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PIETY

1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:14-16; 1 Timothy 4: 4-10; 1 Timothy 6:3-9; 1 Timothy 6:11

I feel impressed, dear brethren, I trust by the Lord, to say a word as to godliness, or piety, believing that there is great need of our being reminded of the importance of it. The Lord is bringing before us in these days much that is connected with the greatest truths of Christianity, the highest privileges of the assembly, intending that we should have power to move into these things, and that requires spirituality; but I believe that before we can be spiritual, we must become marked by righteousness practically, and piety. You will remember that the Scripture speaks of Simeon in the second chapter of Luke's gospel; how the Holy Spirit was upon him and that it had been revealed to him by the Spirit that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ; and how he came in the Spirit into the temple. He was one who was evidently characterised in large measure by spirituality, by being spiritual. But before saying these things about him, it says that he was just and pious, meaning that he was characteristically righteous practically in all his ways and that he was pious; and I believe those two things, practical righteousness and piety, are essential foundations to spirituality. That is, unless we are concerned and helped of the Lord to maintain righteousness practically in every detail of life and to cultivate piety, we shall not be able to go very far in the way of spirituality. The Lord is stressing, dear brethren, that the recovery of the truth which we are now enjoying - truth that the Lord has given to the assembly now for the past hundred years - has in mind that all the thoughts of God, the best thoughts regarding the assembly, should be entered upon by us at the close just before we are taken to be with the Lord. But I say again, and I believe it is incontrovertible, that we cannot in any real power touch spiritual things unless there is a foundation with us of practical righteousness and piety.

Now this first epistle to Timothy says much about piety. If you read through the epistle, I think you will be perhaps surprised at the constant references to piety, or godliness as it is rendered in the Authorised Version. In chapter 2 the apostle exhorts first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving should be made for all men, for kings and those who are in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all piety and gravity. It was a prominent thought in the mind of the apostle, so that he gives exhortation *first of all*, and with a view to this, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all piety and gravity; for, he says, "this is good and acceptable in the sight of our Saviour God, who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." I believe the force is, dear brethren,

that not only are we ourselves to be marked by piety and the blessing that flows from it, but the result of it is to be a testimony to others that saints who are marked by piety are manifestly in the good of salvation. God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, enjoying all the truth, involving the knowledge of God; and there is nothing like the knowledge of God to save us practically from all the different features that are current in the world around. Take discontent for instance; a great feature of the present time is discontent and many things of that kind, that characterise men at the present time. The great power for salvation from things of that sort is the knowledge of God, and piety brings the knowledge of God into our everyday circumstances; so that we are encouraged to prayer and supplication,

intercession and thanksgiving. All these are things that belong to the knowledge of God; indeed intercession is a wonderful privilege; it is the exercise by those who know God of their privilege of drawing near to God, it is the privilege of exercising that power on behalf of others.

Abraham, who is spoken of as the friend of God, took up the attitude of intercession with God in regard of Sodom. What a wonderful privilege, that one man outside of those wicked cities, should exercise the power he had with God, as God's friend, in intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah! and yet not doing it in any sentimental way, but doing it with a right sense of what was due to God, having the knowledge of God. So that he says, "There are perhaps fifty righteous within the city." And God says, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." And then Abraham comes down to forty-five, forty, and thirty, speaking in a becoming way, saying he was but dust and ashes, thus showing what a low sense he had of himself; for, like Job who repented in dust and ashes, Abraham had to do with God. He himself was but dust and ashes, and yet what power he had with God. He came down to twenty and he came down to ten, but he did not go below ten. That is to say, while he was thoroughly with God as discerning that men should be saved, yet at the same time he had a right sense of what was due to God, that if a city was so wicked that there were not even ten righteous in it, then it was not suitable to pray for its salvation, it should be judged. Both Sodom and Gomorrah had to be judged, yet at the same time all that was due to God was maintained by Abraham in the way he interceded. There is great need for that at the present time, for there is no question but that evil is increasing by leaps and bounds in the world.

Government, which is of God, is increasingly insecure in every country, and therefore the urgent need on the part of the saints is, that we should give

ourselves to this kind of prayer, praying on behalf of all men and praying for the support of the government; praying without any political bias at all for whatever authority God has established. We are to pray for it because abstractly it is of God and it has in mind the maintenance of what is right and the repression of what is evil: These are things that the saints do well to pray for, that we should be able indeed to lead quiet and tranquil lives in all piety and gravity.

Piety has the effect of saving the saints from every kind of bitterness of spirit, discontent, and anxiety. All these things that more and more characterise the world, and along with that the grasping after being rich with some. All these things are cured, or rather we ourselves are saved from them by piety. Piety is that we know God and we bring the knowledge we have of God in a practical way into our every-day circumstances. And so the apostle says that "the mystery of piety is great," but before this he speaks of how we should behave ourselves in the house of God which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

Now I say, for the sake of any who may be unaware of it, that we are always the house of God. The house of God is not simply when we are together. Bear that in mind. Let the young ones especially bear this in mind, but every one of us, that we are not the house of God simply when we are together. We are always the house of God by virtue of the fact that God is dwelling with us by the Spirit and therefore, this question as to how we are to behave ourselves in the house of God is a matter that affects us every day and every hour of the day, when we are by ourselves, just as much as when we are together with the saints. It is a question of the kind of behaviour that is suitable to God in His dwelling place, and we are His dwelling place by virtue of the fact that God dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. Thus not only is there this question of suitable behaviour in the house of God, because we are the house of God, but there is also the fact that the house of God is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. The assembly has a place in the testimony as the great testimony to and support of the truth. Hence you can see how sorrowful it is if anyone of us in any way, by his conduct, acts unbecomingly to God and His house. Not only is it an affront to God personally, but it brings the name of God into disrepute. The testimony of the truth is bound up with it and hence we can see how important a matter it is, this question of how we behave ourselves in the house of God. And this involves the practical exercise of piety.

Well now, the apostle says, that "great is the mystery of piety," and great it is indeed. God, he says, has been manifest in flesh, that is God Himself in the person of Jesus has entered into the ordinary circumstances of human life.

Wonderful fact! How did He conduct Himself when He entered into the ordinary circumstances of life? What principle of life, so to speak, was set forth in the Lord Jesus, as having come into the ordinary circumstances of human life? Because that is what piety is, it is bringing God into the ordinary circumstances of human life. God Himself in the person of Jesus entered into those circumstances. According to what principle did the Lord Jesus move in these circumstances, having come in as a Man? He moved as characterised by unswerving confidence in God and unfailing satisfaction with the circumstances which God ordered for Him. They were not such as the natural man would choose, to be laid in a manger when born, to be brought up in Nazareth,

a despised city. His reputed father a carpenter, and He Himself working as a carpenter. All these are not things that appeal to the natural man, they are not the kind of thing that the natural man would grasp after, and yet that is what was brought into expression in this world when God, in wonderful grace, deigned to enter in the person of Jesus into the circumstances of human life. He glorified God in the way He went through life, finding His confidence in God, doing the will of God, finding His satisfaction in God's will.

In the spirit of the Psalmist Jesus could say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage." The goodly heritage was what He found in God, in the circumstances which God had ordered for Him, and He moved through on that principle; and even though His pathway led to death. He could enter into death in confidence in God, saying, "thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life," Psalm 16. "Great is the mystery of godliness." We are to contemplate the way God has come into human circumstances in the person of Jesus and how in these circumstances was set out the true principle of life for men in obedience to God, in confidence in God, in finding satisfaction in God. We shall prove it, dear brethren, if we lay ourselves out for these things. We shall prove that the knowledge of God is the great thing that abides and gives us peace and rest of mind and heart, so that you can come through whatever circumstances are ordered in the sense that God is with you and that you are with God, as it says "The God of love and peace be with you." And so it says, "Great is the mystery of godliness. God has been manifested in flesh, has been justified in the Spirit." There was nothing outwardly to vindicate the Lord Jesus, but He was justified in the Spirit. There was undeniable power about His movements, and there is a certain measure of power about our movements if we go on in that simplicity of piety which lies in bringing God into every circumstance of our life.

You will remember how touchingly the piety of the Lord Jesus is referred to in the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 5, "who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up supplications and prayers with strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him out of death." The Lord did not go through circumstances in any stoical or unfeeling way. The circumstances that God ordered for Him were such that they called forth from Him strong crying and tears, and then it says, "having been heard because of his piety; though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered." He moved on that principle, learning what was an entirely new thing for Him, for in the form of God obedience did not attach to Him, but having entered into human conditions. He entered into a condition to which obedience applied, and He filled out the principle of obedience to the full in a most absolute way, "having been heard on account of his piety." See the link, the affinity between our souls and Christ, as we move on that principle of obedience. He has "become the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey him." It is as we are characterised by obedience and have the principle of it in every detail of our life, that we get the full gain and support of the priesthood of Christ.

In chapter 4 we have the apostle referring to such a simple thing as the matter of our food, what we eat, and he says "every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected; being received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and freely addressing him." One often wonders whether we are in danger sometimes of becoming careless and set and formal in our thanksgiving at meals, for it becomes an occasion of having to do with God. The very food we eat is sanctified by the word of God and our freely addressing Him. Every time we eat, it becomes an occasion for the heart to go out to the blessed God, our freely addressing Him. Think of the liberty into which we have been brought as His beloved children, and every meal becomes an occasion for us to receive it from the hands of the living and blessed God and address Him freely in a spirit of thanksgiving. How important are the little details of human life, becoming an occasion for us to have to do with God in a living way and to become deepened thus in the knowledge of God. Of course, the knowledge of God brings its own exercises because of what He is. Our God, it says, is a consuming fire; we have to face that.

God intends that we should become partakers of His holiness. How should we ever be at liberty with Him, if we do not become partakers of His holiness? He intends that the very exercises and circumstances of human life, as taken up by us with Him, should serve to develop us with a view to our becoming partakers of His holiness. Think of that! So that we might be completely at home in the presence of the blessed God. Hence even the ordinary meal, and they recur three or four times every day in our life, each ordinary meal

becomes an occasion for turning to God, not in any formal way, but as having to do with the living God. It says the food is sanctified by the word of God and our freely addressing Him. And then the apostle goes on to say we are to "refuse profane and old wives' fables and exercise ourselves to godliness." That is, allow it to develop with us and have scope with us. To be practical in these things means not allowing anything in our lives that is inconsistent with the knowledge of the blessed God. In all these things we shall develop strength,

first moral and then spiritual, as growing by and increasing in the true knowledge of God. So he says "bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," and the apostle goes on to say that he himself and his fellow workers were putting things to the test. He says, "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."

In chapter 6 he brings in the thought of practical contentment. What a thing that is, dear brethren, in a world such as this is! We all know how testing conditions in the world are, and they are likely to be more so rather than less. How easy it is for us to become in our spirits irritated, or discontented, or anxious, restless, and all that kind of thing, beloved brethren. This is dishonouring to God, it is as though God were not to be trusted or were not sufficient. See how important piety is in these practical matters, not only for our own blessing and our own comfort, but as a testimony in the world that there is something that is greater than all the trouble in it, the knowledge of God; something which has power to save people from all the discontent, bitterness of spirit and restlessness that are found marking the world. There is something that can practically save us from it - the knowledge of God, and bringing this in in a practical way to bear on our every circumstance here. The apostle speaks of some who regard godliness as the means for gain, as though material gain were to be pursued, but he says, "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Mr. Raven used to say (he was very fond of referring to this verse, he was constantly bringing it in) the one thing that we can carry out of the world is the knowledge of God, and that is what stands us in good stead at the present time.

I venture to say this, as impressed by the Lord with it. One great thing that we all need is to cultivate and devote ourselves to piety; that is, the knowledge of God and bringing it in practically to the circumstances of our every-day life. This will provide a moral basis in our souls on which the Lord can build up

spirituality, but if we attempt to move into the higher spiritual side of our blessing without moral foundation of practical righteousness and piety, I believe we shall find that we cannot do it.

May the Lord graciously encourage us on this line of piety and the knowledge of God and bringing it into our lives in a practical way.

SPIRITUAL AND HEAVENLY THINGS

1 Corinthians 15: 45 - 49; Exodus 17; Numbers 27: 15 - 19

What is in mind, dear brethren, is to show that God has now brought in and is engaged with spiritual and heavenly things. We have been called to have part in them and, thank God, He uses the circumstances of the present time, wilderness experiences, to develop in us what is spiritual. It says in the first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, in that passage we know so well, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." We are to understand at the outset that our blessings are spiritual and not natural, and that the location of them is in the heavenlies and not on earth. That is readily understood as we take account of the fact that Christ has gone on high and the Spirit has come; Christ having gone on high into the presence of God, heaven has been opened up to us, and the Spirit having come, the day of what is spiritual has come in. There is a great tendency with us to cling to what is earthly and natural, but it is good to see from the Scriptures that what is earthly and natural has never been the final thought before the mind of God. The earthly and the natural things were brought in in His ways as a testimony to heavenly and spiritual things. Not that there will not be blessing on the earth in a coming day, for there will; indeed, even in eternity there will be a new earth as well as a new heaven, as though God has indicated that He takes pleasure in different spheres and different degrees of blessing. But that being so, it is well for us to understand that in the sovereignty of God and the love of God, we have been taken up for the very best. You may not be able to say why; that is a matter that lies in God's sovereignty. He works according to the good pleasure of His will, but there it is, that He has been pleased to choose us in Christ before the foundation of the world for the very best, for heavenly things and spiritual things. God Himself being a Spirit; that is, He intends to bring us into the closest affinity with Himself.

God has not only made known His thoughts, but Christ, having gone on high in virtue of accomplished redemption, has the right to give us by the Holy Spirit to enjoy His own love and to understand that we are to share with Him as Man in a way that saints of no other dispensation will ever do. I say, that position having come about, Christ having gone on high and the Spirit having already come, you can understand that God wishes us to take an interest in heavenly and spiritual things, and that we should lay ourselves out to enter into them, and not allow ourselves to be detained by worldly things or even natural things. We often refer to Rebecca and how the question was put to her, "Wilt thou go with this man?" Genesis 24: 58. The test with which

Rebecca was faced with not whether she was going to be governed by what was worldly, but whether she was going to allow herself to be detained by what was legitimate in the natural sphere, her brother and her mother. That was the test with which she was faced, and when the question was raised with her, "Wilt thou go with this man?" ("this man" being a type of the Holy Spirit) she says, "I will go." The result was, that she became a comfort to Isaac's heart and was loved by him, all suggesting the possibilities that are open to us to become a comfort to Christ if we will yield ourselves to what is spiritual.

The passage I read in 1st Corinthians emphasises this. It says, "The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam a quickening spirit." You can see how what is spiritual comes in, how immensely greater Christ is than Adam. It is the last Adam we are to take account of. He is a life-giving spirit. I wonder whether we all recognise, that if we have received the Holy Spirit we partake by the Spirit in the life of the last Adam. That is a very elevating thought. In Luke 10 the Lord says, "rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven," but here we have not merely that our names are written in heaven, but we ourselves are heavenly and therefore fit for heaven. So it says here, "howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual," as though the Spirit of God through the apostle is urging upon us to take account of the fact that the change has now taken place; that there was that which was first, which was natural, but Christ having come in and the Spirit having come, what was ever in God's mind has come in; and He is urging us to take account of the glory of it, and to take account of the fact that we ourselves have been called to have part in these wonderful things.

The apostle goes on to say, "the first man out of the earth, made of dust"; it is a question of what he was constitutionally. If Adam had never sinned he would still have been earthy, but the second Man, out of heaven! What an immensely superior order of manhood has come in in Christ, a divine Person, bringing supreme moral excellence into manhood. Think of the grace of God that has in mind that we should partake of it. This is not something mystical, but something which has actually come in by virtue of the fact, that we have received the Holy Spirit. We partake by the Spirit in the life of the heavenly One. "Such as he made of dust, such also those made of dust; and such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones." And, "as we have borne the image of the one made of dust, we shall bear also the image of the heavenly one."

Well now, we can only enter upon what is spiritual, we can only take on the features of the One who is heavenly, in the power of the Holy Spirit. God has

given us the Holy Spirit in order that we might be able to take on what is spiritual, that we might find our life in what is spiritual and take on heavenly features. We were referring to the third chapter of John's gospel where we have the truth of new birth; that is, if there is to be anything for God, He must begin entirely anew. There must be a new moral being as a result of God's work, and the character of the new moral being is that it is spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," showing that the two are in absolute contrast. I think the Lord puts it that way so that we may understand, that God is working now on the lines of what is spiritual.

I would turn to Exodus now in order to show that God would use the exercises of the wilderness that we may realise the need for the Spirit; and to give us, if we may so say, a taste for the Spirit, that we may really lay ourselves out for that which is spiritual. I can assure the younger brethren that they will never regret it if they do so. In the living water, a type of the Spirit, there is that which satisfies for ever. If I may go back for a moment in the history of God's people as brought out of Egypt, you will remember that at the end of Exodus 15 they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Then when they did find it, it was bitter, so the waters were called Marah; and the question was, What were they to do? Now it is an early experience in our spiritual life to find that the circumstances which God orders for us are not at all according to our natural taste. There is nothing in the wilderness; that is, in the ordinary circumstances of responsible life, to minister to the new spiritual being that has come into existence. We find that circumstances ordered of God for us are often exactly the opposite to those which we would have chosen; the waters are bitter. What is to be done? In what way are they to be made palatable? Moses cried unto Jehovah and Jehovah showed him wood. It is not properly a tree, but rather *wood*. When it was cast into the waters they became sweet. Wood in Scripture is usually a type of manhood, and here it refers to the character of manhood that was brought in in the Person of Jesus, and, I believe, that is just what alters the whole character of things.

It is of great help, support and encouragement when we first begin to take account of the fact that the Lord Jesus in wonderful grace has entered into the circumstances of human life and has been through them as governed in every way by the principles proper to a man in relation to God. That is to say, as having His part in Deity it did not belong to Him to obey, for, you cannot attach the thought of obedience to God as such, but when the Lord Jesus entered into the human position, He entered into conditions to which obedience attached, and He filled them out in human life in perfect accord with the position which He had taken up. The carpenter's shop at Nazareth was not

what men might regard as the most desirable of circumstances, but these circumstances were the will of God for Him, and He accepted them and filled them out in a glorious way on the principle of obedience. Everything the Father ordered for Him was pleasing to Him. His Father had been pleased to hide things from the wise and prudent and reveal them unto babes, and He said, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight," Luke 10: 21. It alters the whole aspect of things in regard of that which may be contrary to our natural tastes if we begin to see that in the Person of Jesus, God has introduced the principle of obedience as that which is to govern His people in every circumstance. We find wonderful rest of mind and heart and spirit once that is accepted. The waters take on an attraction that the Spirit of God gives them. Nothing spiritual will, of course, ever be attractive to the natural man, but to the renewed mind everything of God becomes attractive. The first governing principle in a Christian's life is obedience to the will of God in everything. Marah indicates that. It was there that God said, "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God, and do what is right in his eyes ... I will put none of the complaints upon thee that I have put upon the Egyptians," Exodus 15: 26. It is wonderful, how by moving in a simple path of obedience to God's will, we are set free from anxiety and restlessness, set free from all sorts of diseases that afflict the Egyptians.

Following on that, we find in chapter 16 that the manna is given. God has introduced in the Person of Jesus the principle of obedience to His will, and now He says as it were, I will give you food and I will give it to you daily on that principle. The Lord Jesus moved in the circumstances of human life on the principle of one day at a time. He had His ear opened morning by morning. It was morning by morning that the manna was given. Moses said to the people, "In the evening, then shall ye know that Jehovah has brought you out from the land of Egypt; and in the morning, then shall ye see the glory of Jehovah." They had desired flesh, and in the evening God brought up quails, not then in judgment as on a later occasion, but just to show them that, if necessary, He could do anything; He can work a miracle. He could order our circumstances, if He chose, so that they should all be congenial, but that would not result in any spiritual development in us. He showed in bringing up the quails that He could do anything necessary, but on the other hand, "in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord." The manna was a small round thing on the face of the wilderness. You say, Is that the glory of the Lord? It is indeed the glory of the Lord, that He who is God should have come down in wonderful grace as a Babe, and grown up in human circumstances, filling them out in every way on the principle of dependence and obedience. That is glory indeed, that such a One has entered into our circumstances in order to become,

throughout all the ages of the testimony, food for His people. How many millions of saints have been supported by feeding on Christ! If we are governed by the principles of obedience and dependence it enables us to fit into any circumstance. A small round thing fits in easily anywhere, dear brethren. And it is to be gathered afresh every day. The principle of life according to God in the wilderness is one day at a time, and it greatly relieves us of anxiety if we so take it up. The inward man is renewed day by day.

Then they came to a seventh day, a sabbath, and that is what results as we appropriate the manna, we come to rest in our souls. It produces sabbath conditions. "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest," Matthew 11: 28. And then the Lord shows us the way in which we get it; He says, "take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls." He says, as it were, 'You must come the right way; take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.' It was after feeding upon the manna for six days that they arrived at a seventh day, a sabbath of rest. I have said all that in order to show what Christ can be to us in the wilderness; but when we come to Exodus 17, it is not a question there of Christ so much, but of the Spirit. It is a wonderful thing that two Persons of the Godhead should come in, prepared to serve every one of us individually. I do not know whether you have ever thought about it, but the Son and the Spirit are both prepared to serve you and me in the practical every-day exercises of the wilderness path. It shows what God is like; how low He can come in condescending grace; indeed, in the sixth, seventh and eighth chapters of Romans we find that God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are all engaged in the deliverance of the believer. In chapter 6 we have the thought of being "alive unto *God* in Christ Jesus our Lord"; in chapter 7 we are "to be to Another"; and in chapter 8 we have the service of the Holy Spirit throughout.

Now in the seventeenth chapter of Exodus we have the question of thirst again. There was no water and the people murmured. Water evidently alludes to the idea of refreshment and satisfaction, and we might as well face it, that God does not intend that we should find satisfaction save in the Holy Spirit. If we ignore this, we shall only be heaping up to our souls years of sorrow. We read that "the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." There is no limit to His activities and what He can do for us, and God intends that we should, early understand that all the refreshment and satisfaction we need are to be found in the Spirit. So Moses cried to the Lord, and the Lord told him to go on before the people and take with him the elders of Israel and his rod, and He says, "I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may

drink." Think of that, the rock being smitten! Typically, it is Jehovah Himself being smitten in the Person of Jesus. It is as though God would say, so urgent is it that these people should receive the Spirit, that they should have all the joy and satisfaction that are to be found in the Spirit, that I myself in the Person of Jesus am prepared to bear the smiting in order that the Spirit may become available to them. Think of the love that has entered this matter! Are we going to despise the Spirit in the face of this, when it means that the Lord has been prepared to go this way and bear the judgment? God has removed every obstacle that would hinder us from receiving the Holy Spirit. We are not told that the people drank of the water when it came, but we are told of the wonderful provision for them. We do not want to do despite to the Spirit of grace and not avail ourselves of this wonderful gift that God has given.

Well, the next thing we find is that the position is challenged. Amalek comes up against them and Moses at once calls upon Joshua. Joshua was only a young man. I do hope that the younger brothers and sisters will not think that these things are relegated to the older ones. I read this passage because Joshua particularly represents one who is in the gain of the Spirit. In certain positions he is typical of Christ Himself, but in the main he is rather representative of one who is in the gain of the Holy Spirit. Here, he is intended to be representative of us all. Now Amalek represents the power of Satan working through the flesh, and I am sure you will have noticed that Amalek is most inveterate. His hand is on the throne of Jah. He is deliberately opposed to the rights of God, and God will have war with him from generation to generation. The flesh is incurable. It says that they who are in the flesh cannot please God, and that the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. We are to understand what flesh is, the awfulness of it, and that there is no escape from it save as we walk in the Spirit. The point is, On whose side are we going to be? Are we going to be like Joshua, who chose men and fought against Amalek? We read that "Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." You may say, Is there any weakness with the Lord? For Moses with the rod in his hand on the top of the hill is a type of Christ. What does it mean? There is certainly no weakness with the Lord, but I believe that Moses with his rod represents the authority of the Lord over our souls, which sometimes becomes weakened. Satan is aiming at that, to weaken the Lord's authority over us. Now when Moses' hands were heavy, Aaron and Hur supported them. Aaron represents the sympathetic support of Christ. The Lord understands all about our exercises and is prepared to support us in them. If our exercises are in singleness of heart, which Hur perhaps represents, his name meaning *purity*, and we are set to go

in for the best, although we have to feel what flesh is, how opposed it is to the things of God, yet if we will allow the Lord's authority over us, we shall be given the victory. Aaron and Hur stayed up Moses' hands, "the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun." And the next verse says that "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." Joshua in that way started on this journey of becoming spiritual, and he started by accepting the conflict that flesh will always bring in; but he proved the support of the Lord.

This is very important, beloved brethren, though elementary. "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua." How the Lord had His eye on Joshua, and He has His eye on everyone here, because of what we are destined for, such great things. He would have these things rehearsed in the ears of everyone, "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." The Lord does not intend to give any quarter to the flesh. He wants us to come into line with Him and make no provision for the flesh. And so it says that Moses built an altar and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi - the Lord my banner. It may refer perhaps to the verse in Romans 13, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not take forethought for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts." You have an understanding between yourself and the Lord, that if God is making war with Amalek from generation to generation, you intend to make no provision for the flesh. Until the Lord comes for us we shall have the flesh in us, but if we will take sides with God against it we shall prove the superiority of the Holy Spirit, so that we are not hindered by the flesh. We learn to value and lay ourselves out for the Spirit of God. We are to make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof; that is the first great lesson in regard of what is spiritual, and it has in mind that we are to find power to enter into the deep things of God, the things that God hath prepared for them who love Him.

In closing, I would refer briefly to Numbers 27, where we read that God had told Moses that he was not to go into the land. He had failed in the test, failed to sanctify God. It says in Psalm 106 that the people provoked Moses in his spirit "so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips." They provoked his spirit. God is concerned with our spirits, rather than with our bodies. He gives us our bodies as vessels in which to serve Him, and to some He may preserve health and strength for a little while; with others He may allow poor health and suffering, but the great thing is our spirits. Hebrews calls Him "the Father of spirits." This scripture calls Him "the God of the spirits of all flesh." Proverbs tells us that one who rules his spirit is better than one who takes a city. The only power for ruling our spirits is the Spirit of God. And so Moses, about to be superseded, shines in moral dignity. He says, "Let Jehovah, the God of the

spirits of all flesh, set a man over the assembly, who may go out before them, and who may come in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in, that the assembly of Jehovah be not as sheep that have no shepherd." How beautifully Moses was considering for God's people! This is a word I believe, for leaders. We have our leaders locally and we have leadership in a universal way. Leaders must be men. The word is, "set a *man* over the assembly, who may go out before them, and who may come in before them," that is, all his movements must be transparent and in the light. It says that "all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them" (1 Samuel 18: 16), showing how anyone who moves in singleness of heart gains the respect and affections of the saints. "Let Jehovah ... set a man over the assembly ... who may lead them out, and who may bring them in." I think it is a military allusion. When the conflict is over, the *man* will bring them in again. We do not want to be *always* engaged with conflict. When there is a need for conflict, be in it, but when the conflict is over, go in for the positive things of the Spirit.

Moses leaves it to the Lord to name the leader, and Jehovah immediately says, "Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit." Joshua was now considerably older than he was in Exodus 17. This is the kind of person we need to lead us into heavenly things. Joshua was pre-eminently the leader for the land, while Moses was the great leader for the wilderness, because he was faithful in all God's house. But a leader for the land must be one who is characterised by affording liberty to the Spirit of God so that the divine scope can be opened up before the saints. If we commence as Joshua commenced, we may become those in whom characteristically the Spirit is. We shall have power to enter into spiritual and heavenly things. Joshua was still to be marked by dependence even though he was one who gave place to the Spirit. In verse 21 Eleazar was to inquire for Joshua at the mouth of the Lord, showing that even though we become spiritual, we are not to become independent. One feature of a spiritual man is that he is essentially and characteristically dependent.

Thus we may understand that God uses the exercises of the wilderness to help us to get the gain of the Spirit, with a view to our entering into the things which His love has prepared for us.

CHRIST AS FOOD

Joshua 5: 10 - 12; Exodus 12: 8 - 11; Exodus 16: 14, 15; John 6: 51 - 63; John 14: 18 - 20

I have the desire, dear brethren, to speak of Christ as available to us as food, first as the passover, secondly as the manna, then as the living bread come down from heaven, and finally as the old corn of the land. There are other aspects in which Christ is presented to be fed upon, but these four are of great importance and follow in consecutive order; and it will help I believe, if we can gain some impression of Christ on these distinctive lines. I need not say that it is important that we should cultivate the habit of appropriating spiritual food. No one of us who was in anything but the poorest of health would contemplate for a moment going on for long without food, and yet there may be a danger with some of us of neglecting spiritual food; whereas the habit of feeding is just as essential to spiritual life as it is to natural life.

Food is presented in the spiritual sphere attractively in that Christ in different aspects is the food of His people. There may be certain aspects also in which the saints themselves may be food, for David when fleeing from Saul fed on the shewbread taken from before the Lord; the shew-bread I think referring to the saints as they appear before God in their unity and order. David fed upon it. You can understand how at a time when some of God's people were acting in a way that was unworthy of them as His people in persecuting God's anointed, it was important that David should be sustained in his spirit by feeding upon God's thoughts regarding His people, and not allowing himself to be occupied with their waywardness. But in a general sense it is Christ who is presented as the food of the saints.

When one speaks of feeding upon Christ or upon spiritual food whatever it is, the idea is that we allow our minds to dwell upon it, and our minds become the inlet to the affections, for the spiritual affections are fed with that with which the mind engages itself.

Well now, the first thing that comes before us in the scriptures we have read is the passover, and I would say at the outset that the passover is an idea which goes right through. It is not exactly an elementary idea; it is rather a fundamental one. That is, the passover was celebrated in Egypt, it was celebrated in the wilderness, it was celebrated in the land, but manna was only partaken of in the wilderness; at least, it was wilderness food. The passover is something that applies to us in whatever position we are found. It was that which became strength to God's people to move out of Egypt. It was that which they had to celebrate in the wilderness, and it was that which they

had to celebrate constantly in the land. Hence you will see that it is a basic idea that applies to us in whatever position we are regarded.

I think it is important, beloved brethren, to lay hold of that, for the passover represents I need not say, Christ as the One who endured in an unmitigated way the judgment of God against sin. As feeding upon it, it becomes the lever in our affections by which we ourselves are maintained in the same judgment of sin as God has expressed in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. When once that is seen, you will understand how basic it is, because in whatever position we are looked at it is essential as God's people that we should be maintained in the judgment of sin. Any amount of privilege will not avail us if we go on in the allowance of that which God has judged in the cross of Christ. The fact that we are sons, the fact that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, whatever blessing and privilege may be attached to us as in the mind of God for us, it does not avail us anything if we go on with that which God has judged. The passover must be kept in every position in which we may be regarded.

All the scriptures read refer to eating. I did not read the scripture that refers to the putting of the blood on the lintel, because that act did not need to be repeated. Indeed, the passover strictly speaking did not need to be repeated, but the moral import of the passover needs to be renewed and maintained, and that is seen in the feast of unleavened bread. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians in regard to the state of things that existed there, says, "Christ our passover has been sacrificed," 1 Corinthians 5: 7. The words "for us" are not there really. The point is not exactly what has been done for us, but that Christ our passover has been sacrificed. That has been done and therefore the only thing remaining to be done is for the feast of unleavened bread to be celebrated.

Now the feast of unleavened bread is the moral answer in us to the passover as setting out the way that Christ has borne the judgment of God against sin. So when the passover was instituted they were told to "Eat none of it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roast with fire"; that was the important thing; "roast with fire." The fire speaks of the direct action of judgment in an unmitigated way, and that is seen when we contemplate the cross, for there the Lord felt the terrible character of divine judgment against sin, expressing His feelings in those words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In expressing His feelings thus, He did not ask for any mitigation of the judgment but rather He testified to the rightness of it for He says, "And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amidst the praises of Israel," Psalm 22: 3. The

judgment of God against sin is intended to be apprehended by us as we engage our minds with it, as feeding upon Christ in that way.

Well, it says they were to eat it with bitter herbs, "its head with its legs, and with its inwards." It is to make it more appealing to our hearts, for the head would refer to the personal dignity of the One concerned. The legs would refer to the immaculate purity and beauty of His walk, and the inwards would speak of those inward perfections which were so delightful to God when laid bare. Yet everything came under the action of the fire, and we are to have that in our minds in order that we may obtain a right impression of what lawlessness and self-will are in the sight of God. I fear we tend to have a very weak sense sometimes of what sin is. We judge the more flagrant things but we often have a very light apprehension of what pleasing ourselves is in the sight of God. It is really the working of the will of the creature in opposition to the will of the Creator, and that is why it is to be dealt with so unsparingly. The great thought is, that we, as God's redeemed people, might be delivered from every kind of lawlessness. This is presented to us as the food that lies at the basis of our spiritual prosperity; the passover was to be eaten thus, with bitter herbs.

It also says, that they were to eat it with their loins girded and their shoes on their feet, and it was to be eaten in haste. It is an urgent matter and there is to be no dilatoriness about us. Then it says that none was to be left till the morning, another important thing. It was indeed the beginning of months to God's people. Months in Scripture very often refer to the succession of exercises by which the desired end is reached. So it was to be continually perpetuated as a feast to Jehovah, in the form of the feast of unleavened bread. It was to be partaken of for the complete period of seven days. Paul, in giving it application to the Corinthian says, "our passover Christ has been sacrificed; so that let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." We are not to be characterised by anything that marked us in our unconverted days. Unleavened bread is clearly a moral condition of soul in God's people that answers to our having appropriated the lamb roast with fire. One would emphasise the importance of this basic matter which applies to us in every position in which we may be. We may be just coming out of Egypt for the first time; for Egypt represents the world, not merely in its grossest form, nor yet in its religious form, but here simply as the scene where man is moving in self will. John in his first epistle says, "love not the world, nor the things in the world," as though it is possible to be delivered from the world as a system and yet to bring the things of the world into the circle of light in which we move.

I would pass on now to the thought of the manna. It has an important place as food for God's people. In contrast to the passover which applies to us in every position in which we may be viewed, the manna is distinctly food for the wilderness only; that is to say, it is food especially provided to help the people of God in their responsible pathway here. How gracious of God to provide us with food to support us in every position we may be in, according to His will! We need manna if we are to fill out the responsible pathway. Many of us have to go to business, and sisters have their household duties to perform, and the Christian children have to go to school. All these are different positions in which according to God's will we are set here in responsibility; and what we find, as desiring to fill these positions to His pleasure, is that there is nothing in the world around us that will support us in them. The whole principle of the world around us is that man lives to himself and does his own will whereas we read that "even Christ pleased not himself," Romans 15: 3.

So the manna was provided as food for the wilderness and there was no other food provided. At the outset, for one day, God gave them quails; and then at a later period He gave them quails because they lusted after flesh. "Not one day shall ye eat, nor two days, ... but for a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils, and it become loathsome unto you; because that ye have despised Jehovah," Numbers 11: 19, 20. They lusted after flesh and they got it. "For he that sows to his own flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh, but he that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life," Galatians 6: 8. In grace God gave them quails for one day. It was never intended that they should live on quails, but just that they should see that God could do anything. Just by a word He brought up quails to feed the host of Israel. There is no limit to God's resources and power, and if it were His will to make everything easy for us in this life. He could quite easily do so, but that is not His way. He has in mind to humble us in order, as it says in Deuteronomy, "to do thee good at thy latter end."

God intends that every one of us should be marked by the great moral features of dependence upon Him, which is after all, man's greatest and truest glory. Men think it is great to be independent, but He who is God over all, as having become Man says, "I was cast upon thee from the womb," Psalm 22: 10. That was how the Lord viewed the matter. It was His glory, as having become Man, to be dependent on God, and it is man's true glory to be maintained in the position of dependence that is rightly his as God's creature; and along with that is the great principle of obedience. Dependence is something that flesh regards as irksome, and obedience is something that flesh greatly dislikes; but dependence and obedience have been rendered morally glorious by our Lord Jesus Christ who, though God over all, blessed for

ever, as having become Man did not desire a reputation but "taking a bondman's form ... and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross"; Philippians 2: 7. The manner of His death was one in which obedience was tested to the full, and it says, "Wherefore," that is, because of the moral excellency of it; "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name."

We are intended not simply to accept these things as statements of fact, but to contemplate them, that the One marked pre-eminently and perfectly by obedience has been given a Name above every name. We are to be impressed with the fact that God regards obedience with the greatest pleasure. It is in His sight of great moral worth. These two features of dependence and obedience in manhood are two great things which God would develop in us by means of feeding upon the manna, and He orders the circumstances of our wilderness path with a view to furthering this great end. He fed the people with manna and humbled them that He "might do them good at their latter end." If God brings upon us any circumstances which we find to be humbling, it is all with a view to doing us good at our latter end.

One great feature of the manna was that it was to be gathered daily. There was never enough for more than one day except on the sixth day of the week when God gave them enough to carry them over the sabbath, in order that they might know what rest was, but the principle was that there was just enough for one day, no more. That is a thing that God would have us learn in our responsible path, that a great feature of a Christian's life is to be here governed by the will of God and renewed in it day by day. It makes life so simple if we take things up on that principle. It means, that we are not looking a long way ahead and wondering how we are going to get on. We only have to look after today. I commend that to you. It is a simple thing to say, but I think a helpful thing to bear in mind, that all we have to be concerned about is today, and therefore let us watch what we have to do today. When saints get turned aside it has not all happened in a moment. It is always the result of departure from the Lord; of allowing something to come in that brings in distance; and there was a moment when it began, and if there has been watchfulness on that day, the day it began, it never would have begun. If we are watchful today, all will be well. When tomorrow comes then it is today, but all we need is to go on one day at a time; and that is the principle in the manna.

The manna was given fresh from heaven every day. When the dew was gone there lay on the face of the wilderness a small round thing. How touching! In

how small a way God came in in the Person of Jesus. He who created all things by His word, and upholds them by the word of His power, came into human circumstances as a Babe; into such humble circumstances as being in a place like Nazareth, and then in a carpenter's shop. Think of the grace of this, that He should thus come in order that He might become to millions of His saints, who would afterwards tread the wilderness path, food to sustain them there. When the writer of the Hebrews speaks about what was to be seen in the holy of holies he says, "and the ark of the covenant, covered round in every part with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna." There is no mention of a golden pot in Exodus. We would never have known it was a golden pot if it had not been for the writer of the Hebrews. He had been into the holy of holies to contemplate it and he says, "the *golden* pot that had the manna," as if he was impressed with the glory of it, that the Creator of the earth should come down and fill out each day the conditions of human life, in order that in so doing He might become the food of His saints right through the wilderness path.

So that, dear brethren, is the importance of our learning to appropriate the manna. It was a small round thing, and therefore it fits into any circumstances. Whatever circumstances God orders for us can all be accepted from His hand on the principle of obedience. It makes everything so simple. Six days of feeding on manna brings us to a seventh day of rest, because the more the principle of manna is accepted, the more we find rest to our souls. However testing conditions may be, you are in the will of God and will have His support. I need not enlarge on that, save that I believe to feed on the manna morally develops what we speak of as shittim wood, an order of man that can stand up in the wilderness in the testimony of God.

Now we come to a further food which is not referred to in the passages we read in Joshua; the reason being that in the type the people of God were either in the wilderness on the one hand, or in the land on the other. When they left the wilderness they were in the land, but in the actual experience of God's people things are not quite so definite as that. We have to be in the wilderness in certain circumstances, and then in others we may pass over to that which answers to the land. Now there is a food which will enable us to pass over and we get it brought forward in the sixth of John's gospel, for the living bread come down from heaven is not manna. The food in the sixth of John is not food for the wilderness. That is quite clear, for the Lord says "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that one may eat of it and not die." So that however valuable in its place, as relating to wilderness exercises, the manna is, it is not that which is spoken of in the sixth of John.

I believe the food in the sixth of John is that by means of which we accustom ourselves to find our life in spiritual things; that is, it has in view that we should enjoy eternal life. We are to find our life in that which death cannot touch. It is important to note, beloved brethren, that even the best of natural relationships held under the hand of God in thankfulness and purity - not spoiled as they are in the world - even these are subject to death. The happier we are in natural affections, the more keenly death is felt when it invades them. But there is an order of life and interest which may be known while we are still in this world which death cannot touch; and it is the enjoyment of these things that Scripture speaks of as eternal life in John's writings. Paul presents eternal life from the future aspect, whereas John presents it as something to be enjoyed at the present time, and this is what is typically spoken of as *the land*. It is the thoughts of God which His love has purposed for those whom He has taken up, standing in relation to Christ where He is, but enjoyed now in the power of the Holy Spirit; so that we pass over in our affections from the natural order of things to the spiritual order of things.

In the first scripture we read from John, the Lord says, "I am the living bread which has come down out of heaven: if any one shall have eaten of this bread he shall live for ever." He first of all presents the idea of bread as food which will be sustaining in its effect, and He Himself is the food. We are to get that clearly before us. He came down from heaven as the manna, but now He is presenting Himself as another kind of food also to be appropriated. When He comes to the thought of our appropriating Him as the living bread, He changes the figure and refers to His flesh as meat and His blood as drink. In most scriptures where the Lord's flesh is referred to, it has in view His having deliberately come into flesh and blood condition in order by death to terminate that condition and open up for us a new order of life beyond death. I think it nearly always has that in mind. I will not say invariably, for the fifth of Hebrews speaks of "the days of his flesh," but mostly where His flesh or His having come in flesh, is referred to, it has in view that He deliberately took up flesh and blood condition in order to terminate it in His death. That being so, are we going to continue to try and find our satisfaction in an order of life which He has terminated? At the end of the chapter the Lord speaks of the Spirit's power to quicken. We cannot understand these things nor get the gain of them save by the Spirit. The Lord is presenting His flesh and His blood as something to be fed upon by us; that is, we are to feed our minds and affections on the fact that He has died. Not now that we might be justified and forgiven, but in order that He might have the right to introduce us by the Spirit into a new order of life set out in Himself risen from among the dead.

So He says, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up at the last day: for my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink." There may be an allusion in that both to the love of Christ as having come in flesh and to the love of God; for the blood often speaks of the love of God. The blood refers to the pleasure that God had in the life of Jesus here, so we read of the precious blood of Christ. And the blood was poured out in order that we might be brought into a new order of life in Christ beyond death. Thus we can understand that when the Lord says, "For *my* flesh is meat indeed and *my* blood is drink indeed," He is reminding us of His own personal love, and indeed of Himself, and also of the love of God which entered into the matter. The circle of the saints where the Spirit of God is, is the sphere of eternal life, but eternal life in itself is in God's Son. Then the Lord says, "and I will raise him up at the last day." That is to say, it is on this principle that we go right through, not like those whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, but as those who went through like Caleb.

