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Jesus - Prophet, Priest, and King

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Contents

[Chapter 1 - His Nature and Office as Prophet](#)

[Chapter 2 - His Nature and Office as Prophet \(continued\)](#)

[Chapter 3 - His Nature and Office as Priest](#)

[Chapter 4 - His Nature and Office as Priest \(continued\)](#)

[Chapter 5 - His Nature and Office as King](#)

[Chapter 6 - The Expression of Jesus as Prophet](#)

[Chapter 7 - The Prophet, Priest and King in the Heavens](#)

[Chapter 8 - The Expression of Jesus as King](#)

Chapter 1 - His Nature and Office as Prophet

Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-24; 7:37; Luke 24:19; John 5:27; Ezekiel 1:26; 2:1,3, 6,8.

These passages, to which many more could be added, touch upon the first of those designations of which we have made mention above, namely, Jesus as Prophet. If we look at that carefully and thoughtfully, it is capable of leading us into a wonderful knowledge and revelation of the Lord Jesus; that is, if the Holy Spirit opens our eyes. Those two who were on the Emmaus road made a statement which was more full and more true than they had any idea of, "...which was a prophet...". Yet in the same story we read that their eyes were restrained, so they did not know Him. It is quite clear from their conduct and their state of mind and heart that, although they believed that Jesus of Nazareth was a Prophet, they had not really seen what that meant or how true and how wonderful that was. But very soon He began to take up the Scriptures (with the prophet's [messages]), and their hearts began to burn as they began to see that He was more of a Prophet than they had ever thought.

Something of the wonder of Him of whom they had spoken as "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" began to break upon them. They found a Christ even when it seemed that they had lost Him; and when at length in the breaking of bread their eyes were opened and they knew Him, it was an altogether greater, more wonderful vision of Him than they had ever known. He had been to them a Prophet, mighty in word and deed. Now He, all unknown to them as to who He was at the moment, made them see something more of that which they had known in a way, and then, when they had seen something more of His greatness and His glory, He by an act said, "I am He!" To put that in another way, it was just like this: Jesus of Nazareth was a Prophet to them; yes, a great Prophet. Now this One has shown how much greater as a Prophet He is than ever they knew, and whereas they thought they had lost Him, they found they had a greater One than they knew. That is the upshot of it all.

We begin in this way in order that our hearts may be led to prayer. We have had some conception of, and faith in the Lord Jesus; we believe that we have known Him; we would strongly make our attestation concerning Him; we would be ready to say of Him, "A Prophet mighty in deed and in word before God and all the people". Yet there is something more than that for us. There is something more in Him than we have ever seen, and our eyes are still very largely restrained. Seeing that that is what happened once, who shall say that it has not happened many times? Seeing that we have such a concrete example of what can happen, should we not come at once to prayer, our hearts saying, "O Lord, I have seen Thee, I have known Thee, I have believed Thee; but it is clear that many who have gone that far have made discoveries far beyond anything that they knew; let it be like that with me, today." He is a Prophet; but what a Prophet - what there is yet to be revealed as to who Jesus of Nazareth really is!

There is a vast amount of technique connected with the Prophet, all of very great value, beyond our power of handling, but there are some things which it is necessary for us to recognise at once as we approach the Lord Jesus as revealed to us in the Word of God in the capacity of prophet. It might be thought that when you come to the Scriptures it is not quite correct to put things in that order - Prophet, Priest and King. You might agree to the last two, but question whether it is quite correct to put the Prophet first. It is upon that very point that we rest, for one of the most significant things in this threefold unveiling of Christ (it is correct to put it in that order) the Prophet, and the functions of

the Prophet, precede that of the Priest and the King, but do not stop when the Priest and the King come in.

We go back as far as Abraham, with all that we know about Abraham as the father of the faithful, the father of Israel, and we are surprised to be told that Abraham was a prophet. You will remember that a certain ruler got into trouble over Abraham and found himself under judgement, and he enquired as to how he might be delivered from that judgement. The Word of the Lord to him was that Abraham was a prophet and he should pray for him. Perhaps we have not seen Abraham as a prophet, but I am quite sure we shall see how truly Abraham was a prophet before we get very far.

Then Moses was a prophet. We have thought of him as the lawgiver, the one who delivered Israel from Egypt, constituted the nation and led them through the wilderness. We have not always thought of Moses in the capacity of a prophet, and yet here in these Scriptures to which we have referred it is quite patent that the Lord regarded him as a prophet. "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up from among your brethren like unto me", are the words of Moses. That was before the priest came in in any official capacity.

It goes back much further than that. It goes right back into the bosom of God in eternity, but we want for the moment to notice it in relation to the others.

You will see that when the priestly and the kingly failed, it was then that the prophet came again into evidence. The prophet, so to speak, took command. The priestly did fail from time to time in Israel, and all that the priesthood stood for failed and fell into disrepute, and a state came into being quite contrary to all that. Then it was that the prophet rose up and took charge. So it was when the kingly failed. Yes, even when David, the greatest of the kings failed, the prophet came into evidence and took charge. It was one of those painful, sad things. You notice that when David numbered Israel and sinned in so doing, the Lord spoke to the prophet Gad and told him to go to David. David had to communicate with the Lord through the prophet, and it says in that story that David was afraid to go to the tabernacle because of the angel with the drawn sword. David was a man who had worn the priestly vesture, who had enquired of the Lord with the robe of the ephod, to whom the Lord communicated His mind; the great king. He sinned, and now had no way through personally and directly to the Lord, and the prophet had to come in and govern the situation until all was put right again.

All this indicates how the function of the prophet takes priority over all else. Therefore, we are led to ask: What is the central, essential function of the prophet? For what does the prophet stand? We put it into one sentence. The function of the prophet is to satisfy God as to His thoughts concerning men. You probably think that is surely and essentially the function of the priest. That is true, but not so completely as in the prophet.

When you pass your eye over the whole of prophetic ministry or function in the Word of God, you find that three things constitute it:

1. Personal Representation

The first is personal representation. The prophet always stands as a personal representative of God. God is bound up with him. God is associated with him, and he is there as God, possessing God's thoughts and intentions concerning men. If Moses were a prophet, then remember that God went a very long way in his case when He said that he should be as God unto the people. The prophet always stood in that capacity. That is why to touch a prophet of the Lord was to touch God

immediately. Therefore, "He rebuked kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed and do My prophets no harm", for the anointing is God having committed Himself. To touch the prophet is to touch God.

2. Divine Utterance

The prophet's word was always, "Thus saith the Lord". Again look at Moses, and see how often you have such a phrase as this, "As the Lord spake unto Moses". It was Divine utterance, God's thoughts in expression, God Himself speaking.

3. According to God's Mind

Things under the prophet were constituted according to God's mind, and if they deviated or departed from that Divine constitution, the prophet's function was to call back to that, to have everything among the Lord's people so constituted as to be an expression of the mind of God.

That sets forth the function of the prophet, but it is possible to get still more inward. When you have said that, there is a heart of things that has not yet been touched and we have to ask this further question: What is the innermost reality of the prophet? The answer is that it is man as God intends him to be. That is what the prophet stands for in himself and in his ministry; man. You can leave it with the one word if you like, man; but, of course, man as God means him to be. Hence you find this title, which is essentially and specifically the title of the prophet: son of man. It immediately designates Jesus of Nazareth a prophet. It is not the title of the priest, it is not the title of the king, it belongs to the prophet. It is a title that is wider than Israel, and wider than that of Messiah, and it is significant to notice that it was given to the Lord on the grounds of Israel's rejection of Him.

In Luke 9:18-22 you have the Lord Jesus saying to the disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" They give various answers, and then He directs the question to them, "But whom say ye that I am?" They say, "Thou art the Christ of God." All that they knew concerning men's opinion of Him fell short of a recognition of who He really was, and spelled the blindness of Israel regarding Him, blindness brought about through pride and prejudice. Then there broke forth this, "Thou art the Christ". Now note: "See that thou tell no man. The Son of Man must suffer many things and be lifted up." The meaning of the title 'Son of Man' is clearly because of His rejection by Israel in blindness. It goes right over all the bounds of Israel. It goes right beyond Messiah-ship which belongs to Israel. The Son of Man is racial; it embraces the race.

It was exactly the same way in the case of Ezekiel. It was when the glory had gone from Jerusalem and the prophet was seeing the glory far away from Jerusalem, that this title came in, 'son of man'. What did that prophet see above the throne? Not the Messiah of Israel now, not Israel's King now, but the likeness of a Man, and in connection with the Man in the throne the address was 'Son of Man'. It is beyond Israel, something much greater. The heart of the prophet is man, God's thought concerning man.

Well then, if man is in view, you begin with the Divine design, and you go right back to the counsels of the Godhead before creation. In the Godhead there is this projecting of purpose and intention, "Let Us make man". Man is a Divine conception, "in Our image, after Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). The Divine intention is concerning a special kind of creation called "man"; man to be an expression of God; man who is to serve God in His intent to manifest Himself; man the creation to answer to a desire found in the heart of God, a thought found in the mind of God to show Himself.

It is a great thing to get right back to the beginnings, because it gives you all the wonder, the glory,

the strength, and everything that is so amazing about the Gospel. The Gospel has become shrunken and shrivelled, and pulled down to such a small level. It is a great thing to be saved from sin and from misery because of sin, and from the judgement and penalty of sin. It is a great thing to have the peace of God in your heart through sins forgiven. It is a great thing to know you are not going to hell but you are going to heaven; but with all that that may mean, it is a very imperfect Gospel in the light of what the Gospel really is. You go right back to the first thoughts of God as they are disclosed to us, and you will find His thought and intent in these words: "*Let Us make man in Our image after Our likeness.*" Why do we have an image and a likeness? To project ourselves and to express ourselves. The simplest form nowadays of an image or a likeness is in order that when the person is out of sight, he or she may still be present, may still be seen. God intended to reveal and manifest Himself, and the vehicle chosen was a special creation, man. It was not reproducing Deity, but Divine likeness; moral and spiritual.

Now let us make a parenthesis and see the significance of that passage in Deuteronomy 18. It was ever God's thought that He should express Himself in all that He is, so that He could be seen, and, being seen, could be enjoyed and worshipped and that men should be able to dwell in His presence. When you come to Deuteronomy 18 you come into the realm where man has lost that capacity for enjoying God. God is no longer (to use the word reverently) "companionable," but awful and terrible; "God the all-terrible". He appeared like that in Horeb, and the people asked that it should not happen again. They begged that it should not be repeated lest they died. Did God ever intend the manifestation of Himself to end like that? No! Then you notice what happened. It was because of that that the Lord said, "I will raise up unto thee a Prophet" (verse 15). What is the Prophet for? That they may see God and *not* die; that they might know God and *not* perish; that God may be manifested and they may live and have fellowship with Him. That is Jesus Christ: "Jesus... My Prophet". The whole Gospel is comprehended in that.

That is what we have previously called the downward bend in the line of Divine intention. That line comes up again. The day is coming when man, who could only see God in that way of the Prophet, will see Him face to face in unveiled glory and enjoy His presence, because of the prophetic ministry and Person of the Lord Jesus, that He may bring us to God.

That is advancing a little. We have spoken of the Divine design, man; an expression, a manifestation of God, or in whom and by whom God manifests Himself. That was the intention, "Let Us make man...". The failure of man is recognised everywhere in that he did not conform to the Divine thought, and man as we know him is no manifestation of God. He is the manifestation of anything *but* God, and the more we know of him, the more we know how utterly unlike God he is in the depths of his being. But then there is the universal triumph of Jesus of Nazareth, who becomes the universal representation and pattern of man according to God's thought. In His incarnation, His life here on the earth as Man was subjected to every test of trial and temptation and all the fires that could be kindled upon Him. His Manhood passed through unscathed, unsullied, and God took that Manhood to heaven. Stephen sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Saul sees Jesus of Nazareth in a glory above the brightness of the sun. John sees Him, and because of His glory falls down on his face as one dead. *This* is God's Man in representation and pattern.

Into that so much is gathered. First of all - and you need to go back to John's Gospel for this, for there you have it set forth in a peculiarly rich and direct way - into the Son of Man there is gathered God's *standard* for man. That is what John sets forth. That repeated utterance on His lips, "I am", brings everything to the Lord Jesus. All the way through John's Gospel it is a matter of bringing everything to Himself. He brings God the Father to Himself, and He says so definitely and strongly that even God the Father will do nothing apart from Him, "hath committed all things unto Him". No

man can come to the Father apart from Him, only through Him; no one can know the Father, only by Him. He is the sum of everything in man's concern and interest in relation to God, and God has willed it so. That is, of course, what Israel would not have; that is why they cast Him out. He got in Israel's way before God. Their charge was that He made Himself equal with God.

The remarkable thing is that all this is summed up in this particular designation, and it is strange that it comes in John. You are not surprised to find it in Luke, but in John 5:27 you find: "...because He is the Son of man". It does not say the Son of God, but the Son of Man. The margin says, "a Son of man". The point there is the nature of the Son of God and His function, His office. God has gathered first of all into a Representative, into One who satisfies Him as to His thoughts for man, His standard for man. And there can be no acceptance of any man or any part of the human race that does not take its character from Jesus Christ.

Now you could open up all that Paul has to say about what we get by faith in Jesus Christ, and then all that he has to say about the Holy Spirit's operation in us in relation to Jesus Christ to conform us to His image, and you can see the course of things. It is a universal expression of Jesus Christ in all men who will ever be accepted of God and abide with God eternally. On the other hand, it means that where Jesus Christ is not, eventually that will cease to have a place in God's realm, in God's Kingdom. It is only what is *of Christ* that comes into the Kingdom of God, the realm of God, and abides. Christ is God's standard.

That explains everything for you and for me. Does it not interpret for us those mysterious activities of God in our lives and in the lives of so many of His people, those apparent contradictions? Here is one who seems so pre-eminently useful, so tremendously active for the Lord, who could be so greatly used and could do so much, and that one is taken right out of it all and shut up in apparent inactivity, where none or very little of that is getting out, and all that work is stopped, and the life seems to be imprisoned. Then the enemy is always there to prompt questions and give explanations which are diabolical and evil, intended to destroy the faith and to bring under condemnation. What is the answer? God is far more concerned with producing the image of His Son than He is with our being busy, our being full of activity in an outward way, even for Him.

This is one of the perils in Christian service, that so often our work, our teaching, our words go a long way ahead of what we are. We are saying things, and those things are not true in our own being. We are teaching things, and those things have not yet been wrought into us. We are giving ourselves to a realm of objective activity for the Lord, and looking after other men's vineyards, and our own is running to waste. That is a false position, and God says, "Stop, come away from it all, I have got to bring you abreast of those things you are saying. Ministry is not things said. Ministry is what you are, and everything said comes out of what you are, and the only ministry, the only thing that satisfies Me is Christ! The measure of value in My sight is not the amount of things said or the amount of things done, it is the amount of Christ that is there at the heart of everything. It is the measure of Christ."

All our sufferings, even though they be chastening, even though they be the rebuke of the Lord, even though they be (if you like to call it) punishment, all the mysterious providences of God, all those inexplicable handlings of us by Him, have one object. Believe it; it will rescue you from despair. It is the greatest object in God's universe, and that is: God expressing Himself in Christ in us.

The Prophet is a Representation of God.

Conformity to the image of His Son is an expression of God. It takes precedence over everything. It is God's supreme thought, "Let Us make man...". I wonder how many of us have realised that God

has started that process all over again. Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house has a far wider application than Israel. It is racial. The vessel which he made was marred in his hands, and he made it again into another vessel. What did God say when He took this clay into His hands? "Let Us make man...". He is making the *New Man* in Christ, the New Man according to Christ. He is making man after His own image and in His own likeness. Presently service such as we have never contemplated will be entered upon. There may be work to be done here, but mark you, God will govern all our work and our activity here by this thought of increasing Christ in us. Any service for God which does not have that reaction upon ourselves to bring us into greater Christ-likeness, is false service. Service must come out of what there is of Christ, and must result in the increase of Christ, otherwise it is not service to God.

So it may be that some, because the service is increasing Christ, are allowed to do it. Others are taken out of it, because that is the way in which the Lord will get a greater increase of Christ in them than allowing them to do it. But, whether it be service or no service, here the governing factor is that making according to Christ which shall eventually issue in: "His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face."

"Let it not happen again," said Israel. Ah, but they shall see His face. What has happened? Who sees His face and lives? Jesus of Nazareth is looking fully into the face of God as a Man. He is God's Son, but as Man He is there in the unveiled presence of the infinite God. You and I are being brought through grace to the place where we can abide in the infinite glory, the infinite majesty, where we can see His face and live, and not only live, but serve Him. That is what God is doing with us.

