at other times they spread out, with open water between them. If the gap of water—or 'lead' as it is called—is wide enough, the ship can sail along it. The ship may even be able to push the floes apart if they are not too large, and make a lead for herself. But there are times when the floes are so tightly packed or so large, and the ice so thick, that the ship can make no progress at all. She must then either wait until a lead opens, or, if it is

possible, go back and look for another lead in some other direction. The whole process is one of stops and starts.

Capt. Scott met with quite unusual trouble in the pack-ice. Very seldom did he find that he could sail for more than a few miles without being held up. He found that the best way to proceed was for one of the ship's officers to be stationed high up the mast, in the crow's-nest. From there the officer could see for quite a long distance, and could pick out the best route to follow in order to take advantage of the open leads of water. He would shout down his orders to the man at the helm, who would steer accordingly. He was, as it were, the eyes of the ship. He could see what those on deck could not see. But even he was very limited. He could only see a certain distance, and could never be really sure that the course he was following would end in open water. On one occasion Capt. Scott wrote: 'We felt there was just a chance of getting through, but we have stuck half-way: advance and retreat are equally impossible.' On another occasion: 'I thought we had come to an end of our troubles . . . I did not for a moment suspect we should get into thick pack again behind the great sheets of open water we have crossed . . . but we have come up against an immense floe about as big as any we have seen, and we cannot

move.'

The whole process was full of surprises and disappointments. Sometimes they would be sailing towards a promising looking stretch of open water, but before they reached it the ice would mysteriously close and there would be no way through. Sometimes the reverse happened, and there would suddenly be an open way where before there was no way at all. They were often so hemmed in by the ice that they could not move, and with no open water anywhere in sight. The ship was halted on one occasion for five days, a helpless prisoner. What patience was needed at such times! Capt. Scott wrote: 'What an exasperating game this is! One cannot tell what is going to happen in the next half or even quarter of an hour. At one moment everything looks flourishing; the next, one begins to doubt if it is possible to get through. . . . We can see big lanes of open water further on, but we are hemmed in by the pack and cannot get to them.'

You can easily see how necessary it was to trust the officer in the crow's-nest. Probably at times the rest of the party were inclined to blame him if the ship ran into a wall of ice and could not go further. But they all had confidence when Mr. Bowers was the officer on duty. They knew they could trust him to do the very best thing. If the ship came to a halt when he was on duty—well, there must be good reason for it. But even he had his limits. He could not see and know everything, and so it often happened that what he hoped would be an open way proved a disappointment.

Now if you will open your Bible and read Numbers ix. 15-23, you will find that what we have been saying is something like the way in which God's people Israel journeyed—not through pack-ice, but through the wilderness. They did not decide their own movements. They had Someone Who gave them orders where to go, when to stop and when to move. They were guided by "the cloud." The cloud was the sign of God's presence among them. Now the great advantage which they had as compared with Capt. Scott was this—the One Who was, so to speak, in the crow's-nest of their ship was God Himself, Who could see the whole way, right to the end of the journey, and knew exactly the best course to take. Even Mr. Bowers could see only a comparatively short distance over the ice, and with all his skill he was often baffled and did not know which way to go. Yet, in spite of their having so wonderful a guide, we find the children of Israel constantly grumbling and rebelling. No doubt they said things like this—'Why must we stop just here?' or, 'We are tired of this place; why can't we move on now?' or, 'Why

can't we stay here longer?' or, 'Why are we being led along *this* path? It is obviously the wrong one.'

I am sure they said this kind of thing, because these are the things that we often say when God seeks to lead us on. We are full of questions and doubts as to the wisdom and rightness of His way, and all too often we allow our own foolish and impatient hearts to persuade us into taking some course different from that in which God is seeking to lead us. But everything depends upon the knowledge and ability of the one in charge; and we can be quite sure that the very wisest possible thing for us to do is to trust the directing of our lives absolutely into the care of our perfect, all-knowing, all-able God, and to follow where He leads, even if it looks to us to be wrong, and to stop as long as He stops, even though we think it would be better to go on. Perfect trust in God and patience to wait for Him are the great needs of every one of us. The end of our own way is always sorrow and disappointment. *God's way is always right.*

But, you may ask, if God sees the end from the beginning, why does He not lead us straight forward? Why do we find ourselves halted again and again so that we cannot move? Capt. Scott says this very interesting thing about the pack-ice:

'One is much struck by our inability to find a cause for the periodic opening and closing of the floes. . . . In general it seems to show that *our conditions are governed by remote causes.* Somewhere well north or south of us the wind may be blowing in some other direction. . . . One can only vaguely feel that *things are happening far beyond our horizon which directly affect our situation.*'

Why the sudden hold-up in our lives? Why the sudden opening of the way? We cannot explain, as a rule; but it may be because of things happening elsewhere, out of our sight and knowledge. God is doing an immense work. He is controlling a multitude of lives—and He causes all things to work *together* for good to them that love Him (Rom. viii. 28). Perhaps we have to wait sometimes until other lives are ready to fit in with us—and we seem to be brought to a standstill, hemmed in on every side. And then all at once there comes release, a way opens and we can go forward. We do not know why; we are not aware of anything that has happened to cause the change, but there it is. God has done it, because the time has come for us to take another step. But while we are waiting, are we blaming God for the delay as if He had made a mistake? and when the way opens again, do we grumble because of the direction in which it leads? If

we do, we have not learned to trust in the Lord with all our heart, but we are leaning upon our own understanding. If we did but know it, that is very often the chief reason why God allows us to be held up and to be led along strange and undesired ways. He wants above everything else to win our hearts' love and confidence—to save us from the folly of trusting in ourselves, and for our own good to teach us to trust wholly in Him only.

And, remember, He will not show us *all* the way ahead—just one step at a time. Why? Because if He showed us more, we might begin to feel we did not need Him so much. So He shuts us up to a life of faith, in which we have to trust Him moment by moment and to rely on Him for everything if we are to come safely through life's 'pack-ice' and reach the open water at the other side.

Do you think this is a hard and anxious way of living? No, it is the way of perfect rest. The Lord Jesus, more than any other who ever lived, was a man of rest, and the secret was that He lived under the complete control of His Father, and depended utterly upon Him for everything, and therefore had no anxieties whatever: and He has given us His Holy Spirit to lead us in the same way. Others in the Bible learned the lesson well, though none so perfectly as He. Abraham started out on a journey in obedience to God's call "not knowing whither he went" (Heb. xi. 8). He did not know the way, nor the destination; but he went a step at a time with God, and arrived safely. If you will read II Sam. v. 17-25 you will see David receiving instructions from One above, and being guided successfully through the 'pack-ice.' In verses 17-21 he was shown an open lead that took him straight through, but in verses 22-25 he had to go round another way. In Acts xvi. 6-10 you can read how Paul also was guided through. You can see him trying one way after another before he found one that brought him right through; but he found the way in the end, because he was seeking only God's way, not his own, and was

utterly obedient to the Holy Spirit. Like his Master, he could say, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John v. 30). Such men will always get through their 'pack-ice' successfully, for they have learned how treacherous and how foolish are their own thoughts—and that "it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Psa. cxviii. 8). Their message to us would be: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass" (Psa. xxxvii. 5).

Now I wonder who is in the crow's-nest of your ship, directing your course? Are you there yourself? Then you can be quite sure you are in for trouble! Why not ask the Lord Himself to be there, and to guide you in the way that you should go? He sees the way clearly, right to the end. He is the One Who is "perfect in knowledge" (Job. xxxvi. 4). If you are prepared to accept His direction, even when He leads you by ways you do not understand or halts you when you would go forward: if you are prepared to trust and obey Him in everything: if you are willing to crown Him Lord of your life and to hand over entirely to Him the government of all your matters: if you are prepared to say "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke xxii. 42), and, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts ix. 6 A.V.)—then you may be quite certain that He will gladly and readily respond to you, and will guide you unfailingly through your 'pack-ice,' and lead you right on, all the way, to the 'South Pole.' Are you prepared to do that? If so, will you kneel down now and tell the Lord so? The boy or girl who submits to the Lord Jesus Christ in every detail of his or her life will certainly arrive at the 'Pole' while others who do not do so are still hopelessly trying to find a way through their 'pack-ice.'

Do you want a Pilot? Signal then to Jesus. Do you want a Pilot? Bid Him come on board. For He will safely guide across the ocean wide, Until you reach at last the Heavenly Harbour.

G. P.

The Lord's Field

"Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth he that plougheth to sow plough continually? doth he continually open and harrow his ground? When he hath levelled the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and put in the wheat in rows, and the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in the border thereof? For his God doth instruct him aright, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not

threshed with a sharp threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread grain is ground; for he will not be always threshing it: and though the wheel of his cart and his horses scatter it, he doth not grind it. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom" (Isa. xxviii. 23-29).

"Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field" (Ecc. v 9).

Spiritual Agriculture

THIS is one of the numerous examples and aspects of that great truth that the whole natural creation is intended by God to be a symbolism of heavenly and spiritual things. We know there is a great deal in the Scriptures which sets forth the idea that the Lord's people are to the Lord like a field to be cultivated. Many of the terms of Scripture indicate that, as you know—the Lord's field, the soil, the ground, the seed, the planting of the Lord, the trees of the Lord, and so on. All these terms are symbols of spiritual things. The Lord is cultivating; there is a spiritual agriculture under the hand of the Lord, the great Husbandman. This passage which we have just read in Isaiah brings to us this one thing among others, that, as in the case of Israel, so in the case of the Church—which, of course, involves us all individually—the Lord deals with His people as with a field, or as with a farm, to be fruitful in various ways, to represent different kinds of satisfaction to Himself. Over and through all, the Lord works to get for Himself satisfaction.

He ploughs. The interrogation here—"Doth he . . . plough continually?"—is to be carried into the case of Israel, for God was indeed ploughing Israel and was going to make Israel like a ploughed field, and there was going to be some very deep cutting, shearing down deep into the very soul of Israel, laying open and bare and turning over. It was going to be very hard work with Israel. But the Lord in this question says, 'I do not do that sort of thing just for its own sake, and, although that is a very painful aspect of My activities, it is only done with a view to fruitfulness.' The ploughing has its place and its time, it has to be done; that may seem to be destructive, hard, painful, the ruthless activity of the Lord with His people. He is ploughing deep into their souls, making deep furrows in their very being; but that is an aspect and a phase, something which will not go on always. He does not *continually* plough. That will be completed for the time being—but it *will* be completed—and when it is, the Lord gets on with that for which the ploughing is necessary. He gets on with the positive and constructive aspect, the putting in of the seed.

The Lord is after some kind of fruit from every life for His own satisfaction. Even the king is served by the fruit of the field. It comes even to the Lord's table. The Lord

lives upon what He produces in our lives.

Fruit Possible on Resurrection Ground Only

I started by saying that the whole of this creation is a symbolism of spiritual things, and that here, in this realm of agriculture, we have very much that indicates what the Lord is after. The very creation itself seems to have this symbolism. You go back to Genesis I. There you find the earth without form and void, and darkness covering the face of the deep; everything is in chaos; and then on the third day the dry land appears. The third day speaks always of resurrection, and resurrection is out of a chaos. We come to know well enough at some time or other in our lives what a chaos this old creation is. We may have known something of it before we were saved. We may have come to know a little more about it when we were saved, but I think we have been learning ever since we were saved that a far greater chaos lies in the direction of the old creation than ever we imagined. We know the darkness that lies in the natural realm; we know the bareness, the unprofitableness, of this natural life so far as God's satisfaction is concerned. We know that from us in our natural state there is nothing that can come to His table for His pleasure and satisfaction, that we are no field yielding to His pleasure.

But then that great work is done in our union with Christ—"planted together" (Rom. vi. 5). You see, it is an agricultural figure again. "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." The third day there was the mighty act of our being raised from the dead with our Lord Jesus; and therein, so to speak, 'the dry land' appears. Here is a new field for the Lord to work upon. And that principle is constantly in operation. It is seen in a crisis, but it is going on all the time; that is, it is also a process by which the Lord brings us more and more on to that resurrection basis where there can be more and more for Him. Death works on one side, and is made to work; there must be the growing realisation of the hopeless mess there, the increasing consciousness of the chaos and the darkness lying over that old creation of ours. Yes, that is death working on the one side, but issuing in resurrection on the other side, where God is going to have more.

The Husbandman's Wisdom

But the point that I want to emphasize is this—the wisdom of God over all this. The farmer carries out the ploughing and other agricultural activities, putting in the seed into

own place. I take it that the meaning of all is that the Lord Who gives wisdom to His man, this earthly man, is acting with Israel that kind of wisdom. He is saying, 'What I am doing, I am doing in wisdom; I know what I am doing.' He does that which His infinite wisdom dictates is necessary and which He knows will bring the greatest and best fruit for His satisfaction. 'O Lord, this ploughing, this upheaving, this deep cutting, this furrowing—why is so much of it necessary?' Well, He is "wonderful in counsel." He knows when the ploughing work should go on, and when the ploughing work is done for the season, and so He is governed in His dealings with us by infinite wisdom, having in view the greatest measure of fruit.

Fruit for the King in Terms of Christ

We have our own ideas as to what is fruit for the Lord. So often with us it is a matter of a kind of service and place of service. It is not like that with the Lord. Let us remember that, after all, the fruit that the Lord is after is not so much the fruit of our activities as the quality of our lives. Of course He wants fruitfulness in service, in what we do; but even in that we shall be disciplined. If you think you are going to get away from the plough when you get into the Lord's work, you make a great mistake. Some of us know, after many years of being in the work of the Lord, that we are not away from the plough yet. We are continually being opened up, broken and cut. Then, the plough comes back into use again from time to time. There is something more yet for the Lord. What is it? Not so much what we may do in service for the Lord, but more that answers to the Lord's mind in life; for, after all, it is Christ that the Husbandman is after, and real fruitfulness is just that Christ is given back to Him in our lives—the fruit of life.

That means death and resurrection, if 'the dry land' appears on the third day. But once the Lord gets us on to resurrection ground, there is something there for Him. I notice in Genesis that, after the record of the appearing of the dry land, nothing is said about the creation of the seeds that were to bring forth the trees and the fruit and the herbs and so on; the land spontaneously yielded, the vegetation grew. The seed was there, and the life was in the resurrection earth. There was something for the Lord in resurrection which spontaneously began to grow; and if we really do go through these processes which bring us to resurrection ground, there is something there for the Lord which will begin to show of itself. We have not to strain to produce it—

it comes. It comes out of the ordeal, it just shows itself, it must manifest itself. The life seed is there and it will grow in the power of that resurrection.

Fruitfulness Governed by Heavenly Ordinances

There is only one other thing I am going to point to at this time in this connection. It is that, on the fourth day, the Lord created the heavenly bodies, sun, moon and stars, so that this earth came under a completely established order of government in heaven; and the continuation of fruitfulness and fruitful seasons was the result of this established government of heavenly bodies. We know that to be true. The seasons are governed by the heavenly bodies, and therefore the fruit of the earth absolutely depends upon the established order of things.

But here we come to see that our fruitfulness for the Lord's satisfaction demands an established order of things in heaven and that we can and must come into it and under it. When the Lord was challenging Job at the end of the story, one of the questions that He put, in order to show that after all Job did not know everything, was—"Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens?" (Job xxxviii. 33). That is a great phrase—"the ordinances of the heavens." Translate that spiritually, and you find in the New Testament that the Church stands related to an established order of things in heaven; and if you and I are going on to a life of full fruitfulness, we shall come up against those ordinances of the heavens. They represent an order that is fixed and heavenly. It has got to govern us. We have to come under it, respond to it; and until we do, the Lord's full purpose in all His effort with us in ploughing and harrowing is arrested; there is no yield, or at best the fruit is limited. There is a heavenly order fixed. I am not going to indicate what those ordinances of the heavens are, but if we are really on resurrection ground, that is, under the government of the Holy Spirit, we shall come up against this and that and another thing which is a fixed heavenly ordinance—something that is established—and response to it, like the earth's response to the sun, will determine the measure of the fruitfulness of our lives.

You have only to walk down the drive here to get plenty of illustration of that. See those distorted, twisted trees down there. The branches are all shapes, and in themselves rather poor things. Why? Because they found themselves in a position where there was not enough light and air, and for their very

life's sake they have strained tortuously to reach out to find what they needed; and because they were circumscribed in their movements, and there was not enough light and air for them, they are these poor, twisted, crippled things. They show that there is something of the heavens to which they must come into correspondence, that they must find for their very life and fruitfulness. And of course you have seen in other cases where a tree is in a position to get all the light and air it needs, what a grand tree it is. It is obeying the ordinances of the heavens; it is right in touch with fixed principles of heavenly government.

In His wisdom God has said, 'Now, such-and-such is a heavenly law, a heavenly principle, a heavenly ordinance which is fixed, and you will never yield your full quota of fruit for My satisfaction if you do not recognise that.'

One of the laws is the law of corporate life, of the house of God. If you detach yourself and live as an individual, your measure is limited. And I could indicate many others. The ordinances of the heavens are fixed, and it is going to be a poor lookout for the things of the earth if they are not in line with those ordinances and if there is not a correspondence with them.

We are not concerned with merely *earthly*

ordinances. The Lord's Table, for example, can be, and has been, made an earthly ordinance, but it is really an ordinance of the heavens, it is an ordinance of the risen Christ Himself. You may put it aside as a merely earthly ordinance and suffer nothing, but if you come into the realm of resurrection, it takes on a new meaning and new value. This is an ordinance, not of man, not of an ecclesiastical system, but of heaven—something precious and living, from which the Lord gets something. And there are many things like that; the ordinances of the house of God, of corporate life, and so on. They are all established things. If, I say again, we are in the Spirit, we come into the line of those wise counsels of God which are working unto fruitfulness.

The Lord knows what He is after, and takes the way with each one of us that will reach His end most effectively. It may be a plough, it may be a harrow; but it is not going to be always the same. Each will have its place and He will turn to other phases; but whatever the phase, it is governed by the wisdom which is seeking for Himself the very answer to His creative activities—that for which He brought this spiritual field into being at all—that the King's table might be served. And He Himself is the King.

T. A.-S.

The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

VI. The Significance of the Death of Christ

"He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8).

SO far we have been occupied with that side and aspect of the Cross of the Lord Jesus that has to do with sin, and we have seen that sin is the basis and nature and power of the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of Satan.

We come now to one further inclusive word on the matter of the nature of sin before we say a word about its result, and then we are brought immediately to the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

The Essence of Sin—Independence of God

What does this whole matter of sin amount to? Can we put it into a word? I think we can, and that word is independence—independence of God. Yes, the kingdom of Satan is really built upon independence. He himself decided to take a course of independence. Before he became Satan he was Lucifer, the covering cherub. The Scripture says "thou wast created" (Eze. xxviii. 13), and a created being must be less than, and dependent upon, the Creator; but this one decided to be in-

dependent of Him and to proceed to have everything centred in himself and not in God, to be his own lord, to be god himself and to refer and defer to no one—absolute independence; and it was that which he introduced into the race by Adam. "Hath God said . . .? God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. iii. 1, 5). The inference of his words was this—'Why not have your eyes opened? Why always have to refer to God? Why not be as God?' To that suggestion man fell. He used the greatest gift that God has ever given to created beings—the power of choice, will—he used his great trust, freewill, and chose independence.

There are many ways in which this independence works out. It works out along the line of self-sufficiency, and we see that history right up to date is only the story of independence. self-sufficiency, in one form or another. At different times or in different sections of the race this independence expresses itself variously. Sometimes, and in some places, it

takes the form of definite and positive Godlessness, where God is deliberately and openly and unashamedly thrown over, repudiated, denied. That sort of thing covers a very large section of this earth to-day and is powerfully at work—utter and positive and deliberate Godlessness, giving Him no place. Sometimes and in other places this independence has been, and is, expressed in a system of ideas of human greatness. The word 'ideology' has sprung so much into our vocabulary. It is simply a system or scheme of ideas about human greatness—how great man is and how inherently good he is; you have only to give him scope and facility and suitable conditions, and you see what a wonderful creature he is, both as to his ability, his potentialities, and his inherent goodness. It is only another form of independence of God, of man's blindness; for man's blindness is most of all seen in his inability to recognise his own need.

Or again, the same thing shows itself in religious systems, systems of works, salvation by works. This may be positive or it may be negative, but it is the same thing. The positive form is seen in Judaism and in Romanism and in other systems—the religion of salvation by works. Paul summed it up very well, speaking so sadly about his brethren after the flesh—“Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rom. x. 3). That is the point. They have not done that thing which is just the opposite of independence—submission to the righteousness of God. That whole system, however it comes out, is simply the system of 'what a good boy am I!' 'I do this and that, I don't do this and that; see how good I am!'—seeking to establish their own righteousness.

But this Satanic thing is behind it all, and the Lord Jesus uncovered it. He said to these very people who were making broad their phylacteries, making long prayers in the market places, parading themselves like peacocks with their tails spread religiously—“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do” (John viii. 44). Pretty scathing for religion, is it not?

Or it may be negative. It may be the poor ascetic, cringing and begging, with his miserable face and his poor emaciated form, and he is only saying in another way, 'What a good boy am I! I am very religious, I do not do the things that all you other people do. I am a man of prayer, of abstinence.' It is the same thing. He counts on getting to heaven that way—independence of God.

Or again, it may come in the most subtle

form of all—spiritual pride amongst the real children of God. There is no worse pride than spiritual pride. I think there is nothing more abominable to the Lord, because it exists just where much better knowledge ought to exist; it exists right in the realm of grace. If you think it is too strong a thing to say, remember, we are poor little pygmies compared with such a man as the Apostle Paul: we cannot match up to him as to spiritual stature, as to his knowledge of God: and even such a spiritual giant as he will say, “That I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me” (II Cor. xii. 7). It is there, it is always there, it is always present—some form of self-congratulation; and the peril is greatest, always greatest, where blessing is the greatest. Oh, the infinite peril running side by side with the blessing of God! How very difficult it is for the Lord to trust us with blessing! How very difficult it is for Him to use us! How pleased we feel! Yes, it is in the highest of all realms that Satan appears—amongst the sons of God (Job i. 6). Yes, in heaven. I cannot understand that literally, but I can understand it spiritually—that in heaven Satan appears amongst the sons of God; and Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light when the Lord is using and blessing His people. 'This is great! We are becoming somebody!'—and there it is amongst the sons of God in heaven. Independence—trying to get us unwatchfully, imperceptibly, unconsciously, unintentionally, to presume, because the Lord has done something. How terrible this sin is! You can never track it down and finally lay it to rest.

Now you see, power is based upon authority, and, as we have said before, like can never cast out like, Satan can never cast out Satan, the flesh cannot cast out the flesh. “If a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand” (Mark iii. 25). Authority rests upon right, and right is moral. Hence, we have got to know what the kingdom of God rests upon, and there has to be a very wide cleavage between the two kingdoms.

The Result of Independence

(a) Enmity Against God

What is the effect, the result, of all this which we have summed up in this word independence? It is firstly, enmity, so far as our relationship with God is concerned. All that is the sum and the essence of enmity with God, and there is enmity on God's part toward it. Any form of independence on our part where the Lord is concerned is a positive factor of warfare with God. Perhaps that needs a word adding to it, because probably no one here will deliberately take a line independent of the

Lord. If it came to the immediate issue of the Lord and you, you would not do it. But there is a good deal of independence about us that does so often seek to evade the Lord. The independence may show itself in various directions. The Lord therefore has constituted His house in such a way that the test of our willingness to rely upon the Lord, to trust Him, to commit our way unto Him, is found in relationships, in matters of the House. We cannot say that we trust the Lord, that we commit everything to Him, that we depend upon Him, and then perhaps take an independent course where another child of God is concerned. That is a contradiction. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (I John iv. 20). The proof of your love for God is your relationship to your brother. So in this matter of independence, it is tested out in many practical ways in the Christian relationships of the house of God. I speak of 'the house of God' as a spiritual thing—the relatedness of all believers. That by the way.

Now this all comes to be something positively set against God—enmity. If this is Satan's nature, then Satan is enmity against God. That is in us. There is the innate enmity against God in us. We have only got to be put to the test in a suitable situation and it comes out. I have only to ask you, have you never in your life been put into a situation in which you have found it difficult to yield to the Lord? Have you always, in all circumstances, at all times, in all conditions, in every trial and difficulty, found it perfectly easy to say, Yes, to the Lord? Have you? But here we are, we are put to the test in numerous practical ways as to whether, after all, there is not something in us that has got to be overcome in this matter of natural enmity against God.

(b) Distance from God

And the enmity, of course, creates distance. That is how it was at the beginning. Immediately the enmity came into Adam, God withdrew, distance was created. It was distance of nature, not only distance of persons. God had to put man apart from Himself, and man knows perfectly well by nature that he is at a distance from God. One of the characteristics of the unregenerate man is that he feels that God is such a long way off. Where is God?—somewhere out on the rim of the universe. God is far away. One of the first blessed characteristics of a born-again soul is a sense that God is near; the gap is closed up; God is at hand.

(c) Impotence

And sin brings impotence, helplessness. It is a fact, whether we realise it or not, which is brought out very clearly and strongly immedi-

ately the question of real salvation arises. Even though you may be one who has most thoroughly stood for salvation by works, as did Saul of Tarsus, when it comes to the real matter of the relatedness of salvation to your inner life, you have to say, "The good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise. . . Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 19, 24). Impotence, helplessness—that is the result of sin.

The Issue of Independence—Death

That leads us at once to what that amounts to, what that is. It is death. What is death? We know it is not cessation of being. It is the change of the nature of our being, change in our relationships in being. Here death is the awful sense that God is against you—enmity working itself out in fear and dread of God; your full consciousness awakened to the wrath of God. That is the realm of enmity; that is death. Distance?—ah, yes; far, far away, far out of reach, out of call. You cannot get Him; you cannot find Him. You cry, but no response; He is far away. That is death, when your consciousness is fully alive to it. Impotence?—no hope, no resource, no recourse, helpless, abandoned; that is death. That is the result of sin.

We come to the Cross. Do you understand that aspect of the Cross of our Lord Jesus? There are two aspects to the Cross. We have said that Christianity is a system of paradoxes or contradictions. At one time you will be reading about the Cross as the most awful thing—the place of the wrath of God, the darkness, the terror. At another time you read about the Cross as that in which the Lord Jesus offered Himself without spot to God—God fully satisfied: all the heart longings and cravings of the very nature of God are answered to fully. That is the other side of the Cross. Those two things meet in the Cross of Calvary, and you find that God has in all time given pictures of those two sides.

Types of Sin (a) Leprosy

You turn to the book of Leviticus where the whole question of relationship is being threshed out. In the fourteenth chapter you have the matter of leprosy and the cleansing of the leper. Two birds are called for for the cleansing of the leper and the cleansing of his house. One bird is killed, its neck is wrung, its blood is shed. It is killed as by an act of anger, of destruction. The other bird is sprinkled with its blood and let go. It lives—touched with that blood, but it lives. That is the cleansing of the leper from his leprosy—a picture of sin dealt with. Leprosy is the Bible's worst pic-

ture of sin; leprosy, the thing which is hateful, in which are all the elements of enmity. And leprosy separates; it is so against everything that is lovely and beautiful. There is an element in it of hostility to all that is good. The enmity leads to separation, and the poor leper has to depart. Lest anybody should come near, he cries with his hollow cry, Unclean! Unclean! He is put aside. And what can a leper do? Of course, today we have remedies, we are able to rescue the leper. But then leprosy was regarded as a hopeless and a helpless thing.

How is the leper cleansed? Well, there are two sides to his cleansing. Typically, he must bear judgment and be destroyed from the presence of the Lord, but, being sprinkled with the blood, he may also live. It is the same person, not two halves. On the one hand, judged, condemned and destroyed from before God; on the other hand saved, the blood sprinkled. Judgment has passed, destruction has been carried out, but somehow 'from the ground there blossoms red, life that shall endless be.' The leper is saved.

(b) The Scapegoat

You pass to Leviticus xvi, and you have the ritual of the great day of Atonement, and the central things are two goats. The priest brings the two goats and places them before the Lord. Then lots are cast upon the two goats, one for the Lord, one for the Scapegoat or "Azazel" — meaning for abandonment, dismissal. The latter goat is for judgment, all the sins of Israel being put upon it. It is driven out of the camp, away into the desolation of the wilderness, never to come back again, to be lost forever, never again to be looked upon. I have often thought one of the most pathetic pictures in the whole Bible is that poor goat.

But the other goat—the lot has fallen upon him for God, and he is offered to God.

Now in the Bible and in the Hebrew language, there are two words which are of particular interest in this connexion—one, holiness; the other, consecration. Holiness means 'set apart for God.' Consecration means 'devoted.' I do not know why, but in the Authorized Version the translators have strangely translated that word 'devoted' as 'accursed.' You remember, Achan took the 'accursed' thing (Joshua vii. 10-26). It is the 'devoted' thing. Saul was commanded 'to devote' Amalek to the sword—man, woman, child, and beast. (I Sam. xv. 3 R.V.M.). Here are two sides of one thing. One, separated unto the Lord as holy unto the Lord; the other, devoted. Ah, but what does devotion mean? It may mean

devoted to judgment, devoted to destruction. Achan found that. He, his family, his tent, all that he had, was destroyed. He was devoted, consecrated. You have a new idea of consecration now, have you not? Consecrated; devoted to destruction from the presence of the Lord. That was the goat of dismissal. Devoted to be shut out for ever, never again to come back into the company of what is God's.

The Significance of the Cross

(a) Christ Made Sin for Us

There is the Cross. Looking now on that dark side of the Cross, what happened on that side? Is it too terrible a thing to say that the Son of man took the place of Satan? He took the place of that very nature which had come from Satan into the race, the place of the outpouring of God's wrath because of enmity. He was made *sin* in our stead (II Cor. v. 21). What is sin? We find in this dealing with the goats on the day of Atonement, the words are these—"Aaron shall . . . confess over him all the *iniquities* of the children of Israel, and all their *transgressions*, even all their sins" (Lev. xvi. 21). All their sins; their transgressions (their rebellions) and their iniquities (their perversity). That is put on the goat of destruction—rebellion and perversity. Does this not give some new tremendous meaning to that word "obedient unto death"? Why did the Lord Jesus sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground—what the Apostle speaks of as resisting unto blood, striving against sin (Heb. xii. 4)? He had been called upon by the Father to become rebellion, perversity, to take the place of iniquity and transgression, and to have all that laid upon Him. "He was wounded for our transgressions (rebellion), he was bruised for our iniquities (perversity)" (Isa. liii. 5). Why did He say "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John iii. 14)? Why was it a serpent that was set up? You see the nature that He was asked to accept at that moment. Know Him in the truth of His being, know Him as He really was, know how for three and a half long, weary, bitter years He fought against all that evil, refusing everything that belonged to it—refusing pride, refusing the temptation of the devil to act independently of God, to accept a kingdom independently of God—how He had fought all the way through against that which Satan tried to put upon Him—and at the end to be asked by the Father to accept it for our sake! Can we enter into it? We cannot.

"He became obedient." Oh, what obedience meant in His case! Obedient to God Who said, 'Will you, for the sake of the race, take

all that, be judged as that, be dealt with by Me as that, step right into that very position and let Me deal with you so that My wrath due to enmity against Me is poured out upon you in judgment, and so that the complete withdrawal of My presence becomes known to you in awful reality and you cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As to helplessness—"He was crucified through weakness" (II Cor. xiii. 4); He could not save Himself. The outworking of sin in the Cross was like that; the goat of dismissal sent far, far away. "I cry in the daytime, but thou answerest not" (Psa. xxii. 2). There is no one to answer the crying from the far desolate wilderness of God-forsakenness, God-abandonment. We cannot enter into it. In order to undo for us that power of Satan, for one terrible, eternal hour, He tasted death; the wrath of God, the remoteness of God, and utter impotence and helplessness.

(b) Christ Accepted of God

Yet there is the other aspect of the Cross (of which we shall have to speak more again if the Lord wills) where, while all that we have been saying is true, and we take nothing from it—the awful darkness and blackness and terror of it all—something else is going on. He offers Himself without spot unto God (Heb. ix. 14). He was an offering unto God. That is the other aspect. The word gains strength for us—" . . . who delivered us out of the power (authority) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. i. 13). That is the value of the Cross. Out of that darkness into this—into God's absolute good pleasure. "The Son of his love." "Accepted in the beloved" (Eph. i. 6). Out of one into the other by the Cross.

Oh, I wish that it were in my power to make the Cross known in more of its wonderful depth and fulness in both its aspects. I trust that you see a little more. We are now thinking of the Cross in both aspects—judgment and acceptance. Let us see what He has done. He has devoured and swallowed up all the wrath of God; there is no more remaining for us if we will believe. He has bridged and closed up the mighty gulf between God and us, and brought us nigh unto God through the Blood of His Cross, if we will believe; and He has brought us back into the place of the power of God out of our impotence, that we should be endued and endowed by the Holy Ghost with the mighty power of God. ". . . strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. iii. 16). While in ourselves remaining weak, we are nevertheless able to say, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth

me" (Phil. iv. 13). There is the great change over.

The Practical Application

But, you see, the practical application has got to be made. We have got to come definitely to the meaning of the Cross like that, and say, 'Well, if that is what the Cross means so far as I am concerned by nature, there is no place left for self-will, for independence; that must go to the Cross; and all that belongs to the old creation must go to the Cross.' And, thank God, the Cross is not just some wooden thing set up long years ago, neither is it a crucifix to be worn around our necks; it is a mighty power of God. "Christ crucified . . . the power of God" (I Cor. i. 23, 24). To do this thing, to save us from the strength of our own will, to break the power of this enmity in us against God, to transform us into the image of His Son, there is the power of God centred in the Cross. Oh, what an immense thing the Cross is! Let us go away from this meditation solemnly—I would almost say brokenly—worshipping for what it cost Him. Obedient! Have a proposition like that put up to you! Even in our sinfulness, in all our great capacity for sin, if a certain proposition were put up to us we should shrink from it, and say, 'God forbid that ever I should have to touch that!' We know a little of shrinking from atmospheres and conditions which are so contrary to the Lord. Think of *Him*! We cannot, we just cannot, understand what it meant to Him, the Holy One, to be sin, and to be asked by the Father to be placed in a position—not doctrinally and technically, but actually—where the wrath of God was let loose and exhausted itself upon Him, and the far, far abandonment of God broke upon His consciousness; He could not find God. He was helpless, impotent. That is what it cost; that was the meaning of His obedience for our salvation. Oh, how costly is our salvation! Let us dwell upon it with reverent and heart-moved adoration.

But we are not left there, thank God. Not one of us ever need *taste* the judgment of God; not one of us ever need know God-forsakenness or God even at a distance from us. We know just the opposite of that in our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith in Him.

May the Lord take the feebleness of this presentation and impress upon our hearts how great is the price of our redemption. We were redeemed "not with corruptible things, with silver or gold . . . but with precious blood" (I Pet. i. 18-19).

T. A.-S.

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Editor : T. AUSTIN-SPARKS
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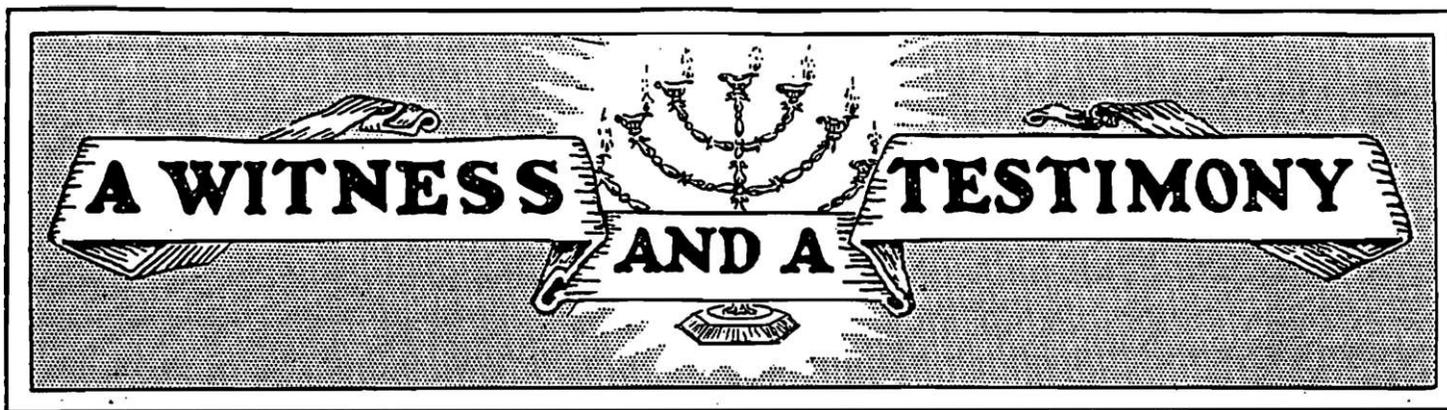
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The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

VII. The Triumph of Righteousness

"My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter; I speak the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty one, thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness: and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under thee; they are in the heart of the king's enemies. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of equity is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Psa. xlv. 1-7).