In closing, I would refer briefly to the old corn of the land, for that was food which they fed upon as having come into the land, and it was intended to support them in that position. I read those two verses in John 14 because I think they convey somewhat of the idea. The old corn of the land refers, as may be seen from the fifth chapter of Joshua, to the previous harvest (see Mr. Darby's note); that is, it was there before they arrived at the land. They found it there when they got there; it belonged to the land. And that is exactly what the Lord presents to us in John 14. He is alluding to the fact that He is going on before. At the beginning of the same chapter he says, "Ye believe on God, believe also on me." He is really speaking anticipatively, speaking in view of His taking His place in the presence of the Father. It is there that He wants us to believe on Him. He would have our affections engaged with Himself in the new position which He has opened up by entering there for us. And in order to make things real He tells them He will send the Holy Spirit. He is speaking of course to all the saints, and He speaks of the gain that the presence of the Comforter would be to them. And He says further, "I am coming to you." Not only would the Comforter be with them, but in addition the Lord says He would come and personally visit them, referring to visitations from time to time. And then He adds, "Yet a little and the world sees me no longer; but ye see me; because I live, ye also shall live." While the world sees Him no more, we *do* see Him, for the Spirit engages our hearts with Christ where He is. The Spirit becomes the power to believe on Him where He is and as He is. Because He lives, we live also, for our life is in relation to another scene. We realise that our portion is bound up with Himself. "Because I live ye also shall live." He has gone on before, but this verse presents Him to us as the old corn of the

land, the One who is already there and belongs there, and we as feeding on Him are sustained in relation to our heavenly portion. "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father." It refers to the day of the Spirit. Then He says, "ye in me." That is our position. And finally, "I in you."

I trust I have said enough, dear brethren, to suggest the wealth that there is for us in appropriating Christ as food. How wonderfully adaptable He is, if I may reverently say so! The feast of unleavened bread is important and basic. Then there is the manna for the wilderness, and wonderful gain there is in it for us. Thirdly, there is the living bread come down from heaven to enable us to pass over in our minds and affections; and lastly, there is the old corn of the land; "because I live ye also shall live."

May the Lord encourage us to be in life more and more for the pleasure of God, for His name's sake.

DISCIPLES AND BONDMEN OF CHRIST

Luke 6: 35 - 40; Matthew 10: 23 - 33; John 13: 12 - 17

These scriptures, dear brethren, all refer to the disciple and his teacher, or the bondman and his lord; the passage in Luke referring to the disciple and his teacher; the passage in Matthew bringing in both the disciple and his teacher, and the bondman and his lord; and the passage in John referring to the bondman and his lord only. The intention in each is the same, that whether we regard ourselves as disciples of Christ; that is, as those who are learning, for that is the idea of a disciple, or whether we regard ourselves as bondmen, which is surely the attitude of mind that each of us should take up, we are to keep in mind that the standard of what God is pleased with, and is working to in each one of us, is what is set out in our Teacher and our Lord. We are to remember that the disciple is not above his teacher, and the bondman is not above his lord. And indeed when we come to the passage in Luke it says that "every one that is perfect (or as it should read perfected) shall be as his teacher," which is a remarkable statement, showing that there is a process going on with every one of us. Discipline will come in in connection with it as may be necessary, for it is a question of disciples, but "every one that is perfected," it says, "shall be as his teacher."

It is a great thing to keep in mind, dear brethren, the setting of the passage in Luke, although there is a certain similarity between these three passages. The setting of the passage in Luke seems to be on the line of what is moral; that is, we are viewed as in an evil world where men are unthankful and unholy, and may even be our enemies, but in that setting of what is moral the saints are to be disciplined, and to come out like God. Indeed it says, "ye shall be sons of the Highest." The setting in Matthew seems to be that as committed to the testimony of God we may expect suffering, even persecution, and in that setting we are to remember that the disciple is not above his teacher, nor the bondman above his Lord; and that therefore the kind of treatment that has been meted out to our Teacher and our Lord is the kind of treatment that will eventually be received by us as saints if we are faithful. Then the setting in John's gospel is what is befitting in the circle of love. But in whatever aspect we are viewed, the great thing seems to be that we are to learn from Christ on the one hand, and to understand that nothing less than that is God's mind for His people; so the Lord in speaking in the passage in Luke's gospel has in mind that we are to be sons of the Highest.

In the first chapter of this gospel the word which the angel said to Mary, speaking of the incoming of Jesus, was that He should be called "the Son of

the Highest." In verse 32 of chapter 1 it says "He shall be great, and shall be called Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give him the throne of David his father." *The Highest* is a remarkable expression, and refers, I believe, to the supreme moral excellence that is seen in God. He says in the prophet Isaiah, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts," Isaiah 55: 9. God has been pleased to bring in the heavens in relation to the earth, to provide us, so to speak, with a means of measurement, a means by which we may come to an estimation of moral values; and if we can measure how much higher the heavens are than the earth, then we shall get some impression of how much higher God's ways are than our ways, and God's thoughts than our thoughts. Hence the expression *The Highest*, as applied to God in Luke's gospel, is intended, I believe, to impress us with the supreme moral excellence that is found in Him.

It is no accident that in God's ways the saints are found, and are left so long, in a world of evil. The presence of features of the world gives occasion for the expression, over against the evil, and indeed as brought into relief by it, of what is good, and that is what God has in mind. The present time, extended as it is, is a training time, a forming time. It is to culminate with each one of us in this, that "every one that is perfected shall be as his teacher." The Lord brought into perfect expression what God was in the presence of evil. It is not here a question of opposition to the testimony exactly. It is a question of evil, of men being evil, and the fact of sin being in the world; and in the presence of it good, light from Christ, is to shine. The Lord says "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Highest." He Himself came in, announced as One who should be called "the Son of the Highest"; that is, He would be recognised as the perfect representation, in a world of evil, of what God is as "the Highest." But now the saints are to be brought into the same position, or rather into a position which is characteristically the same. He, of course, would be pre-eminent in it, "the Son of the Highest," but characteristically the saints are to be "sons of the Highest."

Now, it may be easy, of course, to say these things in congenial conditions, but the value and power of them are proved in uncongenial conditions, and that is what is in mind here. In the presence of enemies, in the presence of those who are unthankful and evil, we are to be reminded of what God has proved Himself to be, and what He has been expressed to be in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, so the Lord says that He, the Highest, "is good to the unthankful and wicked." That is a remarkable thing, that every day as the sun rises we are reminded of the impartial goodness of God towards all men.

Every day as a new day dawns and the sun rises in its glory; one has seen it from an aeroplane, the glory of the rising sun showing itself behind the clouds, it is a wonderful testimony day by day of what God is in His impartial goodness, even to the unthankful and the evil. It is a good thing that we should be renewed in the sense of it, because as going out into a world of evil, this is what is to come into expression in the saints, "sons of the Highest." It is a dignified position, a glorious position, and it is a training time which has in view that we should learn from our Teacher, that "every one that is perfected shall be as his teacher"; no less a thing than this is to be arrived at. We know how Luke loves to trace it in this gospel. He presents to us Christ all the way through as maintaining a perfect testimony to the grace and goodness of God, so that continually as a result of His service and activities we read that people glorified God. That was the result of His service, "they glorified God," and you find Satan doing his utmost to extinguish the light that was shining. You find His disciples obscuring the light, so that as His enemies come to take Him one of His disciples drew a sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest; that was really obscuring the light. It must have been a grief to the heart of the Lord when He Himself was going through so gloriously, to see one of His servants bringing His name into disrepute. The Lord says "Suffer thus far," and then He put forth His hand and touched the ear of the servant of the high priest and healed him; a wonderful thing to do in the presence of His enemies. He was thus characterised right through.

It speaks in the Psalm about one who meditates in the law of Jehovah, "He is as a tree planted by brooks of water, which giveth its fruit in its season, and whose leaf fadeth not; and all that he doeth prospereth." That is a kind of epitome of the pathway of the Lord Jesus as presented to us in Luke, that He brought forth His fruit in its season. Whatever position He was seen in, He would prosper, and His leaf did not wither. He carried the testimony of the grace of God right through to the end in greenness, so that even Peter's failure and the opposition of enemies did not prevent the Lord carrying the testimony of God right through to completion in the greenness of life. That is what we are to be developed for. It is to eventuate, one may say, in the heavenly city coming down out of heaven from God. What an answer, dear brethren, to all the evil and wickedness that six thousand years will have witnessed in this world! - that there should come down out of heaven from God a vessel having the glory of God, really expressive of the Highest; and we are being fitted for that. That is the reason why we are left in a world of evil, that we might be forced to learn from our Teacher. "Every one that is perfected shall be as his teacher." We are to be like Him, and the result is to be that we are to come out as sons of the Highest. Then when we come to

Matthew's gospel, the position contemplated is more definitely that of opposition on account of being here in the testimony. Luke's gospel is simply what we are as of God in the midst of a world of evil, but when we come to Matthew's gospel what is contemplated is definite opposition and persecution in relation to the testimony. And I might say, dear brethren, that from time to time the testimony; that is, the course of the maintenance of the truth here, takes on different features. It may be that it is to take on a feature when suffering will be called for, more than has been known hitherto in the lifetime of anyone here.

One is reminded of a time in the history of David when he fled from Saul to Ahimelech, the priest, and he gave him to feed upon the shew-bread taken from the presence of God. God knew the kind of experiences that David was about to have; he was about to be persecuted even by his brethren; he was about to experience what it was to be hunted as a partridge on the mountains, not by the enemies of Israel, but by the Israelites themselves, and in order to strengthen him in view of that position, he was given to feed upon the shew-bread. In view of the way that his enemies were about to treat him, God would set before David a view of His saints as He saw them according to divine order and divine unity. He would give David to get, so to speak, an abstract view of the people of God, and to feed upon it; and as having that view of the saints he would be strengthened and enabled to go through, even though their actual behaviour might be very different from what was becoming to them. Following that; the prophet Gad comes to him, when he was in the stronghold, the cave of Adullam, and the prophet tells him to go into the land of Judah. He was to take up a fresh position; there had been sufficient time for the feature of the truth set forth in the cave of Adullam, and he was to go into the land of Judah. Another feature was to come into evidence, the immediate result of which was the intensification of the persecution, and yet he was told to go there. The Lord was definitely leading him into that position, and if the Lord leads into a position you may rest assured that He will support the saints in it. I only mention that by the way, because we may well find as the days go on, that along with the development of the most precious features of assembly privilege, the Lord may lead His people into a position where suffering for the truth's sake is called for. It seems to me that it is inevitable, not from the point of view of developments in the world, because God can easily check these if He wishes, but inevitable because the thoughts of God require it, because we are to stand by the side of the Lamb as the Lamb's wife. In the purpose of God we are to have that position by the side of Christ as the Lamb's wife; and that involves that we must be in complete correspondence with the Lamb, morally suited to the position, so suited to it

as to enhance the occasion when the Lamb is publicly glorified. So we must not be surprised if the saints are led into a position where we must suffer for the truth's sake, because it is God's thought for us.

The Lord says here, "When they persecute you in this city." You will understand I am not applying this in any literal sense, only to take it up broadly that the setting of this passage is suffering for the testimony. "When they persecute you in this city, flee to the other; for verily I say to you, ye shall not have completed the cities of Israel until the Son of man be come." Then He says, "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the bondman above his lord. It is sufficient for the disciple that he should become as his teacher, and the bondman as his lord." It is a remarkable thing that in this passage we get the double thought of the disciple and his teacher, and the bondman and his lord. The bondman and his lord are brought in for additional support in this process of learning and formation, because we might be inclined to evade education of so severe and testing a character. And so, to meet any tendency on our part to do this, the thought of the bondman and his lord is brought in to intensify the matter for us, and to make us feel that, as taking up in our minds the attitude of bondmen in relation to Christ, we must go through with it to completion. So he says "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those of his household? It is as if to say, that God would encourage us to take account of the character of the sufferings of Christ for the testimony's sake, and to understand that if in the ways of God suffering comes upon the saints for the truth's sake, we are to bear in mind that "the disciple is not above his teacher." There is no reason why the disciple should be better treated than his teacher, and "the bondman is not above his lord." The bondman has no right to expect anything easier than that which was experienced by his lord, and then, not only so, but the Lord brings in what will, I am sure, appeal to every heart that loves Him. "It is sufficient for the disciple that he should become as his teacher, and the bondman as his lord." That is to say, the more the disciple contemplates his teacher, the more the bondman contemplates his lord, the more he says in himself, 'Well, I do not want anything less than correspondence with Him.' In the understanding that this is the mind of God, the Lord goes on to assure us. He says "Be not afraid of those who kill the body." I speak very diffidently of these things, dear brethren, as understanding what it is to be fearful, to be lacking in courage indeed. I do not mean in natural courage, because mere fortitude is of no value in the things of God. Only that which is produced by the Spirit of God and wrought through affection for Christ is really safe; nothing can be trusted but the work of God. It is a good thing to keep that always in mind. Nothing in myself or in the brethren according to nature can be trusted, but the work of

God can be trusted, and it will go through. That is seen in the book of Job. In the first and second chapters of Job God speaks of "my servant Job." God had placed something there that could be trusted. Then in all the long history of Job you hear no more about "my servant Job" until in the last chapter "

where you find four times over in two verses that God says "my servant Job." He has been subjected to severest testing, but he comes through enriched by what he has gone through. God can speak of him in a greater way at the end than in the beginning.

In another passage the Lord says "Fear not those who kill the body, and after this have no more that they can do," as though to remind us that, after all, that is the limit of man's power against the saints and the limit of Satan's power against the saints, and after that there is no more that they can do. That can only be faced in the light of resurrection. We have the light of resurrection not merely as an idea, but as an actuality in Christ. He is already victorious, and in the light of that we are not to fear "those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; but fear rather him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The only thing that will deliver us from the fear of man is the fear of God. The Lord would bring that in as a stabilising factor. Having brought in the fear of God, He brings in the faithfulness and love of God, the Father's care. He says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father; but of you even the hairs of the head are all numbered." Think of the minuteness of this! We are usually extremely careful of ourselves, but not one of us has attempted to number the hairs of his head. The Father has infinitely more knowledge and care of us than we could have of ourselves. It is a remarkable thought. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Think of the minuteness of the knowledge and interest of God in each one, that He has gone to the trouble of numbering the hairs of our head. He says "Fear not therefore; ye are better than many sparrows. Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, *I* also will confess him before my Father who is in the heavens." The Lord brings in this incentive to confess Him before men. The brother or sister at work, whether old or young, the schoolboy or schoolgirl, however young he or she may be, everyone who confesses the Lord before men, the Lord will confess before His Father who is in the heavens.

In another scripture the Lord says He will confess such before the angels of God, Luke 12: 8. What a remarkable thing, that the angels, Michael, the archangel, Gabriel, and the rest, hear the names of brothers and sisters and children who confess the Lord. How real all this is! How important the day of testimony is, and the suffering for the testimony! It is going to result in glory

being given to the saints. The Lord knows how to apportion it in that day, but then it is a question of learning how to be in the testimony, learning it from Christ. The Lord says, "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the bondman above his lord."

Now, in John's gospel we have the example of Christ in feet-washing. From one point of view it is the expression of the love of Christ for His own, but then in performing this service the Lord had in mind to set in motion the working of love in the circle of the brethren, and the working of love in, a practical way, for love is of no value if it is not practical. Love is essentially practical, and shows itself in serving others. John 13 is very remarkable, and in a way one links it by way of contrast or comparison with Luke 4. I refer to the incident when the Lord was in the synagogue of Nazareth, and this incident, the washing of the feet of the disciples by the Lord. They are both remarkable for the minuteness of detail which the Spirit of God gives us. In the fourth of Luke Jesus "stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Esaias was given to Him; and having unrolled the book he found the place where it was written," and then it says "having rolled up the book, when he had delivered it up to the attendant, he sat down." You might wonder why all these details are gone into, and so again in John 13, we are told that "Jesus ... rises from supper and lays aside his garments, and having taken a linen towel he girded himself: then he pours water into the wash-hand basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the linen towel with which he was girded." Both incidents are remarkable for the minuteness of detail of the movements of the Lord Jesus which is recorded by the Spirit of God, and I believe the point of view in Luke's gospel is that the grace and dignity of the anointing are to characterise everything publicly. It was the Lord's first appearance in public, and He stood up as God's Anointed. He says "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor." It was not only what He said, but what impressed those in the synagogue was the grace and dignity and uniqueness, so to speak, of the way He did things. "The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon him," as though they had never seen anything in the synagogue like that. That is the idea for the assembly publicly, because the assembly is spoken of as "the Christ"; that is, what Christ was publicly as the anointed of God is now continued in the assembly. The assembly is the anointed vessel of testimony down here, and the dignity and grace, the intelligence and power of the anointing, are intended to be in evidence. That is the important thing, the intention being that nothing that is of man, of the first man, nothing that men are used to in man's affairs, should characterise the assembly of God. It

should have a dignity all its own, and there should be the absence of all that is rough or uncouth; all these things are the result of the anointing.

If you look at Exodus 30 you will find that the anointing oil is a compound, carefully compounded, not only with oil, but with myrrh and other ingredients carefully weighed and proportioned. The anointing as characterising all that is public in the assembly is that which is marked by a distinctiveness which is the result of exercises produced, indeed, by the Spirit; not merely the Spirit in a general sense, however, but the Spirit in many and blended features, involving, I have no doubt, intelligence and power, yet dignity and grace. All these different features are brought in in regard to the way things are done in the assembly.

By comparison with that, or perhaps in contrast to it, in John 13 it is not a question of the anointing characterising what is done publicly, but rather the Spirit of Christ as characterising the saints in their relations with one another privately. It is a question of the circle of the brethren, and what is to obtain there, the spirit that marks them in their relations towards one another, the same Spirit that marked the Lord Jesus in this incident. The Spirit of God, through the apostle John, goes into great detail, reminding us, first of all, of the glory of the Person of Christ, and then it says He "rises from supper and lays aside his garments, and having taken a linen towel he girded himself: then he pours water into the wash-hand basin"; doing it all Himself, "and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the linen towel with which he was girded." Every detail of His movements is recorded, as though John, as present on the occasion, was entranced by what He saw. He saw love working out in practical expression, and in a way that meant that the One who was serving was content, though fully conscious of His own greatness, to take on the most menial service in love towards His own. It was really a bondman's service, so the Lord says, "Ye call me the Teacher and the Lord, and ye say well, for I am so. If *I* therefore, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example that, as *I* have done to you, ye should do also. Verily, verily, I say to you, The bondman is not greater than his lord, nor the sent greater than he who has sent him." He encourages us to take on in our minds the attitude of a bondman. Bondmanship has been glorified in Christ. We read in Exodus 21 of a Hebrew bondman who said plainly, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free," and he serves his master for ever. Bondmanship has expressed itself in the voluntary movements of love; how far love will go in serving. The Lord says "I have given you an example that, as *I* have done to you, ye should do also." It is a question of the spirit that is to obtain in the circle of the brethren.

You will remember how Abigail, when she discovered that David desired to have her as his wife, that she was to be united to David and share with him in all the vicissitudes of the testimony, said, "Let thy handmaid be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord"; not to wash the feet of my lord, but "of the servants of my lord." Love to Christ finds expression in the way we treat the saints. You can well understand that (if you would allow the expression) when she came into fellowship she would cause no trouble to the saints. She would move in that attitude. She would be moving happily among the brethren, with nothing more in her own mind than to be a bondwoman, and her business was to wash the feet of the servants of her lord. That shows what she was in her own estimation. She was not making any demands on the brethren, that they ought to do this or that for her, but her whole attitude of mind was that she was to be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of her lord. The Lord says "I have given you an example that, as *I* have done to you, ye should do also. Verily, verily, I say to you, The bondman is not greater than his lord, nor the sent greater than he who has sent him. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them."

That is what I had in mind to present to you, dear brethren, and I leave it with you, desiring that we should be helped to work it out practically, and to keep before us that the disciple is to become as his lord. We are to have nothing greater and nothing less before us. That is the standard God has before Him, and as we are brought up to it, the pleasure of God will be secured in His people.

"THE WISDOM OF GOD"

Proverbs 8:22,23; Proverbs 8:27-31; John 3:12,13; Colossians 1:24-29; Colossians 2:1-3; Ephesians 3:8-10

I want to speak, dear brethren, of the wisdom of God, and to show how it is to come into expression in the assembly. What one has in mind in referring to it is that we might all gain some impression of the greatness of what God has called us to, for if we have been laid hold of by the gospel which has reached us in this day of the Spirit, we have been laid hold of to form part of the assembly, which is the greatest conception that divine love and wisdom could possibly bring into being. I hope I may be able to convey some little impression of that, how it is intended, that in it God's wisdom should be seen. At the end of the epistle to the Romans, it says, "To God only wise," the force of the expression being really, 'To God who alone is wise,' conveying that wisdom is only with God, not, of course, that He cannot impart it to men, for He can, as it says, "If any one of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all freely and reproaches not, and it shall be given to him," James 1: 5. It is a great thing to get the sense that God only is wise. Solomon says in Proverbs 21, "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against Jehovah." That is a very great comfort, that whatever man and Satan may do against God, and against His people, there is no wisdom in it finally. It may appear to have wisdom, and to a certain extent according to man's reckoning, it *may* have wisdom, but in the long run it will be all exposed as utter folly. God will expose it. And so in Revelation 12, the dragon appears with seven heads. That has a suggestion of completeness of wisdom, apparently, for the head is the seat of wisdom; and in chapter 13 the first beast appears, and he has seven heads. He is one of Satan's agents that will shortly appear when the assembly is gone. Satan and the beast both appear to have remarkable wisdom, but where does it end? It ends in the lake of fire. The beast will be taken and cast alive into the lake of fire, and Satan will eventually be cast into the lake of fire, too, and that is the end, you see, of all wisdom against God; that is where it ends, and where its utter folly will be demonstrated.

Now we have in Proverbs 8 the thought of wisdom, which is personified there. It does not literally refer to Christ, because you will notice that all through the chapter it speaks of wisdom in the feminine. It says in chapter 9: "Wisdom hath built her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars," and so on; so that wisdom is presented, not exactly as a figure of Christ, although there is no doubt whatever that when Christ appeared, the wisdom of God came into expression in Him, as we shall see in a moment; but the idea in Proverbs 8 is of wisdom regarded as a quality, and what God says about it. Wisdom, which

is personified in the chapter says, "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I" (that is wisdom) "was set up from eternity, from the beginning, before the earth was." Now I understand that to mean, that before God began to work out His thoughts, He committed Himself to wisdom. His way as I understand it, is the means He takes to effectuate the thoughts that His heart has formed. God begins by forming certain thoughts, certain purposes, then the question is, how He is going to work them out; and with a view to working out what thoughts He had formed, He commits Himself to wisdom. It says, "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from eternity." That is to say, God does not do what men do. They get an idea and they begin to work it out, and they find, perhaps, that they have to scrap what they have done and begin again; or they achieve a certain measure of success, but they have to amend their original plan, and someone else comes along with something better; and so there is a continual displacement and supersession of what had gone before, but not so with God. If God forms a purpose, He carefully thinks out, according to wisdom, how He is going to work it out. He commits Himself to wisdom before He begins His operations, and then when He begins His operations. He carries them through in wisdom in relation to the thoughts He has already formed; so that first of all, we get, "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old."

Then from verse 27 onwards, we read, "When he prepared the heavens, I was there; when he ordained the circle upon the face of the deep; ... when he imposed on the sea his decree that the waters should not pass his commandment, when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him." That is, when God began His operations in creation, wisdom was by Him. "By him" it says; using figurative language, "his nursling: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." It is figurative language, suggestive, I believe, of the pleasure that God had in taking account of the thoughts He had formed in relation to the sons of men, and in the way in which He was going step by step, to bring these thoughts into expression and full completion. One cannot go into all the details. I have no doubt there was a reason in everything.

What God had in mind in relation to the sons of men was to form in that order of creation, *men*, not angels, but men, those who should be competent to respond to Him perfectly, to be brought into a place of greatest nearness and most holy intimacy, to be able to appreciate His glory and respond to it intelligently. Wonderful things God had in mind, showing unselfish He is; that He, being what He is, desired to have creatures before Him of such a

character that they should be able to appreciate what He is with wonderful intelligence, and to respond to Him in wonderful affection. With nothing less than that would God be satisfied, and so I have no doubt that all these things had a meaning. "When he imposed on the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment." What a comfort that is! The sea usually represents the workings of lawless men acted upon by Satan, but they are under control. It was in divine wisdom, dear brethren, that we should be here in a world of evil, for it is in having to be here and having to learn how to choose the good and refuse the evil, and having to learn to trust in God in the presence of evil; it is in all these things that we develop morally and spiritually, so that we may fit the position that God has in mind for us. And so He was pleased to allow that evil should come in, and that those who were the subjects of His purpose should find themselves in a world of evil, but what was it for? For our formation and education in the knowledge of Himself. And so He "imposed on the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment."

What a comfort that is, when evil arises like a flood, as it does, sometimes, the saints fall back on that, that God has said to the sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed," Job 38: 11; and we trust in God that when the waves of lawlessness arise, that He will just say to them, "no further." The whole matter is under His control. We are thankful for that. So the seed of Abraham is likened to the sand of the seashore. God made the sea and provided the sand on the seashore. You may say, how weak is the sand, just little grains; but as held together the sand provides a barrier that the waves of the sea cannot pass over. And that is just what the saints are; they stand as a great bulwark against the forces of evil, so that however much they arise, there is something here that cannot be overcome. It is the seed of Abraham, the true seed of faith, those who know God, and God has set them as the bound of the sea, that it cannot pass over; Jeremiah 5: 22. All these details of creation, I have no doubt, were in divine wisdom because of what God was going to work out in relation to the sons of men. Wisdom's delights were with the sons of men. Wonderful thing to think of! Long before time, as we know it, was created, God had created angels; when He laid the foundations of the earth, "all the sons of God," it says, "shouted for joy," Job 38: 7. They were undoubtedly angels, and angels are creatures of much greater power than men, remarkable power, "angels, mighty in strength," David says in Psalm 103: 20. One angel was able, without any difficulty, to dispose of the army of Sennacherib, an army of one hundred and eighty-five thousand. Think of the power of one angel, and yet, when it was a question of the purpose of His love, God did not choose angels, but set

His delight on the sons of men! It ought to affect us greatly, that God has passed by angels and taken up the sons of men.

Well now, that being so, how is it to be worked out? How was God to secure an order of man that would be great enough morally to satisfy His heart and be able to respond to Him intelligently and appreciatively? Well, the next great step in divine wisdom is the incarnation. The great secret of divine wisdom is the wonderful fact that one of the Persons of the Godhead would become a Man, and so you get the Lord constantly speaking of Himself as the Son of man. Wisdom's delights were with the sons of men, but now the Son of man comes in. That is a title that the Lord constantly took as referring to Himself as One who had come in to take up all that belonged to man. He had to take up, dear brethren, all that attached to man because of sin, and give His life a ransom for many, if God's thoughts for man were to be worked out. So we find Him saying, "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many," Matthew 20: 28. Oh, wonderful grace! And yet on the other hand, God had destined man for the highest place. It says in Psalm 8, "What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and splendour. Thou hast made him to rule over the works of thy hands; thou hast put everything under his feet." That is what God has destined for man, but it was all to be taken up by the Son of man. In the end of chapter 1 of John's gospel, Nathanael said to the Lord "*Thou* art the Son of God, *thou* art the king of Israel," and the Lord said, "Thou shalt see greater things than these. And he says to him, Verily, verily, I say to you, Henceforth ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man." "The Son of God, the king of Israel," related to Israel, but the Lord said, "Thou shalt see greater things than these Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man." That is, the Son of man would be supreme, and the angels of God would ascend and descend upon Him; ascending, as it were, to receive His instructions, and descending to execute them, so great is the place of man in the Person of Christ.

Now in the verse I read in John 3, the Lord says, "No one has gone up into heaven, save he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven." The latter is a remarkable expression, involving His deity. Though here as a Man, walking here on this earth, and speaking to Nicodemus, He could yet speak of Himself as "the Son of man who is in heaven." He does not say, 'Who was in heaven,' nor 'who is going to be in heaven'; but "the Son of man who is in heaven." It is an expression which necessarily involves His deity, because when you come to a divine Person, you cannot limit Him by any idea

of location or anything of that sort. He inhabits eternity. He is everywhere. And when the Lord said, "The Son of man who is in heaven," I have no doubt He was intending to convey the truth of who it was, that was there. That is the keystone of divine wisdom, that He who is God should become Man, and bring into manhood supreme moral excellence. God has brought in in Christ an order of manhood that is great enough in personal and moral excellence to satisfy His desires, great enough to express God, and to respond to Him in a perfect way.

But then, beloved brethren, that being so, what was in mind in a divine Person becoming Man, was that we might be brought into His life; and so redemption has been accomplished. That was a necessity. We read in the next verse, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up." There was a divine must, because of the condition in which men were, they had become the subjects of sin and all its consequences. And therefore, if God was to effectuate His thoughts in relation to the sons of men, that matter must be dealt with according to God, sin must be judged; and as to the man who was sinful, his history must be terminated in judgment, and the Lord Jesus went to the cross in order that all that might be done vicariously for man. If it had been effectuated in us, we should never have emerged from the judgment of God; but the Son of God came and took vicariously, that is on behalf of others, the place that was ours, in order that the judgment might be borne and exhausted, and God be glorified, and the history of sinful man ended judicially in the cross of Christ. What for? In order that God might be free to give us life in Christ, and set us up in life in the heavenly order of manhood, the order of manhood that is according to His original thought, as it says in 1 Corinthians 15: 48: "Such as he made of dust, such also those made of dust; and such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones." The first man was not God's original thought; he was simply brought in by way of testimony, and that God might work out His thoughts in wonderful grace; but it is not an earthly order of man who has place in heaven. We have received the spirit of the heavenly One; we live in His life, and are of His order. But what I am seeking to bring before you is that God having conceived His thoughts in relation to the sons of men brought forward wisdom before setting about to carry them out; the first great step in wisdom being the incarnation. Not that it was first in point of time, because the foundation of the world came before that. When we get the expression in Scripture "before the foundation of the world," I believe it always refers to the purpose of God. God had formed His purposes, and then the foundation of the world comes in with a view to the working of them out. So in John 17 the Lord says to the Father, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world"; it

was a question of God's purpose. When it is a question of the personal glory of Christ as having His part in Deity, in equality with the Father, the Lord does not use the expression "before the foundation of the world." He uses the expression, "before the world was," John 17: 5. "Before the world was," I believe, conveys simply the thought of absolute eternity before time began; but when it is said "before the foundation of the world," it has in view that God had formed a purpose, and that the world was founded with a view to working out that purpose.

Now when we come to Colossians and Ephesians, we have the thought of the assembly, and the assembly as the body of Christ. If you have followed what I have sought to present, and have some little impression of the greatness of what has come in in a divine Person having become Man, and that there is now such a Man before God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, a Man in whom, Colossians says, "dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," you will understand what an immense conception the thought of His body is; that is, that He should have a vessel in which what He is as Man can be expanded with a view to being expressed; not that it adds anything to Him in one sense, although it does in another. Eve added nothing to Adam, in one sense, because she was wholly derived from him; in that sense she added nothing to him, but on the other hand, she did add something to him, because in her he had a counterpart, a complement, the perfect answer, in feminine features, to himself. That is the thought, as I understand it, in the body of Christ, which is the assembly. And this is what we have been taken up for, the assembly, as Paul says in Colossians 1, "for his body, which is the assembly." He makes it perfectly clear, that the assembly is Christ's body. That knowledge, or the light of it, had arrested him years before, it shone upon him from heaven, when the Lord said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul was not persecuting Christ personally; he was persecuting the assembly, ravaging it, as Scripture says; but the Lord says, "Why persecutest thou *me*?" showing Paul that the assembly here on earth was His own body, inseparably bound up with Him; so that anyone who touched the assembly touched Christ. That is what He meant; and so in that way as the Holy Spirit was received by Saul of Tarsus, the light would shine into his soul and expand as he went on. And now in this day, God is securing this masterpiece of divine wisdom, the assembly, the body of Christ; the vessel that is great enough to express Christ in all His features for the pleasure of God, and also, in the coming day as the city, to express God Himself.

Well now, in connection with that, we get greatly stressed the thought of mystery, and I would urge the youngest to take account of this, that if they are Christians and have received the Holy Spirit, they have their part in

something which the wisest men in the earth know nothing of, if they are not Christians. They have their part in what Scripture speaks of as the mystery: something that God has been pleased to hide from the wise and prudent - those who profess to be wise and learned in the world - and which He is working out in the most wonderful way, though the world knows nothing about it. It says in Proverbs 25, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings is to search out a thing." The kings are the saints, viewed in their kingly dignity, and it is our honour to search out a thing. Now we ought to set ourselves to inquire, What is the mystery? and to look at the Scripture, and see what the mystery means. It was hidden, now it is all out. It was given to Paul to bring it out, to complete the word of God, and that involves his bringing to light the mystery. Now the mystery was this, that God was pleased to work by the gospel in all the nations under the sun, and to attract souls to Christ, and to seal them by the Holy Spirit, and by the Holy Spirit to bind them into one body. So that out of all those different components drawn from different parts of the earth, having different national characteristics and all that kind of thing, the wisdom of God is forming a wonderful vessel, the assembly, which is to be the vessel in which Christ is to find expression. This is no theory, it is an actuality. It is a remarkable testimony to the powerful influence of Christ over millions of people, absolutely diverse in character, that as they are formed under His influence, they are drawn together and held together in holy love. On the one hand it is a testimony to the wonderful influence of Christ, and on the other hand, it is a testimony to the wonderful power of the Holy Spirit, who also is a divine Person.

That is the mystery; and those of us who have been privileged to move about a little in different parts of the earth see it. If you go to England you see the saints bound together in love, loving Christ, they are all drawn from different social positions in life, they have different temperaments, yet they are all drawn together, they move together, they think the same thing, they say the same thing, they praise God together in the same way. And if you come to the other side of the earth, you find exactly the same thing; and you go to another part - to America, perhaps - and you see exactly the same thing. It is the mystery. The world cannot possibly understand it; the world has nothing equal to it. People say, How is it you have friends all over the world? You are going somewhere you have never been before, and you have friends there, and are received into their houses without the least difficulty. How is it? What does it mean? It is a mystery to them, they cannot possibly understand; and yet it is a great reality. It is a wonderful thing, the assembly, the body of Christ; and it is what God is working for, and so the apostle was labouring to present every man perfect in Christ. Nothing of flesh, of course,

can have any part in this living organism. If flesh obtrudes itself, it only spoils. You see how flesh spoiled the assembly at Corinth. It was no part of God's purpose that the saints should fall into sin. There was no expression of Christ in that; no expression of the power of the Holy Spirit in that; no expression of the wisdom of God in that! It only showed to what a large extent through carelessness and unwatchfulness on the part of the brethren, Satan had gained a foothold. And Paul laboured, mourned and wept, and sent Timothy among them to bring to their remembrance, "my ways as they are in Christ, according as I teach everywhere in every assembly."

Every assembly is to take on the same pattern, and that pattern can only be learned from Christ, and so Paul says he laboured "to present every man perfect in Christ." The whole bent of his ministry was that every man was to be built up in the knowledge of Christ and to take character from Christ, the heavenly man, the man of God's purpose, because every believer is to form his part in the body of Christ. And so he says, "For I would have you know what combat I have for you, and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in flesh; to the end that their hearts may be encouraged, being united together in love." That is essential if Christ is to come into expression in His body, it is essential that the saints should be united together in love. If we are disunited, beloved brethren, what expression is there of Christ in that? You see how it cuts entirely athwart the divine mind, if we are not united together in love! You may say, we are very diverse, and we rub one another up the wrong way, and so on. That may be perfectly true as regards what we are naturally, but what about the influence of Christ, and what about the power of the Spirit? What about the bearing of the cross of Christ? Have we really learned how essential it was that Christ should go to the cross, because of what we are naturally? How essential it was that sin and the flesh should be judged and set aside for ever. Have we taken to heart what the sufferings of Christ really were? He actually went to the cross; He actually died, and He was actually buried, and all that was for us, every bit of it was for us.

And so if I embrace the gospel, I am to understand that what I am as in the flesh has been judged and has been ended in the death of Christ for me. Am I going to be so heartless in regard of the sufferings of Christ in all that He has borne for me, that I am going to continue to allow what He suffered to bring to an end? Is that going to be my attitude? If so, you may well inquire whether I have really embraced the gospel, whether I love Christ, if that is my attitude. No, dear brethren, this cannot be our attitude; our attitude is that in our own minds we are to be brought completely into accord with the cross of Christ, with all its implications, and as we are, we shall find that the personal influence of Christ and the power of the Spirit of God will enable us to move in

a way that befits those who are of Christ, and the result is that we can be "knit together in love." You cannot have the body, a vessel in which Christ is to be seen, unless we are "knit together in love." There is no disunity in Christ; and so he says, "being united together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the full knowledge of the mystery of God; in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge." That shows how great the mystery is!

Well, just one word more in Ephesians, and then I have finished; and that is to show how great the assembly is, or is intended to be, at the present time. And when I speak of the assembly, dear brethren,

you will understand that I am not overlooking what we must always bear in mind and feel; that is, that the assembly publicly is in a sad state of brokenness. What was set up publicly by Paul's ministry is in a condition of ruin, and therefore if one speaks of the assembly, one is not in any way claiming for any company of Christians that it is the assembly; one is recognising fully, and I trust with sorrow, what the actual state of the assembly of God is. On the other hand, it is our privilege to live in a day when the Lord has recovered the truth. It had been entirely lost, as regards any collective expression of it, up to the time when the Lord began to work, early in the last century, and from that day to this, the Lord has been steadily working, step by step recovering the truth that has been lost. And recovery out of the ruin has come about through those that name the name of the Lord withdrawing from iniquity. We must not connect the name of the Lord with iniquity, and so Paul says that we are also to follow "righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." Scripture contemplates that as withdrawing from iniquity and following righteousness and these other things, we shall find others doing the same, and calling upon the Lord out of a pure heart, and we are to follow with them. There is to be no independence. Now when we find those with whom we can walk, what is to govern us? Obviously the only truth that is to govern us as moving together, is the truth of the assembly, for that is the truth that governs saints as set together, and we shall not be pursuing righteousness, if we do not allow it to govern us. Hence while we cannot assume to be the assembly, yet the light of it, its privileges, and the features proper to it have all been recovered in this our day, and are known in a measure of power and actuality by those who are going on together in the truth. It is in that sense that one ventures to speak of the assembly.

Now when we come to the third of Ephesians, the apostle says, "To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the

nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things, in order that *now*" - notice that word *now* - "to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God." Now what do angels see as they look down on the assembly? They will see a great deal of confusion in the world; a great deal of lawlessness in the world. But what do they see as they look down on the saints of God as moving together? Well, dear brethren, what they should see, and what I have no doubt they do see, is divine order. They see the saints walking in love; they may see perhaps, evil come in amongst the saints, and then they see the saints in wisdom given them of God dealing with it in a way that is according to God, refusing to be identified with evil. Though the world is in a state of confusion and a great deal of evil passes tolerated, they see that there is a spot, in the midst of every evil, where all that is due to God is maintained. They see Satan working to introduce things amongst the saints that would mar the testimony, and see the saints held in living touch with their Head, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and having wisdom to discern what is working, however subtly it may be covered up, and to deal with it according to God. That would be some of the ways in which they see the all-various wisdom of God. It would help the brethren in dealing with matters in care, and saints being called upon to deal with matters in assembly, to remember that principalities and powers in the heavenlies are looking on, to see the all-various wisdom of God in the way things are handled. We may also take account of another side of things; there are conditions in recent years resulting from the war, the saints in one part moving out in love to saints whom they have never seen, because of the links in Christ by the Spirit that bind them together. They see all this. "What hath God wrought!" These are only suggestions of some of the ways in which principalities and powers see the all-various wisdom of God.

I trust what I have said has been enough to show that the assembly, the body of Christ is the great expression of divine wisdom, according to purpose formed before the foundation of the world, and working out ever since. May the Lord help us to see that these are the things to be going in for. In the midst of the apostate state of things that we are surrounded by, God is working to open up this wonderful character of things. Our hearts are bowed as we think of the grace that gives us a part in it. May we grow, and be able to fill our part in the assembly which is His body.

MANHOOD ACCORDING TO CHRIST

Numbers 12: 1 - 8; Genesis 26: 12 - 22; Esther 2: 19 - 23; Esther 3: 1, 2; Esther 8: 15; Esther 9: 4

I have in mind, dear brethren, to say a word as to true greatness in manhood according to God; for there is no doubt that what God is seeking to bring about is the development of manhood in the saints; manhood which takes its character, I need not say, from Christ. We need to have God's own thoughts as to what is truly great, for our natural tendencies are to have our ideas formed - or at any rate influenced - by what is in the world around us, whereas God would always keep Christ before the minds and hearts of His people, showing us what is really great according to His estimation. Paul, towards the close of his course, and as being in prison and having plenty of opportunity to weigh things over, says "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men." Then, as though that were not enough, so to speak, he says, "having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross." Then, following on that remarkable presentation of the mind that was in Christ Jesus, the Man of God's purpose and pleasure, he says "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings." God intends to ensure that throughout the whole universe, even including infernal beings, there shall be a public recognition of the One whom He delights to honour. The world at present is marked by despoliation as regards His name, but we, as God's people, are in the secret of what God's estimation of Christ is.

One has in mind, by the Lord's help, to seek to indicate three lines on which I believe we may be developed in manhood according to Christ; not, however, that there are not other ways, for even the ministry which the Lord gives from His place of exaltation far above all heavens, is intended to that very end, as we were quoting in prayer, "Until we all arrive ... at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ." I think these three passages of Scripture, from Numbers, from Genesis and from Esther, may serve to indicate three ways in which God would develop greatness in the saints. The first is in having to do with God, and the second is in sowing to the Spirit. The first produces moral greatness according to Christ; the second produces greatness in spiritual wealth and in spiritual substance; and the third

is by means of exercises that arise as having to face evil, especially in the assembly, and as proving faithful in relation to those matters.

The Lord was here in the presence of evil, finding evil in His Father's house, for they were making it a house of merchandise. Morally the position was such that He said it was a den of thieves. He rose up in true greatness, and made a scourge of cords and drove out those that sold, and overturned the tables of the money-changers. There was no resisting the power in which He acted. It was done spontaneously, His heart entering into it, because His Father's name was so dishonoured by what was going on in His house. Christ's greatness shone, as it was continually shining in different connections, but it shone there in faithfulness to God, and came into evidence as a result of finding itself in the presence of evil.

Now, first of all, in relation to Moses and what brought out his greatness, it says "But the man Moses was very meek, above all men that were upon the face of the earth." You will notice that in each of these passages I have read it refers to "the man"; first "the man Moses"; then, referring to Isaac, "the man ... became continually greater"; and then too, "the man Mordecai," and how great he became. So that the thought is manhood, and true greatness in manhood. In Numbers 12 we are told that "the man Moses was very meek, above all men that were upon the face of the earth." That is the comment of the Spirit of God; "*above* all men," as though God would show that meekness, as being a feature to be learned only from Christ, is an element that enters into true greatness. One marked by it is, in His estimation, exalted "*above* all men that were upon the face of the earth." It was not the circumstances of rivalry in which Moses found himself that developed the meekness. The circumstances of rivalry brought it into expression, but no amount of rivalry or anything of that kind will, by itself, develop meekness. Indeed, by itself it would tend in the opposite direction, but what characterised Moses was that he was much in the presence of God. I know, of course, that he was a special servant, selected for a special mission, and specially privileged; indeed, in some respects he is suggestive of Christ Himself. But at the same time, I am referring to what he was as having become meek, for, after all, he was not born meek. We may rest assured that not one of us is born meek. It is not innate in man naturally. It is not a feature of the flesh. It is something that has to be learned from Christ, and God intends that we should learn it from Christ. If He allows anything in the nature of rivalry, or anything that is testing to arise, it maybe amongst the saints, He has in mind that it should serve to bring into expression what He would form in us that is well pleasing to Himself.