At present we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus. That glory will be without a veil one day, and we shall behold Him as He is. "Now we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12). It is necessary; we could not bear it otherwise. If we had the slightest glimmer and glimpse of the Lord Jesus it would be impossible for this humanity to bear it. Paul carried the effect of that to his death in his eyes that were affected. It is said of some that they would have plucked out their very eyes for Paul. He said, "See how large letters I have written to you..." (Gal. 6:11). Where did that come from? Just a little unveiling, a flash of the glory. Our destiny is to abide in glory, to dwell in it, and to live and to serve. That is our destiny in Christ. He is preparing us for that. That is the meaning of the Prophet.

We have not seen Jesus yet as a Prophet. There is that seeing of Him which is calculated to transfigure us into the same image, from one degree of glory to another. Into Jesus God has gathered His standard in relation to which He is carrying on His work in this world.

The Lord give us grace to recognise His end in the moulding, in all the perplexing experiences, and let Him do the thing upon which His heart is set, for He has not forsaken His original intention. He has said yet again, with fresh intention, in infinite grace, "Let Us make man... let Us make again after Our own image, in Our own likeness, for the expression of Ourselves."

Chapter 2 - His Nature and Office as Prophet (continued)

Reading: Hebrews 2.

We are going to pause here before going on from where we left off our last meditation, to stress two things.

The first thing is the wonder that God Himself has become His own Prophet, His own Priest, and His own King. That is the utter meaning. We could say God has provided His own Prophet, His own Priest, His own King right out from heaven; but realising that here Jesus is the Son of God, one with God in very essence, we can go the further step and say that God Himself in Christ has become His own Prophet, Priest and King.

It is a wonderful thing when you get behind that governing thought, that God said, "Let Us make man". Eventually God said, so far as the second Person of the Godhead was concerned, "We will become that Man." So in the letter to the Hebrews you have the Son of God saying, "A body didst thou prepare for Me". God prepared and provided Himself with a body. Thus you have one of those grand titles: "They shall call His name Emmanuel... God with us."

The other thing we want to stress before passing on is this. We must never think of the Lord Jesus, while being the Eternal Son of God, as being a Man until the incarnation. We are rather apt to allow the very words 'Eternal Son' to imply that, or carry that with it. The incarnation is definitely God taking up His original thought in the midst of the ages in relation to man. We must recognise this, that God never did have, even in the first Adam, a man that expressed His thought to the full, until the incarnation when He Himself entered into the body prepared for Him. The Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, manifested in the flesh, takes up something that has never before been realised.

So the letter to the Hebrews opens with this statement concerning man (not the Son of God in His intrinsic deity): What is man? He is the express image, the very essence of the Father's nature, the effulgence of the Father's glory. God has, in Jesus Christ, in the incarnation, that which He originally intended to have when He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." That may be an unnecessary emphasis, but it brings us very much to the point where we want to take things up.

The closing word of our last meditation was regarding the Son of Man having become God's standard, established in heaven and set forth as the pattern for the whole creation. God is working towards this in all who have come into a living relationship with Him, and that fact explains and governs all the dealings of God with every one of His children. God is more concerned about conformity to His Son than He is about anything else. Let us say once more that it is so necessary that we get that firmly fixed in our hearts. He is not concerned in the first place with what we do for Him. He is pre-eminently concerned with the formation of Christ in us, and our conformity to the image of His Son. This explains why even service is so often fraught with experiences of the deepest trial.

We might think that being given to the service of God, and being given to the purpose of God, there ought to be such a manifestation of the power and co-operation of God that we simply ride over every kind of adversity without feeling it. The facts are to the contrary, that even when you are most

utterly abandoned to God, when you are given up most entirely to the Lord's interests in the service of God, you go through experiences of the deepest and utmost trial, which constitute tests of faith of the most acute character. You are almost brought to a standstill in your service from time to time on the major questions of God, His power, His wisdom, and so on. We do not escape that kind of thing because we are abandoned to the Lord. Sometimes we have thought that we ought to escape it because of our utter devotion to the Lord. It is not so.

Even when you and I have no reservation, no personal interests, no ambitions of our own, and the Lord Himself is our object, our goal, and His glory the one governing passion of our beings, even then we shall be tested and tried to the very hilt. Let us not expect it to be otherwise for this reason: that the necessity above all others is that Christ should be fully formed in us, and that is only accomplished along the line of trial and refining fires. So even the souls of those who have been martyred for the testimony of Jesus will go on crying, "How long, O Lord, how long?" Right up to the end we shall be tried, however much we are given up to the Lord. The Lord governs everything by this one matter of sonship, as Hebrews 12 makes perfectly clear.

Now we go on with the next phase, in John 5:21. There we read that the Son quickens, or gives life to whom He will. That is a prophetic act, related to Him as Prophet, and it is the relationship between that and Christ in His prophetic capacity that we feel the Lord wants us to understand at this time.

We have seen that Jesus, in the capacity of Prophet, sets forth God's full thought concerning man, and that the prophetic office is to bring those thoughts into expression in man, and bring man to be constituted according to God's thoughts for him. That is the meaning of the prophet throughout, and all the prophets lead up to *the* Prophet. The Lord Jesus sums up all the prophets and all prophetic ministry and meaning, so that, as the inclusive Prophet, He represents and embodies God's thoughts for man. He is working to bring man to be constituted according to those thoughts, and to bring those thoughts into man for full expression; that is, the expression of God in man.

Seeing that is the meaning of the Prophet, and who the Lord Jesus is, we are able to understand better what He meant when He said, as Son of Man, as Prophet, "The Son quickens whom He will." The Son gives life to whom He will.

You will remember how often the whole question of life and death arose with the prophets, how those outstanding incidents in the life of certain prophets had to do with the destruction of death and the bringing in of life. We have seen how the whole life of Elisha was summed up in the one issue of life triumphant over death. Now, here the Son gives life to whom He will. What is the very first step towards the realisation of God's full thought concerning man? By what means shall we come to that Divine end? What is essential for God's achievement of His purpose? Basically it is that we have Life in and from His Son, that the Son gives Life to us. That becomes the basis of everything, for it is in that Life which we share with Him that all the potency of the Divine thought resides, and if that Life is in us and is free to function, that Life which is by the Holy Spirit will itself constitute us according to God's mind. In other words: that is the life, the dynamic power in the hands of the Holy Spirit of the new creation, of which Christ is the sum total.

If you want that made clear, or carried further, look again at very familiar words in 1 Corinthians 15. In John 5 reference is made to resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15 is almost entirely to do with resurrection, and it brings us to the very heart of things. Verse 45 says: "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam a quickening spirit."

In John 5:21 we read: "...even so also the Son gives life to whom He will". First Corinthians 15 goes

on, in verses 46-49: "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual... as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

That clearly sets forth the new creation, a heavenly order of man; man according to a heavenly kind, and the first of that race is this Last Adam, the Lord from heaven. He initiates the new creation by giving Life to whom He will. There we have the Man who is God, who is the Son of Man, giving Life to whom He will, in order to have other men according to God's thought. God formed man and breathed into him the breath of life, and the first Adam became a living soul. Now there is another creation, a new creation in Christ. God breathes into him, not this time the breath of life, but the Spirit of Life in Christ who is a Life-giving Spirit. That is the work of the Prophet, who, like one of old, comes down and stretches himself upon that which is without that Life and has become dead, and imparts as from himself Life, and brings that dead one up in his own life. That is a type, a figure of exactly what the Lord Jesus is and does. He comes as Son of Man in the power of new creation Life where there is an exercise of faith. He spreads Himself upon that which is dead, and gives His own Life, and brings out into a new Life: the sharing of a common Life with Himself.

That is the beginning of everything and the basis of everything. His Life, the same Life as He possesses, with all its qualities, nature, characteristics and forces, as it is nurtured, cherished, watched over and obeyed in all its laws, produces Christ-likeness and issues in conformity to His image. So, by that Life God peoples His new Kingdom, secures His new creation, and realises His first thought when He said, "Let Us make man in Our own image, and after Our own likeness."

The point is this: that Christ as Prophet is not the only one who proclaims God's mind, sets forth God's thoughts, and imposes upon us the demands of heaven and of God. He is more than that. As Prophet He *identifies Himself with us* in order to *identify us with Himself* in His own Life; or, in other words, He is more than a spokesman for God, He is the dynamic of God, "Christ the *power of God...*" (1 Cor. 1:24). Union with Christ is not upon the basis of truth, teaching, doctrine or creed. It is upon a basis of a mighty Life, the intent and purpose of which is to constitute us according to Christ. Our failure in Christ-likeness is traceable somewhere to a hindrance to the free operation of His Life in us, and therefore there should always be exercise to discover where that hindrance is, and what is the nature of that arrest. It may not always be in sins. It may be that there is some specific thing that is the arresting of the Spirit, something which the Life cannot get over because it has got to be dealt with. It would be quite impossible for anyone to catalogue all the things that arrest the Spirit of Life in us. That is for our exercise before the Lord. It may be the comprehensive sin of unbelief. There are various things which interrupt, arrest and hinder, but too commonly it is unbelief.

That brings us to the prophet. When you come to study the work of the prophets you find that the main thing with which they had to do was unbelief. Jesus, as Prophet in His own day on the earth, found Himself up against unbelief as the major thing which made it impossible for Him to give Life. "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life." The "not coming" was unbelief.

In what way does unbelief manifest itself in relation to the Prophet? Just along the line of failure in the practical application of what we have just said. Here is the Lord Jesus, who as Man fully and completely satisfies the thoughts of God concerning man, establishing the fact that God has got in a Man all that ever He thought of having, all that ever He purposed to have, and God has reached His satisfaction in a Man. That Man, the Man Christ Jesus, has been accepted by God in a representative way for all who will believe, so that faith in the Lord Jesus, and faith in God on the ground of the Lord Jesus, of what He is, means our acceptance. God freely gives us all that pertains to Christ, and puts to our account all the perfections of Jesus Christ, all His own satisfaction with the Lord Jesus

Christ, and says, "Now, if you will not stand on your ground of what you are in the old creation, but by faith on My ground in the new creation, I will mediate to you the power of that new creation to conform you to it."

Every bit of unbelief means in practical outworking that we are remaining on our own ground and not abiding on His ground. Follow that through, and you will see that is true. All our failure is due to our getting onto some other ground than the ground of what Jesus is. There is plenty of other ground to get onto. The enemy sees to that. You can go so far as to believe that you are veritably devil possessed, although you are not; yet all your feelings and symptoms point to that. There can be such an operation of the enemy's power of death and evil insinuation upon a broken-down nervous system as to give you all the symptoms of being positively in the power of the devil. He sets up a situation like that, and all he asks you to do is to step across onto that ground and accept it. If you do, you have stepped away from your ground of faith in what Jesus is, onto the ground of insinuation made by the enemy through conditions and circumstances. You can get plenty of evidence, if you want it, that what the devil says is quite true. The Prophet calls you off your own ground onto His ground.

Look at Elijah, and see if this is not the outworking of his ministry. His challenge is that God's ground should be taken. His great crisis challenge was this, "Why limp ye between two opinions?" (1 Ki. 18:21). The word "halt" in the King James Version is a little misleading. I used to think it meant standing, halting between two things; but really the word is what we mean when we say, 'He is halt or limp.' It is like a man who is limping first on one side and then on the other, he is crippled by indecision and uncertainty. Today you will find him on one side, and tomorrow on the other. So he alternates day by day in his position regarding the Lord.

Faith takes one ground and stays there; faith holds on in the dark. Elijah's challenge was to take God's ground and thus prove God. When they took God's ground they proved God. The prophet says, "Come over onto my ground, for my ground is God's." Oh, the strength of Elijah on that point. There was no question about God with Elijah. He was not afraid to put God to the greatest test. He told them to build the altar, dig a trench, pour in water, and do it again, and again. He made things as difficult as he could for God, knowing that God could stand up to it. See the faith of this man! Make it as hard as possible for God, and Elijah does not flinch. That is the Prophet. That is the Lord Jesus who stands there and says, "Come over onto My ground, stand with Me, and slay this unbelief which cripples, and you will find your peace, your rest, and God can go on with His work. While you are taking any other ground, Life is arrested, and therefore the end of God is rendered impossible of attainment." The Son, because He is a Son of Man, in order that He might bring many sons to glory, gives Life and quickens whom He will. Everything begins there, and everything is gathered up in that.

The Last Adam (not the *second* Adam, for there is not a third one; this is final, it is this or nothing) is a Life-giving Spirit, and there is no hope for you if you do not take His ground. The prophetic element is inherent in Man according to God's mind.

In 1 Corinthians 12 there is much said about spiritual gifts, and in the second chapter of Hebrews there is a reference to spiritual gifts. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit"; "God... bearing witness (the writer is pointing back to a past time) with gifts of the Holy Spirit".

We are not discussing all the gifts, but among them (1 Cor. 12:28) there is the gift of prophecy, the prophetic function, first constituted by the Holy Spirit. If you look closer you will find that

everything is very rigid and strictly governed. The apostle is seeking to bring in governing factors because the governing factors were not at Corinth. Things were running wild, and therefore missing the mark, and not attaining God's end. Even gifts of the Holy Spirit may be diverted from the end for which they are given, and so the apostle seeks to introduce great governing factors in relation to spiritual gifts.

What is the great governing law in 1 Corinthians 12? Everything is unto "edifying". 'Edifying' is the word in our translation. Literally it means 'building up'. What are you building? Look again at chapter 12 and you will find it is the Body of Christ. It is the collective, corporate expression of Christ. It is, then, in the Body of Christ an increase of Himself. You come back to the same principle in the prophet. The prophet brings into conformity to God's thoughts for man. Everything is challenged by this. Does it lead to an increase of the Lord Jesus? If not, it has missed its way, it has been misapplied, it has been diverted. Everything is governed by this purpose of God. God has fixed it from eternity, and He is ruling everything. Even gifts of the Holy Spirit are given under this one governing law, that they shall issue in an increase of Christ in His Body; not gifts for themselves, not gifts for the sake of experience, but gifts for an increase of the Lord Jesus.

"Jesus... my Prophet...". That means He stands on behalf of me to satisfy God in all. I, by faith, stand in Him and enter into that satisfaction of God, that peace. What is the peace of God in your heart and in mine? It is just our coming to the place where the Lord has no controversy with us, where the Lord is well pleased. It is a glorious thing, and I am sure your heart leaps to it as you respond to the thought that you and I should be in the place where it is possible for the Lord to say, "I am delighted with you, My child!" How far off we are from that, and how often we are leagues away from that. The enemy is always trying to make us feel that God is against us, or has some controversy with us, to rob us of our peace. When you and I take the ground of the Lord Jesus as our Prophet, we have the peace of God in our hearts which is just that attestation of the Holy Spirit that we are on ground acceptable to God, with which He is quite pleased. After that He simply says, "Stay there and see what I will do; stay there and I will do the rest."

All of this the Lord Jesus set forth in His parable of the Vine and the branches. "Abide in Me...", and if you do that you do not need to worry about anything else. What is abiding? It is faith settled, remaining on the ground of what Jesus is. The Lord knows that you and I cannot be other than we are by any effort of our own, and we cannot do other than we do, but He has achieved all, and done all, in a Man, and that is put to our credit through faith, and then that is made good in outworking progressively while we remain there. It is the secret of rest. You and I will never be any good whatever until we have got the first secret, and that is rest, the rest of faith. God does not go on with His work until we have got there, and we cannot go on with our work until we have got there. We cannot fight the Lord's battles until we have got the battle settled in ourselves, we cannot do the Lord's work until we have come to the place of rest in ourselves. It all begins from rest, and rest is the result of occupying the ground of what Jesus is as our Prophet.

We must say one closing word to conclude this part. It is in John 5:22: "For the Father judges no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son." Jesus as Prophet takes charge of the whole question of judgement, and judgement is bound up with Him. All judgement is taken up in and by the Son of Man. There are several practical values about that.

The first is this, that judgement entirely rests in One who is Himself God's standard. That is why you and I must not take judgement into our hands. We are not to judge one another. If you and I were God's standard then it would be right to judge, but until we are, judgement is not given to us. It is in the hands of One who is God's standard. All judgement is given to the Son, because He satisfies God.

You notice how in this chapter the utterness of Christ with the Father is stressed and emphasised. Take these typical words: "Verily, verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do..." (verse 19); "I can of Myself do nothing; as I hear, I judge..." (verse 30). "There is another that bears witness of Me..." (verse 32). Such words show the perfect oneness between the Son and the Father. That is the prophetic feature. It is the complete expression of Divine thoughts, and it is a constituting wholly according to the mind of God. Because there is obedience in the case of the Son of Man, He is constituted wholly according to God's thoughts. There is perfect oneness between Him and God, therefore, judgement is committed unto Him, and more than that, all the work of the Holy Spirit is related to the Lord Jesus. There is that great statement concerning the advent of the Holy Spirit: "When He is come, He shall convict the world in respect of sin, of righteousness and of judgement. Of sin (now note) because *they believe not on Me*, of righteousness because I go to the Father, of judgement because the prince of this world hath been judged" (John 16:8-11). Consider those three things and, "They believe not on Me." In other words, "They do not take My ground as representing God's mind for them. They refuse to accept Me as their ground."