"... but of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Heb. i. 8-9).

INTO those two fragments of Scripture a great amount is gathered. In our previous meditation, we saw something, if it were but a little, of the meaning of the Cross of our Lord Jesus, and what judgment means. Now we move to the other aspect of the Cross, and come to the ground of righteousness. Sin unto judg-

ment has so far held our attention; now, righteousness.

The Conflict Between Two Kingdoms

But may I just say here once more, for the sake of the setting of everything, that what we are seeking to see in these meditations is that the cosmic conflict between the two great kingdoms, the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God, of darkness and light, of death and life, is heading up in a very intense and comprehensive way at this time unto the end, and that the Lord's people everywhere are involved; and in a very real sense the conflict rests upon them for its issue. The Church is the eternally chosen instrument and vessel in and through which the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus is to be manifested and administered. Unto that a deep spiritual preparation has to be made on very practical grounds and along very practical lines, for these kingdoms are not just systems set up in an objective, external way. They are not political; they are not economic; they are not earthly in any sense. They are spiritual; and the very essence of their nature and strength and existence is a spiritual state, and that state is found within the very constitution of those who belong to the two kingdoms respectively. We have sought to see that the kingdom of Satan is really within man by nature. It is there in man's own nature that Satan now has his strength. On the other hand, the kingdom of the heavens is an inward

thing. It is within you, and it is therefore a matter of inward constitution. Therefore one thing which arises for us is as to whether this kingdom, the kingdom of the heavens within the life of the people of God, is really going to manifest and express its supremacy, its ascendancy; and that is what we are called unto, and that is really the challenge of these meditations.

A Kingdom Ruled in Righteousness

Now we shall pursue that in an inward way again—as to what it means; but this time, on the side of righteousness. You notice that we read: “Of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God” Do not draw mechanical lines between the kingdom of the Son of God’s love and the kingdom of God. It is the same thing in meaning and value and effect. “Delivered us out of the power (authority) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (Col. i. 13). What kingdom is that? “Thy throne, O God,” He saith of the Son, “is forever and ever”—an everlasting kingdom: the same phrase as is used in the Old Testament of the kingdom of the Most High God (Dan. iv. 23). “The sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee”

Righteousness, the Expression of The Righteous One

Now, if the kingdom of Satan is based upon sin, and if sin is what we have said it is—rebellion, perversity, with all its outworking: pride: self in all its forms; unto enmity against God, separation from God, and utter impotence and helplessness to redeem itself—if that is the basis of the kingdom of Satan, then the kingdom of God is based on righteousness; that is, upon that which is exactly the opposite of sin. If Satan is the embodiment of sin, then Christ must be the embodiment of righteousness, when rightly understood. The point is that it is something personal, not abstract or something in itself. Do not talk about sin as some abstract thing. Sin is the expression of a person. Satan *is* sin, and all that emanates from him is sin. In like manner, Christ is righteousness, and the righteousness which is of God is Christ, Who is made unto us from God righteousness (I Cor. i. 30). He is “the Righteous One” (Acts III. 14). It is personal. We need to say that and emphasize it, so that we shall not get any kind of mentality that we are dealing with things. We are dealing ultimately with persons, and therefore with kingdoms. On both

sides it resolves itself into ‘Who?’ not ‘What?’ Who is going to have the kingdom?

Now if ‘kingdom’ suggests dominion, authority, power—as, of course, it does—then dominion, authority, power, rest upon and spring from a nature. They are not official, exercised and asserted by an appointment. They spring from the nature of the person or persons concerned; that is, you and I will know no more of Divine power than we know of Divine nature, of Divine likeness. Our spiritual power, dominion, authority over the power of the enemy, depend upon nothing other than our nearness to God and our likeness to Him. Any system of teaching about authority which takes up a certain kind of phraseology and begins to throw about phrases at the enemy without a deep knowledge of the basis of authority is a most dangerous and pernicious thing, and will involve all concerned in inevitable trouble from which it will not be easy to extricate them. This is not just a statement of ideas, this is fact. Some of us have seen the devil make awful havoc of people who stood up talking about Satan being a defeated foe, and throwing at him phrases from the Bible. The end of that has been scattering and shattering. But that does not mean that there is no such thing as authority over the enemy. What I am trying to emphasize is that it is necessary to know the basis of authority, and that basis is what is here meant by righteousness.

Features of The Righteous One

(a) Meekness

So then, in coming to the nature of the Kingdom which is founded upon righteousness, we see how opposite it is in all its features to the kingdom of Satan. In the latter, as we have seen, pride is the starting point, the first feature of revolt, rebellion, and the long history of perversity. “Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty” (Eze. xxviii. 17). Therefore the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Son of God’s love, must have at its very foundation the opposite of pride, which is meekness; and I would call your attention to the large place that the matter of meekness has in the Word of God, in both the Old Testament and the New. Let me give you but a little handful of references, which will make many others spring up in your mind immediately.

“The meek will he guide in justice; and the meek will he teach his way” (Psa. xxv. 9).

“The meek shall inherit the land” (Psa. xxxvii. 11).

“The Lord upholdeth the meek” (Psa. cxlvii. 6).

“He will beautify the meek with salvation”

(Psa. cxlix. 4).

"(He shall) decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. xi. 4).

"The Lord . . . hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek" (Isa. lxi. 1).

All that leads us to the One Who was the full embodiment of that feature. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. xi. 29). To Jerusalem the prophetic utterance was made, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass" (Matt. xxi. 5). And Peter speaks of this as of great preciousness when he says, "Whose adorning . . . let it be . . . a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. iii. 4). Paul said, "I Paul myself entreat you by the meekness . . . of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 1). To the church to which, through him, had just been given that immense and incomprehensible revelation of the foreordination, the predestination, the election of the Church in Christ before the foundation of the world, and of the object for which those Divine counsels chose it—to the church to which had just been given that matchless unfolding of the Church's eternal calling and heavenly vocation and resources, he comes right down, so to speak, from that high pinnacle and says, "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all . . . meekness" (Eph. iv. 1-2): 'Do not let all this result in spiritual pride.' What is the way of the realisation of it all? By self-assertiveness? no—"all lowliness and meekness."

These fragments, surely, are sufficient to bring us right up against this fact, that power over the whole power of Satan is found centred in the first place in meekness. It says that all that mighty power of sin, all that mighty kingdom which Satan has set up, into which he has drawn all the sons of men by nature—his kingdom is to be undone by meekness; that meekness is a greater power than that.

(b) Yieldedness and Obedience

We use another word here in this connection—yieldedness. The actual word does not occur often in the Scriptures, but what it means fills the Scriptures. We saw that in Lucifer's rebellion, and then in the great betrayal of Adam into his hands, the thing which influenced and governed the enemy and Adam was possessiveness, drawing to self—'I will, I will, I will'—and all Satan's force was bent upon having and holding and not letting go; so his kingdom stands upon that. Does that need any argument? Look abroad to-day—the grab, the acquisitiveness, the stretching out of the hand to have, to take, to hold, to dominate

by possession. Over against that is the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, and the characteristic of Christ and of His kingdom is yieldedness.

It is again a significant and impressive thing that in the letter to the Philippians this matter of yieldedness arises, though unfortunately the actual word itself is not used in our translation. We know what that letter contains. Euodia and Syntyche were evidently standing for their own rights. Somehow or other, they had got across one another. One of them perhaps had been the offender, and the other was standing to have her own rights established. 'You must apologize to me, you must ask my forgiveness, you must restore what you have taken from me.' Then, as his means and method of meeting a situation like that (which you might think is, after all, only a little private quarrel between two people; why make so much of it?) Paul brings in the greatest argument that it is possible to find. By implication he goes right back, before this world was, to that scene we have depicted earlier, where the covering cherub, walking up and down midst the stones of fire, the most glorious created being, next to the very throne of God, said, "I . . ."—and all the mischief started. And in Euodia and Syntyche, two people on this earth, away there in Philippi, the very same thing is being expressed. Here is division because of pride and personal interest and personal possessiveness. It is exactly the same thing, and it divides. So the Apostle appeals. He says, 'Because in principle it is the same thing and therefore in outworking it will have the same effect of rending the Church, see how it has been dealt with and adjust yourselves. There was One Whose right it was to be equal with God; He did not grasp at that equality, He emptied Himself, became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross.' In our previous meditation we saw something of what that means—obedient for the sake of rescuing this disintegrated universe from the thralldom of Satan. Because of that principle of possessiveness at work, the Father asked the Son, 'Will you be made sin? Will you allow all the consequences of that evil to be laid upon you to the extent that the great divide takes place between you and myself, and you go out into the land of forgetfulness, far, far from me, where you will cry and not be heard?'—and much more than that. And, He became obedient. He said, 'Yes, I will'; and He died of a broken heart because of all that. Paul says to Euodia and Syntyche, two people on this earth—'That is the range of this situation between you, that is the significance of it; this thing has got to come to its right

relationship and focus.' "I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord." "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii. 5). 'Yield! The devil is in this; he has a foothold here and is aiming through you two to disrupt the very Church of God, to do here what he did in heaven long ago, and what he has done on earth all through the centuries. It is the kingdom of Satan that is here. The only way to undo it is by yieldedness.' So (keeping in mind that setting) a little later in the letter the Apostle says, "Let your forbearance (yieldedness) be known unto all men." The translation in the Authorized Version—'moderation'—is unfortunate and weak. "Let your yieldedness be known unto all men." The Lord Jesus was the great Master of the art of letting go. There is a sense in which His whole life on this earth was a life of letting go. Men and Satan offered Him a kingdom; He let it go. All the time He knew how to let go; in that way He came to possess. "Thou hast . . . hated iniquity," goes to the heart of the whole thing. "Therefore God . . . hath anointed thee." 'You have the Kingdom because You let go.'

He was "as a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Isa. liii. 7). There can be no more perfect picture of yieldedness. "As a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." You remember that when He was before His accusers, before those who were to slay Him, they did everything they could to get Him to open His mouth in self-defence, but "he gave . . . no answer, not even to one word" (Matt. xxvii. 14). That was yieldedness. But oh, that we knew something more of the power of yieldedness, the spiritual power of that kind of thing! We ought to dwell upon it long, we ought to search our hearts. We are not naturally made that way. We are very ready to give a back answer, to justify ourselves, to vindicate ourselves, to stand for our rights, to take offence, to be very upset if in any way our interests are challenged or cut across. Yes, in the 'bus, in the train, when things do not go easily and people do not treat us as we think they ought to treat us, we are up in a moment. It is so easy to be caught; the spirit of meekness is not always there. We have a lot to learn.

Now again, it is not a matter of introspective self-examination and analysis. It is a matter of knowing what is the meaning of having the Spirit of Jesus resident within us in order to make us Christlike; and the thing to be kept in view is not only our need of being Christlike but the reason for that need, namely, that there is a great kingdom to be overthrown. Yielded-

ness is the way to it.

And yieldedness includes and issues in obedience—the opposite of rebellion. In view of what we have been saying, I do not think we need dwell in more detail upon this; but it is well that we ponder the specific statement that concludes and crowns the declaration concerning the yieldedness of the Lord Jesus—"becoming obedient even unto death . . . Wherefore also God highly exalted him . . ." (Phil. ii. 8, 9).

(c) Dependence

Then dependence; the opposite of independence, with all its many forms of outworking, of which we were speaking earlier—either throwing God over altogether, seeking to realise our destiny without calling upon Him, or through the various less blatant expressions of independence on to the place where even the sanctified man begins to show signs of spiritual pride because the Lord blesses him. It is so easy to assume that, because He has blessed, a step taken can be repeated without the need for going back to the Lord and saying, 'Lord, even though the last hour was a mighty hour, nothing can be for the next hour unless it comes from Thee.' That subtle movement, the taking of a second step because the first one has been blessed, springs from spiritual pride—presumption.

Look at the Lord Jesus. If there is one thing that stands right out as you follow Him in those years here on the earth, it is this matter of His dependence upon the Father. "The Son can do nothing of himself" (John v. 19). Very often you can almost feel Him waiting, poised, suspended between doing and not doing, going and not going, with constraints and influences being brought to bear upon Him to cause Him to act. You recall His mother's words, "They have no wine" (John ii. 3), with their suggestion of an opportunity for Him to save from embarrassment in a very unhappy situation, to do something quite kind. But He is for the moment poised. "Mine hour is not yet come." He cannot, He will not, do it simply at her suggestion. His brethren urged Him to go up to Jerusalem at the time of the feast of tabernacles, but His answer was "Go ye up unto the feast; I go not up unto this feast" (John vii. 1-10). Then, when they were gone up, He Himself went up. All through His life it was like that. Not because other people did it, not because it was the recognized thing to do, not because of any consideration, sentimental or otherwise, did He act in any matter. It was—'Father, do You want this?' He would not act apart from the

Father. He was absolutely dependent on the Father. Was not Satan's kingdom overthrown in that way?

Were not many of these things all of a piece with that threefold temptation in the wilderness?—"Command that these stones become bread"; "Cast thyself down"; ". . . if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. iv. 3, 5, 9). What is behind it?—"Act on your own initiative, do something out from yourself, take the matter into your own hands!" But He refused, knowing that He had been committed to the Father and that He was the Father's bond-slave. "Behold, my servant" (Isa. xlii. 1). This was dependence indeed.

Now our whole being revolts naturally against the idea of dependence. Our pride will not let us be dependent; we are independent by nature. Yes, that is the poison of Satan in us. If that comes into the spiritual realm, it is in principle the kingdom of Satan coming into the kingdom of God.

But dependence is the way of power. Why?—because it is the way along which the Lord comes. It is the meek, the dependent, to whom the Lord looks. "To this man will I look . . ." (Isa. lxvi. 2). Power results from having the Lord with us. We may presume and assume and go on with some activity, but what is the good if the Lord is not with us?

(d) Selflessness Born of Love

All this is summed up in selflessness, which is not simply negative—self-abnegation, the cessation of desire, such as is seen in Buddhism. Selflessness is the fruit of love, and love is a very positive thing. Why did the Lord Jesus take that position and hold to it and fight out that battle right to the end, even to great drops of blood, against all the pressure brought upon Him from the spiritual world? Why did He say, "Not my will, but thine, be done"? Why? Because of His love for His Father. Love was the positive factor, and selflessness is positive when it comes into this realm. It is love, the love of Christ constraining. When love comes in, self goes out. So we are not going to take the negative side in this matter; we are going to ask the Lord to fill us with His love, and self will go out. Those two things can never hold the throne together. Selflessness—that is how love shows itself; that is the fruit of love.

The Effects of Sin Negated by Righteousness

What is the result of all this meekness, yieldedness, obedience, dependence, selflessness? Well, just the opposite of what sin was on the other side. Sin was enmity against

God; the result here is love, the love of God in Christ shed abroad in our hearts, destroying the enmity. Sin put at a distance; this nature of Christ brings nearness and likeness to God. Instead of impotence comes power with God and the power of God.

The Issue of Righteousness—Life

Now if you turn to the book of the Revelation—where all things in the Bible are brought to a consummate expression—you find there that the end of movements in the cosmos is the hurling from his height of "the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan"; hurled down at last, with all his, to his destruction; and then the coming down out of heaven of the New Jerusalem to take his place. But how has it come about?—"The Lamb shall overcome . . ." (Rev. xvii. 14). John at one point said he saw in the vision a book sealed with seven seals and he heard a voice saying, "Who is worthy to open the book . . .?" and there was none found to open it. And he said, "I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book." But the angel said, "Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book." And John turned to see this Lion, and being turned, he beheld "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev. v. 1-6). You are familiar with that. A Lion?—power, majesty, dominion? Yes, all that. Where?—"a Lamb . . . as though it had been slain"; a slain Lamb, the embodiment of all the features of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. xii. 11). Oh, there is spiritual meaning in all that! It ought to find us out, it ought to pierce our hearts! How shall the enemy be overthrown? How shall his kingdom be destroyed? By the nature of the Lamb being so developed in us, the people of God, that all that other kingdom of Satan is undone in principle. And the power of this kingdom, which is an everlasting kingdom, is the power of the nature of Him of Whom it is said, "Thy kingdom . . ." It is His nature. "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore . . ." And this is life triumphant over death; and when the Lamb has made war and has prevailed, and the Church has come into the good of that in fellowship with Him because of the blood of the Lamb, because of the word of their testimony, having loved not their own lives unto the death, then the way is opened for the final scene—the new Jerusalem; and from the midst of the city issues the river, the water of life. That is life!

What is life? It is letting go to God; it is meekness; it is all this that we have been speaking of; it is Christ, the Life. We are not dealing with *things*—although there may well be a very literal side to all this and it is not simply all principles and abstract ideas: yet behind all else there are spiritual features. We are not thinking of going to heaven until heaven has come to us. We are not thinking of going to the Lord till the Lord has come to us. We are not thinking of a kingdom which is going to be given to us until that kingdom has already been constituted in us. All that depends upon what the Lord does inside us now and our intelligent co-operation with Him in what He is after.

The Kingdom Established Within by the Tests of Faith

Why is He treating us as He does? Why does He lead us through the experiences that we go through? Do you ever have the slightest sense that the Lord has left you? In spite of what we have said about Christ bearing all for us, do we not from time to time feel the Lord far away? Why? Oh, we have puzzled over that! He has said, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age" (Matt. xxviii. 20); "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake

thee" (Heb. xiii. 5). 'Then where art Thou, Lord, to-day? Thou dost seem to be a thousand miles away to-day, I have no sense of Thy presence.' Why? Just this; God's fact is that He is not far away. What about your faith in God's fact? Are you living on facts or feelings? by faith or by sight?—for everything has to be established by faith. Faith must rise up and say, 'Lord, Thou dost seem to be a thousand miles away to-day, but Thou art not, Thou art here, according to Thy promise. I repudiate the devil's suggestion that Thou hast left me, and that I have grieved the Holy Spirit and Thou hast forsaken me; I repudiate it on the ground of all that Thou hast done to bridge that gap by the Cross.' When faith thus asserts its position things are restored, the trouble is cleared up.

And as it is with that matter, so it is with all others. We are in the school, where we are to learn that we are not just living on the Bible in an objective way, and that there is a sense in which the Bible merely as a book cannot help us or do us any good. Somehow or other, there has to be something done between us and that which God has said, in order to make it real, and that is done through testing and trial; and thus the spiritual reality—the Kingdom—is established within us, and we learn to reign over that other-kingdom. The Lord help us.

T. A-S.

Wisdom from God

I. Human Wisdom and Divine

Reading: I Cor. i. 17-ii. 16.

WEYMOUTH'S rendering of I Cor. i. 30 is, "... Christ Jesus . . . has become for us a wisdom which is from God, consisting of righteousness and sanctification and deliverance." God has sent us wisdom, in the person of His Son. How often we have asked Him for wisdom! It is one of our most frequent prayers. Usually when we thus pray we are thinking of guidance, of understanding or of information. All of these may be matters of importance, but often they are not so necessary as we imagine. Far more important is the wisdom which is given to us in terms of experience in spiritual life. Christ Jesus is given to us as wisdom from God experienced in three realms, in the realm of righteousness, in the realm of holiness or sanctification, and in the realm of redemption.

Two Contrasting Wisdoms

This passage deals at length with two wisdoms, mutually antagonistic and each regard-

ing the other as foolishness; they are human wisdom, which is false, and Divine wisdom which is the true. The latter, though foolishness to the world, is manifested in all its glory and power in the person of the Lord Jesus Who is the wisdom of God, while the false wisdom is condemned as such because it keeps men from a true knowledge of God. However attractive it may seem, it is entirely opposed to true wisdom—"The world through its wisdom knew not God." It is opposed to the Cross of Christ—"not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void." It finds the things of the Spirit of God foolishness. There is a violent contrast, then, between human wisdom and Divine.

And the division is not only that between saved and unsaved, as the Corinthians must be made to know. Had the Apostle spoken of those who are not in Christ the Corinthians would have agreed that their wisdom is foolishness. But it is the Corinthian Christians themselves who are in danger of being led astray

in this matter. The division cuts right through the Church as well as through the world, exposing the fallacy of every form of wisdom which is not according to Christ. Christians are soon betrayed into folly when they assume that they are wise in themselves. Paul had to remind the Corinthians that before their conversion most of them were of very humble origin. Salvation had not made them any wiser in themselves. They still needed to beware of presuming to think that they knew, for this would only lead them away from the true wisdom of God, which is Christ. We are now to consider the threefold manifestation of the false wisdom, the wisdom of the world, with its contrast, the true wisdom which consists of a threefold experience of Christ.

The Threefold Contrast

I. a. False Wisdom—"Of Words"

In the first place this false wisdom is called the "wisdom of words" (v. 17). I think that the Corinthians liked words, and the longer or more high sounding the better. They became excited to feel themselves dabbling in terms of great spiritual magnitude. They set great store by words and tongues which they could not even understand. The real implication, though, of this phrase "wisdom of words" is surely that it is concerned with knowing rather than with being or doing. It gives the impression that the wise man is the man who knows all the answers to all the questions.

This was the first issue which arose with the human race in its departure from God. You will remember that the choice made by Eve was on this basis, that the tree seemed desirable to make one wise. It made them very foolish really, but it seemed so desirable to make one wise because of the knowledge it brought. The snare which entrapped our first parents was making its appeal to the Corinthians, as it also does to us to-day, offering knowledge rather than life. What a grievous error is this, to think that wisdom consists in a complete understanding of the theory of things, and that to know all about truth is to be wise! It is but the "wisdom of words."

In the second chapter the Apostle speaks of "persuasive words of wisdom," man's wisdom. There is something attractive, fascinating, in this pursuit of the theoretical knowledge of truth; it deceives men by making them feel wise. It has ever been Satan's purpose, whether in Adam and Eve, in the Corinthians, or in us to-day, to have a people whose only wisdom is in their words, in their conceptions, in their theories—if you like, in their doctrines. They know and speak, but they do not act and

live, and so frustrate the very truth which they hold. The Corinthians could be talking great swelling words about spiritual realities, while anyone could see the hopeless inconsistency of their lives. The devil is always pleased when we seek wisdom as Eve sought it, as something divorced from personal experience of life. We know how unconverted people watch us, hoping to find something unchristlike which will justify them in their rejection of the truth. We know how that we ourselves, having been challenged by the Word of the Lord through some servant of His, are rather pleased to discover some inconsistency in the life of the one concerned. Perhaps we are shocked or grieved, but in some hidden depth of our hearts there is a gratification to feel that the tremendous challenge of the Word is somehow weakened by the realisation that, after all, the Lord's servant does not live up to his message. It is the devil, of course, who provokes such thoughts, but it is the devil with some ground to work on. If it is only held in the realm of theoretical teaching the greatest wisdom may become arrant folly.

b. True Wisdom—In Life

Now compare the true wisdom with the false; not the wisdom of words but the wisdom seen in the life which was lived by our blessed Lord. Later on we shall find that He is given to us as wisdom from God, but first of all we need to consider Him as the wisdom of God. Here are no empty words, no mere theorising; He did not only teach the will of God, He lived it. If we are properly to appreciate what it means to have Him given to us as God's wisdom we need to observe how perfect wisdom was exhibited in Him. We note that in the first place it is the wisdom of life, which is the opposite of the wisdom of words. How marvellously consistent was the life of the Man Jesus! It is not only that He brought a wonderful teaching, a perfect teaching, but that He lived a wonderful, a perfect life. Such wisdom could stand the test of eternity, and indeed it was put to that test. The Lord Jesus had the unique experience of passing out of the realm of time into eternity, and then of returning once again from eternity into time. He died, and then He rose again and spent forty days visiting the earth from which death had removed Him. I suppose that we all agree that once a man passes out of time into eternity he comes to know himself as he really is. All that is unreal and unholy appears in its true light. No doubt most of us—apart from the covering of the precious Blood—will have many regrets and much to be ashamed of. Has it ever occurred

to you that when our Lord came back out of eternity into time He had no regrets? How many people feel on their death beds that they wish that certain of their past actions could be undone; they would like to express their sorrow and regret for their past behaviour or attitude. The Lord Jesus came back, but He did not say He was sorry to anybody. He neither offered apologies nor expressed regrets. He had no need to, for He had lived the perfect life. That is true wisdom. Whereas the wisdom of words brings victory to the devil, wisdom which is genuinely lived out spells his sure defeat.

Christ Jesus is made unto us wisdom from God. Our concern for wisdom is so often in terms of precise and convincing arguments; we wish to know all about spiritual matters, to have the complete answer, to say the right thing. Well, the Lord Jesus always had the right answers, as His critics found to their cost, but far, far more important was the fact that He always lived the right life. Wisdom is given us from God not in the first place in order to make us experts in spiritual subjects, but that the truth of God should become incarnate in us. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure" (Jas. iii. 17)—not 'first clever' you notice. We long to be spiritually clever: the Lord longs for us to be spiritually pure.

II. a. False Wisdom—"After the Flesh"

In the second place there is the wisdom of the flesh—"wise after the flesh" (v. 26). Presumably this means naturally wise, wise in yourself, wise in an independent way, so that you do not need to submit to others. It was precisely this independence of God which Adam and Eve regarded as such a desirable wisdom. They chose knowledge rather than life, and moreover they chose to have wisdom in themselves rather than remain dependent upon the wisdom of God. The temptation was put to them in these terms: "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. iii. 5). It is so irksome to the flesh to be constantly dependent, and it seems so much more desirable to be self-reliant. The wisdom of the flesh demands independence. The alternative forces us to a complete reliance upon the Lord. Instead of seeing the way clearly marked out ahead, and making up our minds as to how we will proceed, we have to trust the Lord implicitly for every step of the way, looking to Him for guidance and strength every moment. We have nothing in ourselves; we receive everything from above. Adam and Eve rebelled against such a relation-

ship, and to this day human nature finds it unbearable. The flesh regards such an attitude as foolishness, not wisdom, and thereby betrays its innate enmity to God. Christians, of course, would not wish to fall into this state of hostility, and yet the wisdom of the flesh may be found in them as well as in unregenerate men, for wherever there is an assumption of wisdom, a wrong kind of self-reliance and unwillingness to be taught, bitter jealousy and faction in the heart, "This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above . . ." (Jas. iii. 15). There are perils not only for the careless and indifferent but also for the would-be spiritual—those who want to do the will of God and to be faithful to His Word. It is so possible to trust in our own wisdom, and, even while we are justifying ourselves by the letter of Scripture, to be dominated by the wisdom of the flesh. "Not many wise" the Apostle wrote to the Corinthians. You are not gifted with what the world calls wisdom—not that there would be any spiritual advantage if you had been—and yet you are so prone to assume that you know all about everything. You may not claim to be wise in so many words, yet you betray a strength of the flesh in resenting correction and imagining that there are no fresh revelations of Divine truth to be unfolded to you. Is your knowledge of spiritual things really expressive of humble dependence on heaven, or is it after all only finding its strength in the flesh?

b. True Wisdom—"Meekness of Wisdom"

Perhaps it may be easier to recognise this false and fleshly wisdom if we contrast it with its opposite. The flesh is always proud and self-reliant, and so stands in complete contrast to what James calls—"meekness of wisdom" (Jas. iii. 13). The great Teacher, Himself wisdom incarnate, bids us all learn of Him Who is "meek and lowly in heart." The wisdom of the flesh becomes haughty, harsh and unyielding. The wisdom of Christ is the wisdom of meekness. What a life of dependence the Lord Jesus lived! Whereas Adam grasped at the opportunity of being "as God," the Lord Jesus relinquished the rights which He might have grasped at, emptied Himself, took the form of a servant, and willingly humbled Himself to the extreme limit of the Cross. And it is Christ crucified Who is the wisdom of God. How free He was from the self-opinionated dogmatism which so often mars His followers! How ready to refer everything back to the Father! How careful not to be guilty of the rash impetuosity which so characterises the flesh! Almost every foolish action described

in the Scriptures, the foolishness of great servants of God and even of the Apostles themselves, can be traced back to rashness, precipitate action, to an assumption that they could judge what was needed to be done, and when and how to do it. The Lord Jesus, however, reveals such a humble spirit of dependence that with Him there was often a slowness to move. Such a dependence sometimes seemed like weakness to His enemies, and even to His friends, but it was really a manifestation of the perfect wisdom which is from above—meekness of wisdom.

This, then, is the second feature of wisdom. In the first place it is pure; in the second it is meek. It is this meekness which is so different from the wisdom of the flesh, which is full of resource and self-strength. Meekness is not weakness; it is the strength of humble dependence on God. The acid test as to whether our wisdom is of the flesh or of the Spirit is applied by means of our living our lives in fellowship with others of the Lord's children. There is nothing like corporate experience in the fellowship of saints to discover how much of our spiritual knowledge may be held in the power of the flesh. If we walk alone it is easy for us to have a strong, inward, fleshly assumption that we know the will of God. If, however, we "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together," but seek to recognise the purpose of God in making us members one of another, we shall soon find how much of the old adamic independence still lingers with us. We shall be proved as to whether ours is "meekness of wisdom." The Lord Jesus displayed His wisdom by being wholly dependent on the Father. So often when we claim to depend only upon God we really mean to be free from any irksome consideration of others, to please ourselves. The Lord, therefore, joins us together in His family, demanding of us that we learn and prove our dependence upon Him by depending upon one another, even as we prove our love to Him by loving one another.

III. a. False Wisdom—"Of This Age"

In the third place this human wisdom is described as being of this world, or as the text truly reads—"of this age." It is also called "the wisdom of men." In other words this is earthly wisdom. 'This age' deals with the immediate and obvious; its wisdom is that which judges by appearances and is concerned with the values which can be seen and appreciated by men here and now. Such wisdom is indeed foolishness to the man who is concerned with spiritual and eternal values. On the other hand, to the man of the world it seems the

height of folly to have one's whole life and behaviour governed by unseen and future values. Thus we find the two rival wisdoms—that of this age and that of eternity—each convinced that the other is not really wisdom at all but the extreme of foolishness. Only eternity can reveal which is the true wisdom. Meanwhile those who are governed by the ways and opinions of men, who are looking for immediate advantage and obvious gain, will doubtless claim that they are the wise men. Their wisdom, however, is limited to this earth and to time; it is indeed 'the wisdom of this age.' It would be quite wrong to assume that only unconverted men exercise this form of wisdom. On the contrary, it is all too common among Christians. How much that is current in Christian life and work would cease to be if it were regarded in the light of eternity rather than of time! Of Christ, the wisdom of God, it was prophesied, "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears . . ." (Isaiah xi. 3).

b. True Wisdom—"From Above"

In this, as in every other way, the Lord Jesus shows us what is true wisdom. How unconcerned He was about earthly values; how set upon eternal issues, not only for Himself but for everyone else! Look at the paralysed man who was brought to Him by the four friends. The wisdom of this earth would have dealt directly with the obvious need. It would have urged—Make the man well, and so prove your power; that is what the friends want, that is what the crowds expect, that is what your ministry demands! With the wisdom that is from above He gave the physical a secondary place and dealt straight away with the deepest need—"Thy sins are forgiven" (Matt. ix. 1-8). That is what really matters. What a snare it can be to be governed by this world's judgments as to what best serves the cause of the Lord! How we need Divine wisdom to know wherein lie true eternal values, so that we may pursue them! Think again of our Lord's handling of Peter's denial. Earthly wisdom would have said—Whatever You do You must prevent Peter from denying You. Send him away somewhere; keep him quiet; don't let him get into this temptation; at least pray that he may not deny You. But the Lord Jesus was not governed by such short-sighted considerations. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat: but I have made supplication for thee . . ."—not 'that thou mayest not deny Me,' important as that may seem for your own reputation as well as for My interests, but—"that thy faith fail

not" (Luke xxii. 31). The wisdom that is from above is not concerned with appearances and reputations, but with reality.

It is thus that the Lord is dealing with us all, not attending so much to the immediate and earthly benefits, but seeking always that there should be eternal values. He is really dealing with us in wisdom, though we are often in danger of charging Him with folly. There is a wisdom bound up with earth and time which is supreme folly; and there is a foolishness in the eyes of men which in eternity will be revealed as true wisdom.

Christ Given to Us as Wisdom from God

Christ is the true expression of the wisdom of God in this threefold way. We acknowledge Him to be such and rejoice to trace the characteristics of the One Who is the very embodiment of true wisdom. But there is more. The wisdom of God has been given to us, He has been sent to us from God that we, too, may display His manifold wisdom. There is a threefold provision for us in Christ: wisdom as to life—righteousness; wisdom as to dependence in relationship—sanctification; and wisdom as to eternal values—redemption. This

is not just a haphazard grouping which the Apostle makes when he writes of wisdom coming into our lives in this threefold way. We need them all. We, too, are in danger from false wisdom in its threefold expression, wisdom of words, wisdom of the flesh, and wisdom of this age. We must be saved by the true wisdom, and Christ is given to us for that very purpose. We need Christ in terms of righteous living to save us from the wisdom of words; we need Him in terms of sanctification, separation unto God, to save us from the wisdom of the flesh; and we need Him in terms of redemption, life from above, that being saved from this age we may be secured for eternal values. We need Him and we have Him—wisdom from God.

The whole passage shows us that wisdom and glory are closely bound up with one another. Earthly wisdom brings earthly glory. Heavenly wisdom, thank God, ensures heavenly glory. It is for this that Christ is given us by God—"... foreordained before the worlds unto our glory" (I. Cor. ii. 7). Justified, sanctified and redeemed, we shall indeed share His eternal glory.

H.F.

Prophetic Ministry

VIII. The Cry of the Prophets for Holiness

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts xiii. 27).

WE were taking note, in our previous meditation, of a contrast which is marked between the old dispensation and the new, and of how much there is to be missed if there is a continuing in the fixed order of the old, and how much there is to be gained by moving into the essential nature of the new. This is found focused for us in the passage we have read.

Without repeating too much of our previous meditation, may I just say that it is perfectly clear in the New Testament, from the book of the Acts onwards, that the people in the new dispensation, the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, were required to keep completely free from everything set, from everything of a conclusive position, excepting fundamental facts of the faith, and be always open to the Lord for even the revolutionary, so far as their whole mentality was concerned; yes, their religious, traditional mentality, the mentality which had been formed by their very birth into Israel, by all that they had received through training and

teaching from their infancy upward. They were called upon to come into a place where that no longer held them, but where the Lord was perfectly free to do the revolutionary thing in them and make them revise all their thinking in the light, not of anything contradictory, but of God's fuller meaning in all that they knew of the Word of God; where they acknowledged that the Lord really had 'more light and truth to break forth from His Word,' and so much more as to make all that they already knew as nothing. You find, therefore, that this necessity precipitated crises in their spiritual course, and sometimes it brought them to a standstill, where a tremendous conflict was set up; but the Holy Spirit was sufficiently in possession to win, and to be able to carry them further. That happened with Peter, on the housetop at Joppa. It happened with Saul of Tarsus. There is no doubt about it that, in acting as he did, Saul was acting upon the basis of the Old Testament Scriptures. He thought he had the full support of the Word of God for what he was doing. When he met Jesus of Nazareth out from heaven as he went to Damascus, although he capitulated there and then and acknowledged Jesus as his Lord, his

great problem was, 'How am I going to reconcile my Old Testament with this?' He went away into Arabia, and probably for two years there he was occupied with the reconciliation of the Old Testament with the fact of Jesus Christ as Lord. And he got well through, came back from his desert, and, caught in the mighty stream of the Spirit, became that great servant of God.

We want to go on a little further now. We are saying that here, in this new dispensation as represented in the book of the Acts, the prophets are being reinterpreted, or their inner meaning is being brought to light, with all that that inner meaning implies. We know that the inauguration of the dispensation on the Day of Pentecost was accompanied by a quotation from the prophets. It began with Joel—"This is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel" (Acts ii. 16), and went on with other Old Testament quotations pointing to that time. Now, either by direct citation or fulfilment (as clearly seen in the case of the Joel prophecy) or by an unmistakable implication, the prophets are here in very many senses.