Moses, as I said, was much with God. On two occasions he was with God alone for forty days and forty nights, and not only so, but God Himself showed him the pattern of the tabernacle. Think of the wondrousness of it, God indicating to Moses not only the detail and the pattern of the dwelling-place which God's people were to construct for Him, but no doubt letting him into the secret of what the different items stood for, what they represented. You can well understand God showing him the pattern, but Moses would not have had that instruction merely as carrying in his mind certain mechanical details, certain formal specifications, but his heart would be in it. You can understand with what pleasure God would speak to Moses of the tabernacle as typifying the whole universe in a coming day, in which He will find His pleasure, and in which He will be served, with all taking its character from the ark.

The first item that God gave instructions to Moses about was the ark. When it came to constructing the tabernacle, the ark did not come first, but when God gave instructions as to the system in which He could take pleasure and dwell in complacently, the first thing He speaks of to Moses is the ark. Moses would be impressed as he began to take account of who it was that the ark typified, as God said to him "They shall make an ark of acacia wood; two cubits and a half the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof." Think of the wondrousness of it, that a divine Person was to become Man, and to enter into such wonderful limitations as are there typified. They are not great measurements, but well within the compass of man. He, who was the Creator of heaven and earth, the God who upholds all things by the word of His power, He was to come in in such conditions, and in entering into manhood was to give character to, and impress His own precious features on, the whole system in which God would find His dwelling-place. Any thoughts of self-importance that Moses might tend to have in his own mind would be rebuked. How often do thoughts of self-importance arise in our minds; but how quickly they are rebuked, dear brethren, if we are in the presence of God, and see Christ there, Christ according to divine thoughts, One great enough personally and morally to bring in the moral universe, and secure it as marked by features that God could delight in and dwell in complacently. And yet our knowledge of Jesus is connected with His having come in in such a way that He could move amongst men. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt (or tabernacled) among us." Anyone dwelling in Capernaum would have been able to see Him moving about in the likeness of men, and yet, as their eyes were opened they would say to themselves, 'This is the Creator.' You can understand their hearts being held as they would watch Him, as they would take account of the features that marked Him.

Was there anything in the nature of self-assertion or self-display? No, dear brethren, He had entered into manhood for the pleasure of God, and He would fill out the position into which He had entered in a way which would magnify it morally and make it glorious, with no element of independence, no thought of seeking a place for Himself. His Father's will, His Father's glory, His Father's name, were always precious to His heart. I do not think it is in any way fanciful to think of God speaking to Moses about the ark, and Him whom it typified, and then the whole system that would be built up around it. All the principal parts of it were to be of acacia-wood, the same kind of wood of which the ark itself was to be made. The ark itself was to be overlaid within and without with pure gold, and the boards also were overlaid with gold. How Moses' spirit would be subdued, how it would be affected as God spoke to him of the whole system which He intended to bring in, which was typified in the tabernacle, but which was all to take its character from a divine Person entering into manhood, and becoming such a Man as He was. We find Him saying in the prophet Isaiah, "I was not rebellious; I turned not away back. I gave my back to smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting," Isaiah 50: 5, 6. Think of the grace of it, dear brethren. Those that plucked off the hair, and so on, would call forth in any of us, save as we are formed by the Spirit of Christ, the very opposite of meekness. But the Lord Jesus could say, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls."

Well, beloved brethren, I believe we shall only really appreciate the meekness and gentleness of Christ, the moral excellence and greatness of it according to God's estimation, as we are with God. I do not believe any amount of reading about it will impress us with it, but if we are in the presence of God, and get God's view of Christ and the system which takes character from Him, we shall begin to get an impression of the moral excellence of the spirit of meekness which has shone out in Jesus. In this scripture Aaron and Miriam were speaking against Moses, or rather Miriam and Aaron, for she was the elder, and she apparently stepped out of a sister's place and took the lead, a very solemn matter. No-one knows what may happen if things begin to develop like that. Here Jehovah Himself takes it up, taking the matter in hand, calling to these three, and saying to them "Come out, ye three." Think of the solemnity of Jehovah calling on three saints, a sister and two brothers, and saying 'Ye three, come out to meet God.' I am not suggesting that there anything of that sort present amongst us here. I am only speaking of the solemnity and the seriousness of it. If a sister steps out of her place, and begins to lead in rivalry, God may act suddenly in regard of her. "Jehovah spoke suddenly to

Moses, and to Aaron, and to Miriam, Come out ye three." Moses did not need to do a thing, or speak a single word. The Lord came down, and then He called Aaron and Miriam. It was Miriam and Aaron who spoke against Moses. The Lord called Aaron and Miriam. He would have things in their right order, and He said, "Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I, Jehovah, will make myself known to him in a vision, I will speak unto him in a dream. Not so my servant Moses."

You can understand Miriam and Aaron for the moment despising Moses; he was so meek, but Jehovah says, "my servant Moses." What greater commendation could there be? "Not so my servant Moses: he is faithful in all my house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him openly, and not in riddles; and the form of Jehovah doth he behold. Why then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?" So that Moses was one who had to do with God, being in the presence of God continually. In the end of Numbers 7 we read that Moses went into the holiest to speak to God, and God spoke to him. God anticipated him. He would be impressed as God continually spoke to him.

When we come to the book of Genesis it is also a question of greatness, but not so much the moral greatness of being formed according to Christ, but the greatness that consists in spiritual substance, for it says that "Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold; and Jehovah blessed him. And the man became great, and he became continually greater, until he was very great. And he had possessions of flocks, and possessions of herds, and a great number of servants." That is what the Spirit of God is stressing in Isaac, not so much greatness in moral conformation to Christ, but rather great wealth of spiritual substance; and in that connection what is stressed is first of all where he sowed, and then secondly that he was active in digging wells. Those are two important principles, dear brethren, for us to recognise in connection with the acquisition of spiritual wealth.

I think there is a tendency sometimes amongst us, if any brother or sister is seen to be possessed of a certain amount of spiritual wealth, to think that it is all a matter of sovereign gift. I am not denying the sovereignty of gift. We always recognise that, but at the same time, spiritual wealth is not acquired only on those lines. The great principle is "he that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life"; that is, spiritual wealth is not so much a matter of gift in sovereignty, it is a matter of having followed right lines. This is a farming country, and I need not say anything to the brethren about sowing and reaping. They know all about it. They understand perfectly that they will not get a crop if they do not sow; that goes without saying, but then the same

thing applies in spiritual things, that if we would acquire spiritual wealth we must see that we sow, and sow in the right land. It says "Isaac sowed in that land"; that is, in the land of God's purpose. Sowing to the Spirit is very largely a matter of what we give our minds to. If we will allow our minds to be controlled as the Spirit of God would control them, the Spirit will not occupy them with worldly things, with fleshly things, with things that are of only transient importance. He will occupy them with the things that are eternal, with things that are pure, and just, and lovely, and of good report.

Caleb, in Old Testament history, said of that good land which he had in his heart, "The land ... is a very, very good land," emphasising the goodness of it, and saying, "If Jehovah delight in us, he will bring us in." There is no difficulty about that. "He that sows to the Spirit from the Spirit shall reap eternal life." The mind is the inlet to the affections. The great attraction of things above is that Christ is there. "Have your mind on things that are above"; "seek the things which are above, where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God," that is to say, having His place there deliberately; as though to remind us that His interests are not bound up with the earth, save in respect of the fact that the assembly is here, but with heavenly things.

It says that "Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold; and Jehovah blessed him"; but then there is not only the idea of sowing, but of digging, and that is evidently the exercise of getting rid of everything that would obstruct the free movement of the Spirit. He removed what would stand in the way of the water springing up. The Philistines were always stopping up the wells, that is what the natural mind working in the things of God nearly always does. It stops up the wells, so that there is no freshness. The natural mind attempting to compass divine things always robs them of their freshness, and we have to beware of the Philistines. Any tendency to hold the truth of God merely in the natural mind will fail. There may be a tendency to take on the truth in terms, and the tendency perhaps to place things in pigeon-holes, so to speak, and all that kind of thing. The truth of God cannot be held in that way. It must be held in the Spirit,

and then it will be in constant freshness, just like a fountain of water springing up. It says, "Isaac dug again the wells of water that they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and that the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham; and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them." The truth remains the same, but it is taken up afresh in fresh energy in the Spirit, so that it is held in freshness, in living power and enjoyment. The names are the same; the truth does not change, but taken up in fresh exercise it is held in a fresh and living way.

As Isaac dug these wells, the herdsmen of Gerar strove with Isaac's herdsmen, and said; "The water is ours ... And they dug another well, and they strove for that also." The Philistine element in ourselves always has to be reckoned with. Whatever is brought forward in freshness, there is the effort, so to speak, to claim it in the power of the natural mind, and say, 'That is ours,' but then a spiritual person will go on. Isaac went on. We must have the truth in freshness. There is nothing satisfying for the saints or for God if the truth is not held in freshness, so the more the Philistines strove, the more Isaac went on digging further wells, until he comes to a point when there is no more strife. He reaches the truth in such a way that the Philistines cannot rob him of it, they cannot claim it. The Lord had made room for them.

I just referred to that as a matter which we must carry with us all the time we are here, the importance of seeking to acquire spiritual substance so that we are not poverty-stricken. Jehovah said, "None shall appear before me empty." It is a shame to us if we are barren. God would not have barrenness in His land, or lack of substance in His house. The scripture speaks of the fatness of His house, but the enjoyment of that depends on us recognising, of course, that we are entirely dependent on the Spirit of God. It is largely dependent on us as to whether we will sow and dig, and maintain the exercise of digging, so that the wealth God gives us in the way of the truth known substantially may be held by us in freshness.

Then finally we come to the history of Mordecai, and he, I believe, represents one who became great because of the way he faced the working of evil. While we are here, we must expect to have to face the working of evil; not that one is setting a premium on evil in the assembly, far from it, but we have to remember that so long as we are here we are in the presence of hades' gates. There will be the constant plotting of evil to seek in a skilful and systematic way to nullify what is of God. We are in the presence of it. The Lord has said in regard to the assembly that "Hades' gates shall not prevail against it," but hades' gates are there and we must recognise that, hence the need for continual watchfulness.

The first thing that marks Mordecai is this constant watchfulness. He sat in the king's gate; even after he had been led in triumph through the city as the man whom the king delighted to honour, it says "Mordecai came again to the king's gate." Nothing succeeded in diverting Mordecai from sitting in the king's gate. I understand that the king's gate is simply the principle of judging every matter as to how it affects God. The gate was always the place of judgment, and Mordecai sitting in the king's gate would be that he was one who had habituated himself to looking at everything as it arose, as to how it affected

God. He would have a spiritual judgment of it from that standpoint; not how it affected himself, but how it affected God; and therefore when these two chamberlains were plotting and seeking to lay hands on king Ahasuerus, Mordecai is aware of it. There is no working of evil among the saints that God will not expose and make clear to those who are watchful and considering for Him. It is a very important element to be found in the assembly, that there are those characterised by watchfulness and considering in all things for God, because then the true character of anything that is working secretly will become manifest to such. "The thing became known to Mordecai, and he related it to Esther the queen, and Esther told it to the king in Mordecai's name." The assembly is brought into it, and the matter is taken up before God in purity of motive as considering for God only, for this is what Mordecai represents. These are important elements; and then inquiry was made, too; care was taken to investigate the matter, so that with these elements there the whole thing is exposed and dealt with in a right way. But all hangs first of all on Mordecai, who was sitting in the king's gate.

Another thing that marked Mordecai and which constituted an element in his greatness, is what comes out in chapter 3, and that is, that he would not under any circumstances yield to the flesh. This is very elementary, but it is very essential, and something that has to be maintained by us right through to the end. One has often referred to the apostle Paul, and one marvels at him. After he had been caught up to the third heaven and into Paradise; even after that, with all the light he had, and even with the thorn for the flesh to buffet him, he says to the Corinthians "I buffet my body, and lead it captive, lest after having preached to others I should be myself rejected." That shows what the flesh is even in an apostle, even in a man who has been into Paradise, and there is no other way of meeting it, but by having war with it. The element of self-seeking was having a damaging effect. The whole of the princes were giving way to it. You may say the king had commanded it. We have to take the history as it stands. God was in that, in order to bring out what was in Mordecai, and to bring about a great deliverance for His people. Any element of falsity or untruth that comes in amongst the saints, if it is allowed to go on, will rob God of His pleasure in His people. What Haman had in mind was to destroy the whole of the Jews. Haman was not intent simply on his own glory. All the princes bowed to him, but just one man, Mordecai, stood his ground, and whatever it cost he would not yield to this working of the flesh as set forth in Haman.

These are two elements of greatness in the presence of evil; that is, maintaining the principle of sitting in the king's gate, judging of every matter as to how it affects God, and along with that the purpose of heart that will not

yield to the flesh. We know how successful it was eventually in this history of the book of Esther. We find that Mordecai is the one who is prominent, and also Esther comes in. She is the counterpart, so to speak, of Mordecai. Mordecai stands out as the responsible element; and Esther is the subjective answer to what is seen in Mordecai, for she was brought up by him, and even after she became queen she did as he told her. She sets forth the results of subjection, and of abiding under the influence of one Man. That is what characterised Esther, and so, I believe, there are two things of particular importance in her. She was subjected to a process with a view to being pleasing to the king; "six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with spices." One would say this to all the brethren, young and old, brothers and sisters, that one great thing to be pursued is to consider and cultivate what is pleasing to God. There is nothing spectacular about that. It may involve a considerable process of training. "Six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with spices" may have seemed a long while to Esther, but it had in view her becoming pleasing to the king. We can only cultivate that under the influence of one Man, and Esther secretly was under the influence of Mordecai. Actually she was in the charge of Hegai, the one who was placed over the virgins, possibly typical of the Spirit, and then as being pleasing to the king she acquired power with the king. The more pleasing we are to God, the more power we shall have with Him.

So another thing comes into view. When a crisis arises she is prepared to lay down her life for the brethren.' She must go into the king whatever it costs, and she says "If I perish, I perish"; and then she puts on her queenly robes and goes in to the king, and the king holds out to her the golden sceptre, and Esther touches it. I believe God, so to speak, would set before us a golden standard, the standard of the divine nature. Do we love the brethren? If we love them we ought to lay down our lives for them. "Hereby we have known love, because *he* has laid down his life for us; and *we* ought for the brethren to lay down our lives." Am I up to this standard? If I am, I shall have power with God. If you love the brethren you will have power with God in relation to them.

Esther drew near and touched the golden sceptre, and the king gave her her request. Esther's power with the king was largely the effect of Mordecai's influence, so in the verses read in chapters 8 and 9 the Spirit of God enlarges on the glory and greatness of Mordecai. In chapter 8 it says that "Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white." That is very suggestive. It is the day of his vindication. It is not at present the day of our vindication, save in a moral sense perhaps, at times; but there is

this royal apparel of blue and white, the heavenly colour and what is pure, and "with a mantle of byssus and purple."

All this is very suggestive of the greatness of Mordecai as developed in the presence of evil, and then in chapter 9 it says, "Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout the provinces; for this man Mordecai became continually greater."

That is all one had to say, dear brethren. One trusts it may be serviceable, and may stimulate with us the desire for that true greatness which is of God, and according to Christ, and in which God Himself is glorified.

FEATURES PROPER TO THE ASSEMBLY

1 Samuel 25:1-13; 1 Samuel 25:18-20; 1 Samuel 25:39-42; Genesis 24:13-16; Genesis 24:23,24; Genesis 24:58-67

Each of these passages, beloved brethren, presents to us a woman who was attracted to one who is a type of Christ, and as to whom it is said, "she became his wife." Hence each of them presents, in some distinctive way, features that are proper to the assembly. We have been speaking together of the assembly and of God's own thoughts regarding it; and it is a very affecting consideration for each of us who have been reached by the gospel and who have received the Holy Spirit, that God in taking us up has had nothing less in mind for us than that we should form part of the assembly. It is well, therefore, to get a definite impression in our minds as to what the assembly is, what it is intended to be, what it is in the mind of God and what it is to the heart of Christ. It is good for us to get such definite impressions in our minds, because if we do, we shall have intelligence as to the end to which God is working in all His ways with us; for God, having picked us up for a definite purpose, is consistently working to reach that end.

And I would also say this, that while the assembly is a corporate idea, for it is the body of Christ, composed of many members, yet if the assembly is to possess the features which God intends it should possess, we who form it must in effect take on those features individually. There is no miraculous way, so to speak, in which the assembly comes into being as possessed of certain features, if those who compose it are not marked by those features; and hence as understanding from Scripture what features are proper to the assembly in relation to Christ, it should induce exercise with us each one, that something of those features might have place with us individually.

Now, while the assembly is viewed at first as the result of divine workmanship, according to Genesis 2: 22, God does not work, if I may use the expression, mechanically. He works in the intelligence and affections of those whom He has in hand, and the great lever by means of which He operates with us is the attractiveness of Christ. I have no doubt as to that, that one great means by which God operates in the souls of His people, is the attractiveness of Christ, and that is what comes to light in these two scriptures we have read, and, of course, in many other scriptures as well. David, on the one hand, was attractive to Abigail, resulting in her repudiating Nabal and repudiating Saul and moving out to David; and moving out to him as already having taken on certain features that were in keeping with David and pleasing to him, and it says of her that she became his wife. Similarly, also with Rebecca. There is no

question that the result of the ministry of Abraham's servant, who is typical of the Holy Spirit, was to make Isaac supremely attractive to Rebecca, so that although she had never seen him, she was prepared to move out to him. That indeed, beloved brethren, is characteristic of the present moment, for we can all take up the language of the apostle Peter in his epistle in regard of Christ, when he said, "Whom, having not seen, ye love; on whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory." It is a remarkable testimony to the attractiveness of Christ that He is wielding an influence over tens of thousands, and has wielded an influence over millions, of people who have never seen Him; it is a remarkable thing, but an undeniable fact. It is one of the elements in what is called the mystery, for we have to acquaint ourselves with the idea of mystery. Satan has his mystery in the world, the mystery of iniquity is operating, and we have to beware of that and to be intelligent as to it, for we are not ignorant of his devices; but on the other hand God works on the principle of mystery. Those who are the subjects of His purposes are wrought upon by Him in a way of which the world can have no conception, and we move through this world as having in our souls the light of things of which the world has no knowledge whatever.

The feature that comes to light in Abigail is that she has the appreciation of God's anointed, the man of God's choice. The man after God's own heart becomes Abigail's choice, and in the power of that she repudiates both Nabal and Saul, and indeed repudiates herself, for she says, "Upon me ... let this iniquity be." In the case of Rebecca; the characteristic feature is that she is prepared to commit herself to what is spiritual and to renounce what is natural. These are two great lines upon which the Spirit of God would move us at the present time. He would use, on the one hand, the existence in this world of what is opposed to Christ to develop in us that appreciation of Christ and affection for Him which would break away from all that denies Him His rights, in order to our being wholly for one Man - Christ. On the other hand, He would operate in our souls in the power of the attractiveness of Christ to lead us to prefer what is spiritual to what is natural.

Samuel died, and there was this man in Maon, whose name was Nabal. David, we need not say, was in rejection. He was being hunted as a partridge on the mountains; but yet he was God's anointed, and he had gathered to himself a certain number who were prepared to share the reproach in which his name was held, and the discomforts and testings of the position of rejection in which he was; persons who were prepared to endure all for David's sake. David has in mind that others should be reached, and so he sends ten young men to Nabal. Notice that, dear brethren, he does not come personally, and he does not send one young man, but ten young men who are told to greet Nabal in

David's name. It is, I believe, the testimony which the Lord has been rendering and is still rendering in Christendom by means of those who are committed to the fellowship of His name. These ten men moving together and greeting Nabal in David's name are very suggestive of a fellowship presented to Nabal, the bond of which was David and his name. That, dear brethren, is something we are well aware of. I suppose nearly all in this room, through grace, are having part in that fellowship, the bond of which is the Lord Jesus and His rights; all that is connected with His name in a world where those rights are denied Him, and a world, too, not viewed here from its political aspect, but viewed particularly in a religious aspect. Nabal was committed to Saul, and Saul represents, I believe, very much the clerical system: man at his best, man educated and instructed, bringing in all the best that man can bring in, in a system that professes to acknowledge God, and in which a large proportion of God's people are held, but which in its character is opposed to the Christ of God. Saul represents that, and Nabal was attached to him. Nabal was not prepared in any way to change his ground, and yet this testimony is presented to him; a testimony of those moving together in fellowship, as I have said, the bond of it being David and his name; and what marked them was that they were of real benefit to Nabal's men.

That is another thing that should mark us as we are in this world; that however much we may feel the reproach that is done in the religious world to the name of Christ, and the deterioration that is going on in the world in all its aspects, we must maintain the character of the dispensation, the spirit of grace amongst men, and use our position in nearness to God in intercession and supplication and thanksgiving for all men. We shall be for their benefit, whether they recognise it or not. One young man recognised it, he said they were a wall to them by night and day. The presence of those who are true to Christ and in the enjoyment of liberty with God, and who have power with God because they love Christ, is a positive benefit and protection to those in the world whether they recognise it or not, and we should see to it that we maintain that position. It is of God that we should do so, and maintain the attitude of grace too, however evil the world may become. Nothing is more galling, in a sense, to those who love Christ, than sheer indifference to Christ, yet what is characteristic of this moment in the ways of God, is that it is a day of grace, and therefore the testimony that David's young men were to render to Nabal was, "Peace be to thee, and peace be to thy house, and peace be to all that thou hast." They came in that spirit and they only asked that Nabal would show certain regard for David in the position he was in, and give whatever he was prepared to give. Nabal answers, "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays that break away every

man from his master." He is speaking slightly of Christ and slightly of the position of separation to the name of the Lord Jesus. "There are many servants nowadays who break away every man from his master." He is speaking slightly of those who have broken away from what had at one time had authority over them, in order to be true to the name of Christ. Scripture authorises, and the Spirit of God supports, this position.

The servants go back to David and bring this message and David said to his servants, "Gird ye on every man his sword," and David also girded on his sword. I know that, as we can see from the history that follows, David was premature in this and that Abigail's movements preserved him from shedding blood, and in this respect, therefore, he is not a type of Christ, but at the same time David's word is very significant, and very solemn, that this spirit of refusal of the claims of the Lord Jesus and despising the characteristic work of the Spirit of God is in essence apostasy which must sooner or later come under judgment. Nabal had had good antecedents, for he was a Calebite, but this was what marked him. We are to have a judgment about things that are shortly coming under judgment, but to be exercised to maintain the spirit of grace so long as God maintains it. You can see how needful it is that we should be subject to the Spirit of God, for only the Spirit of God can produce right feelings and sensibilities in a balanced way in us. We need to be maintained in a spirit of grace so long as Jesus Christ the righteous is there in the presence of God, the propitiation for our sin's and also for the whole world. We must maintain the spirit of grace consistent with that, but it is intended we should develop in spiritual sensibilities, so that when the moment comes for judging what is apostate, we ourselves shall be thoroughly with God and with Christ in it.

Now in that setting, Abigail comes to light. Three times in the chapter she is said to move in haste. The same remark is made more than once in regard to Rebecca. In each case the haste is drawn attention to by the Spirit of God. The Lord looks for purpose of heart and diligence on our part in response to the truth. He abhors dilatoriness and half-heartedness. Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves, etc. She had substance of her own. She had, as a result of her own exercises, certain wealth in the way of spiritual food, which she had available to bring with her.

You remember as she comes to David she says first of all, "Upon me, my lord, upon me let the iniquity be" - a very fitting attitude of mind, especially on the part of any who find themselves still not clear of that which challenges the rights of Christ. I do not know if there is anyone here in that position today, but if there is anyone linked up with anything that denies the rights of the

Lord Jesus and sets aside the rights of the Spirit of God, as indicated in the Scriptures, then the Lord intends that you should separate from it. "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord, withdraw from iniquity" - not remain in it with the hope of bettering it, but withdraw from it. The support of the Lord is realised as this is acted upon, but no support from the Lord is realised if there is the refusal to act upon it. But, dear brethren, every one of us who is already standing apart from what is iniquitous is to recognise that we must ourselves accept responsibility for the evil. We may never have been actually in it, but we form part of the church publicly. We cannot in that way dissociate ourselves from the terribly unfaithful and corrupt position into which the church publicly has come. We must accept our share of the shame of it, in order to be acceptable to the Lord. We must separate from it as having a judgment of it. Abigail was united to Nabal as his wife, but she speaks scathingly of him. She speaks scathingly of Saul too, typical of what marks Christendom characteristically. She says of Saul, "If a man is risen up ... to seek thy life." It is a question of the first man in opposition to Christ. Every religious system in Christendom, whatever its name, is characterised by the first man, whom God has set aside in the cross. The Lord spoke of the woman who took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened. The mass has been leavened by the first man whom God has rejected, and there is no room for Christ.

Abigail has a judgment of all that, and David approves of her. He hearkens to her voice and accepts her person. God comes in governmentally and removes Nabal. God has acted governmentally in Christendom. Looked at broadly it has already become dead. It has rejected the light of the last century, it has refused it, and governmentally become dead. David sends for Abigail to become his wife. She is evidently fit for it, for typically she has an appreciation of Christ and has come to a definite judgment of all that denies Him His rights. "She arose and bowed herself on her face to the earth and said, Behold, let thy handmaid be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." That is what marks Abigail. She is going to serve the servants of her lord. Some people, dear brethren, profess to love Christ and yet do not show their love to His people; but the evidence of our love for Christ is seen in the way we treat His people, and Abigail's one desire was to be a bondservant to wash the feet of the servants of her lord. From whom did she learn that? If any of us have that desire, we have learnt it from Christ. We read in John 13 that when He was about to depart from this world to the Father, He took account of His own who were in the world. David was in the wilderness and his servants were with him there. The Lord knew that the scene in His absence would become a wilderness for those who loved Him, and so He rose from

supper and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself; then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel. The Spirit of God records every movement, as if John was greatly affected by it, that One so great as Jesus should lay aside His garments and take a towel and gird Himself voluntarily, deliberately assuming a bondman's service and serving every one in turn. "Hereby we have known love, because *he* has laid down his life for us; and *we* ought for the brethren to lay down our lives." There will be no occasion to lay down our lives in heaven. It is here in wilderness conditions that the brethren are to be served after the pattern of the love of Christ; and in this spirit we are to go down beneath them, not claiming a place, not demanding anything. Abigail was marked by that spirit, the spirit seen in one who has really appreciated the Man of God's choice, so different from the first man. The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and as we are attracted to the Man of God's choice, and learn to repudiate every other man, having our feet washed by Him, we shall take on His features. Abigail was coming into fellowship in a most attractive and becoming way. She was not going to be a burden to the brethren, but just to wash their feet, not making demands on them. You can rest assured that one committed thus to the fellowship of God's Son is not going to be a burden to those in it.

Now I pass on to Rebecca. This scripture has been spoken of frequently in recent years, but in a sense we can never tire of Genesis 24; for the more we look at it, the more the wealth in it becomes clear. What I would urge in regard of this chapter is that the test presented to Rebecca, to which she so wonderfully answered, was not a test as to whether she was going to be detained by anything unlawful; it was not the world or the flesh that was the test to Rebecca. The test to which she answered so beautifully was the test as to whether she was going to be held by what was legitimate in the natural sphere, or whether she would let the spiritual have precedence over the natural. Nothing evil or worldly was proposed to detain her, but that she should remain with her mother and her brother, and that only for ten days. That was the suggestion. It would be a pity to lose the ten days, that is, the whole period of our responsibility here, for we are to fill it out in days, and ten would represent the whole period. It would be an immense loss to lose the whole of our time here through being detained by natural things, and not to move now into what is spiritual. We have received the Spirit of God that we might do so.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we read, "That which is spiritual was not first; but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual." That is intended to affect us, that God has all along had what is spiritual in mind. He is Himself a Spirit and

the Lord Himself as the glorified Man is a quickening Spirit - "the last Adam a quickening Spirit" - and we are blessed with every *spiritual* blessing *in the heavenlies* in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15 it also says, "the first man out of the earth, made of dust; the second man, out of heaven." God brought in the first, that is, the natural order of things and an earthly order of things, merely as a testimony to what He was going to bring in; but His final thought is a spiritual order of things, and a heavenly order of manhood. I would ask the brethren to let that sink in. The natural and earthly are only brought in in the ways of God as a testimony to His final thought. Now Christ having come and accomplished redemption and gone to the right hand of God, and the Spirit being given, God has brought in what is spiritual; and all of us who have received the Spirit are of a spiritual and heavenly order of manhood, for we partake by the Spirit in the life of the ascended Christ. The Spirit we have received is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and that constitutes us heavenly and of His own order.

Now as regards Rebecca, Abraham had insisted that the wife for his son Isaac must be of his own kindred, and the servant made this request on going forth on his mission. "I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass, that the maiden to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and who will say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also, be she whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and hereby I shall know that thou hast dealt kindly with my master." He was going to discover her, the young woman who was of Abraham's kindred, by certain features. He was not going to start inquiring from house to house for Abraham's kindred, but discover her by her being marked by certain features. That raises exercise with us as to whether we individually are marked by the features proper to what we are. If we have received the Spirit from the ascended Christ, we are of Christ's own order of manhood, we are heavenly. It is well to take account of it, not simply that our names are written in heaven, but that we are going to bear the image of the heavenly because we are heavenly, we are of Christ's own order. Now, dear brethren, what marks us? The servant says, "I stand by the well of water." The servant is a type of the Spirit, the well is a type of the Spirit, the camels are a type of the Spirit. It is a question of those who sow to the Spirit, who habituate themselves to recognising the Spirit as the power for life and walk. Are we characteristically spiritual? or are we going on with what is natural, or worse still, fleshly or worldly. If Rebecca had not come to the well, she would have been out of this matter entirely. No one but those who came to the well would have any part in this matter. It was a daily matter, a habitual matter, their life depended on it. It is a question of whether we have learnt in a habitual way to give place to the Spirit of God. If we live by the

Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit. The Spirit of God is the only power for life according to God and the servant took his stand by the well. "Before he had ended speaking, ... Rebecca came out ... and she had her pitcher upon her shoulder." It was an empty vessel, it was, so to speak, what she herself was characteristically, prepared at all times for the filling of the Spirit. Everything that would hinder was excluded. There was power with her to yield herself to the Spirit of God so that she herself might be characteristically a vessel of the Spirit. Such an one is prepared for the leading of the Spirit. How shall we know anything of the leading of the Spirit in the assembly, if we are not characteristically vessels of the Spirit? Each of us has to face that question. It is a question of learning to disallow the flesh and renounce the natural, that we might be vessels of the Spirit and take on spiritual thoughts and have part in spiritual feelings and affections. Only thus shall we really reach what is proper to the assembly in its relation to Christ and then to God.

Now in verse 23 we are told that she was asked, "Whose daughter art thou?" The servant is not now speaking to God, he is speaking to Rebecca, and she is to be able to give an account of herself. If the Spirit of God were to ask us what our genealogy is, what would we answer? She is to be able to say of what kindred she is. Are we able to do that from a spiritual standpoint? Are we able in our own souls to take up that ground, that we are of Christ? "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." There was no doubt about it. She was of the right seed and she knew it. The test is propounded and she says, "I will go." And Rebecca arose, and her maids, and they rode upon the camels and followed the man." The camels are the power for movement and they follow the servant. So these persons are following the man, riding upon the camels, and "Isaac had just returned from Beer-lahai-roi; for he was dwelling in the south country." Where Christ dwells is indeed a south country. He is the Son of His Father's love. It is a remarkable expression that John uses in writing to the elect lady. "Grace shall be with you, mercy, peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." A wonderful view that John had, God the Father, and then the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. He has a view of the Lord Jesus Christ as the beloved Son of the Father, One who dwells in the south country.

"Behold, camels were coming." That word *behold* is most touching. It is intended to convey the way the affections of Christ are stirred as He sees the assembly moving in the Holy Spirit, moving together in the power of one Spirit towards Christ. There was no other object before Isaac at that moment, he was meditating, free of all other business. And Rebecca lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac and sprang off the camel; there are reciprocal and reciprocated affections in this lifting up of the eyes, first on Isaac's part and then on

Rebecca's part. She had said unto the servant, "Who is the man?" and the servant said, "That is my master." Thus the Spirit of God would at a certain time make everything of Christ, other things being held in the background for the moment. Abraham was in the background, for it was he who had initiated this move, the originator of all that was now coming to pass, but the servant was making everything of Isaac, saying, "That is my master"; and that comes to pass in the assembly as the saints move collectively in the power of the Spirit of God in affection for Christ. Christ becomes everything for the heart of the assembly. He took Rebecca and she became his wife, like Abigail, she became his wife, and he loved her. She entered into union and in that position she is loved. This is what may be reached in assembly experience as we learn to allow what is natural to be superseded by the spiritual, for although the natural has to be recognised in its place it is to be subordinated to what is spiritual, the spiritual having come in, and it is only as we are prepared to yield ourselves to what is spiritual that we shall know anything of what is proper to the assembly in relation to Christ.

THE LAMB AND THE LAMB'S WIFE

Revelation 5: 6 - 10; Revelation 7: 9 - 14; Revelation 12: 10, 11; Revelation 14: 1 - 5; Revelation 19: 6 - 8

I wish, dear brethren, to speak of the Lamb and the Lamb's wife. We have been speaking yesterday and today of the assembly in different aspects, and I wish to touch on the thought of the Lamb's wife, believing that it is an aspect of the assembly which we may yet find come into special prominence in these closing days; that is, that the thought of God, centring in the assembly, will not find a complete answer unless we are formed in the features proper to the Lamb's wife. Other features of the assembly have engaged us, but this also is an important side of assembly truth. Before we are to take account of the Lamb's wife, we must, of course, have an appreciation of the Lamb, for the idea of the Lamb's wife - particularly as she is brought before us in the last passage we have read, is that she stands by the side of the Lamb in the day of His public vindication and glory, and she stands with Him, as you might say, enhancing the occasion. She is in every way in suitability in Him, and it becomes us, if we are to have part in that - and we are, through grace - to consider what is necessary in order that we may take on the features that are proper to the Lamb's wife. That is what I have in mind, and what I trust the Lord will help in developing.

The book of Revelation is an extremely interesting book; it is a provision for the last days. In it the Lord has given us through John a revelation which God Himself gave to Him, so that we might be intelligent both as to the present time in so far as the assembly is concerned and also as to what is to develop on the earth after the assembly is taken from it, and it is encouraging in this sense that we are allowed to see not only the complete triumph of good over evil in the end, to see how completely God will overthrow evil and finally consign it to the lake of fire, and will establish all that is good on the earth in the very scene where evil has been rampant; we are allowed not only to see how good will eventually triumph, but also we are allowed to see how gloriously, in the days of the greatest evil - that which will develop when the assembly, and the Spirit of God with it, is removed, God will triumph on the earth in those who are secured as standing for what is right in His sight.

Now in the fourth chapter, John is told to "Come up hither." He sees a door opened in heaven, and he is allowed to see what there is in heaven, and what he sees first of all is a throne and One who sits upon it. That is God; no doubt in the Person of Christ, but it is viewed from the standpoint of God, the One who has never relinquished His right to the earth. But then he is allowed to

see twenty-four thrones and twenty-four elders sitting upon them clothed in white and with golden crowns upon their heads. These represent the saints of the present and previous dispensations; and then he is allowed to see in the midst of the throne and around the throne, four living creatures; one like a lion, one like a calf, one having the face of a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle. All that is extremely interesting, for we are intended to gather by these things, that whatever may be the state of the earth, and we realise that conditions on the earth are becoming increasingly difficult for saints. John is given to see that the throne is unmoved, that the throne is secure, that God has matters in hand, and that He has power to enforce His rights on the earth, and has those who are identified with the throne, and then not only that, but there are the four living creatures, which, I believe, are intended to represent what He secures in creatures; that is, God in His grace desires that we ourselves, who are His creatures, should be brought into sympathy with Him and His rights in every way. Satan has done his utmost to turn man away from God, but the triumph of God is that He secures, in spite of Satan's efforts, those who are in every way in sympathy with Himself and His rights. So that they can be seen in the midst of the throne and round about it. They are in every way identified with the throne.

At the present time all assembly exercise is intended to develop among us the features that are seen in those four living creatures. The lion represents fearlessness, he turns not away for any (Proverbs 30: 30), and when matters arise in the assembly that have to be considered by brothers in care, and then it may be, dealt with by the whole assembly, one important feature is that there should be fearlessness to do what is right in the sight of God. But there is also a calf which speaks of patience and tenderness. The ox always has a steady tread, but the fact that it is not an ox but a calf is intended to emphasise the idea of tenderness too; that is, while what is due to God must be maintained, there must be the element of patience and consideration in the way things are handled. Then there is the face of a man which speaks of intelligence, for indeed we are told in the third of Ephesians that principalities and powers in the heavenlies are learning in the assembly the all-various wisdom of God. All this becomes education to principalities and powers in the heavenlies. Finally, the flying eagle, which means that when the matter is clear there is no delay; the eagle sees its prey from afar and swoops down on it, and the idea is that once a matter is clear there is no delay in executing whatever is needed. I refer to these four living creatures just to show how stimulating it is for us as living in a world where things are becoming increasingly difficult, to see that God has in no way relinquished His rights over

the earth, and He intends to have His creatures entirely in sympathy with His throne.

Now, in chapter five, we find that John is given to see on the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne, a book, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals? And no one was able in the heaven or upon the earth, or underneath the earth to open the book or to regard it. And I wept much because no one had been found worthy to open the book nor to regard it." The book, I take it, was just the opening up of the ways that God would take in order to establish permanently His rights on the earth and to clear the scene of all that was offensive to Him. But then, Who was worthy to open it? It is not to be taken up arbitrarily, it must be taken up by one who has the moral qualifications to deal with this matter. But what man could be found to take up this matter to clear the earth of every element hateful to God? There is only One! "The lion which is of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, has overcome so as to open the book, and its seven seals." So it is a lion, one who turns not away for any, one who is majestic in kingly power. And John looks, but what does he see? He does not see a lion. The elder had said 'The lion of the tribe of Juda,' but when John turns he sees a Lamb, and the word means a little lamb. It is a diminutive thought. We are intended to be impressed with the fact that though the Lord will come forth as the Lion of the tribe of Judah in the establishment of the rights of God, yet His true character is to be apprehended as One who has suffered here at the hands of men in apparent weakness.

As it is said in the prophet Isaiah, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth"; but in Acts 8 it is put the other way, "He was led as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb in presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth." So the idea of the Lamb is a twofold thought. Think of the Lord as led to the slaughter, the apparent weakness of it, and then the lamb in the presence of his shearers being dumb, and that is what John saw. He saw a Lamb as it had been slain, and what is to be apprehended by us is that if the rights of God are to be maintained on the earth they will be maintained only on the principle of suffering, and of dying if need be. It is on that principle that Christ is worthy to take the book and loose the seven seals thereof. So it says "in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are; the seven Spirits of God which are sent into all the earth; and it came and took it out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne." He is no longer marked by weakness. He never was marked by weakness save

only in the sense of outward appearance. He was crucified through weakness. There was no weakness in Jesus morally, but outwardly the position was that He was crucified through weakness, but there is no weakness now, having seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. "And it came and took it out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne."

I pause here before I pass on because I believe it is of the greatest importance that our hearts should be moved by the sense that the Lord has stood here on earth in the presence of evil, maintaining all that was right in the sight of God, prepared to suffer loss,

relinquishing nothing that was due to God. So the closing chapters of the gospels which delineate for us the sufferings of Christ at the hands of men, are a great study for us. In chapters 26 and 27 of Matthew, we find that before the high priests and before the governor, the Lord is asked certain questions which are on the line of personal accusations and He answers nothing; but when questions are asked involving the testimony, immediately the Lord answers. Immediately it is a question of the testimony, He must speak. Whatever was involved, He would be faithful to God, and He would meet the position in faithfulness in the position of suffering. But in personal accusations the Lord answered nothing. The governor, I suppose, had never had anyone before him before who answered nothing; it says, "the governor wondered exceedingly." That gives an idea of the characteristics of the Lamb. One who would die rather than surrender any item of the rights of God.

What I am leading to is that if we are to have our place in the day of the marriage of the Lamb, if we are to stand by His side as the Lamb's wife when He is publicly vindicated, it necessitates that we are in our turn to suffer rather than surrender anything that is right in the sight of God, and that, I believe, is a feature of the testimony which the Lord will bring into prominence in these closing days. It says in the gospel of Luke that when the days of His receiving up were fulfilled, the Lord set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. In the full understanding of what would be involved. He set His face steadfastly, and now we have arrived at a time that corresponds with this in the history of the testimony, and there is the final phase of the testimony to be completed, having in view taking on the features of the Lamb's wife, that we may stand beside the Lamb in the day of His public glory, and be there in every way suitable to the occasion, as being ourselves in moral accord with the One who is the centre of it. Hence we must not be surprised if the days become increasingly difficult for Christians. We must not think that the Lord has forgotten His people, but rather that it is something that is necessary for the

development of the features of the assembly that she is to bear as the Lamb's wife. We may be sure that all the evil arising on the earth is perfectly under divine control, but the book of Revelation shows that however much may arise, God will triumph in the end. We read of a company that none can number, brought to light in the days of the beast, a company that had not yielded to the beast in the days when his power appeared to be complete. We are given from chapter six onwards to see the different companies that will be brought to light on the earth after the assembly is taken from it.

And so in chapter seven we have this company which is referred to in verse nine. "A great crowd, which no one could number, out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palm branches in their hands! The palms are, of course, symbolical of victory. They stand before the Lamb. He takes account of them. He supports them and one of the elders in answer to John says, "These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." That is, in the presence of all that Satan brings to pass on the earth with a view to overthrowing the faithful few, and in these worst days that will ever have arisen on the earth, there is this great company that no one can number which God brings to light. We may rest assured that if conditions necessitating suffering, if we are to be faithful, do arise, it is not because God's love for His people has ceased, it is simply that it is essential in order to bring to light this feature of moral glory in Christ which is to find its counterpart in the assembly. It says "they have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Now this is what *they* have done, It is not that the Lamb has done it for them. It refers, I believe to the way they have washed them as taking account of the blood of the Lamb, recognising that the Lamb has established rights over them in the power of His blood, so that whatever men say, they have regard to the rights of Christ over them, and these rights only, and it results in their having washed their robes for the robes are the things that we appear in amongst men. The Lord by His blood has established rights over us that are indisputable and they must not be allowed to be challenged by anyone else. "Come out from among them and be ye separate Touch not the unclean thing." Anything that is characterised by uncleanness in the sight of God, anything that is of that character, the word is, Touch it not. It is a question now of owning the rights of the Lamb over us. That is an important thing that we have all to face in these days. It is a question of the truth and the rights of God and the rights of Christ. These people will answer to the test, and in those days of far greater testing than will ever come upon us. The Spirit

of God intends, as drawing our attention to these things, that we embrace the truth to prepare us for the days that may be before us.