"I go to the Father." No one ever went to the Father unless God was fully satisfied with them. No one could ever be in the Father's presence unless he fully answered to the Father's thoughts. There is a way through for Him, and that fact settles the whole question of righteousness. If He were the slightest bit unrighteous He could not go to the Father, but His going to the Father makes it plain that that whole question of righteousness is settled, and the Holy Spirit is coming to convict in respect of righteousness.

"The prince of this world hath been judged." How was he judged? What was the basis of his judgement? Who brought him to judgement and overthrew him? The Son of Man. The basis of judgement is that men prefer to remain on the ground of the judged prince of this world than to take the ground of the Son of Man. That is what brings them into judgement. Judgement is not upon the basis of whether we are more or less sinners, for if you commit one sin and another commits a dozen you will be judged alike. It never is a question of how good you and I may be to escape judgement. A lot of people are carried away with that idea, that if they do not do so many bad things as someone else they will pass in the judgement. The whole ground of judgement is whether we are alive to Satan or alive to Christ. One is judged, condemned for ever; the other is righteous and accepted for ever. That is the ground on which we are - by deliberate choice and an act of faith.

We come right back to the whole of this truth, that here the Holy Spirit is doing this work in this threefold way, and the point is that the Holy Spirit is working in relation to the Lord Jesus all the time. And He is dealing with men, He is dealing with us on the basis of what Christ is, and where Christ is, and what He has done. The Lord says, "Now, you stand entirely free of judgement or under judgement by your relation to the Son in whom all judgement is gathered up." Let us not think of the Lord Jesus as sitting like a judge in court, weighing up evidence against anyone. That is not the point. Judgement is related to a Person, and God sets the Lord Jesus forth as His standard and says, "Now, that is what I require, nothing less." If you will in faith take your position on that, then for you judgement is past, there is no judgement, you shall not come into judgement; but if you do not come in a living way by faith into relation to what He is, you come under judgement; the Holy Spirit sees to that. It is all related to the Person.

See how the Lord upheld the prophets. It says concerning Samuel that all Israel knew that he was a prophet, and God did not let one of his words fall to the ground. There you have the principle. Here is the Lord Jesus as Prophet, and the Holy Spirit making Him the beginning and the end of all matters of judgement, sin, righteousness, and saying that those who stand in a faith relationship to Jesus as their Prophet, their representation, do not come under judgement. But those who do not

stand there come under judgement by the Holy Spirit, because they are not in Him. You and I have not to commit a lot of sins in order to come under judgement; we have only to stand on our own ground and that happens. I think it was Henry Drummond who, speaking on "How shall we escape if we neglect..." said, "Here is a man who has taken poison, and the doctor prescribes an antidote and puts it in a glass beside his bed. The man does not have to take that glass and smash it to the ground in order to die, he will die right enough by neglect." If we stay where we are, take our own ground, we shall come under judgement.

All this is a setting forth of what the Lord Jesus is as our Surety. You may think that this overlaps very much with His priestly work, but there is a stress in His priestly work which is not this, although it may include this. Here is "Jesus, My Prophet"; that is, He who for me satisfies God; the One who brings God pleasure on my behalf as I stand by faith in Him; and the One who mediates to Me the energy of His own Divine Life to constitute me according to Himself as I trust, believe and abide. The simplicity of that may cause us to stumble, but there are many of the Lord's people who have struggled on as children of God for many years before they have come to the rest of simple trust in the Lord Jesus. Their Christian life has been a disappointing thing, an up-and-down thing, and they have not come into real rest until they have belonged to the Lord for many years. In meeting them you do not meet one who is at rest and satisfied; you meet a striving, straining, anxious, burdened, troubled one. They tell you emphatically that they trust the Lord Jesus for their salvation, but they are not in the enjoyment of it. Many have known that, so that the burden has rested upon them, broken them and worn them out, and they have come to the place where they have wondered whether the Christian life was a success or whether all that they have had said to them about belonging to the Lord was true. The fault is with ourselves. After many years of belonging to the Lord, many of His children have only just discovered rest. What is the secret of rest, out of which everything else springs? It is contentment with the Lord Jesus; not contentment with what you are at the moment finding Him to be, but what your faith fastens upon Him as being. You are going to prove what He is, not before you believe, but as you believe. The Lord's purpose at the moment is this, to set forth before us His Son, "Jesus my Prophet".

That may not be your experience. You may not know Him like that. You may not be in the enjoyment of that. He is presented to be that; God's Word declares Him to be that; God's satisfaction with you through faith. God takes up the work of the new creation to conform us to the image of His Son only at the point where we begin to believe. We are never a new creation either at the beginning or in any other measure until we believe. The new creation is wrought out to the full along the line of faith, and every fresh test of faith is an increase of Christ as we go through with it. That is what it is meant for.

If you are restless, crippled, unable to lift yourself up, let me tell you there is a Man who can help you. Oh, I like this so much in this Gospel by John. You remember the pool with the poor impotent, lame folk there, and the Lord Jesus came among them, and on seeing one poor fellow who had been there thirty-eight years, He said to him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man replies that he has no man to put him in when the waters are troubled. What he wanted was a man; if only he could find a man then it would be alright. In that chapter the Son of Man is brought out. There is your Man. You are made whole by that Man, by what He is, by your faith in Him as what He is. It is the Man we want, the Man Christ Jesus, the Son of God, Very God, the Man who makes us whole.

Are you seeing this? Try to get through all the language and ideas, to the truth. I hope that in the future we are going to sing with something of deeper appreciation in our hearts,

'Jesus, my Shepherd, Saviour, Friend,

My Prophet, Priest, and King.'

The Lord open our hearts to see Him who has been raised from among His brethren, a Prophet before the Lord.

Chapter 3 - His Nature and Office as Priest

Reading: Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-16; 5:1-6; 7:11-17; 8:1-6; 9:11.

Before we proceed with a consideration of Jesus as Priest, there is an added word to be said in relation to the Prophet.

I am hoping that as we go on we are getting away from Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King, to Jesus, *my* Prophet, Priest, and King. That is, that it is not something contemplated as a great, wonderful, blessed truth, but something apprehended, something entered into, not a mind matter but a heart matter. We should quietly, alone with the Lord, enter into the blessedness of the truth by personal appropriation, kneeling and saying, "Jesus, my Prophet! Jesus, my Priest!" The Lord grant that it may be so.

There is a sense in which with the Prophet there is no coming down; that is, He remains apart and above. That applies, of course, both to His nature, His person, and His office. He may be among men, but He is apart from men. He may be in a sense on the level of men, sitting where they sit, and yet He is above men. With the Prophet in this sense there can be no coming down, because He takes things up at the point where God's full thought is first introduced, and He never comes down from that point, but stays there all the way through. Whatever may happen among men in the loss of that thought, the Prophet never accommodates Himself, He never compromises, He never lets go one iota of that Divine intention. He keeps the exactness of God's thought held firmly and fully and uncompromisingly throughout. A prophet is the most uncompromising being that you could ever meet. He may weep, he may plead, he may be suffering, but he *cannot* compromise, he cannot let go a little bit. He stands in the place, if need be, of isolation in relation to God's full thought.

All that that means we cannot stay with now. It carries us a very long way. If we followed it out we should see how all those who are going to stand for God's full thought will know a great deal of isolation and will find it impossible to compromise and to accept a lower level, and they will have to pay a very great price, because they are the prophet of the Lord. We are thinking of the Lord Jesus particularly, and therefore as Prophet He takes things up, before ever there was a lapse, before ever there was a failure or a breakdown, before all the tragedy of human history entered. We find Him at the end with that full thought secured through His having maintained that position, and not having for one instant or in one iota descended to any lower level.

When you come to the priest you have another position. The priest is entirely connected with man's failure. The priest has to recognize it. The priest, without being involved in it; that is, without becoming a part of it and accepting it, without being compromised by it, nevertheless has to come down to it. Priesthood means that something has happened, and you have to get down and meet with something and deal with it. It is something which is not in the original plan of God.

Now we must guard that. Of course God foresaw everything, and arranged the whole plan of redemption, but God did not predetermine that man should sin and be redeemed. He determined that man should be redeemed if he sinned. Here is something which is not ordained of God, but which has come in, and therefore a special provision has to be made for a new situation. That provision is the priest.

The function of the priest, then, is to deal with that which has come in to make the realisation of

God's thought impossible. That is where the priest is related to the prophet. The prophet stands for the full thought, but now it has been violated and lost, and the priest must work with the prophet to deal with that which has come in to hinder and render impossible of realisation.

God's purpose governs everything. We have said that God's purpose, the purpose issuing out of those counsels of the Godhead, was the manifestation of God and that through man - "Let Us make man...". You ask, What for? Why? The answer is in the rest of the statement, "in Our image, and after Our likeness". Why that? "To express Ourselves, to reveal Ourselves, to manifest Ourselves." Man was made to reveal God, to express God. Man has failed in the purpose of God. The image and likeness have been at least marred, if not entirely lost, but, more than that, and worse than that, another image and likeness has been struck. The deeper you go into human nature the more you are aware of something which is not only the absence of God, but the positive expression of something *not* God. It is all very well to talk about noble humanity, but there is something there which, when it really is drawn out, is not only the lack of God, but the presence of something altogether the opposite of God, something evil.

That is what has happened, and when you come to look at the state of man in his failure, you find that sin (for that is the root thing) has put man in a place altogether the opposite of what God intended. First of all sin has put man in the place of alienation. Then sin has put man in the place of variance with God. Then sin has put man in the place of dispossession of his inheritance in God. Further, sin has put man in the place of bondage, so that he is no longer free. Again, sin has put man in the place of guilt before God. Yet again, sin has put man in the place of judgement. Finally, sin has put man in the place of death. Here are seven things. This is where you find man and it is in relation to all of those that the priest is brought in. The prophet stands where none of those things obtain. He looks down on them, he recognises them, he denounces them, but his function is to declare that God does not and cannot accept this state of things. This is God's thought, and the prophet keeps the vision of God and His thoughts before men. He is a seer. He sees and keeps in view what he knows as to the mind of God. But the priest not only recognises all that, he comes down to deal with it. The function of the priest begins at the point of man's alienation from God, and he functions with the result that from this point man is made nigh to God.

The Lord Jesus takes things up there, and the very first thing that His priestly work says to us is this, that we are made nigh by the blood of His cross. He goes on, and He deals with the variance of man to God. The next thing which the priestly work produces, and Christ declares for us as Priest, is that we are reconciled by His death. From being at variance, there is reconciliation. He deals with the matter of our being dispossessed of our inheritance by sin, and His great ministry effects our redemption and the redemption of the purchased possession.

Further, His priestly work touches the state of human bondage. From that ministry there issues the glorious declaration that we have been delivered out of the bondage and kingdom of Satan. As to guilt, the Priest declares to us remission of sins. As to judgement, He secures a basis for our being justified, freed from judgement. As to death, that state into which man is finally brought by sin, He declares that we are in Him and by His blood made alive again unto God.

You see, the sevenfold work of the priest has to do with man's condition, as contrary to God's thought, and as impossible of realising that thought; and as made nigh, reconciled, redeemed, delivered, forgiven, justified and made alive. Those are all the elementary things of the Gospel of our faith. Every one of them is a great matter in itself. That is where you begin when you contemplate the Priest.

Now we want to take up what we have just said and recognise one or two other factors as to Christ's priesthood.

Firstly, the priesthood of the Lord Jesus is related supremely to God's full purpose. (We come to the second point in the following message.) Perhaps one of the most important things to recognise in a statement like that is that the Gospel of our salvation, whether considered in any one, or in all of those terms just used - made nigh, reconciled, redeemed, forgiven, made alive - is not something in itself. We may preach the wonderful and blessed truth that in Jesus Christ we who were far off are now made nigh by the blood of His cross, and we may preach reconciliation, redemption, justification; but let us remember that none of these, nor yet all of them put together, are an end in themselves. Salvation, which compasses them all, is not something in itself. It is all related to God's full purpose, and has to come up to that for which Jesus as Prophet stands. It is to bring back to a place, to take things up again where they broke down, so that there can be a going straight on to that purpose which was fixed originally.

So the full work of the Lord Jesus as Priest brings us only to the beginning of things. We mean by that, that it just brings us back to where God can get on with what He intended at the beginning: a new creation.

Christ's priestly work relates to that full purpose of God. We take note of the fact that the letter to the Hebrews bears that out. You have in chapter 3:1 these words: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling..." A heavenly calling! That takes you right back to the beginning, right into those Divine counsels, the thoughts and intents of God concerning man. What is the heavenly calling? It is to be in fellowship with God for the manifestation of Himself. So the apostle starts there. In the first two chapters he has given us a wonderful introduction in relation to the person of the Lord Jesus, who He is, and what He is. Now the apostle goes on with the work, the office, the function of the Lord Jesus, and at this point he says, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of (or partners in) a heavenly calling". In the letter to the Ephesians Paul uses another phrase in exactly the same connection when he prays that we may "know what is the hope of His calling". You know quite well that you are in the heavenlies in Ephesians. To believers, the Lord's people, the apostle has said some amazing things. He has taken you right back into those counsels of the Godhead. He has spoken about "His eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ", and our being "chosen in Christ", and being "foreordained unto the adoption of sons". Then, as though he realised how hopeless it was for him to speak of such immeasurable things, he drops on his knees and prays that we might be given "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of (y)our heart being enlightened" that we might "know what is the hope of His calling" (Eph. 1:17,18). If you read through the Ephesian letter you will have the explanation of this heavenly calling, and you will discover in that revelation of the church being the fulness of Him that fills all, that His manifold wisdom is manifested unto principalities and powers. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling". There you are back with the supreme thought of God concerning man.

In the second part of this first verse you have to come down to things as you find them, "...consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession". How can you come to the heavenly calling? Consider your High Priest; take account of your High Priest. What do we mean when we refer to "the High Priest of our confession"? It is related to what we have already said. These Hebrew Christians confessed Jesus as their Apostle and High Priest, and now, says the writer of this letter, they are to consider Him whom they have confessed as Apostle and High Priest. In other words he says, "You have made a confession, you have recognised Him, you have acknowledged Him, you have seen something as to what He is, but it is quite evident that you have nothing like the full content of the meaning of that. You have confessed Him as High Priest; now you need to see what that means." All

the rest of the letter is an unfolding of Jesus as High Priest.

God wants to show us what a Christ we have and to bring us into the knowledge and enjoyment of Him whom we know as Prophet, Priest and King. This letter makes it perfectly clear that that inner and fuller knowledge of Him is of very great importance. What warnings and pleadings there are in this letter in view of the consequences of not knowing Him as Lord! In Hebrews chapter three the apostle goes on to show how Israel fell in the wilderness, and that these Christians may do the same. That is the point. The reason is not because they did not know the Lord, not because they had not acknowledged the Lord, but because they did not know the meaning of the Lord as they should. They had not come to see God's full thought for them as expressed in Christ, and therefore they fell short. At the end of chapter 5 he speaks to them as those who, when by reason of time they ought to be teachers, have need of someone to teach them the first principles. The Lord wants us to go on to full understanding.

In chapter 3:1 we read of the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, and yet this needs to be contemplated in order to enter into its full meaning. Now you pass immediately into chapter 4 and you read: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should be deemed to have come short." What, then, is the first thing about the inner knowledge of Christ as our High Priest? It is coming into rest.

Here is a very precious and blessed thing. Do you notice in the Word of God that when Israel entered into the land, it is put in this way, that they entered into rest, and then they began to take possession? The rest does not lie at the end of all the campaigns, when all the fighting has been done and they settle down in their inheritance. The two things go together, and here in this letter to the Hebrews, rest is mentioned first. It is the work of the High Priest. If you look back to the book of Joshua you will see that it was through the function of the priest that they entered into the land. The priests' feet stood in the bed of the river and they stood fast until all the people had passed over. It was the priestly function to bring the people into the land. They came into rest on the ground of priestly ministry, and then they started the campaign. If ever there was a campaign characterized by sheer rest it was the campaign against Jericho. It is almost like going out for a daily stroll and going home again. You see what the Lord wants to teach us. He is saying quite clearly, "Now look here, all this work that is to be done is not going to be on the ground of your striving, effort, or anxiety; it is going to be on the ground of what I have done, and your resting in it. Now go and walk round quietly on that ground, and do it again, and again, and recognise that all that follows throughout the whole of the campaign is on that ground. If ever you depart from that ground disaster will overtake you." And at the very next step it did, for whatever Achan may have done, it resulted in the reverse of Jericho at Ai.