Christ Alone the Measure of What is of God

You pass from chapter ii of the book of the Acts, and go on to chapter v—the very terrible, dark story of Ananias and Sapphira. Where did the prophets come in in that? In the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, you have what was introduced spiritually on the day of Pentecost. There you have that wonderful, though difficult, vision of the living creatures, the wheels full of eyes, the Spirit in the wheels, the Spirit of life going, always going: the Spirit, life, eyes, and the irresistible movement from heaven in relation to the Man upon the throne. "Acts" begins there. The Lord Jesus was received up, out from this world; and in relation to that Man in the throne there is this going on here, touching the earth and yet detached from it; touching, but not fixed here; a heavenly thing. And that is moving with tremendous directness and deliberation. That is like the second chapter of "Acts." The Man in the throne; the wheels, the eternal counsels of God, the goings of God from eternity; the living creatures, the Church; the life within, the Spirit of life there, with His perfect vision—full of eyes. *Is that not what is here? Yes; but that is the beginning of "Ezekiel." At the other end of his prophecy you have this—away, up from the earth—a vision, a picture, of a temple, a spiritual house, very fully depicted and defined, with every detail marked. The man who leads the prophet round goes measuring, measuring, giving the measure of

every detail. This house is all of the Holy Ghost. It is all a measure of Christ, in every part. This thing is not on the earth; it is heavenly measurement. Before you can have the river issuing from the sanctuary, flowing on in increasing volume, deepening and widening, making everything on its banks to live, and swallowing up death in victory as it proceeds, you have to have the house utterly according to God; and then the one over-all statement about it is "the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy" (Eze. xliii. 12). It is all of God; it is all Christ, His risen, exalted Son. It is out from Him, through a Church constituted on a heavenly pattern, that the life flows; and it is flowing here in "Acts."

Holiness the Law of What is of God

But then Ananias and his wife violate the very governing law of that house—holiness; and what happens? That is where Israel failed to hear the voices of the prophets. We said in our previous meditation, they carried on the external formalities of the temple, the daily services, the ritual and the liturgy, adopted the forms and the vestments, but the inner life did not correspond. It was the cry of the prophets that a system was being maintained and preserved out of relation to the inner life of the people. The prophets throughout are crying for holiness. The trouble lay there. And what does this matter of holiness really mean? When you really get to the heart of it, what is it? "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts v. 3). That is the unholiness. The act of Ananias and Sapphira includes something deeper—that sinister mind behind; Satan finding an opportunity of getting into these holy precincts, this heavenly realm, and corrupting, polluting, and establishing his lie. "He is a liar, and the father thereof," said the Lord (John viii. 44). A lie right in the presence of the Holy Ghost! The life of the Spirit and the Spirit of life do not just go on ignoring conditions. They require that first of all everything shall be constituted on God's heavenly pattern; that is only saying, constituted on the pattern of Christ His Son; that it shall be really an expression and representation of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit Spontaneously Reproduces the Nature of Christ

Now, I am not going back behind what I said earlier. I am not saying that we must take the Bible in its letter and phrases and make a mould, a scriptural mould, which we think is the New Testament order. That is

not the point at all. Development did not come about in the beginning in that way. Every fresh reproduction of the Church in any part of the Roman Empire or beyond in the days of the Apostles came about, not by taking there a fixed mould and trying to pour people into that mould and reproduce the shape of things that existed somewhere else. It began with life, life from heaven, the Holy Ghost come down from heaven; and wherever the believers went, two things were imperative.

Firstly, baptism as a testimony to the fact that the old order was finished, and that everything now had to have as new a beginning as anybody must have who has died and been buried; secondly, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of life, coming to take up residence within those concerned. When He comes in and has His way, He relieves you of all the responsibility of New Testament order; you have no more burden and responsibility about that than a tree has in producing leaves and fruit. No tree ever spends hours and hours worrying and fretting, 'How can I bring forth some leaves, how can I develop my fruit?' No tree ever does that. It lives, it yields to the life process, and the rest happens. And that was the glorious spontaneity of New Testament churches—they just came about. It must be like that—constituted from heaven by the Holy Ghost; not man bringing his form of church and church government, his mould, his conception of things, and saying, 'This is our conception of a Bible church.' No, it is the product of life; and, as that Spirit of life was allowed to work, things took a certain course and a certain form, and that was the form of Christ. The Holy Spirit took responsibility. "I will build my church," the Lord Jesus had said (Matt. xvi. 18), and He meant it; and He is found doing it here.

The Nature of Christ is Utter Holiness

But remember, Christ, in the innermost expression of what He is, is very holy. "The holy thing which is begotten," said the angel to Mary, "shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i. 35). He "offered himself without blemish unto God" (Heb. ix. 14). He was "... in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. iv. 15). He was and is without sin. Christ is infinitely holy. The great antagonist of Christ, that unholy one, is always seeking to destroy what is of Christ by introducing a contradiction, a lie, giving the lie to the holiness of Christ; and that is what happened here. I do feel that this is a very solemn moment for us all. I have not said this without a very great deal of exercise in my own heart.

It is not an easy thing to say. Some of us are not ignorant of Satan's devices. Who has a right to talk about holiness? Who is sufficient in holiness to talk to other people about it? Holiness is what Christ is. Who of us could say we are like that?

The Spirit Arrested by Conscious Unholiness

Unholiness is that which is not consistent with Christ. It is the opposite of what Christ is, it is a contradiction to Christ. The mighty purpose of God, the mighty course of the Spirit of God, all that has come in with this dispensation, can be suddenly brought under arrest and a tragedy occur if you or I knowingly dabble with unholiness. "His wife being privy to it" (Acts v. 2) means that this was conscious. I am not speaking of the unholiness which is ours in general—though we are not going to condone or make light of it; but what I am speaking about now is deliberate sin in the very presence of the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira deliberately planned to give to the Lord only a part of the proceeds of their sale, but to represent it as being the whole. If they had been really in the good of the régime of the Holy Spirit, they would have known the Spirit saying to them, 'That is not right, it is a contradiction of Christ.' And may we not confidently conclude that the Holy Spirit did warn them? Were there not two voices which, though perhaps not audible, yet spoke in them—the voice of the Spirit and the voice of Satan—the one warning from evil, the other suggesting this deceit? They were disposed to listen to the tempter's voice, and Satan filled their hearts. That is the kind of thing we are speaking about.

We are in the dispensation of the Spirit. If we are really in the good of this dispensation, that is, if the Holy Spirit is in us, He will tell us; He does tell us. If we will, we can know the mind of the Spirit on issues like that of right and wrong. Then everything is in the balances until we yield to the Spirit. The whole life of the Spirit is brought under arrest. The Lord was very pronounced in laying down the principles for the dispensation. He left us in no doubt as to what His attitude is toward this sort of thing. If He does not do the same thing every time, and if we do not fall down dead, it does not mean that something just as tragic does not take place in us. The Spirit is arrested and death spiritually comes in, and there is no going on from that time. There is a sense in which spiritually we also are carried out.

Yes, this is a solemn moment. Forgive me if I seem to be oppressive, but this matter of holiness is so very pertinent, and so very much

bound up with all that we are seeking to see—all the wonderful meaning of the Spirit's being here and of His being able to go right on; life and fulness, growing depth, increasing vitality, ever fuller knowledge, the swallowing up of death in victory. That is to be the spiritual experience of the Church, but that can all be arrested by some unholiness, known to be such and not dealt with before God, repudiated and refused. Whatever that may mean to you in its particular application, remember that it is a very dangerous thing to have an unsettled controversy with the Holy Ghost—dangerous not only for you, but it may be for many others who will become affected.

So we find that Acts v does have a very real setting in Ezekiel xliii. The prophets are here right enough; and not only Ezekiel. Did not all the prophets strike this note? You know Isaiah vi—"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." The prophets' great ministry to Israel had to do with the unholiness of God's people.

The Peril of Persisting in Unholiness

Oh, the tragedy of a controversy with the Lord not cleared up! Surely, seeing the setting of a matter like this, we must face the specific things from the standpoint of the great background. You have not an adequate motive for dealing with particular points of outstanding unholiness unless you see this whole matter in its great setting. If it is merely something personal, relating only to us, we may or we may not feel it is worth clearing up; but look! The whole course of God's eternal counsels, coming down our way and gathering us in; the mighty purpose of God to be realised in and through us; the far-reaching range of those purposes of God which would find us as their

vehicle and their channel, all that God would do of making Himself known to us for the sake of others; all brought under arrest because of that! Yes, a personal ministry, a great ministry which might be very far-reaching, may all be set aside—the Lord, in keeping with His own nature, would have to set it aside—if there were a persistence in something about which He had spoken but which was not dealt with. It is a tremendous background.

The psalmist said, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me"; (Psa. cxix. 75). What did he mean? Evidently he had gone through some severe handling by the Lord, and as he looked at what his wrong involved for the Lord's people—how many were affected and how it touched the Lord's honour—he said, 'Only the faithfulness of God lies behind His dealing with me; He has to be faithful to Himself and faithful to me, and not let me off; and He has to be faithful to His own nature, His own righteousness, because so much is bound up with it.' May the Lord show us just what that means, and give us grace. Oh, we need protecting, we need safeguarding in this matter of a holy walk with God; we need to clear up every controversy with Him because there is so much bound up with it.

Coming back to this whole setting of Israel—those that dwelt in Jerusalem, and their rulers and those whom they represented, would not clear up the controversy which God had with them, and they were set aside, and another nation bringing forth the fruits thereof was brought in. What a loss! And do you think that the Lord will deal with us differently? It may not be our salvation that will go, but surely our vocation is of some consequence! The Lord give us grace!

T. A-S.

SPECIAL GATHERINGS

at HONOR OAK

will be held, if the Lord wills, on

SATURDAY, July 30, at 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, July 31, at 11 a.m., 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

MONDAY, August 1, at 11 a.m., 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

“Nor . . . the smell of fire”

Reading: Dan. iii. 16-27; I Pet. i. 6-8.

“THE trial of your faith.” Let us consider four things that are the outcome of the trial.

The Outcome of Trial

➤(1) The Self-Destruction of the Enemy

How wonderfully above the situation these three men were! With the prospect of the trial, with the threat over their heads, how utterly careless about answering the king! “We have no need to answer thee in this matter.” There was a settled confidence of heart, the outcome of an integrity of life and walk before God. Their concern was that they should not in any respect be found in compromise of their relationship to the Most High God. Threaten them with a fiery furnace—they are quite above it all. And the first effect of the bringing of these men into that trial justified their confidence, because the very means that were used of the enemy to compel them into the fire were consumed by the fire. If our lives are in an utter position in relation to the Lord Whom we confess and serve, we have no need to fear the fire. We shall certainly be wise not to invite the fire; but in the course of our life and our testimony, if and as the fire comes we have no need to fear. The very means that the enemy uses to bring about the fiery condition will be consumed. That is a very solemn word for any who would be found creating fiery conditions for the saints. The saints' concern must be their relationship to the Lord.

➤(2) The Loosing of Bonds

Another outcome of the fire is the loosing of bonds. Are you in the fire? Have you got a satisfactory reason for being there? Here is one; it may apply to you; the fire is ordained of God for the very purpose of loosing you from bonds. Yes, the limitations that circumstances and conditions outside of us put upon us, the frustrations of which we are so conscious—they are dealt with in the fire.

But what about the limitations, the bonds, that are peculiarly ours, within us—the bonds of our makeup, the features of our temperaments? The same is true. Here is a loving God ordaining the fire and allowing the enemy to stoke it to a sevenfold heat, with the purpose, in the heart of God, of loosing us from bonds. Oh, is this happening with us? The fires are being heated to an intensity that we never thought possible for us to endure; are we being liberated by them? Are we coming into the

glorious liberty of the children of God? Are we being rid of those things that have so marred our life, our testimony, our ministry?

Maybe you are feeling that you have not got any bonds. Well, some of us have, and some of us are satisfied that this is what God is doing in the fire. There is a loosing in the fire.

➤(3) Closer Fellowship with the Lord

Another thing that happens in the fire is that these three men are found with One with them in closer fellowship and company than they have ever known before. We know a little about that, do we not?—in the fire, coming to a knowledge of our Lord. We come through the phase of fire and say, ‘I would never have known the Lord in this way but for that; it was in the fire that I found Him in these terms. I knew all about the theory of it before, but I got hold of the reality there.’ One “like a son of the gods”—so says Nebuchadnezzar in his ignorance—but, as far as we are concerned, it is “the Son of God”; all through the fire, in fellowship with our beloved Lord. Well, the fire is justified.

➤(4) The Supreme Glory—No Smell of Fire, but Joy Unspeakable

But to me, the crown of this whole matter is what follows after, and it is this that is the real burden on my heart. They came out of the fire, and there was not even the smell of fire upon them. I think that is wonderful. Yes, greater knowledge of the Lord; yes, a liberation and an emancipating; yes, but not even the smell of burning! What is the interpretation of that? Well, I think there is no doubt that one very great effort of the adversary in the fiery furnace—if he cannot stop us getting out and cannot consume us in the fire—is so to leave the marks and smell upon us that for all succeeding days people will associate with us the matter of suffering and trial. You see what that does—it draws attention to us; and the devil does not mind that, because if attention is drawn to us, the Lord is hidden. Having a smell of burning about us means that the suffering and the trial that we have been through have beclouded the glory. To come out of the fiery trial of our faith without the smell of burning means, I think, the fulfilling of that word in Peter—“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” (I Pet. i. 8). That follows this word concerning the fiery trial of

our faith—"joy unspeakable and full of glory." Here is the crown of a desperately dark time, of maybe years of suffering, of the testing of our faith—joy beyond speech, full of glory. The enemy ever seeks to rob us of our joy and frustrate the desire of the Lord that we should be radiators of His glory; and by the fiery trial all too often he succeeds.

I recently had occasion to see a brother who before the last war was on the Continent, and he was incarcerated for years in one of the big concentration camps. Without attempting to describe his harrowing experiences in detail, suffice to say that, by reason of the stand he took, at least three times he was trussed head downward over the bough of a tree and thrashed into unconsciousness. I was interested to see him and to note what were the effects of his suffering upon him. That man's faith is undimmed; he has waxed strong; and the outstanding mark is not the suffering—though you can see the traces in his face; the outstanding mark is not the suffering, it is the glory. He is full of joy. Yes, I think he knows something about this "joy unspeakable."

The Need for Watchfulness

Now the enemy is making a very big effort to rob us of our joy. If he cannot keep us in the furnace, he will bring us out so smelling of the fire that everywhere we go people will say, "Poor So-and-so! He is having a terrible time; I don't know how he goes through; I don't know what he will do." You see what the smell of fire is doing—it is drawing attention to ourselves.

I have been quite impressed with the amount that there is of joy and gladness relating to the Anointing. We are so familiar with the thought that the Anointing brings power and the exercise of the authority of the Throne, but you know the word in Psalm xlv. 7 quoted in Hebrews i. 9—"Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Here is the One Who is supremely standing true to God, committed to a way of trial, of suffering, to the fiery furnace; yes, but this One is outstanding in gladness and joy. Again, the Lord takes up the prophecy concerning Himself in Isa. lxi, and says, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon

me; because the Lord hath anointed me . . ." Look at that prophecy, and see the amount of joy and gladness that follows that anointing; for mourning, the oil of joy; for ashes, beauty; for heaviness, praise. Because of the greatness of the pressure and adversity in which you are found, are you in danger of losing your joy? Are you as glad in the Lord now that you are well on the road as you were when you began? Of course, we can disdainfully attribute the original joy to the superficiality of things at the beginning. 'These young believers,' we say, 'do not know what suffering and trial and testing mean. If they did they would not be so radiant.' Ah, yes, but have we lost something? Have we 'gone on with the Lord' and lost the joy of the Lord? If we are conscious of having lost something of this, we must take steps to regain it. I was reading of an advertisement that had been put in the paper—"Wanted, Christian—cheerful, if possible." Yes, we smile at that, but evidently the advertiser did not think there was much chance! True Godliness and glumness do not go together. We have got to watch, for the enemy is out to rob us and to keep us with the smell of fire upon us. Oh, that we can come through the darkest experiences and be those who are so full of what we have gained in the fire that the fire takes a secondary place, and all that meet us after the trial find us with "joy unspeakable and full of glory"!

► It may be that some to whom these words come do not know what we are talking about, this 'trial of our faith.' All I would say to such is, Don't worry about that. Just store up the word, because if you are going on with the Lord, if you have any faith to purify, God will purify it, and somehow, some day, by some means, you will find yourself in the fire; you are not going to escape. It is not the experience of some special saints only. The Lord is after the purifying of the faith of *all* His people, and you will come to the day of the fire. When you do, remember the Lord wants these things to issue from it. Do not be too concerned about the enemy; he is not on top in the matter at all. In his fury and malice and hate he is doing certain things; but God is turning those things to account and using them to perfect that which concerns Him and concerns us, to bring about the end which He desires, even the glory of God in us. ◀

A.G.T.

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David's Mighty Men

Reading: II Sam. xxi. 18-22.

THIS is a part of the recounting of the deeds of David's mighty men. What I want you to note is that there were a number of giants—apparently of the family of the original giant, Goliath—who were dealt with by these men of David; and alongside of that, in order to get us into our right and proper and up-to-date position, I recall to your minds the familiar words of Ephesians vi. 10-12. "Finally, be strong in the Lord . . . Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, . . . against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies." It is upon the relationship of these giants to the original giant, Goliath, that I want you to focus your attention.

A Corporate Answer to the Enemy's Challenge

You know that David himself first came into view in relation to the throne in connection with this original (and what we might call, inclusive) giant. It was in his victorious combat with Goliath that David was first taken account of publicly, and this marked his first step toward the throne of Israel, in relation to which he had been anointed. Now we have moved on some considerable distance, and the security of that throne is seen to be the issue at the time of these mighty deeds. When these mighty men come into view, they, as in the case of David, are seen in relation to the throne and to him who is destined to occupy it. But the movement is one from the personal to the corporate. In David's case, it was personal. He fought a lone battle with Goliath; he was a lone figure on that field. When the giant challenged, all the people fled, but David moved out alone to accept that challenge and to answer it. But here, in the portion of the record with which we are now dealing, everything is corporate; but it is the same issue. It is all gathered up into a company. The one giant, the inclusive giant, has been fully dealt with and beheaded, but he has left some of his offspring, and they are all giants; and now the giant in corporate expression is being met by the corporate expression of the throne.

That sets us very clearly in 'Ephesians.' We know that in the beginning of 'Ephesians' it is declared that the Lord Jesus has been raised up and set far above all rule and authority; the personal and the individual is an accomplished thing. But at the end of 'Ephesians' the Church comes into view in exactly the same connection, the issue of the throne as challenged

by giants—principalities, authorities, world rulers, the great ones in the spiritual realm—as well as by the hosts of the lesser wicked spirits gathered around. I think that is perfectly clear. So that it is this company called David's mighty men who are brought in to meet the residue of the giant, to take up the same great issue of the throne and of him who is to occupy it. These giants are to be dealt with by the company as the giant was dealt with by the individual.

The Embodiment of a Spirit

David's mighty men are not so much a class of people as they are the embodiment of a spirit. They express a spiritual state, a spiritual life. In 'Ephesians,' it is *the Spirit*. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might"; and it is so clearly, in that letter, by the Spirit that we are strengthened with might into the inward man. Now there are two things to be noted about these mighty men.

Committal in Love to a Person

Firstly, they are committed to David. You cannot fail to see how they loved him, the devotion of these men to David himself. We shall come upon that again before we are through, but you will recall that some of their exploits were especially related to some breathed desire of his heart. It was to himself that they were devoted, and that was quite a discriminating feature. You notice that when the giant Goliath shouted, the people fled (I Sam. xvii. 24). Why? Because they were mainly there for the benefits that they could get for themselves. It was a matter of how things affected them. That is the thing that is found in Israel's life so continually—when things were not favourable to their interests, then they were anywhere but in the right place and condition. They were all over the place because personal interests were so much in the ascendent. But these men were not at all concerned about their personal interests and how things affected them. It was David alone who mattered to them; and so when others who had lesser interests would flee because of the difficulty, because of the greatness of the adverse conditions, these men saw the adversity as an opportunity for proving their love for their lord. They were committed to him. It was, in principle, love for the Lord.

Committal to God's King

And then, of course, they were committed to his throne. Read carefully the things that are said about them, and you will find throughout that their loyalty was not just because of David

as a person, but because they knew God's place for that person, because they had come to see that he was the man chosen of God to occupy the throne. The throne was for them the throne of the one of God's choice. They had had to come to that through discipline, and to arrive at the point where Saul no longer held the ground for them. They saw that David was God's man for the throne. They were committed therefore to him on the double ground of Divine destiny and of personal devotion.

I am sure that simple truth needs no emphasis here. We occupy ourselves much with the proclamation of those two things—that the Lord Jesus in Himself personally has won our hearts' allegiance, and also that we have come to see that He is the One Whom God has chosen for the place of supreme authority throughout this universe unto the ages of the ages; and we are committed—to Christianity, or to the Lord—not for merely personal reasons. If we were, when a giant loomed up we should very quickly be off the scene; the test, you see, is that. The Lord is really working very hard with us to try and woo us from our personal interests in Christianity and in our relationship with Him, because when things which touch us here on this earth and in our personal lives are threatened, we very often lose faith. We go down, we scatter spiritually, in the presence of an uprising threat to our interests here, even though we are Christians related to the Lord. We have to brush aside the consideration of how it affects us, and take a position in the interests of the Lord. It is a very testing and very important thing. We must say, 'It does not matter how it affects me, but how is the Lord going to suffer over this? What does the Lord stand to lose if I flee, or if this thing gains the ascendancy? How is it going to affect my Lord and to touch the great fact of His throne?' So these mighty men of David are distinguished from the general company of those who very largely are Christians for the sake of the blessings of Christianity and who are driven from the field by the enemy because their blessings are threatened. These mighty men speak of those who have got beyond that point of personal consideration and have seen the interests of Christ and the purposes of God centred in Him for universal dominion.

Corporate Responsibility for Throne Interests

There was a sense—and this gets very near to the heart of it—in which David had to be saved and succoured by these men. You notice in verses 16 and 17, one of these giants, in a set of new armour, marked out David and made him his object of destruction, and David

was involved in very great peril. The man who had slain the original giant was now in peril from one of that giants' offspring, and one of the mighty men came to David's rescue and succoured him and slew the giant. Then David's men said to him, 'We cannot afford to lose you; you keep back and let us deal with this; we will come between you and this sort of thing.' You will say it is a wrong interpretation to put the Lord Jesus in David's place there—'Lord Jesus, You keep out of this, we are going to look after You'! Yet there is a sense in which that is right where the Church is concerned; the very interests and honour and glory and throne of the Lord Jesus are bound up with the Church. The matter is no longer His alone, and there is a sense in which He stands to lose if the Church fails—in which God would say about His Son, 'This is not the time for you to come out personally; you have done that; this is the time for the Church to take up your interests.' David's life, David's throne, were put into the hands of these men, and they saw their responsibility, and how great it was, and what David stood to lose if they did not take definite action about it. There must be a company of the Lord's people who rise to that level, who see that the tremendous significance of the throne of the Lord Jesus is in their hands. In one way it sounds a presumptuous thing to say, but you see what I mean. If we do not take responsibility over this matter of these evil forces in their assailing, if we are not strong in the Lord and do not move out against the principalities and powers, it is not only ourselves who are going to lose, but our Lord also. His throne is going to be affected. He has now, in a sense, made us responsible for the final issue, which is not personal but collective and corporate. So there must be a people (actual numbers are mentioned in David's case but we must not take that literally; they represent a specific inner company) who have seen the mighty issues of what is presented in the letter to the Ephesians—those eternal counsels of God concerning Jesus Christ, and the place of the Church in those counsels as instrumental for their full realization—and have got through all personal interest in the matter of blessings, and are now committed to their Lord and to God's intention concerning Him, and realize that the responsibility is with them.

That is what I feel is the Lord's word to us at this time—not to be just 'ordinary' Christians, but to realise that God must have a company of His Own, in the midst of the general rank and file, who answer to David's mighty men, to take up the ultimate issues of Christ's lordship on His behalf. The Lord is

involved in these battles into which we are precipitated, and they are not just our battles, they are the battles of the Lord. There are situations and propositions which present themselves which are gigantic; they are paralysing if you can be paralysed. When Goliath started to shout, the people were literally paralysed—if that is in keeping with being able to run away! But all their strength went in the presence of this man's showing of himself. You can be petrified by some of the situations that the enemy brings about as tests of faith. And then what is it going to be? Well, one deciding factor will be whether we consider ourselves or our Lord; whether at once we begin to feel sorry for ourselves, get down on to our own ground—which is just what the enemy wants to bring about—or whether we say, 'Well, the Lord's name and honour are involved in this; the real issue here is the lordship, the sovereignty, the ascendancy of the Lord'—and, as they did, meet the situation on that ground. They did not always wait for these enemies to come and start the thing. When the enemies loomed up before them, these men took the initiative. I am the last to suggest that we should be careless and frivolous over attacking spiritual forces. We can do that to our undoing; and I also remind you that this is a thing which it is very dangerous to do individually. This is the business for the Church—the corporate assault upon situations which loom up and which could literally paralyse and put out of action. The Lord must have people like this in whom there is the initiative of His lordship.

Suffering for the Body's Sake

There must be some to meet the situation—may I use the word?—in a vicarious way.

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

There are all the others, there is all Israel; but so many cannot stand up, they have not got the spiritual position, the spiritual measure; they are in spiritual weakness, and for them anything in the way of severe or extra trial or difficulty finds them at once paralysed and helpless. Is the enemy going to create a universal situation like that? No, for the sake of the Church there must be those who take this position of the mighty men vicariously for the sake of others, the strong to bear the burdens of the weak, to take the initiative on behalf of the Church for the Church's sake. I am sure that amongst the mighty men of the Lord Jesus the Apostle Paul has "attained unto the first three," and he was one who said "for his body's sake, which is the church." (Col. i: 24). He filled up that which was lacking of the sufferings of Christ for His Body's sake—vicarious suffering, not for sin, which is Christ's alone, but for the Church's victory. You are not unfamiliar with the large place in the New Testament given to the matter of spiritual strength and courage. I think that these stories are written in the Old Testament about David and his mighty men not as nice little picture book stories for the children, but as typifying what God means by courage, spiritual boldness, being strong in the Lord. There they are as great illustrations of these very passages which we have read from 'Ephesians.' The message of the Lord to us is that He needs a company who, having seen what is involved in the spiritual warfare, will graduate out of the position of personal interests and personal blessing, and for the Lord's sake and for His people's sake take up the matter of the warfare with spiritual forces, and break a way through for the Church.

T. A-S.

tion, we find Paul habitually seeking, as opportunity offered, to strengthen the ties between himself and his brethren at Jerusalem.'

PERHAPS no man ever had a more clear and intense conviction of the great truths which in a special way characterised his (Paul's) ministry, and no one could have seen more clearly than he the inherent limitations of the type of Christianity prevalent in the church in Judea; yet we find that he left no stone unturned in order to keep on terms of Christian charity and fellowship with them, even though there seems reason to think that some of them misunderstood and misinterpreted his teaching.'

D. E. HOSTE

(Quoted in his recently published Biography).

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XVI)

"Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke xiv. 11).

Jesus said: "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. xi. 29).

MOST things in the world have some use or other, but I cannot discover that icebergs have any use whatever. They are only a nuisance and a danger. The seas of the Antarctic are full of them. They are like floating islands of ice. Capt. Scott sailed past one which was over twenty miles long! An iceberg floats with only about one eighth of its total mass above the water, so that a berg that appears to be 200 feet high above water will reach about 1,400 feet below the surface. Imagine the weight and power of that, as it is carried along by wind and current! It travels along, crashing through pack-ice and anything else that gets in its way, and woe betide the ship that is unfortunate enough to be in the line of its advance! Many times Capt. Scott had anxious moments, wondering if his ship would escape an advancing iceberg, but happily the danger was avoided every time.

What is an iceberg? Well, it is really only a mass of frozen water—much like the water of the sea in which it floats, though in a different form. Now (whatever we may think of the sea in a storm!) we can at any rate say that the water of the sea is useful. Among other uses, it carries the ships that sail upon it—whereas icebergs would sink them. But more than that; water is, so to speak, united and friendly. No part of it seems to be fighting for itself against the rest. It all flows together so smoothly, so that you cannot see the different drops or pick out a distinct and separate piece. If you draw out some and then pour it back, it at once flows into the rest and loses itself. The drops unite together in a way that seems to say they are all glad to lose their separateness and to become one with all the others. When we find this same attitude among Christians we call it 'fellowship.'

But you can never think of an iceberg as being in any sense friendly. It is a distinct and separate thing; it has its own boundaries, it goes its own way, it seems to say to all around it, 'Get out of my way; I keep myself to myself; I have nothing to do with anything else.' If it does come into contact with anything else, there is a clash. It seems to glory in its separateness, and on it goes, solitary and unfriendly, pushing everything else out of its way. A large

one often breaks up into smaller ones, but every part thus formed becomes another source of trouble, crashing its way along, sometimes colliding with other icebergs as if fighting them, but never on any account uniting with them. Every one is a separate thing, and the longer they go on their course the more trouble will they make—*until something changes their nature.*

How can an iceberg change its nature? Only by melting. And as it does so, little by little the water flows from it into the sea and loses itself among all the other drops of water there; and the iceberg becomes smaller and smaller, until in due course it all turns to water and then—and only then—has it become really safe and useful.

It is very humiliating, isn't it? to feel that you are only safe and useful when you have died right out. Nevertheless that is one of the greatest spiritual lessons we all have to learn. When it is really "not I, but Christ" we are quite safe and God can use us to great blessing.

I do not want to be a spiritual 'iceberg,' do you? Yet I fear many people are such, though they may not realize it. They are people who have not learned to 'flow.' They like to keep themselves to themselves, to hold to their own thoughts, to choose their own way and follow their own inclinations. They may even pride themselves on being independent, on being able to get along very well without anybody's help, on knowing exactly what they think and having no need of the advice of others, even though older and more experienced than themselves. No one can teach them anything, and unless others agree with them and are willing to go their way there is no possibility of working together with them. They often seem as if they cannot trust anyone else, and will not confide in others or share their matters with them. They are hard and set, independent and separate. They seem unable to unite with others, and though others of their company are flowing together in happy fellowship, they themselves remain apart and distinct. They cannot, or will not, let go of their own things. In pursuing their own way they often cause great harm to others. There is only one remedy for such 'iceberg' people, and until they find it they will be a problem to everybody. They must learn to 'flow,' and to do this they must 'melt.'

There never was another man who 'flowed' so wonderfully as the Lord Jesus when He was

here on earth. People of all kinds and classes could be at ease with Him, provided their hearts were open and sincere and ready to recognize that He could help them. Though He was so very different from them all in the holiness of His nature, and of all men He might have been justified in claiming to be distinct and separate from others, yet there was nothing about Him that clashed with the simple-hearted people who came to him. He could share with them in their sorrows and their problems; He could come down to their level and be in perfect sympathy with them. He loved them; and in His heart was no pride because He was better than they. Indeed, He was the One Who could say of Himself, "I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matt. xi. 29). His heart flowed out to them, and they gladly trusted Him and opened their hearts to Him. But there were some with whom it was different; the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests, the lawyers. Many of these were stubborn and proud in heart. They kept themselves to themselves. They resented anything that seemed to threaten their own interests. They thought they knew better than anyone else. Their pride was wounded by the example and the words of Jesus. They resisted His teaching, and in the end they caused Him to be put to death rather than humble themselves and confess that He was right and they were wrong. 'Self' was their great concern. They would not let go of their own position or opinions. They were 'icebergs' that would not 'melt.' If you read Luke xviii. 9-14 you will find there two men, one of whom was an 'iceberg' and one whose heart 'flowed.' I think you will easily decide which is which.

There were some, too, who were not positively wicked men fighting against God, but who were nevertheless spiritual 'icebergs.' Saul of Tarsus was one. He says, "I verily thought . . . that I ought to do many things . . ." (Acts xxvi. 9). No one could convince him he was wrong. He needed no one's help or advice. And so he went on his way, persecuting the followers of the Lord Jesus and bringing damage and hurt wherever he came. And then suddenly he met the Lord Himself, as you can read in Acts ix—and in the fierce heat of that blazing light that shone into his heart the 'iceberg' began to melt very quickly, and greatly humbled he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" From that moment his heart began to 'flow'—first in love to his Lord and then in love to men; and in humble and willing service he poured out his life for others.

What is it that makes anyone an 'iceberg'? I think the chief cause is pride. We think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think,

and have no real sense of need. We feel we are sufficient in ourselves and, while others around us are flowing together and being helped by one another, we go on our way proudly confident and alone. We must be humble if we are to 'flow'—and until we are, we shall be a danger to the things of God. In this matter we have to learn to know our own hearts, for there is far more pride in every one of us than we realize. There is only one way whereby our hard, 'iceberg' hearts can be 'melted,' and that is by our allowing the grace of the Lord Jesus to work in us, producing in us His own meek and lowly character. As He does that we shall become more and more like Him—more truly humble, less concerned about our own things and more desirous of 'flowing' with others, for the good of all. It is wonderful to watch spiritual 'icebergs' gradually 'melting'! Self becomes less and less, Christ becomes more and more in them; the sense that they need others grows, and love towards others expresses itself more and more. Less and less do 'I,' 'me' and 'my' govern the life, and where before it was difficult for simple folk to get on with them, gradually this difficulty disappears and hearts flow together in loving fellowship.

We cannot change ourselves. Capt. Scott noticed many icebergs of an unusual shape and at first wondered what accounted for the difference. He decided that they were simply bergs that had capsized and were floating bottom upwards. But they were icebergs still—just as unfriendly and dangerous. So are our proud hearts, however they may twist and turn. The only remedy for them is the Spirit of the Lord working in them to change them, and He will most surely and gladly do that work if we will give Him the opportunity.

I must tell you, before I close, of one more very common sight along the Antarctic coasts. Many an iceberg lies stranded in shallow water, having continued on its proud way until it found itself stuck fast and unable to move—like some crippled giant, helpless and ashamed. Formerly so dangerous and feared—now a captive, an object of pity rather than of fear. Many a proud heart has brought its owner to a place of shame and disappointment, and there is no way of escape except one—the one by which alone a stranded iceberg can escape. It can melt, and flow away unseen and be lost in the great ocean. So there is deliverance for the proud heart if it will humble itself and yield itself to the Lord Jesus. By letting go to Him and, so to speak, dying, it will find, as if by a resurrection, a life of usefulness and love that it never knew before.

There are many 'stranded spiritual icebergs' in the world—people who know they have failed and missed the way and can do nothing to deliver themselves out of the place and condition to which they have come, and yet will not humble their hearts enough to confess their wrong and seek God's forgiveness and deliverance. If only they would believe it, humility is their way of escape. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due season" (I Pet. v. 6).

Now even though you may not at the moment feel very strongly that you are an 'iceberg,' will you kneel and ask the Lord that everything

that He sees in you that is proud, or hard, or selfish, or unloving, may by His Spirit be made to 'melt'; and that He will so fill you with His own love and meekness that you may be one whose heart 'flows' out in love and fellowship and helpfulness towards others around you?

The boy or girl who has most of the meekness and lowliness of the Lord Jesus will certainly reach the 'South Pole' before others.

Oh, to be saved from myself, dear Lord,

Oh, to be lost in Thee.

Oh, that it may be no more I,

But Christ that lives in me.

G.P.

"Behold, My Servant"

V. Faith's Persistence. A Factor in the Making of a Servant

Reading: I Kings xviii. 41-44.

IN this small fragment we have crowded two of the major things in the spiritual life and experience of the people of God. One is the fact of the seemingly slow and hidden ways of God; the other is the demand for faith to be found in His servants. It is not my intention at the moment to enlarge much upon the former. You will know quite well how much there is in the Bible about it. You have only to look into the Psalms, and you will find again and again the Psalmist crying out because of the seemingly slow response, or the entire absence of any response, from God. "O God, why hast thou cast us off?" (Psa. lxxiv. 1). Whole Psalms are given up to that problem, and in many other places we find the same thing. In our own spiritual experience it is very true that not least among our trials is this same one—that God is so slow in His response, so hidden in His answers; often it would appear that He is almost indifferent or careless; and that is here in this little fragment. I think we shall be convinced of that before we are through, but for the moment we mention it and dismiss it, having just one object in saying anything about it at all, and that is that we might again recognise that this is a very common experience amongst even the greatest and most devoted of the servants of God. It is not the experience alone of the novices, of the ordinary people. It has been the experience of the most outstanding of God's servants through all the ages; they have been confronted with this problem. The Lord does seem to be slow and not at all anxious to respond; though to His people the situation may seem to be exceedingly critical.