In chapter twelve we come to something further. We read "for the accuser of our brethren has been cast out, who accused them before our God day and night, and *they* have overcome him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and have not loved their life even unto death." That looks forward to a day not yet come, but shortly to come, when Satan will be cast out of heaven. How thankful we can be that the day is near when he will be for ever cast out of heavenly places. It shows how complete Satan's overthrow will be, for the Lord according to Luke, says, "I beheld Satan as lightning falling out of heaven." The assembly having been taken up to heaven, Satan must be cast down out of heavenly places. And as Satan is cast out of heaven his overthrow is celebrated in heaven. He accuses the brethren day and night, but our Lord Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us. If anyone is marked by accusing the brethren, what company are you in? You are in the company of Satan. I would not like to be in his company, I would not like to take on his features; far better to take on the features of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is far better to be engaged praying for the saints than accusing them. It says they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. First of all we always overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, there is always an answer to him in the blood of the Lamb, and nothing detracts from the value of the blood of Christ. So that Satan's accusations carry no weight. The testimony must go on, and Satan's effort is to take advantage of our failures so as to weaken the word of our testimony. The great thing is to keep short accounts with God and to get right if we fail. If there is anything in us to give Satan an opportunity to accuse, own it in the light of the blood of the Lamb and we can then go forward with the word of our testimony. This is all constructive. In chapter 7 we have those who have washed their robes, and then this paragraph in chapter 12 has in view the word of the testimony. That is, we give testimony to Christ and the truth, but in order to do this we must have a good conscience.

In chapter 14 we have a further feature which we are to take on. Here we have another company coming into view. You will understand that whether it be chapter 7 or those spoken of in chapter 12, or in chapter 14, they are all saints of God who will be brought to light after the assembly has gone. We may well say to ourselves that if these features are found with them in far greater days of difficulty, they should be found in us; and they must be found in us if we are to become the Lamb's wife. So in chapter 14 we have a company standing on mount Zion, the Lamb's name and His Father's name

written on their foreheads. They are to be recognisable as identified with the Lamb and with His Father. The beast will require that everyone should have his name either on his forehead or on his right hand, but not so with these one hundred and forty-four thousand. They stand openly with the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father written on their foreheads, and they sing a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders. I believe the outstanding feature of this company is that they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Wherever He leads, they are prepared to follow. The Lord may lead into paths of suffering. It is essential that we should know something of suffering if we are to come out as the Lamb's wife. That is what marked this company. The Lamb is the suffering One, the One who would suffer rather than surrender, and now wherever He leads He finds some prepared to follow. The question is, Are we prepared to do the same, not in any self-confidence like Peter, who said "I will not deny thee"? We do not want to be like that, but at the same time we understand that the Lord will lead in the character of the Lamb having in mind to produce in us features proper to the Lamb's wife. And so these who have been bought from men as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb, have no lie found in their mouths, for they are blameless. I believe if these three features of washing our robes and making them clean in the blood of the Lamb, and then continuing in the word of our testimony, in no way being intimidated by the accusations of Satan, and thirdly preparedness to follow the Lamb, there will be developed in us, features that are proper to the Lamb's wife.

That is what we come to in chapter 19. "And I heard as a voice of a great crowd, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of strong thunders, saying Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty has taken to himself kingly power. Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." The wife is now to be with Him, to stand by His side on that great occasion. It is the thought of the public celebration of the One who suffered here for the rights of God and is now displayed as the centre of the thoughts of God. Now if we are to stand by His side we must be there as in every way in accord with Him, and so it says His wife has made herself ready. It is not a question here of imputed righteousness on the ground of the death of Christ, it is rather the practical righteousnesses wrought out in detail, and increased in value by having been wrought out in suffering, in being prepared to suffer rather than surrender, and it is in that way that we develop the moral qualities which will be displayed in the day of the Lamb's glory. Everyone who loves our Lord Jesus would cherish the idea.

Flesh does not appreciate the idea of suffering, but it is a question of following the Lamb where He leads. If suffering for the testimony is involved it does not mean that God has forgotten His saints, it is simply that God has the whole matter under control, and that He sees it to be necessary in order to develop this final feature of true assembly glory in correspondence with Christ, that is to be displayed in the day of glory.

May the Lord strengthen our hearts to enable us to continue to the end. The Lord set His face unflinchingly, let us set our faces also, so that we may be found in the testimony for His pleasure, and suitable to Christ in the day of His glory.

THE HEAVENLY CALLING

Hebrews 1: 1 - 5; Hebrews 2: 7 - 10; Hebrews 12: 1 - 11

We were speaking together this afternoon, dear brethren, of the heavenly character of Christianity, and I have turned to the epistle to the Hebrews because in this epistle we are addressed in the beginning of chapter 3 as partakers of the heavenly calling, and the first two chapters are intended to attract us by presenting Christ to us personally as in heaven, in the double character of Apostle, on the one hand, and High Priest, on the other, of our confession. And then at the end of chapter 12 we have an exhortation to see that we refuse not Him who is speaking from heaven. The epistle opens with the fact that God is speaking, and chapter 12 urges us, near the end of the epistle, to see that we refuse not Him that speaks. The passage in chapter 12 which we have read takes up the path of faith in which we are all set at the present time, and the ways of God in regard of us in that path. I have in mind that we should lay hold at the present time of heavenly things, and enter into our portion as sons, which is in God's mind for us, and that we should not be hindered by anything that the world or the flesh or even nature might bring in.

Well, now, the epistle starts with the thought that God has spoken, and in a distinctive way; as it says, "in Son." He had previously spoken by prophets, but now no less a one than the Son Himself has come into view, and He Himself is the Speaker. He speaks to us; He appeals to us by bringing Himself before our hearts, that we may learn in Him what God's thoughts toward us are. It is a very important thing to understand, dear brethren, that the mind of God is that we should have our attention directed to Christ in glory, and should understand that He sets forth in Himself, and would convey to our understanding, what God intends we should be brought into. I think if a moment's consideration is given to that it will become clear, because Jesus is God Himself, the second Person of the Godhead, but He has become Man. Why should He do that? Obviously it was not necessary, so to speak, unless men were in mind for blessing. Unless men were in mind there was no object, so to speak, in one Person of the Godhead becoming Man and taking up manhood condition. And so the whole intent of God is that the Son having come into view as having become Man, and now having taken His place at the right hand of the Majesty on high, that should arrest our attention and that we should inquire, so to speak, What is it that God is showing to us in these wonderful facts? What are we intended to learn by it? And so it says that "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (or in the Son)." Notice these last days, which have extended from the day of

Pentecost, for the speaking, I suppose, really began with the coming down of the Holy Spirit. I do not doubt, of course, that there was a speaking of God to men in the presence here of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, but I believe the speaking in its fulness dates from the coming of the Spirit, because the whole point is that we are to understand what God is saying in the fact that Jesus is now to be apprehended in a position in heaven as Man. So the speaking has extended for nearly two thousand years, and it is called "these last days." That is, there is nothing, so to speak, to follow. The Lord said in the parable, "Last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son," Matthew 21: 37. There could be nothing to come after the Son.

John, at the end of his first epistle, says, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding." There is nothing to follow, but then in order that our attention might be further arrested, the Spirit of God enlarges on the greatness of Christ. He says, Whom God has appointed heir of all things. Think of that, this forward look into the future, that in a day soon to come Christ is to inherit all things. All things in heaven and earth are to be taken up by Him and held by Him for the pleasure of God. And then there is a backward look, it says, "by whom also he made the worlds." We know not how many worlds there are, but however many there are they were all created by the Son. Hence in the consideration of this forward look on the one hand, that He is the appointed heir of all things, and this backward look on the other hand, that by Him God made the worlds, we are intended to be arrested as to the greatness of the Person who is now appealing to us to engage our attention. And then it makes another remarkable statement, "who being the effulgence of his glory and the expression of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power." That is the present time. We have had a forward look and a backward look, and now there is something that fits into the present, and that is that the Son in whom God has spoken to us is no less than the One who at the present time is upholding all things by the word of His power. A remarkable statement intending to impress us with the greatness of Christ, and to impress us with the fact that God is calling attention to Christ in the present position that He fills as Man in the presence of God, that we might understand what God is saying to us in Him. And then it adds, when He had by Himself purged our sins, or having made by Himself the purification of sins. A few words but full of meaning. Who else could do it? Think of the immensity of it! By Himself He did it, setting God free in that way. The question of sins lay in the way of God opening up the thoughts of blessing that He had in mind for men, and, if I might use a human expression, in one stroke He by Himself made purification of sins. It was not done without cost, I need not say, and there was none else in heaven or earth who could do it, but He

did it by Himself, removing everything that stood in the way of God bringing to light the thoughts of grace and blessing that He had in His mind for men. And having done it He set Himself down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. We know that it was as Man that He made purgation of sins, and it is as Man that He has set Himself down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Now that is the position from which He is addressing Himself to us. God is speaking to us in the Son, and the Holy Spirit will also speak to us in the matter, for when we come to chapter 3 we read, "Wherefore, even as says the Holy Spirit, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." It is urgent that we should take account of the way God is speaking in these last days. So Christ having come in in the greatness of His Person, and having set Himself down on the right hand of the majesty on high, in the value of all that He has accomplished in making purification of sins, it says, "taking a place by so much better than the angels, as he inherits a name more excellent than they." The writer of the epistle is writing to Christians who had been Jews, and who in that capacity had been accustomed to God speaking to them by angels. Angels are wonderful creatures, infinitely greater and more powerful than man. They are not mortal. He makes His angels spirits, it says, His ministers a flame of fire. We read of Gabriel in the book of Daniel, and hundreds of years later we find that same Gabriel coming to Zacharias and saying, I am Gabriel, who stand before God. They were mighty creatures, and the Jews were accustomed to God occasionally speaking to them by angels, and they naturally were impressed with the greatness of angels. Indeed nearly always those to whom an angel appeared were struck with fear. But now it says in regard of Christ that He has inherited a name more excellent than angels, and the rest of the chapter is taken up with unfolding to us what the name is that He has inherited. The idea of a name is that of renown, and as you go through the chapter you will find that there are several quotations from the Psalms and one quotation from the first book of Chronicles, and they predicated certain things concerning someone.

Passing over one or two quotations referring to angels which are introduced by way of contrast to enhance the name of Christ, all these quotations predicate something of someone. When these statements were made by the Spirit of God it was not clear to whom they referred. It was no doubt understood by many that they referred to the Messiah who was to come, but at any rate there it was, for instance, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," in the second Psalm. Of whom was David speaking when he wrote that? It could apply to no one who had appeared up till then. And then again, "I will be to him for father, and he shall be to me for son." To whom did that refer? You say, It referred to Solomon. It did literally, but God had in His mind One

greater than Solomon. And then, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." To whom did that refer? All these quotations from the Psalms and 1 Chronicles refer to someone, but the point is that Christ having come in and gone to the right hand of God the Spirit of God now testifies that all these quotations offer to Him. He has inherited the name. Whatever renown these quotations indicate the Lord has come in and taken it all up. He has inherited a name more excellent than the angels.

Now what is involved in the name? The first thing is, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." That is the very first thing, so to speak, that God would call our attention to in relation to Christ, that He hails Him as His Son. "Thou art my Son," He says, indicating clearly that what God had in mind for men was that they should be brought into the place of sons. Now of recent years, dear brethren, we have heard a great deal about sonship, and rightly so too, but one just fears lest we should become so used to the expression that we should fail to apprehend the magnitude of it, that God has nothing less in mind than that men should stand before Him in sonship, and with a view to that, the second Person of the Godhead came into manhood, and as having become man is saluted by God as His Son. And then there is something further, He says, "I will be to him for father, and he shall be to me for son." That means that not only is sonship in mind for man, but it is to be sonship filled out with the reciprocated affections proper to sonship. "I will be to him for father and he shall be to me for son." It is not going to be a mere matter of title, it is not going to be an abstract idea, it is going to be a position which will be filled out with the reciprocal affections proper to the position. Well now, God is speaking to us in all this. Have we apprehended that that is God's thought for us? How far are we in sonship practically, I mean actually in the liberty of it? How far are we in the enjoyment of the affections proper to it? All this is intended, dear brethren, not to place us in bondage, far from it, but rather to induce exercise on our part, that if God is thus speaking to us, evidently He desires and intends that we should come into it. You remember in the well-known passage in Luke 15, that the younger son, as he returned, had in mind to suggest that he should become a hired servant; but what does the father say? He says, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." That is to say, he has nothing less in mind than the best, and not simply to be brought out, as an abstract idea, but to be put on the young man, so that he would be actually clothed with the best robe and would have the ring on his hand, and as having the shoes on his feet would move in the liberty proper to him as a son.

And so it says, "because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." That is not a matter to be taken up, dear brethren, in mere words. The words are of no value if the affections and feelings that go with the words as uttered by the Lord Jesus are not present with us. But then God has nothing less in His mind than that the position of sonship which is set before us objectively in Jesus glorified in the presence of God, should be filled out by us with the actual affections and feelings and liberty that are proper to it, and if we have received the Holy Spirit, we have in the Spirit the potentiality for entering fully into these things. If we are conscious that our actual measure in them is small, that is something that we might well take up in private exercise with the Lord, because the Lord is prepared to help us into these things, and the Spirit is prepared to do so also, and the one that asks receives, the one that seeks finds, the one that knocks will have things opened to him; but the one that is dilatory and careless will have nothing opened to him.

Let us seek these things with diligence, wisdom says, I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me; Proverbs 8: 17. That is an encouragement to the young to begin young in going in for these things; "those that seek me early shall find me." The Lord says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." I stress this, dear brethren, because of the urgent need in these days of really proving the power and satisfying character of Christianity, so that we may stand, in spite of the influences of the world around, and minister to the pleasure of God, for sonship is primarily for God; as we read in the second chapter, "it became him, for whom are all things." Primarily everything is for God and we are for God.

Well now, I did not read the rest of the quotations in chapter 1, they bring in various glories which are all gathered up in the Person of the Son at the right hand of God. You will find that they involve that His throne is for ever and ever because it is founded in righteousness. It is established on moral foundations so that it can never be shaken; and moreover He Himself is anointed with oil of gladness above His companions. That is, it is a system of joy into which we are introduced, and Christ is supreme in it. And then it is a system that will never pass away, because it depends on Him as to whom it is said, "Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." It is a question of the greatness of Christianity, the system of blessing and glory which is brought in in the Person of Christ. And His years shall never fail, and we as linked up with Him by the Spirit will find ourselves with Him in eternal blessing.

Well now, chapter 1 is the Apostle of our confession, that is, One who brings out the mind of God and presents it to us authoritatively. It is a question of what is set out objectively before our eyes in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and apprehended by us as God's mind for us, but now in chapter 2 He is the High Priest of our confession. That is, He is able to bring us into it practically. It is one thing to have an idea of what God has in mind for us, but it is another thing to be brought into it, and so, while in chapter 1 the Lord is presented as on God's side, in chapter 2 He is on our side. He is presented as tasting death for every man, entering into death in order that that which lay upon man, that is death, might be removed. And so the Lord tasted death for every man, and tasting meant proving to the full what was involved in it, for the thing in its dread reality was entered into by our Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace of God He tasted death for every man and in the power of His own Person He has broken its power and is now crowned with glory and honour in the presence of God. And so we have in Him as beyond death One who is great enough to bring us into all that is set forth in Him in chapter 1 as God's thoughts for us. And He is presented as the Captain or Leader of our salvation.

God is bringing many sons to glory; to be beyond death and in heaven in a condition of glory as set out in Christ is the end to which God is bringing us. The place of sonship is heaven, and the condition of sonship is conformity to Christ. We enjoy sonship in the power of the Spirit of adoption already, but that is only in the way of earnest; Romans says that we await adoption, or sonship; that is, the redemption of the body. The full thought of sonship is seen in Christ in glory in the presence of God, and He is the Leader of our salvation. He is the one who sets out in Himself the full thought of salvation which God has in mind for us. But then it says it became God, "for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." I understand that He is perfected in the sense that He has now reached, so to speak,

the terminus. We have not yet reached it, but He has. He personally sets out in Himself the full condition of salvation and sonship which is in the mind of God for us. He is personally the Son of God; we become sons by adoption, but He is now in the place and the condition proper to sonship, but He has reached that position by way of sufferings.

Now God, it says, is bringing many sons to glory. Glory is the shining out of what God is in the blessedness of His love, and in His wisdom and power as subservient to His love. And bringing many sons to glory has in mind that He would have those before Him who can respond appreciatively to the glory in which He is revealed. You will remember when He said the foundations of

earth He had in angels those who were called sons of God, and they shouted for joy. That is, those who were the masterpiece of His creatorial power celebrated His glory seen in the founding of the earth. But now God has come out in the shining out of His love. What other explanation can there be, but that God is love, that He should desire that we should be set up in the place of sons before Him? And then along with His love there is His wonderful wisdom, involving the incarnation, and there is also the greatness of His power seen in resurrection and the mighty working in the saints of the Spirit. And so God is bringing many sons to glory, that there might be in them a response suited to that glory. But then there was something further that was befitting to God, and that was the *depths* of divine love, expressed in suffering, should also be brought out, and so it became God "in bringing many sons to glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." It was necessary, that the one in whom divine thoughts were to be set out in their fulness should reach that position by way of sufferings, in order that the depths of which divine love is capable should be brought to light. God would not be deprived of what He had set His heart upon even though it meant the cost to Him of giving up Christ to death, and though it meant for Christ the sufferings of Calvary. And therefore the matter is complete, so to speak. It became God that there should be a complete setting out of what He is in His glory, the heights of His love as seen in sonship, and the depths to which love could go as seen in the sufferings of Christ. And so, with these things before us, dear brethren, we have the complete setting out of divine glory to which we are to respond affectionately and intelligently in sonship.

Well now, that being in the mind of God we come to chapter 12, which brings in the path of faith, and God uses the path of faith to develop in us the features that go along with sonship. And so chapter 12 begins with "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." Witnesses to the principle of living by faith; witnesses to that fact, that the called ones of God, partakers of the heavenly calling, are to go through this world on the principle of faith, and I would say to the young ones here especially, bear this in mind, that Abel is speaking to us, and Enoch is speaking to us, and Noah is speaking to us, and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Rahab are all speaking to us; they are all testifying to us that they have passed through their life here on the principle of faith. They, with the others referred to in chapter 11, are the cloud of witnesses brought forward to remind you and me that this idea of going through the world on the principle of faith is not a new one. It is something that governed them from the very outset. They are brought forward to show us that we are in distinguished company, we are on a well trodden path, a path in which God has proved

Himself in every sense. Sin having come into the world God began at once to give the light of another world, and this necessitated living by faith on the part of all who were governed by that light.

Now what is it to live by faith? It is not simply walking in confidence in God, it is that you are governed, as regards the way you shape your course, by the light of unseen things. God has given you light in your soul as to another world, and you regulate your course by that light, the light of a world that subsists in relation to One as to whom it is said, "Thou art the same and thy years shall not fail." So we are to run with patience the race that is set before us, and to look off unto Jesus, the Leader and Completer of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. Let us think of that, the Lord is presented to us as having had a joy set before Him. I do not know whether one would state dogmatically what the joy was, because if one did so one might limit it. I suspect that the great joy set before Him was the joy of bringing into effect all the will of God, and that would include the assembly, what we are to the heart of Christ, but I believe that the joy set before the heart of Christ was the joy of bringing into effect all that God had in His mind to secure. Now Satan made it as difficult for Him as possible, and both directly and through men sought to overcome Him, but for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross. Think of what the cross was, the reproach of it, the public contempt of it and all that was met by Him. And then, of course, what is meant as the judgment of God, too. He *endured* the cross, and *despised* the shame. How easily we shrink from a little shame or suffering. In order to go through we are to look steadfastly on Jesus, "who endured the cross, having despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." That is, He has reached the terminus, and it is a terminus of power and glory in answer to what He suffered. But now it says, "Consider well him who endured such contradiction from sinners against himself." That is, it is contemplating that the people of God will endure contradiction from sinners. I daresay even the children at school know a little of this, and as you go to business you perhaps find it out a little more, and it may be very testing, but the word is, "Consider well him who endured such contradiction from sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." You see the Lord has gone through the whole course, and has tasted the path of faith with all that is incidental to it, including the reproach and shame and the contradiction of sinners, and He is now at the right hand of the throne of God.

But then there is another thing, and that is that God uses for blessing all that may come upon the saints from those who are opposed to the truth. There may be the contradiction of sinners, the reproach of Christ, but we have to do with a God who holds everything under perfect control and never relaxes His

control. God is always working with us from the standpoint of His purpose, and His ways with us have in view our partaking of His holiness. He never has any other thought than that He is dealing with us as sons. Let those that are tried keep that in mind. Nothing less than that is in His mind, and Satan may attack and will attack, but God will use the contradiction of sinners and all the testings of the way as a means by which His work in our souls is prospered. Anything that brings us into the presence of God, and casts us more and more upon Him in dependence, tends to produce holiness in us, and that is what God is after. "Without holiness no one shall see the Lord." God is the Father of spirits. We were reading this afternoon about Stephen; what contradiction of sinners against himself he endured. He looked off steadfastly onto Jesus and what was the result? He had a spirit that he could commend to the Lord. Lord Jesus, he says, receive my spirit; a spirit that the Lord would delight to receive. The Lord Himself had marked the way. He said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," Luke 23: 46, and what contradiction of sinners He had endured, but His spirit went through in perfection and Stephen followed in like manner. And now with every one of us whatever it may be in the way of testing in the path, the whole matter is in the Father's hands, and He is the Father of spirits, and He has in mind that we should live. And so we are not to shrink from the thought of chastening. No chastening for the present seemeth joyous but rather grievous, but afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby. I do not believe there are any peaceable fruits resulting from discipline if we are not exercised by it, but if we understand the God with whom we have to do, and that He has committed Himself to bringing us into sonship, His ways in discipline having that in mind, we shall be subject to the Father of spirits, and live.

And so it says, "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." The writer of the epistle is speaking to some who were in danger of giving things up, and so I would urge on old and young alike, that the way to continue to the end is to go in for the heavenly calling. The more it is gone in for the more its power and satisfying character will be known.

THE SECOND MAN DISPLACING THE FIRST

Luke 3:16,17; Luke 3:21,22; Genesis 32:9-12; Genesis 32:24-31; Genesis 35:9-15; Genesis 46: 29,30; Genesis 50: 7-10

We were speaking this afternoon, dear brethren, of the importance of the priests feeding on the oblation, and also on the sin offering, and you might say that in principle feeding on the oblation involves that our souls are formed in the appreciation of the second man, while feeding on the sin offering involves that we are developed in the power to judge and repudiate the first man, and that is what I seek grace to develop a little this evening. That is a line on which God is working with us all, to develop with us appreciation of Christ, and at the same time to develop the readiness and ability to refuse what is not of Christ, and that idea is largely connected with the thought of the threshing floor, which we have brought before us in the first and last passages that I have read. In the reference to the Lord thoroughly purging his floor it is a threshing floor, and the fan in His hand is a winnowing fan. The idea of a threshing floor is the separation of the wheat from the chaff with a view to the retention of the wheat, while the idea of a winnowing fan is similar, but has in view the getting rid of the chaff.

You will understand, dear brethren, that these exercises which the Lord intends should be going on constantly in our souls, would develop the ability to discriminate between what is of Christ and what is not, and to ally ourselves with what is of Christ, and afford scope for its development. So John the baptist, as we read in the third chapter of Luke's gospel, speaks of the coming in of Christ, and says, "I indeed baptise you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." That is what would characterise the service of Christ. It could not be effective, of course, until He had accomplished redemption and gone on high, but John refers to it as the great thing, so to speak, that would come about as the result of the coming in of Christ. John's own service only went as far as baptising with water. His was a powerful ministry which called upon those to whom it was addressed to repent. It really called for self judgment, but the ministry of Christ would go further. The ministry of Christ would involve the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit would bring in positive appreciation of Christ in those who received the Holy Spirit, and formation according to Christ by His power. At the same time the Spirit's presence and operations would bring in the element of fire, which is in accord with what God is in His nature. "Our God," it says, "is a consuming fire." His love will not tolerate any form of evil. Eventually evil will be consigned to the lake of fire. That is a necessity of divine love, that evil

should be confined to its own place, but the presence with us of the Holy Spirit is in complete accord with what God is in His nature. And so it is well, dear, brethren, to recognise that these are the lines on which the Lord is working with every one of us. John goes on to say, "whose winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his threshing floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." The Lord's activities with us have in mind a bringing into view of the wheat, that is what answers to Christ in heaven; for wheat, I believe, is always typical of the heavenly One, and He will burn the chaff with fire unquenchable.

So now one would call attention to the way the Lord Jesus is presented as He enters upon His public ministry. It says that "When all the people were baptised"; that is, John's ministry was effective and a great many people were being baptised. They were marked by repentance before God and were accepting John's testimony, that really what was needful was that they should disappear in the waters of death. Now all the people being baptised, Jesus also was baptised. It says, "Jesus also being baptised and praying." I need not say that He did not need to be baptised so far as He Himself was concerned. His action in accepting baptism was one of identifying Himself in grace with the repentant ones who were accepting the testimony of God through John the baptist, about themselves. Wonderful grace that the Lord should do that. It was a figure really of His entering into death, for it is in His death that He has fully identified Himself with us in the condition in which we were. And by means of His death He has before God closed up that condition, so that God might righteously give us the Holy Spirit. But here Christ is brought before us in His own distinctiveness as a Man wholly delightful to God. It says, "Jesus also being baptised and praying," as though *praying* was characteristic of Him. It is, as we know, a feature constantly recorded of Him in this gospel. Praying is one feature of true manhood according to God. It gives God the glory; dependence on God is a feature of true glory in man. It is what is fitting in a man, and Jesus set it out perfectly, so that as He comes into view, publicly for the first time He is seen as marked by that feature. And it says, "Jesus being baptised and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him." He descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him. It was the Holy Spirit, committing Himself unreservedly to the Lord Jesus, and that in the character of a dove. There was no suggestion of fire, of course, in the case of the Lord Jesus, there was no need for that. Fire is necessary when it is a question of the Holy Spirit in reference to us, but when it is a question of the Holy Spirit in reference to the Lord Jesus He descended in bodily form like a dove; a dove, as has often been said, representing great sensitiveness, but yet it could rest undisturbed upon Jesus.

And then there came a voice out of heaven saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight." It was the Father's voice. It had reference to what had appeared under the Father's eye during the thirty years of private life of the Lord Jesus; He had found His delight in it. That is a great encouragement for us, dear brethren, and especially when we are young.

It may be that our circumstances are, as men would say, very ordinary, and we might feel we would like to do great things for the Lord, but it is an important thing to realise that even the Son of God was here for thirty years in the ordinary circumstances of human life ordered for Him of God, placed in relation to parents who lived at Nazareth, brought up by them, working in a carpenter's shop as a carpenter. All this, people would say, was very ordinary, but in those circumstances, over a period of thirty years, God found His delight in Him. It is not a question of great things being done. If the Lord wills it, great things may be done in due time, but the point is to be faithful in that which is least. We shall never be faithful in that which is great if we do not learn to be faithful in that which is least. And it is in the ordinary conditions of human life, home life, school life, business life, and all the ordinary conditions that God appoints for His children, it is in these, in the first place, that we have to learn to be pleasing to God, and we can learn to be pleasing to God in them as keeping near to Christ and taking character from Him. He has filled them out in every detail, in every stage of human life from babyhood up to full grown manhood, and that perfectly according to God so that at that time a voice out of heaven said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight."

Now the One who thus caused delight to God, is available to every one of us. We may all abide in Him, by the Spirit, and He will be prepared to influence us and direct us and control us so that we may take on the features that came to light in perfection in Him. I need not say that a voice from heaven had never spoken like that before to any man. This was now the heavenly Man, out of heaven, a divine Person become Man in order to bring into manhood all that was morally excellent in the sight of God; and He has come in to abide. He having come in, you may rest assured of this, that God intends to set aside for ever the first man. The second Man has come in to abide, and God's work in every one of us as being taken up by His grace is on these lines of bringing in the second Man and displacing what is of the first. We may as well yield ourselves to it, dear brethren. If we set ourselves against it in self-will or pride or indifference we are only inviting the ways of God in discipline and they may be severe. They are sometimes severe. God intends to reach His end with every one of us. He has taken us up for the greatest conceivable blessing, and He intends to reach His end, and we are only acting in a most foolish way if

we set ourselves in any way against what God is set to bring to pass with every one of us.

Having said that much by way of introduction, I want to refer briefly to these incidents in Jacob's history, because Jacob is taken up in Scripture as a type of the believer. As the subject of God's ways with him in formation; indeed, Jacob's end, so far as the record goes, is even greater than Abraham's.

I am not suggesting that Jacob was a greater man than Abraham, but the end of Jacob is delineated for us and he is seen to be a man of great spiritual power, one who was wholly pleasing to God, finishing up as a worshipper and a great blessing. That is how Jacob finishes, and that shows the kind of product that God has in mind to secure with every one of us. Well now, as we come to chapter 32 God is beginning to take Jacob in hand in a definite way. He had had him in hand already, but Jacob had gone his own way for twenty years and now the time had come, so to speak, when God decides to take things in hand definitely, and so in the previous chapter He told Jacob to go back to the land. Jacob obeyed, and as he comes to Mahanaim he sends messengers to meet his brother, and receives word that Esau is coming to meet him and four hundred men with him. Now this is a serious matter for Jacob, for he remembers that twenty years before he had acted unbecomingly to his brother. It is quite true that the motive underlying his actions was a good one, that is he valued the blessing and he wanted to get it, but at the same time he supplanted his brother and deceived his father, too. And now the time has come when God is going to raise this matter with him. His brother had been so offended that he even wanted to murder him, and now Jacob hears that he is coming to meet him and four hundred men with him. The matter is assuming very serious proportions. It is one thing to meet an offended brother by himself, and another to meet that brother with four hundred men on his side. God is causing this matter to appear in very serious proportions, and that is exactly how things do appear, dear brethren, things that we have done that are wrong, when we get into the presence of God. They may seem very trifling when we do them, but when we get into the presence of God they assume serious proportions, and God intends that they should. Jacob had to face the matter according to God.

There can be no progress in us unless things are faced according to God. And therefore it says that Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham." Now he is cast upon God, he is beginning to face things with God in exercise, and he calls upon God and reminds Him of what He had promised, and how He had told him to return to the land, and he says, "I am too small for all the loving-kindness and all the faithfulness that thou hast shown unto thy servant." He is

acknowledging all that. All that is to the good, and he reminds God of His promises, how He had said, "I will certainly deal well with thee, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." That is to say in his soul he is holding on to the promises of God. It is a good thing for us to do that, dear brethren; we have the light in our souls from the Scriptures of what God has taken us up for, indeed before the foundation of the world he has marked us out for something, "according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." He did that before the world was founded, and now we come to face practical exercises with Him. You may say, I do not know much about sonship; I do not know much about the liberty of it; I do not know much about the joy of it; I do not know much about being holy and without blame before God in love. We can, so to speak, remind God of what He has committed Himself to, not that He is ever likely to depart from it, at the same time He loves to see us hold Him to what He has said concerning us. So Jacob gets to God about these matters. He asks to be delivered from his brother Esau, and bases his plea on the fact that God has sovereignly said that He will bless him and make his seed as the sand of the sea-shore. God will answer a prayer like that, but not without exercise on Jacob's part. And so we read at the end of the chapter that Jacob was left alone and "there wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day." The prophet Hosea tells us that it was God; Hosea 12: 3. God deigned to wrestle with Jacob. Think of the grace of God deigning to wrestle with us in our self will; for that is what it is. Jacob was a self-willed man and strong in his will and thoughts, and God was deigning to wrestle with this man in order that He might break his will and bless him. There is no possibility of blessing until our wills are broken, but now Jacob has not given way, and God says to him, "Let me go, for the dawn ariseth." God would say, you have gone on long enough and you are not submitting, so I shall have to go, a dreadful thing if Jacob had let Him go. God was putting him to the test, did he really want the blessing? And Jacob says, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," and then God says to him, "What is thy name?"

Now if God says to you or me, "What is thy name?" what are we going to say? You cannot say what is untrue to God, you dare not, it is a question now of coming out with the truth. God says, "What is thy name?" and Jacob says, "Jacob." He came out with the truth. Jacob means supplanter. He did not excuse it or embellish it or wrap it up, he just came out with the truth. That is what God was waiting for, and what He is after with every one of us, in order that He may bless us, that we will really acknowledge the truth as to what we are, not what we have done but what we are. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." The first man is incurable and the sooner we come to it

before God and acknowledge it, the better. That is what God was after with Jacob, and He says "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel." He is giving him an entirely new name; and that, for us, is either the reception of the Spirit, or the point in our spiritual history when we realise the import of the Spirit having been given. We understand that God has removed the first man in the cross of Christ and has set us up in the life of another Man, that is, Christ, and the Spirit is the power by which that life becomes effective in us, and, dear brethren, as having received the Spirit of Christ we are indeed ennobled, we are princes of God.

As having the Spirit, Jacob is ennobled; he is a prince of God, and that is what every saint is who has the Spirit of God. I have no doubt, if one may venture to refer to it, that the members of the Royal family in England have been brought up having in view what they are, that they should learn to behave and move in a way that befits royalty. And if we understand what we are as princes of God as having received the Spirit, we have something to keep in mind, a standard before us, to be learned in Christ, of what is befitting those who are thus dignified of God. Are we going to demean ourselves by being marked by the self-will or pettiness or ambition that may have previously marked us, or are we going to appreciate that there is now just one Man before God in whom He finds delight, and that His intention is that we should derive life and character and impulse from that Man? And so God says, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." And then Jacob asks Him His name, but God does not tell him His name then. He is going to tell him that later on when he is ready for it, but at the moment He just blesses. The point reached is sufficient for the moment and has to be consolidated. As Ruth says to Naomi, "Where thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge." That means, that you understand that the truth of God necessitates movement, but on the other hand every now and then you have to lodge somewhere for a short time, for the truth reached has to be consolidated before you move on to something fresh. So God does not tell Jacob His name there and then, but He blesses him, and Jacob calls the name of the place Peniel, saying, "for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh." The sun rose upon Jacob, that is a new day has dawned for him. So it is with us, beloved brethren, a new day dawns for us when we really take it on in our souls that God has set us up in the life of another Man. But then there is this halting on his thigh. God has weakened Jacob, he is to understand that he is not to go on in a self-reliant, self-confident way. Anyone who is abiding in Christ is marked by dependence; there is no self-confidence in such an one.

Dependence marked the Lord Jesus; there was, of course, no occasion in Him to fear evil as we have to fear it in our flesh, but at the same time the Lord Jesus set out in perfect dependence what is befitting to a man; and God intends that we should learn that the life of Christ in us expresses itself in dependence on God.

Well now, we pass on to chapter 35, and it says in verse 9 that God appeared unto Jacob again. Jacob has now reached Bethel. God told him to go up to Bethel. It is a great thing to understand that we belong to the house of God for that is what Bethel means, the house of God. We belong to it, but indeed we are it. We "are builded together," it says, "for an habitation of God through the Spirit." We are always the house of God and not simply when we are assembled together. We are the house of God by reason of the fact that God is dwelling in us by the Spirit, and we must therefore remember that there is behaviour becoming in the house of God. God has a right to have things in His house as He pleases. So Jacob had come to Bethel and God appears to him again and blesses him, and now God says, "Thy name is Jacob." We might have thought that was settled in chapter 32, but God is reminding Jacob that his name is still Jacob in one sense; He says on the other hand, that his name shall no more be called Jacob; he is to be called Israel, but he is to remember that so long as he is here Jacob still continues in him. So we are to remember that the flesh in us is unchanged, and we cannot afford to give it any licence or it will lead us astray. God just reminds him, but "He called his name Israel"; the matter is confirmed to him. And then God says to him, "I am God Almighty."

Now God is making His own name known, and is giving Jacob enlargement. "Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee; and kings shall come out of thy loins. And the land that I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land." That is to say, God is now making Himself known to him in the sovereignty of His love. What reason was there why God should do this for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and their seed after them? No other reason than that He was pleased to do it sovereignly, and that is exactly our position as we are brought to know God. It is a good thing that we should have our relations with God coloured by that wonderful light. You can understand the apostle saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" as he took account of all that God has pledged Himself to be and to bring us into, simply because it is the good pleasure of His will to do so. We may as well accept it; it will greatly increase our appreciation of God. It will greatly enhance our ability to worship God, to serve Him acceptably, if we give ourselves to think of what He has purposed according to the good pleasure of His will. And so He makes

Himself known to Jacob in this way, not only purposing blessing, but almighty in His power to effectuate His thoughts. So the end of the first chapter of Ephesians brings in the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe. The result in Jacob is now seen, for "God went up from him in the place where he had talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had talked with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured on it a drink-offering, and poured oil on it. And Jacob called the name of the place where God had talked with him, Bethel." He is able to minister to the divine pleasure: That is what God would bring us to.

Now we come to chapter 46. I only want to speak very briefly on the two remaining scriptures, but here we come to a further point in Israel's history. He is nearing the end, although in fact he lived for 17 years after this point that we read of in chapter 46. But he is now typically in the light of Christ in glory and his life is henceforth to be bound up with Him and all that is His. He has had to go through a good deal of exercise to bring him to this point. We may, beloved brethren, know what it is to arrive in the experience of our souls at the repudiation of the first man and the appreciation of Christ, and we may be formed according to Christ in very considerable measure, and yet we may be in danger of living in natural things instead of understanding that the grace of God has linked us up with Christ and the assembly and that the Christ's things are ours. As it says in Colossians, "Seek the things which are above, where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." For it says, "Ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God." That is, all our life and interests are now bound up with Christ, and His interest is in the assembly, which He holds for Himself and for God. And so the latter part of Jacob's history, I believe, sets forth the exercises that he had to go through in order to be rooted up from finding his life in his own things, which only tend to disappointment, and to move over in his interests and affections to find his life in that which Christ has in the assembly. But now he has come to it, and he says, "Now let me die, after I have seen thy face, since thou still livest." He has come to real contentment.

It is a great thing for us to come to true contentment in any little measure. Whatever happens here, the assembly as bound up with Christ is going through. He is at the right hand of God, and the grace of God has linked us up with Him and the system that takes character from Him. The assembly is a sphere which is morally above, and which Christ has here for the pleasure of God, and it is to take character wholly from Him, so that "there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is everything and in all." It is the place for Christ and Christ only to be seen. And so Jacob says, "Now let me die, after I have seen

thy face, since thou still livest." He has been progressing in his soul. He is now satisfied with Christ. He is something like the fathers that we read of in John's first epistle who "have known him that is from the beginning." Jacob has arrived at true fatherhood according to God. The work of God has been progressing on the lines of the threshing floor, on the line of the separation of the wheat from the chaff so that the wheat may stand out.

This work has been going on with Jacob and it has almost reached completion and now Jacob dies and is buried, and it is a remarkable thing that when he is buried it says "they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan." It is as though when we die we reach the culmination of this process. Death is the final threshing floor, so to speak, and how thankfully we can anticipate it, the moment when we shall leave behind for ever, every trace of the first man. That is what death will effect for us. Why not anticipate it? I do not say we can anticipate it absolutely, but we can arrive at it in very large measure. Jacob arrives at it, and the matter is completed. There is a final setting aside, never to be revived, of all that is of the chaff, so that what God has wrought according to Christ alone may remain, in view of being clothed upon with a body of glory like unto Christ's. We shall stand out in the likeness of Christ for His own pleasure and glory and for our own deep satisfaction too.

May God grant that we may understand the lines on which God is working, and that we may not hinder Him.

JACOB, GOD'S PEOPLE, AND ISRAEL, HIS INHERITANCE

Numbers 21:4-9; Numbers 21:16-18; Numbers 23:10; Numbers 23:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; Ephesians 1:1-6

We were speaking this morning of the cross of Christ and of the answer to it in the Spirit, and I wish to follow on that line a little this afternoon, and to show that, as the import of the cross of Christ is apprehended and its power known by the Spirit, we are able to take account of the saints, ourselves among them, of course, in a double way, which is suggested in the words which we get in each of the four of Balaam's prophecies regarding *Jacob and Israel*. I have only read from two of those prophecies, but it will be found that in each of the four the people of God are referred to both as Jacob and as Israel. Jacob does not necessarily mean the supplanter, but sometimes stands for the people of God here as in testimony and responsibility according to the will of God, so at the end of Psalm 78 we read that David was taken from the sheepfolds to feed Jacob His people, God's people, and Israel His inheritance. That is what I have in mind, that Jacob and Israel come into view following on the brazen serpent and the springing well; Jacob being God's people as here in testimony according to His will, answering to what we have in the first epistle to the Corinthians, and Israel being God's inheritance; that is, the saints of God in their dignity in sonship as ministering to His pleasure, answering to what we have in Ephesians.

Well now, the cross of Christ has a double aspect. On the one hand it represents God's judgment of man in flesh, and a very severe and unsparing judgment it is. On the other hand it represents the world's estimate of Christ, and the world's estimate of those who are true to Christ. So that there are these two aspects of the cross of Christ. They are closely connected, and the more we are true in our own souls and walk to the cross of Christ as the expression of God's judgment of man in flesh, the more we shall come into despal and rejection by this world, so that the two are closely related. The world is made up of man and his will and his ambition and his independence of God and his glory. Jude speaks of those who speak great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. That is very characteristic of the world, and any person who appreciates the cross of Christ would completely disallow anything of that kind. He would not allow the very beginnings of it in his own soul; it would be entirely contrary to the bearing of the cross of Christ. And as going through the world characterised by that spirit his very movements and attitude become a condemnation of the world, and

he thus comes in for the same reproach and rejection, the same despisal as Christ did. He finds that the result of carrying in his soul the cross as representing God's judgment of man, and being true to it, is that he comes in for the world's judgment of Christ. The world has the same contempt for him as it had for Christ. Paul says "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." That is, it was reciprocal. He judged the world in the light of the cross of Christ, and the world judged Paul according to what its estimate of Christ was.

Now it is not all at once that we arrive at these things, and the section of the book of Numbers from chapter 11 to chapter 21 has in mind that God's people should learn by experience what flesh in themselves is. God knew it from the outset. It was not a question of God having to discover it, it was a question of God's people having to discover it, in order that they might learn how God had dealt with it in the cross of Christ, and the answer to it in the Holy Spirit. We find when we come to chapter 21 that the children of Israel "journeyed from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom; and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." Edom was their brother, and a most unreasonable brother he was, as we may read from the previous chapter. Israel had only requested that they should be allowed to go through his territory; they promised to keep to the king's highway, they even promised to pay for any water they drank, and yet for all that Edom refused to give them passage. And here God does not say a word about Edom. What He had in mind in setting Edom in proximity to Israel was that by Edom's contrariness and unreasonable attitude what flesh was in Israel should prove itself. And therefore, dear brethren, it may be sometimes that in God's ordering we find ourselves set amongst some who are a great test to us, but what has God in mind in it? God did not say a word about Edom; He would deal with Edom in due time. If we want to know what God thinks about Edom we can read Obadiah and Amos, and others of the prophets, but for the moment He was not saying a word about Edom. The whole point was that His people might discover in the presence of what was so unreasonable the true character of the flesh in them. It says, "the soul of the people was much discouraged ... and the people spake against God and against Moses. Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loathes this light bread." A most terrible conclusion, "our soul loathes this light bread." That is, Christ as the manna was loathed; that is what flesh is capable of. And so it says, "God sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died." God was bringing home to the people what the

source was of the murmuring and the loathing of the light bread; it was the serpent, the poison of the serpent was in them and could not be eradicated. A solemn thing for us to come to, dear brethren, that the poison of the serpent is in our flesh and cannot be eradicated. It is what we are in flesh, as it says in Romans 8, "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God; for neither indeed can it be and they that are in flesh cannot please God." A most solemn thing to come to; to discover it in ourselves. That is what they had to come to, and then as coming to it, God set before them His remedy. They cried to Moses and asked him to pray to Jehovah that He would take away the serpents from them, but God did not take away the serpents. There is no word that He took the serpents from them. It is not a question of removing the serpents. It is a question of setting us up in Christ by the Spirit in an entirely new power and life. It is not a question of mending the flesh or improving it; it is a question of judging it and of setting us up in Christ by the Spirit. And so God told Moses to make a serpent of brass and put it on a pole and everyone who looked upon it lived. We know what answers to that. As we read in the Lord's own words in John 3: 14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that everyone who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal."

