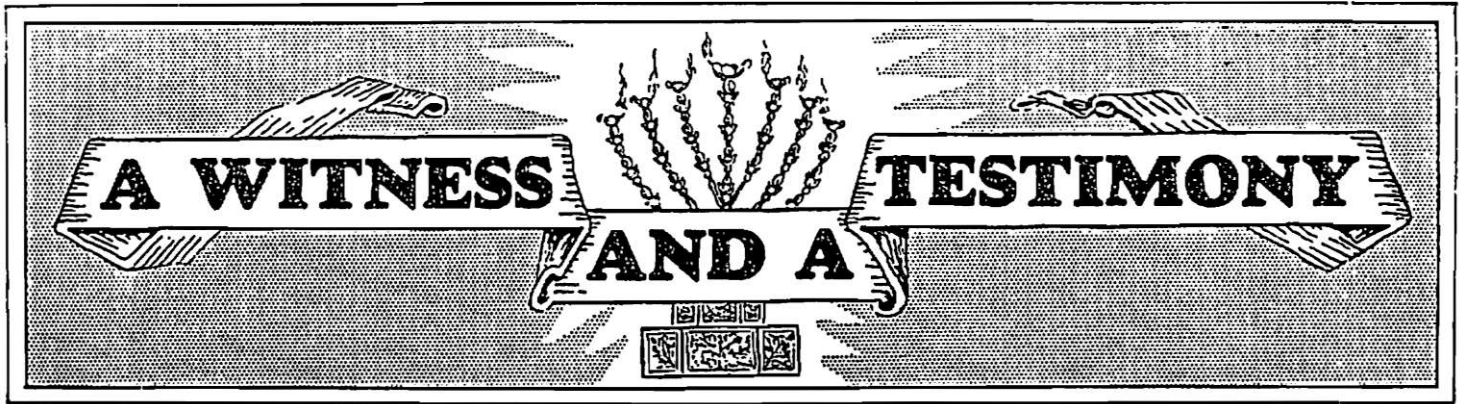


A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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page 71



JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971]

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CONTENTS

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST (II) ..	1	FOR BOYS AND GIRLS	12
THE SPIRIT OF FAITH	6	THE FINGER OF GOD	13
"A STORMY WIND SHALL REND IT"	8	THE BATTLE FOR LIFE (VI)	17

Switzerland, 1970

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST

2. 'LIFE . . . PROMISED BEFORE TIMES ETERNAL'

OUR basic passage for these messages is II Corinthians iii. 3: ". . . being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh".

We have seen that the Holy Spirit is writing a spiritual life of the Lord Jesus in the hearts of believers, and we proceed now with this spiritual biography.

THE BEGINNING OF THE BIOGRAPHY

When a biography is being written of some important person, we always want to know their beginning—something about their birth, their home and their country. That is very important to us where the Lord Jesus is concerned, for what we are trying to see is that what was true of Him the Holy Spirit is seeking to make true in us. His beginning has to be our beginning; His home has to be our home; His country must be our country. All

that was true of Him at the beginning has to be made true of us, that is, in a spiritual way.

Now, when we open our New Testament, we have the biography of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus in three of the Gospels, and two of those Gospels tell us of His earthly beginning and birth. They give us His genealogy, tracing Him right back to the beginning of man on the earth. The third Gospel gives us the beginning of his ministry, but has nothing to say about Bethlehem, nor His earthly mother, nor His home. It just begins with the ministry of the Lord Jesus, when He was thirty years of age. But the fourth Gospel ignores all that. It has nothing to say about Bethlehem, nor about Nazareth. It says nothing about David, nor Adam, but just leaps right back over all earthly history and takes us into eternity before time was. You know that I am speaking about the Gospel by John, which begins with that dateless time before the world was, and shows us that the Sonship of the Lord Jesus was not a thing of time only, but

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

that it was eternal and supernatural, and not natural. John describes it in this way (and he includes us with the Lord Jesus in this matter): “. . . which were born, not of bloods (that is, the blood of Joseph and Mary), nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John i. 13). Born of God! When was the Lord Jesus born of God? Not at Bethlehem only, but away back there before time was. And the wonderful thing is this: that the deepest truth in the life of a child of God is that he or she is not a child of time, but a child of eternity, born from above—not in Bethlehem, nor in Switzerland, nor England, nor Germany, nor in any other place here on this earth—but born from above. That is a supernatural act of the Spirit of God.

What does it mean to be born? It is to receive life. If, then, we are born from above; if ours is a supernatural birth, then the link with the Lord Jesus is the link of eternal life.

We must get hold of this! You may think that when you were born again it was in some place that you can mention, but that is only something to do with this earth. You were not really born again on this earth. You were born where the Lord Jesus was born. You were not really born on any date which you can mention in the earthly calendar. You were born in eternity. Your home is not here at all. Your home is outside of this world and outside of time. In this matter we, like the Lord Jesus, are born with eternal life.

This is a very wonderful thing. If the Bible is true, it is a very wonderful book. If Christianity is true, it is a very wonderful thing. We are so familiar with these things about Christianity that we have lost something of the wonder of it all. I think we need to sit down with our Christianity again and really think about it in this way: the Holy Spirit is reproducing what was true of the Lord Jesus in us, and the beginning of His history and the beginning of our history is in eternity.

You ought to look up all those references to “before the world was”, “before times eternal”, and see us in the mind of God away back there! “Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans viii. 29), and the first thing in that image is the eternal life which is in Him. So John begins his Gospel with: “In him was life” (John i. 4), and later in that same Gospel Jesus will say: “I am come that they may have life” (John x. 10). In both of those statements it is taken for granted that no one outside of Jesus Christ has that life. If they already had life why should He come from heaven in order that they should have it?

This is very elementary, I know, but we have not got very far yet. This is the beginning of the biography of Jesus Christ which is being written by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. Of course, it is very simple when you come to think about it. It is very wonderful, very profound, but very simple, for the very first thing that a newly born again child of God realizes is that something has happened which makes him know that he does not belong here any longer. He has a new home, a new nativity, a new genealogy, and it goes—not back to Adam. Thank God for that!—but back, past Adam, into the eternity of Jesus Christ. You understand that I am not talking about the deity of Jesus Christ, but about His Sonship, and I said before that that Sonship relates to humanity. I am not going to argue that out now, but the purpose of God in creating man was to bring Himself into the relationship of Father and children, and by childhood to sonship. That is another thing I am not going to argue about! I think that will come out as we go on.

So we begin the biography in eternity. I wonder if you are aware of that! We have a hymn which says:

“I am a stranger here, within a foreign land,
My home is far away, upon a golden strand.”

As we go on our life-journey we do find that we are getting further and further away from our natural birth, further and further away from this world, and we are becoming more conscious of our heavenly relationship.

ETERNAL LIFE THE GOVERNING FACTOR

I want to look at two or three fragments of Scripture:

“*For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass the judgement came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life*” (Romans v. 17, 18).

“. . . *in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal*” (Titus i. 2). That life, then, links us with what is eternal.

“*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus*” (II Timothy i. 1).

Now I want to say one or two quite important things at this point. This that is called eternal life is the factor which determines everything in his-

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971

tory and destiny. Not religion, nor ritual, nor orthodoxy, but life determines history and human destiny. It governs everything. The Bible is God's Book of world history and human destiny, and it is wonderful how universal the Bible is. It comprehends the whole human race, it governs the destiny of all the nations which make up the human race, and it contains the principles of destiny. And the centre of the Bible, from the beginning to the end, is this that is called eternal life. It is the all-governing factor.

Life determines whether God is present or not. The question, down to the smallest detail, is a question of life. Begin with the individual and the individual's personal experiences. If we understood rightly we should know that this matter of life is governing our personal experiences. We are individually involved in this great governing matter of life, and that determines whether God is with us. The same is true of any company of God's people, or any company of religious people. The thing that determines whether God is there is this matter of life. God is the source of life, and He cannot be present and life not be there. That, surely, is a very searching thing for our assemblies! Thus, in every sphere, this question of life governs.

Now we are going to look at the Bible along three lines. The earthly life of the Lord Jesus was divided into three sections, and each one of those sections has to be repeated in the life of the believer. First, there was His birth and infancy; secondly, His childhood; and, thirdly, His manhood. These are three distinct sections in the biography of Jesus Christ, and the whole Bible is divided into those three main sections. The issue in each of the sections is life.

BABYHOOD

The first section is what we call the time of the antediluvians, that is, the people before the Flood, and the great antediluvians were Abel, Enoch and Noah. That was the infancy of the people of God, of the Divine biography which was being written by the Holy Spirit. That infancy is marked by very simple things, as one would expect. We do not expect very much when we are dealing with babies, and here we have, in that particular period, the babyhood of the people of God.

One simple thing governed the babyhood of the race, and it is the characteristic of all spiritual babyhood. In doctrine we call it 'Justification by Faith'. I am afraid I am rather tired of that phrase, for it sounds so theological! Justification by faith is the mark of spiritual infancy, the beginning of

spiritual history, but I think some of the music has gone from that phrase. What is justification? Another word used is, as you know, righteousness. But what is righteousness by faith? I love a certain translation, which translates that word 'righteousness', or justification, like this: 'Right standing with God.' Is that not lovely? 'Being in right standing with God.' Is not that what the whole world is craving for? Is that not what the whole human race longs for? Is that not what we all desire more than anything else? God, being what He is, so perfect, so holy, so particular, is it possible that you and I, being what we are, should be in right standing with Him?

You know, in business that is a very important thing. In the commercial world, if one business is asked to do something for another, they look at their books to see what transactions they have had with them before, and they say: 'Are they in right standing with us? Have they paid all their accounts? Are they in our debt? Are they on good terms with us? Are we quite satisfied with them? Can we trust them? Can we commit our business to them?' It all depends upon whether they are in right standing or not.

That is how it is between humanity and God. So far as humanity is concerned, God may very well ask: 'Are they in right standing with Us? Are they in debt to Us? Have they been right in their business transactions?' That is all gathered up into one word, so far as God is concerned: 'Are they in the Lord Jesus? If they are it is all right. All the debts are paid and all the business is clean. We can go on with them. We can commit our interests to them.' That is right standing with God, justification by faith, righteousness by faith. Now you notice what Paul said in that passage in the Letter to the Romans which we read. What is the basis of the New Testament? Life because of right standing with God. That is wonderful! Can it be true? Brother, sister, worried to death about yourself and how God looks at you, worried because you think that God looks at you as you look at yourself, here is this wonderful word which is the beginning! The antediluvians just received life on the basis of right standing with God. That is all!

What about Abel? Do you think that he was a perfect man? But the whole of Abel's life is gathered up into one thing: he believed God, and he knew that he was in right standing with God. (Hebrews xi. 4.)

What shall we say about Enoch? I think he was a very wonderful person. If you read the chapter in Genesis where Enoch is mentioned you find that it is all about people who are dying because of sin

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

This one lived so many years and died, that one lived so many years and died, and you are ready to go on with the whole miserable story—but it is interrupted. It just says, in Genesis v. 24: “Enoch walked with God—he was in right standing with God—and he was not; for God took him.” Then you go back to more of the miserable story, until you come to Noah.

The whole earth was full of iniquity. The heart of every man was evil, but there was one man and his family which stood on one ground only. Noah, says Peter, was a “preacher of righteousness”—a preacher of right standing with God. The whole world was not in right standing with God, so it had to die, but Noah and his family, who were in right standing with God, were saved from death and from judgment.

Did I say that this was infancy? I think there are a great many Christians who have not got further than infancy yet! However, it is a great thing to have got that far!

The Corinthians had not got beyond Noah, for Paul said that they were still infants. They were the Lord’s, because they had apprehended the truth of justification by faith, but the biography stopped at that chapter. They were still in infancy long after they should have gone on into the next chapter.

Do you see the point that I am trying to make? It is that God has ordained the whole history of humanity upon this basis of life, and the beginning of it is on the ground of right standing with God.

CHILDHOOD

The second stage in the life of the Lord Jesus on this earth was His childhood, His boyhood. We have not a great deal about His boyhood in the New Testament. There are only one or two things said about it, but it was a long period, and we cannot believe that it was an empty period. It does say that He “grew in stature, and in grace with God and men” (Luke ii. 52). He grew in right standing with God.

The second period of the spiritual biography of Jesus Christ is much fuller than that, indeed, it occupies practically all the rest of the New Testament, for it is the period between being born and being perfected. It states that He “was made perfect” (Hebrews v. 9). What does that mean? It may create a problem for you in that He who was without sin, whom we think of as being perfect, should have to be *made* perfect, but, of course, our idea of the word ‘perfect’ is not the New Testament idea. The New Testament meaning of the word ‘perfect’ is ‘being made full, or complete’. While for us it may

mean being made different in nature, it was not that with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was working upon that which was not yet complete to make it complete.

I wonder if I am going to get into trouble over what I am going to say now! I am going to ask those of you who have been saved for, say, sixty years: ‘Are you better in yourself today than you were in the beginning?’ I have been saved for sixty years and I think I am a great deal worse today than I was when I was saved! Does that sound terrible? But you know what I mean—I am no more perfect today than I was sixty years ago. If you are speaking about my human nature, what I am as a child of Adam, well, old Adam is as troublesome to me today as ever he was! And yet, something is happening in us. I sometimes say: ‘Well, I may be pretty bad today, but the Lord alone knows what I would have been if He had not saved me!’

This is the period from infancy to manhood. I believe that the Lord Jesus had many a temptation and many a trial during those thirty years. We just have a little glimpse of his home life, in that He had some brothers and sisters, and, you know, brothers and sisters can really put you on the spot! I had some brothers and sisters and I was not the eldest of the family, so they were often a very big trial to me. Jesus had some brothers and sisters and we are told that His brothers did not believe in Him. It is not easy when people in your own family do not believe in you. ‘Oh, he thinks he is somebody! He has a lot of strange ideas, but we will knock all that out of him!’ Is that not the way they talk? Jesus was not without those difficulties and trials, and that lasted for thirty years. I do not know how much Mary told her other sons and daughters about Jesus, or whether she still kept it all in her heart, but they could see that He was different, and that was enough to provoke opposition.

Well, I need not say more. The period of boyhood was a period of discipline, a period of learning, a period of education. The Old Testament has that period and it is quite a long one, for it is the period of the Patriarchs.

Who are the Patriarchs? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. Do you not see what a period of education that was? God had these men in His school and He was teaching them the laws of Divine life. Visit Abraham at school and see what he is learning about the laws of Divine life! Was Isaac at school? Was he learning the great laws of Divine life? Let me put that in another way. Was Isaac being taught the principles of resurrection life? You know, we have some wrong ideas about

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971

these men, and we often think that Isaac was a little boy and Abraham could pick him up and put him on the altar. From our standpoint he was a grown man at that stage, not even a teenager. He had grown to have a will, a mind and feelings of his own, and he could have resisted his father. He could have rebelled against him. He was in a hard school, for he had to surrender everything to death in order that he might learn the law of resurrection life.

From Isaac we go on to Jacob. Need we say anything about Jacob? Was he at school? He was in a very hard school indeed! The discipline in Jacob's life was very severe, for God put him through it. However, he came out all right in the end and became the father of the nation, of the twelve tribes. That was resurrection! That was life out of death! That was victory out of adversity!

MANHOOD

Now you are wondering what the next phase in the Old Testament can be! Well, of course, I leave out a lot, and come to the phase of the Prophets. That is really a longer phase than the part of the Old Testament which is called the Prophets, for Samuel was a Prophet. You go through the whole school of the Prophets, and when you listen to them what do you hear? Can you hear the Prophets? They are crying, they are groaning, they are in pain. What is all this about? It is the travail of life. It is the mature, the manhood phase of the Old Testament.

That phase—the travail of life—began immediately Jesus moved from the Jordan. The battle for life began then, and from then on to the Cross it was the travail of life. This great thing called 'eternal life' has entered into a great conflict in the universe, and Calvary became the centre of the whole universe. It was not just something that happened in a small place called Palestine, just outside Jerusalem. It reached out into all the world, and then it reached beyond the world. Calvary was a great cosmic battle. Paul says that He stripped off principalities and powers in His Cross (Colossians ii. 2). It was the great travail of life.

Now, dear friends, this ought to help us to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing with us. I do

not want to discourage young Christians, nor do I want to cast a shadow over your growing Christian life, but I must say this: the further we go with the Lord, the longer we live with Him and the closer we walk with Him, the more intense becomes this travail of life. Is that true? What do you know about that? We have sometimes said, when we are having a very difficult experience: 'It does not get easier as we get older!' You would think that, having walked with the Lord for so many years, He would let us have a little easier time at the end, but He does not do so. Does that explain something? Things are getting more difficult and sometimes the devil says: 'Ah, this is because the Lord is not with you. If that great Lord that you believe in was with you, you would not have these troubles!' That is exactly what the devil said to the Lord Jesus when He was on the Cross. 'Your Father has left you. You are suffering like this because He has given you up.' You see how the devil twists things! But spiritual maturity involves intensive conflict.

I have said that the third period in the Old Testament, that of the Prophets, is the travail of life. How the Prophets are suffering to bring back that Divine life in fullness to the people of God! Yes, the Old Testament closes—but what are you going to say about closing the Old Testament? It closes in tragedy, in hopelessness? Not at all! It closes in order that the New Testament may open, and what does the travail work out to in the New Testament? A new history begins. Out of the travail 'a child is born, a son is given', the Old Testament is lifted up on to the heavenly plane, and the Holy Spirit begins all over again in the spiritual realm. He begins with our new birth, takes us on into the period of spiritual growth, where we learn the laws of spiritual life, and then on into the travail of life that the Kingdom should come, and we are called upon to share this part of the biography of Jesus Christ—"If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him" (II Timothy ii. 12). And what was the suffering of Jesus? It was the travail of His soul that He should see His seed, prolong His days and be satisfied. That is what He is doing in us now by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is working toward that end—that He should be satisfied, and we shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness.

(To be continued)

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Switzerland, 1970

THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

"I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars" (Psalm cxvi. 10, 11).

"We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you" (II Corinthians iv. 13, 14).

PAUL'S situation was extremely difficult. He felt weak in body; he was pressed even beyond measure. There were many enemies and trouble on every side, but he had one thing which made the outcome of that difficult situation quite different from what could have been expected. He had, as he says, "the spirit of faith", which means the spirit of reality, of *real* reality. I shall come back to that later.

He goes on to say: "according as it is written", and this is one of his favourite expressions. You find it in I Corinthians xv. 3 and 4, where it says: "Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day *according to the Scriptures*." What does that mean? It means that it was according to the fixed, eternal will of God. It is something that is real because God decided from eternity that this should be, and when Paul says here that we have the "same spirit of faith, according as it is written", he is relating himself and his present situation to the eternal, fixed will and plan of God. His situation is no accident, and Paul considers it in the light of this real reality. He is saying: "God has a plan and I am connected with that plan. God moves through history according to the Scriptures and now I, in some mystical way, am connected with God's movements through history. God is fulfilling His plan. I am in difficulties but God is moving and I am with Him. I have the spirit of faith, faith according to the Scriptures, according to what God has planned from eternity." As we have this same spirit of faith, we are allowed to quote the Scripture which was in Paul's mind. He does not quote it himself, but we read it: "All men are liars" (Psalm cxvi. 10, 11). This is according to the Scriptures and it is reality—*all men are liars*.

It means this: All men's ideas about Paul and his situation were lies. All that they thought, said and

planned about Paul in his difficulty was a lie. Perhaps they said: 'Poor Paul!', but that would have been a lie, because he was not poor at all. They might have said: 'This is a hopeless situation!' That would have been a lie, because the situation was not hopeless. They might have said: 'Paul's work has led to nothing!' That would have been a lie. They might have said: 'May we come and comfort you, Paul?', and their comfort would have been a lie. They might have come and said some positive things to cheer him, but that also would have been a lie. All that comes from men—their ideas, their plans, their words—is an illusion. It is in darkness, without any connection with reality, and therefore it is all lies.

Paul has the spirit of faith and therefore he throws all these lies off from himself, that is, he throws off men's way of thinking about his situation, and the human way of commenting upon the situation. He throws all this off and stands in the spirit of faith in close connection with reality, with God. He says: "*knowing*", and when people speak of knowing, then you feel that they are speaking of reality.

What does Paul know? He knows that God raised Jesus! That means everything to Paul. When he says that God raised Jesus, I know that many—perhaps you among them—would say that that cannot be proved and it is only a matter of faith. That is true. It cannot be proved in this world. Why not? Because it is so real, and in the world of lies and illusions that which is really real cannot be proved. The reason why it cannot be proved is that it is the truth. As I said, this world is in darkness and all the ideas of men are illusions. In such a world only illusions can be proved. Reality and truth cannot be proved, and the life of faith is the life of reality. It needs no proofs and it cannot be proved. It is the same with truth. Truth has no entrance into the world of illusions. Jesus said: 'Because I speak the truth you do not believe it.' He did not say: 'In spite of my speaking the truth you will not believe.' Truth and reality cannot fit into the ideas of men, but if we have the spirit of truth, we are in contact with eternal, real reality, and that is victory. "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."

Paul was in difficulties and disappointments, weak in himself, and he had many enemies, but in the midst of it all he was kept quiet, confident and

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971

strong, because all that he was outwardly was not the real thing. The real thing was: 'I know Him who raised Jesus from the dead. I am one with Him and therefore nothing can spoil me, for He will also raise me. Nothing can harm me. My enemies cannot, disappointments cannot, seeming failures cannot, bodily weakness cannot, death cannot and Satan cannot. Nothing can, because I am one with Him who raised Jesus from the dead.'

He goes on further. Not only does he say that nothing can harm him, but also that nothing can spoil his work: "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus . . . shall present us *with you*." And "you" means his work. To the Corinthians he said: 'You are the seed of my apostleship, whether you know it or not, whether you acknowledge it or not, whether you are with me now or not. I have worked in the name of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead and nothing can spoil that work, because I know the One who is raised.'

Do *you* say that? I would be very surprised if there were not quite a number of difficulties represented among you, personal difficulties, difficulties in work, difficulties in the Church, or difficulties with other Christians. Are you in contact with a risen Saviour? Do you have this spirit of faith which says: 'As it is written'? Do you feel and know yourself just now in contact with the movements of God through the history of men? If you do, nothing can defeat you. You are not proud and you are not strong in yourself, but nothing can defeat you. Perhaps you have no difficulties now, but I should be very surprised if you do not have some at least in future days. We have, in these days, been reminded of the importance of not fighting our circumstances, but trying to understand their meaning and purpose. I take up this thread and advise you not to speak as a liar. Do not say a word until you can speak in the spirit of faith. If you learn that lesson, you will be able to go on with Paul on a triumphant note. We all know his glorious words: "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans viii. 28), but that is not enough. All things must also work together for good for those among whom we work. It would not be enough if we ourselves came through triumphantly, but our work was spoiled. Therefore Paul says: "All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (II Corinthians iv. 15). This is a triumphant note, and something far bigger than we are accustomed to. I myself would feel very sorry if some day I had to say: 'All things worked together for good to *me*, but my work was spoilt. The enemy was triumphant there and the

difficulties were too great.' 'No!' says Paul, 'Never!'

The emphasis of the so-called 'Holiness' teaching is that the goal of everything is personal holiness, coming through yourself, but that is only half a truth. I do not want to come through by myself only. I want my work to come through also! Satanic opposition and death in our own bodies will never spoil our work, provided we are in contact with reality. What is reality? It is God, and He never suffers a defeat. He uses all His enemies; they run His errands and they are His servants. Having the same spirit of faith, we are connected to the living God, to His eternal plan and to His strong purpose, and therefore all things work together for good to us. 'It all happens for your sakes that the thanksgiving might redound to the glory of God.'

But this is not enough for Paul. He has the spirit of faith and goes on to say (in verse 17): "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Not only do we ourselves come through and not only is our work being brought through, but through eternities all our difficulties have accomplished a very real weight of exceeding great glory. Can that be proved? Not in the world of illusions! There you will fight your difficulties and try to get rid of them, but in the world of reality, where God reigns and where the spirit of faith prevails, it can be proved.

Paul has been speaking of his very heavy difficulties which, in chapter i, were too great for him and he could not carry them. Now he calls them 'light' and says they are 'but for a moment', and yet they had lasted all his life! What has happened? He is in contact with God and is just filled with the spirit of faith, so that he now speaks a language which anyone without that spirit cannot use.

I think I may already have told you about my great friend, Pastor Fjord Christensen in Denmark. A lady once came to him and said: 'My sufferings and afflictions are so heavy and they have lasted for so many years.' He only replied: 'Have you become a liberal theologian? The Bible says that afflictions are light and only last for a moment.' She spoke as a liar, but he spoke as a man of faith. Which of them was speaking the truth? He was, and the lady accepted it. The truth made her free and she was brought back into contact with reality.

This is the victory! This is just the other side of the Word of the Cross. We accept everything without fighting it and turn it, through the spirit of faith, into something of real value for ourselves,

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

for those among whom we work and for eternity. That is a wonderful thing! That makes life much more interesting and gives us a completely different note when we speak, when we pray and when we sing. That is the Gospel, a message of real joy, not illusionary joy, but *real* joy. That means lasting joy, joy that cannot be taken away because it is founded on God Himself and therefore is strong, masculine and real. And that joy is for us.

But we must come out of the world of illusions and lies. We cannot remain in our own way of thinking and speaking. If you read one of the famous books of history, such as Toynbee's *History of Mankind*, you will never find the most real event in the history of mankind mentioned there. The most real thing, and the thing of most value, was the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the historians never write about it. They write about the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans, and the British, but they never write about the resurrection of the Lord. Why not? Because this real thing does not fit into their philosophy and their way of thinking.

What I have said does not fit into our way of thinking as natural men and women. It does not fit into our feelings and emotions, nor into our philosophy of life. The only way to accept this word of God is to get out of our way of thinking and out of our philosophy of life. We cannot har-

monize these two ways of thinking and speaking. Because it is truth and because it is real, it cannot be accepted by the natural man. We have to have a new conversion and really turn away from our way of thinking, speaking, feeling, advising and comforting one another, and get to terms with the Lord, having a fresh encounter with Him who is real. We have to refresh our spirits with the spirit of faith. Then a new light is thrown upon everything and we can smile and laugh where we used to weep.

Perhaps you will say: 'I am so weak, so small and so weighed down!' My answer to that is: 'Never forget that the greater the importance and the more far-reaching the work is to which the Lord has called you, the lesser and smaller and weaker the vessel must of necessity be.' The weaker and smaller and lesser the vessel, the greater is the knowledge of reality, the knowledge of the spirit of faith and the knowledge of Him who raised Jesus from the dead. Such a vessel can speak the word of faith which names 'the things which are not' as if they were. That word is creative; it creates light out of darkness, hope out of fear, and victory out of what might seem to be a defeat.

This is life in the Spirit. It is the life of faith which the Lord has bought and given to us.

P. M.

Switzerland, 1970

“A STORMY WIND SHALL REND IT”

Reading: Ezekiel xiii. 8-16.
Matthew v, vi, vii.

WHEN the monsoon begins in India—and you have to experience a monsoon to understand what a stormy wind can be like!—the heavens turn on the taps and the water seems to come down all at once. Then, after the first storm is over and you go through the streets of the cities, you will find that houses have fallen down here and there, and not many years ago a very large building collapsed completely. What is the reason for this? It is because inferior materials are used in the buildings. While the sun is shining and the weather is dry the houses look very nice. They are plastered up and look quite solid; but as soon as the stormy wind

comes along they are subjected to the test of whether they will stand or fall. The reason why the very large building fell was that it was just like this wall that we have read about in Ezekiel xiii. There was only just a little cement to a very large amount of sand, which meant that the cement was not strong enough, not being made according to the correct proportions, and the whole thing collapsed. It only needed the stormy wind to prove of what sort it was.

I believe that in many areas today the work of God, and the people of God, are being subjected to the stormy wind, and if we have not experienced it yet, God tells us that it is coming. There is a fiery trial that is coming upon us. Very serious days are coming in the world as the end of this age

draws near—and I am sure that if our eyes are open we are aware that the end is drawing very near.

We are building in three ways. First, we are building the house of character, and that is what these chapters v, vi and vii of Matthew's Gospel are about. Secondly, we are building houses of families, and to build a family is the ordinary, normal course of human life. Then, of course, we are building together in the Church of God. We are the *household* of God.

The kind of building that we are making is vitally important, because in each of these areas there is going to be a testing of what is true and what is false, of what is real and what is just a façade. We are going to experience as individuals, as families, as churches, something of the stormy wind.

Let us clear up one thing concerning this stormy wind before we go further. It is not the work of the devil, but is sent by God. We read in this chapter in Ezekiel: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury" (verse 13), and in the prophecy of Jeremiah, chapter xxv, verse 9, we read very strange words: "Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and I will send unto Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations." If Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon, and the Assyrians were instruments in the hand of the Lord, then so are the nations of the earth today. Do we read our newspapers and say: "The devil is winning!"? Or do we recognize the sovereign hand of God in the course of human history, knowing that God is working all things after the counsel of His will—and that includes the communist régime of China, the chaotic conditions of India and the Arab-Israel war. Do we not read that it was 'the Spirit' who drove the Lord Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil? So I believe that we must recognize that the stormy wind is sent by God, who is in control of this universe, although, of course, the agency is the devil and all his works. And the stormy wind is sent to test.

Now let us notice the point at which the testing comes. These people in Ezekiel, when they were plastering this wall with untempered mortar—whatever that may be!—were just covering up the cracks with cheap plaster. They were building with inferior materials. The sun was shining and everything went on all right day after day. They may have gone on for a very long time, and it was not

until the house was completed that the stormy wind came.

There is a similar example of this in Matthew xiii in the parable of the wheat and the tares. We read in verse 26: "But when the blade sprang up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." Then God says something quite strange: "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

You see, the point of weakness is not a sudden thing. It is not in the crises of life that we are made. The crises just reveal what we are, what has been slowly built up over a very long period, and when the stormy wind comes it is too late to do anything. It is no good trying to build up the house suddenly when the stormy wind comes and knocks it down. It was too late to separate the tares and the wheat when they had grown to a certain height. The point is that we must watch the beginnings, and be very careful about the dangers of small things. When the seed is small it is very difficult to identify one kind from another, and because things are small there is a tendency for us to disregard their importance. I suppose those men who were building the wall in Jerusalem said: "Well, there is only a little bit of cement, but that does not matter. No one will see." When we see small things we must recognize that they have an essential nature, and they have a potential. We must not be deceived by them. Do you realize that Mao Tse Tung was once a little baby on his mother's shoulder, being cuddled by everyone who saw him? We see our pretty little baby boys and girls and we think they are something quite wonderful, failing to take account of the potential that there is in a human life. Children will play with a cuddly little bear, but what is the nature of that bear when it is fully grown? You see, there is a certain delusion about things when they are very small. We shall see the spiritual meaning of this as we go along, but it is vital for us to recognize the beginnings, the foundations. Although the seeds may look very much alike, they differ fundamentally in their nature, and, of course, the outworking will be a vital difference in their fruit.

BUILDING THE HOUSE OF CHARACTER

I have said that we are building the house of our character. How many young people, brought up in good Christian homes, have gone either to university or into the army and found that their whole

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

lives have been subjected to a testing which they never thought possible? Some have been destroyed because somewhere in their lives there has been 'untempered mortar' and not the real thing. It is vitally important that we build with the right material and that there is reality about the very foundation of our lives.

Ezekiel was a very interesting case in point. As a young teenager he was uprooted from his home and transported hundreds of miles away to the deserts of the Euphrates, and there, as a young man, he was in a refugee camp. He could have said: 'Well, all that I have heard about the God of Israel does not make much sense. What does all this religion mean if this is what it leads me to? What does the business about the house of God, which was to be "exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries", mean if it has come to this?' As a young man he had everything against him, and all that could have destroyed his faith and vision, but he was a man of character. I am looking forward to meeting Ezekiel in heaven, for to me he is one of the most interesting characters in Bible history! He was a man with a great passion for the house of God, a man whose heart was moved at the destruction of the temple of God, a man whose life was governed by a very strict self-discipline, and a man who was careful and punctilious in all his ways of life. And all this did not happen overnight! In Ezekiel iv. 14 we have a clue to his upbringing: "Ah, Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn of beasts; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth." In other words, Ezekiel had observed the Word of God. Here was a life that was built upon the Word of God, that sprang from the true seed, so when he faced a crisis he was able to stand. Read the prophecies of Jeremiah, and the books of the Kings, and see how many lives were built with 'untempered mortar' and fell!

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us a tremendous manifesto in those three chapters in Matthew! That is the foundation word of His Kingdom, and He finished by saying: "Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine, and *doeth them*, shall be likened unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock." If we are going to build up a character we must know what these words of our Lord Jesus Christ are, but, like the seed, it is very hard to distinguish one from the other, for the devil is very clever at quoting and mis-using Scripture. It is a case of reading and obeying the Word of God, day by day.

BUILDING THE HOUSE OF OUR FAMILY

I said that we are building a house which is our family, and that is the next unit in God's creation. God has made us as individuals, but He has not left us as a lot of isolated individuals. He has placed the 'solitary in families', and the family is the constituent unit of both the Church and the nation—and if the enemy is attacking anything today he is attacking family life! In doing so he is destroying both the Church and the nation. Analyse some of the weaknesses of church life and testimony, and you will find that they all boil down to something wrong in the family. Let us be really frank, honest and practical about this! How many really happy Christian families do you know? I guess that there are very few. As I move around—and I move around quite a lot—I find very few solid, happy Christian families. But a family is not built overnight. It takes years, and it takes all that God can give us.

The principle of the family goes right back to Genesis xviii, where we get a very interesting clue as to why God chose Abraham: ". . . seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him" (verse 18). Why? Look at the next verse: "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." That is something which I think we sometimes overlook: that in the call and life of Abraham God placed such tremendous importance upon the way in which he ran his family. In other words, if he could not control his family he could not control a nation. If his example in his family life was not good, then it could not be the testimony for a great nation.

Is that not echoed in Paul's first letter to Timothy, where he gives instruction concerning church leaders: "The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach; no brawler, no striker; but gentle, not contentious, no lover of money; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (iii. 2). Let me ask a question: Why are there so few real church leaders? Because there are so few who can stand up to the testimony of Abraham and the bishop of I Timothy.

Well, how do we build the family with the right material? We look at the letter to the Colossians. After Paul has spoken about the pre-eminence of

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971

Christ, the headship of Christ, and the wonders of the risen life with Christ, he comes down in chapter iii to such matters as wives, husbands, children, servants and masters, and the little section from iii. 12 to iv. 1 concerns the family. In verse 14 we read about the cement, the stuff that sticks the family together: "Love . . . the bond of perfectness." Of course, we have to look at the two previous verses to understand what that means.

How is the problem of Christian homes with non-Christian children solved? How is the question of how much pop-music to allow the children answered? What is the answer to the question of whether eighteen-year-old girls should be allowed to stay out until three o'clock in the morning? These are real problems, not imaginary ones, and are the cause of a home being happy, or of being utterly miserable.

Of course, we must face the fact that it is possible to have non-Christian children. They must have their own experience with God, and we parents cannot impose a faith upon them, but we do not allow the children to dictate as to what is done in the home. We 'let the Word of God dwell richly amongst us, and we admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs'—not with microbe dissonance that they call music! No, the answer is here in this chapter, and what we do we 'do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him'.

Of course, when all this is done in the right spirit, there is joy in the home.

Then comes a long list of instructions, and it begins with wives. I wonder why Paul always begins with the wives! The answer is that they are the most important factor in the home. Who spends the most time with the children? Is it not the mother? Go back to the Old Testament and read the history of the kings: '. . . began to reign over Judah, and his mother's name was . . .'. It was the mother who had all the influence and, of course, most of the troubles began with wives! And that goes right back to Adam's wife. But there is nothing more solid than a wife in right relationship to her husband.

Husbands are to love their wives and "be not bitter against them." I know that some wives are in a very frustrating situation when they can see a bit more than their husbands can, but if they are good wives they will know how to influence him, and if they are right they have God on their side.

"Children, obey your parents", but, against that, fathers are not to provoke their children. I think that we must be very careful about imposing our will in matters that are trivial. I know of one home that is almost ruined because of the imposing of silly rules, and good children are being provoked into doing things they do not want to do.

There are not many homes these days that have servants—except the kind that you switch on! And they do not answer back!—but there are ways in which the servants can build the home. We read that the nurses of Jacob and Isaac had a great influence upon the children.

So, as there are few servants, there are few masters in these days. We may not have servants directly under us, but there are many people with whom we come in contact in our daily domestic life. I remember that not long ago I was very irritated with the milkman, for he just did not do what he was asked to do, but after a while I learnt from my wife that he had a sick wife and did not know what to do. He had come out and left his home in a chaotic condition. However, my wife talks to the milkman and all the other 'servants', and is able to show something of Christian grace.

Now, when all these things go into the building of the family, and the house is built on God's Word, then there are no storms that can destroy it.

We must leave the building of the house of God, the Church, for time is against us, but read the third chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians. What is needed for building? The testing that is coming to the house of God, for then it will be revealed whether it has been built with 'untempered mortar', or with gold, silver and precious stones.

Oh, may the Lord help us to build that which will glorify Him!

W. E. T.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

FREE FRUIT

ORANGE trees do not grow wild. Yet once in the forest of Amazonia we found an orange tree loaded with fruit. It was on a river bank, many miles from all human habitations, and so remote that we had been in that region for some years and had never seen it. Year after year it must have blossomed, become fruitful, and then dropped its over-ripe oranges on to the ground to rot and decay there.

It seemed almost a miracle that we found the tree, for none of the Red Indians among whom we lived had ever mentioned it. Either they had never come across it in their wanderings, or else they had despised it as useless.

To us it was a real miracle, for we had had to exist for months on the same dry and uninteresting food, and we were badly in need of something sweet and fresh. At that time I was a sick man, weakened by much fever and suffering from under-nourishment. Nothing could have been more welcome and more suitable to meet our needs. We piled up a great heap of the green and gold oranges in our dug-out canoe, and paddled it triumphantly back to our mud and palm leaf house.

For days and days we enjoyed the refreshing fruit, sometimes eating the segments and sometimes just sucking the juice. Those oranges were the best that I have ever tasted. Not only that, their Vitamin C content had a big part in giving me better health. From that time forward I got steadily better and even began to put on a little weight.

Our first thanks, of course, went to our Heavenly Father who had guided us to discover the golden treasure, but then we started thinking gratefully of the unknown man who had made it possible by planting the first seed. Nobody knew who it was. At some time or other—long before we first went to work for Christ in that jungle region—some traveller had passed that way in his canoe and had rested, or, perhaps, passed the night at that spot. He would have tied up his hammock under the trees and probably sat up in it eating and enjoying the sweet freshness of an orange. Then it may have

occurred to him to plant one of the pips and from that simple planting had come a tree, and not just one more orange, but whole loads of them. We ourselves had a canoe load, and nobody knew how many thousands had already been wasted.

As I have said, orange trees do not grow wild in the Brazilian jungle. A seed must have been taken to that place and planted there. God did the rest. His rain made the seed to sprout and His warmth made the tree to grow. When the flowers came out His insects must have fertilized them, and then, when the fruit was formed, it was His sun which ripened it. A man planted. God blessed the seed. All that we had to do was to discover where it was and help ourselves.

You and I spend our lives planting seeds. In the Bible word, we "sow". If what we sow is truly in love, if it is some act or word which has God's life in it, then later on some fruit will surely result from what we have done. We may not taste it ourselves. Indeed, that should not concern us too much, for the Christian life is not one of looking for what helps us, but of doing that which will help others. I owed so much to that unknown planter of the orange pip, and I am sorry that I cannot thank him. I owe much more to the Lord Jesus, who planted not only His words and His acts but His whole life as a seed of future help to others. Ever since His death on the Cross people have been tasting of the sweetness of God's love by finding and receiving His gift of new life. I have done that, too, and in this case I am so glad that I have been able to thank Him. He is not unknown.

It is good that you do not have to travel to a foreign land, nor do you have to search in an unfriendly forest. The fruit of Christ's sufferings are brought so near to you. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34. 8), and when you have tasted, don't forget to thank Him. And don't forget to go on sowing seeds of love yourself, so that others may be helped through you.

H. F.

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Switzerland, 1970

THE FINGER OF GOD

“All the wells which Isaac’s father’s servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. And Abimilech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. And Isaac’s servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of living water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac’s herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him” (Genesis xxvi. 15–20).

“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John iv. 14).

LAST time we were seeing that God is a Person the face behind the universe. Now we are going to see that God also has a finger which He puts into the universe. He does things by ‘the hand of the Lord’, or, as the Lord Jesus calls it, by the ‘Spirit of God’.

We also saw that the earth stands in relation to God as a book does to its author, so that as we read the book we either see nothing of God, or we see something of Him on every page; and when we look at the universe we either see nothing of God, or we find Him very difficult to avoid, because He is the Author. However, we must remember that He has a very special chapter in that book. The Author became one of the characters, for there is a chapter which is about the Lord Jesus, when God interfered with the story and played the part of one of the characters. One thing about the mystery of the Godhead is that God is a part of the book as well as the writer of it. God did this in order to speak to us—“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”—so that all God had to say to us was seen in the Lord Jesus.

I want you to imagine for a moment that you have never opened the Bible in your life, nor have you heard the Christian message, but you believe

that there is a God who made the heavens and the earth. Now, that God wants to speak to you. That is reasonable enough, but how would He do it? How will the Author speak to the characters of His story? Perhaps He could put words in the mouths of some of the characters, and this He has done with the Prophets. But a Prophet might be giving his own opinion, so perhaps God would speak to you with a vision, a dream, or a revelation. However, most of us, I think, would go to a psychiatrist if God spoke to us in a dream, for we would not be too sure that it was He who had spoken. Perhaps God would speak to you by the touch of His Spirit upon your spirit. He does that, when He makes us hungry for His beauty, when He makes us feel empty without Him, and when we long for love and for peace. But these may be just the movements of the chemicals in our bodies. How can you be sure that God has spoken to you? Perhaps He will speak through your conscience. He does do that, for the conscience is one of His instruments and makes us aware that He is near. But, then, some have weak consciences and others have strong, and all our consciences are affected by sin, so we differ in our judgments. How could God speak in an irrefutable way?

Well, of course, you have not opened your Bible yet! There is only one way in which God could speak to man so that man could understand, and that is if God Himself became a man and spoke man’s language, lived with man’s heart, thought with man’s brain, worked with man’s hands and walked with man’s feet. That would be your language, and you could understand that word. God’s message would be coming on your wavelength. It would be no good if He became an animal, or a tree. All that God has to say to us has to become a man so that we can really understand—and that is who the Lord Jesus is.

Of course, if God were to do this—and we Christians say that He has done it—it would be surprising if He did not prepare the way, so, through the Prophets, through His law given by Moses, through dreams and visions and the prickings of the consciences of the wise, He has brought together a training programme. That is the Old Testament, and in it you find the people who were trained. They were the people of Israel, so that when the Lord Jesus came there was meant to be a people ready to interpret who this Man was, a

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

people who could understand more perfectly the message that God was speaking so that it could be carried to the furthest parts of the world. We Christians say that God has done that.

Now Socrates stated that if a perfect man came to this world, he would be executed, and we know that man's big disease is always to throw God out. So it would not be surprising, in fact, we would expect that if God were to speak to us in a man, we would execute that man. So Jesus died. But God must have something to say to us about death, for, after all, that is man's biggest problem. Therefore we would expect this man to rise again, for God is speaking to us about our biggest problem when He comes to speak to us in this man. So Christ rose again.

You might have thought about all that without opening the Bible, if you started with the assumption that God wants to say something to man. The picture is reasonable, not difficult to work out, and it is what you would expect to happen—and it did happen, and the Spirit of God helps us to see that it happened in Jesus.

Then comes a surprising thing, and something that I do not think you would ever have thought of. You would realize that God would want the message to go through the world, so you would expect it to be put down in a book. It was, in the New Testament, but God has done something even more than that. So that this message of Jesus, God's Word to man, might spread into every generation of this earth, invade every country of this world, be understood in every culture that exists and be seen in every colour of skin that there is, God has taken the Spirit of that message and has poured that message into His people. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, living in every Christian, begins to write the story all over again, as we have been considering in our morning sessions.

The Spirit of God, writing on the spirit of our inner man, does not start with us in Bethlehem, but when we are born again. He does not write out the compassion of the Lord Jesus towards those who were leprous, or who were in sin, but writes out Christ as we visit a sickbed, or as we help a person in need. The Spirit of God does not write 'Golgotha' across our spirit, but writes of the place where there was a crisis in our heart before God and we found that we were crucified with Him, and then began to discover the power of resurrection. The story of the Lord Jesus, God's message to man, is being written out many times in many Christians, so that His message might go throughout the whole world. We do not have to travel back two thousand years. We do not have to go to Galilee. God's Word is being

breathed out of men's lives, so that the whole world can know what He has to say.

This is the finger of God writing the story in your spirit, the Spirit of God reproducing the life of the Lord Jesus in your life, so that all the world might see, and understand, and know. God is still speaking to man in man's language.

Now, we all know that so much of the Christianity that we meet, and that we live with, seems to lack that vital touch of God's Spirit. It has not the same freshness that there is in the story of Jesus. It is not springing and bubbling up like the life of Christ across the pages of the Gospels. It does not attract by being something satisfying, but appears to be dry. How can our Christianity be living Christianity? How can our dry experience become vibrant and fresh? Have we somehow reached the experience of Genesis xxvi where, if you remember, the wells that Abraham had dug had been filled up with earth and life was no longer springing forth from them? We were reminded this morning that Isaac teaches us about resurrection, and he does so, not only in his experience on Mount Moriah, but all the way through his life. There was a resurrection spirit when he touched those dried-up wells that his father had dug, for those wells re-lived. The Spirit of God began to flow again. I want, therefore, that we should think about Isaac in order to get a clue as to how our Christian experience can go on living in the vibrant, refreshing life of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, I want to point out three things.

Isaac had an experience of resurrection on the top of Mount Moriah. This was an historical fact, an event written in his history which could not be altered. And that is true of one aspect of Christianity, for it is something factual, something that happened two thousand years ago. God became man, dwelt amongst us, died on a Cross, and rose again. Those are things that happened, and they cannot be altered.

Then in Genesis xxv. 11 we read that Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi. That was where he was meant to live and experience continuously the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit, for by this time he had come to understand that resurrection was God's interpretation of that event on Mount Moriah. And that is the second thing about Christianity. Not only is it an event in history, but it is an event which has been interpreted to us. God gives us an understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the Scriptures.

The third thing is that these facts—what happened as an event and what is understood from the Scriptures—have to be made our continual experi-

ence by the Holy Spirit. Christianity is not just facts; it is more than that. It is not just facts interpreted, preached and explained; it is more than that. Christianity is the facts interpreted and applied in a living twentieth-century way to twentieth-century people, and these facts are being written all over again in your heart and mine by the Spirit of God.

I wonder if this is an explanation of why our Christian lives are so dry! We concentrate on all the *facts*. We can explain the Christian message very reasonably and rationally. We can demonstrate the evidence for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. We are very good at explaining the 'Gospel', but that is not the whole thing and has not reached the end to which God is aiming. We think we need more Bible Study, and so we get a lot more teaching, *interpretation*, but we still are not really alive or fresh. If we are quite honest, as time goes on we begin to get a little bored, even a little tired of the Bible, for we have heard too many doctrines, and yet, somehow, we are not alive to God. We have to get those wells unearthed!

RELATIONSHIPS

I wonder why Isaac began to experience famine in his life when he was living by the well Lahai-roi! That is the well of the God who lives and sees, who was there in order to be continuously bringing to Isaac that fact of the resurrection that he had experienced on Mount Moriah, and to explain and interpret that experience in his daily life. But Isaac began to be hungry and dissatisfied. There was a famine in the land (Genesis xxvi. 1), and Isaac wanted to find some answer to this lack of food and water.

Now I am going to speculate. It does not say in the Bible that this is the reason, but I wonder if the famine began in his experience because of something in his history. Just to help you to come along with me in this speculation, I want to point out that, although there was still famine in the rest of the country, when Isaac was back in a right place with God he had plenty of water and good crops. So perhaps there was a reason why he lost that experience of the living, seeing God.

Isaac and his wife were for some while without children, so in Genesis xxv. 21 we read: "And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived." That is good! Isaac must be living by the well, for that is resurrection. Then we read that Rebekah found that the children were struggling within her, so she sought the Lord

as well, but on her own, and she had a revelation. The Lord told her that she had twins, but they were struggling because the nation of the elder would be serving the nation of the younger. From that Rebekah understood that God had chosen the younger of the twins, but Isaac would not believe it. In verse 28 we read that "Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob." I think I can see some earth dropping down into the well Lahai-roi! Perhaps things were not quite as they should have been at home. I am sure Isaac must have said to himself: 'Why does that wife of mine keep on about the younger son? It is the first born that matters . . . Now, listen, my dear. That elder boy is the one that matters. It was *my* prayers that brought those boys into being.' And she would have replied: 'No, you have it all wrong. I had a vision from God and it is the *younger* boy.' 'Oh, women's tales! They expect us to believe any old dream!' All this could have been saved if they had prayed together, and if there had been a common spiritual life. It is all very well to talk about our unity as believers when two believers in the same home are not sharing the same spiritual life!

I once met a man who separated himself from every company of Christians with whom he had met, and now he breaks bread every Sunday morning with his wife—and I am not too sure about the spiritual unity there! That is not the Spirit of God, for He is the unity of God's people. If we want to stop that work of the Spirit we start dropping some earth down the well—not very muddy or dirty earth, and not too much rubbish, but just good, honest earth—and the Spirit of God is repressed in our hearts.

I will tell you why I think my speculation may be right. The time came when Isaac said to Abimelech, the Philistine king: 'Rebekah is my sister.' Isaac had not told the truth because "he feared". Ladies, if your husband did that, you would conclude that he was not the world's greatest lover! Indeed, it would be a very wrong thing to do, for it would be exposing you to danger. It was expedient, true enough, and Isaac had learnt this trick from his father Abraham, but that in no way exonerated him, and when God brought it out into the open so that it could be dealt with (and that is the terrible thing about the God of resurrection! He will bring things out into the open eventually if we will not bring them out, and it is sometimes to our shame and humiliation to have to admit to Him that things are not right in our home and in our hearts), and it was dealt with, Isaac's crops began to grow. The Philistines did not have good crops. They still had

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the problem of famine, which is not surprising, for they were the ones who had filled up the wells which Abraham had dug. They had gone around with a lot of earth and had dropped it into the wells so that they could not spring up. How did they do it, and what did it mean?

Who are these Philistines? They always bring famine to the land because they are the sort of people who live in God's things, but do not know the living experience of His Word. They come into Canaan by their own route and are not led, as were the children of Israel into Egypt, and Abraham from Ur. They have no exercises in the wilderness, know no crossing of the Jordan, but come along the coast. They hate God's Word to be sharp—when they were in control of the children of Israel they would not allow them to sharpen their swords. They like the truth of the ark and keep it in their temple so that they can bring it out at special times, like an Armistice Day parade. They are the sort of people who make a lot of men, especially big men—and Goliath was one of their biggest. The Philistines are people who handle the things of God—but God is not handling them. That finger of the Lord is not able to spring in their life and write a story. What was it they dropped down the wells to keep the Spirit of God at bay? Again, can I suggest this? I do not think it was rubbish, nor was it dirty, but just earth—and earth is important. If there is no earth there is no well, for there must be something round the hole so that the water can come up the hole, but the earth that the Philistines put into the wells was earth in the wrong place. There must be earth in a well, and we must have the historical facts of Christianity. We have to have the earth of facts that happened on the earth in the earthly body of the Lord Jesus. We must have the earth of doctrines, formulations of truth, and interpretations that come through the mind, but that, too, is the earth. It goes through a brain which is earthly.