The Critical Issue

The second thing is that upon which I want to concentrate for these few moments—the demand for faith's persistence in God's people. This in a sense was the most critical point of the whole chapter. It might be thought that the most critical point was when the prophets of Baal had exhausted themselves without any response, and Elijah, having built the altar of Israel and saturated it with water and filled the trench, called upon the Lord. We might say this is a breathless moment, everything depends upon what happens now. Perhaps it is true that was the high point of the story; but, after all, supposing it had stopped there! Three years of drought, with all their disastrous consequences, involving the whole question of the possibility of the continuation of life at all—that was all gathered into the moment when the rain began to fall; and, although the people had cried, "The Lord, he is God," if the rain had not come it would have been easy for them to say that some magic had been performed in the bringing down of the fire, and that they were none the better for it all. So there is a sense in which the real crisis is at this point—rain, new life, new prospect, new hope, new possibility; all the rest goes for nothing if the rain does not come.

God's Seeming Indifference

How critical, then, was this moment! and the Lord knew how critical it was. It might well have been thought, 'Well, the people have now turned from Baal, they have cried, "The Lord, he is God," it seems that the great reformation has been completed. That issue is settled; surely the Lord can send the rain now. The

heavens ought at once to be filled with clouds.' But it was not so, and, while the prophet was quite assured in his own heart and gave words of assurance, he went up higher in the same mount of crisis, and before God, with his head between his knees, began to pray the supreme issue through. James tells us "Elijah was a man of like passions (infirmities) with us, and he prayed fervently (he prayed with prayer)," implying something very, very strenuous and definite, something more than ordinary praying: and even so he had to hold on and on and on. It seems that God is slow, even in the presence of the greatest crisis, the most serious situation. Why this?

Well, I think it relates to this anonymous servant, and, in relating to him, it is something for all time. I call him an anonymous servant, because we do not know who he is or where he came from. Evidently Elijah had a servant, though very little is known of him. In the record of Elijah at the brook Cherith, and at Zarephath, no mention is made of a servant; and later, when Elisha joins Elijah, it is stated that "they two went on," implying the absence of any other. But at the point of the story which we are now considering mention is made of a servant, though not by name. This man just comes like that, without name. Being anonymous, he seems to represent the principle of service, and, if that is true, we can understand at least a good deal of the meaning of this strange episode, the seeming delay of God. The battle had been fought through, a mighty victory had been secured, they knew that the issue was in hand, and yet, and yet, something had got to be done.

A Warning Against Complacency

Here in the first place is a very serious warning against anything in the nature of complacency, even after we have poured ourselves out and been assured that we have got through. The principle or spirit of service is gathered up surely into this, that there is a persistence of faith which is the very essence of true service or servanthood. You will not find in the whole Bible any servant of God of account, of value, who did not need to have developed in him this persistence of faith. Here is this servant. The next servant who comes into view is Elisha, and after his call the one recorded phase of his association with Elijah is that which precedes the taking up of Elijah into heaven. Elijah said unto Elisha, "Tarry here . . . the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel" (II Kings ii. 2). Stage by stage, "Tarry here . . ."; "tarry here . . ."; but Elisha would not have it. He said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." At last the whole

issue was gathered up into that request of Elisha for a double portion of his master's spirit, and Elijah's response, "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee." It was the element of persistence that was brought into view.

Now, if you analyse this, you will see that there had been a tremendous thing done. They had got through on Carmel, they had reached a place of very real consequence. We might think that they would have been perfectly justified in saying, 'Now, that is done; now we will wait to see the Lord working it all out; it is His matter, so we will fold our arms and see Him do it.' If you had gone through the ordeal that Elijah had gone through and seen that tremendous thing, and felt that assurance that the end was reached, would you not have felt justified in speaking like that? And yet Elijah went higher up into the mount. "Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel"—to pray. Something more had to be done to see this thing through to the final issue.

The Persistence of Faith

Then comes in this servant. "Go up"—still higher. There is still something more to be done in exercise. "Look toward the sea." He went up and came back. "There is nothing!" After all, nothing is happening. After all that battle, after all that conflict, after all that prayer, all that exercise, all that exhausting ordeal, laying hold of God and getting something of an inward witness that it is all right—after all, nothing happening! Have you ever been there? It is like an anticlimax. "There is nothing." Oh, that is the most perilous point! Everything can collapse there! The tremendous reaction that can set in there! After all, there is nothing. We are just where we were, despite all that we have done and endured.

What are you going to do? Well, one of two things. Either you will say, 'After all, somehow or other, it has all been an illusion.' You know that sort of thing—a counsel of despair; paralysed by the seeming unresponsiveness of the Lord. Or there is the other side. "Go again seven times." "There is nothing." A second time—"there is nothing." A third time—"there is nothing." A fourth time—"there is *nothing*." I try to imagine what the servant's voice was getting like as he went on toward the sixth time. I am not sure that he did not add a few words! 'What is the good of it all—there is nothing; I told you there is nothing!' It could be like that: that is human nature. 'I do not see the use of going right up there again, I am tired of this business, there is nothing.' "Go again seven times." The

seventh time—what? A cloud as small as a man's hand. In the vast heavens, a cloud the size of a man's hand! That is all. God is doing a very deep thing. He is carrying this matter of faith's persistence a long way. You need not interpret the number seven literally, but there has to be a rounding off in spiritual perfection in this matter of faith's persistence. The issue broke; it broke only in something very small. That small thing is just a token, it is not the whole. But the token was given, and Elijah says, "Go up, say unto Ahab, Make ready thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not"—the token is taken as the whole. "Now faith is . . . the title deeds of things unseen" (Heb. xi. 1)—the token of the whole. And as they went, the heavens were full of clouds.

A. Quality Inwrought into the Servant

I think the message is clear. It is so easy to make a big start, with a good deal of strength and shouting and activity, thinking that something is going to happen, that the Lord is going to come right in and do some big thing. Then it does not happen, the Lord does not do as we expected, and then our prayer begins to lessen, our spiritual diligence to wane. All that zeal and energy and devotion which marked us at one time is declining. The Lord is not fulfilling our expectations. But what is He doing? He is making a servant. You go into the service of God and think you are going to get quick returns and instant interventions of God from heaven in difficult situations; you look for the immediate response to your cry, especially in what seems to you to be the most critical situation; you expect that; and because you do not get it, are you going to fade out and give up and lose

your zeal? No true servant of God has ever known it to be like that. The real servant, the useful servant, is the one who persists in faith—a persistence that is demanded even when interests that are clearly the Lord's are at stake. "The Lord, he is God." God had to vindicate that again, not this time in the fire, but in the water, in the rain; not only in the passing of judgment but in the maintaining of life; not only in the death, but in the resurrection. But it is sometimes the most testing thing for a servant of God to believe that God's strange behaviour really does not mean that God is indifferent about His own name. Do you grasp that? His delays, His hiddenness, His strange, seeming indifference—does it imply that He is not as concerned about His name as we are? The true servant has to learn otherwise. God is making a servant, and in so doing He sometimes does appear to be indifferent, slow. Faith's persistence is required to "seven times"—persistence right though to completion. God may test us. We are not to sit down. There has to be a persisting in faith, and holding on for the issue. God is more concerned about the constitution of His servants on true Divine principles than He is about the doing of things by way of demonstrating His power. God can demonstrate His power if He wants to. But no, He has to work into the very constitution of His people that faith which can hold on, stand fast, even against His own seeming indifference. And in the end the rain came in abundance; all knew about the rain. But there was a double battle. There was the battle first with Baal, and then with inward unbelief—the battle of self; the outside and the inside battle; and very often the whole issue hangs upon the battle within.

T.A.-S.

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Editor: T. AUSTIN-SPARKS
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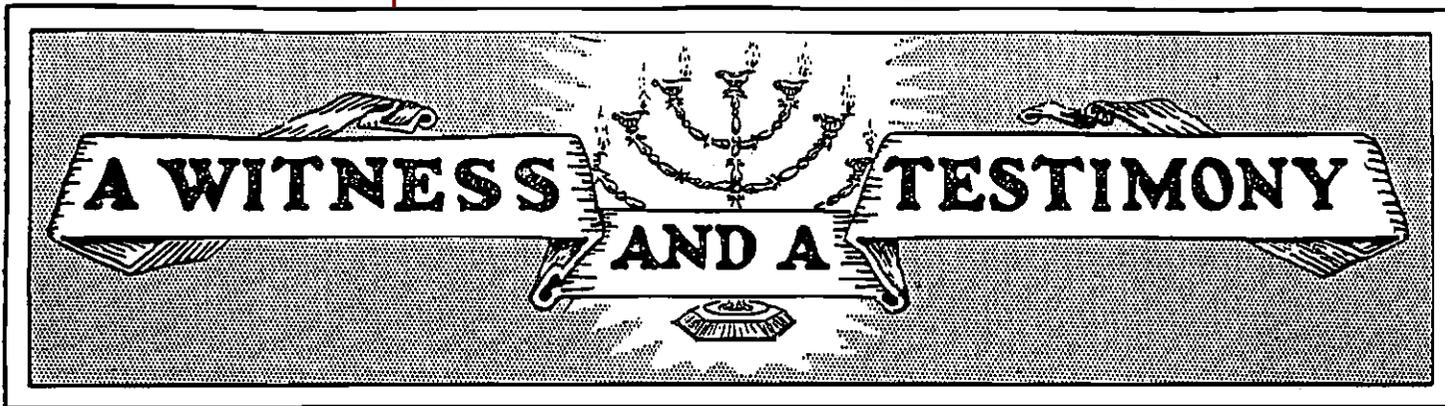
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Prophetic Ministry

IX. A Recapitulation

WE have been taking note that in the dispensation of the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was operating as the Spirit of prophecy, making everything a prophecy, everything within the Divine economy pointing onward, implying something which was not clear to those who lived in those times and who were most closely connected with what was going on and with what was being said; and that comprehensive work of the Holy Spirit through those ages was all heading up to what would be the nature, character and purpose of the dispensation in which we live. This dispensation is marked by two outstanding features—two aspects of one thing. It is the dispensation of Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and of the Holy Spirit here within the Church to make good all that that means. That prophetic activity was many-sided; that is, it pointed to various characteristics of the age which lay ahead; and it is some of those characteristics that we have been looking at.

So that now we start here. We have come to and are living in the dispensation of the spiritual fulfilment of what the prophets foretold, but that fulfilment is not merely and only objective as in the history of the world or of the Church in an outward way. That fulfilment is an inward thing, and an inward thing so far as every member of Christ is concerned in this dispensation. It is something which must come down to the youngest. Please do not think that this is for older or more advanced

Christians. It involves every one of us equally.

Spiritual Vision

The first thing that the prophets were occupied with, and which has its fulfilment in an inward way in the members of Christ in this dispensation, was spiritual vision. Everything in the purpose of God, for its fulfilment and our attainment unto it, rests firstly upon this, that the Holy Spirit has become to us the Spirit of revelation, and has done something in us which has made us to see, in its grand outline, what God is after; and, as we go on, the details are filled in.

(a) The Faculty of Seeing

That has two sides. First of all, there is the faculty of seeing. The prophets had much to say about this; and you know that because of a certain prejudice on the part of the people of Israel by which they were not disposed to see what God wanted them to see because they had their own visions and ideas and were not ready for what God wanted, a double judgment was passed upon them, and the Lord closed their eyes. The word to Isaiah was given to these people—"Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes" (Isa. vi. 9/10). That was a judgment, and a terrible one—that the very faculty of spiritual sight, of vision, was neutralised. It is a terrible judgment with

terrible consequences, and, as we have seen in the case of Israel, the ultimate consequence was that they lost all that God intended, and that was no small thing. It passed away from them. It was given to another nation, a heavenly nation. It is a terrible judgment to have a faculty of spiritual sight nullified; and if that is so, it must be a very great thing in the desire and grace and lovingkindness of the Lord that people should have such vision, such sight.

The faculty for seeing is a birth-right of every child of God. Do not think that you have got to live the Christian life for a long time, have a lot of teaching, and get to a certain advanced position, before you begin to see. It is a part of your very new birth. The Lord said to Nicodemus, "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). By implication He said, 'When you are born from above, you will see.' The commission to the Apostle Paul was—"... unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes" (Acts xxvi. 17/18). The very symbolical work of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, in opening the eyes of the blind, was pointing on to what was going to happen when He went above and the Holy Spirit came, and men saw. It is a part of your new birth to see. I am not saying that you will see all at once, that you will see all that those who have gone far on with the Lord are seeing, but the faculty of sight has been given to you. Are you using it? Do you know that it is just as true of your spiritual life as it is of your physical, that you have spiritual eyes, and that they have been opened? If not, well, get right down to the Lord about this because something is wrong.

(b) The Object Seen

And not only the faculty, but the object, of sight; it is a part of the vision. There must be a faculty for seeing before there can be an object seen, but, having the faculty, you must have an object to see; and the object is what? What was the thing that came to the perception, the recognition, of people when the Holy Ghost came? What did they begin to see? They began to see the significance of Jesus Christ, and there is one very familiar clause which indicates what that is—"the eternal purpose." They are one and the same thing—the significance of Christ, and God's eternal purpose. The purpose of God from eternity is concerning His Son—the place that His Son holds in the very universe according to God's mind; the tremendous comprehensiveness of Christ; the tremendous implications of the very being and existence of Christ; the tremendous

consequences that are bound up with Jesus Christ. They did not see it all at once, but they began to see the Lord Jesus. They began to see that this was not just a man among men, not just the man of Galilee. No, He is infinitely greater than that, overwhelming, so that you cannot grasp it—this mighty impact of a meaning about Jesus Christ which is too big to hold. It is overwhelming and devastating. They began to see that; that was their vision. Out of that vision everything else came. Look at them and hear them, recognise what a new and great Christ they have found, what a significant Christ He is, how everything is bound up with Him. All destiny is centred in Him; He is the only consequence. The prophets had dimly seen something. You will hear a prophet saying, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6). Well, that prophet had begun to see something; and there are other things like that. It is but a beginning, but what they are saying is that this One is going to come into full view. 'We are pointing on to Him,' they say, 'looking on to the day when this One shall come right out into recognition'. And this is that day; we are in the day of the prophets' fulfilled vision.

These are not merely words, great ideas. It has to be true of you, even though it may be at its beginnings, that the apprehension of Jesus Christ in your heart is tremendous, is overwhelming. He is your vision, and He has mastered you in the sense of His greatness. We shall never get through without vision. We shall break if we have no vision, or arrested vision; if something interferes with the clearness, the fulness, of our vision, we shall begin to go round in circles, not knowing where we are. The vision will carry us on if it is kept clear and full. Have you got it? When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, this tremendous thing happened—they saw the Lord, and in seeing Him they began to be emancipated from everything that was other or less than He. Those who did not see, well, they began to pass out and either became nonentities in the spiritual realm or, because of their prejudices, enemies to those who saw. The instance in John ix was fulfilled in a spiritual sense. The Lord opened the eyes of the man born blind. What happened? The others cast him out. Those who saw in the day of the Spirit's coming were excommunicated by many who were prejudiced. They were cut off. There is always a price attached to seeing; but that is not our subject now.

(c) Vision to be Personal and Increasing in Every Believer

Simply, what the Lord has been saying to us in the first place is that He must have, and desires to have—and therefore He can have—in this dispensation a people with their eyes open, a seeing people who have the faculty in themselves. Now, the difference between the dispensations is just that. In the old dispensation everything had to be told to the people. They had to get it secondhand from someone else; it was never their own, it was not original. In the new dispensation of the Holy Spirit, the thing was in themselves, the root of the matter was in them. But Christianity has very largely become a system which has reverted to the level of the old dispensation. That is, so many Christians have their lives based upon addresses and sermons and going to meetings and being told by other people. How many Christians do you find to-day who are really living in the good of a throbbing, personal revelation of Jesus Christ? I do not think that is an improper question. The great need of our day is for the people of God to be re-established on the basis upon which the Church was in the beginning, a Holy Ghost basis; and the very beginning of that basis is this—not to have a lot of information given to Christians, but that the Christians should have the faculty of spiritual sight within them, and have therefore the capacity for seeing, and that they should be themselves seeing. Can you say, 'My eyes are open; I am seeing God's eternal purpose, I am seeing the significance of Christ; I am seeing more and more as to the Lord Jesus'? Unless it is like that, the Holy Ghost is left behind and we had better turn round and go back to find Him where we left Him, because a Holy Ghost life right up to date is a life of continually increasing vision. Vision is absolutely essential, both as to faculty and to object.

The Instrumentality of the Cross**(a) Death—The Removal of What is of Man**

Then we went on next to see that, in order to keep the faculty alive and the vision growing, the Holy Spirit has an instrument. He always works by an instrument and that instrument is the Cross; that is, the principle of the Cross of the Lord Jesus. This means, on the one hand, the removal of everything that cannot come into the new kingdom; getting rid of that which in God's sight is dead and has to be put away—and that is the sum total of the self-life. Call it by other names if you like—the flesh, the natural life, the old Adam, and so on. I prefer this designation because it is

very comprehensive—the self-principle; whether it be the self-principle acting in the outward direction in its assertiveness, in its imposition, where the self is the impact; or whether it act in the inward direction, drawing to self. Oh, how many aspects there are of the self life in both these directions! We may know some of the more obvious ones, but we are learning, are we not? how deeply rooted, with countless fibres, is this self. We never get to the end of it. It is widespread in its tentacles throughout our whole constitution—'I,' somehow, strong or weak. It is just as bad for it to be weak as to be strong. Self-pity is only a way of drawing attention to ourselves and being occupied with ourselves, and it is just as pernicious as self-assertiveness. It is self all the same; it belongs to the same root, it comes from the same source. It all comes from that false life of the one who said, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. xiv. 13, 14); "I . . ." "I . . ." "I . . ." I say, we cannot exhaust the forms of this self-life, but there it is.

Now, because it is so many-sided and so far-reaching and so deeply rooted, the Lord cannot deal with it all at once in the active way. He has dealt with it all at once potentially in the Cross of His Son. But now the application of that must go on. You and I must know continually the application of the principle of the Cross against the various forms of the self-life. We must learn both the need and the manner of its being smitten, stricken, laid low, and brought under the hand of God; and that is the meaning of 'disciple,' that is the meaning of training. It is on that side of things the Holy Ghost is constantly taking precautions against the self-life. Even in the case of a far-advanced and well-crucified Apostle, it becomes necessary, in the presence of great Divine deposits, for God to take precautions and put a stake in his flesh and give him a messenger of Satan to buffet him lest he should become exalted (II Cor. xii. 7). That is very practical. The Holy Ghost uses the principle and the law of the Cross repeatedly and ever more deeply in order to get rid of the rubbish—that which occupies the ground which has got to be occupied by the Lord Himself. There has to be a lot of clearing of the ground, to build the new spiritual kingdom within.

(b) Resurrection—The Expression of the Lord Himself

So, on the other side, the corresponding

thing is the power of His resurrection, which can never be known except as we know the power of His Cross; and it is in knowing Him and the power of His resurrection that our education on the positive side is found. Oh, to know Him and the power of His resurrection! It is a wonderful thing when you and I are brought to the place where naturally—and not feignedly, but very utterly—it is an awful and terrible fact, 'This is an end of everything. I who have said so much, I who have preached so much, I who have taught so much, I who have done so much, I am at an end.' It is the sentence of death; no more is possible; and it is terribly and grimly real. And then God raises the dead! You go on, and there is something more of the Lord than there was before. It is a great thing to see how God does raise the dead again and again; the same person alive again, and there is more than there ever was, because there has been a greater emptiness than there ever was. It is a very safe position from the Lord's standpoint.

What are we learning, what is the meaning of that way, what is it we are inheriting along the line of such experiences? Just this—we are knowing the Lord, that is all. We are knowing this, that everything is of the Lord, and whatever is not of Him is nothing at all. It must be of the Lord or there is no more possibility, no hope. We are the most ready to say, 'If it depends upon me, there is nothing more possible'; and then the Lord does it. You see what He is doing by the death side of the Cross. He is clearing ground for Himself; He is occupying the ground; He is building Himself up as the risen Lord on the ground which has been purged of our old self. The Holy Spirit uses the Cross to keep the way open, to keep the vision clear and growing.

A New Liberty

Further, we pointed out that when the dispensation changed on the day of Pentecost, from that moment there was a marvellous emancipation into a new liberty. In the old dispensation the whole order was one of bondage, of thralldom; people were in a strait jacket of a religious system. In the new dispensation, the strait jacket has gone. There is nothing that suggests a strait jacket in the book of the Acts. People are out, they are free. There will still be some things to be taken away, like Peter's remnant of tradition in the presence of the call to the house of Cornelius, and so on. But in the main they are out, released, and the Holy Spirit brings that about and demands that that shall be maintained.

The Lord wants and needs such a people

to-day, just as then. Firstly, a people of vision; and then, in the next place, a thoroughly crucified people, giving the Lord full scope for all His purpose—a people who, in themselves, have been got out of the Lord's way. (That is the meaning of the book of the Acts—that people are out of the Lord's way, and He can move freely.) Then, the Holy Ghost, having effected this liberation, demands that it shall be preserved. We were speaking about it earlier—that the constant and persistent tendency of man and effort of the enemy is to bring back again into the yoke of bondage, imprisoning the Holy Ghost in some set, crystallised, system of things—a Church system, an ecclesiastical system, a man-made religious order, a formality, an organisation, and all such things as so often commence with a Divine idea, and then take charge of the Divine idea and make it to serve them instead of everything serving it. That is the peril, and the Holy Ghost will have none of it. He can only go as far as He has liberty to go. He demands that we be out in a free place with Him; He demands His own rights as the Spirit of liberty. He will be hampered by nothing. If we hamper Him, put chains on Him, we shall lose His values. He demands that we shall never allow ourselves to be brought into any fixed form and economy and limit of any kind; that we shall be God's free people. That is not licence. That does not give the individual the right to be a free lance, nor mean that we can go and do everything that our impulse would suggest, and independently snap our fingers at all spiritual authority. It never meant that. But it does mean that the Lord will not allow us to crystallise His things and put them into a box and say, 'That is the limit.' He demands that we are ready always to receive and respond to new light. If His new light demands that we shall make new adjustments, revolutionary adjustments sometimes, we are to be so free in the Lord that we can do it. It is most necessary that we should be like that—God's free people. It is a very blessed thing to have the expanse of the universe in which to move.

Holiness the Characteristic of the New Dispensation

Now our next point was that the whole nature of things characteristic of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit and of all the Spirit's movements is holiness—that everything shall inwardly correspond to what is outward. Progress can be brought to an abrupt standstill; all this movement of the Spirit of God can be suddenly arrested; there may be an end beyond which

there is no advance; if there is some debatable thing between the Holy Ghost and us. We have to keep very short accounts with Him on all matters of question, and the Holy Spirit is in us for this purpose. Why are there so many things that are not as the Lord would have them in Christians? It is simply because those concerned have not recognised and taken to heart this—that the Holy Spirit is their personal, indwelling Teacher, and they have to listen to Him. How much is lost because of that failure! ‘Oh, there is a meeting; I do not think I will go to it, I will go for a walk.’ So off you go. In that meeting was the very word ‘God meant you to have!’ If only you had said, ‘I would like to go for a walk, but there is a meeting; I will ask the Lord whether He wants me there.’ Something has been lost that you may not recover for yourself, because you failed to ask the Lord. And so in a thousand different ways—if only we listened to the Holy Spirit, we should make more progress, He talks to us about all sorts of practical matters. For example, we need to be taught by the Spirit in the matter of our merriment—how to be merry without being frivolous, and how to be serious without being long-faced and miserable. We are not going to giggle our way through life, but at the same time the Lord does not want us to be poor, solemn creatures. He does want us to be serious people, but do not think that solemnity is necessarily spiritual life. I read in my morning paper of a poor girl, overtaken of a certain disease in Australia, and brought by air to have an operation in London because she could not smile, and after the operation she could smile! I think a lot of Christians need that operation! But in this whole matter we have to know the discipline of the Holy Spirit, because spiritual value, spiritual increase, is bound up with that. In matters of holiness, controversies with the Lord, which may come down to very small points, such as details of dress, the wearing of adornments, and so on, it is remarkable how adjustments are made by many young Christians on these practical matters without any man or woman saying anything to them. Who told them to do it? No one; but they came to feel that the Lord would have them do it, that is all. Such people are going on, they are beginning to count for God. I take those points, not to impose law upon you, but to show the principle of the Holy Spirit’s being able to speak to us inside on matters where the Lord may not be fully in agreement, and, as He speaks and we respond, we go on. The Holy Spirit adds and adds.

As you come into the book of the Acts further, you find that the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of service. You get to chapter viii, and the movement out from Jerusalem is absolutely spontaneous. Philip goes down to Samaria. Who told him he should go to Samaria? Surely we may say the Holy Spirit led him there. They moved out under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit. He was the Spirit of service; He brought it about. And when you come to chapter x, oh, what a blessed aspect of that development! We find it in keeping with what the prophets, though imperfectly, were made to see. In chapter x the Holy Spirit precipitates the whole matter of going beyond the bounds of Israel out to the Gentiles. And the prophets—where do they come into that? What about Jonah? It is a terrible story, that story in the little book of Jonah. It is not the whole life and work of Jonah, but it is practically all that most people know about him—that he had a fierce quarrel with the Lord. ‘Doest thou well to be angry? . . . I do well to be angry’ (Jonah iv. 9). Think of a man answering God like that! Why? Because the large-hearted grace of God had said, in effect, ‘There must be no exclusivism; I am not bound up wholly and solely with Israel; my heart embraces the heathen as well; the whole world is the scope of my grace.’ Jonah was so exclusive—there could be nothing beyond his own circle, and he came into controversy with the Lord. The Lord has dotted here and there through His Word things which are emphases upon that. What about Ruth? Ruth is a Moabitess, a heathen, outside the pale of Israel. It is the most beautiful romance in the Bible, that little incident of Ruth. What is the Lord saying? Look at the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, and you will find Ruth the Moabitess there. But if that is impressive, what about Rahab the harlot, the resident in doomed Jericho,—who had faith and expressed it by the scarlet cord in the window? And in the genealogy of Jesus Christ Rahab the harlot has a place. What is God saying? He takes up in the new dispensation the principle of that prophetic work of the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament. In Acts x He precipitates it, as if to say, ‘Go out to all; let there be no exclusivism.’ It is impossible to be Holy Spirit-governed people, and not have the world in your heart—not be concerned for all the Lord’s people, and for all who are not the Lord’s people. He will precipitate that issue. Let us allow that truth to search us deeply.

The point of all that we have been saying is

that when the Holy Spirit comes and really has His way, all these things are spontaneous, they happen; these are the features of His government. Oh, that the Lord would get a people back there, away from all the set, ecclesiastical,

religious, traditional limits and bounds, a people in the Spirit! The Lord make us every one to be of that kind!

T. A-S.

[Concluded]

Wisdom from God

II. The Lord Our Righteousness

“... Christ Jesus . . . has become for us a wisdom which is from God, consisting of righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” I Cor. i. 30 (Weymouth).

LAST time we considered human and Divine wisdom as they deal, or seek to deal, with spiritual issues. We found that human wisdom was described in three forms, the first of which is the “wisdom of words.” Another way of putting that would be to say that it has the conception without the reality, the theory without the experience. Over against the three aspects of human wisdom we have a threefold expression of the wisdom of God, which is Christ. His is no mere wisdom of words. In His case the will of God found expression in the practical realities of life. In Him was exemplified the assertion of James that “the wisdom that is from above is first pure . . .” (Jas. iii. 17). We are now to see that Christ is not only wisdom possessed by God but is wisdom given to us—wisdom from God. This will also be found expressed in a threefold experience, namely righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Our present concern is with the first of these three. Christ provides for us the alternative to the empty wisdom of words in the form of a life which is truly pleasing to God: He has become for us a wisdom which consists of righteousness.

God's Standard of Righteousness

Righteousness, of course, means rightness, to be right. True righteousness is when all is right according to God's standard, and so is thoroughly approved by Him. We may be right in our own eyes, and according to our own judgment, and yet not be absolutely righteous. The Pharisees were righteous in their own estimation, and Paul, who as Saul of Tarsus had been one of them, still maintained long after his conversion that in his early days he had been “as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless.” Nevertheless, neither he nor any of the others attained to true righteousness, because they had a standard lower than the absolute one of

Divine requirement. The Lord Jesus made this quite plain when He asserted that “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. v. 20). He did not mean that we must be more sincere than the Pharisees, for though many of them were hypocrites, others—like Saul—were tremendously in earnest in their quest for God's approval. This is not a question of honesty of purpose or probity of character. There is only one standard which can be acceptable to God and that is His own character—the righteousness of God. Saul of Tarsus never knew that righteousness until he met God's Christ, for nowhere else in human experience can such absolute righteousness be found. We are told in Romans x. 4 that “Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness . . .” He is the very righteousness of God. He fulfils the law in every part. God has not lowered His standard for Christians; He has not set aside the law as being proved too difficult by the Jews, in order to introduce an easier way of life for us. Never let us think of grace in those terms. The Christian life is the life lived by Christ, and that is nothing less than a living revelation of the righteousness of God. So instead of being theological in using the term righteousness, can we be simple and practical by talking about the Christian life? It is the same.

Now it needs the wisdom of God to make it possible for us to live such a life. When you consider righteousness you probably think of your need of power. That is indeed our need, and Christ crucified is also the power of God. But what God needed when He was faced with the problem of human unrighteousness was not only power but wisdom. He had to solve the apparently insoluble problem of overcoming man's inherent inability to keep the law, or if you like, to live a Christian life. Man just cannot do it. It is idle to appeal to him to live, or to try to live, a Christian life, nor is it the slightest use saying what a wonderful world this would be if everybody lived according to Christ's teaching. It is vain to

talk about the something that we are capable of living. It is the righteousness of God, and that is quite beyond us—beyond the best of us. And yet although it is so impossible, God could never be satisfied unless it were realised. The wisdom of God has therefore been employed on our behalf, to bring the righteousness of God within our reach.

Man's Attempts to Reach God's Standard

The truly perfect life is that revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no real difference of opinion in the Christian world—or even far beyond it—as to that. The difference of opinion is not as to whether we ought to live that kind of life, but as to how we are to set about doing it. Here, as in every other aspect of spiritual truth, man's wisdom proves faulty.

We are so prone to imagine that righteousness is a matter of understanding, and that it is achieved by knowing all about it. More study, more instruction, more insight and more earnestness; it is along this line that the Christian moralist proceeds. The secret of the Christian life, it seems, is to know what we should do and be, and then set to work to live it out. With the teachings of Jesus and the pattern of His life to guide us, we are to cultivate a life which will more and more approach towards the perfect ideal. This is one form of the wisdom of words—but it does not work. It may sound all right, but it is not practicable, it just cannot be done. Yet how common is the error which imagines that Christian living is the result of education and instruction in scriptural truth! How often are men exhorted to righteousness, as though instruction and effort are all that are required! The teaching of Jesus produced many aspirants after the perfect life, men and women who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, but it did not make one single righteous man. In spite of three years of earnest attention to the Master's words and works the disciples were still found among the mass of humanity concerning whom the Divine verdict was, "There is none righteous, no, not one." It was not that they did not try. The truth is that the standard of Divine righteousness is altogether too high for man. It is foolishness to imagine otherwise.

We are thus led to a further approach to this matter of living a Christian life, an approach which readily admits that man needs more than to be told what is right, and urges that he needs Divine help. He cannot live a Christian life by himself, however well instructed he may be, but if he is assisted and strengthened, if he

trusts in Christ and prays to Him, then there is hope that he will gradually learn the secret of true righteousness and become acceptable to God. Some will go one more step, and assert that the power needed to aid him in this effort is that of the Holy Spirit of God. This sounds like the wisdom of God; it sounds very much like it; but it is not. How many have tried so earnestly to please God in this way, have recognised their need for help and prayed for it, only to encounter further disappointment as they have once again been overtaken by failure. Prayer, Bible study, Divine Worship and Communion, so good in themselves, can never make a sinner righteous. They may give him the name or reputation of a Christian, but he will still not be truly living the Christian life.

God's way is quite different. These former two, you will observe, are gradual. They are seeking an attainment, either by enlightenment, or by Divine assistance. Little by little, overcoming a bad habit, creating a new outlook, conquering a sin, adding a virtue; thus by slow and often painful steps they try to ascend the holy hill of the Lord. They have no assurance as to when they will arrive, but they hope (vainly alas!) that one day their efforts will be successful, so that they may be accepted in heaven as righteous men. The Apostle calls that righteousness "by works of law." It may be man's wisdom, but it is not the wisdom of God.

God's Gift of Righteousness

The wisdom of God has appointed that righteousness shall be substitutionary; not by instruction or assistance, but by taking the matter right out of man's hands; not by gradual attainment, but by an instantaneous, Divine act of justification—declaring and making righteous.

For this purpose Christ crucified is given to us as the wisdom of God. God's wisdom, in this matter of righteousness, is expressed by His taking the matter entirely out of our hands and making His Son alone responsible for our justification. It is man's greatest folly when he refuses this provision and takes the matter into his own hands. Man's wisdom—which is foolishness to God—says that when a man acts righteously he can be called righteous, and not before. He thereupon bends all his efforts to the task of being what he ought to be, so that he can unashamedly offer himself to God for His approval. He argues that if only he can live a righteous life he will be classified among the righteous. This might be true, if it were not for the tragic fact that no man—apart from the Son of man—has ever been able to live such

a life. God's wisdom affirms that in order to live a righteous life a man must first be constituted righteous, or justified. No really satisfactory change of life is possible until he first finds acceptance with God, being given a perfect righteousness which does not depend upon what he is, or upon what he does. This is indeed foolishness to men, and consequently is often rejected as being too cheap and easy. An earnest struggler after righteousness cannot readily believe that it is possible for him to cease trying, and simply accept righteousness as a gift. Nor can he bear to be told that his neighbour, who has not even tried to be good, has equal opportunity with himself of being thus justified. The preaching of the Cross is always foolishness to the natural mind, which prefers to earn a title to a faulty righteousness rather than to receive perfect righteousness as a free gift. God, however, can never accept an imperfect obedience, and therefore provides for His own satisfaction by using the sacrifice of His Son to justify the sinner freely. The moment we put our trust in the crucified Saviour we are made as righteous as He is, as righteous as we shall ever be. This is not by virtue of our behaviour—"apart from the law, a righteousness of God" (Rom. iii. 21); "apart from the works of the law" (Rom. iii. 28). Nor does it depend at all upon our merit—He justifies the ungodly (Rom. iv. 5). The ungodly! Nor has it any relation to promises or pledges that we may offer in regard to improving any particular feature of our lives—"Every one that believeth is justified from all things . . ." (Acts xiii. 39).

This is where God begins. Not by exhortation, not by condemnation, but by bringing us to believe that apart from anything we do, apart from what we are, and apart from what we may promise to try to be, we are instantly made perfectly righteous by faith in Christ crucified. This is the old doctrine of justification by faith. Not that the Lord is interested in theology. He has no pleasure in calling us something that we are not. His purpose is to make us live the Christian life, and He will never be satisfied until we do. In His wisdom He knows that this is the only way.

The Cross and Accusation

This justification by faith makes two provisions. In the first place, no accusation is allowed against the believer. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" It is God who answers, Not Guilty! (Rom. viii. 33). Surely that is good enough, if it is God who acquits us. The Roman letter was written to people who were accustomed to think in legal

terms. To them it was not only a question of feeling guiltless, but of being proved to be so. This is what the gospel does for the sinner; it declares in the face of every charge against him that he is not guilty. It says that his position is as though he had never committed unrighteousness; there is no charge, no blame, no shadow of complaint against him. It is not the Counsel for the Defence who pleads Not Guilty, but it is the final verdict from the Judge himself. Who can come forward to accuse, when the Judge acquits? "Who is he that condemneth" when Christ Jesus, who took all the responsibility upon Himself, has emerged from death and is now raised and seated at the right hand of God? Jesus our Lord was delivered up because of our trespasses, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. iv. 25). He was not raised in order to justify us, so much as raised because we are justified. In the Cross the whole question of guilt was for ever put away, so that there can be no charge against God's elect. He will not receive it. His verdict is, Not Guilty.