The Son of man is a title of the Lord Jesus as the One who has come in as Man to take up all that God had in view for man, but before He could take up all that God had in view for man, He must also take up and remove all that lay upon man. Man being what he is, the Son of man must be lifted up on the cross. That is. He must, as made sin, endure the judgment of God against sin, so that sin in the flesh might be condemned, as it says in Romans 8, "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Now that is set before us objectively in the cross of Christ. There was a divine necessity that the Son of man should be lifted up, but then divine love entered into it, so it says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," John 3: 16. And so there is, as I say, the love of God, a wonderful expression of it, His only begotten Son, and there is the love of Christ in it too, a twofold lever, as power in our souls to accept the truth. The answer to the look of faith, by which the truth is accepted, is life eternal, and this is in the Spirit. That is how God has met the position. He has set us in Christ, in the life of another Man, for the Spirit is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and with power to move in accordance with it. From this point they journeyed; they no longer wandered, they journeyed. It is a point reached in our soul from which there is definite progress. So it says, after introducing certain intermediate journeyings, "And from thence to Beer; that is the well of which Jehovah spoke to Moses, Assemble the people, and I will give them

water." Now this is evidently an allusion to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit, I venture to say, viewed collectively. We have to learn the gain of the Spirit individually, which is what is in mind in the third chapter of John's gospel, "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have life eternal," but the springing well in Numbers 21 is the Spirit recognised collectively as the only power for life and freshness and living ministry, so to speak, when we come together. And so it says, "Then Israel sang this song." They all sang it. "Rise up, well! sing unto it." That is what should mark us when we come together as we are now, or at reading meetings, or on any other occasions; when the saints come together there should be this attitude of mind with us, that that is our outlook. "Rise up, well!" That is, we are not going to rely upon natural ability, we are not going to take things as a matter of course. We rely upon the fact that if there is to be any living ministry, it can only be in the Holy Spirit. And then it says "The princes digged the well." There is responsibility on the part of the brethren, viewed in their princeliness, to dig the well. It may be a special responsibility on those who are leaders, but still one would not limit it to that, but there is a responsibility to dig the well. Digging the well simply means getting rid of all that hinders the free movement of the Spirit among us. "The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves." The direction of the lawgiver involves that there is practical subjection to the Lord, and the staves, which would normally be most unlikely instruments to dig a well with, would speak of dependence. If the Spirit of God is recognised as the only power for bringing in what is living and refreshing for the people of God, the action of the Holy Spirit will only be realised amongst us as we ourselves are marked by dependence. And therefore the princes are responsible to dig the well by the direction of the lawgiver, and it must be with their staves. The element of dependence must always enter into it.

Well now, following on this we come, as I indicated at the outset, to Balaam's prophecies. I do not want to touch on them in any detail, except to call attention to what I have already referred to, and that is, that in all of them the people are referred to in the twofold light of Jacob and Israel; Jacob being God's people here in responsibility in testimony and Israel being God's inheritance, what the saints are for His pleasure as sons. It is a great thing to have that two-fold view of the saints, and we are entitled to have that view of ourselves once we have learned to judge the flesh and to take account of ourselves soberly as those who are in Christ by the Spirit. It means that we can take account now of what God's thoughts regarding us are, and that without any unreality. Before I pass on to Corinthians and Ephesians I would just refer briefly to the passages we read in Numbers 23. First of all there is

the greatness of the saints in verse 10, "Who can count," Balaam says, "the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his." There is a wicked man who had his eyes opened by God to see the saints as God views them, and he is constrained to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his." One often thinks of this at a burial; it may be some obscure brother or sister who has never figured at all in prominence in men's estimation, but he dies the death of the righteous, he dies in Christ, he dies as put to sleep by Jesus. He dies as one who has departed to be with Christ, and who will come out shining in Christ's glory in a day shortly to come. You can well understand Balaam with his eyes opened by God saying, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his." What would a burial in Westminster Abbey be as compared with the death of the righteous! It is a poor thing if we have low thoughts of the saints. The most humble, obscure, unlearned of saints is far greater than the greatest man on earth if he is not among the saints of God. Then how numerous they are too. They may appear very small, local companies may often be small, and we may feel the smallness of things, but let us remind ourselves of the wealth that the Lord has under His hand in those who are fallen asleep. "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" They are referred to as the dust of Jacob, reminding us in a way that that is what we are in one sense. God remembers that we are dust; that is, the frailty of our condition.

Abraham, speaking to God, said, "I have ventured to speak ... I, who am dust and ashes." And so the saints are not boastful; they have learned the cross of Christ. They have learned to recognise that in themselves they are dying people, so to speak, but then "who can count the dust of Jacob?" that is, the immense wealth that the Lord has in those who have fallen asleep. In one moment they will all be raised in His own likeness, and what a glorious distinguished company it will be then. And then in the next passage we read; it says, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob neither hath he seen wrong in Israel." God is entitled to look at His people according to what they are in Christ. He is entitled, if He pleases, to close His eyes to anything in their behaviour that is unbecoming; not that I am making light of it, far from it; nor will God make light of it, far from it; but on the other hand He is entitled to close His eyes to all that, for all that has been met in the cross of Christ, and He is entitled to view them entirely as apart from it all in Christ for His own pleasure. "He hath not beheld," it says, "iniquity in Jacob neither hath he seen wrong in Israel." That was God's answer to Balaam's effort, the effort of an enemy to curse the people of God. Balaam has to say, "I have received commandment to bless; and he hath blessed and I cannot reverse it." Hence,

if that is how God views the saints let us see to it that we view them in the same way; that we do not regard them according to what God is not looking at, but that we regard them according to what they are in His sight. And he says further, "According to this time," that is, at the end of the wilderness journey, "it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!"

Now to enlarge a little on what answers to Jacob and Israel, I have read these passages from Corinthians and Ephesians. In Corinthians the saints are viewed as God's people. You will remember that when God first sent Moses to Pharaoh He told him to say, "Israel is my son, my firstborn. And I say to thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me," Exodus 4: 22, 23. God's first thought was a son and the service of a son, and then on subsequent occasions when Moses was sent to Pharaoh his message was "Let my people go, that they may serve me," Exodus 7: 16; Exodus 8: 1, 20. The thought of a people connects itself with the service of God in the wilderness, while the thought of sons connects itself with the service of God in the land, and that is what is in view in these two epistles. You will notice that in each of them Paul calls himself an apostle by the will of God, showing that the truth that he was about to open up was specially important as definitely linked in his mind with the will of God. So this matter of the people of God here in testimony, the assembly of God in a place, on the one hand; and then this matter of sonship according to God's eternal purpose, applying to saints universally, on the other hand; both refer to the saints according to God's will. So in 1 Corinthians it says "unto the church [or assembly] of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints," or saints by calling, and then it goes on to say, "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." We are now dealing with the assembly locally. I do not think you can speak of the assembly of God in a place, even in principle, if you have no saints there who are governed by the truth of the assembly. The mere fact that there may be saints in a place, and therefore abstractly belonging to the assembly, does not warrant, as far as I see, any mention of the assembly of God in that place if they are not in fact moving together as governed by the light of the assembly, for one great thought in the assembly of God in a place is that it can be taken account of as God's accredited vessel of testimony in that place. If you have two or three saints in a place moving together as governed by the light of the assembly, then without assuming to be the assembly, which no instructed Christians would do, you can speak of the assembly of God in the place in the principle of it.

Now the idea of the assembly of God is that of a dignified company with which the name of God is connected publicly. It stands in the place as a company or vessel with which God's name and testimony are identified. Now that is a great

responsibility as well as a great privilege. The Lord Himself when here was the vessel of testimony, it was a testimony of grace, and He stood up in the synagogue of Nazareth where He had been brought up and said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor," and so on. He stood up publicly as the anointed vessel of testimony for God in that place where He had been brought up. Now Christ having gone on high and the Holy Spirit having come, the assembly takes His place as the anointed vessel for the expression of God in each locality, and so in 1 Corinthians the assembly is spoken of as the Christ. Paul says, "so also is the Christ," 1 Corinthians 12: 12. He is referring to the assembly. That conveys the idea of the assembly of God as an anointed vessel, composed of persons set together in a place, bearing the name of God and intended to maintain a testimony to God. They are part of His habitation and therefore they are to maintain amongst themselves the conditions suited to God's habitation, so that people may get a right impression of God as seen in His sanctuary. Hence you can see at once, dear brethren, what a serious matter it is if any evil is found among the saints, because it is dishonouring the name of God. The name of God is called upon them, they are the assembly of God, and if any evil comes to light amongst them the name of God is brought into public disrepute in the place where they are, a most solemn thing. Hence the necessity for priestly care on the part of all the saints, brothers and sisters, old and young, alike. It was the priests' responsibility as well as their privilege to maintain what was suitable to God in His sanctuary, and that devolves upon us all the time we are here. Watchfulness as to that is to mark us; first in regard of ourselves, and then in regard of one another.

And so in order that they may be equal to this position of being the assembly of God in Corinth they are spoken of also as "sanctified in Christ Jesus." That links on with what we have been saying as to the cross and the Spirit. The cross is what the apostle brings forward in the first chapter to meet the unsatisfactory state of things at Corinth. He brings in the word of the cross, because every sort of evil was there, and the root of all that was there was that the man that God had ended in the cross had been revived at Corinth. That is the root of all the troubles amongst us, dear brethren. Whatever trouble arises amongst us, whatever its character, you can trace it to the fact, that the cross of Christ has not its place in our souls. If the cross of Christ in the power and import of it is maintained in our souls there will be no trouble amongst the saints. The saints are spoken of as sanctified in Christ Jesus; that is, they are set apart to God in Him. How else could God commit His testimony to them? Anything committed to the first man is bound to fail, history proves that; so God does not commit His testimony now to the first man. He commits

His testimony to an assembly of persons sanctified in Christ Jesus, those set apart to Him in the Man of His pleasure by the Holy Spirit. Such persons are saints by divine calling, so when the apostle is dealing in chapter 5 with the gross evil that had shown itself among the saints at Corinth, he says, "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, according as ye are unleavened," not in order that ye may become unleavened. That is, he brings to bear upon them what they are in Christ, sanctified persons in Christ Jesus, in order that they may learn to judge and discard everything that is inconsistent with it. Hence, it is of great importance to us, dear brethren, first to appropriate for ourselves the cross of Christ, and to get the gain ourselves of the presence of the Spirit of God, and then to learn to view ourselves and our fellow saints according to what we are, sanctified in Christ Jesus, unleavened. That is what we are, and as such God is pleased to entrust His testimony to us, in the place where He has set us, and the power for the maintenance of the position is the Holy Spirit.

Now when the tabernacle, God's dwelling place, was constructed, it was anointed in all its parts. Everything had to come under the anointing, the Spirit of God was to characterise everything that was done in God's dwelling place. So when we come together in assembly the Spirit of God should give character to everything. The Spirit of God imparts a certain dignity, a certain power, a certain intelligence. The Spirit of God imparts to those who are characterised by Him something that is entirely of God, and marked out as not being of man, and that is what God is looking for in the assembly. If you look at Exodus 30, where you find the instructions for the making of the anointing oil, you will see that it had to be carefully compounded. That is, it can only be arrived at by a good deal of careful exercise. It was not only olive oil, but there were liquid myrrh and other spices in its composition. One might have intelligence in the Spirit and yet might be marked by a certain uncouthness in the way things were done, but the anointing oil involves a carefully balanced compound bringing in different features of the Spirit of God and of the Spirit of Christ, so that there is a certain dignity, and a certain grace, and a certain authority, and a certain intelligence, about all that is done. That is what God is looking for in His assembly, and I believe the more we think about it the more we will see that the anointing ought to enter into everything that is done in the assembly, including, for instance, the giving out of notices and the raising of tunes; everything that is done in the assembly publicly should bear the distinctive impress of the anointing, for the reason that God is publicly represented in it.

Now to refer to Ephesians, I was saying a moment ago, that in the recognition of the cross of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to take account of ourselves and of the saints according to divine thoughts, and it is a

wonderful thing when we have believed in Christ and received the Holy Spirit to take account of the fact that that is the result of God having wrought in us. All is really of God. There has been the side of our responsibility to believe the glad tidings presented to us, and thank God we have done it, but having done it we have to recognise that all is of God, that all is the result of the work of God. The Lord makes that perfectly clear in the third chapter of John's gospel, that there must be new birth, an entirely new beginning, entirely of God. And God has thus operated, His love entering into it, because He formed a purpose regarding us before the foundation of the world. We are entitled now to take account of ourselves in that light, no longer thinking of our past responsible history or indeed even for the moment thinking of our present responsible history as the assembly of God in a place, but to take account of ourselves as the subjects of divine purpose before the foundation of the world, foreknown; as it says "whom he has foreknown he has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he should be the first-born among many brethren," Romans 8: 29. When we come to this side of things it promotes a spirit of worship. "Blessed be the God and Father," the apostle says, "of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." That is, our blessings are spiritual and they are heavenly, they are not natural or earthly; "according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." That is to be realised now, dear brethren; we are not to put it off to the future; it will be established in actuality and perfection for eternity, but there is no reason why it should not be entered upon now. For all that is still future as to actuality, except our bodily condition of glory, may be anticipated now in the power of the Spirit as the earnest. He is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, and therefore there is no reason why we should not touch what it is to be holy and blameless before God in love at the present time.

God has marked us out for adoption; the word *children* should not be there, adoption has sonship in mind. We are marked out for this by Jesus Christ to Himself; that is, to God, "according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted, or taken us into favour, in the Beloved." That is so blessed, dear brethren, that as the Spirit of God unfolds these things He does not leave us occupied with ourselves. He leads up to this in that He directs attention to Christ where He is, apprehended as *the* Beloved, the One who is abidingly the centre and object of the Father's affections, the centre of heaven, you might say, the centre of love, and God, has taken us into favour in Him. We are right at the very centre of love in Him who is the supreme object of love, and that is

Christ, the Beloved. It is God's purpose that we should be so, and with that in mind a divine Person became incarnate, and in doing so took up sonship according to God's pleasure, and accomplished redemption and has taken His place in glorious manhood; He is God's Son in His presence. There He is now, the Beloved, and we stand in favour in Him according to the good pleasure of God's will.

But then, dear brethren, how can we touch these things practically if we go on with the flesh? If we do not accept the cross and recognise the Spirit, how can we practically enter upon these things? However good the light may be, we can only prove the liberty and joy of sonship in the Holy Spirit. If we feel we do not know these things as we should, let us each one get to the Lord as his own Teacher, Rabboni, as Mary Magdalene did. The Lord will not fail us if He sees that we really want to get into them, and as we do, there will be more for God at the present time. So there is not only the idea of Jacob, but there is also the idea of Israel. Jacob His people - Israel His inheritance. May the Lord graciously bless what has come before us.

OUR MOST HOLY FAITH

Jude 20; Exodus 29:37-41; Exodus 29:45,46; Leviticus 6:14-17; Leviticus 6:24,25; Leviticus 6:29; Leviticus 7:1; Leviticus 7:6; John 17:9-21

I desire the help of the Lord, dear brethren, to say a little as to our most holy faith. Jude enjoins upon us to build ourselves up on our most holy faith. Surely this was in view of apostate conditions, which in his day were manifesting themselves in the world, and which in our day are almost full-blown, for this country and other countries which have been blessed with the truth of Christianity, are rapidly giving it up, and these are things, dear brethren, to which we cannot shut our eyes. It is in the presence of these conditions, that Jude urges the necessity for us to be building ourselves up on our most holy faith, and to be praying in the Holy Spirit, and thus to keep ourselves in the love of God. If we are kept in the love of God Christianity is a reality to us, and to be in the enjoyment of Christianity, what is involved in the knowledge of God, and of Christ, and of our portion among the brethren, is the surest preservative against being carried away by the tide of apostasy.

Now Jude speaks of himself as a bondman of Jesus Christ, and I believe the thought of bondman, whether it be of God or of Jesus Christ, is a most important one for us to take up. If you care to look it up, you will find that all the writers of epistles in the New Testament call themselves bondmen either of God or of Jesus Christ; Paul in Romans, Philippians, and Titus; Peter in his second epistle; James in his epistle; John in the book of Revelation, and also Jude, as we have said, have all taken up the position that they regard themselves as bondmen of God or of Jesus Christ, and that is not something to be merely taken up by those who are gifted. The epistle to the Romans would show us, that as the gospel of the grace of God is rightly apprehended in our souls, it results in each one of us holding himself, first as a bondman to righteousness, and finally as a bondman to God. That is of great importance, because it works out practically in our salvation from lawlessness. To be a bondman of God means that we recognise that we belong to Him in an absolute way, and that is what is to govern us. Not that there is anything servile about bondmanship, nor that there is anything degraded about it; far from it, for it has been made most glorious in a moral sense by the fact that He who was in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him a bondman's form. So that bondmanship to God has been exalted gloriously in a moral sense, as being set out perfectly in Christ; and I need not say that after the Lord Jesus came and set out that idea of bondmanship to God, glorifying God in it, it was with the intention of wielding the mighty influence which He holds over the

hearts of His people to secure a corresponding result with everyone of us. So that practically, in a world of evil, we may be delivered from lawlessness, as holding ourselves here under the claims of divine love in redemption and under the influence of Christ, to be for God's will.

Then in the book of Revelation the thought of bondmen is greatly stressed, and I believe the idea of bondmen in that book is that if we hold ourselves as bondmen to God, we shall be preserved from every influence that would divert us in the testimony. That is, that whatever situation or test may arise, the question is, do we regard ourselves as bondmen of God? In Romans it is, I believe, to save us from the lawlessness that might tend to mark us ourselves, but in Revelation, I believe, it has in mind, while, of course, including the other thought, that we should take our place definitely in the testimony as belonging to God and be here for His rights and His testimony; though it may mean suffering, we shall have divine protection, divine recognition, and the support of the Lord. So Jude writes as a bondman. He had intended to write as to the common salvation, but felt compelled to turn aside from his original purpose because of the apostasy which was already showing itself, to urge upon the saints to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. The best way to contend for the faith is to be in it in power and enjoyment, so Jude urges upon us to build ourselves up on our most holy faith.

Now, I think perhaps the scriptures we have read in Exodus and Leviticus - not that one can touch on them in any detail - might serve to give some definite impression of certain features of our most holy faith. Exodus 29 gives us the term *most holy* connected with the altar. It says, "seven days shalt thou make atonement for the altar and hallow it; and the altar shall be most holy: whatever toucheth the altar shall be holy." The altar speaks of our means of approach to God, and that, I need not say, is Christ. In Christianity we have continual access to God through Christ by the Holy Spirit, and God would have us recognise that there is no other means of approach. It must always be by Christ, and that of itself is sobering and sanctifying, for there is no taint of unholiness in Christ. As down here, the Holy One of God, He was conscious of it Himself. He said prophetically, as facing death, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." The thought of the altar involves much, for none but Christ was equal to sustaining all that was placed upon the altar. If there was to be a presentation to God in the sacrifice of Christ of that which would glorify God in regard of sin, it needed that He should come forth in the greatness of His person, for no one else was able to sustain it, and I believe the altar would thus speak to us of the greatness of Christ. It is taken account of separately from that which is offered on it, see Matthew 23: 19. It was essential that *He* should come in, in order

that by means of death there should be established a point of continual contact between God's people and Himself. The principal thought of the altar is not in connection with sin, but rather in connection with the burnt offering, and it says, "This is what thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer between the two evenings." That is very touching, dear brethren, because it suggests to us how God delights in our drawing near to Him and having to do with Him every morning and every evening.

In Numbers 28 we find that God lays down what He requires. It is what God looks for, not simply for our own good, but that He has something for His own satisfaction in that which His people present to Him; so there is in connection with the altar, and it is most holy, this suggestion of the morning lamb and the evening lamb. That is, God would have us draw near to Him by means of the altar, but in the value of that which has been offered upon the altar, in the continual sense of the offering of Christ, that He has devoted Himself according to God's will to bringing in that which was wholly pleasing to Him. In another aspect of His death He removes all that was displeasing to Him, but in the burnt offering He establishes what is abidingly pleasing to God. We have to do with God in the abiding value and acceptance of what the burnt offering means to God. And so it was to be offered in the morning and "with the one lamb a tenth part of wheaten flour mingled with beaten oil, a fourth part of a hin, and a drink offering, a fourth part of a hin of wine." And so every approach on our part to God in the value of what Christ is, and has been, as the burnt-offering, will normally be accompanied by some ability to present to God our appreciation of what Jesus was as a Man here wholly delightful to God. If He was delightful in death, He was delightful to God in life, and that is what is suggested in the flour. Then there is the drink-offering too, suggestive, I believe, of Jesus having gone the whole length in self-abnegation to God, whatever it cost; the pouring out of the drink-offering suggests going the whole length, and in doing so affording holy stimulation to the heart of God. I believe it is to find an answer in us, for Paul contemplates in writing to the Philippians that he would willingly be poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of their faith. The Philippians had brought a gift to Paul at considerable cost to themselves, for they were poor, and Epaphroditus had nearly lost his life in bringing it, and he was so delighted in that free giving in them as the fruit of his labours, that he said if necessary he was prepared to go to the utmost length in subjection to God's will, even to martyrdom, that they might be all the more stimulated to follow on similar lines. He therefore

contemplated that he might be poured out as a libation in order to give completion to that which was so pleasing to God in them.

As I have said, the first impression that we get of the libation is in Christ, and every day, every morning, we must have to do with God by means of the altar, as identified with the burnt-offering offered on the altar. God does not contemplate, when it comes to the evening, that we should be any less in the sense of acceptance in our appreciation of Christ and of the pleasure God has in Him. He does not contemplate we should be any less in the appreciation of that in the evening than the morning. It abides unchangingly before God and the Spirit of God would remind us of it. If we think rightly of the altar we embrace it at least twice a day; indeed it really gives character to the whole day, the evening being equal to the morning. That is, God's heart should be refreshed by the saints drawing near to Him in the liberty which the appreciation of Christ and His precious death involves. So we can understand that the altar is spoken of as most holy. This is a very simple matter, but a most precious one, and it is one of the items of our most holy faith in which we are to build ourselves up. The more we embrace this the more we shall be accustomed to having to do with God, and enabled to stand against the tide of apostasy which is shortly to sweep over the so-called Christian world. And so in verse 45, God says, "I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am Jehovah their God, who have brought them forth out of the land of Egypt to dwell in their midst: I am Jehovah their God." As we avail ourselves of the altar and of our privilege of drawing near to God, we shall become established in the knowledge of God, for He delights to dwell among His people and be their God.

In Leviticus we come to further matters that are spoken of as most holy, and in chapter 6, verse 14, the expression is connected with the meat offering or oblation, and what is brought into prominence is not only the offering of the oblation to Jehovah, but also the eating of it on the part of the priests. There is the offering of it to Jehovah, so that God might have His portion in what the oblation speaks of, but also it is contemplated that the priests themselves should eat of it. Now, if one may speak for others, I believe this is a matter in which most of us will feel we are defective, for we live in days that are marked by much activity and rapidity and distraction of one kind and another, and Satan would make use of all these things to hinder us from taking time to feed our souls with things that are most holy. It is essential that we should learn how to feed on the food provided for the saints. Feeding, as far as I understand it, means dwelling with our minds on certain things presented to us objectively, so that the affections become fed, and it is specially important in relation to every presentation of Christ as the oblation. He was, as a Man

down here, wholly according to God, and entirely different from the order of man that brought such displeasure to the heart of God. We can well understand God opening the heavens and saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight." I would venture to suggest that we might well make it a matter of personal exercise and desire expressed to God, that He would open our eyes more and more to what it was that He found so delightful in Jesus. I mean that we should have ability to take account of the detailed perfections of Jesus as they appeared under God's eye.

How much it meant to God to have One who was His equal, down here in flesh and blood, moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, all His movements perfect, ever considering for God, never a single movement for Himself, ever glorifying God. How little one is able to speak of it, and yet there is that which was under God's eye as perfect, whether it was in the thirty years before he came out in public testimony or in the three and a half years of testimony. All was perfect. In the second chapter of Leviticus we get various details as to different ways in which the oblation might be presented. So we find fine flour mingled with oil and then fine flour anointed with oil; the one referring to the essentially holy character of the manhood of the Lord Jesus, apart altogether from what He was in testimony here, and the other referring to what He was here in testimony in the power of the anointing. These suggestions all speak of the way in which the perfections of Jesus were brought to light under the eye of God. So we are given ability, in reading the gospels, not only to see the import of what is written and its bearing upon the assembly, but also to see how the gospel writers by the Holy Spirit present to our eyes and hearts what Jesus was under God's eye. As priests we are to feed upon it, in order that we may become more like Him, so that our approach to God may be such as will afford Him pleasure. It says in verse 17, "It shall not be baken with leaven; as their portion have I given it unto them of my offerings by fire; it is most holy; as the sin-offering, and as the trespass offering."

Now that leads us to the sin offering and the trespass-offering, as to which I read a few verses at the end of chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7. It is remarkable that in the book of Leviticus, in which so much, in the earlier part of it, deals with our ministering to the pleasure of God by drawing near to Him with offerings of various kinds, the sin offering and the trespass-offering come last. The burnt offering comes first, and then the meat offering or oblation, and then the peace offering and finally the sin offering and trespass offering. I suppose the trespass offering has reference to the infringement of the rights of God, and the sin offering has reference to what sins are as an affront to God's holy nature. There is His nature which is outraged by every sin, and there are also His rights which are challenged by every sin, so the returning

prodigal in Luke 15 says, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son." Heaven is God's throne, and is a question of the rights of God, and every sin is a sin against heaven;

that is, it is a challenge to the rights of God, for it is the assertion of the will of the creature in opposition to the will of the Creator. Every sin therefore is serious from that standpoint, it is rebellion against the rights of God, but then God being love, every sin is offensive to His nature. The returning prodigal says, "I have sinned ... before thee." Think of the enormity of sinning against such a God! Sin is thus to be taken account of by us in no superficial way, but as involving this double aspect of seriousness. I believe the sin offering and the trespass offering view the matter from these two standpoints, but in each case it is spoken of as most holy. We need not enlarge upon it, dear brethren, in fact one has but little ability to speak of it, but how important it is, that we, as priests, should know what it is to eat the sin offering and also the trespass offering. It says, every male among the priests was to eat thereof and also in verse 26, "the priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it; in a holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting." So it is contemplated that as priests we should feed upon the trespass offering and the sin offering. That is, that every failure on my part not only requires that I should confess it before God and be restored to communion in the abiding value of the blood of Christ, but that one should deepen in the appreciation of what it cost the Lord Jesus, and what it cost God, to put that sin away, and not only so, but we should deepen in the appreciation of the Holy One who alone could put it away by means of His own sacrifice. So the practical exercise connected with this is intended that there should be brought into activity what is priestly in myself. As having the Holy Spirit I am capable of what is priestly, and what is priestly should come into operation as I feed on what has been offered. And this works out in priestliness in regard of the failures of others, for if I see a brother sin a sin not unto death, I am to pray for him, and if anyone is taken in a fault, those who are spiritual are to restore such a one.

I have only touched on these things very briefly, but I am sure that you will appreciate that these are items of a most important character. All these exercises as passing through a world full of evil, are intended to develop in us the means whereby we build ourselves up on our most holy faith, and are kept in the sense of the love of God. There is nothing so precious to us as the love of God. God has given us the Holy Spirit not only to shed the love of God abroad in our hearts, but that we may avail ourselves of it and thus become expanded and formed by the reality of divine love known in our souls. As we do these things we shall present in the world that which will restrain the full development of evil. The mystery of lawlessness is already working, but there

is He who restrains and that which restrains, and that includes the work of God in the souls of His people. They are able to bring in positively that which is pleasing to God, and thus to raise a banner against the developing evil, which will not develop completely until after the assembly is taken.

Well now in closing, I want to refer briefly to what we have in John 17, for while we do not get the expression *most holy* in that chapter, I think everyone will recognise that it presents to us things that are most holy. I had in mind especially the Father's name, for the Lord refers to it in the chapter as a means by which the disciples were kept while He was with them, and the means by which they were to be kept after He was taken from them, and in speaking to His Father in relation to it He says, *Holy Father*. It is very touching to hear the Lord addressing His Father in this way, *Holy Father*, as standing in contrast to the world of evil in which His own were to be left in His absence. He says,

"Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou has given me, that they may be one as we." It is very touching that the Lord presents Himself as a Man here, moving in the good of what the Father was to Him, all that the name of the Father meant to Him. So in a previous chapter He says to the disciples, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." A most touching thing that the Lord presents Himself as having remained in the joy of His Father's love as having kept His Father's commandments. So He presents things in a way that we can take up. In John's epistle, the Father is presented to us as in contrast with the world. The young men are exhorted by John not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world, then he speaks of the things that are in the world as being the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Now it is possible to be apart from the world outwardly, and yet to be governed largely by the things of the world, but John says if anyone love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The Lord prays that the Father would keep them in His name, not that He should take them out of the world, but that He should keep them out of evil, and He adds, "As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." If we may, as I believe we may, take this up humbly in the principle of it as applying to ourselves, that we are sent into the world in order to be here in the testimony. What a dignified position it places us in! And He says further, "I sanctify myself for them, that they also may be sanctified by truth." I understand that to mean that the Lord set Himself apart from this world by going to the Father, in order that we may learn in Him the place we have in the Father's love. There is nothing so sanctifying as the sense of the Father's love resting upon Christ and

resting also upon us. The Lord would have us occupied with all that the Father and Son are to us.

I think we will all agree, however small our measure, that these are most holy things. We are to build ourselves up on our most holy faith, and to keep ourselves in the love of God. May the Lord help us to do so, so that we may be preserved for His pleasure from the increasing tide of evil in this world.

INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED BY THE INFLUENCE OF CHRIST

Luke 8: 35; Luke 10: 38 - 42; 1 Peter 5: 1 - 4; John 13: 23 - 25; Philippians 3: 7 - 14

I have in mind, dear brethren, to speak of the personal influence of Christ upon five individuals: upon the man who had a legion of demons, upon Mary of Bethany, upon Peter, upon John, and upon Paul. The influence of Christ shows itself in the first case in subjection and sobriety, in Mary in intelligence, in Peter in serving love, Peter taking it on and enjoining it on others, in John in restful love, and in Paul in purpose of heart to acquire and take on heavenly excellence, that which is most excellent. I believe all these things should be found in the assembly, but there cannot be anything found in the assembly that is not found in the individuals who compose it, and hence the need that each of us should be concerned as to how far we keep ourselves under the influence of Christ. There is no greater power in the universe than the influence of Christ. It is a great thing, dear brethren, to understand it; it is a most transforming influence that exceeds and ever will exceed all others, the influence of Christ. His influence over millions is tremendous, and eternal in its results, and I believe God effects what He is working out in the saints now, by way of the personal influence of Christ brought to bear upon them by the Holy Spirit.

Now the man in Luke 8 presents the effect of that influence on a man who was in a complete sense under the power and influence of evil. He was possessed by a legion of demons. He thus represents an extreme case, a case that is not intended, so to speak, to be representative of us all, for one would not dare to say that anyone here was under the influence of a demon, far less of a legion of them, but at the same time, he presents an extreme case of a man under the influence of evil, in order to show that, what the Lord can do in an extreme case. He can do in every other case that is less extreme, and every one of us has to recognise that in some degree at least, each one is under the influence of evil until he or she is brought to do with the Lord. But then what comes to light is that not only was the power of evil in that man completely dispossessed, but that he came in an effective and transforming way under the personal influence of Christ, and that is what God intends for every one of us, that we should be brought abidingly under the influence of Christ. It says that they went out and saw the man out of whom the demons had been cast sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and sensible. The idea of sensible here is not so much the idea of intelligence as rather that he was

sober, having a sober estimate of himself. Each one of us needs that, dear brethren, for naturally each one of us likes his own will and in some degree or other has high thoughts of himself. With some it may be more pronounced than with others, with some it may be more secret than with others, but I think everyone here will acknowledge that it is natural to us, until we are brought into touch with Christ, to like our own will and to have high thoughts of ourselves. Now, the effect of the grace of God reaching us in Christ is to deliver us from all that. I think one of the earliest results of grace being rightly apprehended is that we are delivered from every element of self-will. We present our bodies, as it says in Romans 12, "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service." The Lord came in, that that might be secured in every one of His own. He came in, as it says figuratively in Exodus 21, with His body: I am referring to the Hebrew bondman. The Lord would thus, as having taken a body in which He was devoted to God's will, saying He delighted in it, set out the true idea of a human body held here for the will of God. He obtains His place in each heart to secure that result.

It is a wonderful thing to think how transforming the influence of Christ is; there is nothing so affecting as His personal influence. And as we begin to take account of what Paul says in relation to the Lord Jesus, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant," it is likely to have a subduing and transforming effect upon us. There is a certain moral excellence, dear brethren, in being here for the will of God, as well as its being our intelligent service, the only right answer to the grace that has reached us. So this man was sitting at the feet of Jesus; he was delivered from the power of evil and in subjection to Christ. But then, as a result of coming under the influence of Christ we become sober. We do not begin to have high thoughts about ourselves, the cross of Christ has its right place in our hearts, and we begin to take account of things in the light of that. We say to ourselves that our old man has been crucified with Him. That is the effect in our hearts of contemplating the cross of Christ, so that high thoughts are written off. There is not only the cross of Christ, but there is the mind which was in Christ Jesus, of which we have been speaking. If one begins to have thoughts of obtaining a reputation for himself, the Spirit of God reminds one of Him who made Himself of *no* reputation, and God has highly exalted Him. God has given Him all the reputation, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. It is these things presented to our hearts in Christ personally that have a definitely formative, subduing effect upon us. We have sober thoughts, not having high thoughts of ourselves, as it says in Romans "as God has dealt to each a

measure of faith." We are not to think nothing of ourselves, because we recognise that God is working in us and when God begins to work we are not worth nothing! We are intended to work into the divine plan, but we have sober thoughts of ourselves according as God has dealt to each a measure of faith. Now that, I believe, is what is illustrated in the man who was possessed with a legion of demons; they found him sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.

Now with Mary of Bethany what is seen in her is that characteristically she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His word. The Lord says of her that "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." It is very important, beloved brethren, that we cultivate the habit of listening to the word of Christ, because I do not know any way in which we shall become intelligent spiritually save as listening to the word of Christ. All divine wisdom is in Christ, all fulness is in Him, and the assembly is to derive from Him. Mary had grasped the idea; that is, in its application to us, it is not only that we read the Scriptures and the ministry and attend the meetings, but is it our exercise that the Lord will speak to us in it, that in it we will hear the Lord's voice, and are we cultivating sober thoughts, so that there is an opportunity for the Lord to speak to us. That is what is so important. The Lord Himself, as having come in as Man to serve God, moved on the principle that His ear was opened morning by morning to hear as the instructed. Luke 10 provides us with certain features which are to be found marking each local company. The chapter begins with the Lord sending out seventy to every city and place where He Himself was about to come. That is, cities and places were in mind, and the Lord was intending that the ministry of the seventy would come under His review as to its effects when He Himself would come to the place to see what results there were. The chapter gives various characteristics that are to be found in local companies, it is stated, for instance, that there is to be the rejoicing that our names are written in heaven. That is we are to rejoice in our heavenly portion, so distinctive, and to praise the Father accordingly, then the spirit of care is to be there. The Good Samaritan took up the man whom He found and brought him to the inn, and took care of him, and then in leaving indicated that any amount of care may be expended upon the saints and the Lord will see that those who do so are repaid. And then there is also the incident as to Mary, which shows that spiritual intelligence is also to be a feature of each local company, sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His word, and no one is to deprive us of that. Martha was cumbered with much serving. It is a right thing to desire to serve the Lord and we are to be active in it, always abounding in the work of the Lord, which applies to us all, it does not only apply to gift, but is addressed to the brethren, but at the same time as

abounding in service we are also to preserve a balance, and to see that our activities of service do not deprive us of sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His word. Only in that way can the intelligence that God looks for in the assembly, be learned.

Now Peter in his epistle shows, I think, how much he had been affected by the way Christ has served. It is worthy of note that Peter as an elder enjoins on his fellow elders, and says, "the elders which are among you, I exhort, who am their fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ, who also am partaker of the glory about to be revealed shepherd the flock of God which is among you." He is speaking as a man of experience. He is not speaking as an apostle, though he might well have done so, and he does indeed call himself apostle of Jesus Christ in opening his epistle, but he is speaking as an elder, one who had had years of experience, and I suppose there was no one who had had more experience of the shepherd service of Christ than Peter. He would no doubt carry a sense of it in his soul. It is he who speaks of the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. We well know how the Lord Jesus shepherded Peter. There came a time in the history of the disciples when the Lord said to them, "Will ye also go away," and Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast words of life eternal"? As though he would say, 'I know where the food supply is.' He knew how his own soul had been fed, he was not going to be turned away from the Shepherd.

So one of the first things in shepherding is to see that suitable food is provided, and also to see that there is encouragement. How the Lord would encourage Peter! When Peter came forward as he did on one occasion with his confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," the Lord immediately speaks to him and says, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." The Lord encouraged Peter, and there is nothing so encouraging as to bring home to the saints something of the thoughts of divine grace which they have part in. So the Lord would, so to speak, say to Peter, 'You are blessed indeed, Simon Barjona.' He called him by the name by which he was known amongst men, but implies, 'You have something in your heart that the Father has implanted there; you have something that your neighbour has not, it is a sovereign act of God.' So God has given us an appreciation of Christ. In no other way can it be explained, but that it is God's sovereign act in opening our eyes to Christ, so we may well encourage one another that we have been thus blessed.

Then the Lord went on to say, "Thou art Peter," and the Lord would say to every one of us, that if God has wrought in us sovereignly, we are to have part

in that system, in that response in the assembly, which God is securing at the present time. So everyone who has a right apprehension of Christ and of the saints may be encouraged on these lines. But then Peter also knew how to be rebuked, for the Lord said to him on one occasion, "Get thee behind me, Satan." A most solemn rebuke! as though to remind us that if we allow our minds to work, we shall expose ourselves to the influence of Satan. Peter knew what the care of the Lord Jesus was for his soul. As the Lord was in the presence of His persecutors, as they were reviling Him and spitting upon Him, the Lord turned and looked at Peter when he had just denied the Lord for the third time. You can understand how Peter would be affected by the look of Jesus; there was the Lord in the midst of His sufferings at the hands of men, and in the midst of all that, there was no self-consideration on the part of the Lord, but He turned and looked on Peter; the shepherd care of Christ was showing itself in serving Peter. And then when the Lord arose from the dead, how He went after Peter! When Mary of Magdala, and Mary the mother of James and Salome came to the tomb on the first day of the week a young man said to them, "Go tell his disciples *and Peter*, he goes before you into Galilee," Mark 16: 7. Then when the Lord Himself had appeared to the two going to Emmaus, they returned to the disciples who were saying, "The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon." I say that in order to convey an impression of the way Peter was affected by the personal influence of Christ, so that he as an elder enjoins on his fellow elders, as one who has himself been shepherded, to shepherd the flock of God which is among them. Thus there is to be no element whatever of self-consideration or self-seeking in it; it is a question of the flock of God, and caring for the sheep in the flock of God requires a spirit of serving love. Peter had taken on shepherd features, and enjoins on the elders to "shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight not by necessity but willingly; not for base gain, but readily; not as lording it over their possessions; but as being models for the flock."

This is a most important matter, beloved brethren, for those of us who are getting to be a little older, the older brothers and the older sisters should see the great importance of exemplification. It is one of the most important things in Christianity, the importance of the truth being set out by means of exemplification and the elder ones are responsible to take it on. The younger ones may take it on too, but the elders are especially enjoined to be models for the flock. It is a principle that always holds good. You will remember how Paul dealt with the conditions that existed at Corinth, how in his epistle he brought authority to bear upon them, but authority as from a distance; that is, he would not come in amongst them, he knew that if he came in amongst them, he would have to deal drastically with the conditions that existed, so he

remained away, but in order to enforce the authority in a moral way he sent amongst them Timothy, his beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who, he said, "shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ, according as I teach everywhere in every assembly." Thus Timothy as moving about, would remind them of Paul's ways, so that there would be seen the power of exemplification, which the Spirit of God always supports. This is illustrated, I believe, in the history of Gideon, for the history of Gideon answers to the history of the Corinthians. It is a question of which man is going to have place amongst God's people, and the wrong man was there in Gideon's time. That is, Midian was there with the two kings and the two princes, and it says Israel was greatly impoverished because of Midian. They left no sustenance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass, and by what means were they to be delivered? By the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. The sword of the Lord is the authority of the word of the Lord. It is like the apostle bringing in the Lord's commandment in his epistle, but the sword of Gideon is the power of exemplification, because Gideon said "look on me, and do likewise." These two things are always necessary in any local company to meet conditions that are contrary to the truth. On the one hand the authority of God's word, but on the other hand the power of exemplification of the truth. So Peter is affected by the serving love of Christ, and he enjoins on the elders to shepherd the flock of God, as being models for the flock.