Now put the earth in the right place. It goes at the bottom of the well and up the sides, but not right in the middle where there has to be a hole. There is nothing earthly there! There is a spirit there, with our body of earth around it. There must be earth in order to have human beings; there had to be earth for the body of the Lord Jesus, and for the Prophets to be able to speak and for the Scriptures to be written; but there is the unseen Spirit of God who writes on our hearts and who springs up in everlasting life whenever we make room for Him in our spirits.

CONTENTION

Isaac helps us to see how to keep the hole clear.

The Philistines tell him to leave, so he moves on and digs out one of Abraham's wells that the Philistines had stopped up. Isaac knows the secret now! In his own family life he has learnt to pray together and to be in unity. Do you think it is only by chance that we read in Ephesians v: "Be filled with the Spirit . . . wives, submit to your husbands . . . husbands, love your wives"? That is one of the ways to keep the hole open to the Spirit of God! God has put His finger on something in the earth, so Isaac digs out the earth. Then the Spirit of God begins to flow and Isaac is refreshed. No doubt rivers of living water flow out of Isaac's life, so it is not very long before the theologians—I mean, the Philistines—arrive, and they want to know what is going on. They see there is something that they have not got, so they try to take it over, and say: "The water is ours." Is that not terrible? "The Spirit of God is *ours*! He belongs to *us*, not to you. *We* are the spiritual people.' Sometimes this is expressed by just a look on the face, or in a word, but if this is our attitude towards the Spirit of God it can easily be seen. 'God's Spirit belongs exclusively to us. We are first-class, and you are second-class.'

Is it not beautiful that Isaac just moved on? 'I am only too pleased that you want the things of the Spirit! We are not going to fight about it.' He called that well 'Contention', and then left it.

As I pointed out, in Ephesians v it says: "Be filled with the Spirit." How? "Submitting yourselves one to another." We will not be filled with the Spirit if we are contentious, if we are disputing and arguing with one another about the Spirit, or if we are claiming Him for our personal possession and not wanting anyone else to have Him. That contention represses the flow of the Spirit of God.

HATRED

So Isaac moves on and digs another well, and out flows the Spirit again. Once more the Philistines are interested, and that is not surprising, for they have been thirsty for a long time. So they claim the well. Isaac called this one 'Hatred', because of the anger and the opposition which had arisen by reason of his spiritual experience and blessing. Perhaps he decided that if he stayed there he would not be able to give thanks to God. How can you if you are arguing, and when you are in conflict with, and hating, others? But if we would be filled with the Spirit we must "give thanks always for all things unto God".

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 197

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Isaac moves on and digs a third well. He called this one "Rehoboth", and said: 'We shall be fruitful now.' He knew that the Spirit of God was given to bring forth fruit: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control." This time the Philistines did not come, for they are not interested in the fruit that the Spirit brings forth. They are only interested in the Spirit Himself. They kept the other two wells, and this is the terrible thing: God lets us keep the Spirit's workings even if we are not interested in the fruit of the Spirit. Balaam had visions in the Spirit, Samson did mighty exploits in the Spirit, Saul prophesied in the Spirit even while he was chasing David with hatred, Judas did all the works of the Spirit (or the other disciples would soon have found him out), men and women may demonstrate miracles and prophesy in the Spirit—and the Lord Jesus will say: 'Depart from Me! I never knew you.' The workings of the Spirit are dangerous, not because of what they are in themselves. They may be necessary for the work of God, but they are dangerous because we deceive ourselves with them. We claim a unique experience of the Spirit ourselves: 'This water is *ours!*' We are not interested in the fruit, but only in the sayings and manifestations. God allows that, and we delude ourselves as to our spirituality. Spirituality can never be understood by the manifestations. You might be very spiritual, or you might have no spirituality, but God will let you have the workings of the Spirit. The Philistines could take those workings for themselves, but it was in Rehoboth that the fruit was brought forth.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

There is one more well. King Abimelech came to Isaac and said: 'I can see now that God is with you. Come, now, let us make a covenant!' and they did. On that day water sprang out of the well of Shebah—"Beer-sheba", which is the well of the oath. As they were there together the Spirit of God was flowing forth. Is there ever a place to separate on these sort of issues? I suppose that if we are pushed out, as Isaac was, we have to go, but God's heart is towards *all* His people, even the Philistines and the theologians. They can see that Isaac has what they need. Our unity is the unity of the Spirit, and the Spirit is for all those who belong to the Lord. There is never an exclusive movement of the Spirit of God. I believe that when the Lord Jesus prayed: "That they also may be one in us, that the world may believe", it was partly for this purpose—that when we express our unity in the Spirit, the Spirit of God can flow out to the world and all men can see that God is with us.

Is the Spirit of God writing the story of Jesus in our hearts? Or are we still content with facts and theologies? Here are the clues: right relationships, especially in the home, giving thanks in all things, submitting to one another, and, added to all that, praising God, as Isaac did in that third well, when he said: 'Now, thank God, we can bring forth the fruit!', for they were free. Spirit-filled men will go out to all God's people, and, on the basis of the unity of the Spirit, God will go out to all the world.

R. T. F.

THE BATTLE FOR LIFE

CHAPTER VI

THE CONTINUATION OF THE CONFLICT IN RELATION TO THE CHURCH AS THE CORPORATE COMPANY

WE have said enough to make it abundantly clear that there is an age-long battle for spiritual life, and that, if that life can be arrested in its manifestation, its expression, it *will* be so arrested. There is a great power and force working by the instrument of

spiritual death to quench the testimony of the risen and ascended Lord within the individual believer, and within the Church as the Body of Christ. The individual believer and the Church are together in that battle for the manifestation of that life of the Lord. The issue is not as to the forfeiture of Divine, eternal life, nor as to whether Satan can take that

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

life away from us, but as to the keeping of it from its full expression in believers individually and in the Church as a whole. That is the battle in which we are more or less engaged and concerned, according to the measure of our spirituality and our utterness for the Lord. What is true of the individual, then, is true of the whole Body.

THE HIGHER REALMS OF THE BATTLE
AND THE TESTIMONY

I think we can best get to the inside of this matter by noting the contrast between the first letter to the Corinthians and the letter to the Ephesians. By this means we shall be greatly helped in understanding the nature and realm of the battle for spiritual life. There are many practical suggestions and presentations in these two letters by which we can be governed in this matter. To begin with, let us note the realms in which these letters stand; for undoubtedly there is a great difference between them in this respect. We are familiar with the governing clauses of the letter to the Ephesians. The phrase "in the heavenlies" is one of its dominating notes. We know quite well as soon as we take up the letter to the Ephesians that we are in the realm of the heavenlies. A great emancipation has taken place, a great lifting out, a great extrication, a great separation. One whole world has been left behind and another has been entered in a spiritual way, where things partake the utterness of the Lord, where the Lord is seen in a full way as Sovereign Head over all things to the Church. Here there is nothing fragmentary, nothing partial, nothing imperfect, but everything is viewed as complete, full and final, and as linked in a perfect way with the Lord in heaven. Here all the expressions are heavenly expressions. It is a realm, and the testimony is there seen in true heavenly character and vigour. We mean that the testimony is operating in a heavenly realm. It is in those ultimate relationships which are spiritual, with forces and intelligences which are supernatural, which are more than human, and more than the forces and intelligences of this earth, that the testimony is seen to be operating. The testimony is reaching the ultimate ranges of this universe, is touching principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness. It is there that something is being registered. It is back there that the testimony is being established, fulfilled and expressed.

We cannot get further back than that. It goes behind everything seen, everything handled, everything known here, and it touches that realm which is responsible for all that is going on here.

Turn to the first letter to the Corinthians, and see into what a different realm you enter. You find very little that is heavenly there. You find that immediately you begin to move into this letter you are touching the earthlies, mundane, natural things—and what a mass of such things there is! There is none of the atmosphere of the heavenlies here. You find yourself down in somewhat sordid things, even amongst the Lord's people. Sordid is not too strong a word in some connections. You are having to deal with all the unpleasantness, all the wretched aspects of mixture and spiritual weakness and immaturity, and be occupied with things which you would fain sweep aside and have done with. You feel as you move here: 'Oh, that we could get out of this realm of things; divisions, schisms and quarrellings, lawsuits and whatnot! How earthly it is!' It is another realm altogether, and because it is so earthly, because there is such an absence of the heavenly, you are not surprised that the testimony is so poor. You can find here no trace of registration upon spiritual forces. If you read this first letter to the Corinthians from an entirely spiritual standpoint, you have to say that the situation is rather one where the evil forces have gained an advantage than of their having been overthrown. You have to admit that the enemy is running roughshod here amongst the saints. He seems in some things to be having his way altogether, and carrying things into a realm which it is a shame to speak of even in the world. Yes, it is true that the enemy is no defeated foe, so far as these believers are concerned, or so far as the situation in this letter is concerned. He is having too much of his own way, simply because they are so much on the earthly level of things.

That speaks for itself, does it not? The testimony, for its real value and effectiveness, demands that the Lord's people, the Church, be a heavenly Body. It demands that! It is clear that these believers at Corinth had come into a very small measure of the power of His resurrection, simply because they had not entered into the meaning of His death, His Cross. It is a sad and painful reflection that the Apostle should have to remind them of the opportunity that had been theirs by what he says in the opening section of this letter: "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom . . . I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." That had been Paul's attitude and message and aim when he went to Corinth some considerable time before he wrote the letter. Now, his having been amongst them,

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971

stressing, emphasizing Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and nothing else, and then much later writing such a letter, exhibits the fact that they had not learned that for which he had been there!

If there is a living apprehension of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, you will not have divisions like this, nor schisms, fornication, and all these things. They had missed the meaning of the Cross. They had failed to apprehend the message upon which the Apostle had laid such undivided and such exclusive stress in his presence amongst them. And if they do not know the meaning of the Cross, how can they know the meaning of the resurrection? How can they know the power of the resurrection? And if they do not know that, then how can they know the power of that resurrection-life registering the impact of the risen, living Lord upon spiritual forces? You can never undo divisions among the saints by bringing saints together to discuss their differences, and to ask them to make them up. The only way in which such things can be dealt with amongst the Lord's people is to get down on your knees and deal with the forces behind. The power of the enemy behind that thing has to be broken. You can never patch up a situation like that, because it is devilish.

What is true in the matter of divisions is true in every other matter in this letter. It is the enemy behind who is ultimately the occasion of all this disorder, and there is nothing but the impact of a risen, ascended, sovereign Lord against the enemy behind which will make for a better state of things. All this is made very evident in Corinth. They could not register that impact upon spiritual forces because they were not in the right realm. That is a heavenly realm of activity, and they were on the earth, amongst the earthlies. The realm makes a lot of difference to the testimony.

If you are trying to operate in the power of the testimony of the ascended and reigning Lord, and are living an earthly life, you are going to be absolutely worsted and proved completely insufficient for the situation. If we are really going to have the coming through of the power of His throne, then we must be severed in a spiritual way from this world, from this earth. We must be, in a spiritual sense, a heavenly people, seated together with Him in the heavenlies, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies, and so on. The realm is important for the testimony's functioning.

It is to this testimony that we are called. This is not some ideal impossible of realization. This is not something presented as a high level of truth. This is the thing for which the Church is constituted. I do not believe, as some people seem to believe, that

the Church in Corinth and the Church in Ephesus are two different Churches. There is a teaching which says that the Body in Corinth is not the same Body as that in Ephesus. I do not believe that for a moment, and I do not believe that the Corinthians were called for anything less than the Ephesians. It is the same calling. The Corinthians were as much called to a heavenly life and heavenly testimony as were the Ephesians, or any others. It is a matter of whether we accept the meaning of the Cross to bring us through into the power of His resurrection, and that will determine how far we shall be the expression of that ultimate power of the enthroned Lord.

That "realm" question touches any number of contingencies. It raises the whole question of whether we are living on an earthly level; whether we are officially bound up with something which, after all, is only earthly in its constitution, even though it be of a religious kind. All such questions as these are raised, and with them the issue as to whether we are out with the Lord in an emancipated, free, and clear way as His heavenly people. We are content to leave it there for the time, and you can ask the Lord to show you what it means in a fuller explanation to your own heart.

THE RANGE OF THE BATTLE AND THE TESTIMONY

Running parallel with the realm is what we may call the range of things; not so much the dimensions as the values, the qualities. Turn again to the Ephesian letter, and note some of the great words that are found in it. There are some wonderful statements, and phrases, and terms. "The *exceeding greatness* of his power", "*Strengthened with all might* by his Spirit in the inward man", "Able to do *exceeding abundantly above* all that we ask or think, *according to the power that worketh in us*"—the power that worketh in us is capable of enabling us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think—"Raised him . . . and made him to sit at his own right hand in the heavenly places *far above all* rule, and authority, and power, and dominion . . . and gave him to be *head over all things to the church . . . the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" Pick out all these transcendent, superlative things in the letter. Do not regard them just as words, just as oratory, but mark the tremendous range of value and calibre represented by these things. You have nothing to compare with them in the first letter to the Corinthians. If you turn to the chapter in that letter which perhaps carries you farthest in thought and revelation, the fifteenth chapter, you will find

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

you are, after all, only dealing with resurrection, and that, the resurrection of the body; great and glorious things, it is true, as to the nature of the resurrection body. But when you have your resurrection body you are only then entering upon the great realm of the eternities. It may be a marvellous thing for this corruptible to put on incorruption, and I am quite sure we shall think it is a marvellous thing when it happens. It will be a glorious thing when the final touch of death with regard to our bodies is swallowed up victoriously. But we are only started on the career which is presented to us in the letter to the Ephesians for the ages to come. There are very vital things in the first letter to the Corinthians, but in the range, in the depth and the height, the length and the breadth, so far as spiritual value is concerned, there is no comparison. Even when you deal with the Church, the Body, in I Corinthians xii, you are largely dealing with it from the side of its expression here. When you deal with it in the Ephesian letter you are carrying it higher, away from conditions where it is necessary to say such a thing as this: "One member cannot say to another, I have no need of you." How that reveals what had been the spirit of things at Corinth, and what an earthly level had obtained there! The Apostle, it is true, is giving an unfolding of spiritual relationships, but it is of such a kind as is largely occasioned, if not wholly, by spiritual disorder among the saints. But when you come into Ephesians iv and touch the truth of the Body there, you are breathing an altogether different atmosphere.

Pass on to Ephesians v. 32: "This mystery is great: I speak in regard of Christ and of the church." You are carried away into the great mystery of the Body. That is something deeper. What is the explanation of this difference? It is not that they are two different Churches, nor that they represent two different callings. It is that there are two different levels upon which they live. If all these wonderful things presented in Ephesians, these mighty, weighty things, are elements of the true testimony of Jesus, then they belong to a place where the earthlies are left behind. To put that in another way: you have to leave the earthlies if you are coming into the realm where those mighty forces are operating.

Would you know the exceeding greatness of His power which is to usward who believe? You cannot if you live on a Corinthian level, if you live on a natural, earthly basis, even as a Christian. Do you want to know the fullness of Christ? Do you want to become in a related way the fullness of Him that filleth all in all? You can never be that if you live spiritually at Corinth. The testimony is

a mighty thing. It is a thing fraught with these massive elements and features of the risen and ascended Lord. There will be a universal expression of that fullness in the ages to come, but even now we are to partake of it. It is to be known and set forth now in a spiritual way in the life of the Church, but the Church has to come out on to the ground which is presented in this letter to the Ephesians. I am not saying that the church at Ephesus was on this level. It may or it may not have been. But it seems perfectly clear that the Ephesian saints were in a position to have such a revelation given to them, and the Corinthians were not. The Corinthians were not ready for it. But if Paul's visit to Ephesus and the results are indicative of anything, they do speak of thoroughness there. They brought their books of magic and made a great fire of them, and their price was considerable. They sacrificed everything to the fire because they had found a new mystery, a heavenly force which was more than the force of the magicians, the occultists, the spiritists, something far above all that. They had discovered Christ, and at great cost they let all else go, and that prepared the way for a wonderful revelation to them. Paul was able to say to those Ephesian elders: "I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts xx. 27). You can never declare the whole counsel of God to any company of people unless they are ready for it. He had a clear way at Ephesus, and on their part it represented a spiritual position of abandonment of earthly connections, relationships, interests, and religious systems.

We focus our attention for a few minutes upon some of the more specific reasons and causes. These have been included in our general survey, but we now mention them particularly.

THE COMPARISON OF THE CORINTHIAN AND EPHESIAN ASSEMBLIES

I. The Place of Man

Look at these two, and focus your attention upon one word, or one title, one designation, namely, that of 'man'. What was the place of man in these two different assemblies? In Corinth man, as such, had a very large place. The Apostle says: "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ . . . for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?" (I Corinthians iii. 1, 3, 4). Is it not man, as such, that is very much in

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971

view? Man was coming into view to the obscuring of Christ. All the way through that letter natural elements in man are being dealt with. Whatever it is, at whatever point you touch this terrible trouble that engaged the Apostle, you are touching some expression of man in himself; some dispute, for example, though over what we do not exactly know. But two believers, members of the same assembly, have perhaps been in some business transaction, and there has been something not straight, something upon which they have come to a serious difference, and one says: 'All right, I will take it to court, and will fight you there!' It is man doing things as man does them. All the time it is a case of man occupying a strong place of possessiveness and forcefulness.

Turn to the letter to the Ephesians, and see where man comes in there. You cannot find him; but we find "one new man", that new man which we are exhorted to put on (Ephesians iv. 24). The old man has given place to the new man. It is not the individual standing for himself that we see now, but rather the individual rightly functioning in the corporate new man. It is no longer a case of so many separated individuals all thinking of their own interests, but all that individualism is lost in the one collectivity and relativity of the new man. You can almost see them growing up into Him—"Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians iv. 13).

That word "man" is a key to the situation in both letters. How? If he is allowed to come in, there will be a state such as you have at Corinth. If he goes out, the prospects are of an Ephesian position. That is the work of the Cross. You are not surprised, then, that in the Ephesian letter fairly early you come upon the words: ". . . quickened us together with Christ . . . and raised us up in him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus . . ." All that quickening and raising presupposes a death, and that is the death of the old man, the man by nature.

II. The Place of the World

The word 'world' occurs a number of times in the letter to the Corinthians—"the wisdom of this world", "the princes of this world". Read down those first two chapters, and see what a large place the world takes. The world and its wisdom, the world with its spirit, the world with its way, had a large place amongst the Corinthian believers. If you follow through the letter you cannot

get away from it. It is the way of the world, the way the world does things, or conditions ruling in the world—the spirit of the world—that is continually before us. The world has a large place in their reasoning. They are even handling heavenly and Divine things with worldly wisdom.

Turn to the letter to the Ephesians and see where the world is. It is left behind, and believers are seen spiritually as out of the world, though not literally so. They were here on the earth as much as ever Corinthians were, and were in the world as a sphere. They were here, and yet not here. Recall those strange and seemingly contradictory phrases in John xvii: ". . . the men whom thou gavest me out of the world . . ."; "They are not of the world." "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world . . ." We know what is meant in a spiritual sense and there is no contradiction; in it and out of it at the same time. In Ephesians v and vi those things which belong to ordered life here are mentioned. There are families; husbands and wives, parents and children; masters and servants. You say: 'Merely earthly!' No! They are the relationships proper to life here, and yet in them is the possibility of a heavenly life. All are lifted on to a heavenly level where spiritual interests govern those relationships with a view to heavenly purposes and not just earthy interests. The world, in the sense in which it is found in I Corinthians, is not found in Ephesians.

That explains the testimony and shows what is necessary for this impact upon spiritual forces. That can never be unless we come to the same position, with the world left behind in this sense. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood"—that is the world's way of doing things—"but against the principalities, against the powers . . ." It is a case of getting behind flesh and blood, and what a much more effective wrestling that is! What mighty issues there are in the spiritual realm! How things count when we know the secret of functioning there in the power of the risen Lord! But that requires that we shall know here, in mind and in spirit, absolute separation from this world.

III. The Difference in the Order at Corinth and Ephesus

At Corinth two things, or two sides of the one thing are presented. In what the Apostle has to say you have a heavenly order brought before you. He is indicating what that heavenly order is in the Church and is seeking to recover it, or to establish it. But over against, at least the intimation, of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

heavenly order—for the Apostle does not develop it in fullness—there is a terrible disorder in the assembly. Read through the letter again, and see how everything is out of order. Their procedure, their government, their relationships, are all in disorder. In dealing with the causes the Apostle has raised questions and issues which have become the battleground of the Church ever since: relationships and orders, positions and administrations in the Church. All this was out of order at Corinth.

We are not going to deal with the specific points. It would take too long, and might not be altogether profitable. At any rate, it might swing us away from our specific intention at this time. Sufficient to say that the question at Corinth is largely a question of order or disorder. We must recognize that. There is nothing arbitrary about the Apostle in that letter. A false explanation and interpretation has been put upon a great deal that Paul said in that letter—as, for instance, upon his reference to the place of the sisters in the assembly. The interpretation or construction placed upon his words has been that Paul was a woman-hater, and that he was caught up in the Rabbinical idea of women, which held they were subject and had to be kept in a place of subjection, and therefore that what he wrote in that letter was out from that mentality, that conception. Nothing is further from the truth. Nothing is a greater libel against the Apostle. The Apostle was not dealing for one moment with the question of status, of honour; he was dealing purely with a matter of order. He will not rule sisters right out of the assembly in the matter of functioning, but he will show that their functioning is relative, and that it is both right and profitable when in its place. It is a matter of order. Let that be established, and be quite clear. We fasten upon this one point to indicate what we mean.

Turn to the letter to the Ephesians, and you can discover nothing about disorder in the assembly. Chapter iv presents the Body and its relationships established; or that part of the letter brings it mainly into view. It is a beautiful heavenly order. There is no reference to an upsetting of that order; it is simply presented as though it obtained there. There is no quarrel over it, no fighting for it; it is a statement of a heavenly order. You are in a different atmosphere altogether. The point is that the Church's testimony to the risen Lord in the power of His risen life is bound up with order in the House of God. If the Divine order is upset, the testimony is weakened, and is nullified in that measure. There is a tremendous amount bound up with order. Let no one think that the appeal for order is simply with a view to having a domination,

a control, a power over others, a desire to subject people. The word 'subjection' has become anathema to a good many because they have missed its significance. It is the value of Divine order, heavenly order, expressed amongst the Lord's people that is in point; for this is so vital a factor in the meeting of the enemy. A Corinthian disorder cannot destroy the power of the principle, and world rulers cannot stand before spiritual forces when a Divine order is established and adhered to and sacredly guarded. Then there is a wonderfully clear way for the Lord to come through and meet the enemies of the Church. Very often a church is divided and broken, and crying out for victory, for deliverance, for power, for effectiveness; and if the Lord could only be heard speaking He would be heard to say: 'Set your house in order! That is the way to power. Put things right in your midst, and your prayers will be answered. You are crying to Me to give you something which you call power, effectiveness. The way to it is through the clearing up of the disorders that are among you.'

So the expression of His life demands a heavenly realm; separation from the world by the death of the old man in his natural strength and life; the constituting of things according to the heavenly pattern. This is all practical. There are no flights of thought to carry you away into ecstasies, but there is a coming down on to the practical basis of everyday things. I am persuaded that nothing touches the heart of the whole issue more than this. I am certain that the Church's defeat, and weakness, and failure in testimony today, in the first place, is because it has become such an earthly thing; because of the worldly elements that have gained entrance; because man, as man, has such a large place in it; because the heavenly order does not obtain, but a man-made order in what is called the Church. These things are as closely related to the effectiveness of testimony as anything can be.

Do you know heavenly union with the Lord? Have you from your heart abandoned this world? Have you accepted the meaning of His Cross for the putting aside of all that belongs to man as such? Are you quite sure that you are fitting in your place in the House of God, and that you are not out of your place? So far as your devotion to the Lord is concerned, are you really bent upon being in your place, and remaining in your place, and functioning there for the Lord? Are you a party to something which is not an expression of the heavenly pattern? Are you an officer of an official connection, supporting and upholding an order which is not the Lord's order? Well, you will be beaten in the general defeat of such a thing. It is bound to be defeat, so

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1971

far as the main testimony is concerned. These are practical, direct questions. The Lord give grace, and understanding, and response to what this means. I have no doubt that as you go on from now the meaning of all this will come to you in a growing way. You may not grasp it all now, but it is some-

thing laid in store. Remember, it does matter tremendously whether you are in a Corinthian condition or an Ephesian, and these are the features and the differences.

The Lord make us, if we may say it in a spiritual sense, good Ephesians!

(To be concluded)

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CONTENTS

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST (III)	25	THE FAMILY OF GOD	36
ON KNOWING THE LORD	30	THE BATTLE FOR LIFE	41
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORD OF FAITH	32	"AS AN EAGLE . . ."	45
FOR BOYS AND GIRLS	35		

Switzerland, 1970

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST (III)

(A) THE TRUE LIFE AND THE FALSE LIFE

AS you know by now, we are occupied in these morning meetings with what we are taught through the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians iii. 3, that is, that the Holy Spirit is writing a spiritual biography of Jesus Christ in every member of the Body of Christ. To put that in another way, the spiritual history and experiences of true believers are a repetition of what was true of the Lord Jesus, excepting His deity. So we have to understand that the Holy Spirit is repeating the life of the Lord Jesus in us.

So far we have been occupied with the first chapter of that biography: the eternal link with the Lord Jesus, which is by the gift of eternal life. That means that what was true of the Lord Jesus in His eternal life becomes true in every believer.

Now I did not say all that I wanted to last time, so I will add just a few things and then hope to be able to go into the second chapter of this biography.

ETERNAL LIFE ALL-GOVERNING

Let me, then, repeat this truth: Eternal life does govern the history and destiny of humanity. Without that eternal life there is no hope; humanity is in a hopeless position. The destiny of those without this gift of God is a very hopeless thing, for it is eternal death. That does not mean annihilation, nor extinction, but it does mean eternal separation from God; and if you want to know what that means, look at the Lord Jesus in the last moments on the cross and hear Him cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"! But this other side, eternal life, is the basis of eternal hope, so it is just exactly the opposite. Thus eternal life is the governing factor in history and in destiny.

That is indicated in two ways in the Bible. It is indicated on the first page and on the last page,

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

which means that the whole of the Bible lies between this one thing. All that is in the Bible of history and destiny lies between chapter one and the last chapter, and in both of those chapters this one matter of life governs everything. It is therefore all-governing. In the beginning it is indicated in the tree of life in the Garden; at the end it is indicated in the tree fully grown in the city—the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God.

As to that tree in the Garden at the beginning (and, of course, it is only a figure, or type), it is the centre of life, so God indicates that this thing called life is at the centre of everything. Life is centred in that tree representatively, and you notice how very jealous God is about that tree. He is so jealous that, when man sinned against *it*, He set a wall of fire around it, and took every precaution against man touching it. He said: “*Lest* he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life”, and put a cherubim there with a flaming sword. It would be a very dangerous thing to touch that unless man was in full fellowship with God! God is very jealous over this matter of eternal life! That tree, symbolically, is a test of man’s relationship with God. It is a challenge to man as to his relationship with God, or, in other words, as to whether he is in right standing with God. The whole issue hung upon man’s fidelity to God, for that was the test. You see, man was put on probation. This life was to be given on one condition only: was man going to be faithful to God, or not?

Let us get away from the symbol and the type. That tree is a type of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for He is the tree of life, and our attitude towards the Lord Jesus is going to determine our destiny—whether we have eternal life or eternal death. We know from Genesis that on that day when man showed that he was not faithful to God, that in spirit and in mind he was not true to God’s Son, he died, and the whole race died in him. In Romans v. Paul says that death entered into the human race because of one man’s disobedience; so the destiny of the human race was settled on that day. The Lord had said: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis ii. 17). Thus man died spiritually, because death is separation from God.

So we are brought to this, as our New Testament teaches us so fully: the Lord Jesus is the test of our relationship with God, and that relationship determines whether it is to be life or death. The Lord Jesus is set up in the midst of the human race to determine life or death for mankind. So eternal life governs everything.

ETERNAL LIFE RESERVED IN JESUS CHRIST

Now note the next thing. The Lord took action and set a fence around that tree of life. In so doing He said: ‘No one shall have life apart from that tree.’ In other words, it is impossible for anyone to have eternal life apart from the Lord Jesus, for this life is in God’s Son. “He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life” (I John v. 12). Life, then, is reserved in Jesus Christ and cannot be had outside of him. Well, of course, that is very simple and elementary but we have not finished yet!

You notice what happened in the Garden: Satan was there to make God a liar. Jesus said that Satan “is a liar, and the father thereof” (John viii. 44), and he was there in the Garden to make God a liar, Did he do it? Mark you, this is something very important for us to notice today, for this is always Satan’s way. He did not accept the situation in the Garden, and he never does accept a situation. There will come a time when he will have to accept a situation and will not be able to do anything about it, but all through the ages he has refused to accept this situation and has told a lie. So man has fallen a victim to the lie of Satan. What is Satan’s lie in connection with life? He offers false life, another kind of life that looks like the true one. Satan falsifies true life, and, instead of being spiritual life, it is just soul life. Do you know the difference between spiritual life and soul life?

Satan attacked the soul life of Adam. You know what the soul is, do you not? It is your reason, your emotions, your will. Satan began by *reasoning* with Adam, and, oh, what a dangerous thing it is to argue with Satan! Never reason with the devil, or, in other words, do not listen to his arguments! There is a sting in his tail! So Satan first came to man’s reason and started an argument: “Yea, hath God said?” (Genesis iii. 1). Immediately a question about God was lodged in the mind. There is a terrible destiny bound up with that question!

Then Satan appealed to Adam’s *feelings*, and, pointing to the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he said: ‘You see how lovely and full of juice that fruit is! How much it is to be desired!’ So Adam looked at the fruit and said: ‘How lovely! I think I would like some of that.’ His emotions went out to it, and when Satan has got your mind and your emotions, it is not far to your *will*! The next thing was that Adam took the fruit. He used his will, and the damage was done.

It is all symbolic, but, you see, it contains eternal principles. The whole kingdom and reign of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

was in pride. Satan had said: "*I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High*" (Isaiah xiv. 13, 14). We know the result of that! And man entered into a complicity with Satan and God's place and God's life were lost to man. There is so much more in that word 'lost' than we are accustomed to thinking! We sing: "I was lost, but Jesus found me", but when were you lost, and what did you lose?

Here we are in an eternal setting. Jesus said: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10), and as we go on we shall see what that was.

In this situation in eternity the Son said: 'I will undertake to bring it all back. Father, I will do this service for You. I know what it means. Because it was pride that did all the mischief, pride must be destroyed in Me. Because it was disobedience that resulted in all this trouble, obedience must be the law of My life.' Well, to make it short, away there in eternity the Lord Jesus made the great renunciation. He relinquished His position, emptied Himself of His fullness, humbled Himself, and then came forth to do this service for God, which was to recover God's place in this world and in this universe. That was the crisis of Bethlehem!

Can it be true? Is that little babe in that manger in the innermost reality of His being that eternal Son who occupied the place of supreme authority in the past ages? Is this little baby the same One who was filled with the glory of God and all heaven? Oh, wonder of wonders, He has indeed taken the lowest place! What ought He to have had? But what He did have was a manger in a stable! There was no place for Him in the world that He Himself had created. "He came unto his own things, and they that were his own received him not" (John i. 11). What a crisis in the ages!

That is what took place in heaven, so you are not surprised that heaven is interested in this crisis! To begin with, an archangel, Gabriel, is interested, and then we read of a "multitude" of angels who are interested, for they know something of the meaning of it.

MARY'S RENUNCIATION

Well, we have to come to the really important thing. Where was all this focused? In a simple Galilean woman, whose name was Mary.

You know, for two reasons we have lost something very wonderful in this connection. It is the devil's trick again! Satan will always try to get hold of something Divine and discredit it, and the Church

of Rome has discredited this Divine thing by the worship of the Virgin Mary. If you go into Roman Catholic countries and see the place that the Virgin Mary has, your whole being revolts against it and you do not want to talk about her. This is a great triumph for the devil, as you will see in a moment or two.

There is another thing that has made us very hesitant to dwell upon this birth of Christ, and I think it is either a right or a wrong sensitiveness. We are so nice and so good, you know, and we do not like to read and talk about this Virgin Mary! I wonder how you felt when we read that passage from Luke just now! 'It is very wonderful and very beautiful, but don't let us dwell upon it too much! Let us be very sentimental, very proper, very good and very nice!' Do you know what I mean?

So, for these two reasons, we have lost something that is very Divine, and I think poor Mary needs to be redeemed. She needs to be brought back to her right place, and we have to get a new appreciation of this young woman. I have a friend who is a Mother Superior in a very high Catholic body. When I last went to see her she took me into the chapel, and as she went in she bowed to the Virgin Mary. I cannot tell you how badly I reacted to that! She did it again when we went out, and, no, I did not bow! My reaction to that was very bad, but I have had to recover something about Mary.

There is a link between that which happened in heaven with the Son of God when He emptied Himself, and Mary. Do not make any mistake! Mary had to make a great renunciation, for she knew what it meant to have a child without a husband. Is that not the deepest shame that a woman can know? Does that not mean that she has sacrificed all that is noble and honourable about womanhood? Supposing it became known that this child was born and Joseph was not the father! Who was the father, then? That is something for people to talk about! I am not sure that the people in wicked Nazareth had not already spread a rumour, because at one time some of the enemies of Jesus Christ threw this thing at Him, when they said: "We were not born in iniquity" (John viii. 41). Is that not horrible, terrible? Ah, Mary knew what it meant! She knew that if this thing got out into the world she would be counted as one of the world's most disgraceful people. Everyone would look down upon her. She was afraid, and, more than that, "greatly troubled". The angel Gabriel read what was going on in her soul and said: "Fear not, Mary." Never in all history did a woman need that word more than Mary did that day! She had taken in the situation and realized in what she was in-

volved. The angel Gabriel said: 'Mary, you are a very specially favoured woman. God has favoured you more than other women.' And the word that the angel used was 'grace'—'God has put His grace upon you more than upon any other woman.' Well, she considered the whole thing, realizing what it meant, knowing that if she had to go out into the world, and the world knew about it, it would talk (and the world never gives a Divine meaning to a thing like that! You know the kind of world we are in!), and she said—note!—"Behold, the *bondslave* of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." I put a mighty emphasis upon that word 'bondslave'! Did Mary empty herself of a woman's glory? That is what it meant naturally. Did Mary humble herself to be obedient unto death? For, you know, a woman like that would have been stoned in Israel, and she knew it. Did she humble herself and become obedient unto death? Oh, yes, she did. She went down to the lowest place. But what is the word? "*Bondslave* of the Lord"—the servant of God.

Now the whole Bible is opened up! Before the Bible began the Divine Son was saying: 'I will be Your servant, Father. I will go down to be Your bondslave.' And right from the beginning God has sought to have *servants*. You have a long line of servants of God in this world's history: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and on you go to Isaiah, the Prophet, who says: "Israel, my servant" (Isaiah xli. 8). They were the people of service.

That is what God is seeking, but it is always a very costly thing. It cost Abel his life, for he was obedient unto death; Enoch found it was no longer possible to live in a world like this; and so you could go on.

WHAT IS SERVICE?

But what do we arrive at? The point is: What is service? What is the meaning of being the servant of God? Can you put your finger upon it? Go to Mary again. What is the law? To bring God back into His world, and that is the only service of God. Service is comprehended in that one thing—making a place for God, bringing God back into His right place, seeing that He is not excluded from His world. The presence of God is the great law of everything in service. Mary brought God back into this world, so she was "highly graced", supremely honoured. It was not just an angel, or a little cherub, that was sent to her, but the archangel Gabriel was sent from *God* to this woman Mary, because she was to be the vessel and the channel of

bringing God back into this world. Is that not tremendous? Is Mary redeemed now? Has she got a new place? But it is not Mary herself. It is Mary as the bondservant of God. And it is not what we are in ourselves, but just a matter of how much of God is brought back to this world by our being here.

Dear friends, is that what the service of God means to you? It is not the place, nor the person. The place may be a stable and the person a simple woman. It is nothing of the glory of this world. Oh, how men have made a mistake over this! They think that in order to have God present they must have a very elaborate building, with some very important persons, Lord this and Baron that, with a cathedral here and a cathedral there—and the Word says: "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts vii. 48). Where is God? "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew xviii. 20). That can be anywhere, in anything, but the point is this: We are here, dear friends, as the Lord's people to be His servants, and true service is bringing God back where we are. Do you understand that? Why am I here? Why are you here? Why are you wherever you are? Our presence ought to mean the presence of the Lord.

You see, God has been seeking a place for His feet all through the ages. He raised up the men I have mentioned in order that He should be brought back to this world. He raised up Israel in order to bring Him back, and said: "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus xxv. 8). The Old Testament is just about that one thing—a few men bringing God back. That is the meaning of the priesthood, for it was just to bring God back. That is the meaning of the kingship. The supreme king said: "I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids; until I find out a place for the Lord" (Psalm cxxxiii. 3, 4). David was a very imperfect man, and Mary, I expect, was a very imperfect woman, but it was where their hearts were and what was the purpose of their lives that mattered, and that was to bring back the Lord. Israel was raised up to bring God back into the midst of the nations. In the end they failed, and you close the Old Testament. Then you open the New Testament with Mary of Nazareth, and God coming back through this simple woman.

I repeat, it is a costly thing to be here for God, but it is a glorious thing, because heaven *is* interested. The angels of God are rejoicing if there is anything of God in this world. The wise men and the

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

poor shepherds were all wondering what this thing meant. They did not understand it—but there was another one who knew what it meant, and this that represented the presence of God was a mark for Satan. Satan had an evil man in Jerusalem, and that man massacred all the little boys in order to get hold of this One. The fear and the hatred of hell were focused upon this that was of God, and if hell could drive it out, it would. Does that not explain a lot of spiritual experience? Surely you can now see the biography being written in spiritual experience! If you are standing for God here, heaven is on your side, but men will not understand you. Hell will hate you and do everything to get you out.

Oh, does this not throw a lot of light upon what is happening? Communism is anti-God, and is the most satanic thing that history has known. It is

saying: 'Get rid of God!', and is the great instrument of Satan in the nations. The battle for holding the ground for God is becoming very intense.

Let this test everything. Let it test your own life. How much of the Lord has come into this world by our being here? That will determine whether we are the Lord's servants, or not. In the little assemblies of God's people where they live or work together, it is not the outward things that matter, but how much of the Lord is there. In the places where God puts you in this world, does the fact that you are there mean that the Lord is there? That is the crisis of Bethlehem.

I think I have said enough. It is something to search our hearts, and we must just say: 'Lord, make me a point where *You* are in this world!'

(To be continued)

ON KNOWING THE LORD

“. . . that I may know him . . .” (Philippians iii. 10).

“*Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me?*” (John xiv. 9).

“*So that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ*” (Philippians i. 10).

“*And they shall not teach every man his fellow-citizen, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: For all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them*” (Hebrews viii. 11).

“*And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things . . . And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him*” (I John ii. 20, 27).

IT is of the greatest importance for the Lord's children to recognize fully that, above all other things, His object is that they should know Him. This is the all-governing end of all His dealings with us, and this is the greatest of all our needs.

It is the secret of strength, steadfastness and service. It determines the measure of our usefulness to Him. It was the one passion of the life of the apostle Paul for himself. It was the cause of his unceasing striving for the saints. It is the heart and pivot of the whole letter to the Hebrews. The secret

of the life, service, endurance and confidence of the Lord Jesus as Son of man was the knowledge of the Father.

All these facts need looking at more closely. We begin always with the Lord Jesus as God's representative, the Man after His own mind. In His life on earth there was no part or aspect which did not have its strength and ability rooted in, and drawn from, his inward knowledge of His Father, God. We must never forget that His was a life of utter dependence upon God, voluntarily accepted. He attributed everything to the Father: word, wisdom and works. He was God manifest in the flesh; but He had accepted from the human and manward standpoint the limitations and dependence of man so that God might *be* God manifested. There was a subjection here because of which He was able to do nothing of Himself (John v. 19, etc.). The principle of His entire life in every phase and detail was His knowledge of God. He knew the Father in the matter of the words He spoke, the works He did, and the men and women with whom He had to do; with regard to the *times* of speaking, acting, going, staying, surrendering, and silence; with regard to the motives, pretensions, professions, enquiries and suggestions of men and of Satan. He knew when He might not, and when He might, give His life. Yes, everything here was governed by that inward knowledge of God.

There are numerous evidences in the "Acts" as the practical, and in the Epistles as the doctrinal, revelation of God's mind, that this principle is intended by God to be maintained as the basic law of the life of the Lord's people through this age. This knowledge in the case of the Lord Jesus was the secret of His complete ascendancy and of His absolute authority.

Masters in Israel will seek Him out and the issue which will precipitate their seeking will be that of knowing. "Art thou the teacher of Israel and understandest not these things?" (John iii. 10). Nicodemus has come to One who knows, and whose authority is superior to that of the scribes, not merely in degree but in kind.

Towards the end of the Gospel of John, which especially brings into view this very matter, the words "to know" occur some fifty-five times. Our Lord makes the statement that "this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him, whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John xvii. 3). This does not mean merely that eternal life is given on the basis of this knowledge. There can be life with very limited knowledge. But life *in fullness* is closely related to that knowledge, and the increasing knowledge of Him manifests itself in increasing life. It works both ways: knowledge unto life and life unto knowledge.

Seeing, then, that the Lord Jesus Himself, as Man, represents man according to God, we are well prepared to see that

THE DOMINATING OBJECTIVE OF THE
DIVINE DEALING WITH US

is that we may know the Lord.

This explains all our experiences, trials, sufferings, perplexities, weakness, predicaments, tight corners, bafflings and pressures. While the refining of spirit, the development of the graces, and the removing of the dross are all purposes of the fires, yet above and through all is the one object—that we may know the Lord. There is only one way of really getting to know the Lord, and that is experimentally.

Our minds are so often occupied with service and work; we think that doing things for the Lord is the chief object of life. We are concerned about our lifework, our ministry. We think of equipment for it in terms of study and knowledge of *things*. Soul-winning, or teaching believers, or setting people to work, are so much in the foreground. Bible study and knowledge of the Scriptures, with efficiency in the matter of leading in Christian service as the end in view, are matters of pressing importance with all. All well and good, for these are important matters, but, at the back of everything, the Lord is more

concerned about our knowing Him than about anything else. It is very possible to have a wonderful grasp of the Scriptures and a comprehensive and intimate familiarity with doctrine; to stand for cardinal verities of the faith; to be an unceasing worker in Christian service; to have a great devotion to the salvation of men; and yet, alas, to have a very inadequate and limited personal knowledge of God within. So often the Lord has to take away our work that we may discover Him. The ultimate value of everything is not the information which we give, not the soundness of our doctrine, not the amount of work that we do, not the measure of truth that we possess, but just the fact that we know the Lord in a deep and mighty way.

This is the one thing that will remain when all else passes. It is this that will make for the permanence of our ministry after we are gone. While we may help others in many ways and by many means, so far as their earthly life is concerned, our *real* service to them is based upon our knowledge of the Lord.

The greatest of the problems of the Christian life is

THE PROBLEM OF GUIDANCE

How much has been said and written upon this subject! The last word for so many is: 'Pray about it, commit it to God, do the thing that seems right, and trust God to see that it turns out all right.' This to us seems weak and inadequate. We make no claim to ability to lay down the comprehensive and conclusive basis of guidance, but we are strongly of the conviction that it is one thing to get direction for the events, incidents and contingencies of life, and quite another thing to have an abiding, personal, inward knowledge of the Lord. It is one thing to call upon a friend in emergency or at special times for advice as to a course to be taken; it is another thing to live with that friend so that there is derived a sense of his mind in general that will govern in particular matters.

We want instructions and commands; *the Lord* wants us to have a 'mind'. "Have this *mind* in you"; "We have the *mind* of Christ." Christ has a consciousness, and by the Holy Spirit He would give and develop that consciousness in us. The inspired statement is that "his anointing teacheth you concerning all things". We are not servants; we are sons. Commands—as such—are for servants; a mind is for sons.

There is an appalling state of things amongst the Lord's people today. So many of them have their life almost entirely in that which is external to themselves—in their counsel and guidance, their

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

sustenance and support, their knowledge, and their means of grace. Personal, inward and spiritual intelligence is a very rare thing. No wonder that the enemy has such a successful line in delusions, counterfeits, and false representations! Our greatest safeguard against such will be a deep knowledge of the Lord through discipline.

Immediately it is *things* for which we reach out; e.g. experiences, sensations, "proofs", manifestations, and so on, and we become exposed in a perilous realm where Satan can give a false conversion, a false 'baptism of the Spirit' (?), a false evidence and guidance such as is found in spiritism. Then, with the withdrawing of those, he immediately suggests the unpardonable sin. If this suggestion be accepted, the value of the Scriptures and of the Blood is annulled, and the assurance of those involved is lost; and it may, after all, be all a lie.

To know the Lord in a real way means steadfastness when others are being carried away—steadfastness through times of fiery trial. Those who know the Lord do not put forth their own hand and try to bring things about. Such are full of love and patience, and do not lose their poise when everything seems to be going to pieces. Confidence

is an essential and inevitable fruit of this knowledge, and in those who know Him there is a quiet restful strength which speaks of a great depth of life.

To close, let me point out that in Christ "are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden", and the Lord's will for us is to come to an ever-growing realization and personal appreciation of Him in whom all the fullness dwells.

We have only stated facts as to the Lord's will for all His own, and their greatest need.

The absence of this real knowledge of the Lord has proved to be the most tragic factor in the Church's history.

Every fresh uprising of an abnormal condition has disclosed the appalling weakness amongst Christian people because of this lack. Waves of error; the swing of the pendulum to some fresh popular acceptance; a great war with its horrors and many-sided tests of faith; all these have swept away multitudes and left them in spiritual ruin.

These things are ever near at hand, and we have written this message to urge upon the Lord's people to have very definite dealings with Him that He will take every measure with them in order that they might know Him.

Switzerland, 1970

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORD OF FAITH

LAST time we considered the spirit of faith that links us with eternal reality, and most real of all realities is the fact that Jesus was raised from the grave. Sin, Satan and death have been conquered, and, as we have already heard, the argument that that cannot be proved is without any basis at all. It is so real that it does not fit into this unreal world.

The first person to proclaim the resurrection was Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and he did not try to prove it. He just said that it was impossible that death should hold the Lord Jesus, and no further argument was needed in the world of truth and reality. Jesus Christ is risen, and the implications are glorious! Because of that, all things work together for good for us who belong to Him, and even the most difficult things serve His purpose for us. Also, all things work together for good for the work that He has given us to do, for it lives on in eternity. He is actually the One who has done the work through us, and so all things work together and make a glorious weight of eternal values for us all.

THE CHARACTERISTIC EXEMPLIFIED
BY THE LORD JESUS

Now we are going to consider what are the characteristics of this word of faith, and first we will go to our Lord Jesus Himself. After His resurrection we see Him, full of the spirit of faith and of the spirit of reality, meeting His friends. Having conquered Satan He stands there amongst them—and what does He *not* say? What He does not say is *not* the word of faith: 'I had a remarkable experience in Hades!' Well, did the Lord not miss His opportunity? What material He had about which to speak! What a lot of stories He could have told! That could have been the best-seller of all times, far surpassing the Bible, for no one would read the Bible if stories of the Lord in Hades were available! The very idea of the Lord doing such a thing is ridiculous; it has nothing to do with the word of truth and the spirit of faith. Yet so many have small experiences—nothing compared with a visit to Hades—and make a lot out of them. If you say

to them: 'Don't do it, brother!', they answer: 'Well, it draws the people and gives them the Gospel.' They think they are drawing people to the Lord, but they are not.

That was the first thing the Lord did not speak about after His resurrection, and no one who has the spirit and the word of faith would do so.

Another remarkable thing was that the Lord did not go to the disciples and say: 'Here I am, risen from the dead. What more do you need?' But what did He do? We will find the answer in Luke's Gospel, chapter xxiv:

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me. Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (verses 25-27, 44-46).

The Lord was risen and stood in the midst of His disciples—and he took time to expound the Scriptures. This is very remarkable, and quite contrary to what we would do. We would have said: 'Well, here I am! All discussions are ended. Just have a look at me, and what more do you need?' No, He did not do that. Why not? Because He understood that they needed more than the fact of His resurrection, and so He did not give them the resurrection as an historic fact alone, but as an historic fact understood in the light of all the Scriptures. That is, He gave them the meaning of His resurrection, and showed them what God intended it to mean. So after His resurrection He worked hard to make them understand. He did not give them stories, treating them like children. He did not even give them the facts alone, but He started with Moses, went through the Prophets and through the Psalms. He had the "spirit of faith, according as it is written", and therefore He spoke from the Scriptures. By expounding those Scriptures He made those disciples men of God. He knew that if He did not give them all that the Scriptures told about His resurrection they would never become men of God, even though they knew that He was risen.

This is the spirit of faith, which is quite contrary to what we would think and feel. We think that

the spirit of faith means that we must tell stories: 'I was healed . . . I was baptized in the Spirit . . . I spoke with tongues . . .' It does not take very much of a spirit of faith to do all that, and it certainly does not need the word of faith to say it! It is only in the realm of illusions that this is called the spirit and the word of faith. But with Christ it was totally different. He expounded the Scriptures, hour after hour, for you cannot go through the Old Testament from Moses in just five minutes.

The word of faith is not what we might call a 'little' word. Sometimes when I visit a home in the evening and we have had coffee, my hostess will give me a Bible and say: 'Will you give us a little word?' My answer is always: 'I cannot find a *little* word in the Bible.' In the Bible we only find eternal words of abiding value, and they give a full and total revelation of enormous depth. The spirit of faith links us with that wonderful revelation and makes it possible for us to do as Christ did—to take of the Father and give unto others.

Christ wanted to make real *men* out of His disciples, as I want my son to become a man some day, a man who understands me, a man with intelligence, a man lifted out of pettiness and smallness. Therefore Jesus did not draw the attention of His disciples to Hades and to all the things He experienced there. It takes very much faith to keep quiet about such things, and we have to be filled with the spirit of faith not to speak as perhaps we would feel inclined to do. We must know the Lord so well, and know the real need of men so well, that we speak out from God in Christ before God. It does not appeal to the flesh. It is not popular and does not draw thousands of people to big halls. After His resurrection the Lord was satisfied with one hundred and twenty people.

THE CHARACTERISTIC EXEMPLIFIED BY PETER

Let us think about Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and notice what he did *not* say to the people: 'When this flame of fire came upon my head I had a wonderful experience! It was like a current of wonderful joy through my body, and, I tell you, when I started speaking in tongues it was just heaven upon earth!' He did not say that at all. In Acts ii. 40 we read that 'with many other words he testified', and, of course, when we hear that word 'testimony' we know exactly what he said: 'I am so happy. This is my testimony. I have now found what true happiness and joy are, and I love everyone!'

We have a dear brother in Denmark who always gives his testimony thus: 'I am happy and I love everyone.' I am sorry to say that he tells a lie every time he gives his testimony! I know him very well; he is not always happy, and he has many battles

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

with other people. However, people like his testimony very much—and it does not help them a bit!

Peter testified here, but he did not say one word along that line. He could have said: 'I am happy', but why say so when everybody could see it? Why speak about love when it can be seen that we love everyone? We only speak about it when it is not true! Peter did not say: 'I am drunk, not with wine, but with the happiness, the fullness and the joy of God, and I want you to be drunk in that way also.' There was not a word along that line! What did he say? He had the spirit of faith, he spoke the word of faith "according as it is written", so he did exactly what His Master did after the resurrection. He said: 'This is what Joel has written about; this is what David saw; and this is what all the Prophets saw.' The word of faith is not magic, nor some mystical word coming in a flash of fire and doing the thing without the hearer being aware of what is happening. Because it is the word of truth it enlightens, it throws the light of truth into the hearts of men, and whenever the spirit of truth gives light into the hearts of men a work of abiding value is accomplished. We take of Him and give to others.

Not even the giver of the Word, the Lord Jesus Himself, allowed Himself to interpret His resurrection apart from the Scriptures. He is the giver of all the Scriptures, so He could have put them aside, but He interpreted His own resurrection, the mightiest reality in history, from the Scriptures.