When they said, "Let a few of the people go up - there is no need for all the people to go up against Ai" - they met with a reverse. They said, "Let a few go up and the rest stay at home." You notice when Achan's sin was dealt with and was put out of the way, then the Lord said to Joshua, "Let all the people go up against Ai." What was the sin there that brought disaster? It is true that it was Achan's sin, but it was this attitude: "We are able to do this, and even a few of us can do it." It was coming onto the ground of human confidence, self-sufficiency, and the great lesson that the Lord had taught at Jericho was this: here is the massive city, which had disconcerted a whole generation and caused them to perish in the wilderness; a mighty, walled-up city, which was narrowly shut up, you might call it the very citadel of the land. You might say, 'If we could get over Jericho we could get over anything.' That is just where they failed. The Lord was saying, "The whole campaign is represented by Jericho; it is the key to the situation. The lesson you learn there is the lesson which is to govern all the rest. The lesson is that I have done it all, and you go in and possess by simply

resting upon what I have done." And that is where the priestly element came in. Enter into rest on the ground of His priestly work, and then you go on from victory to victory.

If there is not rest in us the enemy will score every time; we shall be turned back in the fight, disconcerted and disintegrated. It is essential that you and I first of all enter into rest; and when we have entered into rest what does that mean? It means that the door is open for all the fulness of God's thought. We are in the land when we are in rest, for that is what it means. Now go up and possess all. The land is simply a type of the fulness that is in Christ for us all. The priestly work brings us to the gate of God's full thought, to the place where we begin in relation to all that God ever intended. Oh, that we might consider our High Priest, with the result that we first of all enter into rest, because of all that He has done. He has by His blood made us nigh. Then why stand far off, stand back wondering if perhaps we dare? That is dishonouring to God. That is saying, in effect, 'God has not done what He says He has done.' So that everything else - reconciled, redeemed, delivered, forgiven, justified, made alive - is in Christ our High Priest. Faith brings us into that position, and when you and I have really by faith grasped Him and what He means as our High Priest, that in Him we are made nigh, and can never be made nearer, than the fellowship between the Father and the Son, and the Son and the Father, is our fellowship. John says, "We have fellowship"; "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son" (1 John 1:3,6).

The variance, the enmity is done away in Christ; we are redeemed in Christ, everything that was lost is recovered in Christ. We are delivered in Him. So we could go through all that He stands for in His priestly work. When we grasp it by faith, the first thing is to come to rest of heart, and then the whole land is open before us. There will be battles, conflict, resistance, pressure, and the enemy will try and give us a very bad time, but it is only to try and get us off our ground of confidence, to rob us of our rest; "consider the apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus".

May He write that word in our hearts: "Oh, rest in the Lord."

Chapter 4 - His Nature and Office as Priest (continued)

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." Heb. 3:1.

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Heb. 4:1.

We now come to another factor as to Christ's priesthood.

The second point about Christ's priesthood is its universal, heavenly and eternal character, and its values for us. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews brings us to a consideration of a comparison and a contrast between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Melchizedek. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:20 KJV). "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him: to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of Peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (Heb. 7:1-3).

Wonderful word! You notice there is an amazing reversing of the order. The first statement is that the Lord Jesus is declared to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and the last statement is that Melchizedek is made after the order of the Son of God. It puts the Lord Jesus right back in priority even to Melchizedek. Melchizedek and his priesthood is constituted after the Son of God. That is a remarkable statement.

"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood... what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah, of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood... who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifies, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:11-17).

"For if He were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things..." (Heb. 8:4-5). That brings us to see the universal, heavenly, and eternal character of Christ's priesthood and its value for us. The contrasts are clearly recognised in these passages between the earthly and the heavenly, the temporal and the eternal, the local and the universal.

The government of what is heavenly in relation to this dispensation is a thing of primary account to the Lord's people. You see what the apostle is saying all along in this letter about the heavenly side of things. We read that first word in chapter 3: "...partners (partakers) in a heavenly calling", and then, "We have a High Priest, who has passed through the heavens", "who has sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens"; "If He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all", for those things are only a shadow of the heavenly things. The priesthood of Christ is taken right

outside of the limits of this earth and is established in heaven, giving us one more note in connection with the universal purpose of God which is in view.

We saw in our former meditation that the Prophet has to do with the universal, the heavenly, and the eternal thought of God for man; that He stands to represent that, and to keep it in view, and to demand the constituting of all things according to that. Now we see Christ's priesthood being carried right out of those dimensions, carried out of Israel, the local, the limited and the earthly, and out to the heavenly, to the universal.

It is just there that you have the specific difference between Melchizedek and Aaron. I do not think that this letter is intended to teach that there was nothing in Christ's priesthood according to the Levitical order. Certainly there was. All that is set forth in the Levitical priesthood, the offerings and so forth, is taken up in the Lord Jesus. The apostle does not mean that the Lord Jesus has no connection whatever with the Levitical order, but what he means is this, that while He takes up that order and fulfils all that type, He goes *beyond* that and links with something else. Now note the difference. In the priesthood of Melchizedek you have nothing that is according to the Levitical order so far as you can trace. We mean this: that the priesthood of Melchizedek is not the priesthood of bloody sacrifice; it is the priesthood of offerings to God. In Aaron and his order it is the sacrifices made by the shedding of blood. In Melchizedek it is the offerings to God without blood.

There are offerings to God apart from the shedding of blood, apart from the slaying and the death, but when you get into the realm of such offerings you have got back to a place of direct communion with God. You have got outside of the time realm, because it is into that that sin has come, and the sacrifices made by blood are required in a propitiatory way. When you leave that realm, and get to the place where, without the shedding of blood you can offer to God, you have got back into the eternal, back into the heavenly, you have got away from the earthly.

Here the Lord Jesus in His priesthood comes down to the Aaronic level, and in the shedding of His own blood and the offering of Himself as a burnt-offering He meets the demand of the time conditions. But that is only incidental to the whole thing that has come in because of an awful necessity. When He has done that, then He carries it out into the eternal priesthood and sees there man offered to God for God's pleasure, man standing in God's pleasure in eternity, according to God's eternal thought. That is the place of this statement, "made like unto the Son of God", reversing the whole thing, a priesthood which means a perfect acceptance with God, a priesthood which means God is well satisfied. It is an awful story of bloodshed in propitiation. You have come away from that scene of death, suffering and sacrifice for propitiation, and you have come into the heavens. You have come away from what is temporal and you have got back into the eternal; away from what is just local as in Israel, into the realm where everything is universal and according to God's mind.

That is the great point of difference between Aaron and Melchizedek, and when it is all summed up it just means that Christ's priesthood stands related to the universal purpose of God. And that universal purpose of God comes in when that which was local and earthly rejected God's Son and set Him aside.

We pointed out in our previous meditation that the Lord Jesus adopted the title of Son of Man in view of His rejection. His first usage of this title was when He called His disciples to follow Him, and said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath no where to lay His head." Surely that is in view of His rejection. He is not accepted; He has no place. He came to His own, and they received Him not; "the Son of Man hath no where to lay His head". That is the Prophet, and it is when the Prophet is rejected by Israel that the universal comes in, and

then, to realise the universal, He fulfils the priesthood of Aaron and carries it out to what is eternal and heavenly in the thought of God. It is just the difference between Israel and the church. One is local, earthly, temporal; the other is heavenly, universal, eternal; and it is into the value of the priesthood which is related to that that you and I are brought.

Now there is this further thing that comes in in that connection. It is the finality of Christ's priesthood and of His priestly work. This letter lays a finger of stress upon that note: "...He ever lives to make intercession". Then there is that word "perfect". If the Levitical priesthood had made things perfect, why should another order of priesthood be necessary? That is the argument and the question. Such another is required, and the explanation is that the priests of the Levitical order could make nothing perfect because they died. They carried their work so far and then died, and someone else had to take it up; then that one died, and someone else took it up and they were never able to reach finality. The argument of the apostle here is that He, after the power of an indissoluble life, exercises His priesthood. He ever lives, and therefore He is able to save to the end, or to the full. It is not necessary to remind you that that statement, "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him", as it is commonly used in evangelistic work today is limited; it is used to mean that He is able to save right down to the depth of your being. Well, that is true, but that is not the meaning here. The context points out that because He never dies, the Son of God, after the power of an endless life, has a perfect work. He can go right on with His work to the end. He ever lives. It is the finality of Christ's priestly work that is stressed. What does that mean? It means that everything that hinders God's purpose being realised has been fully and finally met in the priestly work of the Lord Jesus. It has all been dealt with, and He holds it as something which is eternal, that cannot pass, that cannot die. The Priest and His work are one; they will not have an end and will continue for ever.

We are forbidden to entertain the idea of there ever being a time when the work of the Lord Jesus as Priest would cease to be available to us, or, putting that in another way, cease to be efficacious for us while we are looking to Him. He holds that work beyond all the power of death to touch it, beyond all the power of sin to corrupt it, beyond all the power of earth to change it, beyond all the power of time to limit it. He has taken it right outside of all those things which belong here, and it goes on. We are commanded to consider Him as One who holds a work that is final and perfect on our behalf. Everything has been dealt with.

You can follow that more closely in this letter, and see that it is worked out in this way. In chapter 9 you have the statement that those priests of the Levitical order had, year by year, to bring new sacrifices, because these offerings never made anything perfect, and there had to be a constant repetition of sacrifice and offering, and nothing ever got to an end. Now the Lord Jesus, by one offering for ever, has made perfect. It is what we call the finished work of the Lord Jesus upon which we are bidden to rest.

Let us come back to what lies behind this letter, and see what is the ground of our entering into all that God has intended, reaching the fulness, getting through to the ultimate. How shall it be? What is our assurance? By what means shall we attain? The answer is, not by effort and striving of ourselves, but by resting upon that which is perfected for ever in Him, resting upon an eternally accomplished work.

The wonder of this is seen in this special emphasis that that perfect work is taken by Christ into heaven where it is beyond the reach of all earthly things, all time influences, and that it continues in heaven in the power of an endless life. The work goes on in the power of an indissoluble life. The value of that is that there is a subtle peril of regarding the Lord Jesus as having died on Calvary and having paid the price, atoned for our sins, so long ago, and we come and put our faith in that, and

accept that as something done so long ago. There it took place, and there it ended. In viewing things in such a way there is a very serious loss and a great danger. What this letter says is this: That was a timeless thing, outside of time, and is today just as new, fresh and throbbing with vitality as it was nineteen hundred years ago. It is as though the Lord Jesus died today for you and for me, and tomorrow and the next day, and all the days. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever". The impressive thing is that when you get right through to whenever those times are in the book of the Revelation, they are unveilings of end times, and some of them are unveilings of times beyond the end, you still find a Lamb; the exact words in the original are these: "as though it had been newly slain". It is not a Lamb that was slain two thousand years before, but as though it had just been slain. He is outside of time.

You and I will still fail. We have not yet attained, neither are we already perfect. But we are not going to accept failure, and say, 'Well, we shall fail to the end; we don't have to try, we can be careless.' Imperfection will be found in us right up to the end. Oh, that is most disconcerting! Yes, but the priestly work of the Lord Jesus goes on beyond that, and is new every day. If we lived according to the old Levitical order, after we sinned, we would bring a sacrifice, and then we would be at rest as far as any ritual could bring rest. It brought that sense of satisfaction that you had obeyed God. Well, the next day you sinned, and you brought another offering, and so on, day after day. But this sacrifice of the Lord Jesus does something more than that. It abides as an eternal, present thing in value, not only as a bit of ritual but as an entire relief for the conscience. It is a power, not an outward, objective observance. It is a power in the life when we have real faith apprehension of the priestly work of the Lord Jesus. It brings rest of heart and a peace which abides while we rest upon what that sacrifice stands for continually. "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "If we walk in the light as He is in the light..." (1 John 1:7). How shall we walk in the light? Just that way: "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive". "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son *keeps on cleansing*" (that is the tense there). It is something that is living all the time, every day, and it goes right on. How shall we get through? We shall be brought to God's full purpose by realising that Christ's priesthood continues in its value until the last bit of sin in the redeemed is removed, until the last call for cleansing has been answered, until the whole work of God has been accomplished and He gets man according to His thought. Until then, the priestly values of Christ's work will continue. They are outside of time. They are outside of the earth. They are universal. They are heavenly.

Now, of course, the strong emphasis in this letter, finally, is upon faith. We tend to take up the great faith chapter of Hebrews and make faith something in itself. Oh, yes, by faith all these people triumphed, from Abel onwards. It was their faith that did it. We begin to ask the Lord to give us faith, and we concentrate upon the idea of faith as some thing. We detach faith, and make faith a thing in itself. You have to read that chapter as an accumulation of all that has preceded, and see that all the universal, heavenly, eternal work of the Lord Jesus as High Priest connects with the original thought of God to have man for the expression of Himself, and to realise it means that you have to have faith in the priestly work of the Lord Jesus. Faith is not something in itself. The value of faith is in the Object upon which faith is set. Remember that; otherwise we begin to talk about faith in degrees. There may be more or less faith, but the value of faith finally is not so much the degree of the thing called faith, it is the apprehension of the Person in whom faith rests. It is the result of faith that makes faith small or great.

You may have what you would call a small faith, but if what you would call small faith fastens upon the Lord Jesus so tenaciously that you have no other object or ground of hope but Himself, that is not little faith, that is great faith, and the Lord has always called that sort of thing great faith. Little faith

is just that which is not absolutely anchored to Him. It is looking round for something else to support it if He should fail. Great faith is that which has no alternatives but Himself, and it simply takes Him as the last word. That is greatness of faith. You notice that there are instances of that in the Gospel, where surprisingly the Lord Jesus says, "Great is thy faith." When you look to see what this great faith was, it was simply that someone said, 'Lord, You are my last hope, and I count on You, and I am sure You will not fail.' That is great faith.

In Hebrews 11 faith is simply that. Here is the purpose of God. Oh, it is such a great purpose as to disconcert you as you contemplate it, and make you feel how hopeless you are. Yet it is God's will, it is God's intention. It is something that you have got to lay hold of as God's thought for you, that eventually you shall be one in whom and through whom God is manifested. That is the cumulative effect as seen in the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, which is the church, having the glory of God. That is the end. Oh, here you realise it. "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." That is the purpose. "The new Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down from God out of heaven, having the glory of God" (Rev. 21:10,11). That is the church. That is God's intention. Shall we ever attain? Will it ever be realised that we shall have the glory of God and reach all the matchless thought of God? How can it be? Only by faith in the High Priestly work of the Lord Jesus. That will do it. That High Priestly work takes you right back to God's full thought and deals with all that has intervened to hinder and destroy God's thought. Then your faith lays hold of Him and His High Priestly work. By so laying hold of Him you come eventually to that place God purposed before times eternal, having the glory of God.

We cannot pass from this without remembering that the central element in the High Priestly work of Christ is His blood, and the blood is always represented as something which abides eternally in its efficacy, as though it were shed every moment afresh. It is set forth as living now, not something done and past, but the Life which is in that blood, and that blood which is the Life, is incorruptible, indissoluble, indestructible. There is a vitality in that blood which is not subject to anything that belongs to this earth. He has gone through with His own blood, and that blood is speaking in the presence of God. It is audible, it is vital, and so we are called upon to stand in the abiding value of the blood of Jesus every day, against all that which has intervened in the life of the race to hinder God's purpose. The precious blood of Jesus Christ testifies against sin, Satan, the flesh, and everything that rises up to hinder the reaching of God's end in living power. Faith in the blood destroys the power of that for us, and delivers us from all that has come in to prevent the realisation of God's purpose.

We can understand why Satan, and all that is Satan-influenced, hates the blood of Jesus Christ and would eliminate it from testimony for the simple reason that in the final issue, when heaven is seen to be stripped and empty of all the powers of Satan, and he is cast down, no more place being found for him in those heavenly realms, it is because of the blood of the Lamb. "They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony." (Rev. 12:11). It is understandable why the enemy is against the blood. It is the secret power of his destruction, and the destruction of all his work, his deposing, and the writing of utter futility over all his age-long efforts against God. Wonderful will be the story that that blood will tell at the end. Here is the marvellous purpose of God then, a coming in of forces to destroy it, and prevent it; and what a story this is of the operation of those forces and all the sin that this world has ever known (and there is enough sin in one little corner of this world to cause you to despair if you realised it all). The cumulative sin of all the ages, all the diabolical evil activity of the power of Satan operating through the ages, all the misery, suffering, wretchedness and everything else that Satan has done in the effort to defeat God's original purpose, at long last will fail, and God's purpose will be realised. "The earth shall be filled with the glory of God," which says that all this story of satanic activity has proven vain, been

rendered nil; it has utterly failed and God has achieved His end.

The blood of Jesus Christ, the testimony of the blood, is the secret of God's triumph. That is the heart of the High Priestly work of the Lord Jesus. We are commanded to fix our faith upon the fact of His blood, and to rest in the fulness of His priestly work on our behalf.

Chapter 5 - His Nature and Office as King

Reading: Philippians 2:5-11; Psalms 105:16-22; Hebrews 2:5-10; John 5:20; 13:3.

"He sent a man before them..." (Psalms 105:17).

From Joseph we move to Him who is known to us as the Son of Man, the Man Christ Jesus, albeit the Son of God. The first thing that has impressed itself upon me in connection with that clause is the wonder of what is bound up with it, "He sent a man before them".