When we come to John, it is the influence of Christ in restful love, because there is such a thing as serving love and there is such a thing as restful love, and both are to be characteristic of the assembly at this present time. It is like Abigail, who, as invited to become the wife of David, said, "Let thy handmaid be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord." That is, serving love, but in view of restfulness. Serving love is what is to characterise us here, but the assembly is also to learn restful love, and we are all to learn it, for God delights in it. He will rest in His love, He will joy over His people with singing, Zephaniah 3: 17. I believe John had learned restful love in Christ for he had companied with the Lord Jesus, as, of course, the other disciples had done, but John especially seems to have been affected by the moral glory that he apprehended in Christ. When I say the moral glory I do not mean the excellence of manhood in Jesus, but rather the glory of Christ as with His Father that John seems particularly to have been impressed with. He speaks of glory a great deal in his gospel. He says "we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father." That is not according to man's ideas of glory, but it evidently greatly attracted John as he took account of Jesus, as an only-begotten with a father, and so he goes on to speak to us of "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father." A wonderful

presentation of Christ, beloved brethren, for John wrote that by the Spirit of God many years after Christ had ascended, he wrote from that standpoint, the present position of Christ. That is, he presents the idea of settled conditions of love, the Father loving the Son, and the Son resting in the love in which He is as Man, and that, dear brethren, has come into view in Christ so that we might apprehend what our portion is as taken into favour in the Beloved. Not that anyone else but Christ is said to be in the bosom of the Father, but His position in its uniqueness is apprehensible by us. You remember in the first chapter of John's gospel, certain disciples followed Jesus and He turned and saw them following and said, "What seek ye?" and they said, "Rabbi, where abidest thou?" and he says to them, "Come and see. They went therefore, and saw where he abode, and they abode with him that day." Thus they were introduced into the abode of the Son, and they abode with Him. Now I believe John had peculiarly apprehended that, and so in chapter 13 we have John in the bosom of Jesus; that is, he had apprehended, if I may say so, the bosom idea; the idea of restful love, the place where love can be restful. I am sure we need to cultivate restfulness. The first presentation of love in the Scriptures is the love of a father for a son, it is set forth in Abraham and Isaac. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest." That is, so to speak, the prime thought how Christ is to be apprehended in sonship as loved of the Father, and it goes into eternity. When we get a sense of the place the Son has in the affections of the Father and the place the assembly has in the affections of Christ, we understand what the Lord said, in John 14, referring to this day, "in that day ye shall know that *I* am in my Father, and ye in me, and *I* in you."

So the influence of Christ upon John was seen in the verses read from John 13. He was enjoying love in the bosom of Jesus, and in that position he was absolutely unmoved whatever arose. A serious issue is raised, the Lord says that one of the disciples should deliver Him up. Simon Peter made a sign to John to ask who it might be of whom He spoke. But John, leaning on the breast of Jesus says to Him, "Lord, who is it?" That is, it is not only a question of being restful in love, but you can rely on it, on the strength of it; and so John stresses one thing that will go through, the love of Christ. He says, "Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end." The Lord was taking account of what the world would be in His absence, and He set Himself to love them right through to the end. It is most important, dear brethren, that we should have the sense of that and cultivate it too. There is one thing that will never fail, and that is the love of Christ, and it is a good thing to see to it that we strengthen ourselves in the knowledge of it.

Well, now finally in regard to Paul. The influence of Christ upon Paul was, of course, very great and varied. I do not suggest that what is seen in this third chapter of Philippians was the only result of the influence of Christ upon Paul for it certainly was not, but it is a striking thing that when we come to the epistle to the Philippians we have Paul, who was, I suppose, the greatest of the apostles, and had more revealed to him than any other, and suffered more than any others, as he is drawing near the close of his history, marked by one desire to know Christ, and to apprehend that for which he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus. He speaks of "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" and speaks in the first chapter of our approving the things that are more excellent; it is a superlative expression, because literally there cannot be anything better than what is excellent. He commenced his career as a believer with the light of the glory of Christ, a light above the brightness of the sun. As far as we know he did not know Christ in the days of His flesh, and even if he did he says in 2 Corinthians 5, "yet now we know him thus no longer." Certainly his history as a believer dated and took character from the light he received of Christ in glory. We have never seen Christ; but Paul had seen Him, and he apprehended in Christ in glory, the full thought that God has in mind for those whom He has taken up in Christ.

May our hearts live for it, as we begin to get some sense of it. What it will be to be for ever free from the hindrance of the flesh, and the limitations of the earthen vessel, with no longer any trace of the conditions in which we are at the present time, but to be found in Christ, wholly suitable to the pleasure of God. We can appreciate it objectively in Jesus, but to think that we are to be like Him, even extending to our bodies. Christ's body of glory! The apostle is speaking of it as though his heart is filled with what he apprehended in Christ, and he says, "but one thing, forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." The prize is nothing else than to be found absolutely in Christ, conformed to Him morally and bodily in every way, suitable to the presence of God, conscious of His pleasure in us. So that was the effect upon Paul of the personal influence of Christ. I would urge upon oneself, as I would upon my brethren, that we should look to the Lord to be brought into this. The woman is to be formed in correspondence with the Man, but then in its measure it is to take effect in everyone of us individually, and the means by which it will be brought about, is by keeping ourselves under the influence of Christ.

Well, may the Lord encourage us to do so, for His name's sake.

THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE SPIRIT, IN RELATION TO THE SAINTS

John 4: 13 - 24; John 14: 15 - 28

I have read these scriptures, dear brethren, in order to speak of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit, in relation first of all to the individual believer, and then in relation to the saints as moving together in the light of the assembly and forming part of it. It is a touching thing that the Persons of the Godhead should come so near to us as they have done. We are intended in that way to know God fully as He is revealed, and each individual believer is intended to know the Father as revealed in the Son by the Holy Spirit, and to be conscious too of the service of the Holy Spirit to him, and the operations of the Holy Spirit in him.

We speak much in these days of the assembly and rightly so, and we should cherish it above everything, but it is well to bear in mind that the assembly is composed of individuals, and that we shall not get any greater measure of spiritual affections and intelligence in the assembly than is in the individuals who compose it, and therefore each individual brother or sister should be concerned as to his own part livingly in the things of God. You remember that Andrew and another followed Jesus; they had been disciples of John the baptist, but they heard him speaking, and followed Jesus. "But Jesus having turned, and seeing them following, says to them, What seek ye? And they said to him ... where abidest thou? He says to them, Come and see," John 1: 38, 39. That is very interesting as showing how the Lord takes notice of every individual movement toward Himself, and would certainly encourage it. He turned and saw them following and asked what they were seeking. He would have it come from them as to what they were seeking; He would have things definite in our minds as to what we desire, and would encourage every exercise, take notice of it, and indeed add to it, go beyond what we might be asking at the moment. Andrew, having proved the grace of the Lord Jesus, went and sought his brother Simon, and brought him to Jesus, and "Jesus looking at him said, *Thou* art Simon, the son of Jonas; thou shalt be called Cephas (which interpreted is stone.)" That is what the Lord would do to every young brother or sister as first having to do with the Lord. He would give you a sense that you are to be called Cephas, that is, that He has taken you up that you might be an integral part of the spiritual house, composed, not of material stones, but of living stones. God is pleased to dwell and be served, in a house composed of persons, persons capable of affections, capable of intelligence, and persons who are to be moved in their affections so as to

serve God, not formally, not according to a man-made system, but to serve God spontaneously from the heart, and that is what Cephas conveys. Simon was to be called Cephas.

According to another gospel the Lord said to Simon, "Thou art Peter," which is another thing, meaning that every believer having the Holy Spirit *is* a stone, but it is not sufficient to be a stone, we must be *called* a stone; that is, we are one characteristically. While a stone is an integral part of the spiritual house, it is also a living element in it and contributes its own part, and that is what the Lord wants in regard to every brother and sister, that not only are you to understand, that if you have received the Holy Spirit you are constituted a stone, but that you have the capabilities to function, and He wants you to function so that people will call you a stone. In young people it is sometimes difficult to find much in them of that kind of thing; that is,

of the idea of Cephas. The Lord wants every brother and every sister to be called Cephas, so that persons understand that you yourself are contributing your own part to what is going on livingly in the assembly. Perhaps sisters may inquire how they contribute their part, seeing that they are not allowed to take part vocally in the assembly save in having part in the singing and in the amens, but they contribute their part just as really and as substantially as brothers, for they bring into the assembly affection for Christ, and affection for God the Father, and intelligence too, in the Spirit they bring in feelings and intelligence that are capable of being unified, in the power of the Spirit, with what is there with the rest of the brethren. In what is living they contribute much to the substance and wealth that is there, and every sister as well as every brother should recognise that this is why God has taken us up.

Now with that in mind, the early part of the gospel of John shows us individuals who are led, held, and fitted for that, and this woman in the fourth chapter of the gospel of John is illustrative of it. What is so remarkable is that in spite of what this woman is we have the Lord personally serving her and dealing with her, and He introduces her to the truth of the Holy Spirit, the living water, and He leads to the thought of the Father, and the Father seeking worshippers, individuals who are constituted worshippers, not as I said in any formal way, but in the character of what springs up within; for that is the figure used in regard of the living water. That is a great necessity, dear brethren, that every brother and sister should understand that the Lord is ready to serve him individually so that this might come to pass, and the Spirit is ready to serve him individually, and the Father is appreciative of our movements of affection and response toward Him. It is of great importance that everyone should understand that the whole Godhead, the Father, the Son,

and the Holy Spirit are interested in us personally, and are concerned about our being set free from everything that would hinder us from functioning in the assembly. The Lord was weary and sitting on this well to which the woman came. "Jesus therefore, being wearied with the way he had come, sat just as he was at the fountain." That is He sat there a weary Man. Why does it tell us that? I believe it is to convey to us how very near the Lord Jesus has come to us, so near that He could actually experience weariness. It is to convey to us how sympathetic He is, how tender He is, that He understands and enters feelingly, sin apart, into the experiences that we may ourselves have part in. That is of very great encouragement, because the Lord in sitting on the well in that way was available to this woman. He was intending to convey that she need not be afraid to entrust her difficulties, and you might say, her secrets and her exercises to Him. He wanted to gain her confidence, so He said, "Give me to drink." Wonderful thing to see Him who had created the fountains of water say to a woman, "Give me to drink." It is a very touching expression of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that He was actually asking a drink of a Samaritan woman in order to gain her confidence, and this is how the Lord will act with any one of us in order to gain our confidence, because He wants to gain and hold our confidence, and we will never cultivate individual dealings with the Lord unless He has gained our confidence. "Jesus says to her, Give me to drink (for his disciples had gone away into the city that they might buy provisions). The Samaritan woman therefore says to him, How dost thou, being a Jew, ask to drink of me who am a Samaritan woman? for Jews have no intercourse with Samaritans." He has gained her confidence, so He immediately says, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

You can see how skilfully the Lord is moving in order to engage her confidence and interest and increase it. He says, "who it is that says to thee," to raise the question in her mind as to who He was. We may well raise that question in our minds as we have to do with the Lord. We all know who He is, but are we impressed with the fact that it is open to us to have to do personally with the Son, with the Son as come so near to us, the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among men, actually moving in and out among men as accessible to them. "Thou wouldest have asked of him; and he would have given thee living water." That engages her interest all the more, she begins to ask questions until she is brought to this point that she says, "Give me this water, that I may not thirst nor come here to draw." He had said, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever, but the water which I shall give him

shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life." You can understand the woman saying, I do not know that I understand what that means, but at least it sounds attractive. "Never thirst for ever." Think of the possibility of never being unsatisfied, of never thirsting, of a fountain in oneself springing up into eternal life, and you can understand that, however little the woman understood, it would be attractive. That is what the Lord wants, He wants us to be attracted by the possibility of never thirsting for ever, of being made superior to the desires of the flesh within, and the influence and power of the world around, so that we find our life in things that cannot be affected by death, and know what it is to enjoy eternal life.

The result of His speaking to the woman in this way is that she says, "Give me this water"; she wants it. I would urge, that, if you cannot say that you know something of the service and power of the Holy Spirit as satisfying you with divine things, that you get to the Lord about it, ask Him to make it a reality to you. The Lord loves to see definiteness in His people. "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you," Luke 11: 9. These are three unconditional promises, and it is for us to take them up and have to do with the Lord about these matters. "Give me this water, that I may not thirst nor come here to draw. Jesus says to her, Go, call thy husband." Up till now He did not raise a single question as to her past. He was encouraging her to move in the direction of what He was preparing to give her, and now that she has expressed a desire, and her interest is aroused, He puts His finger on the whole secret of her life. What for? Was it to expose her? It was not, save to herself. The disciples had all gone into the city to buy food. There was no reason for them all to have gone, but it was no doubt of God that they went, so that the woman might be alone with the Lord, and if the Lord is going to expose us. He only exposes us to ourselves, and that for our good. He puts His finger upon the secret of this woman's life in saying to her, "Go, call thy husband, and come here." What is the result? She says, "I see that thou art a prophet," but more than a prophet was there. We have to do with One far greater than merely a prophet. One who knows the secrets of our hearts, and not only knows the secrets, a prophet might know that if God enlightened him. There are instances of prophets knowing people's secrets. The wife of Jeroboam disguised herself and went to Ahijah who was blind, and it says "as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou to be another," 1 Kings 14: 6. He knew it because God had told him. But in the Person of the Lord Jesus we have to do with God, and the great thing in having to do with the Lord Jesus is this, that, while He exposes to us, as He will do, all things that we have done, yet the same One who exposes us can show us that He has Himself been to the cross,

that He might for ever set aside the man who was capable of those things that He exposed, that his history might be ended judicially in the death of Christ. It is a great thing to come to that, and the only answer to it is the Holy Spirit, life in another Man, and henceforth we are to move in the power of the life that is in Christ Jesus. It is a question of the ground being prepared in our souls, so that we feel the need of the Spirit, and have the desire for the Spirit as the only power of life according to God. There is power by which we may be set free in our souls from the things of the flesh and from the power of the world, and find our satisfaction in the knowledge of God and the things of God. We may as well accept it that our flesh will never appreciate the things of God. Do not expect it; for it never will. After forty years of living on the manna the flesh in God's people said, "Our soul loathes this light bread," Numbers 21: 5, and that is what the flesh will always do. Do not expect the flesh to appreciate the things of God. The Spirit appreciates Christ, the Spirit appreciates God. The Spirit in us causes us to appreciate Christ and God, and to love the things of God. God's way of meeting the condition in which we are found and constituting us potential material for the assembly is to set us up in a new life and a new power in the Holy Spirit.

The Lord goes on speaking to her, and she introduces the thought of the correct place of worship, which is what people do, but the Lord brushes all that aside and says, "The hour is coming *and now is*." Mark that. "The hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeks such as his worshippers," and then He says, "God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth"; that is conveying to this woman that the Father wanted her as a worshipper of Him in spirit and in truth, nothing formal, but what is spontaneous and what is suggested by a fountain. Living water is what God delights in. As she is secured as a worshipper of the Father, God Himself is being worshipped in spirit and in truth. There is no reason why we should not know that. I am not suggesting that we do not, but I am saying this to urge on each one to have to do with the Lord personally as this woman did, so that there may not be one of us who is not characteristically a Cephas, as we said at the beginning. She was herself to be a vessel of the Spirit, for she left her water-pot, the vessel that she had used to carry water for temporary satisfaction. She left that, understanding that she was to be a vessel of the Spirit, and to my mind it is a most encouraging thought, that the individual believer, as having the Spirit of God, carries with him wherever he is, a fountain of living water, that is capable of springing up into eternal life. So that, if the things in which people around us find their life are done away with, or if everything that we might naturally tend to live in is destroyed, we will

have within us that which is capable of sustaining us in life and satisfaction. That is very encouraging. We see that in Paul and Silas in the jail at Philippi. They were restricted in regard to outward circumstances, and all that was calculated to try the spirit. In these conditions they are found in prayer and singing praises to God, showing what the effect of the Spirit is. "Does any one among you suffer evil? let him pray," James 5: 13. That is the normal outlet in affliction, and as praying in the Spirit you are almost sure to turn to praise. This woman goes to the men and says, "Come, see a man who has told me all things I had ever done." The divine idea of the woman is that she is to live in relation to the man, she was made for the man. This woman was beginning to set out in herself the idea of the assembly as intended to live in relation to Christ. She says, "Come see a man." She had found a Man who held her heart. The secret of spiritual prosperity and satisfaction is to find in Christ the Man who holds your heart, that we are to be to Him who has died for us and has been raised.

In chapter 14 we have the Father and the Son and the Spirit in relation to the assembly; not that the assembly is mentioned in terms; for the assembly is not mentioned in terms in John's gospel nor in his first two epistles, but John gives us the persons who compose the assembly. From chapter 10 of his gospel he is engaged with the collective side of the truth. In chapter 10 he introduces the thought of the flock; that is, the saints as moving together, it being natural to them to move together. Sheep in John 10 are not sheep that stray. That is a side of the truth that is presented in Luke, the tendency of the sheep to stray and its inability to recover itself, but in John sheep are presented as those who move together as hearing the voice of the Shepherd and following. Hence from chapter 10 the apostle in his gospel is developing the collective side of the truth. In chapter 14 the Lord is speaking in anticipation of the present time, a time characterised by our being left here in His absence, and He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," a most important thing as we enter upon this side of the subject. There are many, of course, who are not keeping the commandments of the Lord, and the result is that they have no idea at all of the truth connected with the assembly. There can be no entrance upon the truth connected with the assembly if we do not keep the commandments of the Lord. It is absolutely impossible, and the state of Christendom around us is a witness to us of the state of things in which many of His people are, themselves at bottom lovers of Christ, but although they are lovers of Christ, their love for Him is not allowed to find expression in the way it should. No one has a right to say that he loves Christ if he does not keep His commandments. "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me." We are to show our love for Christ by making a point of

finding out what His commandments are and keeping them. "If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor know him, but ye know him." It is possible to know the Holy Spirit, "But ye know him, for he abides with you, and shall be in you." It is a most comforting statement, because anyone with any sensibilities as to the state of things in the world will realise it is getting worse in every department, and particularly in relation to the truth. The truth is being given up and corrupted and denied; on every hand that is the case. But what is our great standby? It is the presence with us of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, to be with us and in us for support all the way, and in us in a most intimate way.

The latter part of the chapter shows us that the Holy Spirit is here as Teacher. "But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and will bring to your remembrance all the things which I have said to you." How is it, beloved brethren, that we enjoy the truth, a privilege that saints around us do not enjoy. It is simply because the Holy Spirit is given the place that is His due, and as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit and His being accorded the liberty and the honour that are His due, we are being taught all things. Little by little we are being led into all the truth, established and built up as the saints respond to it. Practically the whole truth had been lost to the assembly, and now in these last 120 years the Lord has been working systematically in recovery, and we are being instructed in the truth, which is entirely dependent on the fact of the presence with us of the Spirit of truth. Hence it is most important that the Spirit should be recognised by us in our meetings. You remember when the brazen serpent was lifted up and those who looked lived, the people then came to a well and they sang. "Then Israel sang this song, Rise up well! sing unto it," Numbers 21: 17. It was a collective recognition of the Spirit of God. It goes on to say, "Well which princes digged," suggesting a responsibility on the part of those who lead amongst us locally to see that there is room made for the Spirit. The princes are made responsible in that matter to see that there is a spiritual ministry provided, and they dig by the direction of the lawgiver, and it is with their staves, which is a suggestion of dependence. Our attitude of mind when we come together, whether for a reading meeting or for ministry otherwise, must be that the Spirit is the only power by which divine things can be ministered in freshness. The element of dependence is that with which the well is dug. Staves are most unlikely implements for digging a well; but the staff represents dependence, and the element of dependence and subjection

to the Lord must always enter into it, if the resources that are in the Spirit are to become available to the saints.

The Lord also speaks of Himself in connection with the Comforter and His presence here, saying, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you. Yet a little and the world sees me no longer; but ye see me; because I live ye also shall live." He indicates that in this present time, not only will He visit and come to us, but that by the Spirit we shall be preserved in the appreciation of Himself as living on high. We shall live by His life, and as in affection linked with Him by the Spirit. He goes on to say, "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." That is one thing that the Spirit of God loves to keep before us, that Christ is in His Father, that He is in a settled place of love. It says, "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father," John 1: 18. It is a wonderful thing to take account of the Father's realm, the Father the Source of it all, the Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, in the bosom of the Father, the place of love, and then we in Him also in the place of love, a settled place of love. It is wonderful to take account of these conditions that have come to pass, which faith apprehends by virtue of the Spirit of God dwelling in us; that is, Christ in the place of love, in which He is as with the Father, our place in Christ's affections, and the place that Christ has in our affections. Wonderful reciprocity between Christ and the assembly!

After speaking of these things the Lord returns to this most important matter of His commandments and His word. A commandment is what is imperative. The idea of a commandment is that it simply must be obeyed. There are certain commandments indicated in Scripture which must be obeyed if we are to get anywhere in the truth. One is in 2 Timothy 2; where it says, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity." It is an absolute commandment, and failure to observe it on the part of many of God's people has led to their being stranded, shipwrecked as regards the truth. They get nowhere as regards the truth of the assembly, although they have their title to it, they get nowhere in actual realisation and enjoyment of it. As well as withdrawing from iniquity is the judging of it, and there is not simply withdrawing from iniquity; that is, any system which is iniquitous in principle, but also separating from vessels to dishonour. There is the authority in 2 Timothy 2 to withdraw from persons who are vessels to dishonour, a most important thing, dear brethren, to get hold of. That is one of the commandments of the Lord. I would urge every brother and sister, especially those who have been brought up in the truth, to hold tenaciously to 2 Timothy 2: 19 - 22, because it is the charter of our liberty in the things of God. We are called upon to flee youthful lusts, and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

I am just going over this in order that we may see the ground on which we are, because it is of God. We are on it as having withdrawn from iniquity and separated from vessels to dishonour, and we are following righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Following righteousness involves that we follow what is right in the sight of God, and as doing that with others we must govern ourselves by the truth given to the assembly, for there is no other truth to regulate the movements of saints together. Hence it is that the truth of the assembly is reached as individuals face the exercises of 2 Timothy 2. They find they are able to move together, and as moving together, they see that 1 Corinthians gives instruction for the assembly. The Scriptures are available to them, and they find that by the Lord's help and the power of the Spirit all that is set out in Corinthians is capable of being realised. 1 Corinthians is one great commandment of the Lord. "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment," 1 Corinthians 14: 37. The whole of 1 Corinthians has that character. It is the Lord's commandment and must be kept.

In the gospel of John we read that the Lord gave a new commandment, that we are to love one another; John 13: 34. This is repeated in the first and second epistles of John. In our relations as brethren moving together if love does not operate everything will be formal. We might be in the right position as governed by 2 Timothy 2, but if love is not amongst us there will be no actual enjoyment of things or power to enter into them collectively. 2 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians are commandments of the Lord which regulate us in the public position, and John 13 as taken up in the epistles of John is a commandment to govern us in the inside position. They are all commandments that *must* be kept, and as they are kept, we will find that all the privileges of the assembly are open to us. In these verses 21 to 24 of John 14, the Lord is occupied with the collective side of the truth, but He is bringing it down to an individual to provide for the weakest day, and also to stress that the collective side of the truth is to be entered upon by way of individual exercise. "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me; but he that loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him." Judas, not Iscariote, recognises that it is not individual truth. He says, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to *us*, and not to the world." The Lord then mentions something further which is very important, and that is, keeping His word. "If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." The word of Christ, in contrast to His commandments, is what He is saying to us at any moment, but commandments have been laid

down and abide, they must be kept. The word of Christ is constantly fresh, whatever He has to say at the moment. That is very important, because the conditions having been brought in among the saints in which the truth of the assembly has been recovered, the Lord loves to speak continually and in no haphazard way, but in a constructive way, and it is most important that we should have an ear attentive to His word; to whatever He is saying to the whole assembly, and also to individual companies according to the local needs of those companies. It is only in that way that we shall progress in the truth, and be maintained in freshness, and that God will secure the full answer in the assembly that He is looking for, as we are formed in our intelligence and affections, and enlarged, by the living word of Christ. "If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." We have settled, abiding conditions, dwelling conditions, for the Father and the Son secured amongst the saints.

And now, after speaking of what the Comforter would be to us as Teacher, to which I have already alluded, the Lord says, "Ye have heard that I said unto you, I go away and I am coming to you. If ye loved me ye would rejoice that I go to the Father, for my Father is greater than I." That is, the Lord has a company loving Him, who keep His commandments and His word, and that company He is able to lead to the Father, as the One who is greater than Himself. That is the Lord's great service in the assembly, to lead us affectionately and in spiritual intelligence to the Father, the One who is the great Head of the economy. Remember how David said as he turned to God, "Thou art exalted as Head above all," 1 Chronicles 29: 11. That is what the Lord loves to do in the assembly as He carries the saints with Him to the Father. He says, "My Father is greater than I," and brings them into the presence of Him who has been revealed, and who receives back through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit, an answer which satisfies His own heart. These are the things we have been taken up for. The possibilities of the assembly are immense, and the Lord would encourage us to go in for them in increasing power and liberty and joy.

May the Lord graciously encourage us to increased acquaintance with and understanding of Himself and of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be enriched in view of our part in the assembly, for His name's sake. Amen.

GOD'S WAYS WITH THE BELIEVER

*Genesis 28:16-19; Genesis 35:1-5; Genesis 35:14,15; Genesis 37:5-11;
Genesis 41:44-52; Genesis 41:55,56; Genesis 45:25-28*

I wish, dear brethren, to touch lightly on the history of Jacob, having in mind that he is representative of every believer as the subject of the work of God. He represents divine sovereignty, for you will remember that he and his brother were twins, and before they were born and before either of them, as Romans says, had done good or evil (Romans 9: 11), God said that the elder should serve the younger. So that, sovereignly, Jacob was marked out, as you might say, for the best, and in that way he is representative of every one of us, for that is exactly the position that we are in if we are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We understand that in God's sovereignty, before any question of responsibility on our part arose, we were marked out for the very best, and it would be well for every believer to let it sink into his heart, the young ones and the old ones, that before the foundation of the world we were foreknown, every one of us personally, in relation to the very best thoughts that God's love and wisdom could conceive. Then, if He has marked us out for the best, He has in mind to bring us practically into accord with His thoughts, for God always justifies His sovereignty, and Jacob, in a particular way, illustrates that. He is one who was the subject of the ways and discipline and formative work of God, and who, as the finished product, abundantly justifies the sovereignty of God, for he closes his days with seventeen years of great spiritual dignity and power, being able to bless Pharaoh and to bless his sons, not in a natural way, but in a spiritual way, and to bless the sons of Joseph, and then also to worship.

Now, I think it will be seen that the history of Jacob divides itself into two periods, one of them commencing with the light which God gave him in Genesis 28, of God's house, and terminating in chapter 35 where Jacob is found completely in accord with it, and the second period beginning with the light which God gave him in chapter 37 through Joseph's dreams and finishing at the end of his career. I want to touch on these two divisions in the life of Jacob. One is connected with the light of the house of God and has reference to our being adjusted and formed, on what I may speak of as moral lines. When I speak of moral lines, one has in mind matters of good and evil, and we have to learn that our standards of good and evil as being Christians, are not to be governed by the standards of men, but are to be governed by an unerring and unwavering standard which is that of the house of God, what is befitting to it. Then the second period of training, so to speak, has reference not so much to what is moral, but to what is spiritual, and raises the question

as to what order of things we are going to find our life in, in the natural order of things, or whether we are going to have an apprehension by the Spirit of the spiritual order of things bound up with Christ and finding its expression at the present time in the assembly, the great administrative system of which Christ is the Head and in which we are intended to have part as a present matter, as, indeed, our commanding interest.

Now, to begin with the side of the truth connected with the house of God. It may not perhaps be understood by all that we, believers, as having received the Holy Spirit, are constituted God's house. We are not God's house simply when we are together. We are God's house at all times. The Holy Spirit has come to indwell believers, to abide with us for ever. God is dwelling in us by the Holy Spirit. That means that at all times, wherever we are, in whatever circumstances we are found, we are God's house, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit. If this is weighed over, I think it will raise wholesome questions with us as to what is befitting in God's house. I think all will admit, that a person is entitled to have his own house in accordance with his own tastes, and you can form a fairly good idea of what a person is like if you can see his house. You will get an impression of the person from his house, and from the kind of things, so to speak, that he has in his house. If we transfer that idea to God, we must recognise that God is entitled to have things in His house according to His own tastes and in accordance with His own nature. Indeed, to any extent in which it is not so, not only will God Himself feel it, but there will be the danger of God being misrepresented to those who are in touch with His house. Hence, this question of the house of God is a very wholesome and sobering one. When Jacob first got the light of it, he said, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven," Genesis 28: 17. The house of God is not dreadful. It is a dreadful place to man in flesh. It is a dreadful place to a believer who is not characterised by the Spirit of God, but actually the house of God is a place of fatness, a place of satisfaction, a place which is characterised by constant praise, and not constant praise as a formality, or as being what is demanded, but rather as what springs forth spontaneously from those who compose it. When the light of God's house first reached Jacob, he discovered that he, himself, was out of keeping with it, so that he says, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Now Paul, when he writes to Timothy in his first epistle, writes in order that Timothy may know how to behave himself in the house of God, which, he says, "is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth," 1 Timothy 3: 15. The matter of behaviour enters into this question of the house of God, and it becomes thus the great regulating factor, so to speak, for

believers as to what is suitable in their conduct. It is a question of what is suitable to God, and so God has in mind to bring Jacob into practical accord with His house, and in Genesis 32 Jacob has to face certain exercises in the presence of God as to what he is in himself. Romans 7 goes into that in great detail, the necessity of discovering what each of us is according to the flesh. We have to find out in the presence of God that each of us according to what we are in flesh is entirely unsuited to the presence of God. The apostle records it in Romans 7: 18, saying, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell." If good does not dwell there, there can be no production of good fruit, and finally so deepened is he in the conviction of what his flesh is, he says, "O wretched man that I am." On the other hand, in the process of exercise and spiritual analysis that is depicted in that chapter, he came to recognise that there was something of God in him, not, of course, as unregenerate. If there is anything of God in us, God has had to begin entirely anew. Paul says, "It is no longer I that do it, but the sin that dwells in me," and again he says, "I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." He begins to recognise that there is an *I* that he can identify himself with, that which is the result of the work of God, and what he comes to in result is that the power for deliverance from what he is naturally, the power for victory, the power for anything that is pleasing to God, lies in the Spirit of God.

In Genesis 32, Jacob faces these matters with God. He wrestled, it says, with a man, but the man was God, as we learn from Hosea 12, and the result of it is, that Jacob comes, in the presence of God, to the acknowledgment of what he is. God says to him, "What is thy name? And he said, Jacob." Unequivocally, without explaining it away, without making excuses for it, he comes out with the truth, he immediately says, Jacob. And God says, "Thy name shall not henceforth be called Jacob, but Israel." It really depicts the exercise of soul by which he comes practically to the recognition of the Spirit of God, and to identify himself with what God has wrought in his own soul, and thus takes account of himself as one who is ennobled in Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is a great thing when we learn to pass over, as one of the honoured servants of the Lord used to say, to change our man. That is, to understand how, as having accepted the glad tidings concerning the death and burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and having received the Holy Spirit linking us with Christ in glory, what we were in flesh has been ended judicially by God in death, and put out of His sight in burial, and we are now set up before God in the life of another Man, and the Spirit of God is the power by which we can derive from Christ and live in a way that is suitable to the blessed God. There is no other way of being found in accord with the house of God but by recognising the presence and power of the Spirit of God.

Following on that experience in Genesis 32, Jacob goes a little further. He still has not gone quite the whole length when we come to chapter 35, and God says to him, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto the God that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." It is a question of a definite understanding by us of the house of God, the assembly of the living God, and that as regards our conduct, our standards of right and wrong, these matters are not to be regulated by what is current among men,

but are to be regulated by what is suitable to God in those who compose His house. The result of this word to go up to Bethel and dwell there, was that Jacob said to his household and to all that were with him, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and cleanse yourselves, and change your garments." It necessarily involves certain exercises, certain looking around, so to speak, as to what it is we are carrying along with us, as to what our ordinary manner of life is, as to what our associations may be, for garments often refer to associations in which we move and appear among men; Jacob says all these things are to be taken into account. They are to be brought under review in the light of the house of God. "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and cleanse yourselves, and change your garments," and the result is, "they gave to Jacob all the strange gods that were in their hand, and the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the terebinth that is by Shechem." Then the next verse shows how God acknowledges and honours anyone who moves in exercise on these lines. "The terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob." Remember what God said to Eli, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed," 1 Samuel 2: 30. It is a great thing, dear brethren, to be honoured by God, and the way to be honoured by God is to honour Him. "Them that honour me I will honour." So because Jacob had honoured God He placed His own terror upon the cities that were around in order that Jacob should go through unmolested.

We now come to the verse we read in Genesis 35, where it says that God talked with him. In verse 10, God confirmed to him his new name; He says first, "Thy name is Jacob," remarkably enough, but then He says, "Thy name shall not henceforth be called Jacob, but Israel." That is to say, He would have us to understand that so long as we are here the flesh remains unchanged - but the flesh is not really what we are. He says, "Thy name is Jacob." That is flesh, but then "Israel shall be thy name," and "He called his name Israel." Israel means a prince, and that is what we are as having the Holy Spirit. We partake, by the Holy Spirit received from Christ in glory, in the life of the heavenly One, and we are sons of God and have received the Spirit of

adoption. Think of the dignity that is placed upon us as being the sons of God! We are to understand that God regards us as Israel, and we are to regard ourselves as Israel, and we are to do that in the recognition that if flesh is allowed to act, it is still flesh; and therefore, "Thy name is Jacob," is just a warning note that unless he watches his natural tendencies he will come out in the features of Jacob, but they are not to be allowed to come out. The position is to be governed by the light of the house of God, and God confirms His blessing to him and calls his name, Israel. "And God went up from him in the place where he had talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had talked with him, a pillar of stone, and poured on it a drink-offering, and poured oil on it." He set up a pillar in chapter 28, but he poured no drink offering on it there. He was not equal to pouring a drink offering on it there. He is equal to it now. The drink offering is something which affords pleasure to God and thus Jacob shows that he has now come back to the house of God, in every way in keeping with it.

I pass on to the other section of Jacob's training and it has its roots, I believe, in the dreams which Joseph had and which he recounted to his brethren and his father, for you will notice that the Spirit of God particularly says, "And his brethren envied him; but his father kept the saying," Genesis 37: 11.

His father did, indeed, rebuke him, but at the same time he observed the saying, as though even at the very moment when he was rebuking him, he had some kind of intuitive feeling that there was something of God behind this dream and therefore he observed it. It was really light that God was giving to Jacob in view of the further training He had in mind for him. The first of Joseph's dreams is remarkable and, I believe, particularly points to what the assembly is at the present time on earth. Joseph says, "Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field." A sheaf is an entity composed of many constituents bound together, and Joseph's sheaf, it says, "rose up, and remained standing." The word used for standing is a word of particular importance, meaning 'taking one's stand'; that is, 'standing deliberately.' Joseph says, "Your sheaves came roundabout and bowed down to my sheaf." Now there are many bodies in the world today, religious and other kinds, but they all have in them the element of disintegration for the simple reason that they are of man, and anything that is of man is bound to be corrupted and disintegrated. It is unavoidable, it carries the seed of corruption with it, so that whether the body is of religious character, and there are plenty of efforts to bind sheaves in the field, it will not be able to remain standing. But there is one company in the world which is standing and will remain standing, and that is the assembly.

When I speak of the assembly, I mean the assembly, not merely as in the mind of God, that is an abstract conception, but as finding practical expression in the saints of God who have separated from all that is iniquitous and displeasing to God and, recognising the lordship and headship of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit, are able to walk together in the light of the assembly. In such, the features of the assembly are, or may be, livingly expressed, and what the Lord is making us conscious of increasingly as the days go on, is that He has a company here on earth bound together in love and held under His own influence. Colossians 3: 14, speaks of love, "which is the bond of perfectness," and there is a company which lives in His life and which remains standing. Whatever may happen in the world, the saints of God, as moving in the light of the assembly, remain standing, and one reason is this, that their life is not bound up with the things in the world which are subject to change and decay and capable of being shaken, but their "life is hid with the Christ in God," Colossians 3: 3. Their life is in Christ, and is hid with Christ in God. They are supported by the fulness that there is in Christ. They are bound together in life, and whatever arises in the world, whatever Satan may seek to bring to bear on the assembly by way of attack from this or that, there is in the presence of the Spirit of God and in the grace and wisdom which Christ affords, the ability to resist every attack of the enemy. As the Lord says, "Hades' gates shall not prevail against it," Matthew 16: 18. That is a great triumph for Christ. It is not to make much of the assembly that I am saying these things, although the assembly is God's great masterpiece, but it speaks much for Christ, that He is able to sustain in the world a company which remains standing in testimony here and in response to the heart of God. No other company will remain standing and that is undoubtedly true, and that is what I believe this first dream of Joseph indicates. It indicates the living character, the enduring character of what is here on earth under the hand of Christ at the present time. It is not exactly known to men. It is in large measure in mystery, but to be apprehended by the saints so that they find their life and interest in it.

Then the second dream looks on in its interpretation to the future. If the first dream links very largely with the epistle to the Colossians, the second dream links with the epistle to the Ephesians, for it presents Christ as typified in Joseph as Head of all principality and power and exalted to the highest place, as Ephesians 1: 20, 21 says, "He set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named." But it is now more particularly the administration which Christ has under His hand in the assembly at the present time, that I had in mind to speak of for the moment, and that is, I believe, why the history

of Joseph is brought in now for several chapters. Joseph is seen as one who suffered. He is presented typically as one who died and is raised again. He is spoken of in Moses' song in Deuteronomy 33: 16, as the one "that was separated from his brethren," and this is the position with our Lord Jesus Christ. He is separated from His own by death and resurrection, or it may be from His earthly people. In whatever way you view it, He is separated from them by death and resurrection. Joseph, of course, did not die literally. He was put down into the pit, but the Spirit of God says there was no water in it, and he was drawn up out of the pit; he was sold into Egypt; he was put into the prison in Egypt, and then brought out of the prison.

There is great detail entering into Joseph's own formation, but the final position we come to in Genesis 41 is that he is in great exaltation. He is second only to Pharaoh. Pharaoh says to him, "I am Pharaoh; and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt." Then, very interestingly, what is brought in at this point is the question of the administration of food. I am sure all will agree that the question of spiritual food is an important matter. We shall languish as saints if we have not spiritual food, and spiritual food becomes prominent at this point in Joseph's history. God had given Pharaoh light that there should be seven years of great plenty, and then this should be followed by seven years of famine, and as a result, Joseph is established in the place of administration in order to conserve and administer the food supply. That is what the Lord Jesus is doing at the present time in a spiritual sense. I believe it is right to say that, spiritually, the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine are going on alongside one another, for there is no question that this is a period of great plenty for those who are in a position to receive it. There is no lack in the fulness of Christ, and there is no lack in spiritual ministry at the present time, there is great plenty, but, on the other hand, if you look abroad, there is very great famine of spiritual food outside the realm where the Lord Jesus administers. In the application of this passage to our souls, the two periods of seven years of plenty and of famine are going on together.

There is another thing to be noted and that is that although Joseph was established in the place of administration of food by Pharaoh, before he commenced his administration we are told that Pharaoh gave him a wife, namely, "Asnath, the daughter of Potipherah the priest in On." Then later on in the chapter she is again referred to, and again it is stated she is "the daughter of Potipherah the priest in On." It is as though the Spirit of God is emphasising what is priestly, and what is priestly means that suited moral conditions are maintained, for the priest always considers for God and what is due to God in His house. This is a most important matter. While all spiritual wealth is in the

hands of the Lord Jesus, "In him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," Colossians 2: 9, yet the administration of it among the saints is dependent on suited moral conditions being found with us. The two have to be allied. Before Joseph enters upon his administration, he is given this priestly wife. That is a very important thing because the administration of food works out in localities. That is clearly indicated here where it says, "He gathered up all the food ... and put the food in the cities." In general, the administration of spiritual food amongst God's people is carried on in the local companies. It is there and there only that it finds expression. Largely, it is maintained through those who constitute the local companies, but there is also what is additional in the way of gift which is, so to speak, a further touch of the Lord Jesus Christ in His consideration for the assembly. He furnishes gifts, and they are not confined in the exercise of their gift to any one locality, but the actual administration of it is in the local companies, and this is a great thing to bear in mind, but before the administration can take place there must be found suitable moral conditions.

That was particularly emphasised in the history of God's people in the days of Eli. The moral conditions in the days of Eli were as bad as they could be, and what was the result? It says, "The word of Jehovah was rare in those days; a vision was not frequent," 1 Samuel 3: 1. There was nothing that you could call spiritual food. Why was that? It was not that God's hand was shortened. It was not that His love to His people was any less, but the conditions among God's people precluded the food being given. There was one woman in Israel, Hannah, who felt it keenly in exercise before God, and in answer to her exercise Samuel was given, and with Samuel there began to arise consideration for God. Before he developed as a prophet, he was morally a priest, for we are told, "Samuel ministered before Jehovah, a boy girded with a linen ephod." He was not officially a priest for he was not of Aaron's family, but he was morally a priest as over against the corruption of the official priesthood. He "ministered ... girded with a linen ephod"; that is, in suited moral conditions. Now, that being secured, the word of the Lord began to appear. The Lord made Himself known to Samuel and it says, "Jehovah was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground, and all Israel ... knew that Samuel was established a prophet of Jehovah," 1 Samuel 3: 19, 20. That is, conditions were developing among the people in readiness to hear the word of God and respond to it, and the result was that there was a continual increase in the mind of God for His people, resulting, as we know, in David being brought in, and then David being crowned by the whole of Israel, and eventually in the service of God being instituted in all its richness under David, and finally established under Solomon. All this resulted from the exercises that

began with Hannah and with little Samuel. That only supports what one is saying, that of there is to be the administration of food by our Lord Jesus Christ through the local companies, there must be the suited moral conditions, and these are suggested in the priestly wife which was given to Joseph.

There is another result brought in in this chapter of suited moral conditions being found, another result of the alliance of Asnath with Joseph, and that is, two sons were born to Joseph. They are suggestive of what the saints are to Christ at the present time; Manasseh meaning, "For God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house," and Ephraim meaning, "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction," or as the name itself means, *Doubly fruitful*. All that is very suggestive of what the Lord Jesus finds in the assembly at the present time. There is what more than compensates Him for all that He has suffered at the hands of His earthly people, causing Him to forget all His toil and affliction,

and then on the other hand, double fruitfulness, that is, a greater character and measure of response to the heart of God through Christ than He could ever receive from Israel. All these things are spiritual, and that is what I want to come to in closing; that is, as to how far we are finding our life in spiritual things. God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ," Ephesians 1: 3. Our blessings are spiritual in contrast to natural, and heavenly in contrast to earthly. Christ is not here and everyone who loves Christ will come to it that they do not want to find their life in things where Jesus is not. In Matthew, the assembly gospel, when the women came to the tomb on the resurrection morning, the angel says to them, "He is not here, for he is risen," Matthew 28: 6. "He is not here"; that is to ring in our ears, dear brethren. Christ is not here, and our interests as bound up with Christ through grace are transferred from this scene to the range of interests connected with Him where He is. I do not mean, of course, that we have not to fulfil our responsibilities in this life, and they can be fulfilled in the power of the Spirit and only thus. We fulfil our responsibilities in the power of the Spirit individually and we find our place collectively in the wilderness in the testimony here, but our real life is bound up with things above, where He is.

The Spirit of God through Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: 46, "That which is spiritual was not first, but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual," indicating that, all along, God has had in mind what is spiritual as His final thought. He brought in the natural and the earthly merely as testimony in His ways, but He has now reached the spiritual in that our Lord Jesus Christ is a quickening spirit, and this is the day of the Holy Spirit, and the blessings are spiritual and heavenly in character. Therefore it is a question for everyone of

us to ask himself, How far he is finding his life practically in the things that are above; that is, morally above, in the things connected with Christ and with His assembly which, is for the moment down here on earth? The assembly is not earthly, it is heavenly; it is on earth in the ways of God in testimony at the present time and for God's service, but it is heavenly: heavenly in its origin and destiny as the vision given to Peter in Acts 10 clearly shows. It is just that which was raised with Jacob in this second part of his history, as to where in fact he was going to find his life and interests and whether he was spiritual or unspiritual.