We go to people and say: 'I have true joy, happiness and peace.' If you meet a modern young man he will say: 'LSD also gives joy, peace and love.' We are unfaithful to the word of truth if, when we give a message, we concentrate on ourselves; in that way we never help other people. If we think that is the power of the Spirit, then we do not know what the Spirit is.

THE CHARACTERISTIC EXEMPLIFIED BY PAUL

We think about another brother, Paul. In II Corinthians 12 he says that he was caught up into the third heaven, into paradise. What a chance, dear friends! Here is material for evangelism! We would say: 'Let us have some pamphlets printed about that experience and distribute them by the thousand! If you speak about having been in the third heaven, people will be dumbfounded and will sit admiring you!' What did Paul do? He had the "spirit of faith, according as it is written", and therefore for fourteen years he missed his opportunity. He did not use that wonderful material he had from the third heaven. What a discipline of faith! What a spirit of faith to look through all

the illusions of men and all their illusionary expectations! Being so disciplined he would not feed illusionary expectations. Could you keep quiet about such an experience for fourteen days? Paul was capable of keeping quiet for fourteen years, and not until men made him a fool, as he says, was he forced to speak about it.

So now we have advice from Paul: Whenever a man or woman comes to you saying that they are in the third, or the seventh heaven, you just—with a Bible in your hand—call him or her a fool! Then it will be discovered how humble they are! Perhaps you will not follow this advice, but at least you will not be influenced by such stories, for you do not need them. They do not help you, in fact, they do you harm, for they draw your attention from the essential thing, and draw you from the Lord to man. "We preach not ourselves", says Paul. 'We don't preach our experiences. They are always petty and small compared with the eternal plan of salvation revealed in the Scriptures. We do not preach our happiness, nor our emotions. We are not sentimental. We do not consider our small experiences of very much value to other people. We have the spirit of faith, so we take up our Father's words, revealed by the same spirit of faith in the Scriptures, and give them to you.' Wherever such a work is being done faithfully, something of eternity, of abiding value is being wrought. Out of such a word men and women are being created, men who do not waver, men who have true love and therefore do not speak about it, men who have deep-rooted joy and therefore do not testify about that, men who know that God is God, holy, exalted and mighty, men who walk consciously with Him as He moves through the history of mankind.

This is the spirit of faith and the word of faith. It is foreign to this world, a stranger to the thoughts and ideas and philosophies of men, but it is needed more than anything else in the churches and in Christianity today.

THE CHARACTERISTIC EXEMPLIFIED BY MARY

Let us turn to a simple woman of faith, Mary. In Luke i. you hear Mary speak in this spirit of faith: "My soul doth magnify the Lord", and that wonderful song goes on until she finishes by saying: "He hath given help to his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever" (verses 46-55).

Here we have an uneducated young woman speaking in the spirit of faith; what is it that is so wonderful about what she says? They are her own words, but, at the same time, they were the words

of Hannah in the Old Testament. It is God's word, and Mary's word, so it is the word of truth. There are not two fountains from which these words come, but they come from the same fountain. Through the spirit of faith God's words have become Mary's words, and that tells us how close Mary was to God. She was as the mouth of God. His words, through the spirit of faith, became, in a personal way, her words. How close to the Lord she must have been to be His mouth! That is the spirit of truth, which relates us to the Lord in the most personal way. The Lord speaks, therefore we speak. The Lord is quiet, therefore we are quiet. The Lord has His material. We have not got any material of our own, but we are one with the Lord.

Thus Mary was used for a tremendous work. She was very weak in herself and an immense burden was put upon her, but through the spirit of faith she was one with her Lord and so was enabled to serve all generations. That is the work of faith, and it can never be undone.

How weak we are in ourselves! But if we have this spirit of faith *truly*, and not a travesty of it, then, as God speaks, we speak. Perhaps only one or two hear that word, but it will have eternal values. It goes out of God's mouth through our mouth and will never return to Him void.

So through that spirit of faith Mary overcame, although she was weighed down with burdens. I do not believe that anyone understood her. She hardly understood it all herself, but all things worked in God's way for good to that little woman. The Lord was ready to be alongside of her and to help her, and all things worked together for that

work to which she was called. Jesus was born, and all things worked together for an eternal weight of glory to Mary.

"We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you" (II Corinthians iv. 13, 14). What a word! What a spirit! What an honour to be called to be the mouthpiece of that spirit and of that word! There is nothing more important in the life of the Church than that kind of ministry, and it is the thing about which a great battle is being fought. Today we see in all four corners of the world a real onslaught upon that word of faith, that word based upon the Scriptures as a complete, wonderful unity; that word which does not meet the need of sensational man but goes much deeper down to the conscience, down to the deep fountains of the will and character of man inside himself, circumcises him in his heart, gives him a new heart, a new understanding, a new light, a new life, a new outlook, and makes him a real man, a man of God in these days.

I ask you to pray very much that the Lord will keep that word of faith in the churches and raise up men of that stature. It could be called the prophetic word. Without it we will all degenerate. With it nothing can crush us, because that word is just as real as God Himself is real, and meets the real need of all of us in the most realistic, Divine way.

P. M.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

LOST IN A MAZE

MARGARET and her sister lived in East Anglia, and from time to time they liked to visit places of interest in that area. One day they were invited to join a coach party which was planning to visit an interesting place called Somerleighton Hall. They had never been to this historic spot before, so they agreed that this would be a happy thing to do.

It was certainly a happy thing while they walked through the lovely grounds and while they saw the house,¹ but it was far from being a happy thing

when they decided to go into the maze. It was like this. They saw that they still had half an hour before the coach was due to drive back home, so, instead of standing around doing nothing, they thought that they would just take a look in the maze, not expecting to be there for more than ten or fifteen minutes.

So in they went, and in no time they had reached the central point. It was all quite easy. Then they turned to find their way out again. This was cer-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

tainly not easy. They lost count of the number of times when they thought that they were on the right track only to end up again in the centre. Margaret would suggest one way, only to find that it was wrong, then her sister would make other suggestions, but whatever they did and whichever way they turned it always led them back into the middle of the maze.

The hedges which made up the maze were quite high, but among those who were wandering around there was a very tall man who was sure that he knew the way and was ready to help others. So he raised his hand high with a paper in it, so that people could follow his movements. The half hour was almost gone, so the sisters were greatly relieved to have found a guide at last. 'Keep your eyes on my hand', he cried out confidently, 'and we shall be out in no time at all.'

Well, they kept the paper in view and carefully followed the various turns to the left and right, but in the end where should they find themselves but back in the centre again. O dear! What would the rest of the coach travellers be saying, for by now their time was up? They grew hotter and more worried, feeling as though they never would find their way out again. It was with great relief that at last they did so and hurried to the coach. They were ten minutes late! They grew red and ashamed when black looks came from every side.

That evening, as they were discussing their adven-

ture, Margaret remembered that she had a leaflet describing the place. They had bought this when they first got there, and as a matter of fact it was one of these leaflets that the tall man waved when he vainly tried to help them. She reached for her handbag, took out the pamphlet, and to her amazement discovered that it showed a map of the maze with instructions on how to find one's way out.

'To think of that!' she exclaimed to her sister. 'While we were wandering about thinking we were lost I had the instructions in my hand all the time. What a pity I did not think to open the bag and look at them!' Then something struck her sister: 'That tall man,' she almost shouted, 'that tall man was waving the leaflet around in his hand. Yet he led us and himself astray. Why didn't he look at it instead of waving it above his head?'

How they laughed! And how silly they had been! Yet it is a strange fact that many boys and girls are wandering around in a muddled state, not knowing the right way to go, while all the time it is clearly shown in the Bible. They have one, but they do not open or read it. Some even wave it about for others to see, but do not themselves obey what it says. This world is a maze, with no way out, for those who do not open their New Testaments and find God's answer to their problem. The Lord Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John xiv. 6).

H.F.

Switzerland, 1970

THE FAMILY OF GOD

*Reading: John i. 49-51;
I Timothy iii. 15, 16.*

ABRAHAM'S four altars helped us to discover the face of God behind the universe. Isaac's four wells revealed to us the finger of God. So God has a face and a hand. Now Jacob's four pillars are going to help us to discover something about God's family.

These four pillars represent the house of God, God's place of relationships. If God has a face, that means that He is a Person, and if He extends His hand, it is to do things, but primarily to take hold of men and women and bring them into a relationship with Himself. So this particular habit

of Jacob's, of setting up pillars everywhere he went, is going to help us to understand something of those relationships in the house of God.

Jacob is sometimes a very difficult character to understand. He seems to have an ability to do everything wrong! That is very encouraging, for the Church of God is made up of people like that, and that is why he is one of the best people to teach us what the house of God is all about. Of course, all these three great men that God used were very weak and fallible, but it was through these men that God was bringing such tremendous truths to us. Abraham was very easygoing, but that is just the sort of man God uses in His Church. He has a wonderful way of dealing with hopeless material, so He takes all the easygoing, sanguine

MARCH—APRIL, 1971

Abrahams and puts them up on the Cross, saying: 'It is all right, Abraham. If you trust Me you will go right through.' Then there was Isaac, who was full of self-pity, but God can use that sort of material. It is a wonderful thing to be in the house of God!

But perhaps Jacob seems to us to be the worst of all. For instance, he was so tied to his mother's apron-strings that he was not married before he was seventy-seven! Well, you cannot do much with that, but God can, and that is the tremendous thing about the house of God. Who is in this house is what really matters, and that is God Himself, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF TRUTH

I Timothy, verse 15, is a very difficult verse in some ways, for it says: "The house of God, which is the church of the living God"—and then, is there a full stop or a comma? In the Greek we cannot tell. Perhaps there is a comma and the verse goes like this: "The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Ah, so the Church, the house of God, is the pillar and the ground of truth! But perhaps there is a full stop there, so that the verse reads like this: "The house of God, which is the church of the living God. The pillar and ground of the truth; and without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh . . .", and that is Jesus, who was "justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory". So perhaps Jesus is the pillar and ground of truth! Perhaps the answer is that *both* are the pillar and ground of truth. The Church is the pillar and ground of truth, but so also is the Lord Jesus, because all that matters about the Church is the Lord Jesus, and all that the Church is is found in the Lord Jesus. The Church is His Body. He fills all things, and He is the truth and the ground of truth, but He is found in us, so we are the pillar and the ground of truth. Perhaps that is why Paul, when he writes to the Corinthians, says: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many, are one body: so also is the Christ" (I Corinthians xii. 12). There the Body is called the Christ. All that matters about our bodies is what is inside them, and if they had no one inside them, they would not be worth anything at all. In fact, they would soon fall to pieces. They would not exist, and if the Lord Jesus did not exist today, neither would the Church; but He does exist,

and is alive for evermore, so that is why the Church is still in existence, and what is in Him is the pillar and the ground of truth.

Now, if we had followed the story of Jacob and looked in the first place where Jacob's pillars are mentioned, in Genesis xxviii, and noticed that he put up a pillar on the ground where he had slept, we would have found that he said: "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (verse 17). So, the place where he set up his pillow to become a pillar was the Church, the house of God, and to make quite sure that we would understand this he poured oil over the top and anointed it. He 'Christ-ed' it. And this setting up a pillar he did four times in all. Now, you notice that it is not just the pillar that is the house of God, but the pillar *and* the ground.

Many churches have two things: a steeple pointing to the sky, and a graveyard. So, believe it or not, has the Church in the Scriptures. It has a ground in which there has been a burial, and it has a pillar which points up to heaven. The ground is the place where the Lord Jesus has died and been buried, and the pillar is where He is risen again and ascended to His Father's right hand, and that is the pillar and ground of truth. As we live in the Lord Jesus we live in His death and burial, in His resurrection and ascension, and it is all that which is the Church. There is that in Jacob which has to be identified with Christ's death. Although Jacob was seventy-seven, he was feeling lonely on that first night away from home, for things had come to a bad end and he was afraid. He had reached an end of himself, and he was tired of trying to do God's work for Him. But in his tiredness he lay down, and there he was finished. There was nothing more that he could do. Then God gave him a dream, and he saw a ladder set up between heaven and earth. He could see that there was something else apart from his tiredness and his deathliness, and it was something that God had raised up which opened heaven. That is why Jacob rose from where he slept, and on the ground of his death he established the ladder that he had seen in his vision. God could do something in that dead man because Jesus also rose and went up to His Father's right hand.

Some years later Jacob was fleeing from his uncle, Laban (Genesis xxxi), but Laban caught him up and was very angry. However, at last they came to an agreement in that place. They buried their differences there, and heaped a lot of stones upon the place. This pile of stones could be translated 'grave', and on the top of the grave they put a pillar, which they called 'Watchtower', and said: 'God will watch over us.' Do you see it again?

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

There was a place of burial, and a place which rose up to God Himself.

Later, in Genesis xxxv, Jacob reached Bethel again, and we read that Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and was buried there. Then Jacob raised up another pillar, poured on oil and wine, and called it the house of God. Once again there was a burial, and something rising up to meet God.

Then, also in chapter xxxv, Jacob moved down towards Bethlehem, and on the way his wife, Rachel, died. He placed her in the grave, and on it he placed a pillar. Once again there was a ground of burial, and once again there was a resurrection that rose to God.

On each of these four occasions Jacob is showing us something about the house of God, but it all comes out of his own negative experience.

I. DEATH TO ISAAC'S HOUSE

Let us move back into that house of Isaac for a few moments, and there we find Isaac and Rebekah, of whom we thought last time. They were not very close in their spiritual life, and now we see Rebekah listening at the tent door to Isaac, who is complaining that he cannot see any more and that people might be taking him in, which, in fact, is just what Rebekah is doing. Then Isaac tells Esau to go out and get the venison, after which he will bless him. Rebekah hurries out to Jacob and says: 'We must do something in a hurry, for God's purpose is going to be lost. If we do not do something quickly, you will not get the blessing, and it is quite certain that God means to bless you. I had a vision about it, but if we do not do something about it, everything will be lost.' So they quickly make up some food out of a little kid and flavour it up with spice to make it taste like venison. After all, Isaac's taste is not as good as it used to be, so it is all right. 'Come on, Jacob,' says Rebekah, 'you go in and take it into him. It is all in a good cause. We are doing God's will, and we must cheat your father somehow.' 'But, Mother,' says Jacob, 'I have a smooth skin, and Esau is a hairy man.' 'Oh, that is nothing. Just put these skins on.' So Jacob comes in to Isaac, Isaac is deceived, and Jacob receives the blessing. When Esau arrives and Isaac understands what has happened, he lets out a great cry, the cry of a man who knows that God is greater and has accomplished His will, despite his hardened heart, his resistance and ignorance. This is a house full of intrigue, unhappiness and deceit, and of man trying to do God's will for him. Ah, Jacob, that is *not* the house of God! There is hatred in that house, and Esau is

going to kill you. You are not learning much about relationships in this family, Jacob! Rebekah had better deceive Isaac again by saying that Jacob must go and get a wife from her brother's family. Isaac believes her, but really Rebekah does this to save Jacob's life from Esau. Is that the house of God?

It may be that the church you are in has difficulties, but God is trying to teach you something from that church. He is trying to show us from the negative what exists in the positive, and that in Christ there is another, totally different, realm of relationships, but we do not understand them, nor appreciate them, until we discover the negatives first of all. That is why the Church always looks a mess, and why there is always pain and difficulty in relationships. God is showing us what the house of man is like so that we might understand what He has given us in Christ. I do not think that any of us are spiritual enough to believe in our relationships in Christ until we have experienced the negative, and it is not a matter of just changing from smooth flesh to rough flesh, for it is all flesh. But the Church is *Christ*, and that is where our relationships are, with God and with each other.

Jacob lay down on that first night, tired of trying to do God's will with clever ways, intrigue, and deceit, with forcing himself, trying to get round people and keeping them in ignorance. It was all hopeless, so he said: 'I will go to sleep. I cannot go on!', and that is the death of a man who has seen that he cannot do the will of God. It is in that moment of despair, despondency and darkness that we get a vision of Christ. The ladder is Christ—the Lord Jesus said so in the first chapter of John's Gospel. Christ is a ladder set up from earth to heaven. You see, Jacob had been trying to take steps horizontally to get God's work done and His will accomplished, but there is really only one step to take, and that is the vertical one, which is the Lord Jesus. That step has the will of God accomplished in it. It has an opened heaven. It has the voice of God, and not the voice of Isaac, Rebekah or Esau, nor of all the members of the church shouting at one another. In Christ there is the voice of God and He says: 'I will give you . . .' In the vertical ladder God gives, and when He gives we only have to take. That is the house of God. If for us the house of God is a place where we are doing all the engineering and are trying to accomplish God's work for Him, then we have not really discovered that the Church is Christ; but once we have discovered that we hear God continuously saying to us: 'I will give . . . I will give . . .' It is the *giving* God who is found in His house.

II. DEATH TO LABAN'S HOUSE

But Jacob still has a lot to learn—and I think that is true of most of us! God sends Jacob down to Laban. Well, if Jacob was a twister, Laban was a double-twister! If we have to learn something like this from God, He will get us all involved with someone who is twice as bad as we are, or, at least that is how it will seem to us. But God is trying to *say* something to us, and it is that word which we are so deaf to hear, because we always think that God is saying: 'Laban is a double-twister!' Somehow, though, that does not seem to live in us, it does not *do* anything in us, and it does not create anything in us because we are not really hearing what God is saying. He never tells Laban off. All He has to say is to Jacob, and when Jacob really hears the message, then he can finish his apprenticeship and go home, but it takes him many years.

You remember that he wanted to marry that little ewe-lamb, Rachel—because that is what 'Rachel' means—and you can imagine what a nice girl she was. But Rachel had a sister, Leah, which means 'bleary-eyed', or 'cross-eyed', so you can imagine what she was like! For seven years Jacob served Laban for Rachel; then the marriage night came—and in the morning he found that it was Leah and not his little ewe-lamb after all. It must have been a terrible psychological shock, but, you see, Laban was a double-twister. You know now what it feels like, Jacob, to be twisted, and you thought you could do the will of God by twisting your brother! It must have been a terrible thing for Jacob to realize that outwardly he could embrace Leah, but to find that internally he was not really joined to her in his own heart's love. Has God shown you that in the Church? Outwardly we can embrace so much, and then it suddenly dawns on us: there is no heart relationship. We have gone through all the outward motions, but our love for Christ is so thin, and our love for the brethren is so weak. 'Oh, I thought I loved that brother so much, but suddenly God has shown me that it is an empty form.' Well, these were the things that Jacob was learning.

Then there was the trouble over Jacob's wages. They were changed ten times! And when he agreed with his uncle to take all the spotted and blemished animals, Laban said: 'Oh, yes, I will sign the paper. Where is it?' and whispered to one of his sons: 'Go quickly and take the spotted and blemished animals three days' journey away.' So when Jacob went to get his animals, all the spotted ones had gone. But God gave him a dream: 'I am still going to give you

a lot of spotted animals', but do you think that Jacob could trust God? Oh, no, he had to help Him on a bit, so he tried an old wives' trick of taking some sticks and peeling off the bark, putting them in the troughs of the animals so that they all got dazzled as they went down to drink, and that was supposed to produce spotted animals. Well, it did, because God had said they would be, but He did not need Jacob's help nor any old wives' trick. Jacob was trying to help God again, but all he did was to make the sons of Laban angry with him. He became a very rich man and decided that it was time to go back to Canaan, so off they went, but he did not say 'good-bye' to his uncle. So Laban was angry and hurried after him, but when, on catching him up, he could not find the images that had been stolen by Rachel, his anger cooled down a bit and he and Jacob buried their differences. They put a lot of stones on the ground and Jacob set up his second pillar, both of them saying: 'God will watch over us, whether we do each other harm or not, and whether or not we cross this sign to damage one another. God will look after our interests.'

That is the second thing about the house of God. While we are looking after our own interests all the time, whether we have Leah or Rachel, whether we have the right wages or not, whether we have outdone Laban, or whether he has outdone us, we are not understanding the relationship that exists in the house of God. 'I will watch over you. I will look after your interests, for I know what your best interests are. I will look after your reputation, and your justification. Stop trying to outdo one another!' The house of God is the place where Father looks after His children's interests.

When I go home, my little boy of four and my little girl of two are quite likely to have a squabble, and they fight with one another, but they never solve any problem by fighting. I resolve the problem. I pull them apart and make sure that the board of education is applied to the seat of learning! Thus I look after their interests. They get a fair deal, and what is really good for them. That is true of the house of God. Do you not think that the Father knows what is best for us? Do you think that He is not interested in our interests, although natural fathers are interested in their children's interests? Surely the house of God is such a place as that!

So a pillar was raised up on the death of the differences between Laban and Jacob: 'God will watch over us.' Christ has His eye on it all and will ensure our interests in being conformed to His image.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

III. DEATH TO REBEKAH'S HOUSE

But there are still many things to learn, and Jacob has to move on. He has to meet Esau soon, and he is afraid. He prays: 'Lord, You told me to meet Esau, for it was You who sent me back to the land of Canaan. Now please look after me!', and then he goes out and divides his company up into little bands. The first psychological trick is to send a few animals along, the second is to send a few sheep, and the third is to send a few donkeys, and on it goes. As the first servant meets Esau he says: 'To my lord Esau, from Jacob.' So does the second, and the third, and Esau wonders how many more are coming! His anger gets less and less! Ah, Jacob, you cannot trust God, can you? You just have to trust in yourself! That is *not* the house of God. The house of God is Jesus, and there is nothing else to trust in but Him. There is no point in trusting yourself, for it is not there. It has been crucified, put underneath and buried, so you had better trust in the resurrected Christ, the ascended Lord.

This time God and Jacob came face to face and Jacob's thigh was touched so that he limped away. Jacob really learnt something then: 'I cannot trust myself.' When, a few months later, Dinah, his daughter, was defiled by the son of the leader of Shechem, and her brothers took their swords and went through the city of Shechem, destroying everything by a very foul trick, Jacob said to them: 'You have made my name stink. This was not the way to do it!' I think Jacob had learnt a lesson! You cannot get Dinah's virginity back with a sword, and you cannot make the Church pure by cutting people with the Bible. You can get your revenge, but it does not purify, and if you try to destroy one another with the sword—'I am right and he is wrong'—that attitude has to be put right out. 'This person has a wrong doctrine'—and so we divide one another with the Word of God. That cannot do God's work, for something has been lost which can only be recovered by death and resurrection. That is the Church. It is not a confidence in what I can do, nor what I can do with the Word, nor what I can do by calming Esau's anger down. It is done by setting up a pillar again and recognizing what the Church of God really is.

Do you remember that I said that this time it was Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, who was buried? That nurse came with Rebekah all the way from the distant land to the house of Abraham. She had nurtured Rebekah and her children, and Jacob learnt a lot from Rebekah! He was very much like his mother, and Deborah had helped that to con-

tinue. This dear old soul was still alive, even after Rebekah had gone! Well, Jacob is an old man now, but his nurse is still around. You are going to be in trouble, Jacob, until Deborah is in the grave! She was the nourishment of what he was by his mother, the conditioning of what he had through Rebekah. It has taken a number of years, Jacob! You have tried to do God's work for Him, but now you have learnt that what has been cherished by Rebekah's nurse can only go to the grave. What you are by your mother's flesh, by your nurse's conditioning, has to go, and it is only there that you can set up the pillar once again.

You see, the Church of Jesus Christ is the place where God says: 'I will keep you, not that nurse. I will bring you through. You were here many years ago, but now I have brought you back.' Do you know that the Church of Jesus Christ is the place that will keep you? Jesus is the 'keeper of Israel', and He will not let us go, but what He salvages is always without the flesh.

IV. DEATH TO JACOB'S HOUSE

Lastly, you remember that Jacob has to place his beloved wife, Rachel, in the grave. They are on their way down to Bethlehem, but they do not quite get there, for Rachel is with child, the labour pains begin, and Rachel cries out in her pain: 'Oh, this is the son of my sorrow!' But, although she dies, Benjamin, the 'son of my right hand', lives. On the one hand, he was the 'son of sorrow' to his mother. On the other hand, he was the 'son of my right hand' to Jacob. On the one hand, the Lord Jesus is the 'Man of sorrows' who lays the foundation of the Church in His death, and that means our death, for we were crucified and buried there with Him. On the other hand, He rises up as the 'Son of My right hand', and there is the pillar again. There is Christ on the Throne, the One who must have the first place in the Church. The Lord Jesus says that when we are prepared to take His glory, it will mean the death of our glory, for that was what Rachel was to Jacob. The wife is the glory of the man, and as his glory is placed in the grave, so, by the power of the Man of sorrows, we see, at the right hand of God, the glory of the Son of Man who says to His Father: "Father, the glory which thou gavest me I give to them." The Church of Jesus Christ is the place of the glory of the Lord Jesus, and not the place of our glory.

In our companies both these sorts of relationships exist. Thank God for the negatives, for they are driving us to that relationship with Him where

we find the true family of God, the true appreciation of His house, and the sons will delight the Father's heart throughout eternity. We are learning from each other just what a great salvation it is that Christ has procured, and what satisfaction it will give God when we bring our earth-learned truths into heaven's eternal glory. It is never us, but Christ raised up in us, that makes us God's family where He can be at home.

Let us go back to our churches and be willing to

accept that a lot of the chaos of Jacob's house will be found there, but seek to live by faith in Christ and be able to demonstrate that God is building a different sort of house. Do not be disappointed with your fellow-believers! God took a long time over Jacob. Probably your fellow-believers think that He is taking a long time over you, too, but we are all in together, and He is in it with us.

R. T. F.

THE BATTLE FOR LIFE

CHAPTER VII

THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE CONTINUATION OF THE CONFLICT

Reading: Judges i. 1-26; Colossians ii. 15; Ephesians vi. 12; Exodus xxiii. 29, 30.

WE come to a closing word on this matter, the nature of which is indicated by what is contained in the passages we have read.

The first thing we have to grasp fully is the fact which is brought before us in the Colossian passage: that in the case of the Lord Jesus the battle is a finished thing. So far as He is concerned, the victory is secured in absoluteness, in fullness and in finality. He did strip off from Himself principalities and powers, and made a show of them, exhibiting them, triumphing over them in His Cross. That brings us to the ground represented by Israel when the Lord said: "I will drive them out . . ." That means that the Lord is in the place of complete possession already. So far as He is concerned, the victory is secure. Now from that point there is this other side of the progressive realization of that victory by the Lord's people. We have the victory in absoluteness in Him, but we are to enter into it progressively ourselves; and it is the progressive aspect of this conflict, and the great need in relation to it, that is to concern us for a little while at this time.

THE PROGRESSIVE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

I. The Fact

The progressive character is clearly seen; that is, we see it to be a fact. That is perfectly clear from

the Old Testament type as well as from the New Testament statement. The words in Exodus xxiii are true to what we find later in the latter: "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year . . . by little and little I will drive them out . . ." (verses 29, 30). We may cite Ephesians vi as a chapter in the New Testament that indicates this progressive nature of the conflict: ". . . our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers . . ." (verse 12). In spite of the fact that the Lord Jesus has Himself stripped them off, overcome them, displayed them as defeated, we are still in conflict with them. We are not represented as having sat down with the battle over; we are still in it. Of course, that hardly needs to be said to those who have spiritual experience; but here is the fact of the progressiveness of this battle for spiritual life, spiritual ascendancy, over the forces of spiritual death. We need not dwell more upon the fact.

II. The Divine Reason

Seeing that the Lord Himself has gained an absolute victory, and that, so far as He is concerned, there is nothing more to be done—all the enemies have been met and vanquished in His Cross—why could He not just give that victory over to us in its completeness and we go happily on through life without any spiritual conflict at all? That may sound rather a foolish question! But we have to bring that question to the Lord and ask Him to explain

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

why it must be that in His will, in His ordaining, conflict should go on and victory be progressive, instead of absolute all at once. Why must the fight go on to the end? Why must it continue? This passage in Exodus explains the matter for us: "I will not drive them out in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, *until thou be increased*. . . ." The Divine reason, then, is that there must be development in order to possess the ground which the enemy still usurps. Our full possession of the victory tarries because of inability to occupy; because of lack of capacity; because of spiritual limitation, spiritual immaturity.

Now let us pass from the Old Testament literalism into the New Testament spirituality, and, if we can, think in terms of spiritual territory, see territory occupied by spiritual forces. No material forces can dispossess them, nor occupy that territory. Spiritual forces alone can occupy spiritual territory. If such are found in possession, and the only thing that can supplant them is what is spiritual, then there has to be that which is at least equal to such forces in order to occupy the place which they as yet occupy. Therefore it becomes a matter of spiritual measure, spiritual capacity. What the Lord says here in principle is that He will make spiritual ascendancy contingent upon spiritual growth. So often in the battle we go to the Lord and pray, and plead, and appeal for victory, for ascendancy, for mastery over the forces of evil and death, and our thought is that in some way the Lord is going to come in with a mighty exercise of power and put us into a place of spiritual ascendancy as in an act. We must have that mentality corrected. What the Lord does is to enlarge us to possess. He puts us through some exercise, some experience, and takes us by some way which means our spiritual expansion, an increase of spirituality and spiritual capacity, and as we increase spiritually so we occupy the larger places spontaneously. The statement in Exodus makes that so clear.

The figure is interesting. Here are people who are called to victory, to conquest which is progressive and ever developing, and the Lord is doing the dispossessing, and is going before: "Behold, I send an angel before thee . . ." Now supposing the Lord goes in advance of His people, drives out all the enemies and leaves the territory unoccupied, but His people are so small that they can only dwell in a part of it. What is going to happen? Neither God nor the devil believes in a vacuum. Leave yourself in a state of passivity and lack of definite occupation, and you will soon find yourself in trouble. So

far as the Lord's people are concerned, the devil does not believe in having a vacuum, so he fills it. The principle of this is seen in the story told by the Lord Himself about the man in whom there was a demon: the demon was cast out, the house was left without an occupant, and the demon went wandering in waterless places seeking rest. Finding none, the demon at length returned to the man out of whom he had been cast. He found the house swept and garnished, but unguarded, so he promptly took possession. But this time the evil spirit entered with seven others. It is quite clear from the Lord's illustration that the enemy does not believe in a vacuum.

The Lord likewise does not believe in a vacuum. He believes in things being filled. He believes in full possession, full occupation. That demands, in a spiritual matter, that there shall be spiritual enlargement before He can give greater space. I am afraid that Christendom has twisted things round the other way and has made large space, hoping to grow to it. So great buildings are put up, and then an immense amount of work and labour is set in motion to try to fill them. The Lord does not do things in that way. First of all He enlarges, and then He gives accordingly. Let us not, however, bring the matter down on to so low a level, but keep it in the realm of spiritual conflict and warfare. The law which the Lord sets forth here in this passage is that spiritual ascendancy over the forces of darkness and death corresponds to spiritual growth, and spiritual growth is essential to spiritual ascendancy, to enlarged territory. The challenge with which the Lord meets us is this: 'Can you fill it? Can you occupy it? Can you possess it?' Are you able, if I give it to you?' The disaster would be all the greater if the Lord gave large territory and we could not occupy it and fill it. How important is spiritual growth, spiritual maturity, spiritual increase!

The whole question of progressive victory rests upon progressive spiritual development. It does not rest upon our having the gift of ascendancy from the Lord. Ascendancy is, in effect, developed in us by spiritual growth and enlargement; it is a matter of capacity. Hence those who know most of victory are not always those who talk most about it, but are those who have been through experiences and processes by which they have been mightily extended in Christ spiritually. Turning that round the other way, it should be a comfort to know that everything the Lord does with us which is in the nature of a painful stretching: that cutting of deeper channels, deeper furrows; that leading into depths; that breaking up and breaking open; all that which

is in the direction of making for a deeper, wider, higher energy of the Lord through suffering is intended to bring into a place of spiritual power, spiritual ascendancy. Thus the power of the enemy becomes weaker, because the power of the saints is becoming greater through their growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The power of the saints becomes greater only on that ground. We have to be built up unto power, unto ascendancy, unto conquest. It is quite evident that if there is not an adequate spiritual background to the life of those who make assaults upon the enemy, they will be knocked to pieces, for they will not be able to stand up to him. It requires that there should be spiritual competence, spiritual wealth, spiritual background and spiritual fullness in order to stand up to the enemy and force him to quit the position. It is important that we should recognize that.

We must be enlarged to occupy. The Lord will not give otherwise. He is governed by infinite wisdom in the way in which He deals with us: "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year . . . by little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased . . ." The measure of spiritual ascendancy is the measure of spiritual increase.

III. A Deterrent if Regarded in a Wrong Way

We hurry on to note another thing. That progressive character can become a deterrent if it is regarded in a wrong way. It seems clear that many of Israel were deterred and discouraged from going on in the fight and in utterly driving out the enemy because it was a progressive, or a slow business. Somehow or other this human nature of ours likes to get things done with one bound, to have it all cleared up with one stroke, and the long-drawn-out process of spiritual growth is often a very discouraging thing to the flesh. So they did not utterly drive out those nations, simply because it required persistence. It required, as we say, a pegging away at it, a steady devotion. It demanded a continuous prosecution, ever something more yet to be done.

It is like that with us. We are so often discouraged and deterred from going on because we seem to make so little progress; because there always seems to be more before us than behind; because we seem, after all, to have gained so little; because we see so much still to be gained. Mark you, that is a part of the Divine, sovereign ordering. So long as we are here the Lord will not give us any occasion whatever for saying: 'Now we can settle down!' Oh, but how we are expecting that almost any day!

Our thought is that it will not be long before we come to a place where we have got the upper hand, where we are in ascendancy, and the fight will then be over, at any rate in the main, and we can come to rest. I want to tell you in all faithfulness that right up to the last stroke in this battle you will feel practically nothing has been done in comparison with what there is to be done. You will have a sense that the forces before are still well-nigh overwhelming. No matter how far you progress spiritually, you will often come to the place where you feel that you are being almost overwhelmed and that the real back of this thing has not been broken. The pathway to the glory is the pathway of increasing conflict, and the most bitter part of that conflict will take place just before entering the glory. The Lord will never give us reason for settling down.

That is another phase of Israel's failure. On the one hand, while many were discouraged because of the progressive and long-drawn-out character of the conflict, it is quite clear that many others entered into a state of unholy content. They said: 'We have fought, and we have got so far, and that will do.' Discontent can be both holy and unholy. There is such a thing as holy discontent. While there remain spiritual forces to be driven out, to be dispossessed, and while the whole range and realm of what is spiritual still has in it that which is opposed to the Lord, you and I have no right to be content. We must not settle down and say: 'Oh, that is the ideal, but it is impossible! It is all very well to see what ought to be, but it is no use setting up a counsel of perfection, and expecting and aiming at what is not possible amongst the Lord's people or in our spiritual experience!' If we begin to reason like that, we shall find ourselves in a very sorry state. During the four hundred years occupied by the Judges, an attitude of that kind produced misery, continuous defeat and weakness, and a terrible state of up-and-down experience throughout that long period. Look at the account in this book of the Judges, and mark the periods under which Israel laboured in bondage and defeat! Why? The explanation is found in the first chapter. Read through the chapter again, and note how repeatedly it is said of certain tribes of Israel that they "drove not out" their enemies. The result was that they had this long time of defeat, failure, and misery. What had happened? They had entered into a state of unholy content. They had said: 'Well, the ideal, of course, would be to possess the whole land, but the present measure of occupation seems to be all that is possible, and we must accept things as they are.'

That comes to us as a very serious challenge in relation to the Lord's testimony. We look out on

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the world today, on what we call the Christian world, and we see its state, which is indeed very like that in the days of the Judges. We see divisions and failures in what is called the Church, and the question arises: Is it possible to have a whole testimony, a full testimony? Is it possible to have a complete expression of the Lord's mind? The answer that is so often returned may be stated thus: 'Well, that is the ideal, but you are setting yourself an impossible task if you attempt it. You had better accept the situation, regard it as all in ruins, and make the best of it!' Are you content with that? I am not, and I have decided that even if I die in the attempt I will give myself to the obtaining of a fuller expression of the Lord's mind. In so far as my own life is concerned, it is going to be poured out to the last to get His people to the fullness of His will, and I am not going to accept this situation which is so far short of it. It is an unholy thing to enter into contentment of that kind. It is that failure to go on, in spite of the seemingly impossible, which has produced the terrible paralysis and spiritual ineffectiveness of the Lord's people that is almost world-wide today.

THE NECESSITY FOR FELLOWSHIP

We come to the final word which we feel to be the note which must stand above every other note. We see the reality of the battle, we see the many laws which govern the battle, but what is it that we need if we are to win? You might answer in different ways, but what I see as being a dominant need, if not the predominant one, is that which is at least suggested in the first part of the first chapter of the book of Judges. There the question is asked: "Who shall go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up . . . And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. And Judah went up; and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they smote of them in Bezek ten thousand men." Here you have real business, real effectiveness. What was behind it? It was fellowship and co-operation. Here you have the spirit of brotherhood manifesting itself in mutual helpfulness and support in the battle. The enemy has held the position and withstood the people of God because of the lack of that. One of the strategies by which he has gained his end has been to keep the Lord's people from a down-right spiritual co-operation in the battle; to get them scattered, divided, disintegrated, and on

individual lines instead of coming right in as a corporate and collective instrument for God and dealing with the issues in a mighty way together. We cannot lay too much stress upon that.

This is the burden of my heart: The Lord's great need is of a prayer instrument that comes together with one object, and that is the driving of the enemy off the ground. Not just offering petitions, nor just pouring out words which are intended to be prayers, for however good they might be, however right they might be, such prayers fall short of this mighty laying hold of the Lord's own victory and bringing it into operation where the enemy is. The victory is in the Lord's hands. He did strip off principalities and powers. He has said: "I will drive out." What has to follow? There has to be a coming together, and, in faith, a laying hold, as it were, of that victory; an appropriating of it, and a bringing of it to bear upon the spiritual situation. Until we get something like that we are not going to see the spiritual counterpart of this mighty sweep of triumph in Judah and Simeon. Here is real progress. Here we see the enemy having to quit.

Oh, for the coming together of God's people for real business in prayer; coming in business-like spirit, with a business-like mind, with full purpose of heart and as one man in a spirit of fellowship, because of the testimony of the Lord which is at stake, which is involved, and which is bound up with it. The Lord's need today is this coming together and squaring right down upon Satanically-ridden situations to clear the ground of the enemy. I feel that to be the Lord's pre-eminent need. We do not take the thing enough to heart. We have not got the Lord's testimony sufficiently at heart. If we really were concerned for the Lord's testimony in this earth, we should only need to hear of the impact against the Lord's people and the prevailing of death in any one situation for us to get down on that situation with such purpose that we would not give the enemy any rest until he withdrew from it. But we can hear of such situations, hear of need, hear of our brethren in the fight pressed out of measure, and can be content with a mere momentary petition: 'Oh, Lord, help them! Oh, Lord, bless them! Oh, Lord, come to their rescue!' when the Lord is saying quite definitely, if only we had ears to hear: "Wherefore criest thou unto me? . . . lift up thy rod . . ." (Exodus xiv. 15, 16). We have the rod of the Lord's victory in our hands—or we ought to have. We have the rod of the mighty name of Jesus, and we come with cries to the Lord, when the Lord is saying, in effect: 'Bring to bear upon that situation this victory which is in Me for you!, The need is for the coming together in fellowship,

in co-operation, to bring to bear upon the situation the great victory which is in the Lord's possession for us.

Oh, may the Lord stir you in this matter unto this mighty prayer in the name of Jesus, and get an instrument, a vessel, in which and through which there will be this registration of the power of His throne upon those situations which are under the domination of the enemy! That is the Lord's great need. There are many of the Lord's people and many places in this world where the Lord's testimony is defeated, arrested, locked up, smothered and unable to break through; everything is at a standstill; the enemy is holding the ground, and it is as much as the Lord's people can do to hold their own, to stay there. There needs to be some power coming through to clear the ground of the enemy, and that power will come through only when the Lord's people take up the matter in such a mighty fellowship of prayer that through that prayer the throne will operate.

There are many who know they are not getting through in their prayer life on their own, and that they cannot deal with the situation themselves.

Many are deeply and terribly conscious that what they need is a mighty reinforcing by prayer co-operation in order to get through, but the trouble is as to where such reinforcement is to come from? Those who are sufficiently concerned are not to be found. There are not those who know how to pray like this in the power of the name. Forgive me for being so emphatic, but the prevailing conditions demand strong words. The need is to recover a prayer instrument by which the power that is in the hand of the Lord Jesus shall be released upon situations which are locked up in the power of the enemy. The Lord rouse us, stir us deeply in this matter, and make us at least a part of such a prayer instrument.

Let us purpose to come together for prayer! Let us not wait until we are called! If it is possible to get together, and if there are those around us whom we can call together for prayer, let us do it. Do not wait for the appointed meeting of prayer. If you can get prayer fellowship with anybody, get down on the Lord's interests with them, and lay yourselves out in this matter for the deliverance of situations from the domination of the power of the enemy.

(Concluded)

“AS AN EAGLE . . .”

NATURE often provides a mirror of man's soul and his relationship to God.

Moses, for example, chose an eagle for the illustration given in Deuteronomy xxxii. 11, 12, to clarify God's dealings with men. “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.”

Those to whom Moses was writing would have little difficulty in picturing an eagle and her care of her brood, and the parallel of God's concern for His people. Likewise we also should have little difficulty in understanding the analogy. It certainly is not beyond our imagination.

Yet with all the obvious comparisons which come quickly to our minds, it would be well for us to pause and examine carefully some specific examples.

Notice the first action of the eagle. “An eagle stirreth up her nest.” When her young have matured

to the point where they are able to learn to fly, the eagle stirs the nest, making it just as uncomfortable as possible and shaking the eaglets loose to accept the challenges of flight more readily.

As the eagle must stir up the nest to dislodge the young who will not of their own accord fling themselves out into space, so the Lord must stir up our nest to free us from the easily acceptable comforts and securities which we enjoy so that we may see and accept the challenges of a closer fellowship with Him.

However, the eagle does not simply shake the eaglets loose and then leave them to their own resources and experiments to learn the art of flying. Rather she flies over the nest, giving her brood practical examples to follow. “An eagle . . . fluttereth over her young.”

Is there any better parallel to the Lord's training of us? He never stirs us loose merely to cause grief or ruin, nor does He leave us without example.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

If the Lord has stirred your nest, dislodged you from your comfortable rut, keep your eyes wide open for His training example.

In the third comparison there is a glorious confidence. "An eagle . . . spreadeth abroad her wings." This speaks of the eagle's self-sacrificing protection for her brood. Many writers have indicated that if danger seems imminent the mother bird will place herself in a position to receive the enemy's onslaught before her young are attacked.

There are few pictures which reveal more of the Lord's care and protection for us. Certainly we are aware of this care in the physical realm. Everyone can point to at least one particular event in his life when the Lord demonstrated His protection unmistakably.

But beyond this, in the spiritual realm, the Lord has placed Himself again and again between us and our soul's enemy to keep him from destroying our spiritual life. When he attacked at our weakest point, when failure seemed inevitable, the Lord Himself hedged us in under His protection.

The final parallel re-emphasises and expands the third. "An eagle . . . taketh them, beareth them on her wings." It has long been noted that when a young eagle is learning to fly and for some reason, be it lack of strength or lack of confidence, it suddenly flounders in air, the parent will dive under the young one and spread her wings, offering support to the infant bird.

What a peace-giving promise this is! As we can expect the Lord's stirrings, as we can look to Him for a guiding example, so we can trust for His speedy and sufficient support in time of weakness and failure.

We may not always understand all the Lord is doing. He will provide an example, a call, which we cannot follow in ourselves. Yet He will not desert us. Rather He has promised to be our ever-present help. Why then do we hesitate to follow Him?

As with all the Lord's dealings with Israel, so with us; He has a specific purpose which dictates His actions. Moses concisely stated this purpose: "The Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

The Lord dealt with Israel in this eagle-like manner—stirring them loose from the comfortable nest in Egypt, leading them through the vast wilderness, protecting against their numerous enemies, always providing His strength, His support—in order that Israel might follow the Lord alone. None of the attachments of Egypt, none of their own strengths, none of their own abilities, was to be their god; the Lord alone was to be God.

His purpose has not changed. When we would become too attached to the nest of this world He stirs us. When we would wonder how or where to follow He provides an example. When we would be overcome by the enemy He protects us. When our own strength is insufficient He supplies His—all for one purpose: that Christ alone would be our God.

Can you see yourself in the picture of the indolent, ignorant, defenceless, frail eaglet? Can you see the Lord's stirrings, lessons, protection and provision in your experience? Are you accepting each of them as His best for you?

Is Christ alone your God?

Selected from
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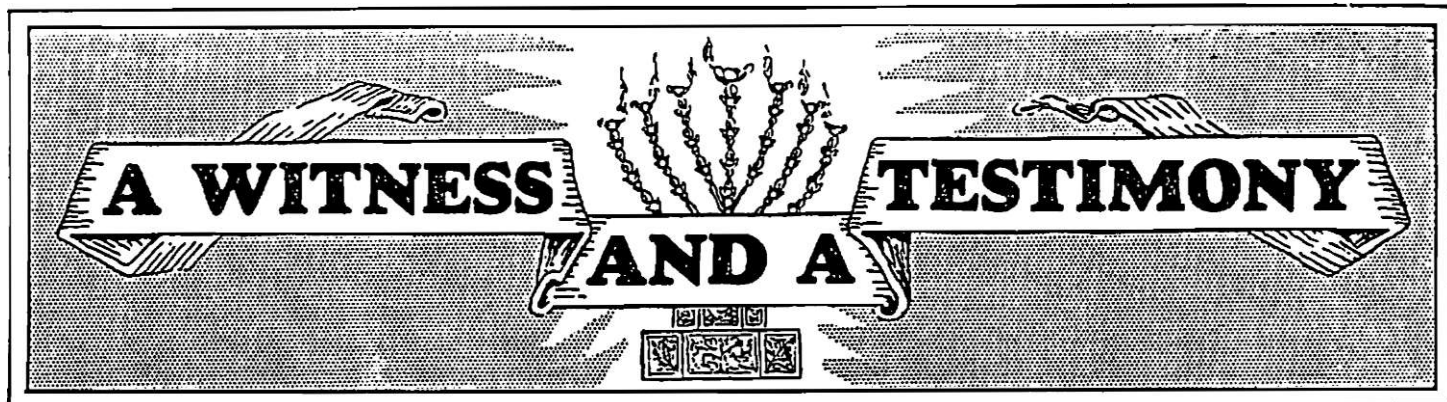
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VOL. 49. No. 3

CONTENTS

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST (IV) ...	49	THE REST AND THE COURAGE OF FAITH ...	58
THE POWER OF THE WORD OF FAITH ...	54	THE REVELATION OF GOD	60
FOR BOYS AND GIRLS	57	FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD	65

Switzerland, 1970

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST (IV)

CHRIST GREATER THAN ALL

Reading: Matthew iii. 1-6, 13-17; iv. 1-11.

WE are seeing that the Holy Spirit is taking up the history of the Lord Jesus and is repeating it in the lives of His people, and we come to the next chapter of the biography that He is writing in the hearts of believers.

It is unfortunate that these chapters in Matthew are divided as they are, for the section that we have just read ought to be one chapter. We should never divide the baptism, the anointing and the temptation, for they are all parts of one thing, and each depends upon the other. We shall see that as we go on, but let us come back to the beginning, to John the Baptist's preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.

This was evidently one of those occasions in history when there was a new movement of the Spirit of God from heaven: what we would call in our time a revival. The Spirit of God was coming down upon that country and was convicting men

and women of sin, and as they were convicted of sin they became afraid of judgment—and that is what every revival ought to be like. First of all there should be conviction of sin and then fear of judgment. John cried: "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" A great spirit of condemnation and conviction had come upon the people and they were fleeing to John to know the way of escape from the coming wrath of God. Of course, that was just the ministry of the Old Testament Prophets.

Then right in the midst of that revival, or that Holy Spirit-convicting of sin and judgment, Jesus appeared on the scene. It is wonderful that, while all this was going on, He suddenly came into the midst and right into that particular situation. The whole multitude were under a great burden of sin and fear of coming judgment, and the Lamb of God appeared in that—"Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!" (John i. 29).

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE TWO PROPHETS

Now John was the last of the Old Testament Prophets and the beginning of the New Testament Prophets, and if you see Jesus standing there at the side of John the Baptist, you see the Old Testament and the New Testament. All that is in the Old Testament is gathered up in John the Baptist. Jesus said that he was the greatest of the Prophets, and that was because he gathered up all the Prophets into himself. As I have said, the ministry of the Old Testament Prophets was to bring conviction of sin and fear of judgment, but standing by the side of John the Baptist is another Prophet, One who is greater than John, and He has come to answer the great cry of the Old Testament for deliverance from sin and judgment. He has come to bear away the sin of the world.

So John is the sum of the Old Testament Prophets, and Jesus takes up the work where all the Old Testament Prophets laid it down. They were not able to go beyond conviction of sin, for they were quite unable to take sin away. Jesus takes up their work at that point, and the imperfect work of the Old Testament is made perfect in the New.

So you have two things side by side. First you have the two Prophets, the Old Testament Prophet and the New Testament Prophet.

THE TWO BAPTISMS

Then you have the two baptisms. There are two baptisms in the Bible, and you will find these mentioned in the nineteenth chapter of the Book of the Acts, when Paul came to Ephesus and discerned that there was something missing in the Christians there. He asked them: "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" (verse 2), and they replied: "Nay, we did not so much as hear whether there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul said: "Into what then were ye baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism." Then, after Paul had explained the significance, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now I do not advocate being baptized twice. I believe that in one country people are baptized every year, but, as far as I can tell, they are not any the better for that! However, here you have the two baptisms alongside one another. John said: "I indeed baptize you in water . . . but he that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit." Water in the Old Testament speaks of judgment and death. You ask Noah about that! You remember that the Apostle Peter refers to the flood as the baptism of that time

(I Peter iii. 21), and that was a baptism indeed! If you asked those people: 'What did your baptism mean to you?', and they were able to answer you, they would say: 'Well, it was judgment and death. That is what the water meant to us.' Go on a little further in the Old Testament and ask Pharaoh about water. You know that the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that the Israelites were "all baptized into Moses in the sea" (verse 2), so the Red Sea was a baptistry. If you asked Pharaoh and his army what their baptism meant, they would answer: 'It was judgment and death.'

This was the baptism of water in the Old Testament, and John's baptism was the baptism of judgment and death. But he said: 'He who comes after me will baptize in the Spirit', and that is life and salvation, that is baptism into the Saviour and not into death and judgment, and that is baptism into eternal life.

THE TWO LAMBS

Then you have the two lambs. They are here in these Scriptures, although they are not mentioned by name. John represents the Old Testament system, and therefore he gathers into himself all the types of the Old Testament, those lambs that were slain over many, many centuries. Day after day, and year after year the lambs were sacrificed, but we are told by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews that they could never take away sin for, after all, they were only types, and not the reality. Thousands, or millions, of lambs never took away sin, but John points to the other Lamb. There is only one Lamb, but this One does what all the millions could never do: "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Here you have the reality! In the Old Testament the lambs were never effective, but this Lamb is the One who has the *power* to deal with sin. What those other lambs could never do He does in one offering for ever.

Do you hear what Jesus says? "Thus it becometh us to fulfil *all* righteousness." You remember that we have already said that that word 'righteousness' means 'right standing with God', so Jesus is saying: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all right standing with God." Here, however, our language is difficult, and the real meaning is: 'To make full and complete right standing with God.' Through all the ages all the world wanted to be in right standing with God, and now here at the Jordan is the One who is making right standing with God complete.