You read the story of Joseph, and what you read is of a certain young man who dreamed some wonderful dreams, which put him in a place of advantage over his elder brothers, and put them at a great disadvantage. He was tactless enough to tell them his dreams, and as the result got what he might have expected - a desire put into action to get him out of the way. They first put him into a pit, then, being fearful as to what might happen to him, took him up and sold him to some traders, who took him away to Egypt, where he was sold again and became a servant in the house of a certain nobleman. Trouble developed, and he was sent to prison. You know the rest of the story.

Over all that this is written: "He (that is, God) sent a man before them". God was the instigator of the whole thing. God initiated it, and carried the whole thing through, and not one fragment of it was outside of the Divine, sovereign control. The whole thing was according to purpose, and is summed up in this amazing statement of very few words, "He sent a man before them...". God recognised a need; and, to meet that need, required a man who was perfected according to His own mind through suffering. So God fixed a cross of suffering with a throne at the end for that man, and when He brought him through the suffering to the throne, He met the need and the need was no less a need than that of life itself.

There is the story. In type, Joseph; in Antitype, the far higher and more eternal fulfilment, the Man Christ Jesus. But there is much more than that in it. We want to look closer, and we can take Joseph, to some extent, as our interpreter to lead us to Christ.

First of all, we find that Joseph in a peculiar way was the son of the father's love. More than all his brethren he was that, and that very title is given to the Lord Jesus. There were wayward ones at a distance from the father, brethren who were very far morally and spiritually from the father's thought. Joseph's brothers broke their father's heart, and were far away, out of touch. The father commissions the son of his love to go down to look into the condition of those brothers, with an anxious and earnest solicitude for their well-being. The son of his love is the sent one, the apostle of the father.

You will see before we get very far that we are moving in the letter to the Hebrews, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus" (Heb. 3:1).

Joseph went with his commission in relation to the state and the need of those brethren afar off, but they knew that he had intimated to them certain claims. He had told them of his dreams, which, if they came true, would see him in exaltation, in a place of power and dominion, high and lifted up, with his brethren as his subjects, acknowledging him as lord. They knew his claims, and when he came to his own, they that were his own received him not. They called him, "this dreamer", and they hated him for his dreams.

We pause to say that unless you have fears, you do not hate. I also venture to say that if you were a big brother who had a little brother who told his dreams you would say, "All right, little man, get on with your dreams; when you get older perhaps you will not dream like that." What big brother would turn upon his little brother and hate him and want to get rid of him because he had dreamed something like that? But you see they were afraid. They had some kind of registration in them that there was something in this, and they hated him for that.

There is a little fragment which the evangelist puts in his narrative of the trial of Jesus before Pilate, when the Jews and the rulers and the high priest had brought Him to Pilate and accused Him. Pilate takes a certain attitude, concerning which the evangelist says, "Pilate knew that for envy they had delivered him up" (Matt. 27:18). That finds them out. They were afraid of losing something.

Joseph, rejected and cast out by his brothers, is slandered and misrepresented in the world, suffering years under misrepresentation. And yet there resides in the heart of that one who is hated, rejected and misrepresented, the very wisdom by which the greatest problem that has ever confronted men should be solved, and the greatest need that ever men have known should be met, the need of life when death is everywhere. The wisdom to solve that problem was there as a secret in the heart of that one all the time. Eventually that wisdom came out, as you know, and proved the salvation of those brethren and of multitudes more.

Consider this: "Christ (crucified), the wisdom of God and the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). There resides within the very person of the crucified Lord, the rejected One, the slandered One, the misrepresented One, the One who has suffered for generations under a lie, the secret, the wisdom to solve the deepest problem of this universe, the problem of the overcoming of death by a Life which cannot be touched of death. Oh, how men have applied themselves to solve the problem of life. Life is wrapped up in one Person, and there is no life apart from Him, and, strangely enough, that wisdom is in Christ crucified.

Now, if we get to the heart of this thing, the truth is that it was Joseph's visions that caused all the trouble. In the case of the Lord Jesus it was the fact that by a Divine ordaining, settled in the eternal counsels of the Godhead, He was to be Lord of all, that every knee should bow to Him, all things in heaven and on earth. That caused all the trouble. How similar to the story of Joseph that is! You remember Joseph's two dreams. Firstly he saw all the sheaves doing obeisance to his sheaf, and secondly he saw the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon, the stars, bowing to him. We read that every knee shall bow to the Lord Jesus, "things in heaven, and things on earth... and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord". It is that vision, that Divinely determined destiny for the Son of God's love that is the cause of all the trouble. There is something satanic behind this rejection and hatred.

That is why we said that the brethren of Joseph were stung. You may have thought that was an exaggeration, a straining of things, but we were implying something more. When men do not take things like that benignly and in good spirit, but are moved to hatred and malice, you may be sure that there is more than a human sensing of a situation, and the Lord Jesus dragged that out into the light. He told the Jews that they were of their father the devil, and he was a murderer from the beginning. There is something sinister behind all this.

What is the nature of the malice and hatred that was behind it? There is one who knows that Joseph is destined to be lord, and he moves everything to frustrate that, to prevent that being realised. So he will throw him into a pit, he will slander him and bring him under misrepresentation; anything to rob him of the fulfilment of that design that he should be lord. Yes, it is the vision that is the cause of all

the trouble. Yet in the shadows behind it all God is sending a man before them; through it all the man is going on. They may seek to frustrate the course and cut it short, to impede, to entangle, anything rather than that that end should be reached; and yet the Sovereignty is using their very interference to reach the end. That is the marvel and that is what we want to get at.

The very cross itself achieved the end which God planned, while the devil and men intended it to be the very thing that hindered and prevented God's purpose. Men in league with the devil said, "Crucify Him"; "We will not have this Man to reign over us"; "cast Him out, destroy Him". God stands over it all and uses that to reach the end which He has purposed. Oh, the wonder of that word: "He emptied Himself... became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:8). He is not falling victim to the adversary, He is obeying the Father, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross. For that very reason, simply because He was obedient unto the death of the cross, "God hath highly exalted Him". That is another side to the story.

Read Hebrews chapter two again in the light of what God is doing as He sends a Man before them. Let these words come home to us in a new way: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour". But what is more, "...that He by the grace of God should taste death in the behalf of every man". That is the reversing of the satanic intention. Satan meant Him to suffer death, to die, and He did not refuse to go into death, and in tasting death He did so in the behalf of every man. The apostle Paul tells us elsewhere that His tasting of death was in the nature of a swallowing up of death: "O death, where is thy sting? O death, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55). It is gone, swallowed up in Him who tasted death on behalf of every man! That is how God sovereignly sends a Man before them, governing all that the opposing forces meant for destruction, and turning those very things to realise the end which they were intended to hinder.

So we find that Joseph's suffering was all governed by God in relation to his reign and his service. The value of the Lord Jesus as exalted is derived from His suffering. He is able to occupy that position and to serve us in the power of His endless, indestructible, incorruptible life, because of His suffering. His service springs out of His suffering, and it is the service of One who is exalted, and His exalted service as the Giver of Life issues from the very fact that He has suffered.

We can stop there with Joseph for the moment, to gather this all up into a few comprehensive words. In these meditations we have moved all too imperfectly over the ground of Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King, and when you come to the King you take up all that the Prophet and the Priest represent, and put that in the throne of glory. When you look at Hebrews two you see all three aspects in one statement. Look at it again in its context: "Not unto angels did He subject the inhabited world to come whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him? (*I think it is Rotherham who gives the more perfect translation of those words: 'What is man, that thou makest mention of him? Or the son of man that thou puttest him in charge?' That carries you further*). Thou madest Him for a little while lower than the angels; thou crownedst Him with glory and honour, and didst set Him over the works of Thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet... But we see not yet (*not realised yet so far as man is collectively, as constituted according to God's mind. It is the Divine intention, it is only a matter of a little postponement*) all things put under Him. But (*as an earnest of that*) we see Jesus (*it would have made a difference if the writer had said, 'We see the Son of God.'* *It would have been quite true, but would have missed the point. We see Jesus of Nazareth, the Man Christ Jesus; the man-ward aspect is in view*) crowned with glory and honour (*He sent a Man before them: they are following on*)..." (Heb. 2:5-9).

That is the Prophet. We have seen that the prophet is the one who embodies the full thought of God concerning man, and that great Prophet of mankind and of the Lord has been sent on before. There in the presence of God the Man Christ Jesus, in the capacity of the Prophet, sets forth God's thought in fulness. He is the embodiment of it. So that there is the Prophet in the throne; that is, God's realisation concerning man is there in the throne.

The Priest is the one who comes down to deal with all that has come in to interfere with and ruin God's intention concerning man - sin with all its consequences and power. Here we see Jesus, who for the suffering of death tasted death in the behalf of every man. That is the Priest. And the Priest is in the throne. He is "crowned with glory and honour". How does Hebrews begin? "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8).

Read Psalm 45 again in the light of that. He is sitting there in kingly majesty. Gathered around Him is the court, "all thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces... Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women; upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir..." (Psalm 45:8,9 KJV). That Psalm is quoted here in the letter to the Hebrews.

There is the Prophet, Priest and King in this one portion. It is man gathered up into the Man as God intended man to be. There he is in his Representative. "He sent a man before them" and in that Man is the very Life by which the others will come.

We could go back to Joseph and see his threefold office. The prophet is the visionary, the one who has the vision of man's dominion when man is according to God's mind. Then with regard to the priest, you follow Joseph and see him interceding on behalf of his brethren, making intercession for them that they shall be brought into the goodly land. In connection with the king, there he is upon his throne.

Joseph is a faint picture of the Lord Jesus, the greater Joseph. Everything is gathered up into that Man, Prophet, Priest and King, because God is superintending sovereignly over all, working according to a Divine design. Our life depends upon Him. Our fulness depends upon Him. Our reaching of God's intended end for us, the end which is set forth in these marvellous words of Psalm 8: "What is man...?" "Not unto angels did He subject the inhabited earth to come whereof we speak, but one in a certain place hath testified saying, What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that Thou make mention of him?" In what connection? Dominion over the inhabited earth to come. It is all gathered up in the Lord Jesus, and we can only come to God's intention as we are in Christ Jesus by faith. But only by being in Christ by faith, upon the ground of His work as the great Prophet our Representative, the great High Priest our Mediator, the great King our Lord, shall we come to God's full thought.

In other words, on the ground that He is our Representative, our Atonement and our Atoner, that He is Lord and Sovereign of our lives, King, having absolute dominion over us, we can and shall most assuredly come to God's thought in the end, to be as God intended from eternity that we should be. "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." "He was made perfect through suffering", and we are to be conformed to the image of God's Son, perfected and glorified.

"Jesus, my Shepherd, Saviour, Friend, My Prophet, Priest, and King; My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End." Can we, shall we say, "Accept the praise I bring"?

Chapter 6 - The Expression of Jesus as Prophet

The book of the Acts opens with an implication: "all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach...". The implication is that His work was not finished, there was a sense in which it was but the beginning, and therefore a continuation would follow. The beginning was in Himself in person on the earth; the continuation is by His Spirit in the church. If it were true that in His person He took up and fulfilled all the Divine thought and idea of the prophet, the priest and the king, and He leaves this earth not having finished, then surely He continues in that threefold capacity in the church. So it is for us to recognise the ministry of Christ and the function of Christ in that threefold capacity in the church.

A Word of Introduction

Let us look at one or two introductory things before we come immediately to that consideration. The first is concerning the abiding value of the revelation of the church. We should recognise that that revelation abides in its value in spite of all that has happened. There are quite a lot of people who, because of what they see as to the disappointing history of the church, and what is called the state of the church, have abandoned that ground and adopted a course of what they would call evangelism: "Let us get on with the simple work of soul winning, for the church is in ruins, and irreparably so!" I do not see anything in the Word to warrant such an attitude. The revelation of the church has been given for the dispensation, and it holds good today as much as it did when it was first given, and is as important as ever it was. We must not be moved away from it, and from the importance and value of it, because of the conditions which we see around us. The fact is that in the realm of spiritual life the values of the revelation of the church are as potent, as mighty, as helpful as ever they were, and they still operate. Those values are far deeper than perhaps we have yet come to realise.

So it is important to remind ourselves that the revelation of the church has an abiding value which is undiminished right to the end. There is a great peril attached to an evangelism divorced from the church, and the weaknesses consequent upon that course are seen everywhere. We must remember that evangelism proceeds from the church and comes back to the church. It is the church doing the work, and all the work of the church is for the building up of the church. You cannot divorce a function of that kind any more than you can take some function from your body and separate it and send it out into the outside objective realm apart from your body. It is there to do its work in relation to the body. Evangelism is essential unto the building up of the Body, and it is the Body building itself up. To divorce that or any other function of the Body from the whole is to mean a large measure of weakness and failure.

Another thing that we want to point out here is the importance of giving God credit for meaning more than we see and more than He says. It is a thing that is lost sight of and forgotten. It is a mark of our superficiality, carelessness or thoughtlessness. If there is one thing that is characteristic of a life which really goes on with God, it is that it is constantly discovering that God meant more than was realised when first that thing was seen. It means more and more, and when you go on into the greater fulnesses of God's meaning about things, you are tremendously impressed; you come to a state of awe. So we must give heed to things, not according to what we apprehend and understand as to their meaning, but because God has said it. And we may take it that if God says a thing, all the fulness of infinite wisdom lies behind that utterance. If you could measure God's thoughts, God's mind, God's intent, then you might come to limitation. But that is not possible, and so within every statement of the Lord there is a universe of meaning. If we could get behind the simplest statements

we should discover they led on deeper and deeper.

The apostle Paul said concerning his being caught up into the third heaven, that he saw unspeakable things which it is not lawful for a man to utter; therefore there was much that Paul could not utter. He knew things which he could not, dare not speak. Were they, therefore, things which were of no value to the Lord's people? If they were of value to the Lord's people surely they ought to be brought out. Or was the restraint upon Paul because of something else, that if those things were spoken, because of their condition men would find them difficult, and would be put under too great a responsibility? I think that is the explanation. I believe that there are many things that the Lord would say, but you and I are not prepared to accept them; men are not willing to have them; and the Lord holds them back because of the responsibility of knowledge, and it is not lawful to speak of them for that reason.

If you and I could come to the place where, at any cost (and that is saying a great deal), we are willing to go on with all the revealed mind of God, we shall get a very much larger revelation than the average believer. I verily believe that was just what Paul represented and that it was because of his utterness and his willingness to pay the full price, not just of laying down his life in one act, but going on throughout years of living martyrdom, that he could have such full revelation. Very largely that was the explanation. There is revelation for those who would pay the price, but for those who are not prepared to do so there are things which it is not lawful to utter; they cannot be revealed, they have to be held back.

The point is this, that there are things which cannot be made known to us because we are not ready for them, but we have got to give God credit for meaning much more than He says. We must not give to things the value which we see that they hold, we have got to take the attitude towards the Lord of openheartedness: 'Lord, You may mean a great deal more in that than I can see and accept at the moment. As far as I can see I cannot go all that way; nevertheless my heart is open. If I cannot accept it at the moment, my heart is open to You to reveal to me the truth!' That is a real openness and teachableness, which makes so much possible.

The third thing is this, that when we come to the church side of this truth - not a departing, separate thing, but the other side of the truth - we must recognise that we come into the realm of the infinite and unspeakable grace of God. So often when we speak about the church, people think of it as truth, as teaching, as something in itself which is optional. But, oh, we have seen the Lord Jesus a little, what He is, and what He stands for in the presence of God on our behalf. As we have contemplated Him our hearts have gone out and we have said, "Jesus... my Prophet, Priest and King". Now in relation to that, the church is brought in, and all that which is true of Him is to be expressed in and through the church. What is our reaction? Is it the reaction that that is teaching, that is truth, or is it, "What unspeakable grace!"

So it is when you come to open the letter to the Ephesians, where more than anywhere else the church is unveiled and that word "grace" is repeated: "the riches of His grace"; "unto me who am less than the least was this grace given" (Eph. 3:8). What grace? To proclaim "the unsearchable riches of Christ". That is the calling of the church, "according to the riches of His grace, ...that we should be unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:7,12). We are not dealing with truth, we are dealing with the grace of God to us, that we should constitute that Body in which, through which, all that Christ is, is to be manifested and displayed to the universe. Let us remember that as we go on, and all the time seek to keep before us that this is not some truth, but this is some grace. This is not some teaching, this is the infinite grace of God to usward. This is not some way that we are called to take. It is some realm of grace into which we are called to stand and are privileged to stand.

Having said that, we now come to at least the beginning of the other side of this great revelation of Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, and we work to that perhaps by a somewhat lengthy process.