The intercession of Christ Jesus at the right hand of God is based upon this very fact. His advocacy is not concerned so much with mercy as with justice. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous . . ." We might think that the justice of God would make Him punish us. But no, ". . . faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins . . ." (I John i. 9). In view of Calvary He cannot do anything else—not that He wants to. We are told that "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." Now this Advocate is not Jesus Christ the tender-hearted, the merciful (though of course He is that), but "Jesus Christ the righteous . . . the propitiation for our sins" (I John ii. 1, 2). He has a righteous argument to produce to the Father on our behalf, an assurance that all guilt has been atoned for, and justice satisfied. There can be no charge against God's elect.

What, then, occasions those inward fears and misgivings, that concern because we feel so guilty? We must always remember that while nobody else may condemn God's elect, His Spirit may remind them and even trouble them, when they are not walking in the light, in true submission to Him. We must not be heedless of the Spirit's convictions, which bring us anew to cleansing from all unrighteousness by the Blood of Jesus Christ. But so often there are sensitive or doubting Christians whose inward worries are due to Satan's accusations. He cannot accuse us in the presence of the Father, so he seeks to voice his accusations in our own hearts. It is useless his blaming us in the

presence of God, for the answer will be given that we are completely justified. It should be equally vain for him to try to get us into despair, for we can have the same answer. He will never cease to whisper his accusations, but we must never accept them.

How emphatic are the Scriptures in this connection! "Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. ii. 14). All that could be written as a charge against us has been blotted out, taken away, nailed to the Cross. We have to act upon this: "Let no man, therefore judge you . . ." (ii. 16), and again, "Let no man rob you . . ." (ii. 18). We must see that we enjoy the blessings of "no condemnation." The secret of Christian joy is to know what Christ is, and has done, for us. If we think more of this and less of ourselves, we shall grow more like the Lord, and be far more radiant, for we shall be satisfied with His righteousness, instead of being dissatisfied with our own unworthiness.

The Cross and Perfect Acceptance

The second provision is that of perfect and instant acceptance for the believer now. If any other than the Lord Jesus had told the story of the prodigal he would have made the reception very different. The erring son would have been given some plain food and some hard work, and offered the chance of showing the sincerity of his repentance, with the hope of ultimately proving his worthiness to be reinstated in the family. How different are the Lord's ways! The elder brother was scandalised that perfect acceptance could be given to such an offender, and from that day to this it has always been considered preposterous by the moralist that a repentant sinner should have immediate and perfect acceptance with God. Is it right, we may ask, and moreover is it safe, to feast the prodigal so lavishly, and to trust him with the best robe and the ring, as though he had never been anything but a perfect son? The father was loving, perhaps, but was he wise?

It is precisely this matter which the Apostle takes up. It is the wisdom of God to give Christ to us as our perfect righteousness. It is His wisdom to grant us immediate and perfect acceptance, because of the merits of His Son which are regarded as our very own; wisdom because there is no other way of making us righteous, and wisdom because it does prove effective. The father knew the right way of making his prodigal boy a true son, and God knows best how to produce practical righteousness in the ungodly. The Cross brings perfect

acceptance. "Peace with God"; "access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Rom. v. 1, 2); "reconciled to God" (Rom. v. 10); "made nigh in the blood of Christ" (Eph. ii. 13). We are urged to believe that because of the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ, the worst sinner who believes in Him has perfect and eternal acceptance in the holiest of all.

The Cross and Holy Living

This may seem a dangerous doctrine. But where shall we find righteousness if not in Him Whom God in His wisdom has sent to us? The danger arises from an incomplete committal to God in the matter. Christ is given to us, not to excuse us from righteousness, but to make practical righteousness possible. The purpose of God in it all is to produce in us the same perfect life which was displayed in His Son. In His wisdom He has found the way to do this. The folly of man is to try every other way except God's. The wisdom of man talks arrogantly of justice, purity and goodness, but can never attain to them. Such wisdom is thereby proved to be folly. The wisdom of God, though it may seem foolish to the natural man, provides a righteousness which really works.

Look at Paul. Was there ever a man who lived such a true Christlike life as Paul? And yet he assures us that he only found righteousness by believing in the crucified Saviour, and so experiencing an instantaneous blotting out of his sins and perfect acceptance with God. He tried other ways—oh, how he tried! How Luther tried! How Wesley tried! These were men who did their utmost to attain unto righteousness; they laboured, they fasted, they prayed, they suffered; but all in vain. They believed in righteousness by works, but they could never do the works, and so had no assurance of the righteousness. But the day came when they realised their own folly, and bowed to the wisdom of God. They gave up trying; they gave up striving; they did not give up praying, but their prayers turned into praise. And the wonderful thing is that when they accepted God's righteousness as a gift they did not become careless about Divine things, nor sink to a lower level, but it was then that they really began to live the Christian life. They began to live righteously when they ceased striving, and realised that all had been done for them in the Cross, so that they were freely justified. I think we misunderstand the Reformation when we imagine that it consisted of protests against abuses and evil living. The message of the reformers was not that people were to reform their own lives, though that was

the effect. The question all the time was, How can a man be just? The Roman Church said, He must try, he must learn, he must do penance and pray. Luther affirmed that he had nothing to do, since Christ had done it all. The same was true in the days of Wesley. In spite of the bad state of religious life in this country, he was not a reformer in the sense that the word is so often used. He did not travel around denouncing people's sinfulness, and urging them to amend their ways. He began like that, but after his conversion his message was that any sinner could immediately become righteous by repentance towards God and faith

in the Lord Jesus Christ. This message changed the country, for those who thus believed and accepted Christ as their righteousness began to live true Christian lives.

How wise God is! And how different is His wisdom from that of the natural man! He has solved all the problems of our sinfulness by giving us Christ as our righteousness. The effect of such a gift, as the Apostle says, is to make us glory in the Lord. Our efforts bring shame, not glory. Our faith acceptance of Christ's righteousness keeps us glorying in the Lord.

H. F.

“Behold, My Servant”

VI. The Servant's Hands

“Moses put of the blood . . . upon the thumb of their right hand” (Lev. viii. 24).

“If thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off” (Matt. v. 30).

“Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities” (Acts xx. 34).

“We toil, working with our own hands” (1 Cor. iv. 12).

“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands . . .” (Eph. iv. 28).

Manual Work Not Inconsistent with Spirituality

THERE is a literal and there is a symbolic application of this word. We can clearly see the literal side from the words of Paul as to himself and in what he said to the Corinthians and the Ephesians; and he said that in this matter he gave them an example. It is something to note that this one who was so very thorough-going in his adverse handling of believers before his conversion, who persecuted the Church and cast the believers into prison, is now seen to be the one who has got his hands converted as well as his heart, and is using his hands so thoroughly for the good of the Church, on behalf of the Lord's people. It is impressive that this servant of God who, after the Lord Jesus, was surely the greatest of the dispensation, did not cloister himself with his knowledge, his revelation, and cut himself off from the practical things of daily life, but went forth, and even laboured with his hands in the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

That must convey its own message to our hearts, showing quite clearly for one thing that, if such a man will do that kind of thing, there is a dignity about the menial tasks of the daily round with which the hands are occupied. All can be lifted on to the very high level of a true

spiritual ministry. That is very simple.

Consecrated Hands Full for the Lord

Now it represents of course a definite act of consecration. Just as with Aaron and his sons the right hand was definitely and precisely touched with the blood, implying that what the hand represented was now consecrated to the Lord; that is, all the activities of life were for the Lord by a definite and precise act of consecration; so Paul says “Present your members . . .”, “Present your bodies . . .” (Romans vi. 19; xii. 1). It is something deliberately done—the whole of our bodies, represented by the right hand, are placed on that physical, active, practical basis of service to the Lord. It is to be remembered that the very word ‘consecrate’ means to fill the hands, and there is no doubt about it that Paul's hands were full; they were consecrated hands in that sense; they were full for the Lord.

Hands Express Inner Disposition

Now that leads to the symbolic significance of hands in the Word of God. They are the symbols of the person. How often we can discern and recognize the hidden personality by a gesture! Very often the whole of the inner life is betrayed thereby. You know what is going on inside, what is being felt and thought, by a gesture of the hands. We need not follow that very closely, but it is quite true. The hand is a symbol of the inner person. And in the Scriptures, it is always taken as signifying whether a person is diligent or otherwise. We speak of willing hands, but what we really mean is that the hands are the exhibition of an inner willingness. Unwilling hands reveal that there is lacking inwardly a diligence, a willingness. The kind of hands reveals the state

inside; it is the spirit of the person. So when the Lord says, "If thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off," He is not speaking literally at all: it is symbolic language. You do not do any moral good to yourself by cutting off a hand literally. You do not change your disposition. The cause of stumbling is what prompts your hand to act, what lies behind the hand. To cut off the hand really means to get behind the hand to what was the cause of the act, and to deal with that. You can run through the Scriptures and see how much there is everywhere about the using of hands as indicating the state of the life within.

Now look at the Lord Jesus. Just run your eye over the Gospel by Mark, having in mind the hands of Jesus, and see His hands actually at work. You know 'Mark' is the Gospel of the Servant, and here He is, everywhere and continuously using His hands in His ministry, signifying that here is the true servant spirit; eager, consecrated hands full, showing something of the Spirit that is in Him.

In His case, and in the case of Paul, you find that the hands are the symbols of the spirit of service, and, indeed, of an overflow of that spirit, for there is never any need to point out to them that something should be done, that something is called for; they are at it day and night. Such is the spirit that is in them.

Everything to be Done as Unto the Lord

Well, the Lord says, Let the Blood be upon your hand—that is, separating it from all work

that is unworthy of the Lord, all that belongs to self-interest, and separating it, consecrating it, to God that it shall be a hand full for Him. Remember that Paul used his hands in making tents for the support of himself and of those who were with him, and to spare the saints embarrassment. My point is this, that Paul would never have said, 'Oh, to serve the Lord you must, of course, regard all that sort of thing as belonging to another realm; making tents, washing dishes, cleaning floors, digging gardens, that is not the spiritual realm; if you are going to serve the Lord, you must have your Bible in your hand all the time and be talking.' No, Paul would not allow that division. He recognized the tremendous importance of making everything the opportunity for spiritual purposes, and he saw that ordinary, daily work could be a channel, a vehicle, of serving the Lord. So may the Lord have our hands in this sense—that He has in us a spirit of unreserved abandonment to His interests along any line in which He can be served.

"WHATSOEVER thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccles. ix. 10).

"WHATSOEVER YE DO, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. x. 31).

"WHATSOEVER YE DO, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. iii. 17).

"WHATSOEVER YE DO, work heartily, as unto the Lord . . ." (Col. iii. 23).

T. A-S.

God's Jealousy for Principles

Reading: I Sam. vii. 1-2; I Chron. xiii. 1-14.

THOUGH God has no favourites among men, and is not prejudiced against people as such, yet He is very jealous for principles, and perhaps in the Old Testament there is no incident which more emphatically demonstrates that truth than the one contained in I Chron. xiii. Again and again, in what looked like real severity, the Lord dealt with His greatest servants on the point of principle. His severity with Moses over the second smiting of the rock, in not allowing him to go over into the land, is so marked that often our hearts have failed as we have thought about it. And here again we are almost shocked to note His severity with David, when all the intentions were so good and it did seem that there was a movement in accordance with the purpose of God. There is no question as to real, whole-hearted devotion to the Lord, and yet we have this severe reaction of God to something which, though not

at the moment clearly recognised as such by those concerned, was a violation of principle.

God Cannot Overlook Principles

Of course, the explanation must lie in the direction that where precedents are concerned, that is, the laying down of foundations for all time, God shows in particularly obvious ways what His attitude is toward principles. These things were to be written in the Bible, and God knew it. The Bible was to be the book which contained the revelation of God's mind for all the coming generations of human history, and it would not do for God to overlook violations of vital principles and let them pass, lest at any time His people should begin to build something upon a wrong foundation. So, of necessity, correction had to be very severe when provision was being made for the guidance of His people in all generations. That is the explanation of the seeming severity of God in

such instances as we have cited.

God's End Must Be Reached in God's Way

But when we look into it to see what is the nature of it all, we find this, that disaster can only overtake if there is the holding of a testimony in substance—the truth, the ideas, the doctrine, the form—without the principles of that testimony being observed. It is easily possible for this to happen, with the result that there is a fundamental contradiction to the very position which is taken. David was quite right in his conclusion that the ark was in the wrong place and that it should be moved, because God's purpose for it was not being realised. So he acted upon a broad conclusion as to God's will and purpose, but without the underlying principles of that purpose being discerned. Thus, while he moved toward the right end, he moved in a wrong way, and he involved something that was of most sacred concern to God in the matter of Divine principle. This is a very solemn lesson to our hearts—that we may be in the terms, the substance, the doctrine, of the testimony of Jesus, with the best intentions and in undoubted devotion to the Lord, and yet there may be real arrest and delay because there is something hidden from our view which the Lord cannot recognise and accept; and disaster may come upon all our efforts and undertakings, and upon the whole movement, for that very reason. God does not desire simply that certain decrees and truths shall be executed. His desire is that there shall be spiritual discernment and faithfulness in relation to spiritual principles. The two things must go together. Ways and means to God's end are just as important as the ends themselves.

That is clearly what comes out here. Uzza and Ahio were the wrong people. They had no right whatever to have been put in that position. That is the first thing that is wrong in principle. It is made perfectly clear by the sequel. The cart was an altogether wrong idea. It was originally suggested by Philistine diviners who were in league with demons that had subtly, secretly, crept into this whole movement. Oh, how subtly and deeply laid are the intrigues of Satan, that even a man like David can be blind to them and caught! The ark had been in the house of Abinadab for years, and these two sons of Abinadab, Uzza and Ahio, had grown up with it and apparently had never studied its history and God's clearly prescribed word about the manner in which it should be moved. They had never gone to what they had of Scripture to see the meaning and nature of the thing that was in their home.

Familiarity had bred contempt, and the ark had become like some personal possession of theirs and they took it in charge. It was all wrong. The Lord Jesus, Who is here typified by the ark, though calling men into fellowship with Himself in a Divinely ordained way, never has committed Himself into the hands of men, to be taken charge of by them. His testimony in that sense will look after itself: God Almighty is in it. He does not need the custodianship of familiar men who have themselves taken possession of His things. Everything was in a superficial state, and because of that the deep principles were not discerned—hence disaster.

The Enmity of Satan Against Christ Involved

What does it mean? What does it all amount to when you put it in its full setting? Here the throne has come fully into view. This is all a part of a movement for bringing the throne into its full place. In the Bible, David is God's supreme type of His Son in kingship, so that it is not so much the throne of David that is in view as the throne of God or of Christ. It is Christ on the throne of supreme authority that is being typified here.

Now, from a long way back and a long way down, there creeps up something sinister, coming hiddenly up through this device of the Philistine diviners—an insinuation of Satan which, in the light of all that we know now with all the Bible in our hands, works out in this way. Satan is in some way going to interfere, if he can, with Christ's coming to absolute authority, and to do it he must insinuate something of himself that will of necessity bring the judgment of God upon the whole thing. It is subtle, clever, far-sighted; for what you have here is the ark in relation to David and full kingship, and then disaster arresting that whole movement simply because God's eye saw in it the insinuation of something of the devil that had come in to corrupt this whole testimony; and God could not accept it. If we were to take things like this as things in themselves we might think that such severe dealings are hardly justified, that God might let pass such faults and failures; but God sees the whole and how it affects the ultimate question of the place which He has appointed for His Son, and He says, 'No! That relates to the greatest issue in this universe and it cannot therefore be allowed to pass.' God is not establishing the throne of His Son upon anything of Satan. That is what it amounts to. It is tremendous.

So we have to get a sufficient reason for such severe action of God; we have to justify Him.

We must not simply say, 'Here is a man whose heart is all out for the Lord, who is sincerely seeking to serve Him, and then the Lord smites it all. It does not seem fair; it seems cruel and unkind.' We must justify God. He is only justified when you can see that something which touches the ultimate issues of His eternal purpose is involved, and that He could not let that pass in the light of the greatness of the issues. And that is just what was happening here.

Natural Man's Hand the Hand of Satan

So we turn to ourselves and ask, how does this apply to us? It means this, that we must always seek that our devotion to the Lord is instructed devotion, that it is zeal which is according to knowledge. It was otherwise with David. Not that he could not know; he could have known. The exercise which followed this incident shows that he had the knowledge at his disposal, but he was carried away at the time by all that was happening, he became in some measure superficial and emotional, and overlooked a vital principle. How easy that is! We can see a good deal of this in history. This was what you might call a revival movement in Israel. There were all the marks of revival, in a way. The ark had been in the house of Abinadab all those years. The people "lamented after the Lord"; and here is movement, and their mourning is turned into joy. All seems to be going well—and then the whole thing is arrested. That has happened

again and again in Christian history. A revival; yes, undoubtedly a movement from the dead state, from the state of utter arrest; people began to think things were going at last; and then arrest. The Reformation was arrested. There came a point at which those great reformers were held up. They did not go right through to God's full end, they stopped somewhere. When you look to see why, you find at a certain point that the hand of natural man came upon the work, and that hand is the hand of the enemy. There is something behind the natural man's taking hold of the things of God which is the insinuation of Satan; and God stands back, removes His hand of blessing, the whole thing comes to an untimely end and does not go through. There must be not only apprehension of the truth but deep-rooted consistency with Divine principles if the movement is to go through to fulness, if the end which God has in view is to be reached without interruption and tragedy. It is a big lesson for some of us who have responsibility, but it is a lesson for all who are related to the Lord's interests. We must see that, while the Lord wants zeal and utterness and wholeheartedness and desires His ends to be reached, it is very necessary for us to have spiritual discernment, that we do not overlook some principle which is essential to God in the reaching of His ends. A close walk with the Lord and prayerful attention to His Word under the illumination of the Holy Spirit can alone bring us that discernment.

T. A-S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XVII)

"Christ Jesus, who was made unto us. . . righteousness" (I Cor. i. 30).

"Christ, who is our life" (Col. iii. 4).

CAPT. SCOTT first visited the Antarctic in 1901. At that time very little was known of the region, and he and his party were the first who seriously set out over the Great Ice Barrier, in an endeavour to find a route to the South Pole. They had to turn back after travelling a considerable distance, without having discovered a great deal. One of his companions, Mr. (later, Sir Ernest) Shackleton a few years later led another expedition to the Antarctic and succeeded in pressing on several hundred miles further than Capt. Scott had reached, and even came to within a hundred miles of the South Pole before being compelled by shortage of food to turn back. When, therefore, Capt. Scott returned to the Antarctic

in 1910 (that is the expedition that we have been speaking about in our stories) he had the advantage of knowing all that Shackleton had discovered, and could make his own plans accordingly. He knew now how far the Barrier extended, and that beyond it lay a range of high mountains. He knew that if he followed a certain course he would arrive at a gap in the mountains which led on to an immense glacier—a tremendous slope of ice and snow extending like a stairway right down the face of the mountain range. He knew that here he would meet with many dangers, as the glacier was covered with treacherous crevasses, and only by the greatest care would he and his party be able to travel up it in safety. He knew that at the top of the glacier he would find himself on a seemingly endless plateau, over which he would have to travel—most likely

harassed all the time by a bitterly cold wind which would make the journey a very trying one indeed. If he and his men could endure all the sufferings and strain, and escape all the perils, of such a journey, they might reach the South Pole—though as Shackleton had not actually reached it himself this was not certain. It might prove to be a journey made at tremendous cost and yet in vain. Who could tell what unknown difficulties would be met with in that unexplored last hundred miles?

Now it was a very great help to Scott to have all this valuable information. It enabled him to plan his journey in greater detail. But when it came to the actual journey itself, the fact that Shackleton had succeeded in going so far did not help Scott at all. It was just as if Shackleton had said to him, 'I have told you the way to take. It is a very hard way, but I managed it. Now you try.' It was no doubt cheering to know that the glacier had once been climbed, and to recognize the landmarks that Shackleton had reported; but apart from this Scott was not helped. He had to struggle on just as Shackleton had done. His sledges were just as heavy, the crevasses just as dangerous, the glacier just as steep, the blizzards just as blinding, the cold just as severe, and his own strength just as limited, as if Shackleton had never made the journey. If they were to succeed, Scott and his men must rely entirely upon their own strength and courage and skill, and if these proved insufficient for the task, then failure would be the end of all their efforts. They could not draw upon any of Shackleton's success. They must stand or fall by their own ability alone.

As a matter of fact they succeeded—even better than Shackleton, for they reached the Pole. But that was because they were men of quite unusual character and physical condition. (It would be of little use for anyone to go to the Antarctic who was not!) Supposing they had been very ordinary people—like you and me—I doubt very much if they would have reached their goal. It seems a pity, doesn't it? that so much suffering as Shackleton endured, and so much labour, should not be available to help others who came after him.

It is just like that, also, with men who have gone before us on the spiritual journey upon which we have all set out. Men like Abraham, David, Paul, and many others, have told us a great deal about the road they took. They suffered and toiled tremendously in climbing to the heights which they reached. But not one of them can give to us weaker ones the least bit of their great strength. None of us can say, 'I have not much faith myself, but

Abraham was strong in faith, so I will make use of his faith; I cannot love people whom I don't like, but Paul could, and so I will draw on his love to help me.' If only some of the 'giants' could help us weaker ones up our 'glacier' by enabling us somehow to draw upon their achievements, what a lot of defeats would be turned into victories! Is there not one of them who can help us?

Yes—thank God, there is One. He was the greatest of them all—our Lord Jesus Christ. No one else ever made such a journey as He made. Through every kind of human experience He passed, going down into the uttermost depths of trial, even into the darkness of death itself and coming in triumph out again. He suffered and toiled beyond anything that man had ever before endured. He did the will of God perfectly, and because of His absolute righteousness He won His way right through to the very presence of God. No one against whom even the smallest charge of sin could be laid could ever come there—but He arrived there, as One Who had triumphed over all temptation and lived a perfect life. What a journey His was! What a victory He gained! And listen to Him saying to us—"If any man would come after me, let him . . . follow me" (Matt. xvi. 24). Follow Him! Does He mean (in the way that Shackleton might have said to Scott) 'I have climbed up through all the dangers and difficulties; I have done the will of God; I have been perfectly righteous. Now you do the same'? If that were what He meant, how heartless His words would sound! how hopeless would be the prospect for even the best of us! Who of us could do what He did? But this is where the Gospel—the 'good news'—comes in. What He did, He did not only on His own behalf—He did it as the representative of every one of us. We read that "one died *for all*" (II Cor. v. 14); that "Christ entered . . . into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God *for us*" (Heb. ix. 24); that "Christ suffered . . . the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God*" (I Pet. iii. 18). All that He is and has done, God puts to the account of every one who believes in Him. Christ's righteousness is counted to be the righteousness of every believer. No need for the poor struggling sinner to try and climb up the 'glacier' of righteousness by his own labour and good works! Very quickly will a crevasse of sin swallow him up! No, "Christ Jesus . . . was made unto us . . . righteousness" (I Cor. i. 30). Faith in Him—trusting in Him as the Righteous One instead of in our own struggles to be righteous—entitles us to the very same

place as He occupies before God. So *by faith* we can find ourselves at the top of the 'glacier' and at the end of the whole long journey—right at the 'Pole' itself where the throne of God is, and all in virtue of what the Lord Jesus has done. Have you arrived yet, or are you still struggling to climb up by your own efforts?

But there is much more in the 'good news' than that. What we have already spoken of is what the New Testament calls "being justified by faith" (Rom. v. 1). It means that God no longer looks upon us as sinners worthy of condemnation, but as justified ones. But that fact does not automatically take sin out of us. Unhappily the nature that is in us does still cause us to sin again and again. How can we overcome that? Must we plod on up that 'glacier,' doing our best, and yet finding we have not strength to get to the top? No, thank God; here also the victory of the Lord Jesus can help us. Our 'Shackleton' not only tells us the way to go and tells us to try and do as He did, but He puts His Holy Spirit—His own very life—within those who trust Him so that they can go forward not in their own strength but in His. Every effort made need not be our puny effort—it can be the putting forth through us of His power. "Christ *in you*" (Col. i. 27) is the hope of glory—that is, the hope of reaching the goal—and the secret of every step upward and onward. Not all our striving and struggling will be enough to take us on successfully, but if we trust in Christ and count upon the power of His life working in us we shall be able to do what otherwise would be quite impossible to us. "I have strength *for anything* through him who gives me power" (Phil. iv. 13, Weymouth). The one great secret is—that we count on Christ and His victory and not upon anything of ourselves. As we do so, we shall have the joy of finding that we are carried forward, and many times we shall be found saying, 'I could never have done that of myself; it was the Lord's doing.' And if we did but realise it, even the 'giants' like Paul, to whom we referred a moment ago, would tell us that even they triumphed only because they drew their strength from the Lord. If Paul loved greatly it was not because his own love was so wonderful, but, as he himself said, "the love of Christ constraineth us" (II. Cor. v. 14).

There is a lovely picture of this in John vi. 15-21. The disciples of Jesus were struggling to row their boat to land against the wind. What a hopeless task it was! How useless

their own efforts seemed! They must have been very near to despair. And suddenly out on the dark and stormy water Jesus Himself appeared, and we read that "they were willing to receive him into the boat." What was the result? "Straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going." They reached the end of the journey without any further struggling. Receiving the Lord on board was better than all their despairing struggles. They triumphed by trusting, not by toiling. He Who was strong enough for the journey Himself was able to give His strength to those who had none. It is still the same, thank God. The weakest of us may say, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. xii, 10) if we will draw upon His strength.

Quite early in his expedition, Scott noticed a strange looking object standing up from the level surface of the Barrier, and he went to see what it was. It proved to be a tent which Shackleton had used and abandoned, and in the tent was found a primus stove, in perfect condition and quite usable. Some of Scott's men took the stove with them; and in the course of the journey one of the party lost a vital part of their own primus, so that they would have been unable to prepare any warm food—a terrible thing in the Antarctic, likely to lead to the death of all concerned—if they had not had Shackleton's stove. So you see that while all the information Shackleton had given could not supply the least bit of life to any of Scott's party, the stove—which was, so to speak, something of Shackleton himself—saved their very lives. It is not the truth we know about the Lord Jesus that saves us, but *Himself*, received into our hearts and counted upon as our very life itself.

You probably know quite a lot *about* Him; but are you really trusting Him as your righteousness in the presence of God? Have you received Him into your heart? Are you counting on Him as the very life within you, drawing upon Him every moment to meet every need? You may—if you will.

I need not say that the boy or girl who counts most upon Him will be the first to reach the 'South Pole.'

"His power can make you what you ought to be;
His blood can cleanse your heart and make you free;
His love can fill your soul, and you will see 'Twas best for Him to have His way with thee."

G.P.

The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

VIII. The Triumphant Christ and His People

THERE remains this one section where everything is gathered up into Christ and the believer.

I do want that we should really understand what it is that the Lord is bringing us to in these days in which we are living; that is, to understand, and very clearly apprehend, the super-earthly setting of all that is going on. (I have before used the word 'cosmic.' I do not like that word at all, and I am not sure that everybody understands or grasps the force of it; so perhaps if I say the super-earthly nature and setting of things, you will understand better what I mean.) The significance of that is, that things are not limited to that which is going on on the earth, but there is another setting of everything, a spiritual background, and it is there that things pre-eminently count. That is the realm in which we are moving, and it is what relates to that that is heading up in these times to a final encounter and conclusion, and therefore it is necessary that we should be very much aware of that setting so far as Christ and believers are concerned.

We have all read accounts of the life of Christ, and we have found them more or less interesting and, in a way, profitable. We have found it interesting to know who the Roman rulers were in His days: what sort of place it was in which He was born: what Nazareth was like: the features of the Lake of Galilee: what sort of men the fishermen were; and a thousand and one other things like that related to His earthly life, all very informative and of a certain kind of value; but is that the life of Christ? Is that all? Is that the story of Jesus? You see what I mean. The real life of Christ was not in Galilee or Judea, not in this place or in that, amidst these scenes or those. The real life of Christ was altogether outside of that realm. The story of Jesus is a story which can never be written in terms of places and things and people. The real life, the real story, is back of all that. It is set in the super-earthly realm. Really, the interest is supernatural interest, not merely human. The whole thing has a meaning which may be entirely missed by studying only what He did and where He went, what He said and what happened to Him. It is that other that matters—the setting of it all as in eternity, as at the centre of a great universe, in the presence of spiritual and unseen intelligences and forces. That is where the life of Christ is written, that

is where it is alone truly known, and, although we may have all the other information, with all its interest or even fascination, it does not get us very far. I ask you, how far will it get you, in your desperate and terrible conflict with sin and the powers of evil, to know that Jesus was born in a little village called Bethlehem with its terraces of houses, and so on? It does not get you very far, does it? But see that other scene and know what is happening there, and you may find that it has a very great bearing upon your deepest spiritual experience. That is what I mean by the super-earthly setting of it all, and it is with that that we are concerned for a little while now.

The Sphere of His Triumph

So we will first of all seek to see Christ as in that setting. We must therefore recognize that there was one inclusive thing at the heart of Christ's coming into this world. It had two sides, but it was one thing. On the one side, it was the undoing of the kingdom of Satan, in firstly the virtual, and then the ultimate, destruction of that kingdom. Virtual—yes, it was done. Ultimate—it has yet to be done. Demons recognised the significance of His presence. "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark i. 24). "Art thou come hither to torment us *before the time?*" (Matt. viii. 29). That points on to the ultimate destruction. But His presence then, and His Cross, were their virtual destruction. We come into the line of the second, the ultimate, when we come into the virtual; but that is for presently. On the one side, then, it was this destruction of the kingdom of Satan which lay right at the heart of Christ's coming; on the other hand, there was the inauguration of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God—now its virtual inauguration, later its literal establishment. Those are the things which are central to His coming; not, coming to live the life of a good man, however good, and to propound certain teachings, 'the teachings of Jesus,' and to set a great example of how men ought to live, and then to be the supreme example of how men ought to be willing to die for their principles. How far short all that is of the real meaning!

Now then, there are three aspects of this of which we have just spoken. The first is the universal—what we have called the cosmic—relationship of everything in the life of the

Lord Jesus, and that is outlined for us here in the incarnation, the temptation, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the exaltation.

(a) The Triumph of the Incarnation

Let us note how from its very commencement—even before it actually happened—the incarnation, that coming in flesh and tabernacling amongst us, touched those cosmic, super-earthly factors of which we have been speaking: the factors which constitute the kingdom of Satan, the very nature of Satan—that pride, that rebellion, that perversity by which that satanic kingdom is constituted and maintained here. I say, even before His birth that was touched. Listen again to the conversation which took place between the angel and Mary as this great proposition was put to her. It was not imposed upon her—that is the point; it was not something brought to her and of which it was said, ‘This must be, you must do this, it is required of you.’ No; it was a proposition, an intimation, the presentation to her of a great Divine thought and intention, involving her, so far as human life and relationships were concerned, in the most difficult and sensitive position; and that is suspended before her. She looks at it, weighs it up. She sees the implications on the human side. She sees what this could easily lead to—that she might be an outcast of society. We will not follow that. She is alive to it, and as you read that story it is not difficult to see, to feel, that a real battle is going on in her soul—a battle, and, at last, a victory; a victory in her will and a victory which requires the casting down to the earth of pride, of all self-interest. A mighty victory—“Be it unto me according to thy word (Luke i. 38)—the absolute self-surrender of Mary to the will of God. “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord”—the servant spirit. You can see in the light of that what is being touched. If pride had had a place . . . ! See what was involved so far as the kingdom of Satan was concerned. If self-interest had governed, if there had been rebellion, perversity, unwillingness to let go—well, I expect the Lord would have found another vessel, but we do not know anything about that. What we do see here is the great drama of the ages concentrated in one woman’s soul, and the issue is, Will she yield, let go, submit, to the will of God? It was in that self-abandonment that there came about that union of her will with the will of God which brought into being, so far as this earth was concerned, the One Who was going to dethrone Satan; and the very dethronement of Satan required the undoing of the pride,

the rebellion, the perversity, the selfhood, which had asserted itself in God’s universe; and the first battle was in that woman’s soul. We have the Christmas season and we talk about the birth, but I do not think we have seen the terrific thing which lay behind the very first step in the incarnation, the setting of it right out there in that vast realm. We have been a little afraid of talking too much about Mary because of that wicked, pernicious system which exists, which worships her, and has given an exaggerated and false meaning to the words of her song—“Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (Luke i. 48); and, of course, we have the phrase ‘the blessed Virgin Mary’ and we are afraid of it. Well, the devil is very clever. He has covered up, by that very falsehood, the truth that there in her soul the first steps were taken in the conquest of his kingdom—the overthrow of pride and the absolute surrender of will so that the will of the woman became one with the will of God, to make it possible for Gen. iii. 15 to be fulfilled—“I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head

But that is not all, even then, in the incarnation. There is the mystery of the virgin birth. We do not accept the theory of the ‘immaculate conception’ which makes Mary a sinless creature. In the genealogy of Mary there were sinful people and naturally she inherited a sinful nature: but the angel’s words to her concerning “that holy thing” meant that Jesus would not inherit a sinful nature, but would be sinless, uncorrupted and incorruptible. By Divine act there was a clean cut between the first Adam and the last as to nature, and the last was an altogether other, which does not belong to this realm but to that which is over there, where God is in His apartness and in His difference, His ‘otherness.’ Somehow there is a miracle being wrought by the Holy Ghost to separate that Holy One from the unholy inheritance. It was necessary, you see, for the undoing of the kingdom of Satan. It is there, in the utter separateness of Christ from the first Adam, that this cosmic battle has its greatest force.

And then see how interested the other forces were in this whole matter. There is a tremendous activity going on, not only in Bethlehem’s stable, and in the fields around and in the lands afar—whether it be the land from whence wise men come, or in Judea where Herod is. There is a very much bigger interest being taken in this whole thing. Here, upon that victory in the soul of that woman,

with the principles that were involved, and that miracle of the Holy Ghost in cutting in between the stream of Adam's sin and that "holy thing"—here is focused the whole course of the battle of the ages; yes, Gen. iii. 15, not only as a prophecy and a statement, but as something with tremendous, far-reaching consequences immediately arising. Oh, the murderer! The story of Cain and Abel shows us the beginning of the battle of the two systems, and that battle of two systems develops, expands, from individuals to tribes, from tribes to nations; and you see it all the way through the Bible, along two lines, on two grounds—murder and mixture. If the adversary cannot kill, as he sought to kill Moses and others of the servants of the Lord who were in the line—if he cannot slay the elect people and destroy them directly, he will entice them, he will ensnare them, he will somehow bring in mixture, by mixed marriages, mixed worship, and accomplish his end. The Bible is just full of that—murder and mixture in order to frustrate the overthrow of the evil kingdom and the coming in of this other; and it is all that universal interest and concern that is focused here upon the incarnation. It is that which lies behind Herod's murderous, iniquitous, barbarous edict to destroy all the male children. We have known that done before to get another in this line—in order to catch one, just one. The devil stands at nothing to get his object. The incarnation is set in that realm. The birth of the Lord Jesus—oh, would to God we could strip it of a lot of that which has come in and simply ruined its spiritual value, these annual festivities! If only we could see what a tremendous thing this is, beyond all that has to do with eating and drinking, and so on, on this earth! I think I have said enough to indicate that in every one of these points the setting is the same.

(b) His Triumph in Temptation

The temptation, we know, was in that setting, and the same factors were in that temptation. What were they?—mixture or murder. Does that need threshing out in the three temptations of the Lord Jesus after His baptism? It is quite clear that seduction was the enemy's object—to seduce Him on to his, the enemy's, ground. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. iv. 9). "You can have, if . . ." Seduction by bribery; and by bribery, corruption. The enemy will even quote Scripture to seduce, urging the Lord to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple on the ground of a certain promise in Scripture. "He shall give his

angels charge concerning thee: . . . On their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone." But the Lord's response exposed the snare—"Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God." There are some ways in which God will not preserve us—the ways of presumption. Presumption is the way of the devil. David might well pray, "Keep back thy servant . . . from presumptuous sins" (Psa. xix. 13). It would have been presuming upon God and His word to have done it at the suggestion of Satan. You see the subtlety and depth of the seductive art to corrupt, to murder. God could not have kept Him in that way, and He would have died. How deeply laid was that plan! Yes, His temptation is set in a far bigger world than men have made of it. What a lot we have read about these temptations, purely of an earthly nature and meaning.

(c) The Triumph of His Death

As for the crucifixion—our earlier meditations have been enough to show that the crucifixion was something more than the death of a good man for his convictions. It had very far-reaching meaning, far beyond this earth. The Apostles give us very clear indication of what took place out there when He stripped off principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross (Col. ii. 15). That is the setting.