I wonder if that is what your baptism has meant to you? Those waters of baptism ought to have carried away all condemnation and all judgment. Charles Wesley wrote one poem that has never

become a hymn to be sung, and I do not know whether it would be possible to sing it. Certainly those in denominations would not be able to sing it honestly, nor would anyone in the Christian system as it is today. In that poem Charles Wesley depicted all the different kinds of Christians: the Presbyterian with his clerical clothes and collar, and his special kind of hat, and even the Plymouth Brother, whom he depicted with a Bible in his hand. He brought them all to Jordan, and when they got into the midst of Jordan, the stream was rushing so fast that it carried away the clothes of the Presbyterian, everything that marked the different denominations, and even the Bible of the Plymouth Brother! All that went down the river, and all that was left was just men stripped of everything. Did your baptism mean that? You cannot be a sectarian if you understand your baptism! You cannot be any of these things that Christianity makes us in these times. The waters of the Jordan take from us all these artificial things and leave us just men and women before God. That is the meaning of baptism.

I said that I do not advocate being baptized twice, but perhaps some of you are feeling that you ought to be baptized again now!

Well, these two baptisms and these two lambs represent a dividing of everything that is imperfect and a making of a way for that which is perfect, and they leave us in right standing with God. All these other things do not bring us into that right standing with God.

THE TWO HORIZONS

Now we have two other things—two horizons which meet at Jordan. "Then went out unto him (John) Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan." Although these were different regions, they were one nation, which means that representatives of the nation were there, and when they were baptized they had to leave their national ground. They were Jews, or Israelites, no longer. You say: "Where do you find that in this Gospel?" Well, what did John say about the Lord Jesus? "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of Jerusalem? Or the sin of Judaea? Or the sin of Palestine?" Oh, yes, He does, but much more than that. The *whole world* meets at the Jordan and all mere nationalism goes.

When you are baptized into the Holy Spirit you lose your earthly nationality—and now you say: "What is the proof of that?" My answer is that Hotel Bellevue, Hilterfingen, Switzerland, is the proof of that! How many nationalities are there

in this room? And how many of you different nationalities will have nothing to do with those of other nations? "Oh, he is German, or—worse still!—British, or Chinese, so we do not have anything to do with them!" No, a greater horizon comes into view in Christ. It is something that the Spirit of God does in us, so that we love one another without any regard for nationality.

I think Christians have to learn something about this! Although what I have just said may be very true with us here today, it is not true amongst Christians everywhere. I have been to other countries and I have overheard people say: "I wonder what that *Englishman* is doing here?" They were Christians and in a Christian conference—but that is an absolute denial of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Well, all this is very simple, but it is very blessed to have an experience of the Jordan. You see, I am talking about the real writing of the life of Christ, and there is a chapter on 'Christ greater than all'.

THE BAPTISM

Now Jesus is baptized, and when He sinks beneath the waters He represents that whole race of mankind which is discredited by God. When He said: "This is the way to fulfil all righteousness, to make real and full right standing with God", He clearly implied that we are not in right standing with God without this. The man who is not in right standing with God must be put under the water out of the sight of God, for he is the discredited humanity. Surely we agree with that if we know men?

So these waters cover that which is discredited, and when Jesus comes up out of the water what is the first thing that happens? This One is *accredited*: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He is accredited by God. He is another Man. The one has been put out of God's sight, and now the other stands under an opened heaven and God is saying: "I love this One!" He is the first of a new race to be accredited by God.

THE ANOINTING

We must recognize that the anointing must be kept related to the baptism. There cannot be the anointing until there has been the baptism. These two follow each other as day follows night, and in the beginning of the creation the day and the night were one. It is strange that it says that "there was evening and there was morning, one day" (Genesis i. 5). I think it just means that you cannot have a whole day until you have had the night of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

judgment and condemnation and come out of it into the new day of light. It is like that in spiritual experience. We know that there was one day in our lives, and half of it was night when we came under conviction of sin and under the fear of judgment. That was the dark part of another day. I am an old-fashioned Christian and I believe that this ought to be true of everyone who is born again. I think that the trouble with many Christians is that they never had a dark night, the terrible sense of sin and judgment which is a necessary preliminary to the day.

Now I know that some of you are saying: 'I know I am a Christian, but I never had that experience.' I will ask you this: 'If you did not have it at the beginning, have you had it since? Has there never come into your spiritual experience something of this sense of the awfulness of sin and the reality of judgment?' I think that experience has to have a place in every Christian life, and I am not sure that that night/day ever has an end. I mean this. Even after many years of being the Lord's, you can have a terrible experience of what a dreadful thing sin is in your own heart. I think the Lord has to do that from time to time to make us appreciate the wonder of being saved. These dark nights of condemnation leading to glorious mornings of justification are foundational to spiritual growth.

Well, if you do not believe that theology, or accept that doctrine, do not worry too much about it. I am only telling you of my experience, when sometimes I have got into the depths of feeling what a terrible person I am, and then the Lord has brought me through and shown me what a glorious thing salvation is. I think that is the only way to appreciate our salvation. I am sure you agree with that!

Now, what does the anointing mean? There is another Man now, who is on the life side of the Jordan, and there we are all supposed to receive the Holy Spirit. I believe that the reception of the Holy Spirit goes with new birth. As with salvation you come more and more to understand and appreciate salvation, so with the Holy Spirit you come more and more to understand the meaning of the Holy Spirit, but that does not mean that you have just that day received the Holy Spirit. I know I am on dangerous ground, but I am not going to be drawn into your argument! I am going right on. What does the anointing mean?

Notice that the anointing relates to only one thing, and that is the purpose of God in our salvation. I am going to call that purpose 'vocation'. It was here at the Jordan that Jesus took up His

life vocation, the very purpose for which He had come into this world, the work that He was to accomplish. Get that and hold it for a minute!

The second thing was that it established the relationship between Him and God. Notice the sequence: first, purpose; second, relationship; and the third thing was equipment for the vocation. When Jesus was anointed at the Jordan, that was the beginning of His life vocation, and that vocation was to be established upon a complete fellowship with His Father. The relationship was to be on the basis of Son and Father, Father and Son. The Bible has so much to say about that relationship! I dare not stop to go over that ground, but the Bible's idea of a Son/Father relationship is that the Son will do nothing without the Father. He will consult His Father about everything; He will seek to know the pleasure of His Father in everything; He will do the will of His Father in everything; He will listen to no other voice than the voice of His Father. That is the relationship in both the Old Testament and the New. You see, the devil has upset that, but here it is established as the only ground upon which a life service for God can be fulfilled.

The purpose of God—that governs. Fulfilled in relation to God—that governs. And then, equipped by God to fulfil that purpose—that is the anointing.

It is gathered up into one word, and that is 'servant'. You remember what we have already said about that! Let us go back to Mary, the mother of Jesus. We saw that her whole significance was to bring the Lord into this world, and that is *the* meaning of service.

We saw three things in the case of Mary. Firstly, we saw the Cross, the cost of this service—and how costly this was to Mary before this world! And the old man in Jerusalem said to her: "Yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul" (Luke ii. 35). It was going to be a very costly thing to bring the Lord into this world! It was going to mean the Cross, because it was at Calvary that the sword went through the soul of Mary.

Secondly, we saw that the ability to fulfil this service was the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee" (Luke i. 35). He was the ability, or the resource, for fulfilling the ministry.

Then we saw the third thing—the devil. He had an instrument, that wicked Herod in Jerusalem. Shall we say that he was 'Satan incarnate', who focused all his malice upon this one little child. He would stop at nothing to kill that Babe! "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning" (Matthew ii. 18), and do you think that Mary escaped? She knew about it, and she knew that

MAY—JUNE, 1971

her Babe was involved in that! The devil came out when she brought the Lord in—and what a lot of history there is in that!

Let us go on to John the Baptist. His vocation was to prepare a way for the Lord, to bring the Lord in. Was it a costly thing for John? Yes, John brought the Lord Jesus in, but the same devil was watching and he had a Herod again, and this Herod beheaded John. Behind the incidents that led up to that there was this sinister power that says: 'If you are going to bring Jesus Christ into this world, I am going to be your enemy!' It was costly indeed for John to bring the Lord in, but he fulfilled his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, and although Herod took off his head, later that same Herod was afraid that John had risen from the dead. When Herod heard what Jesus was doing he said: "John the Baptist is risen from the dead . . . John, whom I beheaded, he is risen" (Mark vi. 14, 16). I think John the Baptist haunted his dreams! However, the point is that the work was accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Are you translating this into spiritual experience? This is not only Bible teaching, or exposition, but it is spiritual history. You see, dear friends, we are here in this world as Christians for one purpose only, and while what I am saying will have a special meaning for those who are in what we call 'full-time service'—people whom we wrongly call 'the Lord's servants'—it applies to the simplest, humblest believer in this place. You are called to the same vocation as were John the Baptist and Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus. More than that, you are called to the same vocation as was Jesus Christ, and that vocation to which you are called is no more nor less than, nor anything other than, to bring the Lord in, that where you are the Lord is. You are to make a way for the Lord. You are to be, so to speak, the vessel of Christ coming in. You are John the Baptist, and you are Mary. In a sense, your presence means Christ. That is our vocation, and it ought to revolutionize our lives.

Dear friends, it revolutionized my life. You see, I was what was called 'a minister', and I wore a clerical collar and all that kind of thing. I thought 'the ministry' was mostly to do with getting up sermons and preaching them on a Sunday. Really, for me, 'the ministry' was climbing steps up into a pulpit and preaching a sermon. Well, as you can see, the Lord has done something! He has shown me what the ministry really is, and if this ministry is not being fulfilled, I am ready to go out at once. If I am not bringing the Lord Jesus in, if the result of my life is not more of the Lord Jesus in this

world, then my life is a failure. I have missed the meaning of service. And this belongs to you, whoever you are. You may not be a great public figure, you may never be called a 'minister', you may never preach in a pulpit, but you can be a servant of the Lord as much as John the Baptist was. It *can* be said that because people met you, they met the Lord, because you lived in that village, people knew the Lord was there.

Are you taking this to heart? You see, this is the principle of the New Testament. It is put in this way in the Gospels: Jesus sent His disciples into all the towns and villages *where He himself would come* (Luke x. 1). Why did they go? To bring Him there. That is the principle throughout the New Testament. Oh, no, they were not sent into all these places to form churches, but to bring the Lord Jesus. I do not think that the devil cares a little bit about people forming churches, in fact, I think that many of the churches that are formed please the devil very much! He does not find that they are a challenge to him, but where these New Testament servants of the Lord went, the devil recognized the significance of their being in that place. 'They are to bring Jesus here, and that is the most dangerous thing to our kingdom!' So, if we have something of the Lord, if our presence means the coming in of the Lord, what do we expect?

THE TEMPTATION

We expect the third part of the chapter, for the next phase is the temptation in the wilderness.

My time has gone, but I will just say one thing and leave it there. Baptism, the anointing and the temptation are all one thing. If you are in right standing with God, for that is what baptism really means, if you have received the Holy Spirit, the anointing, you must expect that the next thing that will happen is that the devil has put his mark upon you, and his one object will be to break up your testimony concerning the Lord Jesus, to nullify the presence of Jesus in your life, or to get you right out of the way. The enemy will be watching you all the time to try to destroy the presence of the Lord Jesus and to get you out of the way.

This is the quite natural sequence: right standing with God; the indwelling Holy Spirit of the anointing; the great purpose of God taken up to bring Him into this world; and then the conflict with the enemy, and that will go right on to the end. Do not expect anything else. Jesus told us not to expect anything else, and the Apostles show us quite clearly that we should not expect anything else.

May the Lord write this chapter in our hearts!

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Switzerland, 1970

THE POWER OF THE WORD OF FAITH

"And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke xxiv. 32).

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart. . . . Then they that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts ii. 37, 41).

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" (Acts x. 44).

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thessalonians ii. 13).

LAST time we noticed what our Lord Jesus after His resurrection, and Peter on the day of Pentecost, and Paul after he had been received up into the third heaven, did *not* preach, and now we are going to consider what was *not* their appeal. They did not say, when they finished their message: 'You have heard these wonderful things and now you have to live up to what you have heard!' nor did they say: 'Now you know all this, so you must seek power to do what you have heard.' They did not say anything like that, for their message was not a piece of good advice, but the Gospel. They did not make the Christian life and message a kind of ladder: 'The first step is that you hear, the second is that you understand, the third is that you pray, the fourth is that you understand more because you have prayed, the fifth is that you commit yourself to the Lord, the sixth is that you seek power'—(and then, as you come to the top, you drop down again!)

No, theirs was not that kind of message at all. This is not the Gospel at all, but the law: 'I tell you the truth and it is up to you to do it.' Anyone can preach like that! That is not a gift, but merely a piece of good advice. It is not Divine, but very human.

When the *Lord* spoke their hearts *burned*, and something happened. When *Peter* spoke "they were *pricked* in their heart", and something happened—the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Why was this?

Well, "no word from God shall be void of power" (Luke i. 37, R.V.), and the Lord Himself

said these marvellous words which we so often overlook: "It is the spirit that quickeneth" (John vi. 63). We would all agree with that, but then he added: "The words that I speak unto you, they *are* spirit and they *are* life"—and we do not agree with that! If we did we would not say: 'You have heard and now you must have the Spirit.' If we say that, then we have not spoken the words of God, because the words of faith do not *describe* the spiritual life—they *are* life. They do not *describe* the spirit because they *are* spirit. They do not speak of the truth for they *are* truth. If our preaching is not like that, then we do not speak the words of God, but only dead letters. We are bringing nothing more than morale, for morale is always teaching people what is right and what is wrong, and then asking people to try in some way—often, of course, by seeking God—to do what is right.

But when Jesus said: "Daughter, your sins are forgiven", what happened? They *were* forgiven, for the word brought what He proclaimed. When He said: 'Go away, and sin no more!', He did not add: 'And it is up to you to try.' That would be no Gospel. When He said: 'Sin no more', it was life, and as the woman heard and received the word, so it happened.

That is the Gospel. It is a secret, and it remains a secret. The Lord says to you: 'My son, my daughter, you are always with Me and all that I have is yours', but if your answer to that is: 'I will try and live up to that', then you have not heard! But when the Lord says: 'My fullness is thine; My peace is thine; My joy is thine', and you hear it, your heart is warmed because through hearing you have received spirit and life. Then you will not reply: 'Because all that is mine, I must obey', but you will say: 'I have heard, so I can obey.'

There is a fundamental distinction between the words of the Lord, which are life and spirit, and what men are so often telling other people. The Lord does not expect us to live up to the heavenly heights, but He does expect us to live out from them right from the very beginning. The Christian life is organic. It starts with fullness, and out of fullness it develops into more maturity. When the Lord gives He does so in a Divine way. When He speaks, He conveys life and spirit. You could never call the Lord a lecturer! Would you say that He lectured wonderfully about Christianity? No! Never has anyone *spoken* as He did, and if you have ears

MAY—JUNE, 1971

to hear (which is the most important thing of all!) you, by hearing, receive all that He says, not tomorrow, but now, this very moment.

Speaking is most important. It is not lecturing. I hardly dare say this, but please do not misunderstand me: Never go to a Bible School where they lecture, but only to one where the life and truth of the spirit are conveyed. Preaching is not just speaking biblical truth, for that could just be dead letters. Speaking should be conveying the very life of the Lord.

In the Bible there is no distinction between teaching and power. If teaching has no power then it is not teaching at all. And there is no distinction between truth and spirit. If the truth is not spirit, then it is not real truth. We have already heard that life governs everything, and that is very true, so life should govern speaking. Dead truth is no truth at all. Teaching without power is no teaching. Then there is no distinction between words and life in the Bible. If the words are not life then they are only dead letters.

All these distinctions have been made by pious men. It seems and sounds very pious to go away from a meeting saying: 'That was wonderful! Now we must see how we can practise it all.' If you go away in that pious mood, then nothing has been accomplished, but if you go away saying: 'I have heard wonderful news! All that I have been seeking and longing for, and praying for, is not up in the heavens, nor deep down in the depths, but here. It is mine! I have it, so I obey, and I can do all that the Lord wants me to do. It is almost too good to be true!' For many Christians it seems that it is too good to be believed! "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Does that not make you want to shout 'Hallelujah!'?

Sometimes Christians are like the Swiss people. They have all this beauty, and when a Dane comes here and sees these mountains and says: 'I never thought in all my life that there was such beauty to be found!', a Swiss man will look up from his newspaper and say: 'Oh, you mean the Jungfrau and the Mönch', but because he has them every day he does not see them. It is the same with the Gospel. Oh, it is so wonderful, but Christians do not see it. 'All that I have is thine!' 'Oh, yes', we say, 'I know that. It is in Luke xv. verse 31.' 'You have fullness in Christ.' 'Yes, now where is that? I do not quite remember whether it is in Ephesians or Colossians.' 'Your sins have been blotted out.' 'Now, I think that is in Psalm ciii, is it not?' 'We have been seated in the heavenlies with Christ'—but no one shouts 'Hallelujah!', and no one thinks it is wonderful. Everyone is very pious and will go

away from a meeting saying: 'We must try and live up to that!' You can say that for the rest of your life, but you will never live up to it! You can pray for the rest of your life, and you will be more and more pious in the flesh, but you will never be a man of the Gospel.

It is up to me now to speak the living words of God, and it is up to you to listen. That is more important than anything else, for the Lord says: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew xi. 15). If He speaks and you listen, you will receive what He says, so you can live out from that. Difficulties and sorrows will come, and Satan will attack, but sorrows, enemies and satanic attacks all have one thing as their goal—the quenching of that living, humble faith which was exercised when you listened and heard and received.

"Faith comes by hearing" (Romans x. 17). Tell me one thing: Did you receive the Spirit through the words of the law or by hearing? If you listen, you will receive; that is what Paul says in I Thessalonians ii. 13. This is the marvellous thing about preaching, which is the most important job in the Church. I am very angry with those people who try to undermine the importance of preaching the Word. Some people say that they do not like preaching, and that they need something else. If they do not learn how to listen they will never receive anything from the Lord. Faith comes through preaching, and the Spirit is given when you listen; Christ is formed in you as you listen; all your burdens roll away when you listen and receive in faith, for the spirit of truth makes a man free. It is so Divine that it is, as I said before, almost too good to be true! We easily corrupt it through the carnal man's conception of what is pious and right. I think it was the biggest fight of Paul's life to keep steadfastly on this path all the time, for he was accused by pious people of being too superficial, but right preaching and true hearing bring the soul instantly in contact with Divine reality, and through that a work is accomplished that can stand all the tests of time.

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life"—therefore they quicken, because the spirit quickens. Well, I believe this. It works, but I know that some of you may perhaps protest that I have forgotten James.

So we turn to the first chapter of James. Pious people will say: 'James says that it is not enough to hear. You must also do', for in verse 22 he says: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." That is clear, is it not? So it contradicts all that I have said and I must sit down in shame. After all, James knows better than I do!

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

But the first thing that James says is: “*Be* doers,” and that does not mean that there is something to *do*, but something to *be*. It seems to be a kind of life, and is more than something that you press yourself to do. In other words, you must *be* the kind of man who does what he hears—but how do you become that sort of man? Not through superficial hearing; that is what James says: “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

How do you become a man who is a doer of what you hear? Through, as James says here, looking into the perfect law of liberty, and continuing to look into it. It is just another expression for really hearing the Divine law of liberty, that is, this word which *is* spirit and is truth and therefore makes you free. If you continually listen to what the Spirit says, then you are transformed through that mighty word which is life, which is obedient life, which is the life of the Lord who was obedient, and it gives from inside that strength that you need, and, as its consequence, you do what the Lord tells you. Through the word of obedience you will receive the life of obedience, you will do the will of God and will be blessed. This word ‘blessed’ does away with the idea of what a terrible struggle it is to serve the Lord. It is the most wonderful thing to sit down and listen to real preaching in the power of the Spirit and not to have too much else to do so that you can concentrate and look into that perfect law of liberty! That is the law that says that you are free to obey the Lord, and you receive that wonderful message, not as good advice, but as life, and truth, and spirit, and you feel inside—not in your emotions, but in your innermost spirit: ‘I have it *now*. Therefore I do it. I do not wait until tomorrow. I have heard, I have seen, I have received, so there are no more steps on the ladder. I have arrived, and so I can do what I have to do, and I do it, not as an experiment, but as life.’ That is blessed! It is blessed to obey and to follow the Lord in life—and that is the Gospel.

The Lord might say some strong words in between

about taking up your cross, but that is just the same. It is not giving you a piece of good advice. You do not have to struggle and say: ‘Now I must take up my cross. I must do the best I can!’ No! Listen to what He says and look into that law of liberty. Taking up His cross is not a piece of good advice, nor just a command, but it is an honour, a piece of Divine wisdom, and is life from above. Listen a little more, really take it in, and you will find that what He says, even about the cross, is life, spirit and power, and it quickens. Then you will say: ‘Now I have it! It has worked in me. Perhaps I do not say “Hallelujah” this time, but I bless my Saviour. I fall down and adore Him, and realize how wonderful He is. Now I can sell my ladder at a very low price and live in Him, and through Him.’

Do it *now*, dear friends, and not in an hour’s time, or tomorrow. The Lord is risen! ‘We have the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, and therefore we speak’, knowing that we are in contact with real reality, with Divine life, with the risen Lord, and with a word that is not just dead letters, but is power, truth, life, joy and peace. That is the word from *above*.

I remember that about twenty years ago, when I was a young man and knew everything, as all young men do, brother Sparks spoke about learning Christ. I thought: ‘Yes, there is a very big difference between learning *about* Christ and learning Christ’, and I fully agreed with him—until it came to me that learning Christ presupposes that you are teaching Christ! At that time I had just started some Bible teaching, and it was there that it dawned upon me, little by little, that if teaching was not conveying Jesus it was not in power, and was only doing what the Pharisees did—putting heavy burdens on the shoulders of men and women. I am afraid I have done that all too often! But we have not been called to do that. We have the wonderful privilege of knowing One who speaks, who commands, and it happens. Through the spirit of faith we are one with Him, and our wonderful privilege is just to speak out from Him.

Therefore, dear friends, listen once more. He has given us all the fullness of the Godhead. I shall not comment upon that, but if you listen and hear it, you have it, and your whole life will be transformed.

P. M.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

SEEDS OF DISASTER

NOT long ago I told you of how wonderfully I was helped by the sowing of an orange pip by an unknown helper. Now I would like to tell you of a different kind of sowing. It took place in the same Brazilian jungle, and happened when I first went there to live among the Red Indians.

Our long journey upstream was made easier by the help of a Brazilian Christian named Nestor. He had been wonderfully saved from a life of evil, and although he could neither read nor write he was always ready to talk to others of the Saviour. What was more, he was practical and used to up-country living, and so just the man we needed to get us started in our new life.

On the lower reaches of the river there were small settlements of Brazilians, and we were grateful to spend the first few nights of our journey under cover as we made our slow progress upstream; after that we left all human habitation behind and had to hang our hammocks under the forest trees and sleep in the open on the bank of the river. We were just about to embark at the last of the settlements when Nestor came hurrying forward, full of excitement because of some seeds which had been given to him. These, he explained, were Bucha seeds, and it would be most important for us to have Bucha because it was used for making wads for our shot gun. Now it was true that we had bought powder and shot, but had nothing to make wads for securing them in the barrel of the gun with the ramrod, so we were glad to think that we could grow the material which Nestor assured us was most suitable for the purpose.

Weeks afterwards, when we were living with the Indians in one of their villages, we began to build a simple house of our own. Before that, though, and even more important, was the clearing of a piece of forest ready for planting maize and rice, and in this work Nestor proved invaluable. He stayed with us

long enough to get our plantation sown and, a little while before leaving, produced his little packet of seeds and went out to sow them.

I should explain that I afterwards discovered that buchas were what we should call loofahs, which grow on vines which spread over the ground, giving a fruit which is like a cucumber or vegetable marrow. We learned how much these vines spread, and learned it to our cost, but that was after Nestor had returned happily to civilization, leaving us to experience the result of his sowing.

The rains came, the seeds planted all around the plot began to sprout, and while we were busily building our house the loofah vines took possession of our whole plantation. We discovered what was happening before it was too late, and so were able to uproot and remove the vines before they had choked all our other plants, but we had to work hard and long to do so, and if we had not destroyed them in time they would have ruined our small crop of food.

This made me wish that Nestor had remained long enough to undo the trouble he had given by his cheerfully abundant and random sowing. It also taught me a lesson which I have tried to remember all through life, the lesson that carelessly sown seeds can produce endless trouble. Even if we have good intentions, the sowing of wrong can do endless harm to the growing work of God in our lives and in the lives of others. We must watch what we sow. Words and deeds may not seem very important at the time, but their influence can grow and spread until it destroys all that is good. They can be seeds of disaster. This is the reason for God's warning words "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews xii 15).

H. F.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE REST AND THE COURAGE OF FAITH

Reading: Hebrews iv. 9; iii. 19; Joshua xiv. 6-14.

I AM sure that it will sound to many of you like going a long way back and out into a very broad realm when I say that we Christians are being constantly confronted with, and challenged by, our Christianity. Many of us have not really entered into Christianity yet. What do I mean?

Well, for one thing, the very door into true Christianity is the door of rest, the rest of faith. The very simple way in which the Lord put it in His appeal was: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew xi. 28). He was speaking to a multitude, and those words are usually employed in Gospel messages to the unsaved. The meaning of the Lord in using those words is given to us here in the letter to the Hebrews, and it is a very much deeper and fuller meaning than is generally recognized in the usage of the simple invitation: "Come unto me . . . [and I will give you rest." There is something that we have to hear, to detect, in the statement: "There remaineth therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

A PRESENT ENTERING INTO REST

If you look at the context, you will find that the meaning is something into which the people of God had not entered. "They were not able to enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews iii. 19). *They* could not enter in—and who were they? The people of God. It is the people of God for whom the rest remaineth. Do not let us put that into the future, for that is not the meaning at all. It is not that, when we get Home to glory, we shall arrive at the Sabbath day rest. It is not something for the tombstone—'He (or she) entered into rest.' It is something which remains *now* as a present thing for the people of God, not in death, but in life.

You will not think me too elementary, for you know in your heart, as well as I do in mine, that this matter of heart rest, the rest of faith, is a live question continually. It is coming up all the time. One of the things which is lacking in so many of us is this rest, or, to put it the other way, the things which characterize us so much are fret, anxiety, uncertainty, and all those things which are just the opposite of calm assurance, quiet confidence, and the spirit and attitude and atmosphere which say all the time: 'It is all right. Don't worry! Don't fret!'

One thing our great enemy is always trying to do is to disturb and destroy that, rob us of it, churn us up, fret us, drive us and harass us, and he will do anything to rob us of our rest or to prevent us from entering into rest.

It is the rest of *faith*, not just the rest of passivity, indifference, or carelessness. There is all the difference between carelessness and carefreeness. There remaineth, there is still to be had, there still obtains, there still exists, there is still preserved a rest *for the people of God*. We have no right to go to the unsaved and bid them come to Christ and find rest until and unless we ourselves know that rest. Our testimony and our ministry are jeopardized, weakened, limited and discredited if we are not ourselves in rest; and the object of the enemy's activity in this matter is to discredit us by taking from us that very birthright of our union with Him who is never perturbed, never anxious, never in doubt as to the issue, and is the One who reigns. You see, rest is the practical outworking of our belief that He is Lord, and the very Lordship of Christ is struck at by the unrest of the people of God.

The rest of faith must be our position; first in the great matter of justification, for if that is not settled here, it will not be settled anywhere. The enemy is striking at that. He is ever seeking to undercut it, and in some way to raise again the question of our right standing with God, that is, not as finally perfect in ourselves, but in our union with Christ on the ground of what He is. The enemy never ceases to try to undercut that, and his methods are countless, very persistent and very forceful.

So there must be the rest of faith in that, but also in a hundred and one other ways, in the practical things of everyday life, things which are not in our power to arrange, secure, settle or bring to pass. Every day brings hundreds of ways in which there is the opportunity to stand into the rest of faith, into that faith in the Lord which brings rest. So subtle are the ways of the enemy that he will even tell us that some things are too small with which to trouble the Lord. 'That is a mere incident. Why take it to the Lord? He has bigger and more important things than that on hand! Why try to make the Lord your errand-boy—I say that reverently—'just to do all the little things you want done?' If in this thing the testimony is preserved in rest, then it is a big thing to the Lord, and not a little thing. If in this matter the Lord's

glory stands to suffer, then it is a very big thing. It may be an incident in daily life. Yes, in many, many ways every day, you and I can so lose our poise and our rest and our quiet confidence that we lose out spiritually, and it is proved that somewhere faith has been lacking, and the rest has gone. That is one side, and it is a real challenge to us.

THE NECESSITY FOR FAITH

“We see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief.” *Not able* because of paralyzing, disqualifying, incapacitating unbelief. That means that the sooner we face this whole question and, as far as possible, get it settled, the better. For thirty-eight years Israel was locked up, held up, and went round and round, so to speak, on this one question as to whether they were going to believe God. It arose, let me say again, on all kinds of matters. It arose on physical matters, for a life in that wilderness was a great proposition physically. The Lord did not change the physical conditions, but called first for a change in the people themselves. The physical conditions were settled when He had got the change inside them. When the matter of faith in Him was settled, then the Lord dealt with the physical. The question arose in the circumstantial, the emotional, the intellectual and volitional realms, and the challenge was made along all those lines in numerous ways. You can take all their experiences and see how each one was a peculiar form of the challenge to faith, and the challenge was changing almost daily in its aspect and its form, but it was the same challenge. It came along every kind of line and the Lord never changed it, never prevented it, and never allowed the whole set of conditions to be altered, but He always focused on one point. The thing that matters is the inner man, and not until the issue was settled there did the Lord deal with all the other things.

Well, that is very comprehensive. Do not think that it is necessarily certain things that account for our condition. These may be contributing factors, and they may be very testing, bearing upon us very heavily. Physical matters do press, do make a situation very difficult and do make a difference. The circumstances in which we have to live do make a lot of difference, and can make the situation exceedingly difficult. We say: ‘If only the Lord would deal with this physical matter, or these circumstances, or this something else! All this difficulty is due to this or that.’ That is our way of reasoning, but it is not the Lord’s thought at all. The thing is deeper down than that, and it is

simply a matter of believing God, of resolute faith and confidence in God. The Lord is trying to get us out of our variable and varying soul life where we are at the mercy of our feelings, our thoughts and reasonings, into a realm where, in spirit, we are steadfast. That is the point which is brought out in the psalm: “Their heart was not steadfast with him” (Psalm lxxviii. 37), and around that the whole of the forty years of Israel in the wilderness is gathered. The key to this is spiritual; to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inward man (Ephesians iii. 16) is the answer to it all. The other may then give way, or, at least, we shall gain ascendancy over the other, even if it is not removed.

FAITH IN GOD THE SECRET OF COURAGE

Come back to the word in Joshua. Of that first generation only two men got out of that soul realm—Joshua and Caleb. They triumphed in and over that realm. They triumphed in that realm first, and then the Lord brought them out, but the fact that it was the rest of faith which was the secret of their triumph while they were in it is brought so beautifully, magnificently to light in this fourteenth chapter of Joshua. I think this is fine.

Caleb, one of the two, comes to Joshua. He is an old man now, but he is still living by faith in the position which he took up with the Lord years before. He took up that position when he went as one of the spies, and when the overwhelming majority brought their evil report. They looked at God through their circumstances, but these two men looked at their circumstances through God, and it made all the difference. Caleb took up that position of looking at everything through God, and he is still living in that position. Now, as an old man, he comes to Joshua, and, while all the other people are being given their inheritance in nice, easy, prosperous positions “where every prospect pleases”, Caleb says: ‘Give me this mountain where the giants are; this hilly country where the cities are great and walled up.’

There is a lot to be said about that, but I am going to be content with this one thing now as following up this challenge to my heart and to yours. What are you looking for? An easy inheritance, a nice, workable cabbage-patch, something that is going to respond to your touch immediately and give you satisfaction? Are you looking for the flourishing land? The faith which brought Joshua and Caleb into rest of heart before they came into the rest of the land was this kind of faith: ‘Give me a tough proposition! Here is a situation full of difficulties, full of threatenings, full of adversities.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

It is almost an appalling prospect, yet, nevertheless, give me a chance there!' You see the challenge. Do difficulties appal you, or do they at once present a great opportunity for the Lord? "It may be that the Lord . . . as the Lord spake." How are we facing the big difficulties? And there *are* difficulties and problems! These mountains seem to pile up upon one another as we go on. Sometimes there seems to be an impossible outlook and prospect, a hopeless situation. Perhaps the mountain is impossible for our own lives individually, for some reason within ourselves or outside of ourselves, or for the work to which we are called, the ministry, the testimony that is laid upon us. Well, what about it? Is it: 'Give me this mountain!' Nothing but a real faith in God can take on things like that and say: 'All right. It is difficult, an appalling prospect naturally, and a hopeless outlook. Nevertheless, let us take it on in the name of the Lord. "It may be that the Lord . . . as the Lord spake"'. It is a case of looking at the mountain through the Lord, and not at the Lord through the mountain.

I think that is the kind of faith that we need to bring us into rest. Yes, there is a mountain right enough, a physical mountain, a circumstantial mountain, a mountain of outlook in the work, and naturally we would do the right, the wise and commonsense thing if we said: 'No, we are not going to touch that!' But faith says: 'I am not going to try and skirt that mountain! I am not going to turn my back on it and run away. Give me this mountain!' We all want that faith! It is not just our natural courage, our bulldog nature,

nor our pugnacity that will do it. We know quite well that we have nothing, and, if left to ourselves, we had better quit. But the Lord is challenging us, and Caleb does come up as a rebuke to us. At the end of a long life, when we might think that now is the time for him to be given a very nice little garden and a lodge somewhere where the work was easy and he could take his rest, he says: 'No! Give me this mountain wherein are the giants and the walled cities!' His *choice* was a difficulty, because it was an opportunity for the Lord.

Probably we shall very soon be brought up against what we have been saying in very practical ways, but let us have dealings with the Lord on this. We are going to have to face what will be naturally appalling difficulties, within and without, and they will take the very heart out of us, but, oh! for this quiet, restful assurance and confidence in our God which says: 'Give me this mountain as an opportunity for proving the Lord!'

And Caleb got it! It was Hebron, and that is another, very long story. I leave you to look that up, for Hebron has a wonderful place in the purposes of God. David was crowned king first in Hebron before he was crowned in Jerusalem. Hebron means 'fellowship', and there is a great inheritance bound up with it. Hebron is secured to men and to women of this kind of faith which says: 'I am not wanting to escape from my difficulty and get out of my hard way! Let me take it in the Lord's strength and give Him an opportunity to show that He can do what is naturally impossible!'

The Lord give us that faith!

Switzerland, 1970

THE REVELATION OF GOD

"And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (Revelation v. 6).

A FRIEND of mine was once speaking at a meeting when a young lady jumped up and shouted: 'If there is a God, show us your God!' In one sense that is a silly question! As if we could open a door somewhere in the universe and say: 'Look,

there is God!', or make Him materialize at our own wish! But yet, for Christians, it is also a meaningful question, for there is a sense in which we *can* see the Lord, not with our physical eyes, but with the eyes of our heart.

You can see me with your physical eyes this evening, for there are little waves that go through the air from my body to your eye. Your eye translates those waves into electric currents which run inside you, and they create a vision of me on your built-in television set. In actual fact, the

picture you get is upside down, but you do not like me that way, so you automatically put me the right way up. You say you see me, but really you are seeing something which is inside you.

And when we see God it is much the same, for there is a communication, this time from heaven, which registers into our lives and transfers into currents and an image. Something happens within us and we say: 'We have seen the Lord!' There is a momentary flash, the shutter of our inner camera clicks, and on the 'sensitive paper' of our spirit there is left an image, an impression. It is something from God, and we have seen it as really as we have seen anything else. That is why, right through the Bible, there are men who say that they have seen the Lord, in spite of the verse that tells us: "No man hath seen God at any time" (John i. 18). Of course they have not seen Him with their physical eyes, but there has been an inward vision in their spirits. When this happens to us we say: 'We have seen the Lord, and we can never be the same again!' An indelible print has been left on the sensitive paper, and we are different sort of people. There is a new factor in our lives, for we have seen God.

From the beginning of the Bible, and throughout, there are men who are wanting to see the Lord, and in the New Testament the Apostle prays for Christians that God might give them a spirit of revelation in the full knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, having the eyes of their hearts enlightened (Ephesians i. 17, 18). This is what a Christian is—someone who has seen the Lord and goes on seeing Him—and this is how he begins to be transformed into the image of the Lord. It is not by trying to act the Lord, nor by trying to be like Him, nor by trying to do His works, but just by seeing Him.

Moses cried on the top of the mount: 'Show me Thy glory!', and as the glory of the Lord passed by him so on seeing the Lord his face began to shine. Or we could turn to Isaiah, who was one day in the temple of the Lord where he saw Him, and that left such an impression on Isaiah that he said: "I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah vi. 5). He had never been so convicted of sin before, and never had he had such a desire to be like the Lord. Now he had seen the Lord, and that was everything! Then Samson's parents, Manoah and his wife, when they saw the Lord go up to heaven, said: "We shall surely die, because we have seen God" (Judges xiii. 22). But his wife was more logical and said: 'God would not have shown us all these things if He was going to kill us. We will not die.' I think they were both right, for it is only when we have seen the Lord that we really do die. What does it mean when we say that we are crucified

with Christ? Can we feel it? No, it is no good trying to feel crucified! Do we understand it? That is very difficult! Even Paul said that he was crucified, and then he added that he lived; and further qualified by saying that he did not really live, for it was Christ who lived in him. So Paul is dead really, but he goes on to say: 'The life I now live . . .' So he is alive! Ah, Paul has seen the Lord, so that is why *he* is dead, and also that is why both Manoah and his wife were right. They had seen the Lord, and something was done inside which was beyond understanding and beyond feeling.

In the Old Testament it was a generally recognized thing that if a man saw God he would die; but if we look into the New Testament we find that the wise men came to look for Christ, and, having seen Him, they went back home a different way. Once you have seen the Lord you cannot go on in the same way!

The most important thing is that we should see the Lord. Each evening this week we have been looking at men, ordinary sort of men, but men who knew God—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All of them in their fallible human weakness showed us something of the ways of God. Abraham brought the revelation of the Cross in his four altars, Isaac brought the revelation of the Spirit in the four wells, and Jacob brought the revelation of the Church with his four pillars, but, although these men were showing us something of God, there was so much of man in it all. Behind Abraham we found the face of the Almighty, and that was what we were really looking for; behind Isaac we saw the finger of the Lord, whom we really wanted to know; and behind Jacob we discovered God's family and God's heart.

Now we are going to turn to Joseph. Nothing at all bad is ever said about Joseph, because he is going to show us something directly about the Lord Jesus Christ. In the person of Joseph we are going to see a revelation of the Lord Himself. He had four sets of dreams in his experience, and because he is a man of revelation he is revealing the Lord to us. He is like looking through a keyhole. The shape of the keyhole is Joseph, but through him we are looking into a lighted room, and there we are seeing the Lord. Joseph is a revelation of Jesus Christ, but of a particular aspect of our God, for seven times we see him weeping, and we are going to see the tears, the broken heart, of God. It is very important that we see the Lord as we look into these Scriptures. As we look at Joseph let us open our hearts to God so that we may see Christ and our hearts be moved

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

towards Him. As we see the broken heart of God in the experience of Joseph, let us ask that we should be moved to a deeper devotion, a deeper love, a deeper adoration and a deeper desire: 'O Lord, I want to see You more!' so that our love for Christ is the biggest, the most important and the overwhelming thing that takes up our human being, that puts a meaning into our existence and draws us out into eternity.

It was as a student that I became a Christian, and the crisis moment came, not when I heard how bad and sinful I was, nor when I found how clever God's ABC of salvation was, how He had provided a way for me to come to Him, but when I was sitting in a meeting and a man preached Christ. It was then that God began to illuminate my heart and I saw the Lord Jesus on the Cross, and it was as though God was saying: 'Look, that is how much I love you!' It was the sight of the Lord Jesus, that "sacred Head once wounded", that made me say: 'God, if You love me like that, if that is what You are like and if that is what my sin has done to You, then it must be a very bad thing, and I must give myself back to You.' I could not do anything else, for I had seen the Lord, and it is that sight of Christ that is what we need continuously. As we gather together amongst God's people in His house, what do we want to find? We want to find that God is at home and that we can meet with Him. That is why Abraham shows us Calvary, Isaac shows us the gift of the Spirit, and Jacob shows us the house of the Lord—but what is the point of it all? It is to come inside and find the revelation of Joseph, to find that God is there and He is like this.

Let us look through the keyhole of Joseph! It is a morning breakfast time in the household of Jacob, and all the brothers are sitting down. Joseph arrives, looking as if he has had quite a bad night, and as he takes his place at the table he says quietly to his father: 'You know, Father, I had a dream last night.' 'Did you, my boy? What was it?' 'Well, Father, it was like this. All my brothers had sheaves of corn. I had one, too, and their sheaves all bowed down to mine.' Jacob raps on the table and says: 'Listen, boys. Joseph has had a dream. Tell them about it, Joseph.' Joseph is his father's favourite, and his brothers grumble: 'It may be that Reuben has lost his birthright, but why should this young fellow have first place and we boys bow down and worship him?' The next day Joseph comes down and takes his place at the breakfast table. 'Oh, Father, I had a dream last night.' This time Jacob does not wait to hear it, but calls out: 'Come on, you boys. Joseph has had

another dream. Listen to what he has to say.' So Joseph tells the story: 'There were eleven stars and they bowed down to my star, and, by the way, Father, the sun and moon were there, too, and they bowed down.' 'What is that, my boy? I and your mother bow down as well?'

You see, Joseph had a revelation as to his destiny, that he was to be the first in the things of the earth, the highest of the things in the heavens, and that all things in heaven and earth should acknowledge him lord of all. He is showing us the destiny that the Lord Jesus has—and this revelation is hated by the brothers! It may be that Joseph wanted to give it to them in love. Certainly he looked for them in love when he was taking their food to them, but their reaction to that love was to try to destroy him, and then to sell him, so he was taken down to Egypt as a slave. Has your love ever been *misunderstood*? That is very hard to bear! It is difficult to understand when you have gone out in love towards friends and neighbours, or it may be to those in your home, and that has been *misunderstood*.

But behind it all there is a warfare afoot. God has appointed His Son to be above all things, and you gladly acknowledge that. You have begun to be headed up into Him and you are glad that He is going to have first place—but the forces of the enemy are in and they seek to bring in *misunderstanding* of the love of God. The Lord Jesus suffered much *misunderstanding* for His great love!

Down in Egypt Joseph reached a very superior position in the household of Potiphar. All things were entrusted to him because of his righteousness, but Potiphar's wife cast her eyes upon him, and you remember how he finished up in prison because he was *misrepresented*. Have you ever had your righteous actions *misrepresented*? Our Lord Jesus was *misrepresented*, for the people said He was doing the devil's work (Luke xi. 15), that He had an unclean spirit (Mark iii. 30), and the Lord Jesus had to suffer all that. His love was *misunderstood* and His righteousness was *misrepresented*. He suffered "the contradiction of sinners against himself" (Hebrews xii. 3), and was *misrepresented* by witnesses before the Sanhedrin, but He did not open His mouth. He reigned in silence. Have we not got a great Lord?

Then, while in prison, Joseph interpreted the visions of the baker and the butler, and on this occasion he was the interpreter of men's destinies, for one man was to be saved and the other man executed. Then he was forgotten by the butler for two years. He was *overlooked*. Have you ever been *overlooked*? You are not worth considering!

MAY—JUNE, 1971

You are such an insignificant person, and no one takes much notice of you in meetings. It is then that you should shout 'Hallelujah!', for you are becoming like the Lord Jesus. He was overlooked, too. It is a tremendous thing to become like the Lord Jesus Christ—at least, we thought it was when we began the Christian life, but we did not know that it was going to mean all this: being misunderstood, even when we love, being misrepresented, even when we are doing things rightly and with pure motives, and being overlooked and forgotten. When the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, do you think that the whole world turned out and put it as headline news in their papers? Why, it is very difficult to find a reference to that crucifixion in any place. It is mentioned a couple of times in Roman literature, but otherwise it was quite overlooked. Apart from His own disciples, no one thought it was worth recording. But the Lord Jesus, our God, is used to being overlooked and misrepresented, and millions of people misunderstand Him, but He is big enough to bear with all that. We are so small and petty that if someone misunderstands us just slightly we have a great enquiry, and go out of our way to justify ourselves, but not the Lord Jesus.

GOD'S PAIN AT MAN'S SELF-TORTURE

Then the moment came in Joseph's life when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, and he was made the chief man in the whole of Egypt. He had shown Pharaoh that earthly things always fail to satisfy in the end. Our fattest cows get thin, our best wheat becomes very poor, and earthly things always get less and less, showing the need for the Lord's spiritual reign. So Joseph reigns in Egypt, and now his brothers are gathered before him, having come to buy wheat. He is unknown to them when he sees them and he begins to question them. As they stand before him and he questions them about being spies, they begin to remember their evil deeds, and say to each other: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (Genesis xlii. 21). The brothers begin to show that they have a conscience, for they feel guilty and it hurts. They show they have a memory, and that memory begins to haunt them. They try to repress it, but it rises up again. Perhaps they see the anguished face of their brother Joseph, and they argue with themselves: 'This has come upon us because of our sin.' You know, there are some people who say they do not believe in hell, when

already within their own lives they begin to feel the pang of conscience. They are tortured and haunted by memories, and their reason argues with them again and again that this is just and right. Surely to be left with that, without God, in eternity is enough hell, whatever else hell might be! There is no release from the agony of conscience, the torture of memory, and the pain of reasoning.

Is God unmoved by that? In verse 24 of that chapter we read that Joseph "turned himself about from them, and wept". God's heart is in anguish over the self-torture of men. He is afflicted in all our afflictions, and the very groanings of this universe are reflected in the groaning of God. In Romans viii. 22 and 23 Paul tells us that the whole earth is groaning, even Christians. In verse 26 we read that the Spirit is also groaning, "with groanings which cannot be uttered", and those groanings are evidence to a Christian that God groans over the condition of this world. A part of the pain of Calvary is the broken heart of God over man's sin.

I am afraid that we could get the impression from some books that we might read, or even from some people who might speak; that the Christian God sits aloof from the pains of this universe. That is not the God of Joseph! It is not the God of the Bible nor the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why, He feels the very pain that we suffer because of our sin, and that suffering is in order that we might find in Him a heart that understands.

Perhaps there is someone here who feels that he (or she) has an unforgivable sin in his heart, some memory that haunts him, some prick of conscience that cannot be stilled, and some very good reasoning why he should suffer for that sin. Let me say that we can only do God more damage if we do not come to the place where God has been hurt by that sin, if we do not confess it to Him and find that He can remove it. Do you know why it will be removed from you? Because it will be removed from Him and you will feel that in your own heart and life. There is no more sacrifice for sin. Christ takes it away, and because it is no longer registering in God's heart, there is no need for it to register in yours.

GOD'S PAIN AT HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH MAN

Joseph wept again when Benjamin appeared with the brothers on their second visit (Genesis xliii. 30), and he had to hide himself from them. Here was his own flesh and blood, for Benjamin was not only the child of his father, but the only other child of his dead mother.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Do you know that it was a pain for God to be involved with man? It was a delightful, exalting, rejoicing pain, for He is happy to link Himself with with man, but it means that He gets involved with what we are, feeling our infirmities and understanding our human situation. Now, in the heart of God, through the incarnation and ascension, there is humanity and it ever lives to make intercession for us. It is ever pleading the cause of man. God's own heart beats in time with man's heart. He has become our Kinsman, our Redeemer, has joined Himself to our human flesh and taken it back into God's own heart. There is nothing that happens in humanity which does not have its pleadings to God, for the Lord Jesus is there, making intercession for us. That involvement with man has cost the Lord Jesus tears.

GOD'S PAIN OVER HIS FORGIVENESS
OF MAN

Joseph wept a third time (Genesis xlv. 2), at the moment when he revealed himself to his brothers. They had reached the point of confessing their sin. Judah, who was the man who had wanted to destroy Joseph, now said to Joseph on the throne: 'Take me in the place of Benjamin.' He was understanding something of substitution, and would rather die himself than let Benjamin die and destroy his father. This had not been his thought when Joseph was sold! He had no concern for his father then, but now he virtually confessed his sin: 'Take me in the place of Benjamin', and Joseph could not contain himself. As he revealed himself to them in forgiveness he had to weep, because it hurt—and to be forgiven always hurts the forgiver. If it does not hurt the forgiver there is nothing to forgive; and it was because there *was* something to forgive that it hurt God to pay the price to forgive at Calvary. At the Cross the Lord Jesus was involved with humanity, with the consequences of our sin, and He paid the price of forgiveness. That hurt God. If you think that God is too big to be hurt, well, perhaps the bigger you are the more it hurts.

GOD'S PAIN AT HIS COMMUNION WITH MAN

But Joseph wept again (Genesis xlv. 14): "And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck." Perhaps this was the weeping of communion. Have you ever wept when you have been away from someone for a long while and you meet again? It is a weeping of joy. We are strange, mixed-up sort of creatures, and we weep when we are very happy! There is a

relief in it. And there is a weeping in Christ's heart when He can commune with us, for He has been waiting for us and we show Him our faces so very little. Perhaps we keep Him waiting for months, or even years, but there is such a relief in His heart when we turn to talk with Him.

GOD'S PAIN AT HIS REUNION WITH HIS SON

There was another weeping (Genesis xlix. 29) when Joseph met his father, Jacob, and they were reunited. At the Last Supper the Lord Jesus said: "I go to my Father" (John xiv. 12), but He went by the way of the Cross, for that was the only way back to His Father. That moment on the Cross, when He cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" must have hurt! It really cost something to experience man's God-forsakenness in His own heart. That was what God was doing in the Lord Jesus, but when that wound had healed and the Lord Jesus was with His Father, do you not think that there were tears at their reunion?

GOD'S PAIN AT DEATH

In Genesis l. 1 "Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him" when Jacob died. Joseph wept at death, and so did the Lord Jesus. There was a moment at the graveside of his friend, Lazarus, when He wept, although He was going to raise him up again. Martha ran out and said: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John xi. 21), and then Mary came out and said: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John xi. 32). Do you think they were saying the same thing? No, not quite, for Mary wept at the beginning, while Martha did not. More than that, although the words the two women used were exactly the same, they occurred in a different order to show a different emphasis, a different tone in the voice. Martha said: 'If You had been here *my* brother would not have died', and that was why she did not cry. She had something which was hers taken from her, and it hurt, but she did not weep. But Mary said: 'If You had been here, my *brother* would not have died.' Ah, that has hurt, for it is her brother that has gone and means the tearing of relationship. It is not the losing of a possession, but the tearing of a relationship, so Mary wept and she saw the Lord Jesus weep, because it is through our tears that sometimes we understand the tears of God. But if we are only concerned with *things*, we never understand what it is that hurts God. God hates death, because He is life, and everything about Him is living. The Lord Jesus snorted like a horse (that is what

the Greek word means) at the sight of death, and then, groaning in spirit, He cried: "Lazarus, come forth." That is God's attitude towards death, and what it means to Him to have a world full of death. But what it must mean to Him to have a *Church* full of death!

GOD'S PAIN AT MAN'S UNBELIEF

There is a seventh and last occasion when Joseph wept (Genesis 1. 17). After their father died the brothers came to Joseph and pleaded with him not to destroy them, because they felt that he had only reserved his anger until their father died. They could not believe that he had forgiven them. Because their own hearts were deceitful they found it difficult to see that God's heart is the reverse. Because they would not have forgiven, but would have sought vengeance, they could not understand the heart of Joseph, which was the reverse, and during all those years when their father was still alive they had been worrying and wondering whether they were really forgiven. That made Joseph weep. He wept at their unbelief, and unbelief hurts God. It is the sin that hurts God most; not only our unbelief that we are forgiven, but our unbelief at what He has said to us. Joseph had told the brothers that the land of Goshen was theirs and they could enjoy it, but they had never really believed it, although they had lived there. They thought that one day, when their father died, Joseph would take revenge. God has said a lot to us, and it is to be believed; and seeing the grieving heart of God over our unbelief will help us to believe.