We first come to the prophet, and we have seen as to the prophet that the deepest and innermost significance of the prophetic function is the representation of God's full thought, and the maintenance of that full thought. The prophet comes forth in a living expression of all the thought of God concerning men, and he stands there uncompromisingly to demand that that thought shall govern, and that everything shall be constituted according to that comprehensive and perfect thought or mind of God. That simply means that all the spirit of prophecy heads up to Him. He stands as the full-orbed revelation of the mind of God, and challenges everything in relation thereto, and this in Man-form, as centred in a Man, so that in Him God has the Man according to His own mind. We have to work to that in relation to the church, by recognising what has come in in a special way as to the Body of Christ. In this matter, I think it is of primary importance that we know exactly what did come in through Paul. I am not sure that people are able to recognise or clearly define just exactly what did come in through Paul, so it will be of value and much help to see where Paul differed from the other apostles.

Before you can touch the differences you have to recognise the similarities. There was no difference between Paul and the other apostles on a great many points. As to Christ, there was no difference. There was no difference between them on the matter of sin, repentance, justification, regeneration, sanctification, the supernatural world, baptism, the Lord's Table, the Lord's coming again as a truth; on evangelism or fellowship, the Gentiles admitted to the Gospel, and the church as a reality. On all those matters they were all one, and there was no difference at all. There may have been on one or two of those points a larger emphasis, or perhaps a little fuller understanding between them, such as on the matter of the Lord's coming. Paul says many things about baptism that are not said by the others, but I do not think there was any difference in their position.

Now you have to see the difference between Paul and the others. The difference was not as to salvation, but it was as to the saved; that is, it was not as to the salvation of Jews and Gentiles. The difference was that both Jew and Gentile disappeared. The others were seeking the salvation of Jews, and Gentiles being admitted to the Gospel, and they still saw them as Jews and Gentiles. But Paul differed altogether from that position, and in what he called "my Gospel", his revelation in which Jew and Gentile, and indeed all other earthly distinctions, disappeared and the saved were not saved Jews and saved Gentiles, saved barbarians, Scythians, bondmen, freemen, but the saved were one New Man apart from all those distinctions and differences. Paul stood apart from the twelve on that ground, and that is a major difference between him and them.

Then Paul differed on the matter of the heavenly nature of the church as the Body of Christ, as to its timelessness and its universality. His position demanded the breaking altogether of the earthly system, and what he saw and was occupied with was a period, a dispensation, in which God had ceased to be occupied with the earth as such, and to be wholly occupied with the heavenly. It is a revolutionary thought. That will make some upheavals if it is true. As such, God is not concerned with the nations, nor with doing anything on this earth. He is not building or planning or constituting anything on this earth throughout the dispensation. God is constituting a heavenly thing, and when He has finished that, the earth will be abandoned to judgement. By the development of His plan in different stages, eventually it will be swept clean, and that which has been done in this dispensation, having been suspended from the earth for the time being, will come to it and occupy it. That is a point where Paul's revelation differed.

He further saw that that church which was being taken out from the nations and made heavenly, had as its destiny the government of the world. The government of this [new] world is bound up with the church, and it is to be the administrative Body in the ages to come. The other apostles went so far, and then stopped short of this full revelation given to Paul.

It is true that John gave us some visions which seem to be entirely in keeping with this. In the book of the Revelation you have this, but John gave them as visions, not as teaching. Paul gave them as a heavenly system of truth, to be applied in practice in the dispensation; John gave them as a vision of realisation at the end.

We are wrong, of course, in speaking of 'Paul' and 'John' when we touch things like that. We should say 'the Holy Spirit through Paul and John' was working with the same thing in view, but we are noting the uniqueness, the peculiarity of the revelation given to Paul. So Paul stands alone, and that by Divine ordination. It is quite wrong to say that a mistake was made and Paul ought to have been the twelfth apostle. Not at all. You cannot fail to see the difference in the revelation given to Paul. Theirs was one line; it was true as far as it went, it was of great value up to a point, but then it stopped. Paul alone went on, and he remains alone to the last. They could not follow him. They tried. Peter said, "Even as our beloved Paul hath said in all his letters... things hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:15,16). He tried to follow, but he could not go all the way. Paul remains alone to the last.

His attitude and position as to the earthly and heavenly order resulted in his being alone. He was not out for Israel ultimately; he was not out for an earthly church, either of Jews or Gentiles or a combination of both; his whole value was the heavenly. He was governed by a heavenly calling, a heavenly vocation, a heavenly vision, a heavenly purpose. Unless you have realised that, you have failed to understand the secret of Paul's endurance, that which supported him when everything around was crashing, and what might have been called his life work was going to pieces. He seems unshaken. In the days when, so far as the earth was concerned, all that had come into being through him was breaking down, he seemed to be most triumphant. This proves that Paul saw the heavenly side of the work of God in the dispensation, and that the earthly was merely a passing phase. God was taking up, as it were, into heaven, out of the earth, that which would abide, and that which would not abide would break down. Governed by that heavenly conception he stood alone. It was that very fact that caused his aloneness.

Yet even Paul came to the fulness of his revelation progressively; that is, he did not come at once into the full meaning of the particular revelation given to him. It came to him in parts, it came by private disclosures, and eventually he came into it in its fulness, but not until he had finally let go of Israel and Jerusalem. For a long time he held on to the hope of Israel, his brethren after the flesh. It may seem almost like sacrilege to talk of an apostle like Paul making mistakes, but he did, and he made mistakes in relation to Jerusalem and Israel. The Lord sovereignly and graciously overruled and brought him out of them. The Lord had told him to depart far hence, because they would not receive his testimony, yet he tried again in spite of the direct and explicit word of the Lord as to what the situation was and what the issue would be. Not until he had finally let go of Jerusalem and of Israel did he come out into the fulness of the heavenly meaning of things.

This shows how it is possible to counter the heavenly by clinging to something earthly. It goes back to what we were saying in the introductory word, that there is something which is of vast and unspeakable importance, but there is a price attached to it, and you cannot come into it until you are prepared to pay that price and to let go that secondary thing, however important you may think it to be, however good it may be in its own realm. There is something higher than that, and the good may be the enemy of the best; it may stand in the way of the fulness. So many people are unwilling to pay

that kind of price. They are prepared to let the bad go for the good, but they are clinging to the good even when there is something better.

We must recognise that there is a difference between the foundation and the superstructure. The foundation may be that of the twelve apostles, as it is said to be, but the superstructure may be something more than that. It is what is going to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The twelve laid a good foundation. All the fundamental or foundational truths of redemption and salvation were laid by them, but the superstructure may be something more than that, and it is upon that that Paul built the heavenly church. So many people are content with the foundation, occupied all the time with the foundation of repentance, and faith, and so on.

All this has certain issues for us of very practical account, and we may as well face the issues as we go along. We will look at some of those issues. Firstly, the nature of our spiritual life and work. Is it in relation to God's fullest thought, God's heavenly revelation, or is it something less than that upon the earth? Are we looking for something here? Are we giving ourselves to have something here, not only in work, but in our own lives? How this pierces right through to the heart of things. What are we looking for here in spiritual life?

Let us put that another way: what is our history of God's dealings with us as we go on? In the early stages we may have something that looks very much like something down here on the earth; that is, we come in spiritual infancy into that which is almost capable of being experienced in the senses, almost tangible. It seems that we have almost reached heaven down here. As we go on with the Lord we find that things are moving more and more away from the earth to heaven, and that our experience is growingly one of faith's utmost tests, even in spiritual matters. We only get through to a position of knowledge and experience where matters are actual, living realities in our history, by means of the severest tests of our faith. We are put into situations and experiences where faith is tried to its full extent, and then, as the result of that, some new knowledge of the Lord comes out, and it becomes more like that as we go on. There was a time when we would have a severe test of faith, then there would be some decrease of intensity, and we would have a little time of respite and enjoyment. But as the years have gone on we have found that the periods of respite have become fewer and shorter, and the pressure upon faith is more prolonged and continuous, and we are getting more and more to the place where we only know the Lord at all by sheer faith, for there is nothing else to help us. You have nothing on the earth, nothing to support you round about, nothing here that underpins your faith. If God in heaven is not real to the last degree, then your ship is going to pieces, you are swung clean away from all that relates to this world and to this earth, and your life is hid with Christ in God; it is in heaven and you have nothing here. That is a proof of the heavenly nature of things.

What is true in the spiritual experience as we go on, is true in service. The principle operates and governs still that in this dispensation God is not building up something on this earth. God is working to get everything of a heavenly order. Unfortunately so many of the Lord's people, with the purest and truest motives, have made far more of the earthly means than the heavenly end, and the earthly means of doing God's work is so great, and the heavenly end is so small that it is hardly worthwhile. There is a tremendous amount of administration, organisation, missionary paraphernalia, and what is the result? You may say, "What is the alternative?" There is a glorious alternative where, with a minimum, if any at all, of that human production, God by His Spirit can be doing something which is utterly heavenly. It is a test. All that other is going to break down; it is destined to do so, and then the thing which will still go on will be only what is heavenly in its nature.

We have not forgotten that we have the Prophet in view. It is a heavenly thought that is to be

represented. This is the church in prophetic function - all things of God, God's mind, not man's. The issue which arises is as to the nature of our spiritual life and work, the measure of God's full thought, and that leads us to the necessity for a revelation as to God's full thought. The mistake has been made, and is being made, and there is failure because there is no perception of what God's thought and intention is. The trouble is the lack of revelation concerning the heavenly. That should be a real burden upon the heart of all who think that they see. Let us, if we think that we see, not condemn and judge, but pray. Paul knew quite well that the Ephesians and others for whom his letter was written, did not see. They had no perception about this heavenly truth - the church, the Body - but he did not rail upon them, he did not condemn and judge. He did not say, "You do not have the light, you do not have the truth, you do not have the revelation, you are all wrong." He said, "For this cause I bow my knees (Eph. 3:14) ...that He would grant you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17). That is the proof, as to whether we have the thing in the head or in the heart. If we have it in the head then we shall talk down at people; if it is in the heart we shall pray to God with all our heart that He would grant unto them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him".

Another issue arises out of this, and is that of our willingness to be in a rejected minority. Paul was not understood. Even the other apostles could only go so far with him. James could not go all the way. Peter came under the influence of James and fell into grievous default, and Paul had to withstand him to his face. Paul had come in later than all of them. Yes, he had to stand up against the rest for his revelation. He was alone. What he saw made him alone, and he was alone to the end. Not that they did not love him and that they did not believe him; not that there was no fellowship in the Spirit, not that they would not have said, 'Beloved brother Paul!' But with all that they were not able to go all the way with him, to see as he saw, and he was alone because of his revelation. If ever there was a lonely man at the end from this world's standpoint it was Paul, just as his Master had been, and it was his heavenliness of perception and understanding that made him that. The willingness to be in a rejected minority is an issue to be faced, and it is quite a real issue. You cannot avoid it. It is not an imaginary thing, and when it comes to the truth it is not a matter of somebody thinking they have something which nobody else has, and therefore are ostracized because of their conceit. The truth isolates if you are going all the way with God. You will find that you sift your following more and more.

There is another side to that. I know quite a lot of people who have isolated many quite unnecessarily by reason of their foolishness, tactlessness, pride and conceit, but that is not what we are talking about with Paul. No one could ever lay such charges at his door. Here is a man with a revelation, a man who knows God, a man who is standing for the thought of God in an utterness that is peculiar, and he is isolated and alone. It will always be like that. It is something to be faced.

Let us refresh our memories as to what Paul says in Galatians 1:10-19 and 2:1-14. There you will see that Paul is letting us into his inner history as to his stewardship, and the points which he makes are his detachment, on the one hand, from that which was of repute among men, from the accepted position, however good, and from the things of flesh and blood in his ministry. On the other hand there is his attachment to heaven. His revelation is seen to be of a double character. Firstly outward: "The Lord appeared unto me", he said. Then inwardly: "when it pleased God to reveal His Son in me." It was that inward revelation of the outward reality that Jesus of Nazareth was God's Son, and all it meant that constituted Paul's peculiar revelation and ministry. It was not the fact, but that which it meant. All the others believed in Jesus as the Son of God, but Paul got a revelation of what that meant: he saw a Man in glory. They believed that Jesus was in heaven, but Paul received, shall we say, the full-orbed revelation of the meaning of God having glorified that Man, His Son, in heaven. All his teaching came out of that. He had seen Jesus of Nazareth in heaven with the glory of God. It

had flung him to the ground, completely broken him and made a tremendous and indestructible effect upon him. 'What does this mean?', was what he said in effect. He must go away alone with this. He spent long months and years with that, alone with God, and the thing began to break upon him, and by the explanations of the Holy Spirit he was taken back into the eternal counsels of God before the world was. He took that fact of a Man in the glory back there, and he saw what God was purposing, and he saw what God determined and decided.

He saw God's Son becoming the model for all His creation, and then he saw that developing, and he saw God's Son assuming the form of a corporate Man. He saw a corporate Body, and that Son as the Head of that Body, and he saw the end was that Son glorified, filled with God's glory, and that Body filled with that same glory. It was shown to him that God had predestined that, and then that the Body was an elect Body, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. And then he saw the operations of God by His Spirit in gathering out from the nations men and women who, as they came out and in their spiritual life shed what was natural, what was of the earth - nationality and everything else - and assumed the nature and form of God's Son. He saw conformity to the image of God's Son as a foreordained thing, as a process going on. Then he saw the Spirit of God's Son introduced into those who were being gathered out, and God's Son fully formed in them. And then he saw the climax of that spiritual process in a day which was called "the day of the adoption as sons", which meant the taking of the veil away and the revealing of them in the likeness of Christ, the manifestation of the sons of God. Then he saw that as the key to everything in the universe, and all the havoc and all the travail and all the vanity in the creation ceasing, and the creation becoming all that God intended it to be in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, the day of the adoption of the sons.

Oh, we have only touched the fringes of it! Paul saw it, and to that vision he was abandoned. No one had seen it like that. Only one had seen that. He could not stand dissimulation or mockery after that, even of Peter or James or Barnabas. If they acted inconsistently, then he must rebuke them. It made him a lonely man, but what we owe to that loneliness!

All that is gathered up into the Prophet. There is the Prophet at God's right hand. That is the full realisation of that eternal thought, the Man Christ Jesus. By revelation Paul became the prophet to the church, and through his ministry the church comes into that prophetic office, ministry, and function, to embody God's thought, to express it and to minister concerning it. The church has a prophetic ministry in that sense.

We have limited the word prophet, or prophecy. We have to take it in its fullest sense; even its meaning in time has been limited, and it has gone perhaps a little too wide of what it ought to be. It is said that the prophet was one who predicted, and we pass from that today into the one who preaches. 'Pro' means 'before', and 'phaino' means 'to set forth', and the root of this word means 'illumination'. Therefore, the meaning is: to give a fore-illumination of God's thought, to set forth - to go before with God's thought is the office of the prophet. That is the church; that is Paul; that is Jesus Christ. It is not just prediction in the limited, historic sense, and certainly not just preaching in the general sense; it is bringing God's thought before men in an illumined way in the light, so that men see the light as God's thought is presented. That is the function of the church in relation to Jesus as God.

Chapter 7 - The Prophet, Priest and King in the Heavens

We resume in the letter to the Ephesians in chapter 3:8-9. Here we have set forth the fact of a superlative fulness in Christ, and the apostle Paul was called to minister in a peculiar way to bring that to light, to make all men see. Alongside of this runs the fact that it is the Divine purpose for the church to come to that superlative fulness. There is a ministry raised up and established in relation to that, in order that the church may attain to it.

Then a large part of this letter is occupied with making it clear that the church as a whole can only be what its individual members are, and what its ministers reveal. We are brought away from mere abstractions, something visionary, something mentally conceived or perceived in an objective way, and reminded that this Divine purpose requires that every individual member shall, in due measure, come to the superlative fulness, and that the church as a whole will only reach the Divine end as the members recognise that they are responsible individually for the Divine purpose and for the realisation of the church's calling.

If you read chapter four you will see the importance of that. The apostle speaks about the unsearchable riches of Christ, the nature of which is simply what we have been saying: the universality of God's full thought and intention for His new creation. You move through the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and you find that truth, that fact, set forth repeatedly in different connections. Israel was chosen for the purpose of occupying an elected sphere, and the governing thought about that twofold election is fulness - God chose them, and God chose the land for them.

It is a type of the church, chosen in Christ; Christ appointed by God (shall we say, eternally elected) as God's fulness, and a people chosen to occupy that fulness. When the land is described, it is always described in the terms of a land flowing with milk and honey. It is a great description of abundance and fulness; it is superlative. The people were chosen to occupy that chosen place.

So the unsearchable riches relate to Christ, and all that is in this letter points to the fact that we are chosen by God in Christ to come to that fulness, to the unsearchable riches. Paul was the great apostle of the unsearchable riches, hidden from all ages, hid in God, who created all things. That is the mystery, and his is the stewardship of that mystery, to bring out the things hid in God, the unsearchable riches of Christ, so that the church may enter into them.