(d) The Triumph of His Resurrection and Exaltation

As for His resurrection and exaltation, well, listen to Paul again—"When he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. i. 20-21). That is not earthly, that is not just here. We see the setting of Christ's raising and exaltation.

What we have thus far said is only the first of the things included in this great setting—the universal or cosmic relationship of everything where Christ was concerned.

The Dynamic Power of His Life

The second thing is that which is gathered into the word 'life.' That was the focal point, that was where the issue was really centred. Life! The Lord Jesus knew that He had come with a dynamic force and virtue which would answer everything. "I came that they may have life" (John x. 10). "I give unto (my sheep) eternal life" (John x. 28). He knew

that He had in His possession a dynamic force, the nature and the power of which would solve everything—what we call Divine life. It is not only a force, it is a force because it is a nature; its power is found in its nature. It is Divine, it is life. One thing against which the enemy is set is that. All his activities are centred upon that life—firstly to prevent men receiving it. And what lengths he will go to in offering alternatives and substitutes and imitations rather than that they should have the real, the genuine, thing! What colossal systems of religion he will build up just to get in the way of one thing—to prevent the reception of Divine life, the very life of God Himself. And then, when he has been outwitted and the life is received and within, if he can by any means do so he will throttle that life. He will set himself to destroy the vessel of that life, the very body in which it exists; and how many arts there are to do that! How much wisdom is needed by the children of God to see to it that they do not violate the laws of Divine life! If that life can be by any means suppressed, thwarted, hindered, limited, then that is the enemy's object—to do it.

On the other hand, how great is the need of the Lord's people for understanding and education as to the ways of that life, and that they should not touch that in which death is. That is the real battle all the way along. You know, I am sure, what I mean by touching death. You know it in your own heart. If you speak a proud word, if you begin to boast as a Christian of anything that is earthly, personal, if you speak or act in ways which are unseemly for a child of God, what is the feeling? Something seems to have died within you—that is the feeling, as though something had died. Your joy, your rest, your peace, your sense of the Lord's nearness, have gone under a cloud. Something has happened; you know it; you have touched death. The ways of life demand that you should not do that sort of thing. You learn; the Spirit of life is within, teaching in that way. That is anticipating the believer's education, but it is helpful here to see. This is the thing which relates to that great cosmic conflict; it is life. If that life can get in and have its way, and if the Lord's people will learn how to co-operate with and correspond to the laws of that life, why, in them and therefore because of them, Satan is losing ground all the time, and the other kingdom of the Son of God's love is gaining ground, because that kingdom also is not an external system; it is a spiritual thing which has to do with our inner life. Let us leave that there.

Believers in the Sphere of His Triumph

There is a third thing to be mentioned—a multiplied seed. This is His way—a corn of wheat passing its life through death into a hundred, a thousand, other corns, multiplying and multiplying. That is, the union, the organic and vital union, of believers with Christ by which is fulfilled in a spiritual sense the ordinance—"Be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. i. 22); by Divine life transmitted through His death, a multiplied seed. That is the way to the undoing of the kingdom of Satan, that is the vessel set in the midst of the whole universal scene.

(a) Triumph in a New Life Imparted

Now what is true of Christ is true of believers, because we have simply passed from Him personally to Him corporately. We have to see that, just as much in our case as in His, we are set in that cosmic setting. Our lives as believers, as children of God, are set in and given that universal significance. What is the meaning of new birth? We have reduced that and limited it far too much to a matter of our personal avoidance of hell and entrance into heaven, of escaping the misery of our sins and coming into salvation and therefore into peace, and when we have got there, well, perhaps we shall learn a few things and grow in grace a little; but it remains very largely for a multitude of people quite a personal matter—their salvation and the salvation of a lot of other persons as such—and it all ends with the persons. But is that all? What is new birth? Well, it is what we have just been saying: this new life, which cannot be overcome of death, introduced to a new organism—"quickened . . . together with Christ . . . and raised . . . up with him" (Eph. ii. 5, 6)—a new organism with a new life, this Divine life, imparted. And then the battle starts. Why do we not understand the elementary conflicts of a new born child of God? It is not until a child is born that the battle starts; and the battle starts inside. Why? Because with the birth of the child, it is set in a world of other relationships where it is no longer just an individual with a world to itself. It is now set in another world; there must be other wills and other ideas; and it finds itself up against something more. Its own life comes into conflict with the life of that world. If you try to perpetuate the conditions of the life of the new-born child afterward, and make the whole world belong to that child, you will ruin it. We speak of spoilt children; what do we mean? We mean that we have made them the centre

of the world, as though the world was created for them and they are to have everything they ask for, and to be denied nothing. By such treatment we are countering the whole principle of life in a child, that of responsibility.

Carry that over to the spiritual, for it is only a parable. When we are born anew, and that Divine life is found within, we are introduced into a world which is a world of conflict; that life in us is at once thrown out into a realm of conflict, of contending wills, and our spiritual education begins along that line and that life has got to find its own inherent, natural potentialities of overcoming. That is exactly why Satan has been left here. You may ask yourself often why, when the Lord Jesus met him in the Cross, did He not utterly wipe him out? If only He had done that, look what a lot would have been prevented! Look at all the centuries of trouble for which he is responsible! Why did not the Lord finish him there and then? The answer is that in doing as He did the Lord is going to get much more than He would have done by finishing him. He has given us a chance of proving the tremendous potency of Divine life, even to the point where that life is ultimately triumphant over all the power of death. It begins in new birth. Birth from above is a tremendous thing in all it points to and includes.

(b) Triumph in Transformation of Character

We go on to transformation. What is the transformation of the believer? In a word, it is simply breaking down on the one hand and building up on the other. In the physical realm that is going on in the body of everyone of us. There are two things going on, one breaking down the food we eat and extracting the food properties. This is called katabolism. The other activity is the positive building up of the body by means of the breaking down of the food compounds and the liberation of their potential energies. This is called anabolism. The word which covers both of these processes is metabolism, which means, change of life. We all know how changed we feel after healthful food when the body is needing it. It is like that spiritually. Transformation in the Christian life is like that. This life process in us is breaking down and getting rid of what is poison and not required; saying, 'No, that is not good, we do not want that, that must go'; on the other hand, there is the inward witness, 'This is what we need, what we want, this builds up.' If Christians do not know and are not learning consciously what is good and what is not good for them spiritually, there is something wrong with their spiritual health. If the

life of God is having its way in us, those two things are going on. We are getting more intelligent to things that will not help us, and we cast them off; on the other hand, we do know what is good, what is of value spiritually, and we say, 'That is what I am after.' It is spiritual intelligence, and by this twofold process of breaking down and building up we are being changed. It is a life action. The transformation of believers comes along that line.

(c) Triumph in Learning Christ through Trial

And you gather into that all the New Testament has to say about spiritual understanding—being "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Our Christian education, then, lies in that direction, but it comes along the line of testing, trial, adversity, suffering. If we know anything at all, we have learned it through suffering, through trial, through adversity. If we know the Lord, how do we know Him? Well, our real knowledge of the Lord is not book knowledge, but just what we have learned in the fires, in the trials. We come to knowledge when we have been really up against things with the enemy.

(d) Triumph in Manifestation of Secret Victories

We pass on for a word on the manifestation of believers. What do we mean? I am putting this all in that fuller, higher, spiritual realm. The manifestation?—well, Romans viii tells us all about that. "The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God" (viii. 19). When the education is complete and the graduation takes place, that which has been going on under cover, hidden deep down in the believers, will be revealed. A great deal goes on unsuspected by even those nearest at hand—all those secret battles that others know nothing about, all those conflicts in which we have to get away alone and seek the Lord for grace, victory and strength. The whole cumulative conflict of the spiritual life, though so largely hidden from view, has been having an effect, it has been doing something, it has been changing us, making us different, making us more Christ-like, more gentle, more humble, more dependent. It has all come out of the secret education, but it is all going to be manifested; sons are going to be manifested, and with their manifestation it is going to be found that that is what the whole creation has been waiting for. Why, the creation was made for this, for a people to occupy it who are like the Lord—full of His glory. And when that is wrought out,

then the creation's meaning is explained, and the creation itself is delivered from the bondage of corruption. That brings us to our final word—glorification.

(e) Triumph in Glorification

I pass over this very rapidly and in a general way. After all, glorification is only the manifestation of that life in fulness. It is the very nature of that Divine life brought out to fulness; and with that, the great cosmic battle ends. When we are manifested with Him in glory the fight is finished, the war is at an end, Satan has no more ground and no more place, and the new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven.

That is a lot said. I am only concerned that our breadth, expansiveness of thought, and many words, may not take away from the immediate challenge and import. That is the

thing that we are in now. It is a grim business. There are tremendous issues hanging upon this whole matter of our setting—from our spiritual birth to our manifestation in glory; tremendous things hanging upon our spiritual life—upon what is going on in us, how we are learning, how we are growing, how that life is having its way, how we are coming to know the Lord, and how we are counting in the unseen. True value does not attach to us merely as people belonging to a religion called Christianity, who believe and do certain things, but our real value is as living men and women who count, just as our Lord counted, out there in the realm far beyond this earth surface. If we do not count there it is all a caricature, it does not mean anything at all. The Lord make us count for Him in that way!

T. A-S.

Enlargement through Conflict

Reading: Eph. vi. 10-20.

I THINK it is well known to you that the letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament corresponds to the book of Joshua in the Old. As to the book of Joshua, the Lord told His people, before ever they went into the land, that He had given the land to them; that every place that the sole of their foot should rest upon was already theirs by gift; that already the land was their possession, and the enemies were subdued. In Him it was already a concluded matter. Yet when they actually came into the land, they found that they had to fight for every inch of it. There was no contradiction really in that, because they were fighting in something that the Lord had already done. We have often put it this way—they were fighting *in* a victory rather than *for* a victory. It was a case of faith's possessing rather than of faith's receiving. Now there, of course, it was the matter of the inheritance and the enlargement of their possessions; and they did not come to possess any part, to extend and spread themselves out over the land, except by meeting a challenge all the way along and overcoming that challenge.

That is exactly the position here with the Church in the heavenlies. The heavenlies in "Ephesians" corresponds to the land in the book of Joshua—that is, the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. It is the Lord in all the fulness of His ascended life and position, and that fulness is for the Church. It is to be His fulness, but the possession by the Church of any measure of Christ, the possession of any fragment of spiritual fulness and enlargement,

comes along the line of spiritual conflict. The Lord left the enemy in the land; even when He said that He had given it to His people and would subdue their enemies under them, He did not go ahead and drive the enemy out. He left them to do that. Although in the Cross the enemy is defeated and everything is secured to the Church, the Lord has left the enemy in order that the Church may come, not to a mechanical or theoretical position of fulness, but to an actual, spiritual position. The enemy therefore is the Lord's instrument of bringing the Church to its place along the line of conflict.

The inheritance, of course, has its two sides in this letter. The Lord has an inheritance in the saints; that is, the Lord's people are His inheritance. There is the other side, where the inheritance of the saints is the Lord Himself; and these two in realization—the Lord getting what He has set His heart upon having, and our coming into that to which the Lord has called us—is a matter of spiritual enlargement day by day by means of spiritual conflict.

The Need for Strength of Spirit

What does this amount to? In a word, it is a matter of strength of spirit. Our spiritual measure is a matter of how strong we are spiritually. Therefore this section begins with, "Finally, be strong in the Lord (or, from henceforth be made powerful in the Lord) and in the strength of his might"; that is your measure, and spiritual strength is decided in spiritual conflict. If we go down easily under opposition and pressure, soon give up and fade

out because things begin to get difficult, that determines just our measure of spiritual strength, our measure of Christ. From one standpoint, you have to measure Christ by His contact with the enemy. Go back to His life on the earth, and see how far the enemy was able to gain advantage, to bring Him down, and you discover that he was not able at all, at any point, in any circumstances. The Lord proved His spiritual measure against the whole force of spiritual opposition. Satan and all his kingdom is matched against the one Man—and the one Man overcomes, casts out the prince of this world, subdues his kingdom and takes his authority. The measure of Christ is seen as over against the enemy; and our spiritual measure is determined in this combat with the enemy. Simply, then, our spiritual measure is a matter of spiritual strength.

That is seen here in these two ways. As the rest of the passage shows, there are many forms in which the enemy comes to break in, to get vantage ground. We cannot here pursue all the things represented by the armour, but each of these parts of the whole armour mentioned points to some form of enemy assault. The helmet suggests a blow at the head, that is, a spiritual assault upon the mind. How far is the mind impregnable to assaults? We know the terrific assaults of the enemy upon our minds, to capture them, to dominate our thinking, our reasoning. Another time he will make a terrific assault upon our hearts—our feelings, emotions, affections, desires. The breastplate suggests this form of spiritual attack. Another time the very vitals, the loins, are assailed, as suggested by the girdle of truth. The enemy will, as we say, 'hit us below the belt' if he can. There is a suggestion here of a form of spiritual assault at a place where we shall be thoroughly wounded if we are not careful, if we have not provision made. So you go through the whole armour in each part, and you find every part signifies some form of spiritual conflict, the point at which the conflict is being concentrated at a given time. To-day it will be at one point, to-morrow at another. Am I able to meet the enemy in strength? Can I spiritually meet him in the mind? Can I spiritually meet him in the heart, where all the feelings are centred? That determines what my spiritual measure is. So, to begin with, it is strength in that sense, which is our need.

The Need for Intelligence

But then it is also a matter of intelligence. The two things which mark spiritual degree are strength and intelligence. You find that all the way through the New Testament. It is a

matter of understanding as well as of being strong. There is a sense in which we may be strong, but not accomplish very much by our strength because it is not accompanied by intelligence. On the other hand, we may have a sort of intelligence and know all about things, and yet not stand up to them. These two factors must go together. So the word here is "the wiles of the devil." It is not only his fierce onslaught in strength that has to be reckoned with, but also his wiliness. He knows where to attack at a given time, and just when it is the best time to make a particular kind of assault; and very often he works up a situation that is very suitable to his purpose. He will get us moving very much in our minds, thinking, scheming, reasoning, and then he will make a terrific blow to bring us down through our minds. Sometimes he is moving altogether in the realm of our feelings, stirring these up, bringing about situations that touch our hearts very deeply. At that moment it is the emotional life that is the danger point, and then he makes a terrific onslaught upon that. He is very wily, very intelligent, very knowing.

To counter that, we need to have spiritual intelligence to see his intention and to be alive to his tactics. Spiritual intelligence is a matter of spiritual measure. How often someone has gone down under an assault of the enemy, completely knocked out; and someone else comes along and says, 'Did you not see so-and-so—how the enemy has been working up to this, and getting you in the end in a position for which he has been manœuvring?' They reply, 'If only I had seen that, I should not have given way!' If we have intelligence to meet the wiles, we have spiritual measure. The need is not only of being strong in the sense of digging our heels in and clenching our fists, but of having *intelligent* strength. A very strong man can be, after all, thoroughly overcome by a little cleverness; beaten, not because of counter-strength, but by a wile.

Christ an Adequate Defence in Every Assault

Paul himself was an outstanding example of strength combined with intelligence. Think of his position when he was writing these very things. "I am an ambassador in chains" (Eph. vi. 20). What a contradiction! How absurd! Paul, in that chain, in his imprisonment, had a very great deal of reason to give up, to weaken, to take the hopeless attitude; but in actual fact he was very strong. He might also have despaired of coping with the whole situation which confronted him, not only personally, but in the churches—he could have been completely defeated by the whole complex

f the situation. But he is displaying a wonderful wisdom. This armour, as Paul picks it up and transfers it to the spiritual life, indicates a great deal of wisdom on his part. Think it through, piece by piece. For the assault upon the mind—the helmet of salvation. How apt, how suited to the situation it is! The assault upon the heart—what is that? What is it that gets us down more than anything else from the enemy? It is a spirit of accusation, of condemnation, bringing home to our hearts a sense of our own wickedness and unworthiness and unprofitableness, to cause our hearts to sink in despair. Paul so wisely says, 'The remedy for that is to put on the breastplate of righteousness—but not your own righteousness. Meet the enemy with the righteousness of another; it is the only way to meet this assault.' Go through each part, and you find it is so wise a provision, so understanding. At every point, Paul is exhibiting this wonderful under-

standing, and showing his measure: for Paul could have gone down under these things as easily as any other man if he had taken another attitude. He could have argued, 'All these churches have turned against me, all these brethren have forsaken me; here I am in prison, shut up: the Lord must have something against me, there must be something very wrong with me.' If he had taken that on, it would not have been long before he would have been a prisoner in the inner dungeon of the castle of Giant Despair. But he had taken up the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness and the rest of the armour, and he showed his measure. We cannot stand as equals with him, but he does indicate for us what spiritual enlargement really means; it is being strong and wise in conflict. So spiritual degree resolves itself into a matter of spiritual strength and spiritual understanding in the time of conflict.

T. A-S.

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Editor : T. AUSTIN-SPARKS
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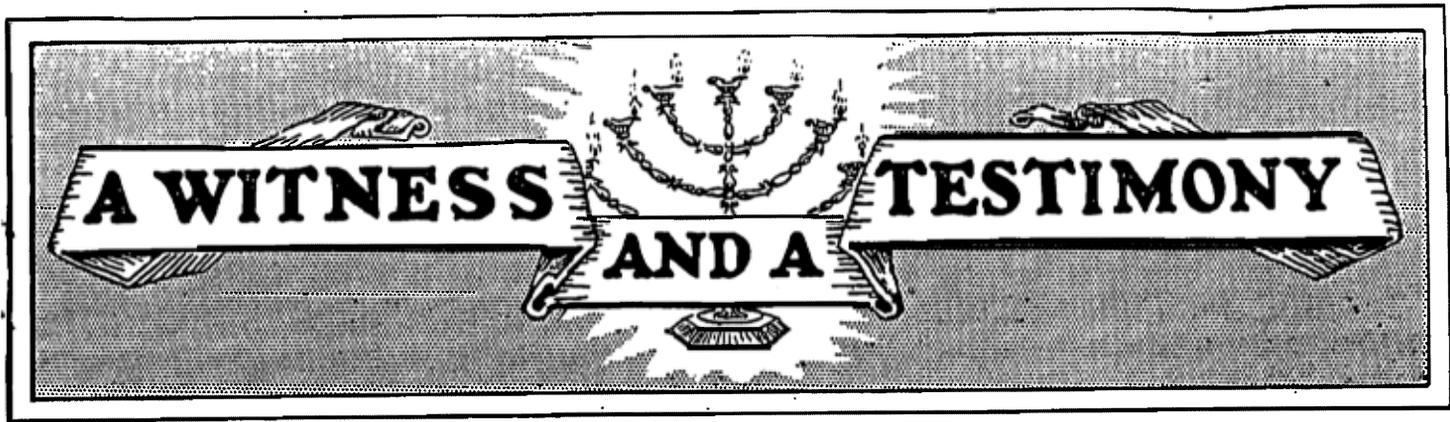
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The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

XI. The Crowning

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. iv. 7-8).

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him" (James i. 12).

"Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. ii. 10).

"And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. v. 4).

"We behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. ii. 9).

THE above passages bring into view and sum up practically all that we have been dealing with in our earlier meditations. Three words compass all—righteousness, life, glory. You will notice that there are said to be three crowns at the end—the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory. Of course, that is meant by 'crown' is the sealing of a course in triumph, with honour, with exalta-

tion, the crown being the symbol both of victory and victorious honour.

Crowning in Relation to an Ordeal

You will notice this common feature in all the passages—in every case the relationship was to an ordeal. The Apostle Paul said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"; an ordeal expressed by three metaphors—a fight, a race, a trust—all indicating that something very serious was at issue. The other two passages, from James and from the Revelation, suggest an ordeal, a time of severe trial and testing. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation (trial)." "Be thou faithful unto death." And similarly also with Peter. You know that Peter's writings can very largely be summed up in the words "suffering" and "glory." It is he who writes so much about the trial of faith, but he also writes much about the glory after the trial. Here it is in Peter—the crown of glory. "When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory."

Now the point is that there is something very serious on hand; and that is, of course, the sum of all these meditations. From beginning to end, the Lord has been seeking to make us aware of the serious business that is on hand just now for the Church—no less a thing than the fulfilment of its vocation, the accomplishment of its course, the preserving intact of its trust. Expressed in other terms, that is no

less a matter than proving the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ in the realm of Satanic forces—forces which are so evidently pressing in and seeking, with new, far-reaching efforts and activities, to set the kingdom of God aside and to rule out the Lord Jesus from this world. If I am not mistaken, the Lord would rally His Church at this end-time and make it aware of that for which it was eternally chosen in Christ and for which it exists as the instrument and vessel—the answering of that challenge in this universe to the sovereign rights of the Lord Jesus.

Are we really alive to the fact of the tremendous challenge to the kingdom of God that exists in the world to-day? We hear of many disturbing things happening. I hope you are not regarding them all simply on the earthly level and becoming more or less paralysed by the outlook. Rather we ought to look behind the events, and see the portent, the significance of them. What we see and hear is only the forefront of the situation, the earthly aspect of something more, something other; and that other is Satan's bid—perhaps his last—for the kingdom.

We are getting very near the last days. Spiritually discerning people can surely see the drift of things to-day, and in the light of that the people of God must know where they stand, and it is not beside the point at all to quote words like these—"The devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days." Do not take that literally; ten is the number of responsibility. 'You are going to be put into a position where the whole responsibility for the testimony of Jesus will be worked out in whether you stand or go under, and it will become a matter of faithfulness unto death.' Now, whether there be a literal prison or not, we can see that the people of God are facing very serious prospects at this time. We may not all be feeling the full force of the antagonism just now, but such statements are very apropos to the situation of many. The evil thing is creeping on; and the Church is chosen to give the answer to it. And in our measure we are all involved. Of course, how much you really count spiritually depends entirely upon how much you are going on with the Lord, what your spiritual position is; but some of us, who have had time enough to learn, do know that spiritual pressure is a thing more intense to-day than ever we have known it in our lives. The enemy did at one time seem to give us a certain amount of respite, but he does not give us very much now. One thing follows another.

I may be talking into the air for some of you, but sooner or later you will find that this is true.

The Crown of Righteousness

Now, you see these three things. First of all, righteousness—the crown of righteousness. What we have been saying in earlier meditations is that righteousness is the battleground of this great cosmic conflict between the two kingdoms. And what is righteousness? Well, after all, it is a matter of God having His rights. Those rights of God to absolute lordship were disputed or challenged long ago—before this present world creation was brought about. Failing in heaven, the challenge followed in the earth. A great betrayal of God by Adam put this world and this race into the hands of Satan. Self in all its forms of pride—self-interest, self-realisation, the Satanic 'I will'—reared itself up in Adam against God; and that is unrighteousness. And righteousness, we have been seeing, is just the reverse of that—no longer 'I' but the Lord, the changing of the centre of things, from the self-centre to the God-centre. That is the battleground, and we know that that is not outside of ourselves but inside; and when we are told that He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. v. 21), we know that provision was thereby made for us to enjoy a change of disposition. Righteousness is a disposition that God shall be all in all, that everything shall be centred in God and be unto Him. Unrighteousness is a disposition that *we* shall be the centre, and everything unto us; and that is Satanic.

Now if you look at it, you will see that that is just what Paul was referring to. He is the great Apostle of righteousness. That goes without saying. When we look to see what Paul meant by righteousness, and what it meant to him, how constantly are we confronted with the Cross, and the Cross in relation to the man! We are so familiar with those chapters in his letter to the Romans, notably chapter vi. We know Gal. ii. 20, and many other passages like it, such as 2 Cor. v. 14—"One died for all, therefore all died." He did not regard righteousness as something abstract. Righteousness with him was a matter of one man being displaced by another—of Adam altogether put out of court and Christ put in his place. That is what the Apostle meant by righteousness. It was focused and centred in the Cross, where not only the secondary effects of the fall—sins—are dealt with, but also the primary effect—sin. Sin is the dethroning of

God from His true place. Righteousness is the bringing of God back into His place, His rights and His rightful position; and the Cross did that. Paul was the great champion of the righteousness which is established by the death and burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and it is to that fight he refers. In effect, he is saying, 'I became committed to the great fight that God should have His place utterly and absolutely. I became involved in a course, the end of which was that God should be all in all. That was the trust deposited with me—to secure for God His rights through the Cross of the Lord Jesus. My life has been poured out for that; that has been the fight.'

And that fight was very often an inward one with Paul as well as an outward one. He could speak of fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus; he knew about the objective aspect of that fight. But oh, how much he tells about his own fight, about what is going on inside! And it was for Paul no easy thing to maintain that position of utter self-denial, self-refusal, and maintain a course with and for God. 'That,' he would say in effect, 'is the way in which answer is given to this challenge to God's place in this universe. It is centred, it is fought out, on this battlefield of righteousness; and that is a personal and inward matter.' And he is so personal. You remember these words written to the Philippians—"That I may . . . be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own . . . but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings" (iii. 8-10). He is thinking of the battle on this matter of righteousness, which in the end is the dethroning of the enemy.

So far as we are concerned, the first aspect of this thing comes right home to us as a challenge; how far are we going to let go our personal interests—all that is personal in our lives here in this world—that God should have His place? That is very simple in words, but a tremendous thing in experience; it is a real battle. It comes to this; is the Lord, at all costs, really going to have His place? Paul said, ". . . for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse . . .", and that is how it must be. In so far as we have any selfward direction, any personal interests to serve, and are not utterly abandoned to the Lord's having His way, to that extent the kingdom of Satan is upheld, is intact. It has always been by means of the people who had no interest in life or in death but that the Lord should have His place and His end,

that the kingdom of Satan has been broken into and overthrown. And that is righteousness; there is the battleground. That is the thing which draws us out and is the test of our real interest in life.

The Apostle says there is a crown of righteousness at the end of that course. He is not saying that it is the crown called righteousness. It is the battle of righteousness fought through, the course of righteousness completed, the deposit of righteousness preserved intact, and God crowns that at the end; He gives the seal and the mark of approval, the crown of righteousness.

The Crown of Life

The crown of life. Of course, this is also in the setting of difficulty, suffering and adversity. "The man that endureth temptation." But life is not the battleground; life is the object at stake. From the beginning it has been that—the battle for life. Satan at the beginning schemed and worked in order that he should capture the race for himself and defeat God's ends in the race. Wherever he has succeeded, he has done so in this way—that he has hindered men from having Divine life; because Divine life is not only continuity of life, it is a nature, a kind of life. It is the issue over which all the battle is raging. Life is the mark of victory now as well as afterward. Whenever we triumph on this battlefield of God having His place, His rights, there is a new release of life. Whenever in some controversy with the Lord as to His place, as to His will, there is victory gained and He is given what is His right, we know life rises up at once. Until that is settled, there is arrest. When we get to the Lord and face the matter out and get through about it with Him, then the hold-up goes and life springs up again and we are released. It is just that thing which is the object of all the activities of the enemy—to try to quench that life. Life is the issue.

Now, says the Word here, you are in the battle for life. Satan is out to quench you, to destroy you. As the Lord's child, the issue is with you. Just how much you will lay hold on the Lord's life, how much you will stand upon that Divine ground, how much in faith you will resist that working of death, in that degree you will know life. Oh, how that works out in so many ways, in so many details! Almost any day in our lives that issue arises—whether we are going to let death have its way. You know what I mean by death. I am not talking about being put in your coffin, but about spiritual death—those stifling, numbing,

darkening forces that come upon your body, mind and spirit, and wrap you around. You get up in the morning wondering what is the matter with you. For no apparent reason you feel depressed, 'dead.' What are you going to do about it? Are you going to give in and say, 'Well, I am not feeling too good, I think I will give up for a bit'? Are you going to yield to it? Well, if you do, you will not be able to get yourself free again until there is a real fight put up in prayer. You will find that there is something more than just a passing bad feeling, it is the battle for life that you are in. We are all in that, and from those simple, personal forms the battle is intensifying and enlarging just now, and it is becoming the battle of *the Church*—that is the point—in an inward way. Is the Church really going to rise up and overcome this terrible wave of death that is spreading over the earth? It is a matter that is left with us; but that is the issue. Why do we not more quickly recognize what the issue is? We look at the secondary causes, we think at once that the explanation is this or that, but the real trouble has come from somewhere else, from behind; and that sort of thing is increasing. We are in the battle for life; it is the great issue from the beginning to the end.

Now then, in the presence of it, what are we going to do? "Blessed is the man that endureth trial; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life." How are we going to be approved? You have never seen a scholar approved who threw aside his test paper and said, 'I can never do anything with that! No use trying!'; or who got so far, and said, 'I cannot do any more, I give it up!' "Be thou faithful unto death"; go right through to the end with this thing. That is what the Apostle is saying. Is it a battle? Well, do not give in. Is it a course? Do not drop out. Is it a trust? Do not surrender it. Go through with it, and you shall receive a crown of life.

The Crown of Glory

"When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory." What is the crown of glory? Well, it is simply the nature of righteousness and life manifesting itself; for righteousness is glory hidden, glory is righteousness manifested. Glory? It may be that somehow or other it will be perceivable glory in the sense of some radiance about us personally. Sometimes you can almost see that in people—those in whom there is such an utterness of devotion to the Lord and such a

complete selflessness of life. In such people you sometimes see something of a radiance about them, even physically. At any rate, looking at it the other way round, it is true to say that in people who are always occupied with themselves, and taken up with their own troubles and the difficulties of their way, you do not see very much that is other than a dark shadow, even over their faces. They bring nothing of light and brightness and glory with them. Well, it may be that actual, literal glory will break out through these glorified bodies at last; but I believe the source of it and the seat of it is spiritual. It is that life of the Lord manifesting itself in fulness. It is that nature of the Lord—righteousness—breaking out and showing exactly what it is. It is the outbreaking of the triumph over sin and death that is glory.

It is very significant to notice the setting of Peter's words. He has just been talking to the under-shepherds, and telling them to feed the flock—not for filthy lucre, not for praise, not that they should get something for themselves, and not because they are under an obligation to do it; but to do it selflessly, disinterestedly, abandoned to the Lord's interests, denying themselves. It may be costly to do this work for the Lord, but if you do it like that, with no other motive or object than the satisfaction of the Lord, "when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory." Well, it is, in the end, the result of this self-life having been completely set aside and of the Lord alone filling our vision and governing our hearts and being our motive.

Righteousness—God having His place; and because of that there is release, there is life, there is victory; and when God has His place and the life of God is regnant in us, then there is glory at the end. These three crowns, these three seals, these three marks that we have triumphed, that the Lord has got what He set His heart upon—with these He attests in the end those who have been with Him in the battle. The battleground, righteousness; the object of the battle, life; the outcome of the battle, glory.

May the Lord find us all in the running for the three crowns; but it is a battle, a deadly battle, and an inward battle. I sometimes think it would be so much easier if we were only in an outward battle; if only we could strike out against something objective. When the thing to be overcome is inside, when it is myself that must be slain, it is not so easy. May we be faithful unto death.

T.A.S.

(Concluded.)

“Behold, My Servant”

VII. The Testing of Self-Interest in the Servant

Reading: I Kings xviii. 36-40; xix. 2-5, 9, 15-16; Mal. iv. 5-6; Matt. iii. 1-6; xi. 2-14; xiv. 3.

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

A Vital Ministry in a Time of Transition

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

Both lived in a time of transition. The principle of transition is clear, firstly, in that Elijah is brought over into full view at the very end of Malachi’s prophecies, at the close of the Old Testament—an end-time, a period of transition unto the Lord’s coming: in that case, of course, His first coming. But I do not think that what the Lord said about Elijah, in Malachi and later, was exhausted by the first coming of the Lord; the great and terrible day of the Lord is still to come. We will not enlarge too much on details, but be content to note that that time of transition was governed by the ministry of both these men, and was marked by the gathering out of a real people from among the professing people of the Lord. Malachi makes that perfectly clear—“*Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even mine own possession, in the day that I do make*” (Mal. iii. 16-17). Out from the professing, religious realm there is seen in these words to be a true people for the Lord. Undoubtedly that was the mark of

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

Preparation in Secret

It becomes clear then that for such a great purpose—to make a way and to make room for the Lord—God had and has His instruments, known to Himself, and secretly under His hand, being prepared. Elijah comes on to the scene mysteriously, almost out of nowhere, after deep secret preparation and discipline. John has spent all his life in the wilderness waiting for the day of his appearing to Israel. Something has been going on in secret. God has had these men in hand in deep preparation, vessels to meet this particular need in the time of transition—transition from a state which the Lord can no longer accept as answering to His known will, to a state which will satisfy Him. He must have a vessel for such a purpose. It may be individuals, as it often is, but it has also through the ages proved to be a corporate vessel, a company of the Lord’s people prepared in this way. These instruments, known and secured by God in secret, have, in a secret history with Him, been learning to know the Lord as their heavenly sustenance. Elijah, at a time when earth could not provide any sustenance, was sustained from heaven. John the Baptist, in the wilderness for many years, where he had to know the Lord in loneliness and apart from men, was having to learn the Lord as his heavenly life and his heavenly provision. Such is the preparation, the equipment, of any vessel to serve God in

his greater purpose of His heart.

All Prone to Variable Soul Emotions

Then we come to the next phase—the heights and the depths. We see Elijah at Carmel, not only literally on a height, but spiritually in great eminence, with an open heaven and the power of God being manifested—people being bowed under those sovereign activities of the Lord, a tremendous time of life and of fulness. And then we see him fleeing for his very life at the threat of a woman, casting himself down under a juniper tree, saying, “O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” “I am an utter failure; let me die.” From the heights to the depths!

John the Baptist—what a day his was! He, by revelation from heaven, had said, “Behold, the Lamb of God . . . He that sent me . . . said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (John i. 29, 33-34). And then we read his troubled enquiry, “Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?” (Matt. xi. 3). Again, from the heights to the depths!

There are many lessons in that. Great spiritual heights where you are enjoying the Lord, in real fellowship with Him, and where there is a large measure of spiritual fulness, followed within a very brief time by the feeling that it is no longer worth living, that everything is gone, and major questions are arising about the very things upon which you were before most positive, about which you would have allowed no contradiction—your own heart asking questions about it all, about your very life-work and the worthwhileness of your existence, whether you have not been altogether mistaken, whether it has not been a great illusion. It is a tremendous thing to observe this change in two such men as these. Well might James say, “Elijah was a man of like passions with us” (James v. 17)!

The first thing to be noted from this is that there are times when we come into experiences of barrenness, of a seemingly closed heaven, and no longer the enjoyment of the consciousness of the Lord's presence and of spiritual blessing. There are times like that in the life of the greatest servants and instruments that God has ever used. It is as well for us to recognize it. Some of us would not range ourselves alongside of these men as to our spiritual stature, but if they went that way, should we expect anything else?

Fluctuating Soul Emotions to be Repudiated

The next thing to note is that every instrument, however greatly owned and used of God, is, after all, utterly dependent upon Him. What a proof it is that our resource is the Lord and not ourselves! We are nothing in ourselves. If only we would really remember, that although the Lord may have called us and used us and made us know quite well that He has apprehended us, in ourselves we can drop down to the depths of despair. If we go into ourselves, that is how it can be. If we sink down into our souls—our feelings, our reactions to situations, our appraisals, our judgments of how things appear, of what seems to be—if we get down there and begin to look from the earthly standpoint, from the merely human angle, that is how we can be and shall be. It is for you and for me at all such times to say, ‘Now, after all, is this myself or is this the Lord? Is this just because I have got down into my own soul?’ We have to challenge ourselves as to ourselves. David was always doing that. It looks to me as though David was constantly taking himself into a corner and looking himself in the face, so to speak, and talking to himself. On one occasion he was pouring out a terrible complaint, and then he said to himself, “This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High” (Psa. lxxvii. 10). ‘This is how I am made, and what I am like, but this is not the Lord.’

Well, there are times when we have to pass through spiritual experiences like this. There is no guarantee that we shall not have them. The Lord allows them for us to learn from them—mainly to learn how unreliable are our own souls, so that we come to repudiate our own moods and all that belongs to that soul realm. In such times of suspense and of seeming emptiness, when all has gone into unreality, we learn what it is that we are really resting upon spiritually. The Lord is now working into us the principles of our testimony. We have borne a testimony, and now is the time to have the principles of it wrought in and wrought out; and that takes place in times like these when we are no longer on the mountain, but down in the valley. Now what about the principles of your testimony—not the things you said, the profession you made, but the actual principles of that testimony?