What is the besetting sin in Hebrews xii? Is it that thing that always trips us up or gets us down? I do not think so. If we have just read the eleventh chapter there is only one thing that that sin can be, and that is unbelief. That is the thing that destroys our Christian pathway. So as God says something to us in His Word we must put our finger on it and say: 'Lord Jesus, make this like a photograph inside me. Make it live in me.' Then we thank the Lord for what He is and that we can see Him in His Word, and it is as we worship Him that faith rises up and lays hold of the truth of God, and writes it on our hearts.

Perhaps the greatest of all pains that God has to bear from Christians are the tears that come through our unbelief. "O fools", He calls us, "and slow of heart to *believe!*"

If we have seen the Lord Jesus tonight in the pain of His heart towards His people, surely everything that is in us must go out to stop that pain, and the wonderful thing is that the very pain of the Christ of Calvary draws out our hearts in worship. There is nothing that moves us more than the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as we see His tears we begin to praise and thank Him for what He is. That is the way in which He illuminates our hearts and we see Him. Let us spend a lot of time at the Cross; do not let us run too fast away from Calvary. The Lord God himself has a Lamb in His heart, slain even before the foundation of the world, and through eternity we shall be worshipping that sort of heart in order that we might go on seeing the Lord.

R. T. F.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

"And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Exodus xxxiii. 11).

"Didst not thou, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?" (II Chronicles xx. 7).

"But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend" (Isaiah xli. 8).

"By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; even he to whom it

was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a parable receive him back" (Hebrews xi. 17-19).

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God" (James ii. 23).

THERE are many astonishing things in the Bible. Few of them, however, are more so than this—that God should desire a friend.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

We would think that of all things God would be able to get on quite well without having men in that relationship with Himself. I say it is an astonishing thought that God, in all His self-sufficiency, His fullness, His creative power, should want a friend, but here it is—"Abraham my friend" . . . "the friend of God".

This, dear friends, is the one thing in the mind of God behind all His strange ways. Probably in all the Bible there was no one who had greater reason than did Abraham to think of God's ways as being very strange. How strange those ways were! And very rarely were they easy. Almost every step, if not every step, was fraught with perplexity. But God was governed in all His dealings with Abraham by this one idea and thought: to have a friend, and to bring a man into such a relationship with Himself as to be able to speak of him as "My friend".

You know, of course, that that title and that relationship are peculiarly and especially connected with Abraham. There are some wonderful things said about other men—Moses, Daniel ("O man greatly beloved")—but "My friend" is uniquely Abraham's title. To understand that we have to look again at the way by which Abraham was led and how at last he arrived in the heart of God.

While the whole life of Abraham is required to make up the full inclusiveness of this sublime fellowship, there is little doubt, I think, that consummately it was bound up with that one incident of which we have just read: the call to offer his son Isaac. Just think what that really meant where Abraham was concerned! Did God call him from Ur of the Chaldees, to leave all and come out, without telling him anything more than that He would lead him to a land? If we knew everything we would see that that was no small step, for there is every reason to believe that Abraham was a prosperous and great man in Ur. Did God lead him out? Did God promise him a son, and then go away and leave him without fulfilling His promise? Did God bind up the whole of his life with that promise and with that son? The very justification of his move from that old country, leaving everything, was focused and centred in that son. Abraham's whole life, the justification of his living at all, and everything in his life, was centred in that son. All the commands and all the guidance of God to Abraham ended in Isaac. Did God so call, so lead, so promise? Did He make Isaac the exclusive vessel of His Divine purpose and the explanation and meaning of all His promises to Abraham, so that Abraham had no alternative to Isaac? Abraham tried an alternative and found that God was not in that. He tried through Ishmael, but found that that was no way through. There was

no alternative for his life for God, his knowledge of God, his history with God, but Isaac. Should Isaac not exist his faith would have been in vain, for he had nothing else. God would have failed him, and his life would have been a failure.

Naturally, if Isaac did not exist, or if he died, there would be some tremendous implications. The obvious implication would have been that Abraham had been misled, deceived, and followed a false line; that God had mocked him and brought him into a trap. He had followed God in a way which he had believed with all his heart to be God's way for him, and he had committed himself without reserve to what he believed to be the way of God for his life. And all that centred in Isaac.

Then came: "Take thou thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest . . . and offer him" (Genesis xxii. 2). Dear friends, we cannot make too much of the seriousness of the crisis to which Abraham had now come. It was a tremendous thing for him! It might have raised the question of what kind of a God his God was, or who this God was to whom he had given his life, and there are many other questions and implications. All his guidance, his consecration, his long years of waiting and travailing, his faithful obedience—and now, at one blow, it looked as though it was all shattered. To survive that, and, more than that, to go through it triumphantly, is to explain what God means by friendship. Yes, that is the meaning of friendship—but what is it?

Well, if this is the Divine explanation of friendship, and we are called to be partakers of the Divine nature, and God is working with us to bring about such a relationship, it is going to be along that same road. If you and I want even to approximate to this relationship, this supreme relationship to God, if our hearts do respond to this suggestion and proposition that God should be able to speak of us as His friends (and, on the face of it, no doubt everyone would say: 'Yes. There is nothing that I would covet more than that God should be able to speak of me as "My friend" '), then see what it means.⁵

Firstly, it means absolute and unreserved committal for life and with life to God, without reserves and without alternatives. Abraham had no alternative. This relationship, this going on with God, was everything or nothing, for it was sealed in a blood covenant. You will remember the occasion when that covenant was made. The sacrifice was cut in two. The one half was put on one side and the second half was put on the other side. One side was God's and the other was Abraham's. Blood was shed and they together, in the true figure, joined hands and moved between the two halves. In the blood of that sacrifice each committed himself to

MAY—JUNE, 1971

the other in terms of blood, or life, for ever—God's "covenant for ever" (Psalm cv. 8). Abraham's covenant with God was in terms of life. At Mount Moriah God was taking the very life-blood out of Abraham, but Abraham was standing to it. He was standing to the very basis of his relationship with God. It was a committal for ever with life itself to God, and the end of that was: "Abraham, my friend".

These are hard things that I am saying, and beyond our present attainment, I know. Not one of us would claim to have reached this point. Nevertheless, this is what God is working towards.

Friendship, further, means this: confidence in the other, when He neither explains His way, nor can we understand what He is doing. Of course, that is friendship at its best in human terms. If there is true friendship, a friend may not always explain to you why he or she takes a certain course, but you have come to trust that one so much that you do not want an explanation. You are ready to believe, without an explanation, that that one knows what he or she is doing, and you have perfect confidence in that one. It is friendship, even when the other one is silent and saying nothing.

There is a slight reflection of this in the life of Mr. Hudson Taylor. After having been in China, away from this country and from his wife, for a long time, he came home and his wife met him at the ship. They got into a conveyance together, and, of course, you would have thought that at once he or she would engage in voluminous conversation on all that had happened during the years they were apart. But they took that journey in absolute silence—and *neither was offended!* Not one word passed between them, but that was the deep, deep understanding of true fellowship. Oh, for something like that with the Lord! He is silent, and that silence is a most testing thing to us. Why does He not speak? Why does He not act? Why does He not do something? He is silent and inactive, and seems to be indifferent. Ah, to believe Him then is the stuff of friendship, a constituent of true friendship.

"Abraham believed God." You notice that that is connected with this very thing, the offering of Isaac. To have confidence in a friend when the friend seems to be mysterious, strange, inexplicable, un-understandable, reserved, silent, is a constituent indeed of true friendship.

But Abraham looked beyond the present and the immediate, and said in his heart: 'This is not everything. This is not the whole story. This is not the end, because it is not the end of God. Even if it is death'—oh, wonderful triumph of faith!—even if I have to slay that son in whom everything for me

is centred, nevertheless, God is God, and He can raise the dead. Even if Isaac is there, dead, God can raise him. I look beyond death, beyond the present situation which may seem to have shattered all hope, and I see God as reaching further on. I believe God. I do not understand, and am not able to explain, but I believe God.'

That is very testing, and I say that it is beyond every one of us, but this is the basis of the ultimate relationship with God. Surely this is the gold of the new Jerusalem!

But what about Isaac? He was the new hope, the link in the chain of God's whole dispensational movements, and the embodiment of this friendship.

Young brothers and sisters, you are the next link in the chain of God's gifts and God's testimony on this earth. Do put your feet down on the ground of the link before. Take up the testimony of Abraham, and take this position: 'I, not as something in myself, not beginning nor ending with me, but just as a link in this mighty chain of the ages, commit myself without reserve to my God, for life and with my life.' If you will do that you are the new hope of the next phase.

Of course, behind Abraham we are seeing God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and we all know so well that any hope we have today is because God raised His Son from the dead. But that is not only a truth concerning Christ. It is a law of God's ways all through history—that something is baptized into death, and in that baptism the testing of heart relationship with God goes on. And that is the point. When Jesus was baptized into death on the Cross, it was the ultimate test of His heart relationship with His Father. His heart broke on that—but, oh! we are all so glad that the very last utterance was: "Father, into thy hands . . ." (Luke xxiii. 46). That is triumph! He is through! Earlier He had cried: "My God, my God!", but now He is saying: "Father". It was a test, the ultimate, final test of His heart relationship with His Father—and, mark you, every baptism into death is that.

We are being found out, dear friends, by deep and terrible testings on the cross of baptism into death as to where our hearts are; whether they are in things, or in God; whether our life is bound up in some *thing*, or whether it is with God.

You see, that was the point with Isaac. After all, it was proved that Abraham was bound up with much more than Isaac, for he was bound up with God. 'All right!', said Abraham. 'Everything seemed to have been centred in Isaac, but if Isaac goes, I still have God.'

What is our life bound up with? Is it things? Is it life work? What is it? We shall be tested as to

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

whether it is the Lord who has our hearts. If He has, we are not going to fight for our own ways, our own ends, our own interests or our own ideas, even in the work of God. It is the Lord who has to take pre-eminence over all things, and over us. Isaac embodied that position with Abraham.

Oh, dear friends, see to it that your heart is like that toward your Lord! If it is, you have the basis of this glorious end: 'My friend, My friend.' Is that worth having? Surely it is, and that he should say at the last: 'Come in, My friend!'

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JULY-AUGUST, 1971

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CONTENTS

'T. A-S.' AN APPRECIATION	69	THE REALITY OF THE WORD OF FAITH	79
THE MEMORIAL SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD	72	FOR BOYS AND GIRLS	82
THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST (v)	74	THE GLORY OF GOD (I)	83
		RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT WE HAVE	87

'T. A-S.' AN APPRECIATION

(By H. F.)

AFTER forty years of active association with brother Austin-Sparks in the things of God, it fell to me to lead the praiseful funeral service on April 19th, when a large number gathered at Honor Oak to magnify the Lord for our brother's long life and fruitful service. During most of those years I have been a contributor to *A Witness and A Testimony*, so I have gratefully accepted the opportunity of writing a short appreciation of our brother and his work for God.

Those who are familiar with his books will recollect that one of them is entitled *The School of Christ*. The very words suggest his conception of what the Christian life is all about, for He taught that God's principal purpose for us all is directed towards eternity and directed to conforming us to the image of His Son. Brother Sparks was able to help so many of the disciples in Christ's school because throughout his many years of service he was ready to occupy the place of pupil as well as teacher.

His discipleship began when, at seventeen years of age, he walked dejectedly down a Glasgow street on a Sunday afternoon and stopped to listen to some young people witnessing in the open air. That very night he committed his life to the Saviour, and the next Sunday found himself standing with the same eager young Christians in their open-air meeting. He continued with them, and before long opened his mouth to speak some simple words of testimony, so entering on a life of preaching the Gospel which lasted for sixty-five years.

Those years were filled with many activities for God, but preaching was his greatest gift and his chief joy. He read widely in his desire for spiritual understanding, and above all he studied his Bible, always in an eager quest for the treasures new and old which can be found there by those who are instructed in the kingdom of heaven. One of his first choices for the supplementary hymn book which he prepared for use at the Honor Oak Christian Fellowship Centre was the hymn which carries

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

as its refrain Pastor John Robinson's famous reminder to the Mayflower pilgrims that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word". How often we sang those inspiring words at the beginning of an Honor Oak Conference! And how often they proved true to the appreciative listeners!

Brother Sparks always set great store on "revelation", by which he meant not the original disclosure of truth by inspired writers of the Scriptures, but Spirit-given illumination and insight into what the Word really teaches. For this reason most of his books, and almost all the articles published in this magazine were transcriptions of spoken messages which had been given with some real sense of divine enabling: they seemed to him to be more likely to have a spiritual impact if they came not only from studying but also from involvement in some practical situation. Probably his greatest helpfulness was when he was speaking of his own experiences, drawing lessons from what he had learned, not from study only, but from what had happened to him in Christ's school, where the Father treats His children with that chastening, or child-training, which alone can prepare them for true sonship according to the pattern of the perfect Son. He was often able to interpret to people the meaning of what they had been going through, showing them the significance and purpose of God's dealings with them.

Especially in his earlier years, brother Sparks used to lay great emphasis on the need for the inward application of the Cross to the life of the believer. He preached a Gospel of full salvation by simple faith in Christ's sacrifice, but he further stressed that the man who knows cleansing by the blood of Jesus should also allow the same Cross to work in the depths of his soul in order to release him from himself, and lead him into a less carnal and more spiritual walk with God. He himself had gone through a crisis of self-undoing by his acceptance of the Cross's verdict on his old nature, and had found this crisis to be the introduction into an altogether new enjoyment of Christ's life so great that he could only describe it as "an open heaven". In the church life of the people among whom he ministered he had also seen a striking transformation produced by this message of the Cross to the believer: it was no wonder, therefore, that he took every opportunity of affirming that there is no other way into the full experience of the will of God than by union with Christ in His death. Again and again he would revert to the teaching of Romans vi, not just as a favourite topic, but out of a conviction that such union was the

sure means of knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.

The Cross is always painful, so we can appreciate that brother Sparks often found God's dealings with him hard to bear. Until 1950 he was frequently prostrate with pain, and unable to continue his work; yet again and again he was raised up, sometimes literally from a sick bed, and no one could fail to recognize the added spiritual impact which came from such a background. We prayed much for him during those years, but with no lasting relief, until he was able to have the surgical treatment which proved to be God's gracious means of answering our prayers, so that from then on he had a further twenty years of activity in many lands, and until his last illness was a remarkable example of how divine life can energize the mortal body.

For various reasons many other sufferings came into his life, but this was consistent with his own teaching that in the School of Christ one learns more by suffering than by study or listening to messages. If, however, the Cross involves suffering, it is also the secret of abundant grace, as he certainly proved. His last annual motto, prepared for this year of 1971, was devoted to the theme of the sufficiency of God's grace. In November he wrote an editorial in this paper, recording the fact that for him 1970 had been a year of unusual pressure and difficulty. Perhaps as an onlooker I may be permitted to comment that in the eyes of those nearest to him it was also a year of new and fuller evidence of the grace of God, and that for my part I have been left with blessed memories of fellowship in conversation and prayer which could never have been possible between us without the triumph of divine grace. To God be the glory!

The Cross is not only painful; it is unifying. Brother Sparks believed and preached that by it the individual believer is not only led into an enlarging personal enjoyment of resurrection life, but also into a true integration into the fellowship of the Church which is Christ's body. He could never think of himself as an isolated Christian, nor of assemblies as isolated groups, but he tried to keep before him the divine purpose of redemption, which is the incorporation of all believers into vital membership of the one body. It has sometimes happened that Christians most anxious to express this oneness have yet contradicted its spirit by being betrayed into an attitude of superiority towards other Christians, so allowing themselves to be wrongly divided from their fellows in Christ. We here have had to confess our own failures in this respect, realizing that our very eagerness to be

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

faithful to the Scriptural revelation of what the Church ought to be may have unintentionally produced something of a separateness among the people of God. If brother Sparks at times tended in this direction, he certainly moved farther and farther away from it as he came nearer to eternity, being growingly careful to show a proper appreciation of all true believers, whatever their connection.

He must have been tempted at times to move away from practical fellowship with the church here at Honor Oak, for perhaps we limited him and we occasionally irked him, but God gave him grace never to succumb to this understandable temptation: he stayed with us to the end, keeping the bond of fellowship intact, showing a loving interest in the coming generation, and taking his share with us in worship and prayer so long as he was physically able. We owe much to his prayers for us, and he was deeply appreciative of the prayer support which we were able to give him, especially in his conference ministries in many places. His last messages to the church, entrusted to me from his sick bed, were of great gratitude for our prayers. In the final days of great weakness, when he often seemed unable to cope with any other sort of communication, he never failed to give a whispered "Amen" when prayer was made, showing that when everything else was growing increasingly unreal, he could still respond to the great reality of prayer "in the name".

In fact, prayer had been his life, even more than preaching: in this matter he laid a foundation for the work and set a standard which by God's grace we will seek to maintain. While he was still pastor of the local Baptist church he used every Tuesday to travel up to spend the lunchtime praying with his two colleagues, George Paterson and George Taylor, who both worked professionally in town at that time. After the church had moved into the present premises in 1926, first Mr. Paterson and then Mr. Taylor resigned their posts in order to be fully free for spiritual work, which left still more opportunity for the united prayer which became a prominent feature both of life in the church and also in the adjoining Guest House.

To brother Sparks prayer had many aspects, as is shown by his book *In Touch with the Throne*. He set us an example of the prayer which is adoration, not requesting or interceding, but just offering to God the worship and love which are His due; he constantly stressed the importance of what he called "executive prayer", by which he meant not just wishful thinking with the tag of "Amen" at its end, but the bold claiming of God's promises

in the name of the Lord; he introduced many of us to the reality of "prayer warfare", for he knew that only by getting to grips with the unseen enemies of God's will can the Church apply Christ's victory to actual situations. Because prayer is a battle he was sometimes saddened when our prayer meetings tended to flag, but he would rally us anew to the fight, and was always ready to rejoice when we seemed to break through into the victory of faith and to get "in touch with the throne".

Perhaps one of the earliest of his books can best give us a real clue to his whole life and ministry. It is called *The Centrality and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This was where he began, and this was where he ended, for it became noticeable in his closing years that he lost interest in subjects and concentrated his attention on the person of Christ. Christ is central! None of us will claim always to have been "on centre", and he certainly made no such claim, but it was his life's objective and the aim of all his preaching and teaching to recognize that centrality and bow to that supremacy. At his funeral service there were hundreds who responded wholeheartedly to the suggestion that brother Sparks had helped them to get to know Christ in fuller and more satisfying ways. If anyone can make men realize something more of the worth and wonder of Christ, so that they love Him more and serve Him better, then such a one has not lived in vain. Many worldwide can truthfully say that through the spoken or written words of 'T. A-S.' this is what happened to them and, especially with those who first trusted Christ as Saviour through his ministry, they will be his rejoicing in the day of Jesus Christ. Moreover, some of the truths, which were by no means accepted when he proclaimed them years ago, have now become widely accepted among evangelical Christians, so it is possible that in the long run his ministry may prove to have been more fruitful than at the time appeared to himself or to others. It is the steward's business to be faithful, and that he sought to be: only the Master is competent to judge of his success.

The very first message which I heard him give in 1924 was an appeal to those present to press on towards the mark for the prize, and it concluded with a reference to the abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom which is promised in II Peter i. 11. Now, after forty-seven more years of the joys and trials of living for Christ, he has finished his course, and we trust that his entrance has indeed been rich and abundant. Although he has gone from us, his message still brings its challenge to

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

us who are left behind, and although his lips are now silent, his prayers for us will still be answered.

There seemed something significant in the fact that he went to be with Christ immediately after the Easter holiday, for the closing service of our Easter Monday Conferences was always a highlight, as many who were present will agree. Brother Sparks could give long messages, and often did so, but his closing message then was invariably brief and to the point. The point was so often the Second Coming of Christ, and as we gathered in large numbers around the Lord's Table and concluded with a triumphant song about "The hope of the coming of the Lord", truly heaven came down and glory

filled our souls. On this Easter Monday there was no such meeting, but early on the following morning our brother passed peacefully into the presence of Christ, to await there the moment when the hope will have become a glorious reality and we shall all together meet the Lord "in the air".

Brother Sparks' voice is no longer heard among us, but at the funeral service the voice of his Lord and ours seemed to ring through our halls, crying "Surely I come quickly!" As one man the whole concourse answered together: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." On this note we went out into the sunshine to lay our brother's body to rest and to sing triumphantly round his open grave: "One day He's coming; Oh, glorious day!"

THE MEMORIAL SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD

AS it was not possible for a number of friends to be present at the funeral of Mr. T. Austin-Sparks, we felt it right to arrange for a special thanksgiving service to be held on May 1st. This took place at Honor Oak and was blessed with fine weather, as also the funeral had been. Mrs. Sparks and her family were present, and the halls were filled to capacity with friends who had gathered from near and far, including some from France and Holland.

We commenced at 2.30 p.m. with the wonderful hymn of praise: "Christ is risen! Hallelujah!", and the note of thanksgiving was sustained throughout the whole time, although of course some of the recollections of our beloved brother's long life and fruitful ministry were very moving.

Mr. C. Fischbacher, an old and valued friend who had travelled down from Scotland, read the Scriptures from Philippians iii. 7-14, a passage which had frequently been on brother Sparks' lips. Following the reading, Mr. Paul Wolff from Strasbourg led us in prayer. Mr. Wolff has had long associations with Honor Oak and Kilcreggan, and served brother Sparks as his interpreter at the Swiss Conferences. He was enabled of the Spirit to lift the whole gathering into true worship in which all the glory was given to God, so setting a tone for the whole service.

Naturally there were many cables and letters from sympathetic friends: it was not possible for more than two to be read, one from the Atlantic States Christian Convention in the U.S.A., and the

other from the elders of *Jehovah Shammah* at Madras, India. Mr. Fred Flack, who works in India and the Far East, read these letters to us, adding his own tribute in which he confirmed what the Indian brothers had written about the rich blessing which many had received through brother Sparks' visits to that land, as well as through his printed ministry. Mr. Flack spoke also of how a door of opportunity had opened for him in the Philippines through brother Sparks' presence and ministry of the Word in Manila. He then led us in further prayer, this time offering thanks for all God's mercies to Mr. and Mrs. Sparks in their numerous journeys to carry God's message East and West, committing to Him the many lives touched and influenced by our brother's labours.

Following this, some reminiscences were given by Mr. John Paterson, the younger son of the man who, until he went to be with Christ in 1951, was brother Sparks' closest colleague. Continuing, Mr. Paterson said that his sense of outstanding indebtedness to brother Sparks was for what he could best describe as "The Grand Design", that is, the realization, based on the Scriptural phrase "the eternal purpose", that God is working to a plan. He stated that what he had personally received and what he is quite clear that he did not get anywhere else, indeed what he barely heard hinted at anywhere else, was the sense of things hanging together in the spiritual life, all being underlaid by one single purpose and moving towards one single goal which God has set for Himself. In this way

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

he had, he felt, been given an insight into "the goings of God", and further asserted that those who had come to see something of this eternal purpose of God had found themselves striking a distinctive note among God's people wherever they went. He proceeded to stress that, although brother Sparks had laid down spiritual principles for us, he had not described the way in which they should be put into operation, but had left us with a research frontier, so that the task of the present generation is to get from God guidance as to how this should best be done.

After this, we rose to sing our second hymn: "Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts", and then Mr. Harry Foster spoke of brother Sparks as a pupil, as well as a teacher, in *The School of Christ*, remarking that perhaps the most helpful feature of his preaching was when he was able to interpret to people the divine meaning of their own experiences, explaining to them from the Word just what lay behind the things they had been going through. Those who were perhaps puzzled as to what it was all about received fresh understanding of God's intentions and an interpretation of how God was dealing with them in the light of His eternal purpose. Mr. Foster reminded us that while brother Sparks' chief gift was concerned with a teaching ministry, he was deeply concerned to win men for Christ, not only in his teenage witnessing activities, but all through his life, until he fulfilled his very last preaching engagement this year, which was to a group of London City missionaries. He had a wonderful ability to convey the nearness of the Lord, and the melting tenderness of His love, which has left fragrant memories to those who listened on such occasions. "The old, old story of Jesus and His love" was ever new and precious to him.

Mr. Foster made no apology for speaking entirely about the past, since many friends were gathered especially to express their gratitude to

God for all His blessings, but he pointed out the need to face the future, and for this purpose introduced two of the younger generation.

The first was Mr. Roger Forster, who gave a brief message on the passage of Scripture which had been read earlier, particularly stressing the need for the singleness of purpose represented by the phrase: "This one thing" (Philippians iii. 13). He said that he had first met brother Sparks thirteen years ago, and after some hours of fellowship in which each told the other of God's dealings with him, brother Sparks closed the time with prayer. He knew that Mr. Forster was going to take a meeting, really a very small affair with a handful of youngsters, but he prayed for the coming ministry as though it was the most important in all the world, as though indeed it might be the last. By that prayer he conveyed this quality of dealing with each apparently trivial moment as truly important in God's eternal purpose, and though Mr. Forster could not claim always to have lived at that level, he was constantly reminded, and wished to stress to all present, that the true spirit of Christianity is the maintained attitude of "this one thing". The "one thing" is, of course, the prize, and the prize is Christ Himself. Mr. Forster sought to reinforce Mr. John Paterson's earlier plea that we should try to discover from God how to bring the power of His eternal purpose right down into this confused, permissive age of ours. Paul found how to do it in the first century; brother Sparks sought to exemplify it in his generation; now, although in such new conditions, the present generation must heed the call to serve God in the same way.

To follow this, Mr. Alan Barrow, another of the new generation, brought the whole matter to God in a final prayer of thanksgiving and rededication to the "one thing" of God's eternal purpose. On this note the service ended as with great enthusiasm we sang: "HOW GREAT THOU ART!"

URGENTLY NEEDED!

Men (and women) of stature—(Isaiah xlv. 14; Ephesians iv. 13). In whom the Cross has done a deep work as to self-interest. Who are not so concerned to preach, or to try and influence others to a doctrine or theory, but whose main influence will be one of LIFE. Who have come to know the Lord in a way of proving. Whose reaction to every situation, circumstance, and proposition is: 'Does it

glorify God?', and whose Touchstone by which all things are tested and determined is: 'Can it work out to an increase of Christ?' For such there is a pressing need, in the Church, in the Lord's work, and in all the nations.

Enquire in The Secret Place. Basis of consideration: Romans vi.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Switzerland, 1970

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST (V)

OUR HEAVENLY VOCATION

Reading: Matthew iii. 13-iv. 11

AS you know, we are in these mornings occupied with the Holy Spirit's biography of Jesus Christ which He is writing in the spiritual history of believers. Last time we commenced a new chapter in this biography, the chapter which contains the baptism, the anointing and the temptation of the Lord Jesus, which, as we saw, are three parts of one thing. Each depends upon the other, and they should never be separated, but, because of lack of time, we had to break off after the second part. So now we shall take part three, the temptation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness.

It is very important that we should recognize what is the setting of the temptation, for it is not something in itself, nor just an incident in the life of the Lord Jesus. It has a very long history, going right back to the Garden of Eden and the first Adam.

May I just say here, to help you in your Bible reading, that it is always important to see any part of the Scripture in relation to the whole, and to see how it fits in to the whole revelation. This is a very special example, for this temptation in the wilderness, as I have just said, takes us back into the Garden of Eden and brings us alongside of the first Adam. As you know, that man was put on probation. The question he was going to answer was: Would he live by Divine life, or would he live in himself and not in God? Would it be a matter of *God* being everything, or, as Satan suggested, man being self-sufficient. That was the issue of the two trees. The one tree, the tree of life, was a symbol of the Divine life by which God wanted man to live, and the other tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the symbol of man being sufficient in himself. So it was a question of whether man would be absolutely dependent upon Divine life, or whether he would depend upon himself. Well, we know that Adam failed, and the immediate result was that he was driven from a garden into a wilderness, and the Lord said that the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles—in fact, everything that spoke of a curse upon the earth. So the first

Adam, because of this wrong choice of life, found himself in a wilderness, and the wilderness represents man making a false choice. Adam broke down in his probation.

Now we pass over some centuries and come to Israel, and this same issue was presented to them. It is the key to their history. When they were brought out of Egypt into a wilderness for forty years (and I hope you are reading Matthew iv in this: Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, so the same principle is there) the question was: Would they live by Divine life, or, in rebellion, seek to be self-sufficient? Well, we know that in that probation Israel also failed.

So God presents the same question to a man and to a nation: "Will you live by My life, or will you be sufficient in yourself?" The wilderness is certainly a good place to test that! God is very practical. If He puts us in a wilderness the question does indeed become very practical: Can we meet the situation here, or will it only be possible by God being our sufficiency? That was the question with the first Adam and the first nation, at least, it was the first nation so far as the Bible is concerned.

Now we come to the third thing. First Adam, then Israel, and then the last Adam, and we find Him in the very place where both the first Adam and the first nation failed. He is in a wilderness, and He also is on probation for forty days and forty nights. You know that the number forty in the Bible always means probation, a time of testing. Now the issue with the last Adam is exactly the same as it was with the first: Will He live in absolute dependence upon God His Father, or will He take up this life-vocation in His own strength? That test was a very practical one, for it becomes very practical if you have not had anything to eat for forty days and forty nights! It is a matter of how you will get something to eat, for it looks as though you will die. So at that point it was a question of life or death, but the question, of course, was deeper than just the matter of bread, which is what we come to here: "Man shall not live by bread alone." It was a question of whether He

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

would face this life work just on a natural basis or on a Divine basis, of whether He would try to find the resources in Himself alone, or in His Father.

The Lord Jesus answers that in John's Gospel when in chapter five He says: "The Son can do nothing *out from himself*", for that is the force of the Greek word. It is not in Him to do it, and that is the position that He has accepted voluntarily—absolute dependence upon His Father. "The works that I do, I do not *out from Myself*. The words that I speak I do not speak *out from Myself*. It is the Father who doeth the works, and it is the Father who speaks the words." Jesus had accepted that position, but there was a tremendous battle connected with it.

That is the issue which confronts every one of us, and it ought to be the issue governing the life of every believer. We were saying that we were all called to the same vocation, and that the service of God is gathered up into one thing, which is bringing the Lord Jesus into a situation. That is the service of God comprehensively. Can you do that of yourself? Can we bring the Lord into a situation in our own strength, in our own wisdom, out from our own resources? Well, you know the answer to that! The very justification of your being a Christian is that through you the Lord is brought into this world, that where you are the Lord comes in. He comes in through you against all the forces of this world and of Satan, and it is because you are there that He comes in. Now, if that were put to you individually, what would you say? 'No, *impossible!* That can never be where I am concerned!'

I think there is a lot of history behind that. The Lord takes away our own strength and our own wisdom, and makes us dependent upon Him. That is the principle of heavenly vocation.

Now we come to the three temptations, and we must remember what is the issue that is involved. The issue is vocation, that for which we are here, and, as I have said, we are here to make a place for the Lord.

These three temptations are immediately connected with that vocation. We must see how each temptation is related to this vocation, because the object explains the methods of Satan. Do you understand that? Satan knows what our presence means to his kingdom. He knows quite well why we are here, just as he knew why the Lord Jesus was here, and so he must defeat that end in some way. He works very subtly and increases his temptation as he goes on, but he knows what he is after at the end.

The whole question is that of the basis of life. The basis of the Christian survival, and the great basic factor, is Divine life, and Satan has always wanted to defeat that. In the Garden of Eden and with Israel his one object was to defeat Divine life.

LIFE FOR OUR VOCATION

In the first temptation Jesus is in physical weakness through lack of food, and this is a question of His very life. Satan comes to Him in His weakness and says: 'If what was said at the Jordan be true, and You are the Son of God, command these stones that they may be made bread.' What did Jesus answer? "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The first thing about this life-bread is that it is a different kind of life from natural life. That is what is hidden in this first temptation. There is a great deal of difference between natural life and Divine life. I think we should notice that the Lord Jesus, in quoting that Scripture from Deuteronomy viii, quoted it correctly. Presently Satan is going to quote the Scriptures, but he is going to do so incorrectly, and that is one of his ways. He takes up Divine things and gives them a twist. In quoting that Scripture the Lord said: "Man shall not live by bread alone." He did not say: 'You do not need any natural bread.' There are certain kinds of Christians today, and have always been through the ages, who think that they are very spiritual because they starve themselves. They fast as much as they can, usually looking very miserable. They are always very finicky about their food—and they think that is being very spiritual! But the Lord does not say that that is what we are to do. He says that there is the natural bread, but that is not the only thing, for there is a bread which is much more important, and that is the *true* bread. That is quite different. How men are trying to fulfil the work of God on natural grounds! Their resources are natural resources which are produced by themselves, and the Lord says: 'No!' There is all the difference between the earthly and heavenly worlds, between natural life and Divine life. But that life is not only different; it is something extra. It is not bread only but something more than that, something extra to the natural. You may have your breakfast in the morning—and there is nothing wrong in having a breakfast, or any other meal—but if you think that you are going to do the work of God on a good breakfast, you make a mistake. Do you see what I mean? This is something extra to the

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

natural, something much more than anything that natural food can give us. It is the great Divine extra.

You see, we are repeating the life of Christ, and I can give you examples from His life. Just take one: His meeting with the woman of Samaria. The Lord Jesus, being wearied with His journeys, sat on the well and sent His disciples into the city to buy bread. Then the woman came from the city, and you know the conversation they had and how the whole of the life of the Lord Jesus was poured out to that woman like living water. As He spoke of heavenly things, as He gave to that woman the heavenly secrets, and as He spoke about the heavenly life, deeper than that well and more eternal than the water of that well, although it was Jacob's Well, all His weariness went and He was a renewed Man. The disciples came back to Him with their loaves and said: 'Master, eat.' Then they looked at Him. 'Has anyone given Him bread to eat? What has happened to Him? Why, He is a new man and He does not want our bread.' You see, He had been talking about life, and it is no use talking about life if you are not an example of it. He said: "I have meat to eat that you know not. . . . My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" (John iv. 32, 34). Think about that for a little and remember that you are dealing with these eternal principles. This is the *extra* bread, which is more than the natural.

Some of us who minister a great deal find that when we face new ministry we often feel very weary, and naturally the question is: 'Can we do it? Can we get through that long conference?' But when we get to the end of the conference we have new life. It really *is* like that. The fact is that when tomorrow night comes and this conference is over, I shall have just as much in hand as I have given all the week—and we shall want another week! Well, I am not an example, but I am trying to enunciate the principle: "Not by bread alone, but . . ." This is one of those very many occasions when those two words are put one against another—"Not . . . but . . ."

There is one other thing: This Divine life is a matter of faith. The Lord Jesus said: "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Well, there is the word in writing in the Bible, but do you think it is enough for it to be the Word of God, written in the Bible? No, you have got to lay hold of it by faith, and we have to lay hold of this life by faith. You remember the woman who came to the Lord Jesus in the crowd and said: "If only I could touch the hem of his garment I would be made whole", and although the multi-

tude was pressing on Him, there was no one else in that multitude who received that life. It was that woman's hand of faith, and the Lord Jesus said: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." *Laying hold* of the word of life by faith is something that we must ever do. Paul says: "Lay *hold* on eternal life" (I Timothy vi. 12), for it is there. Really exercise faith about it.

These things may seem very simple to you, but they are very important and real.

The passage that the Lord Jesus used in answering Satan is from Deuteronomy viii. 2 and 3, and you need to look at the setting of it. It is at the end of the forty years in the wilderness, and says: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

What have we here? The people are not going into the wilderness now, for they are going over Jordan into the land, but there is a history behind them. For forty years God has proved that there is a life other than the natural. Do you not think that that is a good thing? You might say to me: 'You are talking about this Divine life, but *prove* it.' Well, I can give you more than forty years—but no, I am not talking about myself. I am talking about the history of the Church, and that is two thousand years. Has the Church continued through these many centuries by its own strength? Has the Church been in many a wilderness? Has there been much starvation? Yes, again and again the Church has been in a terrible wilderness, with death all around, and with nothing in this world to support it. It could have died again and again, but it has not died. It is alive today, and there is a great history of the Lord's Divine support. And what is true of the Church is true of the history of many a believer. Many of you could say: 'If it had been left to me I would have been dead today. My very survival is a testimony to something supernatural.' Is that true? Oh, yes, it is true, and it has to be true to the end.

So here we have a history behind what the Lord Jesus is saying, and He is able to put the strong proof of history into His words when He answers Satan.

Now the Lord Jesus is in a wilderness, but what

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

is He going to have to meet in the next three and a half years? I do not think that Satan is going to stop at anything to kill the testimony of Divine life in Jesus. Again and again he makes an attack upon His life in every possible way in order to quench the testimony of Jesus, but He goes through. He lives, and He lives today, for that Divine life has triumphed over everything.

That biography has to be written in your heart and in mine. We are in a wilderness—or do you think that your Christian life is the Garden of Eden, with everything so lovely and with everything in the world that you can want? Is that how it is with you? Well, of course, it is very nice here at Hilterfingen, but you know quite well that you have to go back. You may feel like Peter: “Let us build three tabernacles and stay in Hilterfingen for the rest of our lives!”, but it may rain next week, and, even if it does not, you know you have to go back to your difficult situation. That may be very much like a spiritual wilderness, but you have this great truth: there is a Divine life, which is a different life, an extra life, and you can live by that life wherever you are.

I suppose there are few more difficult situations than those in which our dear brother Watchman Nee has been for eighteen years. As far as we know, he is alive, and I believe that his spiritual testimony is still alive—and that is a miracle. We may not have his experience, but we may know the wilderness, and God *can* prepare a table in the wilderness.

The point, then, of the first temptation was this: Would the Lord Jesus use His own powers to save His own life, or would He depend upon God? Later on He will say: “He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew x. 39), and that is the principle. Satan has failed on that ground, so he is going to change his position, for he is not giving up yet.

THE METHODS OF FULFILLING OUR VOCATION

Now we come on to the methods of fulfilling our vocation. Satan took the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said: “Cast thyself down.” Now Satan quotes Scripture, trying to take Christ’s own ground and defeat Him there: ‘You believe in the Scripture, do You? You are thinking of the Word of God. All right! Now it is written: “He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone.”’ I say that Satan misquotes the

Scripture, for is that what Psalm xci really says? If you read that Psalm you will find that Satan left out the most important clause: “He shall give his angels charge over thee, *to keep thee in all thy ways*” (verse 11). There are some ways in which the Lord will not keep people, but Satan leaves that out.

Yes, Satan is quoting Psalm xci, and what are “the ways” in that Psalm? I think it is very impressive and almost humorous. That Psalm begins by saying: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High”, and *that* is the man referred to throughout the Psalm. Jesus had chosen to make His dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and every Christian knows what that is. You have a hidden life with God, and you abide in that. Have you a hidden life with God, a life that this world does not see, a sanctuary with God, a secret place with the Most High? Will you come out from that? You see the subtlety of Satan! ‘Come out from Your secret place and adopt some worldly methods of fulfilling your vocation! Cast Yourself down and everybody will say: “This is something very wonderful!”, and You will have all the people in Jerusalem rushing to You. They will say that You have come down from heaven, and You will be the most popular man in Palestine!’—and it will have been done by a trick. It would mean that the Lord Jesus was party to something in the natural man which likes to have evidences and proofs, for, you see, everyone in Jerusalem sought for a sign. They said to Him: ‘Show us a sign and we will believe. Give us some evidence. Give us some proof that we can see and we will be Your followers.’ This is the temptation: Use some methods in the work of the Lord which will make you popular, something that will appeal to the sensational in man, some tricks. Do you see what I am talking about? Is this not what the Church is trying to do? It is trying to recover its lost power by a lot of tricks, by playing to this thing in man that wants the sensational. Surely we can see that this is what is happening! The methods that are employed in the work of God to attract the crowds, to get big meetings, are to satisfy this desire for proofs and evidences. Perhaps never in the history of the world has there been so much of this. I do not want to be critical, nor to judge too much, but I have a very great question about the guitar, and a lot of other things that are employed to try to make the work of God successful.

That was what was in this pinnacle of the temple. You will get the crowds if you do that kind of thing but you may come out from the secret place of the

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Most High, that hidden place from the world which is the place of power.

I can only just drop these hints, but I know what I am talking about, and I do believe, dear friends, that all we need is the power of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel. I do not believe that it is necessary to have all this other stuff. I believe that where there is reality, people who really want reality will go there, and people who do not want reality, well, just let them stay away! Perhaps you do not agree with that, but I am talking on Divine principles, on the principles of the life of Jesus Christ, and I am saying that these principles of Christ have to be written in His Church.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR VOCATION

We come to the third temptation, and Satan is now moving his position. He is gradually being uncovered and it is now going to be manifest what it is he is really after. He himself knows what he has been after all the time, and he has been moving steadily towards it. He took the Lord Jesus up into a very high mountain. I do not know, of course, how that was done, though I do not think that it was done literally. I think that the Lord Jesus was seeing all this in a spiritual way. However, in that high mountain Satan showed the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said: 'I will give You all this if You will fall down and worship me.' Ah, now it has come out! Satan knows what Jesus Christ has come into this world for, and that is to bring in the Kingdom of God. He knows that this One is destined to be the Divinely-appointed Lord of the universe. If Satan knew the Scriptures in Deuteronomy and Psalm xci, he also knew them in Psalm ii, which shows the final exaltation of God's Son. Satan knew that before the world was. His demons know this One, for on one occasion they said to Him: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?" (Luke viii. 28). So the ultimate issue is world dominion, and that is the one thing that Satan is against, for he is the god of this world and he is not going to have that position taken from him by anyone.

But see how clever he is! 'I will give it all to You without You having to go to the Cross. You can have it all without suffering if only You will do one thing—put me in the place of Your God and worship me. And if You do that I know quite well that You will not get the kingdoms of the world. My kingdom is established, and what You came

for will be defeated.' That is what lies behind it all, but what is Satan really saying? 'Compromise with me as the prince of this world'—and if we compromise with this world we are going to lose our spiritual dominion now and afterwards. You see, it is the Church that is going to reign.

There are some things in the Bible that I do not understand. For one thing I do not understand what Paul meant when he said: "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (I Corinthians vi, 2, 3). I do not really understand that, but I do know that it is in keeping with the whole revelation of the New Testament: "If we suffer with him we shall reign with him" (II Timothy ii. 12). He will give us the Throne with Himself.

That is what we are called to, and is the purpose of the vocation: to govern this world in the place of Satan. Is that not a tremendous thing? That is the destiny of the Church. So Satan sees that the way to defeat that destiny is to compromise with the world, but you cannot cast out Satan by Satan, nor can you cast out the world by the world. The Church has tried to do that, and it has lost its position and its power. It is in a poor state today, and the reason is that it has compromised with this world. It may have had a right motive—trying to win the world on its own grounds—but it takes more than a guitar to beat the devil! You will never overcome the world by worldly means and methods.

'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God *only*.' You must give Him the supreme place in this universe. 'And Him *only* shalt thou serve,' not Satan, nor the world.

What is the service of God? Remember Mary's service—bringing the Lord into His right place, taking ground for the Lord and holding it for Him. But what a battle! The enemy and all his powers are set against it, but thank God for the anointing! It is said that the Spirit which had come upon Him *drove* Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, but it does not say: 'to be defeated by the devil'. He was anointed to test out the strength of this great enemy and break it, and the anointing carried Him through in victory.

Dear friends, we have the anointing. Let us believe in it! There is *nothing* impossible with the anointing: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah iv. 6).

T. A-S.

Switzerland, 1970

THE REALITY OF THE WORD OF FAITH

DURING this week, from morning to evening, we have been concerned with realities. We have a risen Lord who loves us, even though He knows us. We have not been gathered here to discuss religion, nor to teach one another pious attitudes, nor to pray pious, unreal prayers, nor to teach one another pious, false humility. We have not been here to speak to one another about illusions, for the Kingdom of God is not in words, but in power.

Reality is the real power. There is not much power in speaking about joy, but there is a lot of power in having joy. There is not a lot of power in speaking about peace, but what a power there is in having and knowing peace! There is not much power in speaking about redemption, but to *have* and to *know* redemption is power indeed!

It is the same with the resurrection. It is one thing to talk about it, but quite another thing to know the power of His resurrection.

That is what we have been gathered around during this week—power. Not the popular conception of power, which is spectacular and emotional. Actually, there is not very much power in working ourselves up emotionally, for if we try to do that we find that it does not last very long, and we come down again. But we do not need to work ourselves up if we know that the Kingdom of God is power and we know that power—the power of eternal life, of reality, of joy, of peace, of righteousness, of the risen Lord Himself. That is the power of reality based upon the mighty acts of God in which men have played no part at all. We read about them in I Corinthians xv. verses 3 and 4: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” As Paul saw that, through the spirit of faith and in living contact with his risen Lord, something wonderful happened. We read his testimony in verse 10: “By the grace of God I am what I am.” Does that sound proud? No, not at all, for it is real. It would have been false humility to say: “By the grace of God, I am nothing.” Is there not more power in the grace of God than that?

“By the grace of God I am what I am.” You know that God’s name is I AM. When He met Moses at the burning bush and Moses asked: “What is Your name?”, the Lord answered: “I

AM.” Now Paul says: “That is also my name—“by the grace of God I am what I am”.”

You see how wonderfully real this is! Now Paul knows what life is, what being in living relationship with the risen Lord means, and so he calls himself “I am”, without pride, full of gratefulness, knowing what he is speaking about. It is a mighty act of grace—“I am what I am. I am, *through* Him, and *in* Him.”

What was Paul? Perhaps you will say he was steadfast. Of course he was, for eternal life is steadfast, so he could not be otherwise. You might say that he was unmovable. Of course he was, for eternal life, the “I AM”, is unmovable. It would be false humility to say: ‘By the grace of God I am very unstable’, or: ‘By the grace of God I never come through any hindrance.’ It is just ridiculous to talk like that, and yet many Christians, perhaps not directly, but indirectly speak and pray like that, which only proves that they speak out from themselves, without Christ, and pray out from themselves, without Christ. Therefore their words and prayers are illusions, not real. It is as if they would say to God: ‘You have done nothing, Lord. You have given me nothing.’

But what about Paul? Paul was “always abounding in the work of the Lord”. Of course he was, for eternal life is like that. Would you like him to testify: ‘By the grace of God I accomplish nothing!’? Would it be humble to speak like that, or pleasing to our risen Lord? Would it have been very humble for him to say: ‘I have done everything I felt I should, but I feel that it was all in vain.’ ‘Ah,’ you say, ‘that is very humble! Nothing comes out of what I do, for I am so small and insignificant.’ You know, when we say that we are insignificant, it almost always proves that we want to be significant!

“By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

We *must* speak like that if we have the spirit of faith, and, therefore, through that spirit we are humble, boasting only of the Lord. We do not speak very much about ourselves, but of the Lord, as Paul did here. It is all real; it is power. Therefore, it is quite reasonable for Paul to say in verse 58 of this chapter: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

I ask you to notice what Paul does not say: ‘My beloved brethren, try to be steadfast, try to be unmovable, and do your very best to be always abounding in the work of the Lord.’ Neither does he say: ‘Be steadfast some day.’ No, he does not talk like that. This is not an appeal to the ‘old man’, but just a reminder to the ‘new man’ to remain what he is, and to use this grace out from what he is in the Lord. It would be a contradiction in terms to say: ‘I have eternal life, but I am not steadfast. I have eternal life, but I am easily moved.’ There is a real logic in the world of realities, and therefore if you have the spirit of faith you cannot speak words of doubt. You must speak as Paul speaks here: ‘By the grace of God you are linked with the risen Lord. You are here now and He is your very life. You share His name and His power, and therefore you are steadfast, and because you are steadfast, *be* steadfast. You are unmovable. Recognize that and *be* unmovable.’

This is the spirit of faith, and is what John means when he says: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (I John v. 4). As we are filled with that spirit of faith, so, even before we enter into any kind of work, we know that it is not in vain, and that it is purposeful. We have done it and accomplished it before we start doing it! It is not an experiment that can be either a success or a defeat, for it is prepared by the Lord. We are what we are in Him, and therefore we are not living in the world of experiments. Jesus did not experiment when He walked down here, for He walked with His Father. He knew that what He was doing would lead to the goal, and we know the same. By the grace of God we are what we are, and His grace has not been in vain. We have worked, but it is the grace of God and not we ourselves, so it bears eternal fruit. That does not make us full of pride, but neither are we humble in an illusory way. We are free to be ourselves in the Lord, giving all the glory to Him, feeling that it is a miracle of grace that we are in touch with reality, out of the world of illusions and in contact with God day by day, doing His work through the spirit of faith, both on good and on bad days.

I once met a lovely young Salvation Army girl. I only met her once, and have never spoken to her, but she made an unforgettable impression upon me. She had blue eyes, fair hair and red cheeks. She was in a tramcar in which I was also travelling. As she sat there her cheeks became redder and redder, her eyes became more and more strained—and as the tram stopped she took out a tract, gave

it to me, and jumped quickly off. She was the Lord’s servant! She did her very best—and I suffered with her! She had been sitting in that tram for ten minutes thinking of the tract in her pocket and of me in the tram, and there was a struggle going on. At the last minute I received the tract and off she jumped!

Well, I am sure that many of you are in that kind of ministry! It is a ministry of pressure, where you are doing your very best—and you wake up every morning hoping that you have no more tracts in your pocket! Ah, there is a better way if you have the spirit of faith. That spirit does not think so much about whether or not you should distribute tracts, but it keeps close to the risen Lord and fills your heart with confidence, so that, as you leave the matter to Him, all fear disappears and you tell Him about the tracts: ‘I have faith in *You*, Lord, and if *You* want me to distribute tracts, *You* will prepare the way. *You* will not only allow me to distribute them, but *You* will remain in me so that my person is a tract. If my person is not a tract, then the tracts I hand out are not perhaps as powerful as they ought to be.’

By the grace of God we are what we are, and in Him we are steadfast and unmovable. Rely on Him! Do not experiment in one way or another, but walk with Him, and He will give you the words to speak.

A friend of mine got a new job in an office about two months ago, and he asked the Lord to give him opportunities to speak for Him, but everyone was so busy and day after day went by without any opportunity being given. He began to be a little troubled, but the Lord gave him grace to remain unmovable, and he told the Lord from his heart: ‘I have faith in Thee, Lord. I believe that at Thine own time Thou wilt open up an opportunity for me. If Thou hast risen from the grave Thou art Master of all things. I will not experiment.’

Then came our friends from Operation Mobilization to buy a Danish ship, and they went to my friend’s office to have all the papers put in order. Then not only just one person, but all the people in that office came into contact daily with people who were buying a ship for use in the work of the Gospel. They had never had that sort of business before, so they asked questions, and my friend could speak about the Lord to one after another, without shivering with fright and without counting how many tracts he still had in his pocket.

By the grace of God we are what we are. His grace is not in vain. “Have faith in God.” Be what you are—a Christian, one who is spiritually risen from the dead, risen from sin, Satan and fear,

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

and living just this very moment with that risen Lord.

An English brother came to us once in Copenhagen and said from the platform: 'I wish missionaries would tell the truth! I always hear wonderful stories from the mission field. They pray and God answers; they are in a difficulty, and God intervenes. I would like them to tell the truth and say: "We were in a difficulty and the Lord did not intervene. We prayed, and it was as if we could get no answer." ' Wonderful stories are good, but not good enough, for they do not convey the whole truth. We live with the risen Lord, so we can have difficulties, we can have darkness, we can have unsolved problems and we can carry burdens. We live with the supreme Lord, but He cannot always spoil us. He must train us, discipline us. He does not answer our prayers, so our faith is tested, but we have Him and we learn. Then the life we have which, in some way, is already full and complete, grows through our experiences, through our testings, through discipline, through unanswered prayers, and through problems, but it is all grace, for the Lord governs everything. He is supreme. He can take the burden away this very moment if He wants to, but if He does not, have faith in Him.

It is very important to speak the word of faith. Do you know what the Lord Jesus said on the very last night? He said: "Righteous Father" (John xvii. 25). That is the last thing that we would have said, for He was being treated in the most unrighteous way, darkness was falling upon Him, and yet He did not say: 'Holy Father', or 'Mighty Father.' He said: "Righteous Father"—'You are right.' That is the word of faith.