The apostle tells us how we enter in. That is a matter of great practical interest at once. He tells us in this letter quite clearly that the first thing in entering into that place of the unsearchable riches, the fulness of Christ, is by way of apprehending the heavenly position of the church. It is in the heavens that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. The fulness, the unsearchable riches, and everything in this letter, is in the heavens and that follows so closely upon what we were saying about the apostle himself.

The great feature and factor of Paul's revelation was the heavenliness of everything for which he left all that was earthly, even in the things of God or things related to God. It is the heavenliness of Paul's vision that governs. It is from that heavenly place that he has such triumph in all circumstances.

We must repeat this because it is impressive, because these letters, such as Ephesians, being written

at the end, were written when that which had been brought about through the apostle's ministry was completely disintegrating. "All they in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). That is Ephesus. That is all the churches in Asia that came in through the apostle. Then, "This one has left me, and that one has left me"; not converts but fellow-workers, yoke-fellows, companions in the Gospel: "only Luke is with me", said he. With everything in a state of disintegration and breakdown so far as the earthly side is concerned, you find that the apostle is able to write with such exultation and freedom from depression, with constant references to the heavenlies: "...blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies"; "made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". The secret of his own endurance and triumphant faith was that he understood that the earthly side of things was not that with which God was ultimately concerned. God was getting a heavenly thing.

There is an earthly side to us as the Lord's people, which is a very disappointing side - the side of failure, the side of weakness. But by what the Lord is doing with us, and in us, through the trials and adversities, it is as though He were taking up something all the time to heaven, accumulating some spiritual values in heaven. And eventually when all that which is of us which is going to pass does pass, that which has gone to heaven will constitute our new being, so to speak. It will be the constituents of the heavenly man that we shall be.

That may be a strange way of putting things, but it does seem like that, that something is being stored up in heaven all the time. I look around and look back and see the tragedy of certain things. I have had great blessing from the ministries of certain servants of God, who have now gone to glory. I have had great blessing in my time from the ministry of Dr. A. J. Gordon of Boston. His ministry was of great value in its time, and when the opportunity arose some years ago of being in Boston, I went at the first opportunity to Clarendon Church. What did I find? A church with Modernism in it. I looked around to see if there were any traces of his ministry, but I could see none. You may say, "That is a tragedy! Where is that ministry?" It is in heaven. I have had great help from the ministry of Pastor Stockmayer, and the opportunity came of going to Hauptville to sense the atmosphere of Otto Stockmayer and to breathe in something of it. What did I find? No trace of that ministry. I did not meet anyone at all living in the value of that ministry. Some knew him, but they were spiritually dead. It was all gone. Where is it? It is not on earth, it is in heaven. I do not mean merely that these people are in heaven, but that the value of the ministry is in heaven. We see all around the tragedy and the failure, and if we lived on that, we should despair. A thing grows, and when it is past what is there? It is stored up in heaven.

The apostle realised that even though there be a turning away from him it was not all loss; God has something in heaven which will not fade or pass away. He is building something in heaven. It is a heavenly Body. The earthly side may be very disappointing, but every test of faith and every triumph through a test sends something up to heaven which is preserved and which will be there eternally. Something is going up, constituting an eternal thing, making a spiritual testimony which will come back in the ages to come in a very real, concrete form. Nothing is lost that is of God or that God has ever done.

The apostle triumphed by that realisation, and it is the only way to triumph. We need to get the heavenly point of view. To enter into the unsearchable riches of God's full thought requires that we shall, in the first place, apprehend our heavenly position, the heavenly position of the church, and of course, that means the heavenly issue of the cross. The cross is not all tragedy, not all defeat, not all failure. The cross has a heavenly issue. The triumph and the fruit of the cross is seen there, not here. If we did but know it, we should see that there is far more resultant from the cross of Christ than we imagine. When the apostle was caught up into the third heaven he evidently saw things like that.

The second thing necessary for entering into God's full thought, the unsearchable riches of Christ, is, as the apostle says here, "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the *full* knowledge of Him". Now, it is important to underline the actual word there which is not translated into the English correctly. All we have is, "in the knowledge of Him". We must pause, because this is not written to the unsaved, who need to know the Lord, and this is not written to mere infants who have just some knowledge of the Lord. It is written to people who have had a real ministry. You must remember that the apostle was with them for three years himself. He has given these Ephesians a very rich ministry, and not only they, but others to whom this circular letter was sent. So it is not just knowledge unto salvation, and it is not just that knowledge which brings salvation, the knowledge which spiritual children have. The Holy Spirit, therefore, uses a word which means "the *full* knowledge of Him"; "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him". The unsearchable riches of Christ are the full knowledge. Unto that a spirit of wisdom and revelation is needed. The apostle would not have prayed for that if it had not been possible, if it were not for us.

The third thing as necessary to enter is, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man". It requires an inner strengthening to arrive at the full knowledge of Him, the knowledge of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Now, the stewardship, as the apostle calls it, of this mystery, of these unsearchable riches of Christ, is essentially connected with the revelation of the Body of Christ. That is stated here quite emphatically. That is a point upon which we must settle, and it must be allowed to take hold of us and sink into us. The stewardship of the unsearchable riches of Christ is essentially connected with the revelation of the Body of Christ. Unless we have a revelation of the Body of Christ we do not have the stewardship of the unsearchable riches of Christ. If we are to have a ministry of the fulness of Christ we must have a revelation as to what that fulness is for, with what it is connected, and that is the Body of Christ.

It is not enough for you or for me to read the letter to the Ephesians, to study the letter to the Ephesians, to analyse it and even to memorise it, and then say, 'We know what the church is as the Body of Christ.' We may have all the terms, and all that is said, not only in this letter, but elsewhere about the church as the Body of Christ. We may know it like that, but never have had a revelation of the Body of Christ. That makes all the difference. Some of us lectured on Ephesians and preached Ephesians for years, and talked much about the Body of Christ, the church which is His Body, and the day came years after that when the revelation of the Body of Christ came to us. It came through the Word, but it was a revelation, and such a difference was made as to have proved utterly revolutionary. In the first place it was emancipating; it simply lifted us clean out of everything else. Then it meant a Holy Spirit ministry that has been growing and going on without hard labour in the ministry, but rather the flow of the Spirit in revelation.

It makes a tremendous difference when you get the revelation of the thing, and that is what the apostle is here seeking to bring over to his readers. He is saying things; he is putting it down in writing; and then it is as though he almost recoils and says, 'I wonder if they will understand this? They will read it, they will see these things as I write them, what I have written, but, oh, I do not want these people just to have something in writing, I want that all to become a mighty revelation to them as it has become to me. I want it to mean to them what it means to me; I want those people emancipated; I want them under an opened heaven.' "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, that He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation...". Then perhaps he wonders if they may faint in view of it all, what a tremendous thing it is, and how conscious they may be of their own weakness and imperfection, and be discouraged so that they might say, 'Oh, we shall never attain

unto it'; "for this cause... I pray that He would grant you that you may be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inward man." It is all in relation to the unsearchable riches.

So these three things are set forth as the way: firstly, a recognition of the heavenly position of the church; then, a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him; finally, the strengthening with power by His Spirit in the inward man.

There is a big difference, you will agree, between a human being and a mighty set of machinery or organisation. There is a great difference in the mode of operation between those two. In the machinery there is no mind; the mind is outside, apart, it does not belong to the machinery. In the machinery there is no power. The power is supplied to the machinery from outside. In the machinery there is no spontaneous movement; it has to be driven. In a body the mind is in itself, the energy is in itself, everything is there self-contained. It is the difference between the church as the Body of Christ and the church as an institution. Here in the church, which is His Body, the government is from the Head without human counsel; the unity is without human arrangement; the resources are by Divine augmentation without human appeal; the growth is without organised effort. The government is from within as by the Head, the Lord's government, and not man's counsels. The oneness is the oneness of the Spirit. It is not arranged or brought about by man. The resources are the resources which come direct from the Head Himself to meet all the requirements. They are never brought from without by effort and appeal. The development and the growth is from within, and not by organised efforts.

When you really get the Body in expression that is exactly what you get. You can dispense with all committee work, and in prayer know exactly what the Head is doing, and desires to be done, by revelation of the Holy Spirit within. That principle applies to everything when you have a Body. It is self-contained in every way. It is not that the Body has a Head, it is that the Head has a Body, and that makes all the difference. It is not that the Body has to get a Head, and gets everything in that way; it is that this Head has a Body, and He is governing, He is directing, He is supplying; He is in charge. So the apostle says here, "gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him...". The Lord is in charge of this. The Lord has His own work in hand, His own end in view. You must get onto the basis of what the Body means in order to know this fulness of Christ, to know this working of Christ. It is not theory at all; it is truth. You get onto any other ground of the conception of the church, and you find that the responsibility rests with the people, someone or some company has to take responsibility for it all, but when you get onto the ground of the Body you find that the Lord takes responsibility. He takes responsibility for the ministry. He meets all the requirements of the ministry. That is a boon to those who minister. We know the difference between an old form of ministry, where the responsibility was on our shoulders, and we had to meet the demands and find the wherewithal, and it meant keeping abreast of everything to be able to keep up the ministry and be fresh in our preaching. You come onto the Body ground and the Lord takes responsibility for that, and it is by revelation; there is spontaneous fulness, and spontaneous flow. You come onto the Body ground and the Lord takes responsibility for the resources, for meeting the need without your making appeals, and that is no small thing. And so it is with everything.

You have come to the place where the Lord Himself is simply doing His work, expressing Himself, giving Himself. It is the Lord Himself; that is all. Can you imagine the risen, ascended, glorified Lord going cap-in-hand to this world to help Him do His work? It is unthinkable! He does not have to come down to these poor, mean levels of human resource to tap them; He has everything; all the fulness is His. The Body is not a Body if there is no Head. It is the Lord in effect, and He is going on, but going on now in all the universal resource and freedom of His heavenly position. That is why it is necessary to come spiritually into heavenly union with Him.

It seems that the Lord wants that stressed and recognised, that it is this which constitutes the prophetic function of the church - simply the personal expression of the Lord, His representation and His embodiment.

So there can be no action upon merely intellectual theories as to the nature of Christ's work, as to the need of man, as to the character of our commission. We do not sit down to think this out, work it out intellectually, and say, 'Now then, Christ's work is so-and-so, and the need of man is so-and-so, and the character of our commission is so-and-so.' That is beginning at the wrong end. The governing factor is that the Holy Spirit dictates; it all comes that way. You do not have to sit down and plan it out; it comes to pass when you are in Holy Spirit union with the Lord. We can go all wrong in applying our minds as to what the Lord's work is, and what we ought to do, by simply reasoning as to what man's need is. The Lord knows that very often we get surprises, that when we thought a need was such-and-such the Lord does not take account of that at all, and we are compelled to deal with things along an altogether different line.

We find that in the beginning things were of a spontaneous character which was simply the living expression of the Holy Spirit's sovereignty in the church. Nothing was done by mere mental conclusions as to the scheme, the policy or the objective. It all sprang out of the supremacy of the Holy Spirit in the church as the Spirit of Christ. The expression of Jesus as Priest continued in the church.

Now we will pass on for a few moments to that next feature of Christ's ministry as taken up in the church, namely, priesthood. We shall not be able to go very far, but we can indicate some things which should be of profit. We have contemplated Christ as Priest, and seen what the priestly function is. Now that has to be taken up in the church just as the prophetic function has to be, and we can sum up the priestly characteristics and activities in a few things.

One very full expression of priesthood revealed in the Word of God in type, and taken up by the Lord Jesus, is that in priesthood, certain things are opposed to one another. A condition exists which threatens the realisation of God's purpose; it stands in the way to obstruct and render impossible the attainment of the revealed mind of God for man. Priesthood, as we have seen, comes in to meet the situation, and to oppose it point by point, to counter it and render it nil. So that in the first place priesthood stands to oppose sanctification to sinfulness. The priests represented Israel. They were not a class apart, but Israel was gathered up in them. Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests, or a kingdom and priests. The one thing about Israel, therefore, as represented by the priests is their complete sanctification. They are separated from all defilement, from everything that is opposed to God's thought; they are a consecrated and sanctified people. And in the power of that sanctification they oppose an active force of sinfulness, and in that opposing they render nil the thing which threatens God's purpose.

The Lord Jesus undoubtedly has done that in His priestly work. He has met all sinfulness, and opposed it with His own sanctification. He has destroyed it in the power of holiness. Holiness, we must recognise, is a mighty, active, energetic force. It is not just a passive state. That is where we make a mistake. We think that to be holy is something very lovely, quiet, beautiful and enjoyable, but remember that whenever you come to holiness in the Word of God you meet something awful. Come and touch God's holiness and see how you feel. Should anything that is not according to the holiness of God come into the presence of God, in His holiness it will be met with the awfulness of that holiness. Sanctification is an active force opposed to another active force in this universe, and there is terrific impact.

Is not that one explanation of the holy life of the Lord Jesus viewed from a certain standpoint, that His very presence roused something? His very presence disturbed; He could not be endured; His presence brought conviction. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone", and they all went out from the eldest to the youngest. There is something not just in the words that is conveyed; His presence smites. It is a tremendous, potent thing; it destroys; it opposes. As He offered Himself to God a holy sacrifice, without sin, that holiness was an effectual power, destroying that which stood in the way of man's coming to God's end and realising God's thought. Lay hold by faith of that sanctification of the Lord Jesus, and it is something which operates to deliver you from the paralyzing power of sinfulness. It is an active force. That is priesthood.

The church, being called into that one office of the priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus, having by faith stood into His holiness, and walking today according to that holiness, in separation unto God, sprinkled with the precious blood, becomes a mighty, active force to clear the way for man to come to God's end. It operates in the virtue of Christ's holiness against sin and sinfulness, to destroy and nullify it as something that stands in the way of man coming through.

That sounds like something very big, and perhaps technical or hard to understand. But you and I know that if we seek to deal with some sin that has risen up to arrest the spiritual progress of some life, to get that life delivered from the bondage of that sin which has come across their path, we know quite well that if there is conscious sin in our own lives we are paralyzed in the matter of helping that other life. The whole thing comes back on us, and we find ourselves helpless in dealing with things like that, and we have to get to the Lord and get straight with the Lord before we can help that other one, because holiness is not only a state, it is a power; something that brings conviction. Remember that this is the value of living a holy life. You need not tell anybody where you stand. (I am not saying there is no need to testify). You need not in the first place tell anybody that you are a Christian and that you belong to the Lord Jesus.

If you are living a life of communion with the Lord, your presence will arouse the devil, your presence will raise resistance before you have said a word, and your presence will be God's strategic occasion for helping someone through. How often it has been like that. Someone has been in difficulty, and have found there is sin in their life, and they have longed to get through. They have looked around and no one has spoken to them, but they have known somebody within the circle of their associations who represented the solution to their problem. They know when there is a true Christian about, a child of God, and they have so often gone to that one. A life lived in communion with God through the virtue of the ever-cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus is a strategic thing for God in delivering souls, in making a way for man, in clearing the path for realising God's full thought. There is a mighty power in holiness which is not passive, but very active. That is priestliness. We are all called to be priests. Every child of God is a priest.

Then, priestliness is the life in the Spirit opposing life in the flesh. You look at the priests again, and you see how very careful and precise the Lord was along this line, that, so far as they were concerned, no flesh whatever was to appear in their lives; their whole bodies were to be covered. There was precaution taken that even when they mounted the steps of the altar their flesh should not become uncovered. It is a type of tremendous significance. There is to be a life lived not in the flesh, with no flesh appearing, but in the Spirit, under the anointing, opposed to life in the flesh. It is a mighty thing. It related to the expression and manifestation of God in the midst of His people to all around. If there is flesh then God is obscured.

Now apply that to the spiritual life. It is only as you and I live and walk in the Spirit, and not after the flesh, that we have power. Carnality is the destruction of all spiritual power. We are immediately laid

low spiritually when carnality arises. We know it quite well, and we have to go back and say, 'That was flesh', and repent of it, put it away in the grave. When we speak of flesh, please do not think we are speaking of something that is obviously and grossly iniquitous. We are speaking of the life of nature, self-life, that whole body of the old creation, which the Lord says was crucified and put in the grave of the Lord Jesus. If we bring it back again and are actuated by it or allow it to influence us, our spiritual power is immediately nullified. But as we walk in the Spirit and not in the power of the flesh we oppose something that is in the way of the full purpose of God. It is Spirit opposed to flesh, a mighty energy clearing the way for God.

Then in priesthood it is life in the Spirit opposing death. Of all the characteristics of priestly ministry, that perhaps is the most outstanding. You will notice that all the time the priest has to do with life and death. He has to take account of death through sin in judgement. Death is the last enemy. Death is the final expression of a state opposed to God's mind and it is recognised by the priests. The priest, in virtue of the precious blood, opposes life to death.