We may be good Christians on moral lines and our conduct may be blameless, measured by the standards of what is fitting in the house of God, but the next question arises as to whether we are spiritual, whether we are finding our life in the things of the Spirit, and that was exactly the test proposed to Jacob. He had lost sight of Joseph, and did not know that he was alive, far less had he any conception of the glorious administration that existed under his hand. Joseph's great desire was that Jacob should come down to him where he was. He should leave his own sphere of things and find his life and interest in Joseph's circle of interests and Joseph's message is that he will maintain him and his little ones. By command of Pharaoh, Joseph sends his brethren back with wagons, and it says they came to Jacob, their father, "and told him, saying, Joseph is still alive and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And his heart fainted, for he did not believe them," Genesis 45: 26. How easily unbelief may find a place with us, dear brethren. "He did not believe them."

There is no excuse for us if we are marked by unbelief, for we have the Holy Spirit and He has come to bear testimony to the glory of Christ. The Scriptures are full of it. If we read the Scriptures,

we shall get an impression of the glory of Christ, and the glory of the system that He is administering on earth in the assembly, and how there is enough to keep us fully sustained and occupied. You will notice that in Genesis 47 Joseph introduces some of his brethren into the presence of Pharaoh, who may be regarded as typical of God, and the only thing which Pharaoh is recorded as saying to them is, "What is your occupation?" Now that is a wholesome question to have raised with us. It is as though God would say to us, as the Lord brings us before Him, "What is your occupation?" How are you filling in your time? There is plenty to do in relation to Christ's sphere of interests, to contribute to it in spiritual wealth, in prayer and exercise and in the care of the saints, and so on; for while the administration of the assembly is in the hands of Christ and He is quite equal to it, He always does it through His people, and

is largely dependent upon suited conditions among His people. So God would raise the question, "What is your occupation?"

And so, as to Jacob it says, "his heart fainted, for he did not believe them. And they spoke to him all the words of Joseph, which he had spoken to them. And he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him." That is, he is now, if I may apply it to ourselves, waking up to the fact that he has the Spirit of God from Christ in glory and the Spirit of God is quite capable of making these things real to Jacob. If others are in them, why should not I be? If other brothers and sisters are finding their life in spiritual things and are happy and prosperous in them, why should not I be? It is a question of realising that I have the Spirit of God from Christ in glory and that He is quite capable of carrying me over in thought and affection so that I find my life in spiritual and heavenly things and contribute to the sphere of administration that is under the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ and which is subsisting here on earth among the saints, and so it says, "*Israel* said." You will notice that the Spirit of God calls him *Israel* as soon as his spirit has revived and, typically, he has come to recognise that the only thing necessary is to avail himself of what is in the Spirit. The wagons would refer to the Spirit and when he has come to that, the Spirit of God calls him, "Israel." He is answering to the true nobility of a prince of God, Israel. "And Israel said, It is enough: Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die." And he did so, and the rest of the history shows what a period of, spiritual elevation and dignity and prosperity lay before him. He talked of being about to die, but he had seventeen years more granted to him, seventeen years marked by not a single feature of complaining or unbelief, but marked by spiritual dignity as a great blessing, blessing Pharaoh, blessing his sons, and blessing the sons of Joseph, and, finally, completing his history as a worshipper.

May God grant that the work of God may prosper with us similarly, so that all His thoughts concerning us may find with us a present answer, for His Name's sake.

SERVANTS OF GOD

Isaiah 54:17; Job 1:8; Job 42:5-8; Numbers 14:6-10; Numbers 14:24; Psalm 18:30-33; Luke 2:36-38

I want to speak, dear brethren, of serving God, and to seek to show the encouragement there is in the Scriptures for every one of us, whether it be brother or sister, to be here definitely as serving God. The scripture we commenced with in Isaiah is one of particular encouragement, for Jehovah says that it is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, those who serve Him, that "No weapon that is prepared against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn." He says, "This is the inheritance of the servants of Jehovah; and their righteousness is of me, saith Jehovah." It is as though God would say to everyone who is prepared to take up the exercise of serving Him, whatever form that service may take, that they can afford to do so in singleness of heart with the assurance that God will stand by them. He will, of course, afford to them any adjustment that they may need. He will have His own way with them. The Scriptures are full of God's ways with His servants, but He would at the outset say that the servant need not be concerned about what others think or say about them, if, in fact, they are in singleness of heart serving God. "Their righteousness," Jehovah says, "is of me." In speaking of serving God, one is not limiting one's thoughts to serving in ministry or anything of that kind. I think the Scriptures read will show that *servants of God* is a term that goes far wider than serving in the power of gift in the ministry of the word or in the gospel. Certainly there is no suggestion of any such thing in the case of Job, yet he is one of whom God speaks as "My servant Job." The thought of serving God is a very wide one.

I want to refer to these cases of Job and Caleb and David and Anna in order to indicate different aspects in which serving God shows itself, and also to show, not only, as the verse in Isaiah says, how God stands by those who serve Him, but also to show how He takes in hand any discipline that may be needed in order that they may serve Him more effectively. God will take that in hand Himself. I do not think you can read of any servant in the scripture who is not disciplined. In the case of Job the service that marked him in the first instance was that he was characterised by personal piety, concerned as to himself and his household to maintain practically what was pleasing to God. He was thus characteristically a servant of God, and God calls Satan's attention to him. That is a serious matter, you might say a surprising matter, that God should call Satan's attention to a servant of His, for God knew well that if Satan were allowed a free hand it would be in opposition to those who serve God. Yet God calls Satan's attention to Job, with the result that Satan was allowed to put his

hand upon him to a remarkable extent, affecting him in his circumstances in a most grievous way, and affecting him also in his body and in his health. What God had in mind was to bring out, I believe, the indestructibility of His own work in Job.

In speaking to Satan in chapter 1 about Job, God calls him "My servant Job," and similarly in chapter 2, but in the remaining chapters to chapter 41 inclusive, there is no reference to "My servant Job." In chapter 42, four times over in a very short space of time, God uses the same expression and says "My servant Job." That is what Job was as serving God. He had come through in no way damaged by what God allowed Satan to bring upon him; but rather, greatly enhanced. That shows that whatever Satan may do against those who serve God, the thought is that he is not to prevail, even as the Lord says that hades' gates should not prevail against the assembly, which is particularly the vessel of service God-ward. Whatever Satan does, faith understands that God has the matter well under control for those who are really serving Him; that is, those who have no other motive, whose activities and outlook are just in that one direction of serving God and doing His will. I say this, that in regard of all such, whatever evil there may be in opposition to what is of God, God is in complete control of it, and uses it for the furtherance of His pleasure in His servants. At the end of the book God has it in mind to bring Job into more complete liberty, and a fuller and better knowledge of Himself. He brings him to a point, as we know, where he says, " ... but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

In order to bring Job to this point, God brought before him His wonderful wisdom and majesty, and concluded by drawing his attention to the creature who is king over all the children of pride. No one was able to handle him but God. I believe it is an allusion to Satan, one who cannot be handled by anyone but God, but then we are in the light of this, that God has handled Satan. The Son of God has been manifested, to "undo the works of the devil", 1 John 3: 8. That is a wonderful thing, and the manner of the undoing of the works of the devil has been most marvellous, bringing to light what God is in His blessedness. Think of it, that the Son of God should have come in manhood, an incorruptible Man, and has met Satan and been into death to accomplish redemption, yielding Himself to pay the full price needed if redemption was to be effected, and that we might receive the Holy Spirit, and be set up in the life of another Man, in the life which is in Christ Jesus, and have the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts. I say this, and much more, is involved in the way in which God has handled Satan. "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding that we should know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John 5: 20. The very fact of the

power of Satan over men has become the occasion for the bringing in, in the incarnation and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and His ascension to the right hand of God, of what has been the greatest expression of divine love, and wisdom, and power. It has involved the setting aside judicially of the man that had come under Satan's power, the man that was susceptible to evil, and the establishment before God, holy and blameless in Christ, of those whom He has called. That is a wonderful thing, dear brethren, I do not know whether we sufficiently give ourselves to contemplate these great truths of the gospel, for if we would contemplate them more I believe we would come to the point that Job came to. He says, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." What brings us to that point? Is it not the contemplation of the fact that no less a One than the Son of God has had to go into the place of death and judgment, which dust and ashes speak of, if we were to be lifted out of it, and set up before God in Christ according to the thoughts of His love.

Job says, "But now mine eye seeth thee." He saw God as He was known in creation. We see God as He is known in the glory of redemption. If we begin to appreciate this it will work out in complete self-judgment. Self-judgment is a term we often use, but which one sometimes fears is not as fully understood as it might be, because self-judgment means judgment of self, it does not mean judgment simply of what has been done, it means judgment of the root, the man that did the evil. That is what God would bring every one of us to, and it is one essential element in spiritual stability that we arrive, in the light of what God has done in Christ at the reality of true self-judgment. In 2 Samuel 23 we read of David's mighty men; the first of his mighty men is one of whom it says "he fought against eight hundred, slain by him at one time." I believe that is a man who is marked by complete self-judgment. It does not say what the character of the enemy was. The remarkable thing is that he could slay eight hundred of them at one time. You wonder how he could do it, but I believe the spiritual suggestion of it is this, that if Satan brought eight hundred different influences of evil to bear upon one, one proves himself victorious over them all, they are all absolutely refused, eight hundred different influences of evil all brought to bear, pressing at the one time and all absolutely refused. The only man who can do that is the man who is walking in self-judgment by the Holy Spirit. A man who is walking in self-judgment will refuse every influence that appeals to what he is in the flesh, and though there be eight hundred of them, so to speak, they are all rejected, and that constitutes the foundation of spiritual power. Job is called "My servant Job," and God supports him through all the discipline through which he was brought, and reaches His end with him, so that Job is brought into the fulness

of liberty. There is no liberty like that of the one who has arrived at the end of himself and has Christ before him. Now following on that God says to Eliphaz the Temanite, "Mine anger is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken rightly of me, like my servant Job." What characterised Job as a servant of God was that he spoke right things of God. That is something that is open to every one of us, to speak right things of God, and to move in this world in a way that is consistent with speaking right things of God; that is, to bear a right testimony as to God, supported by a walk in humility and holiness.

When we come to Caleb he is called God's servant at a critical time; for the people of God had been brought out of Egypt and they had reached Kadesh-barnea. They were not very far from the land, and it was God's desire that they should go into it. Twelve spies had been sent out to spy out the land, and Caleb was one of them; Joshua was another and there were ten others. They brought back a report, supported by a bunch of grapes of Eshcol borne upon a pole between two men. They admitted that the land was a good one, but ten of them said that the difficulties of taking it were too great and they discouraged the hearts of God's people. That was a crisis. It was unbelief operating in the spies and finding its answer in God's people, in the presence of which "Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up boldly and possess it, for we are well able to do it," Numbers 13: 30. Then in the verses we read in chapter 14 Joshua and Caleb say, "The land, which we passed through to search it out, is a very, very good land. If Jehovah delight in us, he will bring us into this land; and give it us, a land that flows with milk and honey; only rebel not against Jehovah." Thus Caleb, and Joshua with him, is stimulating the people of God to go in for that which God has in His purpose for them. Why should we not stimulate one another to do that, dear brethren? Paul says in Ephesians 1: 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." We may well ask ourselves, What do we know of it? Can we give an account of it? Are we ready to go in for it? There is the power to go in for it. "If Jehovah delight in us," Caleb says, "he will bring us in." The Spirit of God has come down from heaven for that express purpose. The Lord says "But when he is come, the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth," John 16: 13. Are we going to slight the presence of the Spirit of God amongst God's people, and refuse to take possession of heavenly things? That was the position here. Heavenly things were theirs as a matter of title. God's love had provided them for them, but now when it comes to the point of going in they say "we are not able to go up." The difficulties were too great. What are the difficulties? They are really in ourselves, and all difficulties are overcome just

in the measure in which the Holy Spirit is given place amongst us. Caleb was one as to whom God said, "But my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit in him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he came; and his seed shall possess it." He is seen as characterised by an appreciation of heavenly things, not only an appreciation of them for himself, but having the ability and energy to stimulate God's people to go in for them. Actually we have to move into these things together, dear brethren. That was a serious matter. Caleb and Joshua, though having the heart to go in, had to wait for nearly forty years before they could enter in, not on account of any failure on their part, but on account of the unwillingness of God's people to move. What a serious thing that is. If I am marked by unbelief or slothfulness in regard of divine things, I may be hindering the saints of God from reaching practically their portion in the inheritance. We must remember that the state of spirituality in any company is simply the state of those who compose the company, and if the greater part of the company are unspiritual and unbelieving you will find little or no power in the company to move into the choicest things that divine love has prepared for us. This is a most serious matter.

The relatives of Rebekah said to her in relation to the servant, "Wilt thou go with this man? and she said, I will go," Genesis 24: 58. She did go; she and her maids rode upon the camels and followed the man; they definitely committed themselves to the power of the Spirit suggested in the camels, and they follow the man, who I believe, is typical of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. "He shall guide you into all the truth," John 16: 13. We know how Isaac appreciated it. "And Isaac had gone out to meditate in the fields towards the beginning of evening. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, camels were coming," verse 63. "Behold" (as though when Isaac saw it his feelings were stirred) "camels were coming." It is not too much to say that as the Lord sees the saints moving together in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the bridal affections proper to the assembly with desire to have part with Him in His own things, that the feelings of the Lord are stirred as He sees it, but does He see it? That is the point. Here ten out of the twelve, and then the whole congregation, apart from Joshua and Caleb, were marked by unbelief, and the result was that for forty years, those who desired to go into the land were not able to go in, they had to wait for another generation. The Lord stood by Caleb and Joshua. It says "and the whole assembly said that they should be stoned with stones." Think of the opposition to the truth, and the opposition to two faithful servants of God which showed itself at that time, "the whole assembly said that they should be stoned with stones, and the glory of

Jehovah appeared." That is, the Lord came into the matter. "And their righteousness is of me,

saith Jehovah." The Lord came into the matter and upheld Caleb and Joshua, and although Caleb and Joshua had to wait forty years before they could enter into the land that was held in their hearts, they were supported right through those forty years. The Lord says of Caleb, "But my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit in him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he came; and his seed shall possess it," and as we may read from the book of Joshua he did so.

Referring now to Psalm 18, you will notice that the heading of the Psalm is, "To the chief musician: a Psalm of David, the servant of Jehovah, who spoke to Jehovah the words of this song in the day that Jehovah delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." The Psalm is a recital by a servant of God when he had come to the end of his experiences. "In the day," it says, "that Jehovah had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." I wanted to refer to this briefly. David, as we know, was a servant of God in a very marked way, a much more distinctive way than Job. Job is a servant of God characteristically, in his personal and home life, and he spoke right things of God. Caleb is called a servant of God in that particular feature that he appreciated the inheritance and sought to stimulate the people of God to go in for it, a very valuable service, but David was a servant of God in a very wide and varied way, one used to bring deliverance to God's people, one used to collect material for the house of God, one used to institute the service of God in all its departments, and one used to compose many psalms that were valuable in that service. He had his failures, as we know, but God took in hand to perfect His work with His servant. It is a great thing that God does not give up those who serve Him. Even though they may fail He does not give them up.

David in this psalm recounts something of what he had learned of God as the result of the experiences that he went through. He says, "As for God, his way is perfect." What a testimony to God and to the faithfulness of His grace! When we think of what David's history was, that he should say, "As for God, his way is perfect," and then he speaks of the word of God. "The word of Jehovah is tried." We were speaking this afternoon of "Every word which goes out through God's mouth," Matthew 4: 4. David said it "is tried." That is to say, it has been put to the test; it is proved to be something that can be relied upon. "The word of Jehovah is tried." You may safely govern yourself by it. That is the idea. David would say to himself, I always prospered as long as I was governed by the word of God. If I got into difficulties it was when I was

not so governed. "The word of Jehovah is tried; he is a shield to all that trust in him." Then he speaks of God as a Rock. How blessed to be able to speak of God experimentally in this way. You can build upon a rock. There is something abidingly stable about a rock, and David's knowledge of God was such that he says, "For who is God save Jehovah? and who is a rock if not our God? The God who girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." That is one who is wholly subject to God's discipline. David shines in that way, as one who was always subject to God's discipline. One who is subject to God's discipline prospers. He may have to carry the results of his failures to the end of his days. God's governmental ways may follow him to the end. They did with David, "Now, therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house," 2 Samuel 12: 10. David had to carry what was governmental to the end of his days. The one who knows God humbly submits to that, and understands that in the process, God is deepening His work with him, teaching him to abhor increasingly that in which he had failed, and teaching him increasingly to appreciate the grace that is working with him. He says, "God girdeth me with strength and maketh my way perfect." That is, God has a perfect result in mind for us "that we should be holy and blameless before him in love," Ephesians 1: 4. That is not to be put off to the future. It is something to be realised now, it is what God would bring us to, to be rooted and founded in love, and to be holy and blameless before Him in love. I believe God would bring us to it now, and it may be touched in assembly; for all God's ways with us have in mind that we may be fitted to fill out our place in the assembly now, and have our part now in the service of God.

David says, "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places." That is what we want to reach, dear brethren, our high places. I was saying that God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." That gives us what are our high places. Are we able to tread them? We discover in assembly the measure of our ability to tread our high places, and that is what God has in mind, that we should be able to do. It is a question of being formed in holiness, in spiritual intelligence, and spiritual liberty in these things. Hinds' feet are feet that are able to move in regions where the natural man cannot move, and they thus refer to our ability to touch spiritual and heavenly things in agility and power, beyond the reach of the natural mind. That is what David reached as the result of God's ways with him. He became increasingly skilful in the service of God, so that this Psalm is addressed "To the chief Musician." All his experiences had in mind that he should be increasingly fitted for his service. Habakkuk,

another servant of God, a prophet, closes his book on a similar note. He says, "For though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines;

the labour of the olive-tree shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength. And he maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon my high places. To the chief Musician. On my stringed instruments," Habakkuk 3: 17 - 19. That is the result that Habakkuk reaches.

Finally I refer to Anna in order to show, if it is necessary to say it, that serving God is not in any sense limited to brothers. Here is a sister brought forward. "And there was a prophetess, Anna, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, who was far advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and herself a widow up to eighty-four years." She is one who had herself been the subject of God's ways, ways which outwardly might seem severe. To have only seven years of married life, followed by eighty-four years of widowhood, seems like severity in God's ways, but was there anything in Anna to suggest that she was not happy in the position that God had brought her to? Nothing at all, although of such a greatly advanced age she "did not depart from the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers." You may rest assured that that was precious to God. I do not suppose that Anna was of any consequence to the high priest and the elderhood in Jerusalem at that time. She would be regarded as past any usefulness, probably an unknown woman, but a woman who was day and night under God's eye, departing not from His temple. The interests of God were her great concern, she had no other indeed. "Who did not depart from the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers." The result of that is that God saw that she had part in anything that was moving spiritually. She was not left outside of it. The Christ of God had just been brought into the temple. Simeon had Him in his arms and Anna comes in at that moment; God sees to it that she is in that, she would have her part in anything that is of spiritual value at that time, and so it is with those who serve God, that God sees that they have their part in it in the Spirit. They may even be cut off from it in regard to actual circumstances. Anna was not.

There are instances, where saints have been cut off from having personal part in spiritual privileges, and yet have been entirely in them in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what God always ensures in regard of those who truly serve Him, so this is placed in the Scriptures for our encouragement, for the encouragement of sisters who serve God to continue in it, and there is none who is able to support them in it but God. David says, "The God who girdeth me with strength." It is God who is going to support them to the end, those who have the mind and heart to serve Him. It says of Anna, "who did not depart from the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers; and

she coming up the same hour gave praise to the Lord." She contributes her own quota, she yields something for the service of God; and not only that, she "spoke of him to all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem." She knew them all and she spoke of Him. Job could speak rightly of God. Anna here, at the end, is brought into the current of what God is doing at the moment. Her soul is filled with the light of God's Christ, and she "spoke of him to all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem."

One's desire is that we may all be stimulated to serve God, and especially in relation to His own thoughts, and His interests and people. There is no greater privilege which can be accorded to us, and the opportunity for it in the presence of adverse conditions will soon be past. May the Lord encourage us, in whatever way the service of God is open to us, to take it up and to continue in it to the end, for His Name's sake.

THE GLORY OF DIVINE GRACE

Ephesians 1: 3 - 11; Ephesians 4: 8 - 16; Joshua 10: 10 - 14

I wish to say a word, dear brethren, as to God's thoughts concerning us as they are presented to us in the epistle to the Ephesians, and as to the means by which He is giving effect to them at the present time in the saints. The apostle, as we have often remarked, as introducing this great subject of what God has in mind of Himself, you might say, for the saints, introduces it in a spirit of worship, saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This would show that these things are not to be regarded by us in any academic way, but as entering into the feelings of love in God which lie behind the thoughts which He has made known concerning us, and getting some little impression of the greatness of what God is pleased to do for His own satisfaction, and the wisdom by which He effects it, and the power too, that is brought into expression in effecting these thoughts, that we should be developed in a spirit of worship.

You will remember that Jacob, who is taken up as an example of God's ways with one who is the subject of His sovereignty, finishes his days as a worshipper. He worshipped, it says, leaning on the top of his staff (Genesis 47: 31), as though that is an end that God is working to with us, that everyone should become developed in the ability to worship, and not only to worship, but also to celebrate God's praises intelligently and feelingly. David, too, in the last chapter of 1 Chronicles, speaks to God and says, "Thou art exalted as Head above all." His heart rises to God in a sense of the exaltation which attaches to the blessed God, so that David says, "Thou art exalted as Head above all." So with others also, such as Simeon, who coming into the temple and embracing God's Christ in his arms,

blessed God; Luke 2: 28. His movements were in the Spirit, and the Spirit of God has a large place in the epistle to the Ephesians, for the Spirit of God in His ungrieved operations is essential if we are to have any true understanding of what God has taken us up for, but Simeon came in the Spirit into the temple and took up the child Jesus in his arms. It had been made known to him by the Spirit that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ; that is, the Christ of God, and he took up the child Jesus in his arms, and blessed God. It is a great secret in regard of our spirits being called forth in worship God-ward, to have an apprehension of the Christ of God; that is, not now in relation to ourselves, but Christ apprehended in relation to God; that is, as the One by whom and in whom God effects every thought that His love has cherished.

Well, now, the epistle to the Ephesians, I need not say, is written from the standpoint of the exaltation of Christ, as, indeed, we are told in this very epistle that God has "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named," Ephesians 1: 20, 21. We are in the presence, in this epistle, of the greatest conceivable exaltation, the greatest conceivable elevation too in a moral sense, and that is to give us an idea of the kind of riches, so to speak, into which we are introduced. The greatest thoughts of God are now to be opened up to us, and Christ is already there as Man in the position from which those thoughts are unfolded. That is a great thing to take account of. In olden times, Abraham and others saw things as God revealed them to them, distantly. "Abraham," the Lord says, "rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad," John 8: 56. At the same time, what he saw was still in the distance, but things are no longer in the distance. Christ is already in the place which God's purpose has marked out for Him, and the Holy Spirit is here, the Earnest, and in the Earnest there is the power in the saints to enter at the present time into all that will soon be ours in glorious actuality. Indeed, dear brethren, one frequently reminds oneself that it will only take a twinkling of an eye; *that* is all the time it will take to transfer us actually from this scene into the place and bodily condition in which these blessings are to be realised in their fulness and for eternity. So near are they that it only requires a twinkling of an eye to complete the matter so far as our bodily condition is concerned, but there is that completion to go on in the meantime in our souls in a formative way, and that is what we are concerned about.

What I am seeking to stress is that the day for these things has come, in that Christ is already in the position which the purpose of God has marked out for Him as Man, and the Spirit has come. The day for heavenly things and spiritual things has come. That is what one wants to reach, that the day for these things is now. We are not to put them off till the future, and so the apostle says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us." The apostle can speak in that way. He is dealing with God, and with God's standpoint, so to speak, and, as I say, Christ is already in that position, and in Jesus where He is is the setting out of what God has in His thoughts for us. It is well for us to take that in, and so the apostle can say that God "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." He has chosen us, he says, "in him before the foundation of the world." It is remarkable the scope that is covered in one or two verses, going back to before the foundation of the world, eternity in the past, if one may speak of the past in relation to eternity; going back to that, and then looking on to what is called the administration of the fulness of times which is the day

that is to come; then in chapter 3, going on to all generations of the age of ages which is eternity in the future. The apostle, in a very short span, so to speak, so far as words are concerned, covers an immense scope as regards time or eternity. He says, God "hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

We have often gone over these things, dear brethren, but it is well to go over them again to get our minds and spirits saturated with the sense of the blessedness of God operating entirely from His own side; not presented as actuated by any question of need on our part or desire, for indeed these matters go back to before the foundation of the world, but choosing us for His own pleasure, choosing us in Christ. One sees, dear brethren, what divine purpose is, how marvellous it is! How from the very outset, when once the thoughts of divine love were conceived, the incarnation was in view, as, you might say, the keystone of all that God was going to effect. He chose us in Christ. The explanation of it, of course, is that all is "according to the good pleasure of his will." It is not a question of what might meet our most exaggerated thoughts or desires; it is a question entirely of what will satisfy the heart of God. You might say, why should God desire it? Well, it is a matter for us to consider, why indeed? I was speaking of different ones who were moved in a spirit of worship. Paul, himself, is another remarkable instance. So blessedly did he know God that in writing an epistle like Romans, he constantly bursts out in doxology. In chapter 1, he refers to God as Creator, saying of men, that they "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." Then in chapter 9, he speaks of Christ coming in of Israel, according to flesh, and then in order to establish the truth of His Person, he says, "who is over all, God," but then he has to add, "blessed for ever. Amen." That is the spirit in which Paul handles divine things. As he thinks of God and as he thinks of Christ, a spirit of worship arises in his heart and that is what the Lord would help us in, lest we should become academic or formal in these holy things. In Romans 11, he traces God's ways and, as he does so, he says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" And then he says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." That is how Paul is affected as he thinks of God. If he thinks of Christ, who He is, he is affected in the same way. If he thinks of God's ways, he is also affected in that way, and as he thinks of the mystery, he is similarly affected, according to the end of Romans 16. The

spirit of worship is intended to characterise the saints as they take account of God.

As I was saying, we might well ask, why should He purpose these things and why should we be the subjects of them? Long before man was created He brought into being an order of creature infinitely greater in power and glory than man, I refer to the angels, and yet when we come to the epistle to Hebrews, we find, "he does not indeed take hold of angels by the hand, but he takes hold of the seed of Abraham," Hebrews 2: 16. That is God's sovereignty. Why should He do it, save that He is pleased to do it? He is pleased to magnify His grace, to exalt His own Name in the glory of what His own grace is able to do, but, if, on the one hand, it is infinite grace that takes up such as we, there is another side to it and that is that He makes us entirely worthy of the position which His love has marked out for us. While it is right to have low thoughts of ourselves, to be marked by humility, it is not right to have thoughts of ourselves lower than what God thinks of us. You will remember that when the unbelieving spies came back and spread a bad report of the land, they said, "we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight," Numbers 13: 33. That was not the divine view of the people at all. Balaam, a little later, had his eyes opened and said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them," Numbers 23: 21. God's view of the saints is not at all that they are grasshoppers, and we are not to have a view of ourselves less than what God has of us. So it says, "he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved," Ephesians 1: 4 - 6. That is one central point that is to hold our hearts, "the Beloved." It is the light that governs the present dispensation. It says in Isaiah 60: 1, "Arise, shine! for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee." Our light has come. It is the light of Christ in glory, and then of the assembly as of Him and united to Him, so that the first thing that is to hold our hearts is the light of "the Beloved." It is Christ in a settled position, loved of God, on account of what He is in His moral excellence in manhood and in sonship; beloved in that position. He is the antitype of both David and Solomon. It says, we have been "taken into favour in the Beloved." That is the position which we fill out in sonship and then it adds, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace." We have that in the Beloved,

and through *His* blood, the blood of the Beloved. How touching that is, dear brethren.

In Proverbs 8: 24, Solomon writes, "When there were no depths, I (wisdom) was brought forth," but there came a time when depths came into evidence, and one of the greatest depths that came into evidence was when God's Beloved went down into death and judgment that we might receive forgiveness of sins. The depths have come into evidence, and God has brought in wisdom in order that we should be furnished with that which is intended to appeal to our hearts and enrich them with a sense of how blessed God is. Paul prays that God would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. That is the great thing, and then, not only are we taken up in sonship, but God would have us marked by intelligence. To be characterised by affection and liberty are two great features of sonship, but also to be characterised by intelligence. A parent who has young boys regards them, of course, as his sons; they are his sons. At the same time, they do not represent, while they are boys, the full thought of sonship. The full thought of sonship involves full manhood, so that they are capable of entering in an affectionate and intelligent way into the thoughts of the father. Having introduced this thought of sonship, we get the further thought then that God has abounded towards us in the riches of His grace in making known to us the mystery of His will. He wants us to be fully intelligent, and all this, dear brethren, is to take shape now. It is not at all the thought that it should be put off to the future. There is no object in putting off to the future our becoming intelligent as to the administration of the fulness of times, because when the fulness of times has come the administration will be seen, but what God wants us to be intelligent about is what He is doing before it actually comes to pass, and so He has made known to us the "mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fulness of times; to head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth; in him, in whom we have also obtained an inheritance." That shows the place that the assembly has with Christ. It answers to Eve as given to Adam, for Adam was set over all the works of God's hand. There were the fowl of the heavens, the cattle, every beast of the field, the creeping things, and the fish of the sea, all were placed under Adam. He was set over them all as head. It was a prefiguring of what God has purposed for the administration of the fulness of times, that all things are to be headed up, both heavenly and earthly, in the Christ.

Now Adam being in that position, God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate, his like," Genesis 2: 16. There is the deep sleep and the rib taken out of the side of Adam, and the building of the

woman, and the bringing her to the man. She was brought to the man in that position, and that is exactly what is before us here: "In whom," that is, in Christ, "we have also obtained an inheritance." We have an inheritance with Christ because He is to inherit all things and we are to have part with Him in His inheritance. The point is, dear brethren, Are these things to affect us now? It is a wonderful thing that these things are ours, but how are we to be fitted to have part with Christ in that day? Adam rejoiced when he saw someone brought to him whom he could recognise as being worthy of him, and capable of entering intelligently with him into the position in which God had placed him. He said, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: this shall be called Woman, because this was taken out of a man," Genesis 2: 23. That is, there was, in feminine form, in the affections and grace connected with the feminine idea, that which was the exact counterpart to the man. That is what we are to have before us, dear brethren. This is God's side of the matter. In the fifth chapter of this epistle, we have Christ's side of the matter (Christ viewed in this position as the One in whom all things are to be headed up); "the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless." We only arrive at what is holy and without blemish as we are brought into correspondence with Christ, and hence that is what we come to in chapter 4, what God is working for at the present time in the assembly. We read in chapter 4 that Christ has gone up far above all heavens. "Wherefore, he says, Having ascended up on high, he has led captivity captive, and has given gifts to men. But that he ascended, what is it that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same who has also ascended up above all the heavens."

I was speaking a moment ago of the exalted position in which Christ is. He is there permanently, never to be dislodged from it. He is to be taken account of there. It says, "He ... has also ascended up above all the heavens." In the first chapter He is presented as being set by God in this exalted position; in this chapter He is presented as gone there in His own right and power, "ascended up above all the heavens." We get a wonderful view of Christ, the One whom God has supremely exalted on the one hand, and the One who has in His own Person the inherent right and power to go far above all heavens, beyond the created sphere, and hence we are in the presence of the greatest conceivable thing: a divine Person in manhood, and yet we are to be united to Him. We are not to have part in Deity, of course, but, at the same time, to be brought near, to a most intimate and most holy place, to be united to a Man who has

part in Deity. "He has ascended up above all the heavens." He has gone there in His own right and power, far outside the created sphere. What a glorious Christ! Then from that position, so to speak, unaffected by conditions down here; that is, not operating from that standpoint but operating entirely from the standpoint of divine counsels, He has given gifts, but then there is a parenthesis to call attention to the fact that before He ascended He descended first into the lower parts of the earth. All that had in mind the formation of the assembly. The body of Christ is to be brought into view, and is to be brought into view as corresponding with Himself, as formed under the influence of His love expressed in death. Adam went into a deep sleep, and the woman was formed out of what was taken out of his side in the deep sleep, and Christ has gone down into the lower parts of the earth. It means complete identification in love with the position in which we were; not, of course, that the assembly has any past history, I am not suggesting that, but then the assembly, as the body of Christ, is to be formed in moral features, formed in features that are of God, formed in love, in righteousness, in holiness, and these things are learned in the light of the death of Christ. Those who are to compose the body of Christ are those who have had a past history, though viewed as the subjects of the work of God they have no responsible past history. So the process of formation goes on, and Christ has ascended up above all the heavens, and from that position He has given gifts. Later in this same chapter, we read, "But ye have not thus learnt the Christ, if ye have heard him and been instructed in him according as the truth is in Jesus; namely, your having put off according to the former conversation the old man which corrupts itself according to the deceitful lusts; and being renewed in the spirit of your mind; and your having put on the new man, which according to God is created in truthful righteousness and holiness." It is a question, I believe, of the way the work of God goes on. On the one hand, there is Christ personally before us: "But ye have not thus learnt the Christ," and then the entire disallowance of one order of man in order that an order of manhood created according to God in righteousness and true holiness should come into view. That truth is learned in Christ and in the light of His death: "Ye have not thus learnt the Christ, if ye have heard him and been instructed in him according as the truth is in Jesus." Now the work of God is going on in the formation of the body of Christ. We should bear in mind that what is in view is the formation of this vessel that is to be the fulness of Christ, the complete answer to all that is found in Him as a Man. There are two means which God employs, and the first is the gifts from an ascended Christ, and the second is what we ourselves do amongst ourselves as holding the truth in love. These are the two means by which God is effecting His present thoughts in the saints. First of all there are the gifts from Christ ascended far above all heavens: they represent the invincible

power of the ascended Christ. They are used, it says, "For the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man." The Son of God is God's ideal. A divine Person in manhood is God's idea of manhood, and we are to have an apprehension of the Son of God and arrive, in the appreciation of Him, at the full measure of stature, no less measure of stature than that of the fulness of the Christ.

I trust that I am able to convey what one has in mind. One seeks to present the great thought before the mind of God, the body of Christ, the fulness of Christ, and that what God is effecting now by means of the gifts is nothing less than this, and what we are to have before us is nothing less than this, "The measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ," no less measure. The Son of God is God's ideal. The Christ is what He is working to, and so no less a thought than the full thought of manhood as set out in Jesus is to be before our hearts. I need not say that there is a double thought in God's mind, in regard to manhood as seen in Jesus. One is that Man is before Him entirely for His pleasure, capable of responding to Him in a way that affords Him satisfaction, and the other is that Man is in view as the One in whom God can be perfectly expressed. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion," Genesis 1: 26. Both these thoughts are to be filled out in Christ and the assembly, His body, for the assembly is the great vessel in which God is to be ministered to for His own pleasure, in affectionate and intelligent response. It is also the vessel through which Christ will fill all things with the knowledge of God. Indeed, He will fill all things by the assembly, I have no doubt, for the pleasure of God. The assembly will shed its own influence over all the other families, and as influenced by it, they will yield pleasure to God, but then also by means of the assembly Christ will fill all things with what is morally of Himself and thus truly expressive of God, for He is the image of the invisible God.

There is not only what ministry has in view, but there is also the part we are all to play in this. There is something now brought in which is not a question of gift. We are not all gifted but we all have a part to play in this matter of the edifying of the body. Verse 15 reads, "But holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply." It is a question of the saints as set together, compacted, every joint doing its part. How important this is in our local companies, that we should be compacted, and that everyone should hold himself under the influence of Christ, and that the truth should be held in love, not abstractly, but in love, understanding that

all the saints are essential for it. "God ... has raised us up *together*, and has made us sit down *together* in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." All the saints are necessary. We do not want to be without them. It is a question of being fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply; each brother and sister having something to supply with a view to the increase and building up of this vessel which has one end in view and that is the expression of Christ. That is what is contemplated here: "according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love." As the truth is held in love, and we are growing up in all things to Christ, who is the Head, and deriving from Him, there is the ability to edify ourselves. The body edifies itself in love.

In closing, I want to refer to the passage in Joshua, for I think that is illustrative of what I have been saying, and also brings in a further feature which enters into what God is effecting. Joshua 10 is, I believe, the point of greatest power reached by the people under Joshua, and the beginning of the chapter presents to us certain kings of whom the first was the king of Jerusalem, coming against the people to prevent them from entering into the inheritance which God had prepared for them. Jerusalem in Scripture nearly always sets forth the truth of the assembly in actual expression among the saints, not in the abstract thought of it, which is more Zion, but in actual expression among the saints, and that was in enemy hands. A king of the Amorites was king of Jerusalem and it was a question of the people of God coming into their inheritance. They went to battle and the people themselves effected a great deal, and then, in addition to what the people effected, God effected a great deal. He cast down hailstones from heaven so that there was a complete victory gained by this two-fold means what the people themselves did, how they slew the enemies, and then what God Himself did from heaven, hailing down hailstones upon them. It is a good thing, dear brethren, to see that these are the two lines on which God is operating now with a view to our being brought practically into His present thoughts for us. There is what is being effected in the power of gift from Christ in heaven, but we must not think that everything is going to be effected by gift. There is what we have to do ourselves, and as we set ourselves to do our part, we shall find that God is with us, and that the power exercised by Christ in heaven will help to further what we, ourselves, are doing, but both means were used in this great victory to overthrow these kings, so that the people of God might go into the inheritance. But then there is another thing and that is the power of prayer. Joshua saw what was needed, that the day should go beyond the length of an ordinary day, and so he calls upon the sun to stand still. He says, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon."

We must acknowledge that there is much to be done yet if the saints are to be brought into full possession of all that God has in His mind for them. With all the light that God has given us, and the Lord has been giving us much light, we must acknowledge we have a long way to go yet as regards actually getting into these things in power. So that Joshua, seeing what was needed there, called upon the sun to stand still. He seeks that the full shining of Christ should continue, the sun stood still in the midst of heaven. It is a question of appealing, so to speak, that the full shining of Christ should be brought to bear powerfully upon the saints. "Arise, shine: for thy light is come," Isaiah 60: 1. The apostle says, "Wake up, thou that sleepest, and arise up from among the dead, and the Christ shall shine upon thee," Ephesians 5: 14. It is a question of prayer that calls upon God to cause the light of Christ and all that it means to shine powerfully upon the present situation, that the saints should be brought into their inheritance. So Paul, in the epistle to the Ephesians, doubtless feeling that it was beyond even his ability to set out at great length what the thoughts of God were, and indeed if there were any attempt to define them it would but limit them, whereas in fact, they are illimitable, just sets out enough to convey the mind of God in outline and to incite interest in it on our part, and then he prays. He tells us in chapter 1 at great length what he prays, and in chapter 3 he prays again, that the Father would strengthen us with might by His, the Father's, Spirit "in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." It is as though he is crying to the Father that He would cause the Christ to shine, and to shine unchallenged upon the hearts of the saints. That is what Paul does, he prays, he bows his knees. There was never a day like this day in Joshua which extended about the length of two days, and that is what this present dispensation is doing. It is being extended about the length of two days. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," 2 Peter 3: 8. This great dispensation is being extended because God has His choicest thoughts to effectuate in the saints. So what is needed in addition to what we do ourselves and what Christ does from heaven is that there may be power to pray, and power to pray in a way that will prevail: "And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man." A man commanded the situation. You may rest assured the more we pray in relation to these great things, the more God will answer it in bringing the saints into them in power. Paul prays in chapter 3, and in chapter 6 he urges us, to pray and persevere in it for all the saints. He enlarges on the necessity for prayer. As to this great victory, it says, "There was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel."

That is all I had to say, to stimulate us in the recognition of the importance of this day, the great things that God has in mind for the saints that we are to be brought into. I repeat that it is not a question of waiting until the Lord comes, to bring us into these things. What Ephesians has in mind is not the future but the present, the saints entering into their portion at the present time. There is ministry from the Christ in glory; there is also what each is to do as a joint of supply contributing his own part; and then, finally, there is the great power of prayer, prayer exercised by those who have power with God, for God will hearken to the voice of the man who is in the appreciation of His thoughts regarding the assembly and desires that the saints may come into them.

CHRIST'S FEELINGS TOWARDS THE SAINTS EXPRESSED IN PAUL

2 Corinthians 13: 11 - 14; Colossians 4: 7 - 18

We were speaking this afternoon, dear brethren, of Joseph in relation to his brethren, and all the feelings which were found with Joseph, and I have read these scriptures as indicating, I believe, something of the feelings of Christ in regard of the saints as finding expression through Paul, because every right feeling in regard of the saints has been derived from Christ.

In Exodus 28 we have in Aaron clothed with the garments of glory and beauty, a type of Christ in His present position and service on high as personally sustaining the whole service of God in the assembly down here on earth. If you will remember, on the skirts of the cloak of the high priest were pomegranates and bells, the pomegranates being very suggestive of the local assemblies, each pomegranate being complete in itself and yet each setting out the idea of unity in itself. Then along with the pomegranates, suggestive of the local companies in their unity and fruitfulness under the eye of God, there were golden bells, suggesting that there is not only what is for the pleasure of God in the local companies, but also there is to be testimony, the bells undoubtedly referring to that. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, "the word of the Lord sounded out from you." The remarkable thing is that all these are presented as on the skirts of the cloak of the high priest; that is, they are all sustained and supported by the high priest personally. When you begin to think of what there is in the world today of true assembly character in all but one, at any rate, of the continents, you can understand how immense is the service of Christ in sustaining that for the pleasure of God day in and day out, and I might say night in and night out,

for "He that keepeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep," Psalm 121: 4.

Another thing to be remembered is that it is supported feelingly, for the people of God were carried on the high priest's shoulders according to their birth, referring, I believe, to what the Lord Jesus is doing as interceding for every one of us individually at the present time. Romans 8: 34 states that and adds, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" All finds its answer in the intercession which the love of Christ is carrying on at the present time, and not only so, but the names of the children of Israel were borne in four rows of three on the breastplate of the High Priest, the breastplate of judgment, and the four rows of three undoubtedly allude to the four camps of three tribes each in which the people of God were set around the tabernacle;

that is, it refers to the saints as committed publicly to the testimony of God in their various local settings, tribal settings, using the type, and in that setting also, not merely in the individual needs and pressures and testings of the saints, but in connection with the exercises which they have as seeking to move together in their respective localities, the saints are being borne up before God by the Lord Jesus continually on the breastplate of judgment, meaning that He has a perfect judgment as to the conditions that exist in every locality. He has a perfect knowledge of them, and a perfect judgment as to them; a judgment as to what is the cause of anything that is lacking or unsatisfactory; a judgment as to what is the need in each locality.