The Lord Does Not Meet Us on Soul Ground

I must close with a word as to the Lord's way with His sorely tried servants. How did He come to their rescue? Now note—neither

in the case of Elijah nor of John the Baptist did the Lord make a lot of them personally. He did not meet them on their soul ground. He does not do that. We get down into our souls, become the prisoners of appearances and feelings, and the Lord never comes there to us and takes our ground. He says, "What doest thou here?" We have got to get up, we have got to get on our feet again. We may be quite sure He is full of sympathy—the story of Elijah reveals the Lord's tender care for His servant—and yet He cannot condone and accept that level and realm which we have taken, and He will not make a great deal of us personally; we must not expect that He is going to do it. He did not say to Elijah, "Oh, Elijah, you are all wrong; after all, you are a great man, you are much better than your fathers." And He did not say anything like that to John the Baptist. What He had to say about John—how great a man he was—He said to the people when even John's disciples had gone. He did not say *to John*, "There hath not arisen a greater than you"; but He did say it of John to others. The Lord is not going to pat us on the back.

What did the Lord do in both cases? Well, in effect, He said, "Elijah, the work is going on; now then, is it yourself or the work you are concerned about? Elijah, go and anoint Elisha!" Oh, what a new prospect came in with Elisha!—a transferred ministry. If

Elijah had been caring only for himself, he would have felt jealous, piqued. But no, he went on his way and did it. And to John the Baptist—"John, the work is going on; you have said you must decrease and I must increase. I am going on with the work, John. You may be put aside out of it, but I am not giving up the work. I am going on with the purpose that I started." It tests us as to our utter selflessness. It puts us on the right basis. It is a tremendous thing, if really our hearts are in the work. The Lord says, "You may be having a bad time, you may feel you have come to an end—but I have not; I have a Jehu yet, I have an Elisha yet, I have the kingdom yet that you, John, have talked about." "I am going on." You see the point. The Lord has not abandoned His work. We may be having a bad time, but the Lord is not giving up, He is going on with the thing which He has taken in hand; and while you and I may not at the end be beheaded like John, the principles are these, and we shall only be able to come back into line with the Lord's going if a new severance from self-interest takes place, and if we are concerned only with the Lord's interests. But remember that the Lord snapped His fingers at Jezebel. Remember her end, and Herod's end; and see Elijah and John the Baptist as spiritual forces going on through the ages, and speaking to us to-day.

T.A-S.

Wisdom from God

III. Sanctified in Christ Jesus

Reading: I Corinthians i. 18—31.

"But know that the Lord hath set apart for himself him that is godly" (*Psalm iv. 3*).

WE find in I Corinthians i. that the wisdom of man has three characteristics, the wisdom of words, the wisdom of the flesh and the wisdom of this age; and that God's wisdom is also given to us in a threefold way, namely righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Christ Jesus is made unto us wisdom from God. We have already seen that He is our righteousness, as an answer to the vain wisdom of words; now we are to consider God's wisdom in giving Christ to us as our sanctification, so providing for us the very opposite of what is called 'the wisdom of the flesh.' This phrase does not mean that such wisdom is associated with those unwholesome and unpleasant things which we so often connect with the flesh. It means the wisdom which is natural to man, inherent in him. It is his own wisdom, in-

herited or acquired, which in a sense renders him independent and self-sufficient. It is just this latter condition of independence which is so typical of the 'wisdom of the flesh,' and which finds its complete contrast in the relationship of dependence which is called sanctification. Christ is made unto us wisdom in terms of sanctification.

The simple verse from Psalm iv. expresses the truth of sanctification in a homely and most helpful way. It is, to be set apart for God Himself. That is not so complicated after all, is it? Yet how often has the subject of sanctification brought more headaches even than heartaches, as God's people have tried to find their way through a maze of apparently conflicting counsels and exhortations!

Sanctification is not the same as righteousness, though we often confuse the two. We think—quite wrongly—that righteousness is some judicial arrangement whereby God accepts

us, and that when this has an inward effect of transformation in our lives that is sanctification. In other words that justification is righteousness imputed, and sanctification is righteousness lived out. This is not quite the case. Righteousness and sanctification are not the same thing. The Lord Jesus is described as the Holy and Righteous One (Acts iii. 14). He is both holy and righteous. Quite often the two words are connected in a way which shows that they do not mean the same thing. Romans vi. 19 says that we are to present our members as instruments of righteousness "unto holiness," which really means 'with a view to holiness.' Righteousness itself is an inward experience, but it is intended to lead on to a further experience which is called sanctification.

Set Apart Unto God

Sanctification, in its simplest terms, means the state of being set apart, and primarily deals not so much with condition as with position and relationship. This is clearly seen in the fact that both in the Old and New Testaments the adjective 'holy' is applied to that which in itself has no character, either good or evil. There are holy things, holy places and holy times. Jerusalem was the Holy City, the seventh day was a holy day, and the fiftieth year a holy year. Certain utensils were holy. Quite without reference to their condition, men—and even animals—are described as being holy: "Sanctify unto me all the first-born . . . both of man and of beast: it is mine" (Exodus xiii. 2). Sanctification is a matter of being set apart especially for the Lord.

God Himself is described as being holy, which is not the same thing as saying that He is righteous. It means that He is set apart, He is different, He is not like us. The claim concerning Him is that He is unique, absolutely alone and without peer in the glory and perfection of His character. God's holiness, His difference from all others, may be terrifying to sinful man, but the heart which has been touched by God's grace is most thankful that He is so different from itself.

And He commands His people to sanctify Him. This, of course, cannot mean to make Him better than He is, but rather to recognise His apartness. "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me . . ." (Lev. x. 3). God commands that we should treat Him as holy, that we should give Him His place and recognise His unique position because of the glory of His perfection. When we pray "Hallowed be thy name" we are responding to the Divine

injunction to realise His essential superiority and distinctiveness from all others.

But even more amazing is the truth that His people are to be holy with Him. We, too, are distinguished from the rest of mankind, and made to share in His holiness. We are sanctified unto Him, set apart for His own special use and pleasure. "But know that the Lord hath set apart for himself him that is godly." In us is fulfilled the spiritual reality expressed in type by those holy things and places which were set apart for the Lord's special enjoyment. They were sanctified, not because of anything inherently good in them, but because the Lord wanted them for Himself. This is always the thought which underlies the idea of sanctification.

When, however, this description is applied to us, it naturally raises the whole question of our state, and challenges us, for obviously God would not wish to reserve peculiarly for Himself that which was unlike Him or unworthy of Him. If God will not lower His standard one iota in the matter of righteousness He certainly cannot do so in the matter of sanctification, dealing as it does with those who are specifically set apart to hold such close relationship with Himself. He demands godliness, which is clearly quite beyond us or any man. Once again we are faced with a problem which only the wisdom of God can solve.

Sanctification is Christlikeness

If we think of holiness as being what God is like, we appreciate that it involves Christlikeness, for Jesus Christ is the true revelation of the Father. In Him we see "the beauty of holiness," a state which surpasses even that of absolute righteousness, if that is possible. It is not only being right, but having a character which is unspeakably fragrant with the very goodness of God. We can never be content even with righteousness. Sometimes we err because in some matter we insist on being 'right.' The question is not only, are we right? but, are we Christlike? If we lack Christlikeness we fall short in the matter of sanctification, whatever may be said of our righteousness.

Sanctification is not a theological dogma, but a blessed experience of union with Christ. If we were to go through the Scriptures, studying the matter of holiness, we should soon find that it is an eminently practical experience. The Israelite in his camp had to proceed with the ordinary matters of daily life with a view to God's holiness. He could not do even the simplest thing just as anyone else might do it,

but had to remember that he was different from others by virtue of his association with the Lord. "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. xix. 2). "Ye are mine" (Lev. xx. 26). We are to be holy in all manner of living, for sanctification is practical, governing the whole life.

And it is a very deep spiritual experience. It is not merely for us a question of outward behaviour in the ordinary matters of daily life. It includes these, but goes very far deeper. The Lord demands that if we are to have fellowship with Him it must not only be in the external realm of our demeanour, our speech and our dress, but that in the depths of our being, in body and soul, yes, and in spirit too, we must be wholly sanctified unto Him. If we truly love the Lord this is our deepest desire. We long to be truly Christlike in an inward way. We long, but we do not know how. Only the wisdom of God can solve this problem for us. And He has solved it. He has taken the matter right out of our hands, and given us the Lord Jesus to be our sanctification; not to give us sanctification, notice, but Himself to be it.

Christ Our Sanctification

The glorious news of the gospel is that God has provided sanctification for us in the person of His Son. He is too wise to expect us to achieve it for ourselves, for He knows that this is quite impossible. The wisdom of the flesh, far from drawing us closer to Him, will only make us more self-reliant and self-confident, the sure road to moral defeat and unholiness of life. God does not ask us to provide or maintain sanctification; He only asks us to make full use of His dear Son. This is our wisdom, true wisdom—to receive and appropriate and altogether to rely upon Christ our holiness.

a. Sanctified by His Death

Sanctification is firstly by the death of Christ. In the will of God "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. x. 10). In the New Testament the emphasis on the means of sanctification is not so much on the Holy Spirit as on the death of the Lord Jesus. It is by the shedding of His blood and the power of His cross that He has undertaken the work of our sanctification. When Israel came through the Red Sea they were separated by it from the old life of Egypt, and brought into a new life of fellowship with God. In the same way the Cross has delivered us from the bondage

of earth and self, that we might be among those whom the Lord has set apart for Himself.

For sanctification we need to be delivered from ourselves. Speaking generally, the enemy to righteousness is sin, while the enemy to holiness is self. Of course self is sinful, but it is often not recognised to be so. It is because of self that we are held back from being wholly set apart for the Lord. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus he would not admit of any lack in the question of righteousness; rightly or wrongly he maintained that he had observed all the commandments of the law from his youth upwards. Yet he still felt a lack. The Lord immediately applied to him the test of holiness. He did not argue with him as to whether he really had kept the law, but challenged him in the matter of self. Righteousness is with a view to holiness. He who claims to have found righteousness must renounce all ties with self and be wholly separated unto God—"Go, sell that which thou hast . . . and come, follow me" (Matt. xix. 21). The young man went away sorrowful. He could not, or would not, pay the price of complete separation unto God. Well, the Cross has done for us what he could not do for himself—it has made a clean break between us and our natural life, that we should be free to follow Christ. It has made us sell all that we have. We are not asked to do so merely, but told that it has been done; we are now bought by the precious Blood, and do not belong to ourselves. The Lord Jesus does not say to the redeemed, 'Will you sell all and follow Me?' He says, 'You are Mine; all that you formerly had or were has been disposed of by the Cross. You belong to Me; well, then, follow Me! I have separated you unto God by the Cross; now you must act accordingly.'

Of course we shall soon find that there are many forces which seek to hold us back from belonging entirely to Him. Chiefly there are the links with the self life, self-interest, self-importance and self-opinion. These expressions of the self life can be multiplied, and they are all like so many cords holding us back from being wholly separated unto Christ. We may resent the suggestion that our self-efforts are a contradiction to true sanctification. Like the rich young ruler, we may protest that we are keeping all the commandments, that we are right. It is not a question of whether we are right, but of whether we are leaving all to follow Christ; not a matter of whether we are justified, but rather of the call to be wholly sanctified unto Him.

The Cross has done this work of sanctification for us. As the strength of the self life is revealed—as it surely will be—we shall become convicted about it, we shall struggle to be free from it, and we shall realise that we could be holy but for it. We could be altogether set apart for the Lord, to love and to serve Him, if it were not for this inner strength of self which draws us away. It is so subtle, so complex and so strong: is it possible that there can be perfect holiness for such a person? Can the Lord give us wisdom to solve this problem? Christ, the true Wisdom, Christ the Crucified, has already done it. He has died a death which can cut us off from our own self life; that we may be free for a life of true holiness unto God. We become free as soon as we recognise that we have been freed. Reckoning ourselves to be dead indeed, we know the delivering power of His death. In the Cross we have been freed, but we have to take our freedom; to walk away from ourselves, as it were, and to follow Him.

Years ago, in Brazil, we had a dog who needed to be taught a lesson. As he had always been quite free we decided that the punishment should be to tie him up for some hours. We fixed a rope to his collar and, in spite of his loud protests, tied him to a post near the house. After much struggling and howling, he finally realised that he was a prisoner and settled down. When the time came for his release nothing could convince him that he was free. The rope was removed and he was called into the house. He remained, however, close to the post, lugubriously imagining that he was still a prisoner. The bonds were loosed; freedom was his; but he remained in an imaginary imprisonment. Is it not thus that many Christians fail to take their liberty? The Cross has loosed their bonds; the Lord calls them to follow Him; but they remain where they are, unable to believe that they are really free to do so.

b. Sanctified by Life Union

And in the second place sanctification is described as being 'in Christ.' We are set apart, not only by His blood or by His death, but by union with Him in life. We are sanctified by the separateness of His life which is now our very own. Sanctification is freely given to us in the person of Christ.

The Word of God is most insistent that sanctification is not primarily a goal to which we are struggling, but a completed act, to be entered into by faith. It is not that after years of effort we may finally feel justified in claim-

ing that we are godly and therefore fit to be set apart especially for the Lord. Here and now we must claim sanctification, not as an achievement of our own but as the result of our vital union with the holy Lord. How much we needed righteousness! We could never attain to it, but we found that it was freely given to us in Christ, Who is sent from God to be our righteousness. The very same Lord Jesus is also sent from God to be our sanctification. We are to count upon Him as such. We are to rejoice that in Him we are truly sanctified unto God.

This union is described in the form of two relationships. The first is that of brethren—"Both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. ii. 11). As the Son He was entirely set apart for the Father; and now by redemption He has invited us to share in this holy relationship. He has undertaken that by sharing His life we shall share His devotedness. He is not ashamed to call us brethren because He gives us the nature as well as the name. We shall never have a holiness of our own; we must be content to share His.

The second relationship is that of husband and wife. "Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it . . ." (Eph. v. 25, 26). In His great love He has called us into closest union with Himself. The purpose of the union is that we might bear His name and possess as our very own all that He is and has. His name is holy; that name is now ours. His nature is holiness, all that He is and has being entirely devoted to the good pleasure of the Father; we now share that nature and that same devotedness. Love, then, has united us in this way with Him. He is made unto us sanctification. We are only responsible to cleave unto Him; He will provide for all the rest.

c. Sanctified by the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not described as the agent of our personal sanctification, but it is through Him, of course, that the life of Christ is mediated to us. Now His very title of 'Holy' reveals that all His being and activities are devoted to God. He Who ministers the risen life of Christ to us is primarily concerned not for us or for others but altogether for the glory of God. He is the Spirit of power, of utterance, of service and of many other matters. All these are secondary. The first thing is that He has come into our lives to be the Spirit of holiness, to make good in our case the wonder-

ful fact that the Lord has set us apart for Himself.

d. Sanctification in Fellowship

There is another way in which we enter into the good of Christ being made our sanctification. Perhaps I can best indicate it by pointing out that in the New Testament believers are described as 'saints' over sixty times, whereas the word is only once used in the singular. There is an obvious emphasis on the plural number in the matter of sanctification. The one use of the singular is in the expression "every saint" (Phil. iv. 21) which, of course, shows that there are many in mind. It is the whole Church which Christ has set apart for Himself. Sanctification is an intensely personal matter, but it involves relationship not only with the Lord, but also with those who are His. The test of sanctification is in living with the saints, and such living in fellowship is the very means which God uses to establish us in holiness. It is 'Wisdom from God' which so determines. We often think that it would be better if we were alone. That is the wisdom of the flesh. Beware of it! It is independent, it wants to be alone and unfettered

in its so-called devotion to God. Wisdom from God decrees that we are not to be independent, but find our own saintship by fellowship with the saints. The very use of the plural serves to emphasise this great feature of true sanctification.

We are therefore faced with two alternatives. We can live by the wisdom of the flesh. Most of us have attempted to serve God in this way. We have been strong in our own thoughts, resolute in our own ways, and unwilling for the life of simple dependence. We have had our fill of that, and have cried to be delivered from ourselves. The alternative is another sort of wisdom, wisdom from God. This means that Christ must be given full place in our lives, Himself to be our sanctification. He it is Who assures us that He can provide us with a holy life, indeed that He has already done so, if we will but believe it. We must cease from seeking holiness as a thing in itself, and lay hold anew of the fact that Christ Jesus Himself is our perfect sanctification. If we would be set apart wholly for God we must heed the gospel command—"Go, sell that which thou hast . . . and come, follow me."

H. F.

"A Candlestick All of Gold"

I. Its Function

Reading: Ex. xxv. 31-40; xxxvii. 17; Zech. iv. 1-7.

"AND thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold:" (Ex. xxv. 31). It is the latter part of the sentence that is the more important—"a candlestick of pure gold," but there is something very significant and important about the former part. "Thou shalt make . . ."

The Need for a New Spiritual Position

In approaching this matter of the candlestick of pure gold, we do so from a more distant point. We stand back, withdrawn. I think that we are all conscious of a growing sense of need among the Lord's people for a new spiritual position. It may not be universal or general, but it is something which we are meeting a good deal in these days, and, when you come to think about it, it is a thing which marks the Word of God throughout—that is, a challenge to reach a new place. You find it in the Word, you find it in subsequent history. Even when the Lord's people are in the right way or in the right direction, this need is constantly brought before them—the urge not to stay there, not to rest there, but to move

on. That is very true in a general way as to the spiritual history of the Lord's people and all the ways of the Lord with His people—constantly challenging, constantly creating a sense of need to reach some position which has not been reached, or, it may be in some cases, to recover a position from which they have receded.

But among ourselves (and when I say ourselves, I mean those of us who have been related here in this ministry, in what we have often called this testimony) this sense is growing—a sense of the need of coming to a new spiritual place. One and another has expressed that to me during these past months particularly—"I must get to a new place with the Lord, I must somehow get to a new position." It is expressed in different ways, but what lies behind it is this sense that we are being exercised, wrought upon, and that prevailing conditions are forcing us to this. We must somehow get to a new spiritual place. I think that many of you will find a response to that in your own hearts.

There are many with us who have not been with us for long, and do not know the spiritual

history of things among us. To them, what I am going to say must be an explanation of why we are here, of what this means as something more than just an occasional coming together of Christian people for conferences, to hold meetings.

Now that sense of which I have spoken, while it carries with it to those concerned a good deal of trouble and exercise and trial and suffering, is, after all, a very healthy sign. The most unhealthy thing would be that we were able to settle down with our spiritual position. Such a sense of need and challenge leads to heart searching; and that heart searching leads to a reach out to the Lord. It may lead to adjustments, correcting what may be wrong or false. It will lead to a clarifying of our position. The main upshot of such exercise must, and will, be that we come to closer grips with that to which the Lord has really called us. It will, or it should, lead us to the place where we say, 'Well, what is it all about? What does the Lord mean by this? What is He after? What is it that He has called us to?' And to discover, or rediscover, that will be to have a good deal of explanation of the Lord's dealings with us. It will help us perhaps to get rid of a lot that is superfluous, and to get right into line with what is essential.

Now, this calling, this purpose of God, this object of the exercise, this meaning of the challenge and of the sense of need, is very concretely and, I think, inclusively represented by this candlestick all of gold. Many of you will realise that in that very phrase we are going back to the beginning of our local history, behind everything of all these years. It lies behind the very title of the paper—"A Witness and A Testimony"—upon the cover of which the candlestick all of gold is seen. That is where we began. That is what is supposed to have been governing all through the years. That is not only superimposed upon a magazine; that is what has been imposed upon us by God from the beginning—"a candlestick all of gold"—and there is a challenge to us to make it so, to produce it, to have the thing actually in us, really, truly.

There seem to me to be three aspects of that candlestick. One, its function; two, its character; three, its form.

The Function of a Candlestick—to Give Light

Simply and precisely, the function of a candlestick is to give light; not to be an ornament, not a pretty thing to look at, not some mystical symbolism to interest and to fascinate and to intrigue; not some abstruse, imper-

ceptible suggestion. No—to give light! That is what it is for—light. In God's thought and intention, the function begins and ends there. At the opening of the book of the Revelation the Apostle, in recording his vision, said, "I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man" (Rev. i. 12-13). And as the Lord proceeded to speak to and through His servant, what issued was this—for every church, the one question upon which their very existence depended was the function of the candlestick. There were many things noted, but the one vital thing was the light; and the Lord said quite clearly that the churches had no justification for continuing their existence except on the ground of the function of the candlestick. "I . . . will move thy candlestick out of its place"—when?—when it becomes merely a candlestick and not a light-giver; when the thing without its meaning is there; when the instrument, the creation, exists without its function. When those conditions obtain you may as well remove the candlestick, and the Lord said that He would. The function of the candlestick which the Church is called to make is to provide light—that is all.

True Light is an Impact

But there are one or two things to be said about the light. The first is that this light, for which the people of God are created, formed, constituted, is an impact. True light is an impact. It is such an impact that anything that is contrary to it cannot co-exist with it, but has to go. That is the proof that it is Divine light. We know quite well something of the impact of light. We come suddenly out of darkness into the blaze of the sun, and we cannot bear the light; we have to shade our eyes, the impact is too much for us. When we let light into a dark place where there are things which belong to the darkness and not to the light they very quickly make their departure. It is an impact.

What I mean is that the testimony of this candlestick is not the giving of a lot of information. It is not just the statement or presentation of cold facts. It is not just a matter of doctrines and truths; and it is so easy, in the course of time, for that which began as an impact of light to degenerate into words, mountains of words, and ideas—scriptural, spiritual, in a way Divine ideas—and yet still only ideas. It is so easy to degenerate into that, and for all that to be present in great volume, and yet somehow or other the mighty impact

not to be present and to be registered and felt among those who have it all. I find that that is one of the challenges to the seven churches in the Revelation. They had their orthodox teaching and beliefs; they would have laid down their lives for this truth and that; they hated certain things which were not sound; but the impact had gone. It was all right in its way, but not the impact of light. The surrounding darkness was not provoked and challenged by their presence. The kingdom of the evil powers was not made aware that here was something to take account of. We know it all—ah, but that is not enough; that might be more to condemnation than otherwise.

Now this is not intended to be a word of condemnation or judgment or criticism; but may not this explain a lot—the Lord's dealings and ways with us? Especially may this be so where there is this deep sense of the need of a new position. We have tried to weigh up our position, perhaps, from the standpoint of our beliefs, our doctrines, our teaching—we have said, 'Yes, but our position is such a right one according to the Word of God, it is so scriptural'—but we may not have weighed it up from the standpoint of the impact of our beliefs. What effect is being produced? Light, from God's standpoint, is not just cold light; it is a mighty impact. So these churches in Asia were challenged on the ground, not of what they believed, held, or even taught, but of the effect of their position over against every aspect of the realm of darkness.

The Light of God's Holiness

Another thing about the candlestick, or this testimony, concerns its object of illumination—that is, what it lights up. What does it light up? What does it make clear with an impact? It not only shows certain things, but it shows them with an impact, and it is here, I think, that we can best understand what we mean by impact. One of the things which the candlestick all of gold is intended to illumine with an impact is the eternal holiness of God—the eternal holiness of God brought into the midst of the Church in the Person of the Son of man. Early in the description of the Son of man in the midst of the lampstands is this—"And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow." Go back to the book of Daniel, and you find that that description is given to One Who is called "the Ancient of days"—"the hair of his head like pure wool" (Dan. vii. 9). As I understand it, the head and the hair as white wool symbolises age—timelessness, all time compassed—and utter holiness,

utter purity. When you recognise that everything is being brought to judgment before this "Son of man," this "Ancient of days," this "Father of eternity," you understand that that means that all things are being first of all dealt with and challenged on the ground of His eternal holiness; and the candlestick brings that testimony to light with an impact.

"Thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold." What does that amount to? It means that, where God is going to have what He wants, holiness is going to be an impact, an impact upon unholiness. You cannot have anything unholy persisting there. Holiness is not a word that is greatly loved; it is very much feared. It is not a matter into which we can go in any detail now; but it is one about which we can have our own secret understanding and life with God. But be assured that inasmuch as those eyes of flame see anything that is inconsistent with that head and hair as white wool, the impact of that testimony is weakened, is lost, and the justification of that candlestick is forfeited. It is a solemn word, but is it not true, grievously true, that we can have a lot of first-class doctrine, of truth, of Divine ideas, and stand for a very high level of teaching, and yet at the same time there may be very much in the private, personal life that is not holy, not pure, that could not bear the light of God's presence. I say that, and leave it there.

This is, of course, where responsibility comes in. "Thou shalt make a candlestick." There are things to be dealt with before the Lord which are not holy. I leave it to you; but we are concerned about our effect upon the powers of darkness, upon the darkness around us—our effect upon darkness both absolute and comparative; that we should register, not our teaching, not our system of truth, not our ideas, but the presence of something which is more than words, much more than even scriptural language—the registration of an actual power. That is what we are really concerned about, that the forces of darkness in every degree should meet something by our presence. It can never be if those forces of darkness have some darkness inside us, if they have their own ground. Their strength is unholiness. Their strength is not official, it lies in their nature. If they can get some unholiness in, they have undone us; they laugh at our teaching, they ridicule what we call our testimony; it matters nothing to them how much deeper truth we have. They are in the place of power because of unholiness, and we learn from the Scriptures that the unholiness of one life in a cor-

rate company is enough to arrest the process of the whole; an Achan may bring all Israel to a standstill and defeat. "Make a candlestick"—deal with it! This is your matter, it is my matter. The light of the eternal holiness of God is a tremendous power. I, that evil coming in should feel it cannot hide this, it has to do something about it! I, that people who are wrong should feel, if I am going to stay here, I must put things right; things revealed as needing to be dealt with, not because of something said, but because of the presence of the Lord in holiness. Holiness is a tremendous power. There is to be the light of that holiness present, making itself

The Light of the Strong Love of God

Then it is the light of the strong love of God. Another thing said about this Son of man in the midst of the candlesticks is that He girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. Symbolism again; a girdle speaks of strength, strength unto action; the breasts, the affections, the seat of love. Girt with a mighty strength Divine love in the midst of the candlesticks. The candlestick, the testimony, is to be this—oh—the impact of this light, the strength of Divine love. Oh, here we must all confess our failure, and go down before the Lord. We have so much truth, so much teaching, so much knowledge, so much spiritual information, but what do people meet in the matter of the impact of love? This strong love of God is one of the things that Satan really cannot get over. Do you not feel you need a new position over that? Have you not had any exercise about love? What is the use of going on?—that is the point to which we come—what is the use of going on keeping a candlestick? We have no room for ornamental candlesticks. It is the action that justifies the candlestick, and its justification is here—the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in terms of the strong love of God, the girding with Divine love.

Listen! "Make a candlestick." There is nothing we have to do about this. We have been waiting for a flooding of love, something to happen to us in this matter, waiting for it to come to us. We have been asking the Lord to give us with love. Quite rightly so; but there is another side. Make it! Do something about it.

We have a part in this matter of the strong love of God. It will all be a mighty battle—God only knows what a battle!—because of the importance and value of such a testimony, of the terrific effect that it will have in the king-

dom of darkness, the kingdom of hatred. All this work of suspicion and criticism and doubting, all that many-sided work of the hatred of Satan from what we will call its simple forms (if there are such things as simple forms of hatred) between Christians, out to that awful thing we are finding in the world to-day, Satan's work of universal and terrible hatred—the only counter to it all is the strong love of God. Think about that. We have to do something about it, we have to make the candlestick. We can only make it by Divine grace, but we will make it when we think on these things, we will make it when we face these matters, when we deal with our own hearts before the Lord.

The Light of the Power of Divine Righteousness

Then it is the light of the power of Divine righteousness. Another thing said about the Son of man in the midst of the candlesticks is that His feet were "like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace." Brass is always a symbol of strength, but it is also the symbol of righteousness; and, seeing that it is His feet that are as burnished brass, this speaks of His goings, His ways, His steps, in righteousness, absolute righteousness. It speaks of our activities, the righteous acts of the saints, our ways. As I see it in the Scripture, righteousness is that which always stands over against the dark works of Satan. Unrighteousness, iniquity, in the Word of God is that which at any point, in any way, in any degree, has a complicity with Satan. Satan's one inclusive object is to take from God what are His rights, and that is unrighteousness in its root and nature—taking another's rights away. And while the taking away of rights will and does work out between man and man, creature and creature, behind it all God's rights are involved. When you rob your brother of his rights, you rob God. So that righteousness is the opposite of every work of Satan to deprive God of what He ought to have. Very often we have to sacrifice, to let go what we call our rights, in order that the Lord should be honoured. So often, when we stand on our rights, it is *our* honour and *our* vindication, not the Lord's, that actuates us. Sometimes it does amount to this—that we have to let go what we believe to be, and what may quite rightly be, our rights; to allow the Lord to be glorified, to give the Lord an opportunity.

If we track this matter of unrighteousness to its very core, we find it is self in the place of the Lord. Think that out. Look at any

work or act of unrighteousness, track it to its source, and you find it is self every time. Robbery, withholding, misrepresentation—there is a self motive behind it. And here is this Son of man, Who has now come back from the Cross; He Who has been dead is alive; He is in the midst of the candlesticks; and He is the embodiment of that utter selflessness which is utter righteousness, which means that God has everything, that is, all His rights; there is no question at any point, no debate with the Lord, the Lord must have all, whatever it costs. It cost the Son of man everything in order that God should have His rights. He says in effect to these churches, "Look at My feet!" There is the impact of an utter selflessness which is the impact of not only an utterness *for* God but an utterness *of* God. "Make a candlestick of pure gold."

Has this seemed a hard word? I feel, as I said at the beginning, that the Lord has

brought us back together at this time to come to a new position, and it is of this kind. For my own part, I tell you I am taking this to heart. But we say to one another together—what matters it that we have meetings, larger or smaller, and go on with our teaching, with our magazine with a candlestick of gold printed on it? None of these things matters at all. I say, let them go, the Lord save us from them, unless, as the fruit of all and as the source of all, there is this light which is an impact—without any inconsistency, without contradictions, without a lie—so that our teaching is not in the first place heard but seen. If there is to be a coming and an enquiring, it is because something is seen. "I turned to see the voice." People are hearing things, and they are turning to see. What do they see? A light, not a teaching? A light with an impact? May the Lord make it so.

T.A.S.

Suffering and Glory

Reading: Heb. xi. 32-40; II Cor. xi. 23-33; Col. i. 24; II Tim. ii. 3.

IT is a remarkable combination which we find in those first people of God—the combination of suffering and joy. It is not easy for us to put ourselves into the atmosphere and conditions in Jerusalem in those first days, but there is no doubt about it that it was a perilous time. The crucifying of the Lord Jesus had by no means satiated the lust of His enemies. We know quite well from the story of Saul a little later that everyone who was of "the Way" was an object of that blood lust, and there was a mighty hostility raging in the hearts of those enemies of Christ. We know that His followers had to meet sometimes behind closed and barred doors. And yet we find that the word 'praise' abounded in their midst. "With gladness and singleness of heart, praising God" (Acts ii. 46-47) is the phrase. Yes, even when they had been haled before the magistrates, threatened and made to understand very clearly what the consequences would be for them if they persisted in their course, they rejoiced, it says, "that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name" (Acts v. 41); a great mingling of joy with suffering.

The night in which the Lord was betrayed was a night of solemnity and heaviness, and there were deep shadows in that upper room; yet there was One Who could take the cup, knowing all that the cup meant, and give thanks, and, as a last thing before they went

out, suggest that they should sing a hymn; and they sang it, it says. I do not know what they were feeling about it, but they sang a hymn. So you pass through the New Testament and you come on such wonderful passages as those we have just read. Here is Paul recounting his sufferings, most of which we know nothing about so far as a detailed record is concerned—a long list of intense sufferings; but making it clear that he gloried, rejoiced, in his sufferings. And that eleventh chapter of Hebrews, too, does not conclude with a dirge, but in triumph; and you cannot fail to feel as you read through verse after verse that here is strength, here is triumph, here is ascendancy, there is nothing mournful here.

What does all this say to us? It is all gathered into the Table of the Lord. To His disciples He said, "Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? They say unto him, We are able. He saith unto them, My cup indeed ye shall drink" (Matt. xx. 22-23); and that for them was the cup of passion, the cup of suffering. It was the filling up of that which was lacking in the sufferings of Christ, given to His Church (Col. i. 24); and suffering it was. They were drinking the cup even unto death.

But take up whichever you like of those men. If there was one man in all the circle who ought never to have sung or rejoiced again, never to have gone about the world with his head lifted up again, who ought to have had the most melancholy voice and look, always trying to

people know what a miserable mess he had made of things, it was Peter. But listen to Peter—" *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* " (I. Pet. i. 3). (The word 'blessed' there is the word which means 'praised'.) "*Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy* (Peter knew what he was talking about) *begat us again* (unto the most awful despair? No!) *unto a lively hope* (not "a living hope"; the word is much more emphatic than that. You can be living without being lively. There are quite a lot of people who are living, but are not a bit lively)—"*unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" There is something of tremendous hopefulness and optimism in that, and it was the same with the other Apostles.

Accepting the Fellowship of His Sufferings

Now, what is the point again? Well, first of all, we must face the fact and we must seek help from God always to bear in mind that we are going to have a path of suffering if we are in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. That is one thing. Perhaps it is because we have not at the outset calculated with that that we have such a long-drawn-out period of joylessness and defeat. There has to come a point when we sit down and do some calculating and come to a finite conclusion on this matter—that, although very often we may not be able to see that our suffering is because of our relationship with Him (the sufferings are so manifold and diverse, and very often they look as though they have no relationship at all with our Christian life) at the same time, whether we can discern it or not, the fact remains that the pathway of the child of God, of the fellow of Jesus Christ, is the pathway of suffering. I know that postponement or delay in settling that matter keeps us all the time in that state of going and waiting for it to be different, and because the difference does not come, getting downcast and feeling that all is wrong and that the Lord is against us and all that sort of thing, thus giving all the ground that the devil wants for destroying our testimony. The very first thing to remember when we take the cup is that while we are taking it as the cup of salvation, while we are remembering the redemption which is in the Blood, and all the wonderful redemption which is ours because of the Blood, the cup does also speak to us of fellowship with His sufferings. It is *His* cup, and as it fills up that which is lacking—the remainder—of the afflictions of Christ for His Church's sake which is the Church. We are not able to see the values of that in ourselves—we

are kept far too occupied with the cost, the suffering and the trial—but oh, some looking on are able to see a marvellous spiritual growth, a wonderful refinement of spirit, the beautifying of the life. Yes, there is something which is going up to His praise and glory as Christ is being formed through the fires of adversity and suffering. It is fellowship with Him in His sufferings, after all, if it is bringing about more Christlikeness. So our first thing is to reckon with this and get it settled.

What are you expecting, what are you waiting for, what are you concerned about, what are you pleading and praying for? If you are praying for full and final deliverance from adversity and suffering and difficulty and all that sort of thing, let me tell you your prayer will never be answered. Forms of suffering may change, but in some form or another we are going on to the end in a way of adversity. Satan is not going to become our friend while we are friends of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of Satan is not going to rally to our support while we belong to the kingdom which is opposed to his. Let us settle that. It will get us free, perhaps, from this entanglement.

Deliverance Without Deliverance

And the next thing is that there is deliverance while there is no deliverance. There is a passage of Scripture which probably has often puzzled you. It seems to be something that recoils upon itself and says that it is not true. "*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it*" (I Cor. x. 13). What do you make of that—'escape by enduring it'? That is not getting away from it, that is getting on top of it. Paul pleaded about that thorn in his flesh, that it might be removed; thrice he sought the Lord concerning this thing, but the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness." And Paul's reaction was—"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. xii. 8-10). Paul was not delivered from that "messenger of Satan." That is the bald way of describing his trial. It may be taken to cover your particular trial—that difficult person with whom you have to live, or whatever else it may be. Let us come right to the point, and say, 'It is something that the devil wants to use for my undoing, for the ruination of my testimony, and the Lord has definitely and deliberately permitted that.' Paul was not delivered from

that stake in the flesh, that messenger of Satan that constantly buffeted him; and yet he *was* delivered! "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses"; like that old warrior in the Old Testament, who said, "Give me this mountain" (Joshua xiv. 12); "do not remove this mountain, do not get it out of the way; give it to me, give me a chance to master it, to bring it under, to gain ascendancy!"