You will notice that because of the priestly function everything is made to live, there is life. If it were not for the priest, to come into God's presence would be death. You cannot come into the holy place and live. You cannot come into the Lord's presence and live apart from the priestly function in virtue of the blood, but because the priest is operating in virtue of that blood, everything lives. It is a testimony of life; it is life all the time triumphing over death. That is priesthood. It is life opposed to death being the great obstructor of God's purpose.

We are taught that Christ's own priestly ministry, taken up after the order of Melchizedek, is after the power of an indissoluble life. That is the essence of His priesthood, an indissoluble life - death entirely set aside, overcome. That is taken up in the church, and while these other things are indispensable, this is the ultimate, supreme work and testimony of the church: to minister life over against death. The Lord's people are here primarily and ultimately to be a testimony of life against death, a mighty resistance to death, and there is plenty of scope for that ministry. Death is active. We are not speaking merely in the physical realm. What a tremendous power there is in spiritual death! Why, sometimes when you pray you feel you are right up against an opposing force of death that will suffocate, throttle and kill you. With ministry in the Word it is often like a great wave of death everywhere; it has gripped everything. The church is here in the priestly work of the Lord Jesus to oppose life against death, and to nullify it, so that the one thing that should characterise us when we are together is that death is vanquished. There may be a battle, but you find life triumphing. The Lord is training us in this priestly ministry by allowing us to have a good deal of experience in the matter of conflict with the devil. The further we go on with the Lord the more we come to understand the nature of spiritual death and its terrible force. The Lord allows that in order to bring us out into our priestly ministry; that is, to have the testimony of life opposed to the testimony of death.

The last glorious phase of the conflict will be: "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." I do not believe that any of these things that we are told will be destroyed are destroyed in a kind of official way, as though the Lord came forth and smote the thing and it died. That is not the way things are slain. The Lord opposes them in His people. All those things have to be wrought in a body; a Man has to do this. "By man came sin", by man has to come the riddance of sin. "By man came death"; then by man death has to be vanquished. The church has to take that up, and in the end the last enemy will be destroyed, not by the Lord coming out and smiting it, but by the Lord in His church destroying it. Oh, what a conflict that will be! It will be the last agony! It will be terrific to meet the last force of death. The issue is victory, however intense the conflict will be.

That is priestliness: opposing those things which are set in the way of God's full thought with life.

God causes His church to function in this priestly way to nullify those other things by virtue of spiritual forces, holiness, life in the Spirit, and life as against sinfulness and flesh, nature, self and death.

Open your heart to let the import of these things in. It all means this, that the Lord Jesus occupies a certain position. In heaven as (Prophet) Man He represents God's full thought. In heaven as Priest He stands opposed to all that which has come in to frustrate God's thought in fulness. In heaven He is King, with whom is the ultimate issue of dominion. The church is an elect Body, brought in, through which He can express that. He can express what God's thought is and set it forth before men, He can meet all the opposing forces to God's thought in and through the church, (and that is what the church is for), and He can show in and through the church that He is universal Lord when He is on the throne.

We have not yet considered the church as related to the throne and the King, but this is what it amounts to. Living, Holy Spirit union with Christ means just that. As we go on we shall learn the meaning of these things which are very real. You may ask, 'How did you come to know all these things?' Not by study, nor by reading, but through a number of years in the hands of God, being taken into experiences strange and mysterious, dark and difficult, fighting a way through defeat and failure and a lot of other things. It was in all these adversities and perplexities discovering Divine secrets, the Lord showing where things were wrong and what was the secret. So we come to know in a living way, and things become very real in that way. If we go on with the Lord we shall all come into the secrets of the Lord, and to come into the secrets of the Lord is to be put in a very strong position. It means that there is something there that Satan cannot overthrow. He can overthrow a lot of things, but he cannot overthrow what is wrought of God.

Chapter 8 - The Expression of Jesus as King

Reading: Ephesians 1:20-23; 4:10; Philippians 2:9; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 2:9; Ephesians 2:6; Numbers 23:21.

Christ enthroned! That means that God's end is reached. Do you notice what those words in Hebrews chapter 2 teach? "We behold Jesus... crowned with glory and honour... For it became Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, (the margin says, "having brought") to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings...". This teaches quite clearly that the enthronement of the Lord Jesus is the perfection of the Captain. He is first seen crowned with glory and honour, and then it says He is made perfect. We know that does not refer to Him as Son of God, but as Jesus the Son of Man. In the throne, then, the meaning of His enthronement is that He is perfect. It is the perfection of the Son of Man. God's end as to man is reached in Him; it is perfect. But God's end is reached in Him in His perfection as Captain of the salvation of many sons who also are to come to a like position and condition, to be perfected, to come to glory. Christ enthroned is God's end reached as to man. God's purpose is secured, and the many sons are secured unto perfection in His enthronement. It is a good thing to recognise that the glory is connected with the perfection. When you come to perfection according to God's mind you have come to glory. That clearly indicates that the destiny of man according to God's mind is glory and the glory comes when he is perfect and in Christ the perfection is secured. The marginal is quite one with the Ephesian tense which sees the thing done from God's side: "Hath made us to sit in the heavenlies in Christ"; "...having brought many sons to glory". From God's side, when Christ is there, we are all there; it is as good as literally done. It is secured. God's end is reached in the enthronement of the Lord Jesus.

Christ's enthronement links with the original thought of God as to man, and says most positively that God's purposes cannot be frustrated. It is a long history from the counsels of God, the projecting of the intention of God in the creation of man; it is a long history of the saddest, most tragic nature. It is a terrible history of the apparent triumph of God's enemy, of his success in making havoc of God's purpose. Many times in the course of the ages it would have been very easy to have despaired of there being anything of God in the creation at all. You find in the Bible various points and periods when it looked as though there was nothing left at all, that the imagination of the heart of every man was only evil. It looked like universal success of all that which came in to say, 'No', to God's intention, but over against all that Christ enthroned declares God's purposes cannot be finally frustrated. When God decrees, it does not matter how much and how long forces may rage and work against that decree; it cannot be set aside. "I will declare the decree, I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." That was prophetic. That is a Psalm written long years before the resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ; a Psalm, as you know, taken up several times in the New Testament in connection with Christ, showing that with God there is no time factor at all; it is complete from the beginning. Christ ultimately enthroned shows that there never was any question at all about God's purposes being open to destruction. That is strong, solid ground for our feet.

This also means that Christ enthroned sees every adversary and opposing element overcome. Not only do the decrees of God stand and the purposes of God remain impossible of being set aside, but everything that comes in, no matter what it is nor how much it is to work against those purposes, is destroyed when God has His King upon His holy hill of Zion. And if we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour, we see in Him and in that fact the utter destruction of everything that has been set

against God's purpose concerning ourselves.

We must seek to get our feet planted firmly upon the fact that Christ enthroned does mean that if there has been a universe of evil precipitated against God's intention for you and for me, all that has been defeated and overcome, for Jesus is enthroned! That is what it implies.

You notice that the Word teaches that His enthronement is because of what He has done in His suffering and death. "Wherefore, God highly exalted Him..." is linked with His obedience right to the point of death, even the death of the cross. He obeyed God step by step in all that that obedience to the Father required, even unto death, and that, the death of the cross. And that obedience took Him into the realm where He had to meet everything that had ever risen up in history to hinder God's purpose, and meeting it He overcame it. His enthronement is in view and in virtue of that overcoming. That is very simple, and it may seem elementary. But it is good for us to remember that this enthronement of the Lord Jesus is not just the automatic movement from earth to heaven, from heaven to earth and back to heaven again; it is a process of the operation of a tremendous force against a whole realm of antagonisms to their overthrow. He is in the throne as Man who has overcome everything that ever came in to hinder man reaching the destiny which God had fixed for him. That is our destiny. Our destiny is where Jesus is now, and as Jesus is now, crowned with glory.

Now we come more to the side of the church. The church is the elect vessel for the expression of Christ's enthronement. He is beyond the reach of the enemy. I suppose the enemy has given Him up, but he has not given the church up, and if the enemy can no longer touch the Head, he will turn upon the Body and assail it, which he has always done and which he is doing. There is no more hope of his success with the Body than there has been with the Head, but he knows quite well that we are still here in the flesh, cumbered about with a lot of the old nature, in the midst of a great deal that is very serviceable to him. He knows that we are here in training, that we are not yet perfected in ourselves. If by any means he can retard or arrest our progress towards that glorious destiny he will stand at nothing to do it, and so he assails us as he assailed the Lord Himself.

Certain necessities, therefore, arise for us, and the first of these is that the church should apprehend its place in the heavens in Christ. You and I should apprehend our place in the heavens by faith. It is declared to be a fact from the Divine side that Christ being in heaven, we are with Him. God regards the church, the elect vessel, as inseparable from its Captain, or its Head. There is no such thing as a division from the Divine side between the Head in heaven and the members on earth. As God sees it we are in Christ there, as God sees it we have reached the end. Therefore we are not allowed to raise such questions as to whether we shall ever get there, as to whether we shall ever get through. That is just what the enemy wants us to do. He constantly reminds us what we are in ourselves, and the hopeless state that we are in, and the hopeless mess that we are, to try and get us to accept the suggestion that we are going to fall by the way and we are not going to get through. In God's sight we are already through.

That is the faith that overcomes. It is the faith which advances to God's end realised in Christ, and anchors there. Today there may be a terrific storm and a great strain upon faith's cable; we see nothing. Paul in his first shipwreck, for many days saw neither sun nor stars. So it seems. There is no sign of heavenly government; all seems to have been blotted out in this terrific upheaval. It is often like that spiritually. The enemy threatens us and seeks to get us to doubt as to our getting through, to accept that we are going to be submerged and defeated; that the whole thing is a myth, the bottom has fallen out of it all and it is a terrible unreality. The church must say, "I stand by the grace of God in that place where there is no question about this after all. It is not left with us; it is settled in Christ in heaven."

It is a necessity for triumph, and for the expression of Christ's triumph in the church that the church takes that position. You and I can only be an expression of the Kingship of the Lord Jesus as by faith we take and hold to our position with Him in the heavenlies; that is, as we seek to stand into the position that there is no question as to the issue of this. The issue is victory. It is fixed. If Satan can pull the Lord Jesus from that throne and hurl Him down, then we have no ground for faith. But as long as it is impossible for Satan to undo the enthronement of the Lord Jesus, we in faith hold onto that and we are indestructible. The fact of His enthronement is manifested in the church.

In that connection there are two things to consider. I have usually found that when you speak about being seated together with Him in the heavenlies there is always a reaction to that. The inability to grasp its meaning results in people saying, 'Yes, but after all, you know, we are not in the heavenlies, we are here. That is all very well, but here we are on this earth, and things are as they are. It is very nice to contemplate that, but in reality we are here.' Well now, what position are you going to accept spiritually? Your own position, or God's position? Your own view, or God's view? What we are in ourselves, or what we are in God's sight? Where we are in ourselves, or where we are according to His mind?

That is why we referred to Numbers 23 at the beginning of this meditation. Israel is in the wilderness. The story of Israel in the wilderness is a sorry story. It is a story of failure and weakness. It is a pitiable story when you read it in the light of what they were in themselves. Oh, these things that Balaam is made to say about Israel, how utterly untrue they are. Yes, they are untrue if you are looking at Israel as to what Israel is as a people in themselves, but that is how God looks at Israel in virtue of certain things. You see just before this the serpent has been lifted up, and then the springing well has broken forth. Where the curse has been removed the Spirit has broken in, and in view of the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the people, God sees them in another way. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob." I think that is one of the most wonderful statements in the Bible. If there is a more wonderful statement, it is: "I am the God of Jacob." Of all the mean and contemptible men in Holy Writ, Jacob was the meanest. "I am the God of Jacob"; "The God of Jacob is our refuge." If Jacob can find refuge, then we can. No one need despair if He is the God of Jacob. Now this is God's point of view.

If Balaam could have depicted Israel according to Israel's own natural colours he could have gone the whole length in cursing Israel, but because he was compelled to depict Israel according to God's thought, in virtue of the blood and the Spirit, there was no place for a curse, and he had to come to the point where he said: "...and the shout of a king is among them." What is that? That is victory; all the work of the enemy is destroyed. There is no place for a curse; Satan cannot bring them under condemnation. "The shout of a king is among them." It is victory, and you only get victory when you look at things through God's eyes, with the blood. It is the efficacy of the blood having been sprinkled and the Spirit of God having come to reside within that makes that possible. When the blood is there, and the Spirit is there, there is the shout of a King; victory over all the attempt of the enemy to bring into judgement and under a curse. Our power of ascendancy over all the work of the enemy is to ever keep in view how God views us in Christ, not in ourselves. Sit down and begin to take account of yourself as you are, and Satan will soon triumph over you. Keep holding on to that ground of where you are in Christ and the shout of a King is in the midst. That is the meaning of Christ enthroned.

That which might be only ideal and theoretical has got to be made spiritually real and that is what the Lord is doing with us. The ideal may be, 'Yes, we are in the heavenlies, seated with Christ, and the Lord is at work to make it so.' God never accepts mere ideals, and He certainly never accepts mere theories. Doctrinal positions are no good to God; actual positions are the only things that He will

have. Our training under the hand of God is all to teach us how the fiercest assaults of the enemy only issue in ascendancy. There is the love of God. How we have retarded our own spiritual progress! How we have kept ourselves in defeat by our reaction to the Lord's permissive will in allowing the enemy to assail! The Lord has allowed a time of fierce assault of the enemy, when everything has seemed to be brought to an end, under eclipse, and in the fire doubts and questions and bad feelings have arisen. But in His grace He has brought us out into a place of enlargement and a place of blessing through that. The reaction then was, "Oh, why did I question the Lord? Why did I doubt the Lord? Why did I not rejoice in it, and thank the Lord for it?"

A few experiences like that have steadily, gradually begun to bring about this position - "Oh, here is another assault, here is another bad patch; nevertheless we shall come out higher up, further on, there is some gain coming out of this!" That kind of thing has started to grow, and the Lord has been at work seeking to produce that.

Some of you have got to the place where you can enter into the darkest and most fierce experiences from the devil, and in going through you never wavered for a moment; you rejoiced as though you had all the spoils of the battle already. But the point is this, the Lord is seeking to train us to get there, and what is the meaning of that? It means that we have already in faith reached the place of Christ enthroned. That is, we have fully apprehended the fact that this is not defeat; this is victory. We are learning to reign in and through all that the enemy is allowed to do. In this way the Lord is using the enemy for our training. This is how He turns things upon the enemy and uses him to manifest in the church the very victory of Christ, which Satan intended to set at naught. That is sovereignty; that is the throne set up in the church.

"That now unto the principalities... by the church may be known the manifold wisdom of God." I suppose our wisdom would say the best thing to do is to finish the devil right off in one stroke, and get rid of him, but God's wisdom says, 'No! I will use him to realise the very end that he is seeking to defeat.' Only God knows how to do that. God can override with a superior wisdom all that cunning, wit and diabolical ingenuity of Satan. God can so override with a superior wisdom as to make it serve His very end. That is the wisdom of God, but it is being displayed in the church. When the members of Christ's Body pass into such times, and have an awful experience of suffering and adversity at the hands of the enemy, and a weak saint looks up to the Lord and says, 'Lord, I am having a bad time, but I know I am coming out alright and this is not going to be loss but gain; it is not going to be defeat but victory; this is not going to be greater weakness but greater strength', then the very throne of the exalted Christ is, in essence, in that very action. That is a display of Christ's exaltation and enthronement, and the Lord is thus using the church to express the Kingship of His Son.

This is all very practical. We do not open ourselves to anything by what we say, but we recognise what the Lord is doing. Faith is being trained to take the position of Christ's victory as to God's purpose in every assault and trial, so that it may be made known how exalted Christ is. If our course were without trial and without adversity, there would be no occasion for the victory of Christ to be displayed, and while we are here, that victory is being made known.

It is that to which Paul refers when he says: "Thanks be unto God who leads me on from place to place in the train of His triumph, to celebrate His victory over the enemies of Christ." In the train of His triumph! The triumph is in front. I am following on in the triumph. The victory is not to be gained; it is to be celebrated in every place. That is triumphant faith. Oh, that I would always look at things like that. I see Paul going from place to place and in every place his life was a prey unto him. Oh, the tremendous difficulties that met him in every place. Looked at naturally it was anything but a

triumphal procession, but he viewed it like that. We may say, 'This is a difficult place, this is Satan's triumph, this is a stronghold of the devil, this is a manifestation of the power of the enemy!' Not at all! This is a place for the celebration of the victory. That is how the apostle Paul faced these situations. How far you have got there I do not know. I do not profess to have got there, but I see that this is what the Lord is seeking to do in me, and in the saints, in the church, that through trial and adversity these things only issue in advancement.

When the people were going into battle it was not the Field Marshal, the militant Captain who came to the front and made a proclamation and gave an address to the troops; it was the priest. Therein is this significance, that it is He who has triumphed by the blood, and whose triumph by the blood is the basis of victory, who governs all our conflicts. He is in His victory there as King, because of the priestly work of the blood of the Lamb.