We have a risen Lord, but He was crucified, and the marks of the crucifixion can still be seen in His hands and feet. He has given us a Divine calling. Peter defines part of that calling in words that we do not normally like: "For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endures grief suffering wrongfully, for what glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer

for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable—this is *grace*—with God, for even hereunto were ye called" (I Peter ii. 19, 20). Is it not wonderful to realize one's calling? Do you know anything more satisfying for a man than to reach that for which he has been called? He feels life abundant in himself, and satisfaction to the utmost degree.

Here is one part of our calling: To follow our Lord, not grumblingly, not with fear that would paralyse, but with faith.

"By the grace of God I am what I am." I am His. He is my Lord. What an honour to be identified with Him! I have His name, so why should I not share His fate? There is nothing about which to be fearful, but we should rather glory in Him. So James speaks the word of truth and reality, the word of faith, when he says in chapter i: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers *testings*, divers *trials*." That was not a piece of good advice, nor was it James saying something which he did not mean for himself. He meant it, for it is the word of reality, of truth. When we have taken that in there is nothing more that has any power over us. All things belong to us, whether they are the things that are now, things that will come, or death itself. Everything belongs to us, and we belong to Him, and so we say: 'By the grace of God, and that grace only, I am what I am, and His grace has not been in vain. I have worked, yet not I myself, but the grace of God.' And so we go on, steadfast and unmovable, knowing that our labours in Him are not in vain. The Kingdom of God is powerful.

We do not speak very much about joy now, because we have it. We do not speak very much about peace, because we have that, but we talk all the day long about our wonderful Lord in whom we have found everything. We do not say to Him: 'Father, please excuse me. I cannot do Your will because You have not given me the power.' No, rather we say: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth and doeth, through Thee.'

P. M.

Lord Jesus, Intercessor,
O teach us how to pray:
Not wave-like, rising, falling
In fitful clouds of spray.
The mighty tides of ocean
A deeper secret know,
Their currents undefeated move
Whatever winds may blow.

Lord Jesus, Intercessor,
Creator of the sea,
Teach us the tide's great secret
Of quiet urgency.
Spindrift of words we ask not;
But, Lord, we seek to know
The conquering patience of the tides
Whatever winds may blow.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

FIRMLY ANCHORED

SPLASH! As Donald leaned over the side of the ship he could just see where the anchor had fallen into the water, and presently he watched the chain tighten up as the vessel was held firm to its position. Their journey was near to its end; in most of the ports the ship had drawn alongside the quay, but on this occasion they had to wait out in the bay for a whole day, and so the ship was still and steady, riding at anchor.

His friend, a fellow passenger, was not there when the anchor was released, so later on when the two walked around the deck and remarked on the steady position which they were holding, Donald explained it all to him, adding: 'It makes you feel safe, doesn't it, being anchored to the rock?'

Now Donald's friend knew more about anchors than he did, so he immediately challenged this last remark, commenting: 'anchored in the mud would be more correct'. They were both members of a Crusader class, and Donald had often sung the chorus: "We have an anchor . . .", so he rejected his friend's correction, insisting that of course their anchor was embedded in the rock, for otherwise the ship would be drifting away. His friend said that this was nonsense, for the anchor had to grip into the soft sea bottom, and then it could be hauled up again when the ship wanted to sail. Donald disagreed; the argument became fierce, and as neither knew much about it they were glad to see the third officer approaching and decided to ask him.

His answer made fun of Donald's idea, for he confirmed that the anchor was gripping into the muddy bottom, and said that if the bed of the bay had been rock, then their anchor would have just bounced off it, and by now the ship would have been dragging out to sea again.

Oh dear! Was the chorus wrong? Was the Bible perhaps wrong? What could he believe? Donald's sense of doubt and insecurity grew. He felt that he had been misled, and he got into such a state that when the voyage was over and he was back home again he almost decided not to go to Crusaders any more, as he felt that he was not told the truth.

Happily, though, he did go again, and he was sensible enough to ask the leader what was the truth about anchors. The class leader was not sure himself, but he promised to make enquiries, if possible before the coming Sunday.

He found the right man, and when he had put his question he received an answer which helped him in his own spiritual life as well as settling Donald's doubts. Around the world's coasts, including our own, there are lightships which must remain in a fixed position in order to give navigational help to sailors. These lightships do not have an ordinary ship's anchor, the kind that can be raised and lowered, for they are not made to travel, but to remain stationary. For this purpose they have to be held by special anchors which bore into the rock or solid ground, so remaining permanently fixed.

So the Crusader leader was able to explain this to Donald and to point out to him that it all depends what you want to do with your life. If you want to be always moving about spiritually, shifting and drifting from one thing to another, then it will be good enough to have an anchor in the mud; but if you want to be spiritually steadfast, giving out to other travellers a light to guide them on their way, then you must have a different kind of anchor, the one that goes deep down into the rock and stays there.

He hardly needed to add to Donald: 'Of course, Christ is our Rock. If we really lay hold of Him by faith', he said earnestly, 'then it will be true that the billows will not move us and—like the lightship—we shall be grounded firm and true, just as the chorus says.'

This is not only true for Donald, but for every reader of this story. The lightship needs firm ground for its anchor; we need the spiritual Rock, the Lord Jesus, so that we can be anchored firm and deep in the Saviour's love. "Which hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast . . ." (Hebrews vi. 19.)

H. F.

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

THE GLORY OF GOD

I. HOW TO SEE THE GLORY OF GOD

Reading: John xi.

Out of that chapter we will just pinpoint two verses:

"But when Jesus heard it, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (verse 4);

"Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" (verse 40).

"For the glory of God . . . thou shouldst see the glory of God."

YOU probably know that chapters 11 to 17 of this Gospel are chapters of summation, and consummation, that is, a gathering up of everything into finality, and what comes out with great clarity in this consummate part of the Gospel is the priority which governed the whole life, the teaching and the work of the Lord Jesus. It seems that that is what John had in mind when writing, for he placed this priority right at the beginning of his Gospel, worked steadily along that line, and then brought it all out in this full and conclusive way at the end. Although the Lord Jesus had been governed by this priority for thirty years and more, there came a crisis point in His life at which He made a complete adjustment of everything upon this one thing that we are calling the priority, where He determined that everything should be focused upon it, and that there should be no deviation at any point from it.

And what was His all-inclusive priority? It was the glory of His Father—the glory of God.

As I have said, John struck that keynote right at the beginning when, writing after it was all over and seeing the whole content and significance of that life, work, teaching and conduct, he started off by saying: "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (i. 14). That is bringing the Father right into view in the matter of glory. Then John went on writing the Gospel, like a great harmony or symphony tuned to that keynote, and all the way through he kept true to it—the glory of the Father.

And I believe, dear friends, that that is the keynote that the Lord wants me to strike at this time. It is a very considerable burden with me in these days.

THE COMMITTAL OF THE LORD JESUS TO HIS FATHER'S GLORY

Let us turn to the Lord Jesus Himself in this matter. There was in His life that hour of His great committal, which took place at His baptism. He there and then committed Himself *utterly* to the glory of His Father. He gathered every detail of His life from that moment and centred it in this thing, as though He were saying: 'From this moment there is to be not one deflection from that motive and object. My Father's glory is to govern everything.' And it was so.

I. IN HIS INNER LIFE

Firstly, the committal was in His own personal, inner life, in His secret walk with His Father. This is a most impressive thing as you read through the Gospel. You find all the way along that everything is coming out from His personal, secret life with His Father. "The Son", He said, "can do nothing of himself [or, out from himself], *but what he seeth the Father doing*" (v. 19). Mysterious language, but those who know anything about life in the Spirit know what it means. "For what things soever he doeth, *these the Son also doeth*", and not in His own way, but "in like manner." How meticulous and how exact! His committal as to His own relationship with God His Father meant that there was nothing out from Himself, but only that which He knew in His own heart, and from His secret history with God, the Father wanted Him to do and to say. The background, inner sanctuary life with the Father was maintained unbroken.

II. IN HIS CONDUCT

As to His conduct, He behaved Himself on this ground: 'How I behave, how I conduct Myself is going to be altogether a matter of how it touches My Father's glory. The impression I make upon others, what they see in Me and about Me, must never for one moment veil the glory of My Father, hide that glory, or detrimentally affect that glory. My behaviour must always be for the glory of My Father.' This was as to His conduct, His walk. You know, John made a special note of His walk, for it was not just an outward progress. John said:

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even *as he walked*” (I John ii. 6). There was something about His very movements that was governed, and His walk, His movements, His behaviour were always for the glory of His Father.

III. IN HIS WORKS

As to His works, we have already quoted Him: “The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner.” And His words: “The word which ye hear is not mine, *but the Father’s who sent me*” (John xiv. 24).

IV. IN HIS TIME

Then His times for doing things. Ofttimes we read that He put back suggestions from others that He should do things now, at this time. When something seemed to be demanded of Him, and people expected Him to do it at that time, He put it back: “Mine hour is not yet come” (John ii. 4), but He did it very quickly afterwards. He was waiting and in His spirit He was saying: ‘Father, is this Thy time?’ You know, dear friends, you can do a right thing at a wrong time and it just does not work out. We do a lot of things, and they fail because it is not the time for them. You remember the great incident in the Apostle Paul’s life: “They assayed to go into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not” (Acts xvi. 7). They were “forbidden of the Holy Ghost to speak the word in Asia” (Acts xvi. 6). Paul was diverted, for it was not the time. They got to Asia and Bithynia subsequently, in God’s time, and when God’s time is registered things are very much more fruitful, for you do not waste time. When we do things so often in our own time, we really are only putting them off to God’s time, for nothing happens until God wants them done. That is by the way, but that is how the Lord Jesus worked: “Mine hour is not yet”, and then the hour seemed to come so quickly afterwards.

V. IN HIS FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Here He is, moving, speaking, working, timing, by His fellowship with the Father. He brought everything else on to that ground. He brought His family on to the ground of the glory of His Father. The people came to Him after He had been speaking in a house and said: “Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to thee”

(Matthew xii. 47). Now that is a natural appeal. It may be sentimental and quite a right kind of appeal, but wait a minute. He answers: “Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? . . . Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.” He puts it on another ground. ‘How far do My family relationships, as far as I am concerned, reflect the glory of God?’

VI. IN HIS ATTITUDE TO MEN

He was governed in the same way in His attitude towards men. As to the religious world, He would commend what was sincere and go as far as He could with it in sympathy. A young man came and told Him that he had kept all the commandments from his youth up, and Jesus “looking upon him loved him” (Mark x. 17–20). He did not condemn. He was sympathetic to sincerity, but bring hypocrisy into His presence and His commending changed into condemning! There was nothing that brought out His wrath more than hypocrisy in religion, because it is a thing which robs God of His true glory.

VII. IN HIS JUDGMENTS

These are all things that made up the life of the Lord Jesus, and, as you see, His priority governed everything and was over a lot of things. It was over natural judgments—not always sinful or evil judgments, but just natural judgments, when suggestions were made to Him, when persuasion was brought to bear upon Him, and when men projected their minds. But He knew the truth: ‘My thoughts are not your thoughts. My ways are not your ways. There are two worlds. I live in one and you live in the other.’ And so His concern for the Father’s glory often necessitated the setting of natural judgments on one side and seeking His Father’s judgment on the matter.

VIII. IN HIS FEELINGS

Natural feelings had often to be set aside. He understood them all right. We shall come to that in this eleventh chapter of John, with Lazarus and his sisters. He was very sympathetic and He understood how they were feeling. He truly entered into their human life, but when they sought to persuade and influence Him to act simply on the basis of natural feelings, He thrust it back. He stayed away two days, and did not move until the fourth day when, humanly speaking, it was all too late. The sorrow had run its course. He was not unsympathe-

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

tic, as the chapter shows, and yet, because He has some greater thing in view, He could not just surrender to human, natural feelings. He had great principles which were governing Him.

IX. IN HIS PERSONAL INTERESTS

As for His natural, personal interests, He was all the time thrusting them back. It would have been greatly to His personal interest to accept the devil's offer of the kingdoms of this world and the glories thereof, but He repudiated the whole thing. When speaking of His Cross, it might have been to His natural advantage if He had listened to Peter when he said: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matthew xvi. 22). But He said to Simon Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" You see, personal interests must take a back place: but He was not governed by these things, for His constant motive was His Father's glory.

WHAT DOES GLORY MEAN?

Now before I can go on any further I must return you to the definition of that word 'glory'. It may be that you have heard me give this definition before, but I do not know of a better. What does glory mean where God is concerned? What is the meaning of that word 'glory' when it relates to God? It just means the rebound of God's complete satisfaction. When things have answered to His nature, His mind, when He is satisfied, He is delighted, He is well-pleased, then there comes back something of His own satisfaction, His pleasure. You can put that to the test in your own lives, in more ways than one.

Take your Bible and begin at the beginning. When God had created all things for His pleasure, for His glory, and all things were as He intended and commanded, and everything was governed by: 'And so it was . . . and so it was . . . and so it was as the Lord commanded and said it should be', the end of that was: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis i. 31). I would like to have been in the atmosphere of that, in the realm where everything satisfied God, emanated from Him, and there was this sense of His complete satisfaction and pleasure. That is glory!

When we come into the new creation, are born from above, on the ground of our recognition and acceptance of the perfect, finished work of the Lord Jesus for our sin, for our salvation (and very often we are better believers at the beginning than we are later on!), when we come on to that ground

of the new creation in Christ where everything answers to God's pleasure, do we not have the sense of the glory? The beginning of the Christian life is so often like that. While we could not explain it theologically or doctrinally, we feel it! 'It is wonderful to be saved! This is glorious!' It is something that just wells up inside of us. And what is it? It is the Holy Spirit bearing witness to God's satisfaction with His Son whom we have embraced with all the knowledge and understanding of Him that we have. We have accepted the perfection of Himself and His work, and there is a reflection, an emanation, of His glory, the satisfaction of God in our hearts. When we get away from that simple trust in the Lord Jesus the glory often fades—but I must not go on to that for the moment.

Move on in the Bible, and you have God's mind completely and perfectly revealed in pattern form in the creation of the tabernacle in the wilderness. It was meticulously prescribed to a detail, to a pin, to a thread, to a colour, to a position, to a measure, and it was all given by God. And the last chapter of that reads: "As the Lord commanded Moses . . . as the Lord commanded Moses . . . as the Lord commanded Moses." It becomes almost monotonous! It was done as the Lord commanded Moses, and the glory filled the tabernacle. God was satisfied! And you and I know that that tabernacle was only a foreshadowing in type of the Lord Jesus.

We move on to the temple, and, again, the prescription, the pattern, was given to David, and it was all perfected through Solomon. When it was finished according to the heavenly pattern, the glory filled the temple, and even the priests could not abide in it. God filled everything with His satisfaction.

The Lord Jesus came to His baptism and His great committal, and as He came up out of the water the heavens opened and the Father's voice pronounced: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew iii. 17). God was well pleased. That was indeed a good foundation for starting His life work! God's satisfaction is the glory, and John says: "We beheld his glory."

Then we come to the perfection of His work on the Cross. There is nothing further to be done after Calvary. It is *all* finished. Oh, believe this, and believe it with all your heart: there is *nothing* remaining to be done for your eternal salvation. If you try to add something you will lose the glory and get out of the place of God's satisfaction. When the work on the Cross was accomplished, the work of redemption was a finished work, and the sacrifice was well pleasing to God. Calvary was finished, that Son was raised from the dead, and it would

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

not be long before the temple received the glory of the Day of Pentecost—and then what glory filled the house of God! Why? Because Jesus was glorified. Until then “the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John vii. 39). But when He was glorified the Spirit was given.

There you have the Bible background. At the end this glory is seen coming down in the new Jerusalem: “The holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (Revelation xxi. 11). It is the perfected work in the Church, having the glory of God. It is all over, all finished, the battle is won, the course of Christian trial and discipline and suffering is all over, and the glory crowns everything at last because God is satisfied.

Have I, on the side of Scripture at any rate, proved the definition that glory is the expression of God’s perfect satisfaction?

WHY NO GLORY IN OUR LIVES?

Now I said that you could put this to the test in your own experience. Some of us have had to go through this experience to learn these things, for they are not just theories. What has been the most miserable time in your life? Well, I can tell you what was the most miserable time, lacking in glory and having all that is not glory, in my life. It was when I allowed the devil to succeed in putting me outside the finished work of Christ by accusation. ‘The Lord is displeased with you. He has it against you. The Lord is really, because of this affliction, suffering, trial, and sorrow, not well pleased with you.’ Go down under that and the glory goes. And while you stay there, there is no glory, simply because God’s ground is this ground of the absolute finality of the work of His Son for our redemption. Get off that ground by any accusation or condemnation of the devil, forsake the ground of Christ, and the glory goes and will never come back while you stay there. Make no mistake about that! If you are occupied with yourself how long is it going to take you to learn that that is not the ground of glory? Well, it will take just so long as you stay there on the ground of this wretched, miserable self that God has finished with in the Cross of His Son. If we move over on to the ground of Christ and His perfection, and by faith put our feet down on that, then the glory will return.

We have only opened the door to this matter, but we really have to apply all this, for I do not want to give you a lot more teaching for you to put into your heads. I have prayed that the Lord

will use His word as a shaft to cut in and really do something.

IS GOD TO BE GLORIFIED IN OUR LIVES?

Dear friends, do we, you and I, really want God to be glorified in our lives? You say: ‘Yes!’, but there are some who say: ‘Well, let us see what it means and then we will say Yes.’

First of all, it means exactly the same for us as it meant with the Lord Jesus, for He was here as our representative Man before God. Therefore it means the great and utter *crisis* committal. Oh, let that word get hold of us! There are Christians, and there are committed Christians—and I must just leave that with you.

The great crisis experience in the life of the Lord Jesus was when He made the great committal to the glory of His Father and said: ‘Everything from this day is going to be judged by the value of how much glory there is in it for My Father.’ That was a crisis, and then, as I have said, everything did fall into line with that where He was concerned. He saw to it that His conduct, His own life with His Father, His secret life which no one saw or knew, and His life before the world, before people and before His disciples, were governed by this one thing—His Father getting the glory. His behaviour, the way He spoke and the way He acted were all governed by this one thing. If He had been a business man, it would have governed His business transactions. Were they to the glory of God? If not, He would not have had anything to do with them. His family, His brothers, sisters, mother—‘Is My family to the glory of God?’ Is the behaviour in our families, in us, in our children, in our husband and wife relationship, in how we go on as a family, to the glory of God? How do people looking on view it? This is searching!

But if you come to a position like that where you really have a transaction with the Lord, do not think that it is going to mean a life of loss. No, you are going to see the glory of God. That is the upshot of this eleventh chapter of John with Lazarus and his sisters at Bethany. Difficult as the way to it was for them, the last picture is of an emanation of the glory of God. What a delightful scene that is in chapter twelve! Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, lived, and they made Him a supper. Martha served, in a new spirit of service, and Mary and Lazarus sat with the disciples. It must have been a beautiful time—real glory in resurrection life. But they had been through something to get to

JULY—AUGUST, 1971

that! They had been tried and tested on this question: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

Do you want to see the glory of God in your own

life? It is not going to mean a life of loss, for if you have the glory of God you cannot get anything beyond that, or better than that.

T. A.-S.

(To be continued)

RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT WE HAVE

"They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. . . . If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead" (Luke xvi. 29, 31).

THAT is a strange parable, or illustration, that our Lord gave about the rich man and the poor man and their places and conditions after having passed from this life! How much speculative teaching has been read into or made out of it! And yet, in truth, the Lord was not propounding a doctrine of life after death. Anything in that connection was quite incidental.

What He was really touching, as the context shows, is the matter of responsibility. Whenever He came into touch with the existing traditional religious system this was the issue which He deliberately raised and pressed. If the after-this-life factor does have a place in the above story—and it certainly does—it is this factor of responsibility which dominates the situation.

The rich man represents those who:

1. have had every facility and possibility of obtaining a wealth of the things of God:
2. have accumulated all that information, or a great deal of it:
3. have, by reason of it, come to a place of spiritual complacency, smugness, and contentment, or even pride and superiority:
4. have not grown spiritually although so well provided for:

5. have failed to realize that every bit of spiritual provision is a trust; it must not stay with them, but must enrich the needy always at the gate, as represented by the beggar—the sufferer, the suppliant, the hungry.

There is no need to spend many words in order to try to make the Lord's meaning clear. It just amounts to this:

- A. Have we available to us those Divine resources, those riches of Christ, those ministries—personal or printed—which are intended by God to make us spiritually wealthy and of Christly stature?
- B. If so, are they just *things* to us, 'teachings', subjects, themes, 'lines of truth', Christian tradition, interesting and informative treatises, etc?
How much are we *really* 'growing thereby'?
- C. What is the interest value to the Lord who gave them? Do they stop at us, or is 'our profiting' the gain of others? Not the passing on of truth as such, but the value of our life with the Lord.

The Lord has been strong, almost severe in His warning that a very big responsibility lies at the door of everyone who is in touch with His Divine resources, and that what has issued from them will find us out in eternity.

T. A.-S.

"THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINETH"

WHAT was it that carried this sensitive man (Paul) with his difficult temperament and ailing body through it all? He tells us about this as he tells us about everything else; it was nothing else

but the love of Christ. It is doubtful whether Paul made as many converts in his whole ministry as Wesley made in a year or two; certainly the great world took but little notice of him, and Christian

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

literature in the centuries which followed, while it could not ignore him, proves that neither the Church of his own day nor that of succeeding generations really understood him.

The Christianity which conquered the world was indeed not Pauline; it was a compromise, and it won the world by incorporating alien elements of which it has not yet rid itself.

But, his posthumous influence has been like the man himself, a volcanic ferment rising every now and again to destroy the shelters in which the organised Church takes refuge, and force her out

into deep waters again.

But all this was hidden from him; his ambition was not to found so many churches, much less to turn the world upside down, or make Corinth a place fit for Christians to live in, but simply to 'share the sufferings of Christ', that is, so to preach Christ that when he saw Him at last, he might not be too much ashamed.

It is strangely true that the men who have changed this world have been other-worldly men whose hearts were in Heaven."

Selected.

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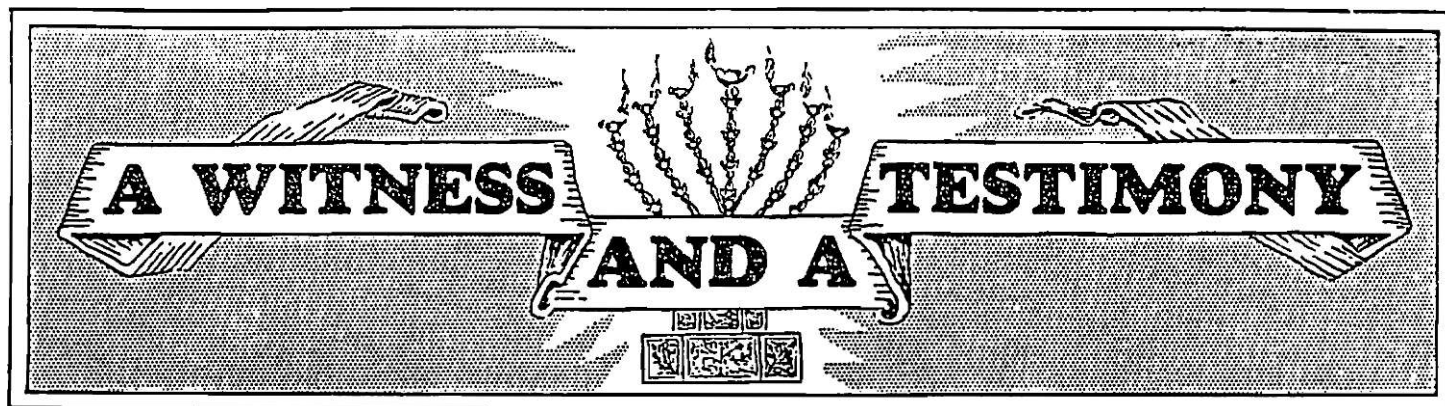
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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1971

VOL. 49. No. 5

CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE TRUSTEES	89	FOR BOYS AND GIRLS	97
THE WORD, THE WORK AND THE WORLD ..	90	SONSHIP	98
BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM!	94	THE GLORY OF GOD (II).. .. .	103

WITNESS AND TESTIMONY LITERATURE TRUST

39 Honor Oak Road, London, SE23 3SH

IT will be readily understood by all our friends that the home-call of our beloved brother, Mr. T. Austin-Sparks, who founded the paper *A Witness and A Testimony* 49 years ago and continued to edit it until his recent passing, has created a situation calling for a fresh seeking of the Lord on the part of the trustees.

That concern has been deepened by the further removal into the presence of the Lord, on 14th June 1971, of Miss Beryl Guy. Miss Guy was known to many of our friends, and especially to all who have attended the yearly conferences in Switzerland, as Mr. Sparks' "right hand" in all practical matters, as well as for her own spiritual contribution.

There has therefore been much prayer regarding the future, for it has not been taken for granted that the paper, however greatly appreciated in the past, and right up to date, must continue.

The trustees wish to record their gratitude to the Lord for the manifest tokens of blessing which have attended the ministry of *A Witness and A Testimony* and of all the literature, and to His

people in all parts of the world for the fellowship which has made it possible.

After prayerful consideration, a decision has been reached whereby, under the editorship of Mr. H. Foster, a magazine with a new title will be published, dedicated to the same objective as prefaces this issue—and all previous issues—of *A Witness and A Testimony*, and will continue to carry articles from the ministry of Mr. Sparks.

There is a quite unanimous conviction on the part of the trustees that *A Witness and A Testimony* is so identified with the personal ministry of Mr. T. Austin-Sparks that publication of the magazine under its present title should cease after the end of 1971.

The new paper will go out just as long as there is justifiable demand for it, and the prayers of all our readers are earnestly coveted that it shall continue to serve the spiritual objective of the ministry which saw the inception of *A Witness and A Testimony*.

THE TRUSTEES

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE WORD, THE WORK AND THE WORLD

(A message given to young Christians in October 1970)

I HAVE been wondering if I could define and sum up your conference in three words, and I think I have them: the Word, the Work and the World. We are going to speak a little about these, but first we will read some fragments of Scripture.

“And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (John i. 14). The word “tabernacled”, which is used in the margin of the English Revised Version, is the correct translation here.

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew xxiv. 14).

I am going to re-translate that verse into what is perhaps a more literal and true translation:

“This good news of the sovereign reign shall be preached in the whole world to set the evidence.” We will come back to that later.

“This is the sum of the things for the tabernacle, even the tabernacle of the testimony” (Exodus xxxviii. 21).

I. THE WORD

We begin with the Word, because that is the basis of everything. Everything must be according to the Word, out from the Word, and governed by the Word. The Work, which comes next, is the purpose, or expression, of the Word. Then comes the World, which is the sphere in which the Word has to have its expression.

Perhaps I should say that I am treating you as a group of students and am not preaching to a congregation, so I am expecting that you will follow quite closely every word that I say, for I am weighing up my words very carefully and there is a great deal more behind them than there seems to be on the surface.

As far as the Word is concerned—and I am now referring to the Scriptures—we must always look at any fragment of Scripture in its wider context. Do remember that, when you come to read any part, any sentence, even any single word of the Scriptures, because it is the Word of God it has a much wider context than the thing itself. It is not just a word, or a sentence, or a verse, or a portion of Scripture, in itself. It has a much greater setting, and you will be greatly helped, and it will be of

really vital consequence, if you can see that wider context. In other words, look for the fuller content of any part of the Scripture, for it has much more in it than lies on the surface. There is an inexhaustible depth in anything that proceeds from God. Indeed, if it is true that the Bible, the Scriptures, are God-breathed, inspired of God, coming out of God, then they are as full as God Himself. There is not a little mind behind that word, that sentence, that statement or that argument. It is God’s mind, and that mind is inexhaustible. You will never fathom its depths, but it is there in every fragment.

Please try to remember that when you are reading the Word of God. Do not just read on and on, but take it fragment by fragment and seek to see both its wider context and its fuller content.

Now that is not just technical. I am speaking to you as one who has been with this Word of God for over sixty years, and I have found this to be of immense value. You see, the Bible has been preached and taught for some two thousand years now, but at the end of that time there is still something new to be found in just a fragment, as far as words are concerned. Take any one of these texts, so-called, on which people preach. You may have heard hundreds of messages on it, and if you are as old as I am, you will have heard preaching on it many times in many parts of the world, but, you know, it is never exhausted. There is always something new and fresh about that well-known bit of Scripture. How often we hear someone get up and announce his text, and our reaction is: ‘Oh, we know that one! We have often heard people talk about that one!’ but, if the person speaking is really under the anointing, before he or she is through we have got something quite new on that old, well-worn bit of Scripture which we have heard so many times before. I am enunciating something of tremendous importance. This that comes out from God is as big as God Himself, and can you exhaust God? Can you really get to the end of God’s mind? Never! Indeed, after all our years, however many they may be, we are saying to ourselves: ‘Well, when I get to Glory I am going to ask for an explanation of that bit of Scripture that I have known so well. I am going to ask Paul what he meant by that statement, and the Lord what He meant by that one. I know there

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1971

is something more there that I have not been able to fathom.'

I need not labour this, but I want to stress, first of all in relation to the Word, that its depth and its fullness are quite inexhaustible because it comes from God, and therefore it is as full as God Himself.

We are going to take an example. Our first passage was John i. 14: "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." The Greek word 'logos' is used, so we have: 'And the Word, the logos, became flesh and tabernacled among us.' Let us break it up. 'The Word, the personal expression of God, *became* flesh'—not 'always was', but *became*, and that is a point, a time in eternity. We do not know when it happened exactly in the mind of God, but, of course, we know the date in history. But there was a juncture, a crisis, a terminal point between the pre-existence of the Word which was God in the beginning and His becoming flesh—"and *tabernacled* among us." As I have already said, that is the correct translation, for that same word is used many times in the Scriptures. The last time is in the book of the Revelation: "The tabernacle of God is with men" (xxi. 3).

Now we begin to open out. John is writing his Gospel with a full Jewish background, and I suggest that you get down to that Gospel and track down carefully every allusion to the life, history and constitution of Israel. You will have to search very closely, but you will find that it is all there. Where does he begin? ". . . and *tabernacled* among us." 'He took up His residence in a tent.' The Greek word cannot be exactly translated into English, for it would sound too awkward if I said: 'and entented among us.' You see, John is right back with Israel in the wilderness where we read of "the tabernacle of the testimony". The tabernacle is in John's mind, for it is part of this whole Jewish system which lies behind all that he is writing. He has a lot to say about the system, and you will find that he speaks about the manna in the wilderness, and Jacob's well. Yes, it is all there.

John has this whole Jewish life and constitution at the back of his mind as he is writing, and he begins with the tabernacle. In effect, what he is saying, or meaning, is that what the tabernacle in the wilderness was long ago, Jesus is now. He has supplanted that tabernacle. It is dismissed and He has taken its place. The great transition has taken place. Presently the temple will come up in the same way with the woman of Samaria: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to

worship" (John iv. 20). Jesus said: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father." What has happened? Mount Gerizim, the temple of the Samaritans, has been dismissed, and the great temple in Jerusalem has been dismissed. Someone has taken their place. Well, as I have suggested, read through this Gospel again and mark as many of the allusions to Israel's life and history as you can.

We return to the tabernacle. First of all, God commanded: "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus xxv. 8), so the object of it was: "that I may *dwell* among them." This is the same word again; although it is in Hebrew, and God was really saying: "that I may *tabernacle* among them."

Then look at the making of this tabernacle. It is a revelation from heaven, and nothing whatever is left to the inventiveness or judgment or thought or imagination of man. The pattern is given in the Mount, and you notice the meticulous and scrupulous exactness of God over this. "According to all that I shew thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it" (Exodus xxv. 9). Nothing was left to man. Man, with all his imaginative, emotional, intellectual capabilities, is ruled out, set aside. He has no place in the making of this tabernacle. God is very particular, so much so that when two of Aaron's sons made incense which was not according to the prescription, it was called "false fire". It was not according to the prescription given by God, so He came down and you know what happened. It meant complete destruction, the obliteration of everything in this connection that was not God's thought or mind, but was of *man*.

Why this very stringent jealousy of God over this tabernacle? Because His thought does not begin and end with this thing called the tabernacle: His thought is so much bigger, fuller and greater than anything that can be measured. And what is God's thought? Nothing less and nothing other than His own Son, Jesus Christ, and every detail of this tabernacle in the wilderness symbolically, and of the Person in incarnation actually, is meticulously according to God's mind. This is the One who came and tabernacled. There is a detailed, scrupulous correspondence with the mind of God, and that was what was governing the tabernacle in the wilderness. In God's intention, mind and thought that tabernacle was an expression, a representation of the Lord Jesus in His character and nature.

That is the fuller content of: "The Word became

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

flesh and tabernacled among us." So, you see, we cannot just go on reading the Bible on and on! We have to get this fuller, wider context, and the far greater setting of each fragment.

Well, that is the Word, and remember that you cannot go on with the Work until you have got that, because there is so very much that is of man's conception, genius, idea, imagination and activity in the things of God, but God is not dwelling in all that. He is not there, for the very object has been lost or missed. To put that in another way: If God is going to come in, tabernacle, reside, be present, everything must be according to Christ. How meticulous Christ was Himself about that! He had His Father's mind, and here in John v you will hear Him saying: "The Son can do nothing *out from himself*". That is what the Greek says, not "of himself". You see how you have to weigh every little word! What is coming out from us? "The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner" (verse 19). "The works that I do, I do not out from Myself. The words that I speak, I speak not out from Myself. It is the Father that speaketh, and it is the Father that doeth the works." He is in touch with the ultimate thought of God in every detail. Was God in Christ? Has history proved that God came in through that One? Well, you have the answer to that.

That is the Word, which governs and is the basis of everything, but we must go on.

II. THE WORK

What is the work of God? You, of course, are very concerned about the work of God. Now, please do not quote me out of context. You are concerned with the salvation of souls, and that is quite right, *but . . .*, and when I put a 'but' in it means that there is a question. You are concerned with the spreading of the Gospel. Quite right, *but . . .* What are you concerned with? Well, you can make a list of answers to that question. Why are you here at all? Why are you a Christian? Why are you going out to the various places to which you are going? Perhaps you would comprehend it all in this one sentence: 'I am going out in the work of the Lord. I have committed myself and my life to the work of the Lord.' Please, what do you mean? These answers that you will give may be quite right as far as they go, and yet this 'but' is there, and it is a very challenging 'but'. It might be a very devastating 'but', for it might put us right out of our work. It might be a 'but' that causes the

Lord to lay us aside from His work for a time. This 'but' may account for so many things.

What is the work of the Lord, dear friends? Will you take this to heart? Again, please do not say that I have said: 'The work of the Lord is not to preach the Gospel, and not the salvation of souls', for I have said: 'Yes, it is' to those. These are means, but they are not the end. They are the means to an end. What is the work of the Lord? What does our passage of Scripture indicate?

"The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us." Why did Jesus Christ come into the world in the flesh? To save men? Yes. To bring men to God? Yes. To make known the Kingdom of God? Yes. But is that all? Are those ways, or are they the end? Again, I ask the question: What is the work of the Lord?

The work of the Lord is to bring God into His place in this world. That is all. In your being where you are, in your being a Christian and a servant of the Lord, in your preaching the Gospel or in your doing any of these things which make up the sum of your work, the challenge, the test is this: Is God present? When we meet one another, do we meet the Lord, or do we meet an enterprise, an undertaking, a piece of work, an organisation, or a lot of people interested in a *thing*? Is the presence and the impact of our life the impact of God upon a situation?

Let us come to our passage in Matthew xxiv: 'This good news of the sovereign reign shall be proclaimed in every nation in order to *set the evidence*.' In the Greek, the word is 'testimony', or 'witness', and you know what a witness is—one who has a testimony. In no court of law anywhere will the judge allow you to say: 'Now, I *heard* this. I *was told* that. I *believe* that it was so and so. I *read* it.' To that the judge will say: 'My dear man, I do not want to hear what you heard, what you think, what you believe or what you read. I want first-hand evidence. Reading and hearing is second-hand and I do not accept that as evidence.' Do you not think that this is challenging where our witness, our testimony is concerned? The fact that you are in a situation is evidence of what? 'This good news of the sovereign reign proclaimed in all the nations to set the evidence'—and of what is the evidence? That this earth is God's by right. 'This earth, and this patch upon which both my feet stand, is God's, and not the devil's, nor man's. It is God's by right of creation and by right of redemption.' If you take that position you have God on your side.

That has been the battle all the way through. It began when Abel took the position with an altar.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1971

testifying that this earth is the Lord's by right, not only of creation (Cain got as far as that!), but of redemption, by right of precious blood. And the devil came out and slew him—and yet, did he? "He being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews xi. 4).

We come to Noah. By this time the whole creation has been wiped out, except for those few in the ark. Then they came out, emerging from judgment, death and destruction, and the first thing that Noah did was to build an altar upon the regenerated, renewed earth. In so doing, he said: 'The earth is the Lord's.' Men had robbed God of His place. The imagination of every heart was evil and men would not have God in their thoughts, so He said: 'That is not what I created the world for. I created it for Myself, for *My* dwelling and tabernacling.' So Noah put up an altar and there the Lord's rights were recognised.

Abraham went up and down the land, and wherever he put his feet he built an altar, and in so doing he was saying: 'This belongs to God. His rights of creation and redemption are represented here.'

We think of Moses. Israel came out to be constituted a nation by way of an altar, which was constructed on the threshold of every dwelling, for that was where the lamb was slain. From the basin which caught the blood of the lamb on the threshold a circle was made, which meant that that home and that family were encircled with blood, and out through that circle of blood they emerged as God's nation. It was by way of an altar. They may not have understood all this, but the meaning was: 'We are the *Lord's*! We are redeemed by precious blood. The Lord's rights are recognised and acknowledged by our very existence, for all the first-born of the Egyptians have died. Our survival is on the ground of redeeming blood, for we are the *Lord's*.'

You go on through the Old Testament, and all these altars were leading up to the great altar of the Cross which included, comprehended them all with one inclusive, comprehensive meaning. What was the battle of Calvary? Well, you can say many things about it—atonement for our sins, and so on—but all that is included in one thing: the rights of God in this world were being fought out in the Cross. You are not surprised, then, that when that battle has been fought, the cosmic forces against God having His place have been stripped off and the battle of God's rights has been settled by redeeming blood, the next great event in the history of this world is that heaven opened and down came the Holy Spirit to tabernacle in the Church, the new tabernacle of God, the corporate Body of

Christ. God is here, and now the work of God is to set the evidence, that is, to bring the Lord into His place.

Sometimes you can do no more than stand. Many of the Lord's servants have been able to do nothing more than just stand where the Lord put them, 'withstand, and having done all, to stand'. Sometimes they are not able to preach, not able to do what they call the work of the Lord. Let us get that straightened out, for sometimes to be unmovable and stand for God's rights in a place is the greatest service that we can do for the Lord.

Well, this ought to revolutionise our idea of the Lord's work! What is it? Much more ought to be said, but it is simply bringing the Lord in where we are.

I expect you have principles that you have been enunciating in this conference and at other times, but this is one upon which I want to put an emphasis. The principle of this work of God is a corporate principle, and no one worker ought to be left alone. The minimum requisite of the New Testament in the work of God is two. Be careful about isolating yourself, detaching yourself. The devil will make a mess of you and the testimony if he can get you isolated. This standing together is a representation of the principle of the *Body* of Christ, and Paul said that the body is not just one member. Always watch this corporate principle, because sometimes, if we have not got another alongside to stand with us, we will go under. We need one another to stand together.

This is devastating and challenging. It says to me continually: 'Does it work out that the result of your being here, as a Christian, as a so-called servant of God, is more of the Lord? Because you have come this way, because you have been here, does it mean that there is more of the Lord?' Oh, how much we can be taken up with what we call the work, and the Lord is expressed so little! That is why I said that the Lord Jesus was so meticulous and scrupulous in seeing that everything was according to the mind of God. Take that to heart!

III. THE WORLD

The testimony of God and His sovereign rights—which is only another way of speaking of the Kingdom—are to be planted in every nation. It is not that every nation is to be saved in its entirety in this dispensation, but the testimony is there to set the evidence in all the world.

That, of course, will open the door for a lot more to be said—and my time has gone! But

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

why was that tabernacle in the wilderness right at the centre of a nation? What was it for? And if you look at the terrible tragedy of Israel, why were they set aside, why have there been these two thousand years in which they have been in what the New Testament calls "the outer darkness"? It was because their testimony in the nations broke down. They were raised up, constituted and governed by God and by heaven in order that in the nations it should be known that God has the rights in this world, by creation and redemption. Israel's presence was meant to be, in effect, the presencing of God. So, when the purpose is lost the thing is dismissed. God will have no more use for an enterprise when its purpose is lost and He will dismiss it. And the purpose is the bringing in of Christ. That was the history of Israel, and it is the history of many things in which the Lord manifested Himself, but which eventually lost the purpose of their existence. They went out on other lines and other things, and have been dismissed by God, like the tent in Shiloh, which became an empty shell, and like the temple in Jerusalem, wrecked and ruined, and dismissed from God's purpose, for its object was lost.

Shall we pray: 'Lord, don't let that happen to

me! Don't let the thing for which You have brought me to Yourself lose its purpose and I no longer bring You in. Does my presence mean Your presence?' Let us pray like that, for there must be the impact of God.

That is the Word, that is the Work, and that is what we are in the world for. You are going to be scattered among the nations, and what are you going to do? You will preach; yes, it has to be proclaimed. You will labour, you will suffer and you will be very busy, I am sure, but remember this: There must be that life in secret with God which means that when you come out from the sanctuary, the secret place with God, the presence of God is with you and registering just where you are, and if men are insensitive, the devil won't be! He knows where the Lord is. He is the arch-enemy of God and of God having a foothold in this world. He is the prince of this world and is not going to tolerate any interference with his kingdom without a fight.

Yes, bringing the Lord in has been a battle all the way through, but this is the work of the Lord, and this is what we are here for.

T. A-S.

BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM!

Reading: Psalm xlv

WE might hesitate to describe Christ as the Bridegroom if He Himself had not made use of the title. He was not the first to do so, for there are a number of Old Testament allusions to this relationship between the Lord and His people, and there are also some typical figures, such as Adam, Isaac and Boaz, to illustrate it. The first New Testament reference to the idea is found in John the Baptist's confession that his Spirit-filled ministry had as its objective the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom to claim His true bride, and that Christ's increase is associated with His experiences as Bridegroom.

The last references fill the final chapters of the book of the Revelation, where the marriage of the Lamb is seen to be the grand climax not only of the book, but of the whole history of God's dealings with men. All His servants, the four living ones, the four and twenty elders, the great multitude, the small and the great, all unite in one tremendous Hallelujah chorus of rapturous joy over the fact that "the marriage of the Lamb is come" (Revelation xix. 7). The whole universe of God will

felicitate the Son, for this will be HIS DAY, His marriage feast. The event seemed so overwhelmingly wonderful that even the beloved John was so overcome by his emotions that he tried to worship the angel who revealed it to him. There seems to be no doubt that this will be one of the supreme events of all time, so that the title of Bridegroom is of superlative importance.

THE TITLE INVOLVES A RELATIONSHIP

The title of Bridegroom alludes to a relationship, the name having no meaning unless there is also a bride; so that this stresses more than any other title possibly could that Christ's union with His people is not only a life union, it is also a love union. What is more, it is a reciprocal love union. The Head loves His body, He needs and uses it for self expression; the King loves His people, over whom He watches like a Shepherd caring for His flock. In the same way the Bridegroom loves His bride, but in this case He not only loves, but He is

also loved. He is everything to her, but she is also everything to Him; He needs her to make His destiny and happiness complete.

There are four marriages described in the Old Testament which can help to illustrate different aspects of the way in which a wife can be complementary to her husband and provide that which is essential to his perfect self realisation. The four brides are Eve, Rebekah, Ruth and Esther.

THE MAN MUST HAVE A FAMILY

Adam needed Eve in order to constitute a family unit. Human life is unbalanced and incomplete when it is limited to one individual; God's order is based on the family. The nation of Israel was also formed on this same family basis, with prominence given to fathers' houses. Then, again, the New Testament churches were shaped and ordered around this basic conception of family rather than confederation. From Adam and Eve's beginnings we learn that the individual's life is incomplete if he remains alone, which indicates to us that in adopting this description of Bridegroom, Christ is gladly accepting the fact that His own fulfilment in terms of divine destiny requires the companionship of a heavenly bride.

Moreover, the passage in Genesis states that such a union requires self-renunciation; the man must leave all else to be joined to his bride. This was demanded of the first man, and is certainly fulfilled in the case of the Second Man. When the Lord Jesus described Himself as the Bridegroom He proposed to implement the relationship by sacrificing His very life, for there are no limits to His love for His own; it passes knowledge.

THE HEIR MUST HAVE A PARTNER

Isaac needed Rebekah to give meaning to his inheritance. The notable feature of his marriage was the initiative taken in the matter by his father, Abraham. The beloved son was the sole heir, all the vast possessions and limitless future prospects being reserved only for him. This explains Abraham's concern about the choice of a bride for him, and the solemn oath extracted from the servant about her selection; it was because the father wanted a worthy partner for his heir. Since the heritage was to mean so much, not only to that family but to all the families of the earth, Abraham pondered long and seriously over the matter and then took every possible precaution to find this girl who could be Isaac's fellow heir.

So far as the historical fact is concerned, we

readily appreciate all that was involved, but when we transfer the implications to the spiritual realm we may well be dumbfounded, for we are confronted with the magnitude of our responsibilities and the wonder of our calling. Can it really be that we are called to joint heirship with Jesus Christ? Is that what He meant when He prayed so earnestly for "the men whom thou hast given me out of the world" (John xvii. 6)? Yes, Christ is indeed the Bridegroom, and the hope of our calling and goal of our predestination is to be partners in His inheritance.

THE KINSMAN MUST HAVE A WIFE

Boaz needed Ruth just as much as she needed him, for a kinsman had to do more than repurchase the lost inheritance; he had to take the impoverished widow to be his wife. It is one of the implications of the beautiful story of redemption told in the book of Ruth that the redeemer-kinsman himself was enriched by his generous act. Boaz was a rich man, but a lonely one; he had many friends, but he was without a wife; there were many on whom he could bestow his generosity, but none with whom he could share it. Ruth's other kinsman was not in this condition, so he could not fully be her redeemer, but Boaz could and did fulfil that function.

Boaz had great wealth, but he lacked one whom he could love and who could not only receive but also give back to him. He was obviously aware of this, for his first response to Ruth's appeal was not to say what he would do for her, but to thank her for her generosity to him: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter, for thou hast shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich" (Ruth iii. 10). This was true grace, showing to the lowly not condescension but rather appreciative gratitude, and it was true love also, for a love relationship cannot be perfect if it contains any elements of condescension.

Ruth had great capacities for devotion, and she brought them all to Boaz. Her union with him gave meaning to his great wealth and enriched him still more, for although he gave Ruth much he also received much as the result of his redemptive action. For our part, we have Christ as our great Kinsman-Redeemer, and in His case too there seems to be a sense in which He could still be unsatisfied at heart if His vast and generous giving did not receive a right response; if His people could receive His wealth of love and not give back

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

to Him the bridal devotion of which she alone is capable.

THE KING MUST HAVE A CONSORT

Ahasuerus, with all his magnificence, was not complete without Esther to share his throne. This is a very poor illustration of the spiritual truth, especially in view of the character of the royal husband, and is not really the main lesson of the book of Esther. At least, however, the story contains a hint of what is elsewhere suggested in the Old Testament and so eloquently described in the Psalm from the pen of the ready writer, where the king's glory is enhanced by the fact that at his right hand stands "the queen, in gold of Ophir" (Psalm xlv. 9). Her vocation is to administer the kingdom with him, a matter which is developed in Revelation xx and xxi, where the bride is shown as the holy city, central to the whole of God's universe and ablaze with His glory (Revelation xxi. 24).

Perhaps dignity is the best word which aptly describes her calling: she will not only be called a queen but she will be queenly. "All her splendour is the splendour of a princess through and through" (Psalm xlv. 13—Knox). Esther had twelve months of preparation, "six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours and with things for purifying"; we have a lifetime, for one of the main purposes of all God's dealings with us is to prepare us for our reign with Christ.

THE WORK OF SANCTIFICATION

Christ has not yet finally presented the bride to Himself. He will not do so until she is "glorious . . . not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing . . . holy and without blemish". The truth is that He not only died to purchase her but now lives to prepare and beautify her, and not until the sanctifying work is done can the marriage be regarded as fully realised. This is a truth which applies to us individually, and helps to explain some of the trials and difficulties which the Lord permits to come into our lives, for they represent His faithfulness in preparing us for the great Day. The relationship of Bridegroom to bride also applies to our life together, for though there may be many guests at the marriage feast, there can be only one bride. The Spirit's sanctifying work is therefore directed to our unity in Christ, seeking to remove the spots and blemishes in our corporate experience, so that in our life together we may find ourselves a true "king's daughter", gloriously clothed with inwrought gold (Psalm xlv. 13).

For this very reason the command is given: "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews x. 25, R.S.V.). What Day? Why, His Day! The Day when the royal Monarch finds complete fulfilment for His kingdom because His consort is able to share the throne with Him, the Day when the marriage of the Lamb is publicly announced, and His bride comes down out of heaven from God, radiant like a fair jewel.

BRIDAL IMPLICATIONS

We now consider three New Testament passages which apply the test of God's Word to all who are called to be included in the bride. The first speaks of betrothal or engagement, for this is really the nature of our relationship to Christ at the present moment. ". . . for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (II Corinthians xi. 2). In this passage the essence of the bridal spirit is described as "a sincere and pure devotion to Christ". Not by their own efforts or on their own merits but by the election of grace, the Corinthians were called into partnership with Christ and so betrothed to Him, yet the apostle was jealous over them and fearful that they might fail to go through with their engagement vows. The serpent who deceived Eve, that very same serpent, is still alive and still busy, seeking now to rob Christ of the satisfaction which should come to Him through His bride by seducing her to other interests and meaner loves. He need not succeed, but will any of us dare to affirm that in our case he cannot do so? If there were no perils for the Corinthians—and us—then we may find ourselves obliged to charge Paul with foolish jealousy and unnecessary fears, or even with using insincere and dishonest threats. None of us will do that.

The second passage speaks of the actual presentation of the bride (Ephesians v. 27), and does so in a context of grace, for the theme of this great letter is that redemption is not by human righteousness, but by divine grace and through faith alone. The same letter, however, explains how the gracious sanctifying work is done, namely "by the washing of water by the word". Christ is all eagerness to present His bride to Himself, and for this reason seeks our submission and co-operation as He applies His cleansing Word to our daily conduct. The prospect of meeting Him as Bridegroom should act as an added incentive to pay heed to that Word and to give it a ready response; His words are not the commandments of the lawgiver, but the tender

appeal of the Bridegroom. Do we treat them as such?

Finally, we have the thrilling passage concerning the marriage supper of the Lamb, where it is stated that the royal bride has made herself ready, a hint of a similar emphasis made concerning the wise virgins who were ready when the midnight cry announced that the Bridegroom was coming. The expression employed to describe the fitness and suitability of the bride's dress is that it is like beautiful white linen (Revelation xix. 7-8). God will never be satisfied with show; He requires reality and so speaks of the fine linen in terms of righteousness, in terms of character and behaviour, righteousness not only as a gift but as expressed in actions; not only righteous thoughts and desires, but righteous deeds. This in itself is a solemn challenge to all of us who are waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom.

Nevertheless, we must not make of this noble subject a legalistic matter of fear or duty, but rather think of a call to deeper love to our great heavenly Bridegroom. The relationship of Bridegroom and bride is essentially one of mutual and

reciprocated love. Married love is different from all others, for it is at one and the same time the most unselfish and the most demanding; it gives without qualification or reserve, but it can only be ideal if the other partner does the same. Christ will always be faithful and devoted, generous and self-sacrificing, for this is His true nature, but if He is to be a successful Bridegroom it can only be for those whose spirit and attitude fully reciprocate His love. However faulty human marriages may be, it is inconceivable that the eternal heavenly marriage union should be a one-sided affair, leaving Christ with a bride whose submission is grudging or half-hearted. His is the love which provides the origin and inspiration, for it all begins with Him; but He expects and must have from His people that sincere and pure devotion which befits His bride.