Now, this is no easy, glib talk. It is the outcome of a good deal of personal exercise. God knows how we have cried and sought for deliverances which have not come. Forgive this personal word to back home what I have been saying. During this past week or two I have been praying very much about that thorn in the flesh, that messenger of Satan, and I did not see the Lord answering in any way at all. And during the same time I have been reading some books. I have been reading again the life of Wesley, and of Whitfield, and the story of the Scottish Covenanters; and then I found myself reading II Cor. xi; and suddenly pieced the whole thing together. Oh, those terrible sufferings of John Wesley! Up and down the country, often laid prostrate with physical weakness and suffering; in every town persecuted, mocked, stoned, or dragged by the hair; what a time that man had! And his brother Charles shared it. The Scottish Covenanters—why, one is made to blush with shame in reading the awful sufferings, the martyrdoms, the tortures of those people; hunted, without food, without homes, having to live on the open hillside, in caves, anywhere. And here is Paul giving us his list. Oh, should we all the time be stipulating that our lot ought to be very much easier? And yet they triumphed. What triumph was Wesley's! We sing, 'Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise.' Do you know that Wesley did not mean what we usually think he meant when he wrote those words? We think he meant, 'Oh, what I had a thousand tongues!' He and his brother had been into a town for some meetings. Only a few people came and they poured out their hearts to the Lord. Then they went out and saw a great mob in the street, coming from a sports event, and John Wesley said to his brother, 'Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise.' It is the same thing in effect. 'Oh, for thousands of tongues

that are out there to sing my great Redeemer's praise!' Those were their sentiments. That is triumph!

The Lord's Table is a blending of joy with suffering, but I do not believe that the Lord is going to make any changes in our circumstances until we have got on top of them. Whatever change of situation and conditions may be in His will, actual deliverance will wait until we are delivered in this inward way from our spirit of stipulating that we cannot go on unless the Lord provides better conditions for us. Such a spirit is a denial of grace, that is, a denial of His sufficiency. "My grace is sufficient for thee . . . Most gladly therefore.

No, the way out is up; the way of victory is over, not from. So before ever anything changes, we have somehow got to find the grace that will result in our being filled with joy. Sometimes, with Peter, we are "put to grief in manifold trials"; sometimes, with Paul, we are "smitten down"; but if we will give the grace of God a chance there is the old joy back again! Give it a chance! It is there, it is not quenched, it is not dead. The point is, what is the normal? Is the normal—misery, depression, melancholy? or do these mark us only for the time being, sometimes? Is the normal—joy, hopefulness, optimism? Some people, I am afraid, have the idea that they are going to give something away if they smile. It will not do. There must be about us, after all, something bubbling up which is not just ourselves. It is the Lord.

So we come to the Lord's Table. As we take the cup, we shall, on the one side, have that reckoning—"I know what this means: the fellowship of His sufferings: to take my share of hardness with the apostles and the prophets; by the grace of God, I take the cup." But there is also the other side—rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer for His name and realising that through His Blood there is the begetting again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

May we have grace to seek the Lord with this resolve, that by His grace we are not going to capitulate but to triumph, even in the time of trial and suffering, and find our deliverance in that way. "God . . . will make . . . the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it."

T. A-S.

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For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XVIII)

"No longer I, but Christ . . ." (Gal. ii. 20).

"Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. ii. 12).

"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (Isaiah vii. 9).

IN our last story we were speaking of the Beardmore glacier that had to be climbed on the way to the South Pole. When Shackleton made the journey he was very fortunate in his respect, that the surface of the glacier was practically free of snow, and he had good solid ice under his feet which gave him a firm foothold and helped him very much in climbing. But when Capt. Scott made the journey conditions were very different. For several days before he started up the glacier, snow had been falling heavily, and when he set out everything was covered by a deep layer of soft, powdery snow into which the men sank at least up to their knees every step they took. This made progress very difficult, and much more so because the men were pulling behind them heavily-laden sledges. (For part of the journey the load to be pulled by each team of four men was equal to nearly a third of a ton.) It would have been hard enough pulling such a load uphill without any added complications; but the sledges, being so heavy, sank in the soft snow; and this at times made it almost impossible to move them. At the very outset, on one particular rise it took six hours of the hardest pulling to travel one mile. On another occasion we read, 'After five hours' work we were about half a mile forward.' And this kind of thing continued for several days. The greatest difficulty was in starting: The sledge would be lying sunk deep in the snow, and to get it on the move at all was a desperate business. We read, 'The starting was worse than pulling, as it required from ten to fifteen desperate jerks to move the sledge at all.' And then, when it was moving—'so heavy were our weights that if any of us slackened a hand even, the sledge stopped'; and then, of course, it sank into the snow again and had to be restarted. 'It was all we could do,' wrote one man, 'to keep the sledge moving for short spells of a few hundred yards . . . On one occasion we stuck ten yards from the camp, and nine hours later found us little more than half a mile on. I have never seen a sledge sink so. I have never pulled so hard . . .'

Your imagination will help you to understand

the difficulties of such a journey, and you will probably not be attracted to embark on one like it. But be quite sure that you are not making a spiritual journey like it without being aware of the fact!

You will recall that in our last talk together we were speaking of the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we said that all that He is and has done, God puts to the account of every one who believes in Him; and also, that the secret of a life of spiritual triumph is that we count on Christ and His victory and not upon anything of ourselves. That means that we have finished with *ourselves* and all that *we* are, and are now living as those who have a new life and a new nature and are on new ground altogether—even Jesus Christ Himself.

Now this matter of counting continually upon Christ and not upon ourselves is of tremendous importance, and is not nearly so easy as you might suppose. Our two explorers, Shackleton and Scott, illustrate for us the two ways that can be followed. Look at Shackleton climbing the glacier. He has something firm under his feet—something that will not give way. There are plenty of dangers and difficulties to be avoided or overcome: there are crevasses everywhere, but they are not hidden by snow and he can see them and therefore avoid them. He has a firm foothold for every step he takes, and it is as if he were saying every time he put his foot down, 'I am standing on what Jesus Christ is and on what He has done.' Nothing can ever alter that, and on that firm ground he can go forward confidently and steadily. That is the example for us to follow. But now look at Scott, floundering about in the soft, clinging snow. He cannot get a foothold anywhere; there is nothing firm beneath his feet. Wherever he treads he sinks in, and when he manages to get a leg clear and advances one step he plunges his leg into the snow again and has to do the work all over again. He is all the time spending his strength on getting clear of something which is not really a part of his climb up the glacier—something that is fighting against him, that clings around him and smothers him, and that piles up in front of his sledge when he moves forward as if to say, 'You shall not go on if I can hinder you,' and that swallows up the sledge the moment he stops moving. Scott would seem to

say, 'If only I could get rid of this snow I could tackle the problem of the glacier; the snow is my chief enemy and hinders me from getting at my real task.' And the snow had this further evil feature, that it covered over the crevasses, so that they could not always be seen and therefore could not be avoided.

I think Scott suggests to us a man who, instead of being on the firm, unmovable ground of what Christ is, is still living on the ground of what he is in himself—and he is finding himself to be a very great problem. He knows he is not the kind of man he ought to be, and he wants to be better. So he worries about himself; he groans about his faults and failings; he condemns himself for being such a sinner (and Satan gives him plenty of help in doing so!); he *feels* so unworthy; he *feels* it is impossible that God can put the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the account of such a man as *he* is; he *feels* this and he *feels* that, until he *feels* so badly about himself that he comes to the conclusion that there is nothing more to be said, and either he must give up in despair—his sledge, so to speak, coming to a dead stop and sinking down into the snow: or else he must struggle along, trying to improve himself—and he will find that is a very disheartening and hopeless business. He is on the wrong ground altogether! He has forgotten all about what he is *in Christ*, and what Christ is for him! Christ has not changed, nor has the work of His Cross lost its value, however bad the poor man may feel himself to be! If only the poor struggler would be occupied with Christ instead of with himself he would find that the snow had suddenly disappeared and that there was something firm under his feet.

The apostle Paul had exactly that experience. He tells us in Romans vii of a time in his life when he was floundering about in the 'snow,' trying to make himself a better man, and this is the conclusion to which he came: "I know that in me . . . dwelleth no good thing . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (vii. 18, 24). He found the 'snow' thick and clinging and the task of dragging his 'sledge' along was more than he could manage. But he learned the secret of deliverance, and in answer to his own question, "Who shall deliver me?" he cried triumphantly, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord . . . There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death" (vii. 25; viii. 1, 2). What he meant was this: 'As soon as I ceased being concerned about

myself and took my stand by faith on the ground of what Christ is for me, I was free; I was out of the thick "snow"; I had solid ground under my feet; I could go on.'

Now it is altogether right that we should wish to be the very best that we can be. Nothing that I am saying is intended to weaken your desire in that direction. But the whole question is, how can we become what we should be? We shall never get there by trying to alter ourselves—by looking at ourselves, as it were, and saying, 'I am not this; I am not that; I must try to do this; I must try not to do that.' 'I,' 'I'! You will stick fast in the thick snow and never move forward a yard if you keep thinking about 'I'! That is the wrong ground to be on. Get off, on to the ground of what Christ is, and you will begin at once to find things are altogether different. Christ is everything good that you are not, and *in Him you already are all that you should be*—as perfect as He is! So cease groaning about yourself and your failures, and begin to rejoice in what Christ Jesus is for you, and by faith claim it all as yours. You will discover to your delight that what He is begins to be expressed in your life; the evil that you hated in yourself will disappear and the good that you longed for but could not find in yourself will begin to be found in you—not because you have suddenly become better in yourself, but because Christ has begun to express Himself through you. This is the way to a life of true holiness—not struggling with yourself, but claiming by faith what Christ is for you. That is the sure ground on which you will find a firm foothold. Progress up the glacier will be swift and sure then.

'The great thing is to keep the sledge moving,' wrote Capt. Scott. 'There were dozens of critical moments when it all but stopped, and not a few when it stopped altogether. The latter were very trying and tiring.' I have already said that it is not as easy as you might suppose to do what I have been saying. What you are, and your own feelings, seem so very real, and what Christ is seems so unreal. To turn away from yourself to Christ often involves a real fight of faith, and calls for determination and strength of will. To say, "No longer I, but Christ" sometimes means that we have to take ourselves in hand very vigorously and refuse to go on any longer in the way we have been going. But that fight must be fought. We *must* keep our 'sledge' moving in faith, however hard it is to do so. Once we come to a halt and are wholly taken up with our own feelings and

doubts and fears it is terribly hard work to make a new start. "Fight the good fight of the faith," for "if ye will not believe, neither shall ye be established"; you will find your 'sledge' will sink into the 'snow' so deeply that all your efforts will scarcely move it, and you *may* find yourself like the children of Israel who *would* not believe God and who remained and died in the wilderness. "They were not able to enter in (to all the rich inheritance that God had prepared for them) because of unbelief" (Heb. iii. 19). They stuck fast in the 'snow.' Be sure that you do not! You will not, if you live by faith in what Christ is for you.

One final word. When you are enjoying the glorious liberty of life in Christ, beware of the crevasses of pride that lie across your path, lest you fall into them. There is always the danger of thinking some of the credit for your

progress is due to yourself, when really it is all due to Christ. The moment you say 'I did it' you are on the ground of self once more—and pride always goes before a fall. Be sure that you are one of those who "glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. iii. 3).

Now you will easily see, I think, that the boy or girl who knows best how to deny 'self' and to glory in Christ will be the first to reach the 'South Pole.'

"Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night,
Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!
Into Thy freedom, gladness, and light,
Jesus, I come to Thee!
Out of my sickness into Thy health,
Out of my want and into Thy wealth,
Out of my sin and into Thyself,
Jesus, I come to Thee."

G. P.

A Way of Growth

IV. Living "In the Heavens"

Reading: Eph. i. 3, 20; ii. 6; iii. 10; vi. 12; 6, 9-10; iii. 11, 21.

IN meditating on the subject of spiritual enlargement as seen in Paul's epistles, when we pass into this letter to the Ephesians we come into an entirely new realm. It is like passing from one world into another. In 'Corinthians' we find everything earthbound in a carnal and soulish way, and all the features which we find there are due to an earthliness of Christian life. In 'Galatians' we still find things earthbound, but this time in a religious way. When we pass into 'Ephesians,' the earthly ties are severed. The one governing word is "the heavens." It is a new realm with a new time factor. We have passed out of the earthlies into the heavens, and out of time into eternity. We want to understand as far as we can what that means.

The Limiting Effect of Things 'On the Earth'

We can, of course, conclude at once that if our horizons are pressed back so far and if that is our realm, it must surely mean spiritual enlargement. But how? If we want to interpret this word 'heavens' in a practical way, we find the key in verse 3 of the first chapter of the letter—"... hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ." This means that now, in this realm of the believer's life, spiritual values are pre-eminent. That is easily seen by a comparison with the two letters preceding. In 'Corinthians'

spiritual values were not really pre-eminent. Personal interests governed there. Everything was judged from the standpoint of the advantage to the people concerned and of its effect upon them here in this life on the earth. Even spiritual things were pulled down, spiritual gifts were dragged into the realm of display with a view to making something of the people themselves.

In the Galatian letter the same thing is true, but from the standpoint of religion. All is brought down to earth. The Apostle put his finger upon the heart of the matter when he said of the Judaizers who were capturing the Galatian believers that they wanted to glory in their flesh (Gal. vi. 13); that is, that they might be able to count heads and say, 'See how many converts we have! See how successful our movement is, how many people are joining us!' And he sets that over against the offence of the Cross. The offence of the Cross is that there is nothing to glory in in the flesh. All the glorying in the flesh, even in a religious way, is removed by the Cross. There is an earthliness even of religious life that wants to make of Christianity something here, seen and sentient. It is earthliness in another form. It is an earthly 'Church.'

Only Spiritual Value Counts with God

So here, when we come into the 'Ephesian' position, we are at once introduced to the pre-eminence of spiritual values. That is what 'in

the 'heavenlies' means—how things are viewed from above; not what they look like and seem to be from the earthly standpoint, not how we weigh and measure them down here on this earth, but how they stand from heaven's viewpoint, how the ascended Lord looks at them. That is what governs all the way through this letter, at every point—spiritual value; not numbers, not what men call success, not all these things which are of such importance to people here, but just that which weighs with God; and that is spiritual value.

"Hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing," or, more properly and literally, "every blessing of the Spirit." We saw how Paul sought, with both the Corinthians and the Galatians, to get them away to the place where the Spirit was the great, dominant reality. Now here that realm is brought fully into view, where the spiritual matters more than anything else. So if we want spiritual enlargement, if we are really coming to that greater fulness, we shall have to forsake these earthly standards and judgments and interests, and get to the place where, after all, nothing matters but spiritual value. How far is a thing of value in the Lord's sight? We may take it as settled that only spiritual value counts with God.

Knowledge of Christ in Heaven the Measure of Spiritual Value

Christ is in heaven. We must know Him now only in a spiritual way, and no longer after the flesh. We do not know Him as men know one another on the earth. He truly said, "The world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me" (John xiv. 19). For the moment, that raised a problem for His disciples: they could not understand Him: They said "What is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" They came afterward to understand that perfectly well. Christ can be known truly now only in a spiritual way; He is in heaven. So here again the great phrase is "in the heavenlies in Christ"; that is, the great spiritual values are Christ known in a spiritual way. Enlargement is a matter of knowing Christ. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32). Paul tried to make the Galatians see that. His epistles are full of the name 'Christ'—the Galatian epistle as much as any.

Earthly Features Must Not Govern

Now, the letter to the Ephesians begins—not only ends—with that: ". . . every blessing of the Spirit in the heavenlies in Christ." That

is, knowing Christ in a spiritual way is the way of spiritual enlargement; there is no other way in which we can truly know Him. So in 'Ephesians' we find this idea of the spiritual. 'The Spirit' and 'spiritual' occur frequently in this letter. The earth touch, we have said, is severed. That earth touch seen in the Corinthian letter meant divisions—"I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Peter": parties, circles, sects, dividing the Body. That is the earthly aspect and the earth touch, and we always come into the realm of divisions if we touch one another on the earth level. In 'Corinthians' and in 'Galatians' it is—Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female (Gal. iii. 28). That is the earth touch, the divisions of the earthly life. But "in the heavenlies" there is no earth touch, and that results in there being no earth man. Here in 'Ephesians' we come into touch with the heavenly man, Christ, and then with the "one new man." Here there is neither Jew nor Greek: it is not Jew and Greek brought together in fellowship; here there are not bond and free; here there is nothing of those divisions at all, but one new man in Christ. "He . . . made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition . . . that he might create in himself of the two one new man" (Eph. ii. 14). So that spirituality and heavenliness mean that we meet all believers solely on the ground of Christ. We do not meet them for what they are in themselves, nor on the ground of what their connections are religiously—whether they belong to this or that, or do not belong to this or that. Those things do not come into consideration at all. We meet them on the ground of Christ, and the measure of our practical unity will be the measure of Christ. We go as far as we can with the spiritual measure of everyone; we make that the thing that governs.

Now, if we are to deepen and increase in fellowship we must grow in spiritual measure. Spiritual enlargement will result in the fuller expression of fellowship. That is the teaching of this letter.

Spiritual enlargement, then, is a matter of getting away from the old-man-level, 'the earthlies' in the Corinthian sense—and even religiously, in the Galatian sense—to 'the heavenlies,' in this sense, that Christ known in a spiritual way is the ground upon which we live. Other things do not govern at all; it is the Lord Himself and the things that are spiritual which predominate with us. That is heavenly ground. When we get there, we are introduced to the realm of very considerable

spiritual enlargement. There is so much more, of course, in this letter, but that is just a beginning.

Only Spiritual Values to Concern Us

Well now, what weighs with me most? Where am I living? Is it on this wretched, earthly ground of people and things down here, or is it on the ground of Christ? Is it spiritual life and spiritual values that matter? If we can get up there and say truly, 'It does not matter one little bit to me how a thing affects me personally; the question is—how much of the Lord is there in this? How much can there be for Him?' I am not influenced by people's relationships down here; I take the higher ground of the heavenlies and meet them, not as this, that or something else according to earthly designation, but I meet them on the ground of Christ, the one new man.' On that level there is nothing to impede spiritual enlargement. Spiritual measure is not a matter of anything here, even for the Lord—its success, its support, its maintenance—but just how much it is answering to the full thought of God in a spiritual way. That is what counts, and that is heavenly ground. We know so

well that if people are more concerned with the maintenance of something for the Lord on this earth—keeping it going, building it up, making it successful—they are in a realm of spiritual limitation, and not until they are completely lifted out of such considerations with the one question—How far is this answering to the Lord's fully-revealed mind?—and are governed by that alone, can there be real progress and spiritual enlargement. Is it not true? And it is impressive that people who are really tied up, with some thing—some organization, some piece of work, some society, some mission, some institution—even though it be for God in all sincerity—if that is their horizon, if that constitutes their world, they are limited spiritually. They go just so far spiritually and no farther. They are bound by their own earthly fences, the fences of that particular thing. Get away from things, out to the vast range of God's eternal, timeless purpose, and you find all fences are down and spiritual enlargement takes place. It is the only way.

So we come back. What is the Lord after?—not just good things for Himself, however good; He is after nothing less than that great summing up of all things in Christ (Eph. i. 10).

T. A-S.

David's Last Words

"Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse saith, and the man who was raised on high saith, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: he Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was upon my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me: One that ruleth over men righteously, that ruleth in the fear of God, he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springeth out of the earth, through clear shining after rain. Verily my house is not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for I am all my salvation, and all my desire, although he maketh it not to grow" (II Sam. xiii. 1-5).

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. xvi. 7).

"Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be

ashamed" (II Tim. ii. 15).

IN the fragment we have read from the second book of Samuel—the last words of David—we have a clue or an explanation. When we read the unvarnished story of the life of the great servants of God in the Bible, and note how so many of them failed, how they broke down and were guilty of things which are to be very greatly deplored—in the case of David, for instance—the question arises: If God knew the whole course, the end from the beginning, foresaw what would happen, foresaw the sin that David would commit, why did God choose him? Why was he allowed to come into such great responsibility where God's own name and honour were involved? Ought not the Lord either to have chosen people who would never do that sort of thing, or entirely safeguard His interests from the weaknesses of His servants and prevent them from making those terrible mistakes? Some such question often arises when you see how much the Lord made of these men, what great things He said about them, and what responsibilities He allowed to fall into their hands. Yet nothing about such men is covered up. It is all exposed to full

view.

David's Reliance on Another

I think the clue or the answer is found here in II Sam. xxiii. It does not lie just on the surface. You have to look again and find the help which is in the marginal chain for some of the things in the text; and this is what it amounts to—David has seen Someone, he has seen a glorious One. You will see, as you read with the help of the margin, that David is not talking about himself when he speaks of One Who will rule in righteousness, One Who answers to this beautiful description which he gives. He says, "My house is not so; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." He has seen another One, and it is concerning that One that the covenant has been made with David. "I will set up thy seed after thee, that shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom" (II Sam. vii. 12).

The effect of this is to assure David that God has chosen him on two grounds—or a ground with two sides. As to the first, his language is, in effect, this: 'God has provided Himself with the supply of all my defects in Another; He has provided Himself with a covering for all my sins in Another; He is putting to my faulty account all the perfections and glories of that Other; He has made a covenant with me in blood concerning that Other. My house is not like that; I am a very faulty man; but God has the One Who satisfies Him on my behalf.' There is no doubt about it that in his last words David was lifting up his eyes from his own failure, his own coming short, his own weakness, yes, his own grievous sins, and at the end of his life he is saying with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job xix. 25). 'I see the One Who will complete my life and "perfect that which concerneth me" (Psa. cxxxviii. 8), and make good on my behalf where I have failed.'

A Positive Heart Relationship with the Lord

But there is the other side to that, which is found in those words which we read—"the Lord looketh on the heart." There also is a clue. Those words were not spoken actually of David, but their setting warrants us in taking them as directly applicable to him, and they mean that David was not just taking this attitude—'Well, I am a very imperfect, sinful man, but the Lord knows my heart, He knows that I am well-meaning, He knows that I have never really meant to do wrong; I was over-taken, I slipped up, but really I am not an evil-meaning man at heart, I mean well.' No, that

was not it, and that is not it with God. That is not good enough. This looking on the heart by God is never negative. There are many people who take that position, thinking to cover up a lot. But it was not like that with David. It was a positive heart relationship with the Lord Himself on the part of David which provided the ground for the Lord to make good all that was in Christ to this faulty man.

Concern for the Lord's Interests

You can see it in several respects. First of all, note that one of the very first things that sprang out of or followed that statement of the Lord was the incident with Goliath. David arrived on the scene not under commission, not having had this matter put to him; he just came up, it would seem casually, on an errand; and while there, he saw this giant come out from the ranks of the Philistines and vaunt himself and challenge Israel. As David saw and heard him his heart boiled. Oh, it was not just a young man wanting a fight, presumptuously wanting to take something on. His language afterwards as he accepted the challenge was, 'You have defied the Lord; it is the Lord and His interests that you are vaunting yourself against; and therefore I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, I take up the Lord's interests.' It was positive jealousy for God that was in the heart of David, that made him boil when he found something that was reaching out and laying a hand upon what was precious to the Lord. The Lord knew that heart of David, that it was jealous for His interests. It was positive; and when the Lord finds a heart like that, that is inwardly moved for His glory whenever it finds His interests challenged, then there may be weaknesses in the life—blunders, mistakes, tragedies—but the Lord looks on that heart and says, 'Yes, but that heart is not passive, negative, toward Me; that heart is really positive toward Me, set on My interests, jealous for My Name and My glory; and I can come alongside of that and make good, in view of what I have in My Son, the defects and the weaknesses.'

That, I think, is very true in principle in the Word of God. We cannot fail to see in the apostle Paul another one like this. It is all wrong to think of such men as infallible. Paul made mistakes, but the sovereign grace of God is marvellously displayed in them. Why? Because here is a man whose heart is on fire for the interests of the Lord at any cost. When the Lord gets that kind of heart He accepts the weak, faulty vessels, and supplies their wants in Jesus Christ and His perfections.

A Gift Developed for the Glory of God

You notice another thing about David which sprang out of his secret life—the developing of gifts for the glory of God. Notice that little fragment in his last words—“David . . . the sweet psalmist of Israel.” Away there in the fields, minding his father’s sheep, hidden from public view, living his secret life with God, he was learning to play, developing a musical gift for the Lord; and you find that came into very great use and service for the Lord later on. It was said of him that he was skilful in playing (I Sam. xvi. 18). He taught himself alone in the field to play, and it came in as a mighty force—at times against evil spirits, but supremely in the psalms. “The sweet psalmist of Israel.” What should we do if the psalms were cut out of the Bible and taken from us? How the saints in all the ages have found help from those psalms which David sang! He became not only a great solo musician, he became also a great organizer and leader of choirs and bands. It was he who instituted the twenty-four courses of the singers so that the whole round of the twenty-four hour day should have no hour in it without praises to God.

David’s heart led him to develop whatever gifts he had or could have *unto the Lord*. He did not have mixture in his music; it was all unto the Lord. Oh, the variety of strains! You find everything here in his psalms, from the depth to the height, but you find nothing evil; all is unto the Lord. That in itself should be a word to us. The heart upon which the Lord is looking, to which He can bring so much more that is of His Son, is the heart that is so toward Him that spontaneously, without having to be provoked and urged and persuaded, and out there alone in the wilderness, with none of the incentive of publicity or the inspiration of an audience, it will develop its gift unto the Lord, so that later, in the midst

of the Lord’s people, that gift just breaks out into full volume. A secret devotion to the Lord finds expression along that particular line. Have you some line that you can develop for the Lord? Have you some gift that can come under your heart’s devotion to the Lord and be made to serve Him? Or have you a lot of fallow ground, latent possibilities, that you are not developing for the Lord? Just look round. “The Lord looketh on the heart.”

A Passion for the Lord’s House

Then, again, David had a secret in his heart. When it came there we do not know, but it was evidently of long duration, and was one dominating, all-consuming passion. It breaks out from time to time in his phraseology, as anything that is deeply in the heart is bound to do. This is always coming out with David. What was it? The all-absorbing ambition, the vision, the passion, was—the house of the Lord. On one occasion he said, “I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids; until I find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the Mighty One of Jacob” (Psa. cxxxii. 3-5). Then, when he had found it and had got the pattern and had prepared the materials for its construction, he divulged something. He said, “Seeing that I have a treasure of mine own of gold and silver, I give it unto the house of my God . . .” (I. Chron. xxix. 3). See his master passion for the house of the Lord! The Lord had looked into that heart and seen this; and when He finds a heart like that, He has ground on which He can work. Are you conscious of faults, weaknesses, failures? Do not be discouraged, do not give up, do not think you are no good. The Lord has a place for you if your heart is like David’s. There is all the margin of what the Lord Jesus is to set over against your weaknesses and failures.

T.A.-S.

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The Peril of Divided Loyalties

Reading: I Sam. xxxi. 1-13; II Sam. i. 17-27.

IT is around Jonathan that our thoughts are gathered at this time. His is a strange and very pathetic story and raises a matter which is perhaps more difficult to resolve than most—the whole question of divided loyalties.

We take a cursory glance at Jonathan and his father Saul, and we see a good many variations in their histories; strange mixture, many conflicting and contradictory features. Sometimes both of them seem to be in the full flood of Divine blessing and help. At one time you find Saul moving out and subduing all his enemies round about, seeming to be in a tide of spiritual life and power and help from the Lord, and then at another time you see situations such as the one we have just read, with everything in reverse—defeat, failure, tragedy. So also with Jonathan. There was at least one outstanding occasion when with his armour-bearer he went out and made that great assault upon the Philistines, issuing in the complete demoralization of the Philistines so that they fled before Israel. Clearly the Lord was with Jonathan on that day in great fulness and blessing. Then you come to the story we have just read—complete reverse. Taking such an inconsistent and contradictory history, you have to get down into it and behind it and ask some basic questions.

The Lord Not Prejudiced Against People As Such

But we must first of all look at it from the Lord's side; and what I see as coming up out of this whole story in the first place is this, that the Lord has no prejudices against people as such. When a man is, even if only temporarily, stretched out for the Lord's interests and abandoned to His honour and glory, although the Lord knows a great deal more about him as to origins or as to ultimates and knows perhaps the failure that is coming later, yet for that time the Lord shows that He is not prejudiced against the man. He is with him while and when he is utterly for the Lord. There were times when even Saul surmounted that other side of his nature and seemed to be set upon the Lord's interests, and it is quite clear that Jonathan was like that. The Lord knew what the end would be and what was deeper down in the heart, but for that time He showed that He was not prejudiced against the individuals. It is a tremendous thing for us to

realize, that "the Lord is with you while ye be with him" (II Chron. xv. 2). In spite of a lot that the Lord knows about us, and of the fact that He knows the end from the beginning, He is right there to give us a full chance and a full blessing, immediately we are utterly for Him. It is a thing to lay in store.

God Cannot Compromise on Principle

But while that is true, what comes out in the life of both Saul and Jonathan is that God cannot compromise on principle. When principles are contravened He cannot stand by the people concerned. Sooner or later it will be manifested that, while the Lord loves the people, He cannot support the wrong principles which are governing their lives. That will be the key to this whole situation, as we shall see as we go on.

No Compromise with the Self-Principle

Now, deep down in Saul there was the self-principle active; there is no doubt about it; and, although at times he seemed to rise above it and to have the Lord's interests at heart, that self-principle was recurrent, and when put to the final test with Amalek in Chapter xv, we find that it asserted itself again. That was the turning point, where the Lord rejected Saul and finally in intention passed the kingdom from him to David. The self-principle goes too deep for the Lord to regard it lightly. It is not just a matter of the person. It is there that the link with an entirely antagonistic spiritual system is found. Amalek was such a link. Amalek had stood in the way of Israel when they came out of Egypt and were making for the land. They had stood across their path in the attempt to frustrate the Lord's intentions of spiritual fulness for Israel, and that very people Amalek were the test case for Saul as to whether he was really wholly set upon the Lord or whether he had personal interests. When, through Samuel, the Lord commanded Saul to destroy every vestige of Amalek, leaving nothing alive, Saul reserved the best of the herd and the flock. He discriminated according to human judgment, to keep something that he fancied, that he thought was good. He set his own judgment over against the judgment of the Lord because of this self-principle that was in him, thus proving that in principle he was one with Amalek, that is, he was not set upon all that the Lord was after. The Lord was seeking to bring Israel into the land, that is,

to spiritual fulness. Amalek said 'No!' Saul and Amalek found themselves one in principle. He spared them. But see what Samuel does to Agag, king of the Amalekites!—he hews him in pieces before the Lord. There is no compromise there.

The Self-Principle Links With The Kingdom of Satan

The self-principle goes so deep as to link with not just another nation, but with the spiritual domination of false principles that are standing right in the way of spiritual fulness. Any self-interest is Amalek straddled across the path which leads to spiritual fulness. It is not just a little bit of childish selfishness to be excused and pardoned. It goes right deep down to the kingdom of Satan, and God cannot compromise on a principle that gives Satan an opportunity to frustrate His full purpose in Christ. So God sees where this thing comes from, not just the form of its present manifestation. It comes from the devil, and the devil is all the time out to cut across the way of spiritual fulness. The Lord, knowing that, cannot compromise. We have to be quite sure that the background is wholly according to the Lord's mind, or all our fighting against what we think to be the Lord's enemies will only bring disaster upon ourselves, as in the story of Saul.

Divided Loyalties Issue in Disaster

Now take Jonathan. Even he can be involved at last in the awful tragedy of compromise. It is one of the saddest stories. We all want to shed tears when we read David's lament over Jonathan. We remember the beginnings of the relationship between David and Jonathan, how their souls were knit together. Their story is always being taken as a kind of classic and model of friendship, and yet even there there were divided loyalties in the case of Jonathan—loyalty to the realm of nature, to his father after the flesh, straining against his loyalty to David, and causing him to be a divided personality. When he is with his father, his heart is with David. When he is with David, he feels the pull of duty to his father. He is a divided man. What a problem divided loyalties present!

Jonathan must have known all about that Amalek episode and what Samuel did; that in the Divine intent the kingdom was then taken from Saul and passed to David; that the Lord forsook Saul and was no longer with him. He may have known of the consultation with the witch, the touching of that realm forbidden so

strongly by the Lord. And yet, on natural grounds of some kind, Jonathan did not break with that whole system of things. What a different story might have been told if he had taken sides wholly with David and been David's right hand man for the kingdom! But this divided loyalty involved him in the ultimate tragedy. And even good people who have been blessed of the Lord, to whom He has shown His favour and whom He has used very greatly, may in the end be involved in spiritual tragedy if for some reason compromise has entered in. It may have come in because of policy. What a snare policy is! We tell ourselves we must be very careful that we do not do this or that because it may have such and such a result. It is all policy and diplomacy. 'We must be careful to avoid . . .—what?' Just what we seek to avoid betrays the whole case. Are we afraid of losing prestige with men, support, friends, position, opportunity? Do these things weigh with us as over against implicit obedience to the Lord? If so, there is divided loyalty; and if we allow it, we may at the end pass into terrible tragedy; the tragedy that always follows compromise.

Divine Fulness Reached By Subjection to Divine Principles

The whole question of spiritual fulness is at stake. I have spoken of what might have been in the case of Jonathan. David came to the kingdom in fulness, and Jonathan might have been there at his side, his strength and support in the kingdom. But no; instead of that, he passes out in this tragic way. In a sense, there is nothing wrong with Jonathan; but he has become involved in compromise with another one and another instrument and another order of things, because he did not make a clean cut. It is not for us to judge why, but it does seem that it must have been that he argued on the ground of natural reasoning about this thing. What does it all amount to? If spiritual fulness is to be reached, we have to be governed by Divine and heavenly principles, and not by human considerations. Divine principles; not, What will the consequences be? not, What shall we lose? not even, What will the Lord lose?—because that is a very subtle argument. The Lord does not ask us to reason this thing out on that level at all. He says, 'What is the Divine principle? Let that principle govern and guide.' You may not see at all how it is going to work out. If you are governed by Divine principles you may seem to lose a lot here; you may, for a time, have to go out with David and wait. But in the end the principles

will be vindicated. You have to recognise that compromise on principle only brings disaster. You see it everywhere.

Former Blessing No Argument for Present Compromise

The need is, to seek to know what the Divine principle is in any matter. Has God revealed His own thought and mind? Then I must not pursue some other way on the ground that the Lord has blessed and the Lord has used that other way. That was true of Saul; that was true of Jonathan. But there came a point at which an ultimate issue was raised on principle by the revealing of God's full mind. Now I cannot argue that because people have been blessed and used of the Lord though they have not at given times and in given ways stood for that full mind, therefore it is not necessary for me to be abandoned to God's full thought. That is human argument. We must not do it. The Lord blesses when the heart is wholly for Him, but that does not mean that everything is there that He wants. The very people whom He is using He will presently bring to see something more of His will and how much more deeply His thoughts go. Then it is no less an issue than Amalek. Human judgment must be utterly put away, in the light of the Divine mind then revealed.

I have no doubt you can see through what I am saying a great deal more. If you do not grasp the whole thing, just take this as a guiding lesson in life, that where Divine fulness is concerned, the fact that the Lord blesses does not warrant us in arguing that we can stay in a certain position, that there is nothing more required. The point is, has the Lord revealed something more than is actually represented in the sphere where we have known His blessing? If so, it is for us to go on in the light of all that the Lord has revealed, and take the consequences. In the end it will be seen whether the

principle was vindicated by God.

This story of Jonathan is, I say, a terribly pathetic and tragic story. No doubt he had a good argument for what he did, but he certainly did not argue from the heavenly standpoint. He did not say, 'God has made it perfectly clear that it is through David that His full purpose is to be realized. I knew from the beginning that David was the anointed, and not my father; I have had it confirmed again and again; I told David that he was going to have the throne and the kingdom; my heart is with him; and yet he is out there in the wilderness and I am here with my father. What am I doing here?' He did not argue, 'That is the direction in which the Lord's full purpose lies; it is for me to be there.' He doubtless had his arguments and his reasons and could probably have been very plausible as to why he was still sticking to his father and to the kingdom from which God had departed. He was compromising. His loyalty was divided and he was involved in the tragedy.

It is a fresh call to us to act on principle with the Lord and not to argue from any other standpoint, on any other ground. We must say, 'What has the Lord revealed? It will mean this, it will cost that, it will involve me thus; but that is not the point. I am not going to be influenced or governed by consequences at all. Policy must have no place with me. What God has revealed—that is the only argument for me.'

So Amalek became the occasion for bringing up the whole question of obedience to the Lord, involving the necessity for the setting aside of a great deal of natural judgment. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" (I Sam. xv. 22). Beyond all outward observance and profession, the Lord looks for full and uncompromising obedience to his revealed will.

T. A-S.

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