As John the Baptist assured us, the crux of full spiritual joy is to hear the Bridegroom's voice. If we make this our aim and pleasure we will find the Holy Spirit's guidance and support, and need have no qualms about our readiness for the midnight cry concerning the coming of the Bridegroom.

H. F.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

A SAFE JOURNEY

“GOOD day, Captain”, drawled the pilot as he climbed the last few steps on to the bridge. He was a tall, thin Australian, brown from his life in the sun. “Full ahead, and steady as she goes,” he called out as he handed the Captain the mail and newspapers he had brought on board with him. The ship began to gather speed away from the pilot station at Thursday Island as we headed for the Torres Straits.

It was my first voyage around the ‘top’ of Australia, through the coral reefs and islands that block most of this narrow stretch of water. The entry in the ship's log reads: “Courses to Captain's orders and pilot's advice.” The Captain was still in control, but now for safety the ship must steer to the pilot's advice. “How like life!” I thought. Even though you ask Jesus to be your pilot, you still have command of your will and must make your own decisions to obey Him.

At first the pilot's job seemed so easy; there was nothing to it. Then, checking the course the pilot gave for a particularly narrow stretch, I saw that

the ship was heading straight for a hidden reef marked on the chart. The water all looked the same, but under the surface sharp coral waited to rip the bottom out of any ship that passed too close. As we went closer, however, I saw that the tide was drifting us down so that instead of hitting the reef we went straight through the gap in the centre. Of course, we couldn't see the tide any more than we could see the reef, but the pilot knew how the tide was running, and where the danger was, and the course he gave was just right to bring us safely through.

Later we passed a rusting old wreck, stranded on a reef, and I asked the pilot what had happened. “Well,” he laughed, and said, “they thought they could do it without a pilot. They were doing all right, too, while they could see everything”. “What happened?” I asked. “A dust storm blew up,” he replied, “and then they couldn't see the marks or the beacons. They thought they were on the right course, but they didn't allow for the tide.” “Could they have had a pilot if they had wanted one?” I

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

asked. "Not out here," the pilot said. "You can only get a pilot at the pilot station. Once you get yourself into difficulties it is too late to think about getting a pilot."

I looked again at our pilot. Life was so much easier and safer with a pilot on board. I felt sorry for the captain of that ship that was wrecked, and I wondered if they ever gave him another ship to try again. How much worse if we wreck our lives through not having Jesus as our pilot, for we only have one life to live.

Soon we were through the dangerous waters, and away went the pilot, but as we headed out into the open sea I knew we would be meeting a pilot again. Nearly all the ports in the world require a ship to have a pilot on board if the ship wants to enter. Without a pilot on board you are not allowed

in, which is just like life again. We might make a mess of our lives through not having Jesus as our pilot, but, worse than that, without Jesus we will not be allowed into the port of Heaven.

There is one more thing about pilots on ships that I think you ought to know. A ship with a pilot is required to fly the pilot flag so that everyone can see that there is a pilot on board.

We find that David, who wrote Psalm 31, knew where to go for a pilot. In verse 3 he asked the Lord to lead him and guide him. If you read the Psalm you can discover many of the troubles and difficulties we can meet on the voyage of life, but David had a good Pilot on board. "Do you want a pilot? Signal then to Jesus." "This is our God . . . He will be our guide for ever" (Psalm 48.14).

G. S.

SONSHIP

Reading: Acts xiii. 26-43

EASTER morning meant the end of one conflict: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians xv. 55-57). That is the end of the old conflict with death, and every Christian who has experienced the resurrection power of our Lord Jesus Christ can confidently affirm that death has lost its sting, namely sin. We can rejoice in the assurance that God has done something about this last great enemy and that we need be no longer held in its bondage. We can know emancipation from its prince who wields the weapon of death, even Satan.

So resurrection morning is a wonderful early morning experience for every Christian man and woman that keeps them fresh in the delight that God has answered that old conflict with which man was faced.

A NEW CONFLICT

But, in another sense, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was the beginning of a new conflict. Everywhere the apostles went in the book of the Acts they proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection. From the very first moment, when Peter stood up in the midst of those antagonistic authorities, men who had put Christ to death and wanted Christians to be put out of the way, he preached:

'You put Jesus Christ to death, but God raised Him from the grave', and, of course, it started a conflict. Or, if they went into the synagogues, as they did in Antioch of Pisidia, and, indeed, in the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire, they would proclaim Jesus and the resurrection, and straight away trouble would start. Wherever Paul went he was the cause of trouble breaking out, because he preached the resurrection of Jesus and men had to take sides. When he was standing before the pagan university at Athens he once again proclaimed that God was going to judge the world through this one man, Jesus Christ, whom He had raised from the dead in order that all men might have assurance and belief. Some mocked him arousing the controversy again.

Right the way through the Acts the resurrection not only marked the end of an old conflict, the conflict against death and sin, but introduced a new one, and that same conflict is going on to-day wherever Christ and the resurrection are being proclaimed. The second Psalm, which prophesied the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, begins like this: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed", and as we read on in that Psalm we begin to see that the whole conflict is because God has spoken to the grave, to the earth, to the tomb in which Christ lay for those three days, and said: "Thou art my Son; this day have begotten thee." And there broke out of th

grave, through the resurrection power of our God, a new challenge to the powers of this world, and men rose up together, assembled tumultuously, gathered together, argued, and got themselves into the place where they resisted God.

In the fourth chapter of the Acts, when the Apostles Peter and John had been brought before the Sanhedrin and had once again been cautioned: 'You must not say these things nor preach them in Jerusalem', they went back to their own company and told the disciples the things that they had suffered. Immediately the company burst into song, for it was just wonderful that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord. As they burst out into praise they used this second Psalm again: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ . . . And now, Lord, . . . grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."

The resurrection causes a conflict. Now, why? Would you not think that people would be only too pleased that death has been answered? Do you not think that people would like to have some message from the other side of the grave to meet man's number one problem? Would you not think that man would be delighted to receive something like the resurrection of Christ? Why is it a conflict?

There is instigated an antagonism because people are proclaiming Jesus and the resurrection, and I would like us to see that this whole thing is focused upon one word, and the one word which is really at stake in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the word 'sonship'. That is the problem; that is the issue which is being raised out of the grave as Jesus rises again.

You see, it was for this reason that Jesus had been put to death. He had been tried before the Sanhedrin and put on oath: "I adjure thee", said the high priest, "by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God", and Jesus answered: "Thou hast said." You see, it was Sonship, whether He was the Son of God, which was the issue that put Him into the grave.

It was the same issue when God spoke into the tomb on the third day and said: "Thou art my Son. This day have I begotten thee", and Christ rose out of the grave as God's declared Son.

The apostle Paul and the disciples declared the resurrection in these terms. Paul said at the beginning of the letter to the Romans: "God . . . declared him to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from

the dead" (i. 4), and when John had told us his story of the Lord Jesus and how He rose from the grave, he could not hold himself back and burst out: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John xx. 31).

Sonship! And it was the bursting forth from the tomb of the Son of God that somehow or other began this whole conflict, for in one way this was the vindication of God concerning the claims of Jesus Christ that He was who He said He was. In another way it was the substantiation of man's feelings, his sensitivities, his spiritual leadings and revelations as he groped for God's purpose for humanity. God is not just power, presenting a philosophy that says: 'Might is right', nor is He just an energy that maintains the universe. The resurrection declares that God is a *Person*, and that Person is a *Father*, for here is His *Son*. In another sense the resurrection was a declaration that this is God's purpose for man: 'Out of the grave, sonship. This is what I want to say to mankind', and it is round this one issue of sonship that the difficulties, the problems, the battles, the conflicts and the controversies are raging. That is why Easter morning was the beginning of a lot of troubles in the world, the beginning of the problems that you and I perpetrate as we go on proclaiming Jesus and the resurrection; for there are many who do not want God to be a personal Father, which the resurrection declares; they do not like to feel that they are meant to be His sons, which is what the resurrection declares; and they do not like the claims of Christ, and the way in which He lived, which are authenticated by the resurrection from the dead. That is what caused the controversy and antagonism. God did something in the natural order of affairs that upset men.

Men are so used to death, for everyone dies. The Bible is forever speaking of people dying, and now Someone has risen again and that has upset the whole natural order as men know it. But God is saying: 'Look, I am a Father, and you are meant to be sons. Look at the Person of *My Son* who makes His claims upon your life'—and the conflict begins.

Did you notice that in this passage from Acts xiii which we read the apostle Paul used three verses from the Old Testament to establish that it was prophesied that the Lord Jesus would rise from the grave? In verse 33 he used the verse I have already quoted from the second Psalm: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." That verse is saying something very special about

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the resurrectional sonship of the Lord Jesus: "Thou art my Son; this day, the day of resurrection, have I begotten thee." Then in verse 34 he quoted from Isaiah: "I will give you the sure mercies of David", which were that there would be One to sit upon the throne of David for ever. These are God's sure mercies and promises to His people, and they would have to be by resurrection, for it was going to be for ever, and death would not bring it to an end. Finally he quoted in verse 35 from Psalm xvi: "Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." With those three verses from the Old Testament, two from the Psalms and one from Isaiah, Paul pressed home the point that God has raised Jesus from the grave, and each one of those verses highlights the issue of sonship in a special way and brings before us the Sonship of our Lord Jesus from a different angle, in a different light. I want to suggest to you that our Lord Jesus is the Son of God in three different ways, and each of these verses quoted by Paul shows Him from a different angle.

THE ETERNAL SON

First, we take the last quotation in verse 35: "Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer *thine Holy One* to see corruption." There we see the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of the Father. He is the Holy One, the One who is separate and distinct from all others. That is what holiness means: One who is apart from everyone else, who is set apart to the Father's delight, the darling of the Father's heart, the One who existed from all eternity, delighting the soul of God, the One who is eternally the begotten of God, the One whose Father is the eternal Father, for He is the eternal Son. And that One was not allowed to see corruption. How could He? He was eternal. He always had been and always would be, and if you put One who is eternal into the grave of time, the very eternity of the situation has to break out, and that is what happened on Easter Day. Men had put something which had eternal life right down under the worst thing that material existence can do, death, and it had broken out in resurrection. The eternal God is being demonstrated. Was it not a garden in which the Lord Jesus was buried? It was not surprising, therefore, that, having put a Seed into the ground, He would burst forth again. It was not surprising that there would be a breakout of life, because the eternal life of God had been buried in the temporal life of man and had broken out again. That is what the eternal sonship of our Lord Jesus is demonstrating to us.

Of course, that could be seen before the resurrection. When the Lord Jesus became a man, when the eternal Son was brought into this temporal, earthly scene, God was stretching out in time and showing, in different frames, like pieces of photographic film, all that He is in eternity. We see the very greatness of God in how small He could become; we see the humility of God in the Babe carried in the arms of His own creation; we see the compassion of God as He put out His hand to the leper, or put out His hand of friendship to those who were despised and rejected; we see the love of our eternal God as He gave in the Cross a demonstration that no man had greater love than this and He laid down His life for His friends. In every aspect of the life of our Lord Jesus we see the eternal wrapped up in time, so that He could say: 'If you have seen Me, the Son, you have seen the Father.' God was accommodating Himself to our time scene. He, who is eternally *thus*, stretched out in time in the different frames of the experiences of the Lord Jesus on earth and said: 'See, I am like that, and like *that*. You cannot see all at once who I am in eternity, so I am going to stretch it out for you and you can see all the different aspects that I am at different times.'

So the eternal Son is showing us the eternal Father. He, who is eternally begotten of God, is revealing to us in time what God is like, so that He could say: 'Your sins are forgiven you', He could claim lordship over the Sabbath, and He could do things on the Sabbath day so that men would say: 'He is making Himself equal with God.' He would say: 'I only do what I see My Father doing.' If you want to know what God is like, just look at Jesus Christ. If you want to know what God is like in our terminology, in our time-space system, go to Jesus of Nazareth and you see the infinite, eternal God concentrated into the space of a man and unfolded in time. That is what Jesus claimed.

Then He was put in a grave, and the fact is that eternity broke out of the grave and said: 'Now all that I said was true. I am showing you what God is like. I am the revelation of the Father's heart.' The resurrection was the authentication of all that Jesus had said, all that He had done, and all that He had revealed. If He had not risen from the grave all that would have been lost. How would we have known that God was a Father with a Father's heart? How would we have known of His fatherly compassions? How would we have known that we were meant to love our neighbours, to go the second mile and to turn the other cheek? All these things would have been just wild speculations and guesswork if God had not vindicated

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1971

this revelation of Jesus through the resurrection. God did something when Christ broke out from the tomb on Easter morning which declared: 'This is what I am like', and He put His stamp and seal to the Sonship of the Lord Jesus.

That is the first thing that the resurrection is doing for us. God could not let His Holy One see corruption. It was just not possible, for He is eternal, and although the body might show the marks of time and death upon it, yet there was an inner life which was eternity itself and could never be broken.

At the risk of being slightly complicated, I ask you if you have ever seen the beauty of this: The Lord Jesus said: 'I do not go to the Cross alone. My Father goes with Me', and Abraham and Isaac demonstrated that the Father was there already. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself"—and yet on the Cross Jesus cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Was He really forsaken? Well, He was, in one sense, for He experienced everything that a Godforsaken man would experience, but I want to assure you of this: the Father and the Son were never torn apart. It could not be so, because of eternal life. The Father and the Son were one on the Cross, although Christ was experiencing everything that a hell-bound, condemned man would experience. The eternal life of the Seed could not be torn apart, and it was still there, even on the Cross; the Son knowing the Father and the Father knowing the Son. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3), and it was life eternal for the Father to know the Son and for the Son to know the Father. That could not be split or broken; the Holy One could not see corruption; and all that God is has been authenticated in the resurrection of the eternal Christ. He was the eternal Son of the Father.

Now, in a sense, we do not share that, for we are not of ourselves eternal. That is Christ's uniqueness. He is *the* Holy One, the Father's only-begotten Son. But we do *taste eternity*, we do share eternal life now, and that very life has been put into us, so that when we became a Christian we had a sense that there was something *eternal*, final and complete about it all. It was something to which nothing could be added or taken away. That was eternal life beginning to register deep within us. Although we may now have lost the thrill of it all, was it not part of the thrill of our resurrection morning that everything that we did was charged with eternity because we were sharing eternal life through the Son? We had been dragging our feet down the

Emmaus Road, thinking that nothing ever seemed to turn out in quite the right way, and, then, suddenly we saw the Lord, and eternity had come right down into time and we raced back to Jerusalem as fast as we could. My, life had become worth living now! "The Lord is risen indeed!" Eternity was charged into time, and that is what it means to be a Christian. Everything we do has eternity vibrating out of it, and everything in which we are involved has eternity wrapped in it. It belongs to God, and the trivial things are eternal things, because there is eternal life in us. We cannot be the unique, eternal Son, for there is only One, but we can share that eternal life that is in Him, and when that happens, that is the resurrection morning for us.

THE SON OF PURPOSE

Secondly, we look at verse 34: "I will give you the sure mercies of David."

The Lord Jesus was the Son of God in another way, and that was by being supernaturally conceived in Mary of the line of David. Do you remember that when the angel visited Mary, he said: "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"? It was the Holy Spirit who was the Father of this Sonship—"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee"—and the baby Jesus, who is called here "Son of God", was fathered by the Holy Ghost.

Now this sonship is again unique, for, while we may have a supernatural *new* birth, we were not born physically in a supernatural way. A new kind of Man was being brought out of the line of David, and He is called "Son of God" in this second sense: not the Son of the Father, but Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost. He is called Son of God because He has a job to do, a purpose to fulfil. Israel had once been called 'son of God', because they, too, had a job to do and a purpose to fulfil. They were to be supernaturally brought out of Egypt to do it, and God said to Pharaoh: "Israel is my son, my first-born" (Exodus iv. 22). They were called 'son of God' because, for a Hebrew in Old Testament days, that implied an instrument for God's purpose. They lost it later, and the Prophet Isaiah had to re-emphasise it: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isaiah xliii. 1). If you remember, it was during His earthly ministry that the Lord Jesus heard those words from heaven: "This is my beloved *Son*, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew iii. 17).

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

The Son of God was here on earth because He had a job to do, and that was the second unique thing about the sonship of the Lord Jesus: His job was to reign on His father David's throne, and to bring about the kingdom, the order and the authority of God in a reckless, anarchist world which was against the Almighty; to reign for ever and ever over the affairs that God has made.

With this in mind, this second sense of sonship is fulfilled when the Lord Jesus is brought up from the grave and will reign for ever and ever. Do you remember that when David had these promises made to him they were given in these terms: "I will set up thy seed after thee . . . and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (II Samuel vii. 12-14).

This, then, is the second sort of sonship. The Son has a job to do, and that is to reign on the Throne. Mark begins his Gospel by saying: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God", and this Son, who at the end sat down on the right hand of God on the Throne, went about with the disciples everywhere working with them. God, in His amazing grace, gives us a little taste of this unique kind of sonship. Did you not notice that when you became a Christian and the first resurrection morn began to dawn on your newborn soul, for the first time in your life you were in an *atmosphere of purpose*? 'I am a son of God. I have something to accomplish, and there is a meaning in what is going on.' Perhaps sometimes you found that you were surrounded by death, but the power of the resurrection, which lifted Christ out of the grave, worked in you. You thought: 'My, there must be a purpose in that I have got through this thing', after you had felt that everything was so hopeless and finished. But there was a power of resurrection in you that went on, and because it was in you, you went on, too. Otherwise you would have been left behind, but you have not been. God has a purpose for you, something for you to accomplish.

Not only did the Lord Jesus go through death, but He sat down and is "far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named", as we read in Ephesians. There have been times when names and pressures and satanic powers seemed to be pressing you down and you thought: 'This is terrible!' But there was something in you that said: 'No, this has a purpose'; you used the name of Jesus and you broke through because every power is under that name.

Or there were times when He sat down and "put all things under His feet". But you say: 'Well, all

things do not seem to be under my feet!' How do we impress the earth, put our imprint on it and put it under our feet? At times we do not feel very much like that, but this is a life of purpose, of doing something, of getting somewhere, and that is the Son of God. Even through those moments when you feel you cannot do it, God is printing His imprint; Christ, the last Adam, the Second Man, is leaving His prints everywhere. We have enough of the prints of Adam, the first man! Oh, the ugliness of our civilisation! But the feet of the Lord Jesus leave an imprint of purpose in us and through us, and all things are under His feet.

"And gave them to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth *all in all*." That purpose is to fill everything, and that purpose of sonship in your life and mine is that Christ should fill every particle that we move in. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus was establishing His office as Son of God, which was His uniquely, but we are included in its outworking.

THE SON OF GLORY

Third, in verse 33 of Acts xiii, Paul, speaking of the resurrection, quotes: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Does that mean that the Lord Jesus was not the Son of God before the day of resurrection? That cannot be, for we have already seen that it was the Father who sent the eternal Son, and, as God became man, he was called the Son of God. So what does it mean that on the resurrection morning God could say: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee"?

Well, this is the third aspect of resurrection, a third sort of sonship. When God said: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee", there was a begetting out of the womb of the earth, or, as Psalm cx says: "from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth." So there burst forth, in the early morning of the day of resurrection, a new sort of Man who eternally would have the dew of His youth upon His brow, and God said: 'Now this is my Son.' In that sense the Lord Jesus is not unique at all, for He becomes the first of *many* sons who are going to break forth out of the earth at the voice of God, and be clothed with bodies like unto His body. These are the sons whom the Lord Jesus has brought to glory. He is bringing many sons to glory; He is the firstborn from the dead, the firstborn of many brethren. In this sense the Lord Jesus utterly, totally and completely shares His Son of God-ship with us, and that is why we can be called sons of God. It is not

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1971

because we get a taste of His eternal Sonship, nor because we get a taste of His eternal purpose to reign in God's order, but because God is making Him the pattern, the firstborn, to which every other son is to be conformed, even to the resurrection body which we shall bear.

Did you not notice that on your resurrection morning, when you became a Christian, there was not only a touch of eternity about your soul, not only a touch of purpose that began to move into everything, but there was also a *touch of glory*? He is bringing you to glory, so was there not glory in your own heart that responded and said: 'I belong to something which is beyond description. God's biggest thought for me as a man was that I should become like His Son. Oh, the glory of it is eating into my whole being and is thrilling me!' Your resurrection morning was a glorious morning, when you were being led to glory.

That began in Christ's resurrection, and we share this sort of resurrection with Him. God has spoken to us and said: 'You are My beloved son. This day have I begotten you', and then will come a moment when it will be completed, and the resurrection will mean that the earth will give up its dead, and out of the earth will come the glorious sons of God to share in the glory. The earth will respond to that moment, for it is waiting for it. Paul says that it is groaning, and waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. In that moment, when out of the graves rise those who have been conformed to the image of God's Son to be with Him, the whole

of creation will respond and will come back to a glory which God has ordained for it. And the sufferings which perhaps we have already tasted in this age will be nothing compared with the glory that will be revealed in us.

The resurrection morning is the herald of the moment when the whole earth will be brought into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God through what God has been doing through you and me. That is why you taste glory today, because God has been preparing for the glorifying, for the releasing of this groaning universe, and He is doing it in you and me. Is there a bit of eternity there, a bit of purpose there? There is a preparing of that glorious liberty which one day the whole universe will taste and experience.

Is it not a terrific thing to be in God's purposes for men, summed up in the little word 'sonship', which is highlighted by the resurrection, and established through the resurrection, around which the conflict rages? We are in that! We cannot share His eternal sonship, nor His uniqueness in the way in which He came into this world, in His birth and His new humanity, but we can share completely and utterly those words: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." The resurrection experience begins to exalt us with the highest dignity which any of God's creatures can bear, for we are called 'the sons of God', and we delight in our Father and His name.

R. T. F.

THE GLORY OF GOD

2. GLORY ONLY IN THE NEWNESS OF RESURRECTION LIFE

Reading: John xi

WE turn again to this eleventh chapter of the Gospel by John, and I would remind you that this chapter represents the culmination of the life, teaching and works of the Lord Jesus during the days of His flesh. This is quite evident, for you notice that in verse 47 it says: "The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we?" The rest of the chapter shows that this was the last of a number of such councils, and it was in this last council that they decided definitely and finally that this Man must die. So here we have that which marks the culmination of His life and work at that time. The finality is not by the act, but is the fullness of the very

purpose for which He came, and, more than that, it is the fullness of Divine counsels.

Behind this chapter there are two things. There are the eternal counsels of God coming to their completion in His Son at this time, and then there are the counsels contrary to God which are seeking to bring that Son to an end, to destroy Him. The Divine counsels are summed up in what is in this chapter. No doubt you have read it many times and perhaps you think you know it. If you were asked what John eleven is about most of you would say: 'Well, of course, it is the chapter about the raising of Lazarus from the dead', and perhaps that is all that you would have to say about it.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

In so saying (forgive me if this sounds a bit critical of your apprehension) you indicate how really you have missed the way. Of course, we have all said that in time past, but as we have gone on we have come to see something more, and that is that this chapter contains all the major features and factors of God's ways unto glory. Have you grasped that? The end of all God's ways and works is glory, His own glory. It sometimes seems a tortuous way, as these sisters felt it to be while it lasted. It sometimes seems to be anything but glory, and you might very well decide, as perhaps these sisters decided at a certain point, that the end is not glory. You might feel that all this sorrow, distress, disappointment and despair could not lead to glory, but all that, from God's standpoint, is the way of glory and is unto glory.

Let me repeat: when God takes anything in hand—and you really must lay hold of this!—the end is going to be His glory. You need make no mistake whatever about that! The end of all God's ways is His glory. Read your Bible in the light of that, and you have the whole Bible in one chapter—the eleventh chapter of John.

FACTORS IN THE WAYS OF GOD UNTO GLORY

I have said that this chapter contains the main features and factors in the ways of God unto glory. What are some of these main factors?

A very big one is the incarnation of the Son of God; the Son of God taking flesh; God manifest in the flesh. Is that not a big one? The very purpose and object of the incarnation, of God taking flesh, becoming incarnate, is found in this chapter. Hold that for a while.

Then there is the method of God in redemption. Redemption is a big factor, is it not? No one will dispute that! In the eternal counsels of God redemption is a big factor, and the method of redemption is the substance of this eleventh chapter of John.

Another thing—and I am quite sure that, while you will have agreed with those other two, if you know anything at all about God's ways, you will agree with this—God's ways are very strange, and are beyond human explanation and comprehension. While God is in the process of moving towards His end, it is very difficult to follow Him. The Apostle Paul, who knew a good deal about the Lord, said of his experience: "Pressed out of measure" (II Corinthians i. 8), or, as another translation has it, "*beyond* our measure". The Lord is always a bit ahead of us. It would not do for us to be equal with Him, would it? We would soon

be taking the place of the Lord! If we were right upsides with Him in everything our dependence upon Him would very soon go. So the Lord gets ahead of us, beyond our measure, and puts us out of our depth in order to enlarge our capacity. We would never grow if that were not true.

The simple way in which John's Gospel illustrates that is in chapter x. 4: "When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them". Well, of course, you have sometimes taken that as a comforting statement, but there is profundity in every clause of the Divine Word, and this Gospel in particular reveals that. "When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them"—He always is ahead of them, and they are always a bit behind Him. In a sense, He is too much for them. They have to move on, and still move on, if they are going to come up to where the Lord is, and when they get there, they find that He has gone ahead again. They have to keep going, to keep running all the time.

The Apostle Paul explains this when he said, right at the end of his full life: "That I may know him" (Philippians iii. 10). 'I have not caught up yet. He is still beyond me.' The mystery of God's ways, the strangeness of what we call 'Providence', is a major factor of God's ways, and that is in this chapter.

Another thing, which is not by any means a small thing, is the farsightedness of God. How much beyond our seeing He is! Or let us come to this chapter—how much the Lord Jesus was beyond the seeing of these sisters and the disciples! They just could not see beyond this present happening and experience. The thing that was immediately before their eyes was their horizon. But God, in Christ, was moving here on the principle of farsightedness, beyond the incident, beyond the present. However big this was to them, He was far beyond it. His horizon was far outreaching this thing, and He was acting accordingly. The farsightedness of God is no small factor in the ways, the works and the dealings of the Lord, and it is all here in this one chapter.

How unfathomable are the ways and the works of God!

THE LORD IN CONTROL

Now, having said that, let me step back for a moment and remind you of something here which we must get hold of. Do believe me, dear friends, when I say that it is not just the *teaching* of John's Gospel in one or all of the chapters with which I am concerned. This has to come right into our very

history. It has to be taken out of the Bible, out of the history of Jesus during His time on this earth, and put right into our history, and we shall never get anywhere unless that is true. It is applied truth, and not theoretical truth that is here.

So let me say this: The thing that comes out at us as we quietly and thoughtfully dwell in this chapter is that the Lord Jesus has the situation in His hands. Let me put that in another way. If this is God incarnate, then it is God with whom we are having to do here. When you come to this chapter you see how the Lord Jesus has everything in hand, and in His hands, and He is not letting it go out of His hands all the way along.

Look at the various aspects! He said He would go back into Judaea. The disciples immediately reacted: 'No, the Jews recently sought to kill You there. You must not go back there!' You see the move to take things out of His hands, to govern His movements, His judgments and His decisions, but He is not having it. He has taken this thing in hand, and, disciples or no disciples, He is going on. There is something that He is after, and He is in charge. Messengers are sent to him about Lazarus when He is away somewhere else, and undoubtedly the message means this, although it is not recorded: 'Lazarus is dying. Come, please! Come quickly! Come as quickly as You can!' The beloved sisters would have said that, but to do as they wished would have taken the matter right out of His hands and ruled His judgment, ruled His feelings, governed His movements, set a time that He did not set, and taken it over. No, He abode where He was. He had the situation in hand and was not going to let it out of His hands, although the appeal was from those whom He loved. It is stated that that was so. The situation was one which could appeal to any sympathetic heart, but that was not going to decide this thing. It was in His hands and He was going to decide the ground upon which He worked, the time in which He worked, and when He was going to move, and nothing would alter His decision. The Jews, of course, ever ready to criticise Him and discredit Him, and put Him in a bad light, said: "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of him that was blind, have caused that this man also should not die?" All these forces were at work in every realm, from the centre to the circumference of His relationships, to get Him under control, but He was not having it. He had this matter in hand, and that is a very important thing. Why? He stated it: 'This sickness is not unto death, finally, absolutely. This sickness is not going to end in death, but is for the glory of God.' And what then? "And I am glad for your sakes that I

was not there." Oh, what are you going to make of that? Put yourselves in the position of these sisters, with a beloved only brother slowly passing out, in the grip of this apparently fatal sickness. Their hearts were wrung with distress and anxiety, were breaking, and they had seen to it that He knew about it—and this was His attitude: "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there."

Well, you see, He has got hold of this situation and is in charge. We are dealing with God. He is in charge, and if He is working to a certain end, you cannot hurry Him, you cannot take over from Him and make Him do what you want Him to do. He is going to reach His end, and it may be a very trying way for our flesh and our natures, but He will get there, for He is in charge.

THE LAW OF TRAVAIL

We sometimes sing, rather glibly and without watching our words too carefully:

"How I long to climb to the utmost heights!"

I wonder if we realise as we sing that that the utmost heights are only reached through the utmost depths! You and I, dear friends, will never reach God's end except along the pathway of brokenness. That is what this chapter says. While we are whole, and substantial, and well-knit, and self-confident, we will never reach His end.

You see, God, right at the beginning of the Bible and of human history, planted something in human experience which became the *law* of all true knowledge of God from that moment. The great issue in the Garden was *knowledge* of good and evil. Man made a bid for knowledge, under the instigation and inspiration of the devil, and God came along on that declension, on that breakdown, and established a law by which He said: 'You shall never have true knowledge except by this law. Everything that is going to be true and real in the future is not going to be gained so easily as you thought.' The law of travail was planted right at the heart of human life. Travail was introduced as a law for the future, and you and I know very well that true love only comes out of travail. Put it another way: We never value anything that has cost us nothing. We can let it go very cheaply if we have not paid any price for it, but if we have paid a price, if it has been costly, if it has meant something to us of real suffering, or sorrow, or great trial, that is infinitely precious to us, and we do not let it go easily.

So God came right in at that point and put this law of travail into human life and human history, and said: 'You tried to get everything cheaply, but

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

you will not get anything that is worth having without cost in the future.' And from that point, you notice all through the Bible, until you come to the travail of His soul, the travail of the Garden, the travail of the Cross, of which Isaiah had said: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied", that out of travail is the preciousness. It is the law, you see, that there is no reaching the heart of God and having true knowledge without costliness.

Peter learned that by a deep way. He tried to get things cheaply. "It is good for us to be here, Lord. Let us build three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah", and I suppose, although he did not say so, he meant: 'We will have some tabernacles, too. We will stay here.' Peter was like that, but he went the deep way of utter devastation by the Cross of the Lord Jesus, and years afterwards he wrote: "Unto you therefore which believe is the preciousness" (I Peter ii. 7).

The last picture of the Church is of the city, and its gates are of pearl, which is the very symbol of agony, of blood, of tears. That is how it is made. It is costly, and very precious because it costs.

I said that this is a comprehensive chapter, did I not? We will come back to it. Here are these dear sisters, and how they are baptized into the passion, the agony of the Cross, and how they are having to know a tasting of death in order that they might know the preciousness of resurrection life! There is no other way to it.

"I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." He was farsighted, and saw that, although He was running this risk of being misunderstood—for everybody, sisters and all, were misunderstanding Him and were incapable of comprehending Him—He must accept the risk. He saw beyond, to the ultimate. And what is the ultimate? "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

The end of all God's ways is glory. How rich and how full all this is! We are in the presence of God, and when we are there we are in the presence of profoundest realities. Oh, that we might have the grace, when the Lord has us in hand and is dealing with us, not to wrench ourselves out of His hand, but to remain there unto the inevitable glory!

THE BATTLE OF COMMITTAL

I am so hesitant, dear friends, just to add words to words. I do want to make sure that what I am saying is going deeper than your heads, than Christian theory and doctrine.

First of all, as we said last time, there has to be

the basic and utter committal to the Lord. Now, of course, I suppose there are few of you, if any, who would not say that you have surrendered your lives to the Lord, and perhaps you say that you are *utterly* given to the Lord. You don't know what you are talking about! I am sorry to say that, but it comes out of very long experience. We shall never get beyond the point where there is no more battle to get perfectly adjusted to the mind of the Lord. It does not matter how long you live here. If you are walking with the Lord there will be, right to the end, occasions when you find it is not easy to accept some new revelation of the mind of God for you. Indeed, you will have a new battle every time on this, and that is what I meant when I said: 'You don't know what you are talking about!' That is not, of course, to discourage or discount any consecration that you have made, but there has to be a basic, initial, fundamental committal, when we say: 'Now, Lord, I do not know all that it is going to mean, or how it is going to work out, or what it is going to cost, but I put myself into Your hands. I am Yours. I am committed. You are my Master, and I want you to have the absolute mastery of my being. If at any time it becomes difficult for me to yield to Your mastery, I am going to seek grace to adjust to it.' There must be something of an attitude taken which is *complete* committal.

I ask you—not with the sum total of all that it means known to you—has the Lord got the mastery of your being, of your life? As we have already said, this touches every point and aspect. Has He got the mastery in your business, in your business relationships, in your business transactions? Are you doing business that does not lie in line with the glory of God, that is, are you doing business that is a contradiction to the glory of God?

I knew a young fellow once who had got on very well in business and had tremendous prospects, but he was in the biggest tobacco firm in Europe. He had a good position, with great prospects—and he came up against this matter as to whether the Lord was glorified in his doing that kind of business. He decided eventually that that kind of thing was not to the glory of God. As he saw it working out, he found that it was contrary to the glory of God in human lives, so he surrendered his position and came right out of the firm. For a time he was tested by his action and by the position which he had taken of faithfulness to God. The Lord looked after him in the end, but I am not throwing that in to say that you will get a reward, or will get compensation.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1971

The point is: not policy, but principle. The world is governed by policy, by what is politic and what is diplomatic. That is the whole spirit and law of this world, but the Lord Jesus is not policy nor diplomacy, and the principle is the glory of God.

That is what it means to be committed. Is your home in the committal, your domestic relationships, your social life and relationships?

And so we could go on. It is just not a matter of getting on your knees and saying: 'Lord, I am Yours. I give myself to You absolutely', and then when the Lord comes along the next day and says: 'What about this?' to say: 'Oh, I did not mean that!' The Lord is very practical!

Forgive me for speaking like this, but we must, for we are in very serious times, and God is coming near to His people in order to sift out. The end is going to be a tremendously sifting time amongst the Lord's people. Peter says, speaking about the time of the end: "The time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (I Peter iv. 17), and if it begins with us, where will the sinner and the ungodly be? We shall be sifted down to this: Is your priority in life really settled, and is that priority the glory of God? If so, whatever happens, you will go through and you will reach God's end, the glory. "It is God with whom we have to do!"

GOD'S ATTITUDE TO HUMAN LIFE

In this chapter we are dealing with the ultimate things, the primary things and the eternal things. I am going to say what may perhaps be a very difficult thing for you to accept, but it shouts at us and we cannot get away from it, much as it hurts us and we do not like it. The attitude of the Lord Jesus towards the situation and all concerned with it is God's attitude towards human life as it is. Here in this chapter you find human life represented by a number of different aspects. You have the Jews, the scribes and the Pharisees. Well, you are not perhaps surprised at God's attitude towards them, but move on into the heart of the chapter. Here are these dear sisters, and there is this man Lazarus, as far removed from scribes and Pharisees and ruling Jews as could be, humanly. You would say that they are lovely people, but what is the attitude of the Lord Jesus? He is non-committal, holding a reserve. It says that He stayed where He was for two days, and that when He came at last Lazarus had been dead four days. Four days had elapsed between receiving the news and arriving there, and, as you know, they mentioned to Him the state of things which naturally would have prevailed. *Why* did He let Lazarus die? He could

have raised him, for He had healed many others and raised other dead. Why this one who was so beloved? Why did He allow the sisters' hearts to be broken, torn with this sorrow and this distress? Why this attitude? This is God's attitude to humanity at its best in Adam, as well as at its worst. This humanity at its best is something that in Adam God has set aside, and He is not going to patch it up. He is not going to give it medicine to cure it. He says: 'It must die!' The only possible thing is resurrection, a new life altogether, something different from the natural and earthly even at its best.

Do you think I am exaggerating, or going too far? I want you to pick up this Gospel and read it from end to end. Why the marriage in Cana of Galilee? Why did He attend, why did the wine fail and why did that terrible predicament arise? "They have no wine", says His mother, in a kind of appeal and expectation that He would do something. Consternation is over the whole thing. There is no resource left. It is an end of the very thing that makes life. "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." It had been the appeal in a predicament, the appeal of an opportunity, the appeal of a mother's heart, the appeal in a difficult situation, but, no, He would have none of it, for there is something more in it than just patching up this feast. There has to be something that is above the natural, and that is newness of life, and not the old thing patched up. This old thing *must* die, and then resurrection alone is going to be the answer. That is the explanation—something different. God's attitude is that the old creation is bankrupt, and the only prospect is a new creation life. "This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory" (John ii. 11). Glory is the end of God's ways. How? In something that is beyond all natural possibility. Cana is the beginning and Lazarus is the end of the story.

In between—I cannot stay with them, but I will just remind you of some of them—there is Nicodemus, with all his religion and all his learning, to whom Jesus said: "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?" (John iii. 10). All the religious knowledge, learning, position and tradition are bankrupt. 'You must be born from above. This natural life of yours, though it be all like that, will not get you through.'

There is the man at the pool of Bethesda. He was for thirty-eight years lying in that position, struggling every day to get on to his feet and into the water. Try that, perhaps a dozen times every day for thirty-eight years, and see whether you have

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

much hope left at the end! Without the use of the pool and without any artificial aid, He who is the resurrection and life comes on the scene and there is another sign, another showing of how hopeless the natural is until Jesus comes in, but He comes in with another kind, another order of life.

Then we come to the woman of Samaria at Sychar. What a story of moral bankruptcy that is! "Go, call thy husband . . . I have no husband . . . Thou saidst well, I have no husband, for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." Everything has been exhausted in that realm, "but the water that I shall give shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life" . . . "Sir, give me this water" (John iv. 14, 15).

So John goes on with his Gospel until we come to Lazarus, and there in one chapter all this is

gathered up, showing that the glory of God is the end—"Thou shouldest see the glory of God."

The glory of God is not something that God can do in human life, for He is not going to patch that up. Men can do that. You call in the doctors and they may help to keep this thing alive for a time, but God says: 'No, let that die. The glory is not in that kind of thing. It is something absolutely new and different.'

The end of all God's ways is like that. I do trust that you will interpret everything in the light of this. Have you suffered? Have you been knocked about? What are you doing about it? Are you putting it merely and only into the category of things common to man? No, the end is glory, and when you come through you will see the glory of God in the newness of resurrection life.

(To be continued) T. A-S.

THE MOTTO CARD FOR 1972

The wording of the new motto card is:

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD (Psalm 23.1)

In quietness
and in confidence
shall be your strength (Isaiah 30.15)

Large size 4p each

Postage and packing: on 1-3 cards: 3p
on 10 cards: 6p

Small size 2p each

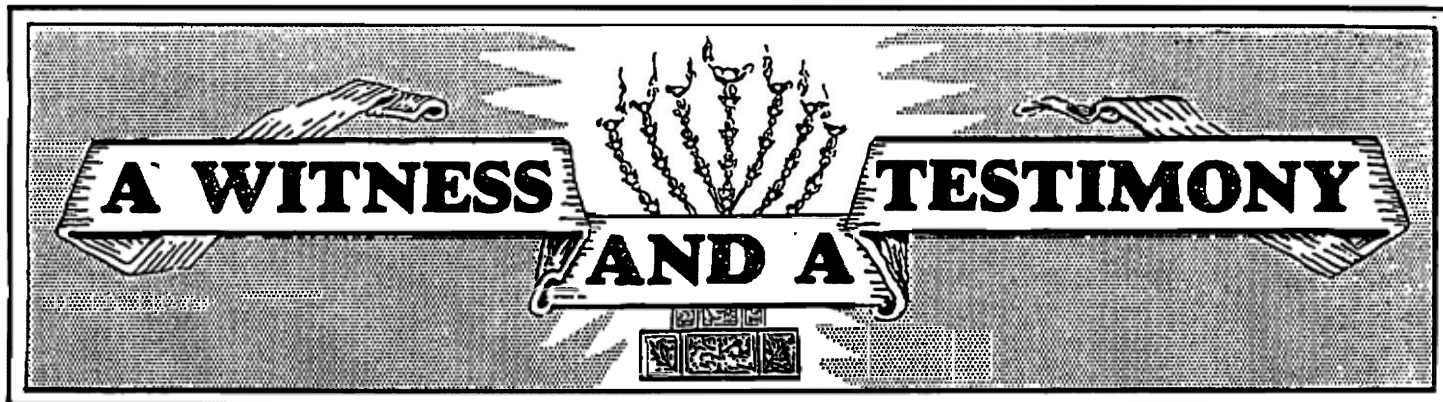
Postage and packing: on 20 cards 3p.

The postage on cards sent overseas is a little higher than the above rates.

Orders for the motto cards may be placed immediately.

They will be despatched as soon as available.

We regret that, owing to lack of space, the list of Acknowledgments must be held over until the next issue.



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1971

VOL. 49. No. 6

CONTENTS

LETTERS	109	FOR BOYS AND GIRLS	118
THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER	110	SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING	119
“LOOSE HIM, AND LET HIM GO”	113	VICTORY	122
THE GLORY OF GOD	123		

39, Honor Oak Road,
London, SE23 3SH.

26A Lower Bristol Road,
Weston-super-Mare,
Somerset.

DEAR FRIENDS,

As we go to press for this last issue in this form, we look back with the deepest gratitude to God for all his enablement over the past forty-nine years.

Our testimony is that help has been received from God to fulfil this ministry (Colossians iv. 7) in its various aspects, and to Him be all the glory and all the praise.

As we look forward to the future, for we feel we are moving under His guidance as our brother Mr. Foster takes over the editorship, we do so trusting the One who is the same yesterday, today and for ever. In these days of such positive enemy activity we remind ourselves of the word in Daniel: “The people that know their God shall be strong and do exploits.”

With confidence then in Him we face the future and believe we shall again prove the sufficiency of the Lord who reigneth.

Yours, by His grace,
F. AUSTIN-SPARKS

DEAR READERS,

I am grateful to the Witness and Testimony Literature Trustees for this opportunity of introducing to you the new magazine which you will receive in January 1972.

As you have been told, it has been thought right to discontinue the use of the title *A Witness and A Testimony*, so I will edit a new bi-monthly which will be called *Toward The Mark*.

This will be devoted to the same spiritual aims as the paper which for so many years you have known and appreciated, and will contain contributions from those of us whose initials are already familiar to you. It will also contain messages extracted from the many manuscripts which Mr. Austin-Sparks bequeathed to us. It will continue to be sent to you unless you write us to the contrary.

As before, the magazine will have no subscription, but will be entirely supported by the gifts of appreciative readers, and they should be sent to the office

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

at 39 Honor Oak Road. I shall not continue to print a list of such gifts; the donors will receive a personal acknowledgement.

Although the name of the magazine and some of its details may be different, I have no intention of introducing new features just for the sake of novelty. A list of *Witness and Testimony* literature will still be provided. The office work, including the dispatch of the magazine and all other literature, will continue to be carried on by our secretary, Miss Ruth Read, from the same address: 39 Honor Oak Road, London SE23 3SH. Please remember her in your prayers.

The editorial work will be done from my new home, 26A Lower Bristol Road, Weston-super-Mare,

Somerset, and I hope that you will write to me there if you think that I can help you in any way.

When my wife and I realized that the Lord was calling us to relinquish our pastoral work at the Honor Oak Christian Fellowship Centre and move away to Somerset, we had no idea of what the future would hold for us, least of all that the Lord would call me to take up this editorial work. We now realize, however, that our exercise and decision were all a part of the Lord's skilful planning, and rejoice at the prospect of continuing to serve His people in this way.

We count on your prayers.

Yours sincerely in our Lord Jesus,

HARRY FOSTER

THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER

Reading: John xvi.—xvii. 26

I WANT you just to pass your eye over that prayer again—"He said, Father . . . O Father . . . I come to thee. Holy Father, keep them . . . As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee . . . Father, that which thou hast given me . . . O righteous Father."

"I manifested thy name . . . I made known . . . thy name", and, quite evidently, from this chapter and from the whole of this Gospel, the name which the Lord Jesus manifested and made known was "Father".

That may not impress us as it would have done those in His own time, for, with the Lord Jesus, there came in a revelation of God which was nothing less than revolutionary. Go back to the Old Testament and look at the manifestation of God in the names and titles which are given to Him there. They are many, wonderful, very great and very glorious, but they are usually very remote, and put Him in a place of holy and awful isolation. He is there the One who is unapproachable in Himself, and whose presence always created fear, even terror. If there was anything approximating to the coming near of God, even in those strange forms of manifestation called the 'theophanies,' when in the first place those visited thought it was a man and then afterwards realized it was the Lord, the people cried out in fear and terror. And the Lord said even to Moses, who was such an honoured, choice, faithful, devoted servant: "Man shall not see me and live" (Exodus xxxiii. 20). When a man wrestled with Jacob and subsequently departed, Jacob cried: "I have seen God face to

face, and my life is preserved" (Genesis xxxii. 30). To him that was a most wonderful thing! Of course, he had met the veiled deity—the veiled God had come in man form—but, even so, Jacob recognized that it was the Lord, and the wonderful thing was that his life remained whole in him.

When the Lord Jesus came into this world He brought an altogether revolutionary revelation of God, and the one word which was on His lips more than any other was 'Father'—'My Father', 'The Father'.

This seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel is, as you can see, the culmination and summation of all that has gone before of the life of the Lord Jesus and the manifestation of the Son of God with all His works and words. The end has come, for you will notice that the next chapter begins: "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where there was a garden." Then the final scenes of his earthly life were enacted and the cross followed. So this prayer is the gathering up of everything by Jesus. He is gathering up the very purpose for which He came into this world, the meaning of all His teaching and His works, the meaning of His having been here in this world, and He is putting it into one marvellous word, or name: 'Father.' He is saying 'I have done what I came for. I came to manifest Thy name.' Note the way in which He puts it. He did not come to give people a doctrine, a truth or a teaching about the Fatherhood of God, as a theme or subject. He said: 'I manifested', or, fo

our purpose you could use the word: 'I demonstrated'. There is all the difference between a lecturer and a demonstrator! To 'manifest' is very practical; it is more than words or teaching, for it is showing in a living way the thing that you are desiring to have grasped and understood.

And so this matter of the Father God was manifested in a Person. The Person Himself was the manifestation. When you look at Him, listen to Him, watch Him, there is one deduction that you can draw, should and must draw: 'That is just what God is like.'

Whether it be with the little children, and His hands of blessing upon them, drawing them to Himself; or any of the many things that He did in healings, in comfortings, in restorings; or in any of the wonderful things that He said in parables, our conclusion should be: 'That is what God is like!' It is an expression of God as Father, and the Lord Jesus Himself is the manifestation of the Father.

Now, open that out and go right back to the beginning of history as the Bible gives it to us, and this conception is inherent in the very beginning. What was the conception with which the Bible opened, when God had completed His creative activities and got His man and the man's wife? It was a family. The *family* conception was there right at the very beginning, and in God's mind it was to be a family of His *own* children. He wanted a family of children 'after His own image and likeness', like Himself, and His heart was set upon this. There, at the beginning, He says: "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Genesis i. 22), and behind that is God's intention to have a family.

Do you notice that in the second phase of the Bible, that which we call the Patriarchs, it is the family which is the dominant, characteristic feature? 'Patriarch' is a Bible word, as you know, but do you know what it means? It just means 'the head of the family'. Perhaps you have not thought of that when considering Noah, Moses and Abraham and calling them by this high-sounding name 'the Patriarchs'! But right through that long and very rich phase of the development of history in the Bible there lies, deeply embedded, this idea of the family. And in the patriarchal families it was not only the father who was the head of the household. The eldest son was also the priest of the family, in union with the father. Fathers and sons were the divine idea, and if you like to make it singular you can, for you are looking right ahead to John xvii!

And when you move still further on in Bible history and come to that section of the Old Testament which has to do with the kings, the monarchy,

have you been impressed with the fact that, when that phase reaches its highest point in David and Solomon, the very conception and idea of monarchy, of government, of dominion, of reign, of a kingdom, lies with the father and son, David and Solomon? That was the peak of the monarchy. And if you look both into the Old Testament account and into the New Testament references to it, you will find that those words spoken by the Lord to David about his son, Solomon: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (II Samuel vii. 14), are taken up in the letter to the Hebrews and applied to the Lord Jesus. So God was looking *through* David and *through* Solomon—not just *at* them—to His own eternal thought of the family.

You come to the next and final section of the Old Testament, the Prophets. And what is the cry of the Prophets? For in this section there is a cry, a sob, a groan, an anguish, a travail, and, for the most part, that is the spirit of the Prophets. They are burdened, men with a burden, a cry, a heart-ache, men who are expressing a travail. Listen again to Isaiah liii!

But what is it all about? God has lost His family! The family of Israel has been broken up and disintegrated. It has gone away from God and from His house. God is deprived of that thing for which He first of all created men, and then inculcated into the whole of His dealings with them. In the Prophets God is seen to be in a state of disappointment and sorrow. Listen to Hosea, for instance. There is a cry of deep anguish in that prophet's heart, and it all focuses upon this family conception.

Well, that has covered a lot of history, and there is more in it than that, but that is enough to show what was in God's heart, what His heart had been set upon, what He had hidden, in a way, in His dealings with men and in His constitution of things. This was a hidden desire and purpose in the heart of God.

Then the Son of God comes, Now you go through your New Testament and tabulate the number of times 'Father' and 'Son' occur in connection with God and the Lord Jesus. And then go on to the next step and tabulate the number of times that the Lord's people are referred to as His children, His sons, or as in a family relationship to Himself—'begotten of God', 'born of God', and so on. It is very full and rich. We have only to mention it for a great deal just to come back to us and break upon us!

We said that the Son of God came from the Father: "I came forth from the Father" (John xvi. 27). And why? For one thing, to take up all that history from the creation, through the Patriarchs,

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

through the monarchy, through the prophets, and gather to Himself the realization of this thing for His Father, in order to satisfy His Father. Dear friends, if you want to know what the Lord Jesus meant, and what it means where we are concerned when He said: "I came to do Thy will", it is this about which we are talking. The will of God is the family of God in which He is truly Father God, and His Son is truly *the* Son, the eldest Son, "The firstborn among many brethren" (Romans viii. 29). Do you pray to know the will of God? Do you ask to know what God's will is? Well, of course, you may apply that to all sorts of things, but you must remember that the will of God is very comprehensive and specific, and is just this that we are talking about. The Son came, not only to speak of the Father, but to manifest the Father, so that He could say: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9). "There is no further need for you to say "Shew us the Father" (John xiv. 8). "I manifested thy name. . . I kept them in thy name." And, as we have seen, in this chapter alone He calls Him 'Father' six times—"O righteous Father . . . Holy Father."

The Lord Jesus has come to give in His own Person the revelation of God as Father, and to redeem unto God His family. Those wonderful words in the early part of the Letter to the Hebrews: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren . . . I and the children which God hath given me . . . Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" (Hebrews ii. 11, 13; iii. 1) are the fruit of His *redeeming* activity.

Dear friends, it is a good thing to be redeemed, to have what redemption means in the sense of sins forgiven, deliverance from bondage, security unto eternal life, and all those blessings. But do we sufficiently recognize that it is a *family* He has come to redeem, and that we are redeemed as a family? We may be redeemed individually, but God's thought, and Christ's thought, was to redeem a *family*.

What is a family? Now, if you friends have a family, how happy and pleased would you be if every one of your children was a unit in himself or herself, living an independent life without any concern or consideration or interest in any other member of the family? Just so many isolated units in one place could not be called a home! Would you be happy about it if they all went off and never had any concern for the other members, but were just individuals? Well, they might be children of the same parents, but, if that was the situation, the parents would feel that the real meaning of parenthood had been lost. How God must feel about any-

thing and everything that is other than a family concept and a family spirit amongst His people!

We hear so much about the Church, the church: and the local assemblies. Indeed, we can get very tired of that, for it can be so technical. But what is God's thought in companies of His people in any place? That they should be a representation of the family where His Fatherhood is the dominant thing, where His Son has the place that He ought to have, and where all are a unit. "I pray . . . that they may all be one" (John xvii. 20, 21). How? 'As Thou *Father*, and *I* are one.' The Father is revealing Himself in the Son and the Son is manifesting Himself in the Father. What perfect oneness there is between those two! "That they may be one, even as we are one."

The prayer of the Lord Jesus, right at the end as He went to the Cross, was for the family. He went to the Cross to redeem the family, that out of His death and resurrection many sons should be born.

And there are not lacking some indications that there was a very real answer to His prayer at the beginning. You would never call those twelve disciples a family before Calvary! I should say: "Thou Lord deliver us from families if that is one." There was quarrelling, envying, striving and jealousy of one another. But look afterwards: "But Peter, *standing up with the eleven*" (Acts ii. 14). And there is that wonderful second chapter of Acts when they "were all together in one place . . . they had all things common . . . and not one of them said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own" (Acts ii. 1; iv. 32).

Well, we have reached something of the family when the Holy Spirit brings Christ into His place and God is Father over all. Paul had some conception of this. You know that in his letter to the Ephesians he prayed to the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (iii. 14).

So the Lord Jesus came, firstly to secure unto the Father the satisfaction of His eternal desire, the realization of His own ambition of *heart*, to redeem unto God a family; and not to leave it there, but to bring that family to reign, to govern in the eternal kingdom. It is to be the governmental family of the ages to come. The means by which He is going to govern this world in the coming ages is by this family elevated to His throne. The far greater and more glorious counterpart of David and Solomon is the Father and Son. And then, to use another phrase from the Letter to the Hebrews, "many sons" whom He has brought to glory.

We cannot just say these things without reminding

ourselves that the realization of this, both on the part of the Lord Jesus and on our part, if the Father is to find His satisfaction, is a costly thing. It is by way of travail. There is no family without travail. God has put it in the very constitution of this creation that the family is by way of travail, of suffering. In a word, someone has to be prepared to lay down their life for the family, and the Lord Jesus did it. And, dear friends, we are not going to have anything like this amongst the Lord's people unless we are prepared to suffer for it, to lay down our lives for it, to set aside all our own personal interests for it, really to put up with a lot, that we might bring to the Father that upon which His heart is so much set. It is the way of travail, of sacrifice, of suffering. For this His Body was broken, that we might share that Body as one family. For this His Blood was shed, that we might, in drinking His blood—in other words, His out-poured life—share as a family that one life.

So we come back and close where we began, with His prayer. What a cry it is! What an appeal it is! Shall we say: what an agony it is! 'Father, the world has not known, but these have known . . . Father, as Thou and I are one . . . that they may be one.'

Have you been all the time poised and adjusted, asking: 'Is the Lord saying something to me? Somewhere, somehow, I have violated this family spirit, family disposition, and grieved the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of the family.' Is there something that He is saying to you and to me? How does this apply to us? Is it just a lovely Bible theme? God forbid! It was a prayer with Him, so let us make it a prayer, and a prayer that will have a very practical aspect, for sometimes we can go a long way towards answering our own prayers. And this matter is not *all* to be left with the Lord. He has done His part!

T. A-S.

"LOOSE HIM, AND LET HIM GO"

Reading: John xi. 38-44

IT is that last verse that we shall be considering especially:

"He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him and let him go."

I would just like to place alongside of that a fragment from the tenth chapter:

"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John x. 10).

We have said more than once that we are here in the presence of God manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, His Son, and, being in the presence of God, we are being made aware of God's mind concerning man. What Jesus says is the expression of the mind of God for man.

THE FULLNESS OF THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

I think that you have learned that what is written in this whole Gospel by John is more than an earthly story, or a collection of sayings and doings on the part of Jesus Christ. There is in every one of those sayings and doings, and in every part of the story, a setting forth in one way or another of some eternal and unfathomable truth because it comes from God. God is unfathomable, unsearchable,

incomprehensible, profound beyond our understanding. He has a depth and a fullness never, never to be exhausted, either in time or in eternity, and anything that emanates from God in word or deed carries with it that significance. It is not just human language. These are not just the words and works of a man. Every fragment contains the profound depth of God, and this chapter, which is marked out in the organization of the matter for our convenience as chapter eleven, is a wonderful example of what we have just said. Every bit of it goes far beyond the thing that is said or done. It is so comprehensive, so far-reaching, so full of depth and meaning. I have been reading the Gospel by John, and, of course, this chapter, for over sixty years, and I have spoken on it many times, but I am still in the presence of that which is far beyond me. I am not just giving you something that has been said before. The whole Gospel is *always* divulging that which we have not seen or known before. Now that does not mean that you have never seen what I am going to say at this time, but what I am saying is that there is a fullness here, and that, whatever and however much you have seen, there is more yet that God means in the fragments of this chapter.

We are always wrestling with our limitations both to understand and grasp, and certainly to utter what is herein contained. Some of us are very poor

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

at this business, and we know it. A little grandson of mine heard I was going to America and he asked his mother: 'What is Grandpa going to America for?' She said: 'Well, to preach.' He said: 'To preach? He is not very good at that, is he?' And Grandpa fully agrees! So now you know what you have to put up with! Well, that is just how we feel when we come into the presence of the divine stature of God's words.

I think you all realize something of the vastness of this chapter, but I trust that we shall yet see a little more, though by no means the fullness of what is in the passage which we have just read, and especially the fragment in verse 44.

THE ASPECTS OF THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

Now, before we come to that, let me just say this word that is necessary, I think, and leads up to it. We must recognize the aspects of this Gospel. First of all, it is a backward aspect. That is, John wrote this Gospel long years after all that is in it was completed. The whole thing was finished, as to the actuality of the content of this record, and the Lord Jesus had left this earth. All that is here lay in the past when John wrote it. It was something completed as to history. John was writing it from that standpoint, with the backward aspect. But you will notice that the Gospel itself is written on the forward aspect. That is, it was all written in the light of the day that was to come. Jesus is here saying repeatedly: "In that day . . . in that day . . . when . . . when . . ." and that relates to the day of the advent of the Holy Spirit. "When He is come . . . in that day." This Gospel was written for a coming day, and we are living in that day, that is, in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was making it perfectly clear that what He was saying and doing in the flesh related to that day which was yet to be, the day when the Holy Spirit inaugurated the present dispensation. This Gospel, therefore, is written to us precisely because we live in that day.

You, perhaps, are asking: 'Why is he saying this? It is simple and obvious. We know it.' Well, do we? I have said all that in order that we might recognize that this verse 44 belongs to us. It was written for us. In the day in which we live, this very dispensation day, this verse belongs to us.

One other word about that. The backward aspect of this Gospel, written after it was all actually accomplished in history, was the objective side, when everything was outward. All that Jesus was doing was outward. His meanings were put into outward things, ways and means. The day for which all that objective was done and said is the

day of the subjective, when it is taken from history without and made history within, when it is no longer something just outside of us, but something to be planted inside of us. That is the real meaning of the coming of the Holy Spirit—to lay hold of everything in the Scripture which is there objectively and place it right within the centre of the life of the believer, so that it becomes a part of the very inwardness of the believer's life.

If we do not recognize these things we may miss our way in reading the stories, and just think of them as wonderful stories of what Jesus did, particularly this one of the raising of this man Lazarus from the dead. It was done and recorded in order that it might become our inward experience, a very part of our own being. That is the foundation upon which we build what we have to say as to this whole Gospel.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE GOSPELS AND EPISTLES

May I add another word, which I hope will have some value to you? It is always necessary, in the light of what we have said, and important to take account of the correspondence between the Epistles in the New Testament and the Gospels, because the Epistles are, after all, only the subjective expression of the objective Gospels. How can I put that to help you? Well, you read your Gospels. If you like, read this chapter. There is the story, the account of what happened; all the parts, the phases and the stages of it. That is very wonderful, but when you come to the Epistles you are told what all that means. It is there that you get the explanation for your own life of what is in the Gospels. The Gospels will remain the history of two thousand years ago until you come to see what God meant them to be in your own life, and you find that out in the Epistles. Always read the Gospels in this twofold way, and remember that this in the Gospels is explained somewhere in the Epistles. Read the Epistles and you will say: 'This is explaining what is in the Gospels.' So read your New Testament in that way. We have to look at the Book of the Acts and the Epistles for the real meaning of the Gospels, and before we can get the real inward value of the Gospels.

Now we have said all that, we come to this verse in the eleventh chapter of John: "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." Do you know that you have the vast amount of the remainder of the New Testament (after John)

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1971

that is exactly in keeping with that? It tells you what that means for us. Here in this chapter is what it meant for Lazarus and his sisters, but what did that mean in God's mind for us?

LIFE, BUT LIMITATION

First of all, it is possible for us to have life by the word of Jesus Christ, resurrection life, divine life, that which is called eternal life; it is possible for us to have that life by which we have been brought from the death of our natural state into this newness of life by the fiat of the Son of God, and yet be limited in every way while we have it. Limited in ministry—"his hands bound"; limited in progress—"his feet bound"; limited in understanding—"a napkin around his head and over his eyes". Those three things are three of the major things in the teaching of the Apostles.

Let me repeat that, for it is so true, and it is true of multitudes today. It is one of the problems in Christianity that, while through simple response to the Word of the Lord Jesus, many have been born again and are His people, are children of God and have divine life, it is so possible—and is actually so in numerous cases—to be limited in almost every way as to that life, and that life is so limited in them. Here the symbolism is bound hand, bound foot and bound head. The hands are the symbols of ministry, or fruitfulness of life, and are there not many Christians who believe in the Lord Jesus and have that saving faith in Him, yet whose ministration and fruitfulness of life are exceedingly limited, bound and tied up? Oh, how many Christians are just tied up in this matter of real fruitfulness, real ministry—and when I use that word 'ministry' I am not just talking about platforms, or Bible preaching, but the ministration of the Lord Jesus. In the next chapter we read that Jesus came back to Bethany and they made Him a feast. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those who sat at meat. It would have been a poor lookout for that whole occasion if Lazarus had been tied up in his grave clothes! But, no, he is able to share with the others in this experience, and if you think I am trying to make something of nothing, look again, because it was at that point that the Jewish rulers took counsel to put Lazarus to death also, because by reason of *him* many believed. That is what I meant by loosed hands, ministry, fruitfulness: "By reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus." Is it not true that multitudes of Christians are not in that release of life where many believe because of them? They remain isolated, tied up, bound. They are Christians, but in

the meaning of hands of fruitfulness, of service, of the ministration of Christ, of the testimony of Jesus, they are still in the grave clothes. And that is why Jesus said: "I came that they might have life", but, more than that, "have it abundantly". And Lazarus had the life, but not abundantly until he was loosed.

Now you get into the Epistles with that fragment only, and see how much there is about the life of the believer being an effective life, a fruitful life, and a responsible life, a life that is really producing something. Indeed, we could say that one of the major purposes of all the Letters that the Apostles wrote was to get these Christians (and need I remind you again that more than ninety per cent of the New Testament was written to Christians? That is impressive and challenging!) who had the life to have it more abundantly, that is, to be loosed in this matter of their newness of life.

Well, perhaps that is enough for the moment on that.

LIFE, BUT NO PROGRESS

And what is true of the meaning of the hands is true of the feet. Lazarus was "bound hand and foot". Again, is it not true that many, many Christians, born-again believers, are making no progress in the spiritual life, are not going on? You meet them once, and three, six and ten years afterwards they are just where they were when you first met them. They have not gone on, for their feet are bound. They are not going on, not making spiritual progress, not gaining ground, not overtaking the course, not—to use Paul's phrase—"attaining". They are in a state of spiritual stagnation, spiritual arrest. Their feet are bound, and that is not God's idea. Jesus, God incarnate, said: 'Loose him, and let him go. Release those feet that he may walk, that he may run in the way of My commandments.' That is God's idea for us. That is not only a statement of truth, but a challenge as to where we are.

LIFE, BUT NO SPIRITUAL SIGHT

What about this head, wrapped in a napkin about the eyes and about the mouth? We mention the eyes in particular for our purpose at the moment. Again, is it not true that there are many who are the Lord's people but who are not really seeing more and more, and ever more of what He has for them and through them? Many Christians see no further than their hand before their eyes. It is a little world in which they live, a very short

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

horizon of spiritual perception and understanding, apprehension and spiritual knowledge. Their heads are wrapped around and their eyes are covered over. They have life, but that is all.

Having said these things, in order to indicate what we mean by the great fullness that there is here, even in a verse, let us look at it again.

THE GRAVE TOUCH

Lazarus came forth and he had life, but at that moment when he came forth he was still in contact with the grave. There was still that about him which spoke of that sepulchre, and the limitations of that sepulchre. Again, what are these limitations? Well, we come over to the Epistles. I am not going right through them all, but I will give you just enough to indicate what is meant.

LOOSING FROM THE NATURAL LIFE

If you turn to the first Letter to the Corinthians, and have any knowledge of what is in that Letter, you will know what we mean by the grave touch still upon born-again Christians. Paul opens that Letter by addressing the Corinthians as "saints", which means those who are the Lord's, but as he writes on and on an awful situation is unfolded, is it not? They have life, but you cannot say that they have it abundantly. The grave clothes are on them, that is, the grave touch is still there, and in the first Letter to the Corinthians it is the grave touch of the limitations of the natural life. They are Christians, yes, but they are bound and limited by the ties of the natural life. That is the word which the Apostle uses specifically: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . and he cannot know them" (I Corinthians ii. 14). That is limitation, is it not? You proceed into the Letter and you find that these people are behaving as worldly people behave. In their behaviour, their conduct, their procedure, they go on just exactly as do worldly people. Someone has done a wrong to another believer, and apparently that happened in more than one case at Corinth, and the result was that this believer against whom the wrong was done thought this was criminal and should be set right in the court of law in the world. So he hauled his fellow-believer before the judge in the worldly court to get his rights. That is exactly what the world does, and that is an instance of a whole handful of things that were going on at Corinth. Some were worse than that. "There are divisions among you, and when there are divisions among you are ye not carnal?" Not

spiritual, but carnal.

Well, gather up the whole of that Letter and it is a terrible story of those who are the Lord's and who have the life just behaving as other people do, living in the way that the world does. You find the women behaving as worldly women did in their dress, in their demeanour, in their behaviour, and even in the assembly. I do not want to pick out the women particularly, but I am indicating that there is the spirit of the world amongst believers in Corinth, and (read the Letter again in the light of this) that is keeping them still in this bondage, in this limitation of their spiritual life. It is grave clothes, and you are not surprised that at Corinth the world is not feeling the impact of their testimony, that the church at Corinth is not counting in the world, because the world has got into the church, and into its members individually. In this sense the grave clothes are still on them, by reason of the limitations which come upon the spiritual life when the natural takes charge and governs, controls and directs. It is a terrible spiritual limitation. There is life, yes, but not 'life abundantly'. Do you see what I mean? Their testimony is bound. There is still something of the grave, and that Letter to the Corinthians was written in the same spirit and with the same idea, intention and object as the Lord had when He said: "Loose him and let him go." Paul is striving to get these Corinthians loosed as Christians loosed, liberated, set free into the fullness of the life which they had.

LOOSING FROM TRADITION AND LEGALISM

We pass from Corinthians into Galatians, and no one who knows that Letter will dispute the statement that here you are in touch with the grave very truly. You know all that the Letter to the Galatians is about, and you know the two prominent words: Liberty—"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians v. 1—A.V.)—and sonship. Not servanthood, nor slavery, but sonship; the liberty of sons. They are the two great words of that Letter, but what are the grave bands there in Galatia? They are the grave bands of tradition, of legalism, and all such things. You know, dear friends, it is very easy to get tied up with these grave clothes! The persistent peril through the ages of Christianity is to crystallize itself into something set, something fixed. You have some light, some revelation, something of the immensity of truth, just a fragment of it, and it is not long before

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1971

you begin to form that into a set system and make it the limit, saying that this is what people must believe, they must come within this horizon, and they must behave like this. It becomes a system again: 'You must . . . you must not!', and there is no difference between that and the Old Testament 'Thou shalt . . . thou shalt not!' Christianity has fallen into that peril, and is continually doing it, circumscribing the great revelation, making Christ smaller than He is, crystallizing truth into something fixed and set: 'This is how . . .', and the meaning of that is: 'This is the ultimate.'

Now you notice that when the Spirit did come, as we have the record in the Book of the Acts, the one thing that these old Jewish disciples experienced was a marvellous emancipation from that bondage of Judaism; and how the Holy Spirit was working all along against any fixed barriers! Peter will argue that he is a Jew, born, bred and died-in-the-wool, and that never has anything unclean entered *his* mouth, according to Leviticus chapter 11. All right, Peter. You are just putting your interpretation upon the Scriptures, and you are putting your hmits upon what Christ has done by His Cross, and so he is told: "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common" (Acts x. 15). The Holy Spirit reacted to Peter's traditionalism, legalism, limitation and bondage, and made him go and do what he would never have done otherwise. Again and again, right to his death, the words of the Lord Jesus to him, in the last chapter of this Gospel, were made good: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (John xxi. 18). That principle was being applied over Cornelius and his house, and Caesarea and the Gentiles. He was made to go whither he would not. He was saying: 'No, Lord', and the Lord was saying: 'Yes, Peter'. "Whither thou wouldest not" is heaven's reaction to this legalistic limitation, these grave clothes on an Apostle. And that was not the only battle that Peter had, but we will not stay with it.

Then John says that when the Lord Jesus said those words to Peter He was signifying "by what manner of death he should *glorify* God". Years afterwards Peter wrote: "Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me" (II Peter i. 14). We do not know the manner of his death, but tradition says that Peter was crucified. Only Jews could be crucified by Gentiles, for Gentiles dared not crucify one of their own. So

Peter went that way, but because Paul had Roman citizenship they could not crucify him, so they beheaded him. Peter was selected for the same kind of death as His Lord's, and he knew it, for he said: "As our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me." He was girded by another and carried the way he would not choose to go, but the way of the Spirit is the way that goes against our limitations, our grave clothes, and takes us along ways of which we would never have thought. Indeed, our theology would not accept that way, our doctrine might be against it, our tradition would forbid it, but the Holy Spirit says: 'This is the way. Loose him, and let him go.' That is Galatians, is it not? I said that we need the Epistles to explain the Gospels, and just one verse in the Gospel by John contains all this!

LOOSING UNTO FULL SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

I close with one other thing. Look into the Letter to the Ephesians, and you, having come through the loosing of the hands in Corinth, and the loosing of the feet in Galatia to walk in the Spirit and stand fast in liberty, now move to the head. In Ephesians Paul takes the napkin from the head and does it thoroughly. Ephesians has to do with the napkin around the head. What do we mean? Well, Paul hardly begins that Letter before he says: 'I bow my knees unto the Father of glory, that He would grant unto you Ephesian Christians that you should have the whole counsel of God given to you, to grant unto *you* a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, Christ, that the eyes of your heart be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.' 'That you may *know* . . . the eyes of your heart being enlightened'—there is the napkin off the head! This Letter to the Ephesians is a wonderful revelation as to the eyes of the heart being unveiled, unbound, as to the greatness of our calling and vocation, as to the immensity of that for which we have been brought into union with His Son. How great it is! Beyond all our grasping, dear friends. Believe me, it is no exaggeration, and Paul says: "that you may *know*".

There is one little prefix missing in our transition which is the key to the whole thing. The Apostle says: 'That you may know . . . that you may know', and in the New Testament we have that word given to us in part and in whole. It is not given to us in our translation, but it is just this: Knowing, in itself, is applied to our beginning

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

knowledge of the Lord. To quote John again: "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John xvii. 3). That is the entering into life, the receiving of divine life, but when Paul speaks here about 'knowing', he is using a compound Greek word which we do not have in our translation. It is 'epignosis', *full* knowledge. 'You know', he says to these Ephesians, 'that in the space of two years I ceased not to preach unto you the whole counsel of God.' They knew, and on that initial knowledge they had come to the Lord, but now he is praying, at the end of his life from his prison: 'that you may come unto *full* knowledge.' It is more than life; it is life abundant. It is more than seeing; it is seeing with a great range of divine purpose and meaning for our calling and our having life.

Will you tell me that all Christians are like that? Are there not many around whose heads there is a napkin, which obscures their spiritual vision,

limits their spiritual sight, and narrows down the range of their comprehension of the great purpose of their calling? Real revelation, dear friends, is not just information. It is liberation. To see fully and more fully, is to be released.

We have often said about this man Paul that there was nothing on earth or in hell, or in a combination of both, that would have changed the rabid, fanatical Pharisee into the greatest friend that ever Jesus Christ had except light from heaven. Nothing could have done it—but light from heaven did it. The napkin was taken off and the man was set free to walk up and down in the greatness of Jesus Christ.

I think we can see that that one verse in the whole of John's Gospel contains the Bible. Is it not true that God's mind for man, God's thought for His people, is: 'Loose him. He has got life, but loose him and let him go!' "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

A MATTER OF IDENTITY

THE ship was called *Ormara*, though it is many years now since I sailed in her, and I fear that long ago she has gone to the breaker's yard. I had sailed on quite a number of ships before her, but there was something different about this one. You couldn't miss it; as soon as you arrived alongside it hit you in the eye! On the side of the ship was painted a very, very large Union Jack.

Now all ships fly their national flag when going in and out of port, or when they meet warships, but this one had the national flag painted permanently on the side. There was a very good reason for this. This ship was trading between the Middle East and Japan, which meant that every few months she had to pass through the Formosa Straits. That is the stretch of water between mainland China and Formosa, the no-man's-land between Communist and Nationalist Chinese.

Warships and planes in those parts sometimes shot first and asked questions afterwards, so, just to make sure that they knew to whom we belonged, the flag was painted on the side for all to see.

Just after this experience I flew home for some leave. There I heard a preacher speak about people who had little Bibles that they hid away in their pockets. Now that is exactly the sort of Bible I had.

The preacher said that we should have a big Bible so that it was easy to read, and people could see us carrying it to church.

The very next day I went out and bought a big black Bible. Now, it wasn't too bad carrying a Bible in the streets of Edinburgh, for on Sunday morning many people could be seen doing this. After a while, though, I flew back to India to join another ship. Oh dear! No one carried a Bible through the Bombay docks on a Sunday morning.

On that first Sunday morning as I got ready to go to church I looked at the two Bibles. The little one to slip into my pocket and not be noticed, or the other one which would identify me as someone different? As I stood there wondering, the words of a hymn ran through my mind: "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord or to defend His cause." I knew what I had to do, so picking up the big Bible I set off down the gangway humming the tune of the hymn.

The Custom's Officer at the bottom of the gangway gave me a searching look, and I almost thought he was going to speak. When I returned from church he did speak. "I see you carry a Bible. Are you a Christian?" We soon found that we were brothers in Christ, and there began a friendship

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1971

which went on for years whenever he had to board my ship. His heart was cheered to find an officer on a ship who stood for Jesus Christ.

The following day an engineer on the ship spoke to me. "I saw you go ashore yesterday with a Bible. Did you go to church?" He told me that he had wanted to go to church but had been frightened about what other officers might say. From then on we were able to go to church together. He was encouraged because he found he didn't have to stand for Jesus Christ alone.

"Supposing," I said to myself, "I had chosen the little Bible, and so hidden my identity, what a loss

there would have been to me and to others." It is not only ships that need to show at all times to whom they belong. And for me it had been so simple. Just carrying a Bible.

There is a much more important reason, too, for showing to whom you belong. Jesus said: "Every-one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew x. 32-33).

G. S.

SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

Reading: Matthew xiii. 1-9, 11, 14-15, 19, 23, 51

YOU will probably note that one word occurs in all these varied verses—the word 'understanding' in its different forms. I have recently been very much impressed with the necessity for spiritual understanding.

This parable is, I expect, as familiar to you as any of the parables of the Lord Jesus, and you know that it has its setting in what are called 'the parables of the kingdom', that is, in our Lord's teaching concerning the kingdom of Heaven. However, we have to see it in a larger setting, for this book which goes by Matthew's name does make the definitions very clear as to the differences between the Kingdom of Heaven and the other kingdom. Indeed, this book sees this contrast being drawn, pressed and forced to the point of ultimate destiny. There were the two kingdoms: that kingdom in which the Jews were naturally, and the Kingdom of Heaven to which the Lord Jesus was calling men and women. Through this book you find those two kingdoms in very strong contrast and opposition, so that the Jewish rulers, teachers and leaders are found to be increasingly antagonistic to the Kingdom of Heaven until the issue is pressed at last in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, that issue being the destinies which are here in view and involved, the destiny of those in the Kingdom of Heaven and the destiny of all others who are not in that Kingdom.

The Lord Jesus, in His teaching concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, is working on a selective line, for He is drawing out from the other kingdom a people for the Kingdom of Heaven, those who will enter and be born into that Kingdom. He speaks

on the one side of "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew xii. 39), which is the other kingdom, and then, on the other side, He speaks of "the sons of the kingdom" (Matthew xiii. 38), and that is so different.

Now right in that setting stands this most familiar of all parables, that which we call 'The Parable of the Sower'.

It is tremendously impressive that the Lord Jesus makes this whole issue turn upon one thing. This immense issue of the two kingdoms, the two destinies, the two courses, the two kinds of people, turns upon this one thing of spiritual understanding. It is worth looking again at these verses which we have read:

"By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise *understand* . . . Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and *understand* with their heart . . . When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom and *understandeth* it not, then cometh the evil one . . . And he that was sown upon the good ground, this he that heareth the word, and *understandeth* it . . . Have ye *understood* all these things?"

Before we can go further, we must see that there are three realms to be recognized as realms of relationship between us and God.

First, there is the realm of the unsearchableness and inscrutability of God and His ways. He cannot be understood, He is past finding out, and altogether defeats the last attempts of the wisest of this world to explain Him. That is a true realm recognized in the Scriptures.

Then there is another realm in which we are

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

called upon to obey and go on with the Lord in blind faith, and without any explanations from Him. Sometimes, we would say, He *will* not explain Himself. He just calls on us to go on believing Him without any kind of understanding or explanation. We know we have to go on, but that is all we do know. We do not know why we must take a certain course beyond that the Lord has said that we must. We have to wait. That is another realm that is clearly recognized in the word of God.

But there is a third realm—and these are not contradictory—and that is the realm of education and instruction unto spiritual intelligence and understanding, and the Word of God makes a lot of that,

When this struck me as I was reading this parable, I was led off, and finally turned up my concordance. I was greatly impressed with the place that this word 'understanding' has! It occupies several columns, going right through the Bible, and there are many different connections. There is far too much for us even to glance at now, but how important and valuable understanding is! What a lot really does hang upon spiritual understanding and intelligence! How essential it is for the Lord's people, in a day of crisis and perplexity, difficulty and confusion, to have somewhere, by some means, spiritual understanding! It was a great thing in Israel's history that the men of Issachar "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chronicles xii. 32). I am sure that strikes a chord in us! Oh, that there was such a capacity, such a faculty and such a ministry amongst us in these days of confusion and perplexity—that there were those who had "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do"! It is saving in such times if there is that gift!

Think of those men on the Emmaus road. What a position and a state they were in! Their world had collapsed and everything had gone—until He opened their eyes and they understood the scriptures. A new world was recovered instantly, and a new hope and prospect were saved by spiritual understanding.

Oh, the tremendous value and importance of spiritual understanding! However, let us be quite clear as to what it is and what it is not.

Of course, it is not worldly wisdom and acute, natural, intellectual acumen. In this Gospel by Matthew the people who are most in evidence are the teachers and rulers of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees, the people who knew it all and gave the interpretation and explanation of everything. They are in the forefront of the scene on the stage here, but later Paul said about them that theirs was the

wisdom of men, not the wisdom of God, "which none of the rulers of this world knoweth: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians ii. 8). It was the wisdom of this world that crucified the Son of God. So spiritual understanding is not that!

It is not that we have a great and wonderful religious tradition with all the oracles handed down to us, and we stand possessed of the great inheritance of religion. That is not spiritual understanding! It is quite evident that you can have all that and still go wrong. There was a man in the New Testament who said that he had everything along that line, and yet he was the most vehement antagonist of Jesus of Nazareth and all who were of that way. He pursued them unto distant cities, haled men and women to prison—yet he was a man with the largest tradition. So spiritual understanding is not that!

Further, it is not a wealth of truth and Christian teaching. Again, it is possible to have that and not have spiritual understanding.

What is it, then? To begin with, it is the combination of two things. First of all, it is the result of the direct action of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man. By nature our spirit is in death, and the Spirit of God acts to raise it from the dead and bring it into life. And it is our spirit which is the organ of spiritual understanding. If we are normal we have a natural understanding, but by nature we do not possess this faculty, this organ of spiritual understanding. It is dead, or dormant, until the Spirit of God acts upon it, and then we are aware that we have a new faculty—a faculty of discrimination. We know from that moment, without being told anything about it, what we should do and what we should not do, what is right and what is wrong. It is a new faculty, but that faculty is indwelt and actuated by the Spirit of God, and is not acting independently. "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God" (Romans viii. 16).

Therefore the combination of these two things, the resurrection into life of our own spirit and becoming indwelt by the spirit of God, constitutes the organ and function of spiritual understanding. It begins in simple ways, but education in the Christian life proceeds upon that basis, and that alone.

There is a link formed by this action of the Holy Spirit between knowledge and conscience. Note that, for it is a very important thing. There is a link between knowledge and conscience, which is a new conscience or consciousness. That explains the tragedy of many Christian lives. They have a lot of know-

ledge without any conscience about it. It is not a knowledge which produces a consciousness of life, and so there is inconsistency and contradiction. They know the teaching, the doctrine, the truth and what the Word of God says, but there is no deep exercise in their hearts that gives them, on the one side, a bad time for any inconsistency and, on the other side, great joy in realizing that they are being well-pleasing unto the Lord. This link, you see, is what is meant by spiritual understanding. 'I *know* that that is mere knowledge, information, or truth, but I *understand* when the thing affects me, when it touches my life, and when it brings me up short on matters.' That is spiritual understanding.

You see, in this chapter all those people received the Word. They received the ministry of the sower and the seed, but with three parts of them it came to nothing in the end. They had the word, they had the sower as much as anyone, and they had Christ. He was present, and they had the word of the Lord. All the potentialities of the Lord's presence, His work and His Word were with them and were there for everyone. It was not that He gave more lavishly to some than to others. They all had the same possibilities, but only a fourth part showed anything for it, and the Lord said: 'There is one reason only. The three classes failed in the end because they had no spiritual understanding. They had the word, the Lord and everything, but they might just as well have never had them for all the value that accrued. The one class showed a return, greater measures, because they had spiritual understanding.' What did it mean? Well, surely it just meant that these people laid the word to heart. They discerned and recognized something of the significance, the meaning, the importance and the destiny that were bound up with the word.

Dear friends, these are not the words, nor is this just teaching. The Lord Jesus was not just broadcasting ideas and saying: 'You can take it or leave it.' There is something here that is going to affect us in relation to the ultimate issue of the Kingdom of Heaven.

A seriousness of attitude is the beginning of understanding. It is put like this in the Old Testament: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs ix. 10). What is the fear of the Lord? It is taking Him and His word really seriously. Anything that comes from the Lord is of tremendous consequence, and that is the beginning of spiritual understanding.

Now look at the parable and you see what are the values of spiritual understanding.

Spiritual understanding means that that which comes from the Lord finds a place for itself in us.

There is a receptivity in the heart. In the first scattering of the seed the birds of the air found it a easy prey because of lack of receptivity. It just stayed on the outside, on the surface, and did not enter in at all. And so it was stolen. Spiritual understanding means that we draw the word in and take it in and apply ourselves to it. There is a receptivity about us.

In the next place, spiritual understanding means an endurance of and through what the Lord gives. The life of the seed on the rocky ground was short so the history of that bit of the work of God was very short-lived. There was no real endurance. Spiritual understanding is the basis and the means of the spiritual endurance of the work of God in our hearts and in our lives. That is very clear and, I think, very simple. It is so possible, as we know, to hear it all and, in a way, know it all. Then, when the real test is applied, things begin to get difficult, the sun rises with scorching heat, and we get into the fires, the adversities and the suffering, all our knowledge means nothing. All that we have heard and all that has come to us just stands for nothing, and our spiritual history goes. I am afraid that is how it is with many—there is no endurance through the scorching sun and the fires.

Then, what about this that fell among thorns? "And the thorns grew up, and choked them." Spiritual understanding has a wonderful power to set up in us a resistance to this world and its fires but there was no resistance here. The thorns sprang up and choked the seed. They were not challenged and subdued. The Lord's explanation shows that there was no resistance because there was no spiritual understanding, no real spiritual apprehension.

Give me men and women, however simple according to the standards of this life, who have spiritual insight, spiritual discernment, spiritual judgment, spiritual sensitiveness and spiritual aliveness to the things of God! There is a wonderful resistance in those lives when other things come along with their appeal—the thorns, the cares and the pleasure which come along to spoil and overpower the work of God—and this resistance is because of spiritual understanding. You meet people like that, but you also see people driven away from the Lord by adversity or by prosperity. When you ask yourself why that is you have to say: 'Well, the root of the matter was evidently not in them. They had the things, but not the *meaning* of them. They really did not understand where they were and what it all meant.'

Spiritual understanding means depth, and that brings us to the fourth class. Everything depends upon our having depth.

Oh, for more of this spiritual understanding that

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

has these results! First a receptivity, which means that we embrace the truth. Then an endurance against all adversity and temptation. Then a resistance to everything that comes to us which is not true or right, and finally a depth that lays hold and reproduces.

Now, spiritual understanding is shown quite clearly in the Word to be essential to a sound beginning in the Christian life. Why is it that such a large proportion of those who seem to make a good beginning do not go on? They fall away and you cannot find them after a little while. Why? Because they did not have a beginning in understanding what all this is about, what it means, what it implies and what it involves. It was an appeal on the outside, perhaps a very powerful one and so they made their answer, but where are they after a little while? Spiritual understanding, says the Lord Jesus here, is the answer to that. Be very sure that your converts understand! Do not be satisfied with any light and superficial spiritual catch phrases, but seek to get them truly grounded in the Word of God and rooted in *obedience to that Word*.

The unproductive soils, by their very contrast, illustrate for us the essentials of a spirit of understanding. The opposite of the hardened ground is the heart which is ready to receive with meekness the seed which is sown in it. Always the Lord requires of His children that they have a teachable spirit. Those who are self-assured and independent give little opportunity for the Word to do its cleansing and transforming work. So the first requisite for an understanding heart is simple dependence

and a genuine humility, with a willingness to abandon one's own conceits in order to allow God to do His own work of correcting and reshaping according to His will.

Then there is the stony ground, the opposite of which is surely a heart softened and broken under the hand of God. This is not natural to any of us, for even the weakest nature can be strong and stubborn in its unwillingness to submit to the inward working of the Word. Even though the experience may be painful to the flesh, it is essential that our own strength and self-esteem should be set aside to make room for God. Without such experiences of being broken down and opened up by the working of the Cross it is not possible to become spiritually sensitive to the will of God.

Finally, it is essential to be single-minded if we are really to understand the ways of God. Whether the "thorns" be ugly or whether they be seemingly beautiful, if they are rivals to God's speaking then they must not be tolerated. Spiritual understanding means the ruthless setting aside of lesser things in order to make room for God. The man who is truly taught of God is the man who makes it his daily exercise and delight to give absolute priority to the hearing and *obeying* of the voice of God.

We need to pray that among the children of God there may be an increase of spiritual understanding in the knowledge of Him, and we need to remind ourselves that the essentials to such an understanding are humility, brokenness and singleness of heart.

T. A-S.

VICTORY

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians xv. 57, 58).

THANKS!" "Victory!" The Apostle has been dealing with the most formidable enemies of human hope and confidence. It is as though he had called out these giants, arrayed them, and dealt very effectively with every one, immobilizing them by the Cross of Christ.

The first one to be so dealt with is the formidable colossus of condemnation—the law. No man could

ever stand up to that vaunting force. It had challenged every generation, and always rendered men casualties and defeated. Indeed, in the sovereignty of God, one purpose of its existence was to expose the weakness and impotence of man in his unregenerate state. But *grace*, the grace of God, in Christ Jesus, manifested in fullness in Christ crucified and risen, has slain the law's power of condemnation, and has risen over that prostrate form with this exultant shout: "Thanks!" "Victory!" "Through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The strength of the law was sin, and this monster son of that "Goliath" was the next to be dealt with in this tremendous chapter.

What a force is sin! Every conceivable recourse has been made to neutralize it: ceremonial righte-

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1971

ousness; psychological justification; philosophical reasoning; fatalistic evasion; sublimation, and ideological make-believe; to say nothing of the agonies of struggle and striving. But sin remains victor of the field. Do what you may, and call it what you will, it scorns all efforts to put it off. Until Christ came and He was "made unto us from God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption"; the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" . . . "Made sin for us (in our stead) that we might be made the righteousness of God through faith in him". "By his Cross, he triumphed", and over that grave the triumphant cry breaks forth: "Thanks!" "Victory!" "Through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The law, sin, and the consummation of both—death! What an enemy! What a power! In its own realm it is final, and hope is silent. It is the refuge (?) of the hopeless and abandoned. And yet, it is not numbed; it has a 'sting', and, inasmuch as it is an 'enemy', it is a power.

We will not enlarge upon this parent of sorrow, loneliness, disappointment and desolation. Neither can it be dismissed by that philosophy which says—to man in general—"there is no death".

But, says the Apostle, "death is swallowed up in victory"! "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" It assailed the incorruptible Son of God, and He turned and plucked its sting from it. He, by dying, destroyed death for ever for all who put their faith in Him. Over death He conquered by His resurrection; for "now is Christ risen from the dead", the trumpet has sounded—"Thanks!" "Victory!" "Through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The Apostle does not stop there. He adds an inspiring, heartening word of assurance for all who "labour" in "the work of the Lord". "Wherefore" . . . 'Be not disconcerted by condemnation, by your own consciousness of fault or imperfection; by the persistent thrusts of the accuser; by the shortness of tenure to finish the work; by the disappointments which time brings. Because of this universal triumph of the One for whom you labour, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding . . . inasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

"Thanks be to God!" "Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

T. A-S.

THE GLORY OF GOD

3. THE FATHER OF GLORY . . . THE LORD OF GLORY . . . THE SPIRIT OF GLORY

IN pursuing the matter which has been before us, I want to call to your remembrance three fragments of the Word:

"For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and which ye shew toward all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians i. 15).

"My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons" (James ii. 1).

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy. If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye;

because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you" (I Peter iv. 12-14).

May I just remind you that we have been occupied with the truth that the end of all God's works is glory. We have defined glory as being the expression of God's full and final satisfaction, God giving out from Himself His pleasure, His delight, and, like a heavenly contagion, those who come within its range and its reach are very conscious that He is pleased and satisfied. In one place He is called "the blessed God" (I Timothy i. 11), but the original says 'the happy God'. You know that if you go into the presence of people who are really happy you are affected and infected by their happiness. It is possible to go amongst people who are heartily laughing, and you begin to laugh, not knowing what you are laughing at! The atmosphere influences you. Now, if God is happy, satisfied, well pleased and delighted, and you come within touch of Him, you catch something from Him and feel that happiness. That is exactly the meaning

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

of glory: God being completely contented with a situation, or with a life, or with a person, and if you should happen to be that person you just take from Him something of His contentment and satisfaction. It is a glorious sense of contentedness, of satisfaction, of blessedness.

So the end of everything that is really of God is that wonderful power of His own personal pleasure. I think there is nothing in all the universe so blessed as to have a sense that the Lord is well pleased. It must have been a great day for Abraham, a wonderful, inexpressible day, when God called him His friend, and for Daniel, too, when the messenger of God said: "Oh Daniel, thou man greatly beloved". What do you want more than that from God? That is glory, is it not? Well, God is working toward that in all His works in the universe, in the creation and in the redeemed.

You will have noticed from the three passages that we read that the triune God, the three Persons of the Trinity, are personally related to glory. First, the Father of glory; secondly, the Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory; and thirdly, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of glory. Each member of the Godhead takes character from this word 'glory', and each Person of the Trinity is supremely concerned with glory. That opens up a very large door, but I shall not go very far through that door just now. I will just mention that you can follow through the Bible how God, as Father, the first Person of the Trinity, is always concerned about glory; how the Lord Jesus, the second Person in the Trinity, is always working on the line of glory; and then how the Holy Spirit all the way along is operating toward glory, with glory as the governing concern. I leave that, for it is a long, long line of very blessed revelation. The point for me just now is that the Godhead is united, is one in this thing. The three are united concerning glory, and their interest is one interest. As we have already said, it is their priority. So the priority of the triune God is glory.

All I am going to do now is to say a little word about each of these designations—the Father of glory, the Lord of glory and the Spirit of glory—and may the Lord give us something in our hearts from our brief meditation!

THE FATHER OF GLORY

What does that mean? Well, it means that God is the source of glory, and that glory emanates from Him. The principle of fatherhood is that the father is the source, the beginning and the projector, so all that really emanates from God has, as its very purpose and destiny, glory. We are children of God, and the very object and purpose of

our being His children in His mind is that we should come to glory, that is, that we should be brought to that position where at last—oh, wonderful thought! too wonderful to grasp!—God says: 'I am perfectly satisfied and content.' Can you imagine God saying that about you? Can you believe that the all-mighty, eternal, perfect, holy, great God could look down upon us and say: 'I am well pleased. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord, into the very satisfaction of My Father heart.'? It is too much for us to grasp just now, is it not? But that is the meaning of His Fatherhood. He has begotten us, brought us into being as His children, is responsible for our coming into being as His children, has taken responsibility for us as His children, and all with this one object of bringing us along the line, along the way, to the end, which is an entering into that unspeakable awareness that He has nothing whatever against us, but is satisfied to the last possible degree.

Whatever comes out from God, whether it is children or His creation, comes out as destined for that glory of His perfect satisfaction. Things are like that at the end of the Bible. There is a state of glory, a glorious condition, which means the outgoing, the emanation of God's own perfect satisfaction. Paul puts it in this way: "Fore-ordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans viii. 29). What is that? His Son!—"My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew iii. 17). And we are to be conformed to that! We are to inherit God's own attitude toward His Son, to come into that position and condition that His Son occupies of the perfect satisfaction of the Father.

You see, His Father-dealings with us are along that line. "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art reprov'd of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews xii. 4). What is the chastening all about? "All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews xii. 11). What is righteousness? It is that complete peace in the heart that God's sense of rightness is satisfied.

THE LORD OF GLORY

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" is what James calls Him, and it is a wonderful thing that James, His own brother in the flesh, should say that of Him! There was a time when James did not believe on Him. "For even his

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1971

brethren did not believe on him" (John vii. 5), was what was said about James formerly. Of course, we have a fairly shrewd idea of why that was. In those early days James and the other brothers of Jesus were a bit worldly and they had an eye to business, to success, to popular acceptance, and they wished especially to stand well with the authorities. That is worldliness, is it not? It is the spirit of the world to wish to stand well with the authorities. This older Brother of theirs was taking a course that was getting Him into trouble with the people who had it in their power to take everything away from Him, and they belonged to His family, which meant that they would suffer because He had taken that line. Well, we will leave that, but I think it is a fairly true judgment of that statement: "Even his brethren did not believe on him." They could not accept the way that He was taking, for it was not going to bring popularity.

Now here is this brother of His, these many years afterward, calling Him "the Lord of glory". Something has happened! James is saying that his own Brother is "the Lord of glory"! Once he did not believe in Him, but now he calls Him "the Lord of glory". That is indeed a wonderful thing! But what did he mean, and what does it mean to call Him "the Lord of glory"?

Well, you know, if anyone is a lord, he has everything under his control. If you should be a 'lord', then things are under your control and in your power. You dictate how these things are going to work out. Yes, you are lord in this situation and, indeed, in all situations. Jesus is Lord, and as Lord of glory He is in a position of mastery.

Peter, who at one time denied Him vehemently, later said: "He is Lord of all" (Acts x. 36). A big thing has happened in Peter, too, as well as in James. Indeed, it had happened in all of them, for they all called Him "Lord". We know from the very context of Peter's words that he was at that time having to recognize the absolute mastery of the Lord Jesus. Peter was arguing a bit. It was very strange that he should have been arguing with the Lord Jesus at that time: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean", but he had to succumb to the mastery of the Lord Jesus, and he did. Then he said: "He is Lord of all", meaning that He was in charge both of Peter and of every situation, and, being in charge, this situation was going to work out to the end that He intended. So, when James says "the Lord of glory", it means that the Lord Jesus is in charge of everything to make it work out for glory.

You have only to read through the book of the Acts of the Apostles, as it is called, and as you go through you see the Lord of glory holding the situations. Yes, in phase after phase, and stage after stage. We need only lift out one or two examples.

Peter is in prison, with his feet in the stocks and four quarternions of soldiers to guard him, and the inner and outer doors of the prison tightly closed. Herod has made very sure that *that* man is not going to escape! This looks a somewhat difficult proposition, does it not? I doubt whether it would have been possible for any man to have liberated Peter that night. At any rate, all the forces of this world are determined that he should not escape. He is the key man, the strategic man in this new movement, so he must be kept safe. All right, do all you can and all you wish. Take every precaution, every measure, to make everything secure. But the Lord of glory has other ways, and so an angel comes and smites Peter, who is asleep.

It is rather wonderful that when the Lord of glory is in charge you can go to sleep, even in situations where you are going to be brought out for execution tomorrow! You are in a condemned cell, and you know that tomorrow you are going the same way as the other James and be executed, but you just go to sleep right through the night. Well, it needs the Lord of glory to make you do that, so that you can say: 'The Lord has this thing in hand, so I am going to sleep.'

I remember a man who was here in the West in the wild days of long ago. He was travelling and came to a shack, which was in a perilous place where bears were roaming about. He was very tired after travelling all day, but he found that he could not get into the shack. He could only rest under the awning outside, so he lay down there. He belonged to the Lord and before he settled down he read a Psalm: "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." He said: 'Well, Lord, it is no use the two of us keeping awake. If You say You are keeping awake all night, I am going to sleep!' And so he went off to sleep and had a good night. That is trusting the Lord!

Peter went to sleep and the angel smote him, struck off his chains and fetters, and said: 'Rise up and follow me.' They left the guards, the cell, and the chains, and went out through the first door, then through the next, until they came to the outer gates, which opened of their own accord, and Peter was landed out in the open. This circumstance, so apparently adverse and impossible, was in the hands of the Lord of glory. And what

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

about the glory? We have Peter's Letters, written years afterwards, and they are wonderful Letters, are they not? His was a wonderful life, and so much wealth has come to us through Peter's ministry in these Letters. Yes, there was glory, and Jesus is the Lord of glory.

One more thing from that Book of the Acts. We are in Philippi. Paul and Silas have arrived, because the Lord has sent them there. 'They had assayed to go into Asia, but were forbidden of the Holy Ghost, and they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not.' Then, wondering what all that meant—'Why are we not allowed to go this way or that?'—Paul, in a vision, saw a man of Macedonia and heard him say: "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." "And," said Luke, "concluding that God had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts xvi. 10), they set sail, arrived in Philippi, quite sure that the Lord had sent them there—and the next thing they knew was that they were in a dungeon with their feet fast in stocks and their backs bleeding after thorough lashing. Now what do you make of this? What are you going to do about it? It seems an absolute contradiction, and that a big mistake has been made. Are they saying: 'We have got into confusion over our guidance'? No! Not a bit. In that condition they are singing and praising God at midnight. The Lord of glory has the situation in hand, and that is proved before the morning. There is the earthquake, the prisoners are released, the jailor and his house saved and baptized, and the church in Philippi established. The jailor and his family were amongst the first members—and I do not believe his family were infants! It says: "They spake the word of the Lord unto them", and you do not put a little innocent baby in a chair and preach the gospel to it, or teach it the things of Christ. They were intelligent and old enough to understand the teaching and preaching of Paul, and to accept it, so they were all baptized as responsible persons. They were amongst the first members of that church; and we have that beautiful Letter from Paul's own prison, written years afterwards, when he was in Rome. We would not sacrifice that Letter to the Philippians for anything, would we? It is very precious. There is the Lord of glory, you see. It is the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit, the acts of the Lord of glory, for He is in charge. I wish we could always believe that when we are in prisons, tied up, with things all against us, and we are having a difficult time! If we could always just say: 'The Lord is the Lord of glory. He has charge of this and the end is going to be glory'! Well, it works out that way,

even though He has to say to us afterward: "O ye of little faith! Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Although we, under the trial, sometimes feel that there is nothing of glory in the situation, or in our condition, in the end He is faithful, and we find that glory is the end of His strange ways. He is the Lord of glory, which means that He controls everything with glory in view.

THE SPIRIT OF GLORY

Peter calls the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of glory". Now the context is necessary as the background of that title of the Holy Spirit. If you read this first Letter of Peter's you will see that it is very largely about the sufferings of the Lord's people to whom he is writing. It says that he is writing "to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". Then he opens up on this matter of the sufferings of these people: "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you."

There is a lot about the sufferings of the Lord's people in this Letter of Peter's, and when he has mentioned the sufferings there are two things that he links with them: first grace, and then glory, grace issuing in glory. It is very helpful to notice how Peter speaks of grace, but, unfortunately, in our translation there are places where the word is changed, and the word 'acceptable' is used. In chapter ii. 19 and 20 we read: "For this is *acceptable*, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is *acceptable* with God." But in putting this right we have something very rich: "For this is *grace*, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is *grace* with God" (R.V. margin). Grace, then glory. In chapter v. 10 Peter says: "And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you." "Through the suffering of this little while there will be grace sufficient to make us triumphant." Grace triumphant in suffering, and that means glory.

We sometimes sing:

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1971

Jesus, Thy life is mine,
 Dwell evermore in me;
 And let me see
 That nothing can untwine
 Thy life from mine.
 Thy fullest gift, O Lord,
 Now at Thy word I claim,
 Through Thy dear name,
 And touch the rapturous chord
 Of praise forth-poured.

That came from the bed of an invalid! It is something, is it not? Well, that is what Peter is talking about—the sufferings, the fiery trial, and then he says: 'Grace in that means glory.' The Spirit of glory.

The Lord help us! We can say these things, and I say them carefully, guardedly, for we can be so put to the test on things that we say. The Spirit of glory can take hold of the things which could destroy us, and could be our undoing if we had the wrong reaction to them, and turn them to glory. This suffering, this reaction, this trial can mean glory. Paul said: "And by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelation—wherefore, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given

to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch. Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice" (and when Paul sought the Lord you may take it that he did so very thoroughly, and when he did it three times you may be sure that Paul put himself right into it!). "And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Corinthians xii. 7-10).

The Spirit of glory can take hold of our trials, and will do so, if we trust Him, and turn the dark things, the hard things, the painful things, into glory. That is, in those things He will lead us to find God's pleasure, God's satisfaction, God's 'Well done!', and what more glorious thing could we desire than that we should hear Him say: 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

The Father of glory, the Lord of glory and the Spirit of glory. The Lord place this word in our hearts!

T. A-S.

(Concluded)

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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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The wording of the new motto card is:

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD (Psalm xxiii. 1)

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength (Isaiah xxx. 15)

Details of prices were given in the September/October issue

"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."