It is a great thing to have a sense, that the heart of Christ is caring for the saints, but caring for them, if I may venture to use the expression, feelingly and intelligently; that is caring for them in relation to what the thoughts of God concerning them are, and having no less desire than that there should be a complete answer to those thoughts amongst the saints. We see that in Epaphras in Colossians. He had learned from Christ, for he continued urgently in prayer that the saints at Colosse should stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. He was not content with half measures; however far they might have attained, he wanted them to go still further, and we may rest assured, dear brethren, as knowing something of the Lord Jesus, as knowing how characteristically He is devoted to the will of God, that He will not rest content until a perfect answer to God's thoughts is found amongst His people.

Now, I have said that much by way of introduction, but also to impress us with this thought of the feelings of the heart of Christ, and how those feelings will find expression and reproduction in those who are near to Him. That is particularly seen in Paul, for I have no doubt Paul stands out head and shoulders above anyone else in this matter of feeling for the saints. He says in 2 Corinthians, "the crowd of cares pressing on me daily, the burden of all the assemblies," and at the same time it was not limited to the state of the assemblies, but his interest in the saints was individual as well; so he says further, "Who is stumbled, and I burn not?" If he heard of one stumbled soul, one young brother or sister it might be, who was stumbled, his heart burned at the thought of it, his spiritual indignation, so to speak, was awakened as he heard of even one soul amongst the saints being stumbled. So if Paul could be marked by similar feelings, there is no reason why we should not be also, in our measure. I do not think it was exactly apostolic, although no doubt his position as apostle largely contributed to it, but feelings of this kind are not a matter of gift, they are a matter of being near to the Lord, and of getting an impression in nearness to Christ of what His own feelings are in regard of the saints. So the apostle, as concluding his second letter to the Corinthians says,

"For the rest, brethren, rejoice." That is his final word to us. The Corinthian epistle, as we know, deals with the saints in their local settings as committed in the locality where they live to the testimony of God; whereas the Colossian saints are viewed in connection with heavenly truth, the universal setting of the assembly, and in both settings we get the apostle's feelings in regard of the saints coming out in these verses we have read.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul had addressed them in both epistles as "the assembly of God which is in Corinth." Brethren will, I am sure, understand that in nothing I am saying am I assuming that the saints in this place, or anywhere else, moving together in the truth, claim to be the assembly of God, or can claim to be that. That would be presumption, because we represent only a fraction of the whole number of saints that there are, but in the mercy of God we have been delivered from captivity; for the church as a whole is in captivity to the world, but we are living in days in which God has wrought to deliver some of His people from captivity, and we are among those set free, that is our position. Just as in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, those who came up from captivity were enabled of God to build the house and to set up the service of God in it; and to build the wall and dedicate it with the gates proper to it, so in this our day those saints who have been set free from what is contrary to God, are in a position, if they will go on with the Lord and with the Spirit, and govern themselves by the truth that relates to the assembly; to enjoy every feature of the truth, although it be only in outward smallness and weakness. Therefore we may take up humbly the thoughts of God regarding the assembly; and, indeed, dear brethren, if we do not, we are unrighteous, for there is no other truth than the truth of the assembly that can possibly regulate saints going on together. It is a matter of positive righteousness as we seek to go on together to regulate ourselves by the light that governs the assembly.

Having said that, I return to what I was saying, that the apostle addressed both his epistles to the Corinthians to "the assembly of God which is in Corinth." That is something to rejoice in, dear brethren; he says, "For the rest, brethren, rejoice," the idea being that at Blenheim, or any place you like to name, where any saints are available as delivered from what is opposed to the truth, there should be in that place something that answers to the thought of God's assembly. There should be a vessel in the place which the Lord claims as His own, "My assembly," and which He is prepared to sustain provided the conditions necessary are there; and in spite of all the evil that is around, in the very presence of it, that there should be what is available under the hand of Christ to maintain the service of God for His pleasure, and to maintain in the midst of the evil around a true light as to God, light as to His holiness and

faithfulness, in unity amongst ourselves, and with the ability to deal with evil, if it should show itself, in a way according to God. All these things are features of glory, things that properly belong to the assembly of God, and it is a matter to rejoice in, dear brethren, that it is open to us to have our part in these great things. The time for it will soon be gone, the opportunity will soon be past. The days of our receiving up are near, and therefore the urgent need that we should all be of one mind, to provide under the hand of the Lord the conditions in which He can maintain the service of God and a true testimony to His name.

So the apostle says, "For the rest, brethren, rejoice." In each epistle he had linked a brother with himself, Sosthenes in the first epistle, and Timotheus in the second, in each case calling him "the brother." That is, these two elements are always necessary if there is to be a prosperous condition of things in a local company. There must be what is authoritative on the one hand, not in the assertion of authority on the part of one not having it, but authoritative in the sense of the apostle's doctrine, and what is brotherly on the other. So he says, "For the rest, brethren, rejoice; be perfected; be encouraged; be of one mind; be at peace." There is only one mind that is properly characteristic of the assembly, dear brethren. The apostle develops it in Philippians. He presents it in a most exalted form in Philippians 2, saying, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men." No reputation! and a bondman! What a mind to shine out in one who is God, yet did not claim for Himself the glory and dignity proper to Deity, but took a bondman's form. It is possible that this mind should be in us. You will remember how Abigail was attracted by the light of God's anointed as found here in wilderness conditions, and how David sent a message to her that he wished her to become his wife. That is exactly what the Lord would say to us. He is here in testimony in wilderness conditions and He wants His assembly to be thoroughly united to Him in one mind and one thought; and Abigail said, "Let thy handmaid be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." She was, so to speak, of one mind with Christ who became a bondman, who assumed that form. She says, 'All I want, my greatest aspiration, is to be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.' That is the spirit in which things will prosper in any local company. How that will develop mutuality, and affection, and consideration for one another, just one or two moving in that spirit, with no other thought before them. And so she became united to David. So the apostle says, "Be of one mind, be at peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

Then he says, "Salute one another." He is concerned about mutual feelings among the brethren. "Salute one another with a holy kiss." It is a salutation that is to be holy. One is not suggesting that it be taken up literally in an actual kiss, but whatever form the greeting may take, whether kiss or handshake, greet one another with it in holiness. Let love be expressed in the salutation. "Salute one another with a holy kiss. All the saints salute you," that is, the saints at the place from which he was writing. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." So he brings in the whole Godhead, beginning with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, I believe, a subduing influence. It is a remarkable thing that he should not begin with God. One would have thought that as he was going to bring in the activity of the Godhead, he would have begun with God, but he begins with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a subduing influence. You will remember how the dew comes down from heaven, even Nebuchadnezzar was bathed with the dew of heaven. There was that subduing influence, so to speak, interwoven with God's governmental ways with that man. "His body was bathed with the dew of heaven till seven times had passed over him." And so the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is a kind of subduing influence.

The apostle says in this epistle, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he being, rich; became poor, in order that ye by *his* poverty might be enriched," 2 Corinthians 8: 9. All that is to be carried in our minds. The apostle, with great feeling, as one expressive of this grace, brings it to bear upon us. You will remember how he appeals to them, saying in the first epistle, "For if ye should have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the glad tidings. I entreat you therefore, be my imitators," 1 Corinthians 4: 15. How the feelings of Paul come out in that way as expressive of the feelings of Christ! "I entreat you therefore, be my imitators." He says in that same passage, "Railed at we bless; persecuted, we suffer it; insulted, we entreat; we are become as the offscouring of the world, the refuse of all, until now." That is what he brings to bear upon the Corinthians, so that they might have before them in himself the pattern of true Christianity, and in order that it might be strengthened, he sends Timotheus, who, he says, "is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ, according as I teach everywhere in every assembly," 1 Corinthians 4: 17. It is a most important thing that the assembly is to be according to one pattern. Paul, like Moses coming down from the mountain with the pattern of the tabernacle, had the pattern in his mind before ministering and before coming to Corinth. He had the whole plan as a wise architect and he laid the foundation. A

builder does not start to build until he has the plan. The plan is first drawn up, and then the work proceeds according to the plan, and Paul had the whole plan of the assembly as God had it in His mind; and not only did he minister the truth but he exemplified it in his ways as they are in Christ, as he says, "according as I teach everywhere in every assembly." Every assembly was intended to take on the same pattern of ways as they are in Christ. He sent Timotheus into their midst as one who, by his own ways, would remind them of Paul's ways as they are in Christ.

Then he brings in "the love of God." The love of God is like a rock, it stands true in everything and sure for ever. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 8: 38, 39. It is a kind of home we can all retire into. The world knows nothing of it. It belongs to the saints. The very thought of it should draw us together, and it does so, to think we have part together in these things that the world knows nothing of. "And the communion of the Holy Spirit." We know something of the blessedness of that at a reading meeting when the Lord helps us; we are conscious of the communion of the Holy Spirit, we partaking together happily in the things of the Spirit. The Spirit is operating and making divine things real and living amongst us, and we are partaking in it, and we are to increase in that more and more, it is proper to the assembly. The apostle says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." These are his feelings as expressed toward the Corinthians and toward us all in the local settings in which we are as in the presence of hades' gates. All these resources are available to us so that we may be rejoicing, may be of one mind, and live in peace; and we shall find that God, known as the God of love and peace, will be with us.

When we come to Colossians, the apostle is writing to the saints not viewed exactly as in a local setting,

but more as holy and faithful brethren in Christ who were marked by faith in Christ Jesus and love towards all the saints, and he introduces one after another, all marked by different spiritual features, for their encouragement. He says, "Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-bondman in the Lord, will make known to you all that concerns me; whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that he might know your state, and that he might encourage your hearts." He is sent to them for the purpose, primarily, that he should declare to them all that concerned Paul. All this is most interesting, as

showing the mutual feelings subsisting between the apostle and the saints; that he counted upon them to be interested to hear about him, and he on his part would be most interested to hear about them. So he sends Tychicus to them, whom he commends to them as a beloved brother and faithful minister, one prepared to do anything in the service, a fellow-bondman in the Lord. How beautiful all these things are. It is a great stimulus to us, dear brethren, to be able to take account of the work of God in one another, and specially to see it in a wider way than what is merely local. By all means let us know and value one another locally. That is an important feature in binding us together; in fact I know of no other way to esteem others better than ourselves than by concentrating our attention on the work of God in each other. It is the only way to do it. We may look on someone and say, that sister is a great deal more patient than I am; and another brother is a great deal more faithful in testimony among men than I am; and someone else is more devoted than I am. You feel these things as you look on one another and take account of the work of God in them. Paul says in Philippians 2: 3, "in lowliness of mind, each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves."

This is a most important element if we are to go on happily and unitedly, and the secret of it is to fix our attention on the work of God in one another, and if need be, to ask the Lord to open our eyes to see it. Paul speaks in this beautiful way of Tychicus. Tychicus seems, from this epistle to the Colossians and also the epistle to the Ephesians, to be one particularly near to the apostle, able to show the Colossians how Paul was getting on. And he would also ascertain for the apostle's information, how the Colossians were getting on, and further he would encourage their hearts.

Then Paul brings in Onesimus, whom he calls, "the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you." You can see how Paul is fixing his eyes on the work of God in one and another. Onesimus, the runaway slave of Philemon had been converted and brought into touch with Paul while he was in bonds at Rome, and became converted. He belonged to Colosse, we may assume that Philemon lived at Colosse by comparing this with the epistle to Philemon. There seems to be no doubt that the two epistles were written at the same time and conveyed at the same time, probably by Onesimus himself. So Paul says, "Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you." He had not been that when the Colossians last saw him, but now he was to return to them as a faithful and beloved brother, "who is one of you." He would evidence amongst them the work of God who had taken up one from their very midst and converted him. We know how cheering it is when the work of God in an unlikely person in our midst comes to light in an unlikely way; how encouraging and stimulating it is to the hearts of the saints. Paul is not only

ministering the truth, but bringing things to the notice of the brethren that will all help to stimulate their interest in divine things, and link them on in their affections with the work of God outside their own locality as well as in it.

Then he says, "Aristarchus my fellow-captive." That is another commendation, suffering for the truth's sake with Paul. That is a great commendation. "And Mark, Barnabas' cousin, concerning whom ye have received orders, if he come to you, receive him." He is an evidence of recovering grace. Onesimus is expressive of the grace in the gospel to pick up an unlikely person and set him amongst the brethren, making him a faithful and beloved brother. Now, Mark, sister's son to Barnabas, is evidence of recovering grace. "If he come to you, receive him, and Jesus called Justus These are the only fellow-workers for the kingdom of God who have been a consolation to me." It is a good thing, beloved brethren, to fix our eye on the features of the work of God in one another, and on what God is doing, not only in our own locality, but in every locality. It all helps to stimulate interest in what is going forward, and what is going forward is the truth of the assembly in all its features, and we are here for that very thing and for nothing else. When Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee but my Father who is in the heavens," Matthew 16: 17. That is that God had wrought in Peter's soul and given him light as to Christ. So the Lord tells him he was blessed by reason of that fact, and that is true of everyone here. It may be that there are plenty of people we know who have no light in their souls as to Christ, and no appreciation of Him. How is it then that we have? Simply because God has operated sovereignly, and thus we can take account of ourselves as blessed, and rejoice in it. Why has He done it? After the Lord said that to Peter, He said, "I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter." That is to say you are a stone. God has not wrought in you in order that you should fritter your time away in the transient things of this life, but that you should fulfil your responsibility in relation to the assembly. That is what the Lord said to Peter, and that is what everyone is to understand, that the sole reason we are here is to fill out our place in the assembly of God.

So the apostle brings forward these different features for their encouragement and joy. "And Jesus called Justus." I suppose he was one outstandingly known as righteous in all his ways, so he is surnamed Justus. We all should be righteous, but some are outstandingly so, they have that reputation publicly, a very good feature. So it says, "who are of the circumcision. These are the only fellow-workers for the kingdom of God who have been a consolation to me." Then he comes down to a local brother. "Epaphras, who is one of you, the bondman of Christ Jesus, salutes you, always combating earnestly for you in

prayers, to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." You might say Epaphras had a high standard before him, and he had, dear brethren, and the Lord has a high standard before Him, and God has a high standard before Him, and God is going to reach it. Let us be with Him in it. This can be filled out by anyone in any locality. Epaphras was a local brother, "one of you," not exactly brought forward as an outstanding gift although a servant of Christ, and in the first chapter spoken of as a faithful minister of Christ and a beloved fellow-bondman, but what characterised him was his earnest prayer for the saints in his own locality that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." What is the reason for telling us this? Is it to no purpose? If I know that one brother or sister in my locality is constantly day and night praying fervently that we in that locality might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, is it not intended that it should start an inquiry on my part as to what the will of God is for the saints, and what it means, to stand perfect and complete in it? That is what is intended, that we should have our faces in the one direction with nothing else before us than what is perfect and complete according to all the will of God. That involves every feature of the truth of the assembly. That is the will of God for the present moment. Then he brings in Luke. "Luke, the beloved physician, salutes you." He is one whose influence would be healing, binding, a comforting influence, a brother who always kept himself out of sight, always in the background, content to be one of the 'we' that we hear of in Acts; hiding himself behind Paul and his company, but going along with Paul and supporting him to the last, as it says in 2 Timothy, "Luke alone is with me." He goes right through with Paul to the very end. "Luke, the beloved physician," Paul says, "salutes you, and Demas." It is most sorrowful the way he says "and Demas." He has nothing to say about him. Not long afterwards he writes about Demas and says, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age," 2 Timothy 4: 10. Paul had to say that not long after he wrote this epistle. Here, we might safely say, Paul was sensing something of that sort, and so he says, "and Demas." He wanted to be included in the salutation and Paul includes him, but says nothing about him. It would be with sorrowful feelings that Paul added, "and Demas." There are sensibilities amongst the saints, "the spiritual discerns all things, and he is discerned of no one," 1 Corinthians 2: 15. You can almost sense the feeling of sorrow that the apostle Paul had as he just said "and Demas."

Then "Salute the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the assembly which is in his house And say to Archippus." First of all they are to see that this epistle is read at Laodicea, and the epistle to be sent from Laodicea is to be read at Colosse, showing the importance of inter-

communication and of seeing that anything of spiritual value is passed on and circulated and shared. Pass on this epistle to Laodicea and see that you read the one from Laodicea. Then he says, "Say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, to the end that thou fulfil it." It says in Ephesians 4: 7, "To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ." Everyone has received something whatever it is; whatever we are fitted for in relation to the testimony, take heed that we fulfil it. It would seem that Archippus had received definite gift, and the brethren were to use their influence to urge him not to fail in his responsibility regarding it.

"The salutation by the hand of me, Paul. Remember my bonds." There is this touching appeal for sympathy and affection on the part of the saints with Paul, and all that he stands for, and he stands for the truth of the assembly in relation to Christ and in relation to God, and all that enters into it. Paul stands for that, and he wants us to be thoroughly sympathetic with the heavenly truth that he ministered. I have called attention to these two passages simply as illustrative, I believe, of the feelings of Christ toward us as reflected in Paul. May we be stimulated to answer to His desires for us, for His name's sake.

CHRISTIANITY CHARACTERISED BY GLORY

Ephesians 1: 15 - 20; James 2: 1 - 5; 1 Peter 4: 12 - 15

I wish to speak, dear brethren, of the Father of glory and the Lord of glory and the Spirit of glory, three remarkable expressions involving the three Persons of the Godhead, and showing that each of Them is connected with the idea of glory. I hope the Lord may enable me to convey some impression that Christianity, as enjoyed down here, is a system of glory, not in any fanciful way or using in any sense extravagant expressions, but substantially it is a system of glory, and it is well that our eyes should be open to it, for the more we appreciate that it is so, the more we shall be delivered from any kind of hankering after this present world.

Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, says, "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery"; he says this of himself and his fellow-labourers. He does not speak of the wisdom of this world, but of that hidden wisdom which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory. He evidently contrasts this world, with its princes who, in ignorance of what is truly glorious, have crucified the Lord of glory, with a system of wisdom which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory. Evidently that implies that we are to glory in it. So I think it will be agreed, if we give a moment's thought to it, that to have some sense borne in upon us that we are having part now, by the grace of God and as drawn to Christ, and as having been sealed with the Holy Spirit, in a system of glory which God had predetermined before the ages for us, for ourselves, is something that might well stimulate us to know more about what it is that we have come into; and to be happily in it, because no one is so unsatisfied as a believer who tries to have a little bit of two worlds. A believer who tries to find a certain amount of enjoyment in relation to this world, and at the same time to have his links with the people of God and enjoy something of the privileges belonging to the people of God, I say such a believer is always unsatisfied. He has no satisfaction in the world really, only a guilty conscience, and a heavy heart, and a guilty conscience and a heavy heart are, of course, utterly opposed to any real enjoyment of spiritual things.

Now in writing to the Ephesians the apostle speaks of the Father of glory. We have in these passages I have read from Paul's ministry, and from James' ministry, and from Peter's ministry, evidence to show how unified the great apostles were in appreciating that what they were having part in with their fellow-believers was a system of glory. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, "Wherefore I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is in you, and the love which ye have towards all the saints, do not cease giving thanks

for you, making mention of you at my prayers." I believe that faith in the Lord Jesus as brought in in this epistle, does not merely refer to that initial faith which marks us as we believe the gospel, but rather to that settled faith which is characteristic of established believers, that their affections, and their faith as entering into their affections, are livingly and abidingly connected with Christ where He is. "The Lord Jesus" is an expression peculiar to Paul's ministry and expresses the way in which Christ is held affectionately by those composing the assembly. It is a combination of the reverential address that is due to our Lord Jesus Christ in view of who He is, with that personal appreciation of Christ and knowledge of Him which is unique to the assembly.

The Lord, when making Himself known to Saul of Tarsus at the outset, having in mind to give him an impression which would afterwards colour his ministry, called him by name, and Saul said, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the Lord said, "I am Jesus." He might have said many other things which would have been true, but He did not; He said, "I am Jesus." Indeed, in one place it is recorded that He said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth." So the faith of Saul, in the full light of the glory in which he apprehended Christ, for he saw the Lord, was to be connected with Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, indeed, one bearing the reproach connected with Nazareth. What I am stressing is that He was to be known in that personal way as *Jesus*. At the close the Lord, addressing Himself to the assembly through John, says, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies," Revelation 22: 16. In the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as we read through their records, we find that they constantly refer in the simplest and happiest way to Jesus. I believe it is essential that we should be developed in the reverence that is due to the Lord Jesus before we can rightly speak of Jesus; but I believe there is a way in which, in the Spirit's power, we may rightly speak of Jesus. The world will speak of Jesus as a mere man, but Jesus is a name which is particularly cherished by the assembly, indeed, I believe, cherished only by the assembly. As understanding who He is, the assembly, in speaking to Him, very often says, 'Lord Jesus,' and in speaking of Him uses the expression 'the Lord Jesus.' So Paul said, "Having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is in you, and the love which ye have towards all the saints." Love to all the saints. They were greatly enlarged in their affections as taking in the blessedness of the assembly. How great it is! Think of the different continents in the world, and the different places in those continents where the truth of the assembly is answered to in some measure, and where there are hearts that beat true to the Lord Jesus and at the same time are characterised by love amongst themselves. Think of this, and see how great a vessel the assembly is, even if we exclude for the moment those not at present available, and the myriads

who have fallen asleep, who will all be included when the Lord comes, the millions given to Him. Think how vast the assembly is, and how it enhances the glory of Christ, to think of Him as the One to whom the assembly has been given.

These features proper to the assembly were seen in the Ephesian saints, and Paul, as having heard of it, says, "I ... do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you at my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him." It is a remarkable presentation of God, that He should be spoken of as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is clearly, presenting the Lord Jesus as Man, apprehended as such where He is, and the very expression, our Lord Jesus Christ, I believe, involves the thought that we are associated with Him in that position in which He is apprehended. But that God should be spoken of as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ; that is, God in relation to men, of whom Christ Himself in manhood is the pattern! Think of God having men before Him who take character from Christ, who will, indeed, appear before God in the image and likeness of Christ. Think what a conception it is! That is what God has in mind in regard of the sons of men, His own creatures. The subject is wonderful, dear brethren, that there should be such a Man in the presence of God, the second Person of the Godhead become Man in order that all His thoughts regarding men might be established for His pleasure by bringing into manhood an order of excellence that could not possibly attach to the first order of man. But there He is, in the presence of God, a Man wholly according to God, and we ourselves, in wonderful grace, set up through redemption in His life by the Spirit in order to be before God as in every way conformed to Him.

So the apostle, speaking in this way of God, calls Him the Father of glory; that is, He is the source of all that is true glory; there is much glory at the present time attached to this world, glory of a kind, but it will all pass away. You will remember on one occasion the devil showed the Lord Jesus in a moment of time all the kingdoms of this world and their glory. He was wise to do it in a moment of time. If they were subjected to more than a moment's investigation, the utter worthlessness of man's glory would become apparent, but he unfolds it in a moment of time, and that is all the length of time, according to divine measurement, for which the glory of this world will last. Already it is crumbling to its foundations, but the God of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of glory, the source of all that is truly glorious as worthy of God. So Paul prays to God that He would give us "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling, and what the

riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe." It means that we are to know. May I say at this point that one is impressed with this, that in the presence of the great things which Paul had in his heart as he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, he makes no attempt to explain to them in great detail, but he prays, and he tells us what he prays. In the third chapter he tells us that he bowed his knees, meaning that there was intensity of exercise in his prayer, and I believe what is in mind in all this is, that if we would have a real apprehension of the things which God in His love has purposed for us, and would have the power to enter into them so that we touch them in some measure of power and enjoyment and reality, the great thing to do is to pray, and to pray on these lines; not, of course, uttering Paul's words as having learned them by heart and saying them, for there is no value in that, but as having direction to our exercises by what the apostle indicates as to the lines on which he prayed. I believe the point in all this is that if there is any attempt made unduly to define what spiritual blessings are, the inevitable result will be to limit them, whereas they are in fact illimitable. On the other hand, if there is the exercise and desire to enter into them which shows itself in continual prayer, we shall find that the Spirit of God, who has first-hand knowledge of these wonderful things, will give us more and more an entrance into them, so that we realise that what we are having part in is a system of glory. Paul prays that God "would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling."

When we were first converted, for it was then that God's calling became effective in us, we had nothing else before us than the settlement of the question of our guilt and the meeting of every question that existed in our conscience, and it may be, the settlement of the question of what we discovered in ourselves; that is, nothing else than the question of meeting our need and giving us the certainty of eternal blessing, but God had much more than that in mind. He had in mind the hope of His calling, and what God has in mind for the believer is nothing less than the character and measure of blessing in His presence which is set out in Jesus Himself as a Man there; that order of glorious manhood, great enough to satisfy the heart of God, filled out in the relationship of sonship, with the affections and intelligence proper to it. Then he says, "What the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." When we speak of glory we are very apt to think that glory refers to what is future. I quite agree that in certain connections it does, but what I want to show, if the Lord help me, is that these things are glorious now, and what God has now in the saints is positively glorious, "the riches of the glory of his

inheritance in the saints." As we take account of what marks the world around, the greater part of it characterised, one may say, by total indifference to God; and then a large part of it not marked exactly by total indifference to God, but characterised, it may be only outwardly, but in some cases inwardly, by a certain acknowledgment of God; the whole of the religious systems around us are of that character, but how much is there in it to afford pleasure to God; how much of liberty in it, how much of joy in it, how much affection that moves God-ward in it, how much intelligence in it that God can take pleasure in? If you look at these things soberly, you will realise there is very little indeed in it that God can find pleasure in. On the other hand there are many of His saints, through grace, who have been recovered to God's own thoughts regarding them and delivered from bondage and brought into peace and liberty, with the light of Christ in their souls, and some measure of understanding as to what the assembly is in the thoughts of God, and some measure of power to take these things up in the power of the Holy Spirit. What is the result? God is served affectionately in liberty and intelligence; He is praised; He is prayed to in the spirit of dependence learned from Christ; continual thanksgivings rise to Him from those in happy relations with Him, and this goes on day in and day out. Is there nothing in it for God? There is much in it for God. Perhaps we do not sufficiently take account of it, but we should have our eyes opened to see the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints at the present time. If we say of ourselves that we are very weak in these things, then we need to consider what is the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe according to the working of the might of His strength in which He wrought in the Christ in raising Him from among the dead. That is, the same mighty power which was evidenced in raising Christ from the dead, is at present operating toward us, and if we on our part are available in faith and spiritual desire it will enable us to take up in power what is our true portion.

Now I pass on to the thought of the Lord of glory. I apprehend that when the Lord Jesus is spoken of as the Lord of glory, it has in mind that He is in supreme control of this system of glory which is operating here on earth amongst the saints and which He disposes of, so to speak, as He will, in order that glory may shine more and more. You will remember it says in Genesis 47, speaking of Joseph, that he moved the people into the cities from one end of the land to the other end of the land; that is, Joseph was the lord of the whole land and he was simply disposing of those under his hand to the best advantage. I am quite sure that when we take account of this system of glory, Christianity, which in its working out takes form in local assemblies, if we get an idea of the glory of it and the Lord of glory as controlling it and directing

everything in relation to it, then we shall see how even the movements of the saints may be directed circumstantially from one place to another as all under the hand of the Lord in connection with this system of glory. It may be He sees that one locality needs a particular feature of glory that a brother or sister can bring into it; or sometimes it may be, that He moves to a place someone who may be testing to the brethren, because He wants to bring into that locality certain features of glory that can only be developed by having to meet the testing character of the brother or sister in question. One wants to stress that the Lord of glory has the whole matter of glory in hand; He is disposing of it; He is ordering everything in relation to it. I believe that shines particularly in Acts.

I was referring a moment ago to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus; think what glory shone there, the Lord in heaven, and the arch-persecutor of the saints was there breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. There would have been nothing amiss in it if the Lord had smitten Saul in judgment, and no one could have said it was undeserved, but instead of that He speaks to him in remarkable grace. The Lord Jesus was in heaven, setting forth in Himself as Man what the grace of God was to men; and He Himself as setting it forth would actually dispense that grace, for He is the great Dispenser of all that He has secured by His death and rising again. So He was administering to the chief of sinners the grace of heaven, administering it personally in the very tones and voice in which He spoke to him, and administering it so effectively that a man who had been the chief of sinners, and the worst persecutor of the saints, was transformed, according as the Lord said, to be "an elect vessel to me"; indeed, one who would evince the Spirit of Christ in all his movements and services, and could be taken up as a great vessel of ministry to bring out the thoughts of God. Who would not say glory was shining in that? The Lord of glory was there in charge of the system of glory.

In Acts 12 we find that Herod killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. Was the Lord of glory over that? Triumphantly He was. He could certainly have prevented it if He had chosen, but He did not choose because there is glory attached to suffering for Christ's sake unto death. Different features of glory are to shine out, and if one apostle of the assembly is made to suffer martyrdom for the truth's sake, then glory shines out in it. The Lord of glory was not in any sense limited in His power. We read that Herod also laid hold of Peter. Peter was put in prison to be brought out after Easter, it says, to be slain, and he is there bound with chains and asleep with guards about him, and so on. He was a kind of foreshadowing of what would come in, and has come in, in the history of the assembly when the ministry became

bound. We all know the state of things over a long period of years in the history of the assembly when the enemy succeeded in binding the ministry by means of the system of clerisy. Now in the case of Peter the Lord of glory intervened. An angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the prison. He smote Peter on the side and he rose up and the chains dropped off him. The angel told him to gird on his upper garment and he did so, the Lord of glory was intervening, not intervening as in the case of James, to cause the glory of martyrdom to shine, but now intervening that the glory of the liberation of the truth should shine. So Peter represents the ministry. He rose up and the chains fell off. It was the intervention of the Lord and the gate leading into the city opened before him, it opened of its own accord into the street, like the Lord saying to Philadelphia, "I have set before thee an opened door, which no one can shut," Revelation 3: 8. Peter went into the city; that is, the truth of the assembly has been opened up by the intervention of the Lord. He walked down one street and the angel left him. Wonderful intervention of the Lord of glory. In the last 120 years, after a long period of the ministry of the truth being bound, God has wrought having in mind that the whole scope of the truth regarding the assembly should be opened up to the saints, and they have found an opened door so that they have been able to move forward and provide an answer in the last days to the desires of God and Christ regarding the assembly. All that is glory. I do not know whether we take account of what is moving now amongst the saints from this standpoint, but I would urge brethren to look on these things and see the glory of them. We are bound up with the truth of the assembly and the Lord of glory is with it, and any opposition will be turned to account to bring out further glory.

So we read in Acts 16 how Paul and Silas invaded Europe. It was really the Lord asserting His rights to the Western world, and this country and Australia have really grown out of the Western world, and in the view of God they form part of it. The Lord was invading the Western world in Paul and Silas, in order to bring to pass what has been brought to pass in this part of the world. There was the opposition of the enemy, and Paul and Silas were cast into prison. They were beaten, and their feet put in the stocks, and this is what happened. It says, "At midnight Paul and Silas, in praying, were praising God with singing." They sang praises to God! Was not glory shining in the midst of suffering? It was glory complete, supreme; it was Christianity known in the souls of men against all the power of Rome represented in that jailor. It was the Lord in complete victory, the Lord causing glory to shine; and everywhere, as we go on with the Lord, glory shines, for He is Lord of glory and He was causing glory to shine so that not only Paul and Silas were confirmed in the sense of the glory of that to which they belonged, but that others should get

an impression of it too, and they did. The prisoners listened to them, and the Lord came in with an earthquake, the jailor was converted and his whole house secured. It is a question of the Lord of glory causing glory to shine time after time in His operations in relation to this system of glory to which we belong. The Lord is not concerned for the moment with the world or what is going on in the world save as it affects the saints in the testimony, but He is the Lord of glory; He is supreme in the dispensing and ordering, so to speak, of this system of glory to which we belong.

So right through Acts you find this. Paul later on, it may be marked by a measure of weakness, though one would speak humbly and hesitatingly of it, was in the castle, and that night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good courage; for as thou hast testified the things concerning me at Jerusalem, so thou must bear witness at Rome also," Acts 23: 11. Think of that! There was a man, a prisoner in the hands of his enemies in Jerusalem, and the Lord says, 'You must testify of Me in Rome.' That would settle the matter; he would go to Rome; he would not be slain; the Lord of glory was in complete control; He had given His orders, and whatever man might do to him Paul would go on and testify of the Lord. The Lord of glory was in control. Glory is shining in all these things as we see them with spiritual eyesight, and before Paul got to Rome, at Caesarea, the Lord of glory arranged things so that he should be brought before Festus the governor, king Agrippa and Bernice, and all the grandees of Caesarea. They were all there so that the Lord, through Paul, might give testimony to the immense superiority of His system as compared with the best that this world can bring forward. The prisoner Paul bound with chains, obviously and consciously superior to all that were around him, says, "I would to God, both in little and in much, that not only thou, but all who have heard me this day, should become such as I also am, except these bonds," Acts 26: 29. There is that man exemplifying in himself, and in the very spirit and power in which he spoke, the glory of Christianity and its immense superiority to the best this world can produce. The Lord was in control of it all, and bringing out these features of glory in one and another as He pleased.

Now James, in the verses we have read, says, "My brethren, do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of glory, with respect of persons." It is a question now of having a right view of things. If we are marked by respect of persons, paying regard to the man with the gold ring and fine apparel because of his gold ring and because of his apparel which speak of material wealth, we are not looking at a system of glory at all; we are entirely out of keeping with the Lord of glory. We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was rich, supremely so. It was not a question of a gold ring or goodly apparel with the Lord Jesus Christ. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your

sakes he, being rich, became poor," 2 Corinthians 8: 9. Glory shone in that. You will remember when the mother of Zebedee's children came to the Lord and said, "Speak the word that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand and one on thy left hand in thy kingdom," Matthew 20: 21. Why should her two sons sit there? A mother wanting a place for her two sons in this system of glory. Sometimes we find that sort of thing working amongst the saints, a mother, may be, wanting a place for her son amongst the saints. Has that any place in the system of glory? The Lord says, "Ye know not what ye ask. Can ye drink the cup which *I* am about to drink? They say to him. We are able." Undoubtedly there was affection there for Christ and the Lord says, "Ye shall drink indeed my cup." That obviously does not refer to the cup of wrath, the atoning sufferings of the Lord Jesus, for no one could drink of that cup save the Lord Himself, but it does refer to tasting the reality of suffering for the truth's sake. So the Lord says, "Ye shall drink indeed my cup, but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but to those for whom it is prepared of my Father." The Father is going to decide in regard to Christ's kingdom as to who shall sit on the right hand or the left. The ten were indignant; their pride was touched by the fact that the mother of Zebedee's children should have asked this for her two sons, leaving out the rest. The Lord has to speak to them too, and he says, "Ye know that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them and the great exercise authority over them. It shall not be thus amongst you," Matthew 20: 25. It is a question of having our eyes open to what is truly glorious, and that has to be learned in Christ, and so He adds, "the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." He came to serve, and to serve in self-sacrificing love, not to be ministered to, but to minister. So James warns us against this idea of looking on things as the world does. It is a question of seeing the saints in their glory and value as subjects of the work of God. Does it matter if they are poor as regards this world's goods? Not at all. If God has wrought in them there is new creation there. "If any one be in Christ, there is a new creation," 2 Corinthians 5: 17. It is the work of God, and the work of God is glorious, and that is how we are to regard one another. So James says, "Hear, my beloved brethren: Has not God chosen the poor as to the world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to them that love him?" It is a question of seeing what is truly glorious, and appreciating Christ as the Lord of glory.

In closing, I would say a brief word as to the Spirit of glory to which we have referred in the first epistle of Peter. The apostle is contemplating testing conditions in the world; they were existent at the time he wrote, and there, is much that is testing at the present time to those who desire to be true to

Christ. All down the ages there have been tests, at times more marked than at others, but at the time the apostle wrote things were extremely testing, and he says, "Beloved, take not as strange the fire of persecution which has taken place amongst you for your trial, as if a strange thing was happening to you; but as ye have share in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, that in the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exultation." Suffering for Christ's sake is glorious; it will be seen to be glorious in the day of His glory. It is a question of being patient, as James says, "Have patience, therefore, brethren, till the coming of the Lord." Endurance is the order of the day, and it has in mind the coming of the Lord, and with the coming of the Lord all that is truly glorious will be displayed in glory, and the whole world will see what is truly glorious, but we are to have our eyes open to see it now. "If ye are reproached in the name of Christ, blessed are ye, for the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you." The Spirit of glory! "If ye are reproached in the name of Christ." I suppose the idea is that Christ is seen in the saints, because He is seen in the saints they are reproached, they are reproached in the name of Christ. It is the opposition to Christ that is poured out upon the saints. You will remember the spirit of Christ in the Psalms said of the Lord when He was here, "The reproaches of them that reproach thee have fallen upon me," Psalm 69: 9. He was here for God and for God's name, and all those who hated God vented their hatred of God upon Christ. We are in a similar position in regard to Christ. Christ personally cannot be reached by those opposed to Him, but Christ in the saints can be reached, and as Christ is seen in the saints the hatred that the world feels in regard of Christ is brought to bear upon the saints. "If ye are reproached in the name of Christ, blessed are ye, for the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you." It is not that glory is actually displayed, but the Spirit of it rests upon us. We bear all the features, dear brethren, as we are taken account of as in any way like Christ, of the anointed system that is before God to which Christ Himself gives character. The Spirit of glory rests upon us. Every element of suffering for the name of Christ now, or in His name, will find its answer soon in glory, and the Spirit of glory already rests upon the saints. "The Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God." The Spirit of God is not ashamed of those who are reproached in the name of Christ. He identifies Himself with them; we become conscious of it if in any degree we are reproached in the name of Christ. The Spirit gives confidence to our hearts that we are linked with a system of glory. "The Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you; on their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified."

I do not know that one can say more as to the Spirit of glory, but I have been impressed with these three references: the Father of glory, the Lord of glory,

and the Spirit of glory, as indicating that Christianity as it is known now is a system of glory, and one would desire for oneself and for one's fellow-believers that our eyes might be open to it more and more; a system with which divine Persons Themselves are not ashamed to be identified; the Father the great source of it all; the Lord the great upholder and dispenser of it all; and the Spirit as the One who attaches His own dignity and His own support to those who, in a hostile scene, bear the reproach that is connected with Christ's name.

May the Lord stimulate us to go in more wholeheartedly for these things, and find in them that which is satisfying, and which will make us infinitely superior to all that is connected with this world.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST AS PRESENTED IN THE ARK

Exodus 25:10,11; Exodus 25:16,17; Exodus 25:21,22; Psalm 40:6-8; Psalm 73:1,2; Psalm 73:17,18; Numbers 10:33-36; Joshua 3:14-17; 1 Kings 8:6-11

I wish to say a word, dear brethren, as to the ark of the testimony and the ark of the covenant, knowing that everyone who loves our Lord Jesus Christ will take an interest in every glory in which He is presented to us.

The scriptures I have read in Exodus and the Psalms bear on the ark of the testimony, on Christ presented in that light. The last three bear on Christ viewed as the ark of the covenant. The ark of the testimony is almost always connected with the wilderness. It is not so on one occasion, in Joshua 4: 16, but in the main the ark of the testimony is connected with the wilderness, and that fits in with what we had before us this morning, when we were speaking of the testimony of the Christ having been confirmed amongst the Corinthians.

In Exodus 25 God proposes to His people, as having redeemed them and brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness, that in that position they should make Him a sanctuary that He might dwell among them. Then, as His thoughts were unfolded, it appeared that in that sanctuary He was to be served, and moreover that the sanctuary was to be carried in testimony throughout the wilderness journey. At every place where they stopped it was to be set up again complete, and the service of God connected with it was to be set up, and so throughout the whole of their wilderness journey they were entrusted with the privilege, and committed to the responsibility, of carrying this sanctuary in which God dwelt, setting it up according to His own requirements, defending it from every attack or intrusion upon it, maintaining in it all that was suitable and pleasing to God, and seeing that every feature of His service was functioning in it. Hence, you can well understand that it would constitute a very real testimony to God among the nations they might pass, or with whom they might come into contact during their journey from Egypt to Canaan, a very real testimony as to the character of the living God. Normally it would be seen that He had a dwelling amongst His people characterised by holiness, and that His people, with Him dwelling amongst them, constituted a living system characterised by sacrifice.

Now these are features which are to be seen amongst God's people today. In Psalm 93: 5 it says, "Holiness becometh thy house, O Jehovah, for ever." He has approached us by means of the precious death of Christ and we approach Him on that basis, and as under the influence of the way that God has come out to us in Christ, we ourselves become formed in love; so that Christianity is a system of constant sacrifice, not only in what we say to God, but more

particularly in what we are as characterised by love. In this system, this sanctuary which the people of God were to provide for God's pleasure, the first item in the instructions which Jehovah gave to Moses was the ark. As the instruction unfolded it became clear that the ark was the centre of the system, not literally the centre in a physical sense, in that it was actually in the most inmost place at the extreme end of the tabernacle, but it was the first item, the most prominent one, which God indicated in His instructions, and one, I think we may say, which was intended to give character to the whole of the rest of the system. As an example of that I may point out that not only was the ark of shittim or acacia wood, but the boards and bars of the tabernacle were also to be of the same wood; so also were the table and the two altars, so you will see that the system was intended to take character from the ark.

Another thing is to be noticed in connection with the ark viewed as the ark of the testimony, and that is, it is always, save possibly in the instance in Joshua 4, presented as covered; that is, either covered by the veil, being within the holiest and therefore to be seen only by one going into the holiest, or when the system was in movement, covered actually by the veil, for the priests had to go in and take down the veil and with it cover the ark of the testimony. It was then covered with a covering of badgers' skins, and finally with a cloth wholly of blue. Thus covered it was carried. What I am seeking to point out is that the ark of the testimony is presented as hidden from view, and only to be apprehended by those who take up the exercise of going into the holiest, for only in the holiest could it be seen. That is important, because it is as we seek the presence of God that we gain some impression of Christ as the ark of the testimony: that is to say, it is not something that is open to public gaze; it is not something presented, so to speak, in the initial testimony of the gospel, but it is something which is to be cherished, and cherished by God's people, for while in the old dispensation only the High Priest had access to the holiest and that but once a year, in Christianity the way into the holiest has been made open to us, and we are encouraged and exhorted in Hebrews to draw near and to enter the holiest. It is contemplated that we will make a practice of withdrawing into the presence of God, not for the purpose of making our requests known in relation to our own needs, not indeed necessarily for the purpose of praying at all, for the holiest itself is not connected with the thought of prayer, nor necessarily exactly connected with the thought of worship, though that would result, but more to contemplate what Jesus is and has established in the presence of God.

So I read Psalm 40:6-8 because the Lord in Spirit is presented as saying, "Sacrifice and oblation thou didst not desire: ears hast thou prepared me. Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not demanded; Then said I, Behold, I

come, in the volume of the book it is written of me - To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight, and thy law is within my heart." That gives us a clue to the idea of the ark of the testimony. It is Christ as having come into manhood with a view to establishing all that is in the will of God, and establishing it as cherishing it, as having it in His heart; not merely coming, so to speak, officially to do something as commanded to do it, but coming in as loving God's will and devoting Himself to it. So we read that the ark was to be made of acacia wood; that is a particularly indestructible kind of wood capable of much endurance, signifying, I believe, the distinctive and holy character, the incorruptible character of manhood in which Jesus was found as having become Man; an order of manhood proved in the temptation in the wilderness to be wholly incorruptible, and therefore wholly capable of going through an evil world maintaining all that was due to God, and in no way deflected or corrupted by it. We, as having through redemption received the Holy Spirit, are capable of being formed after the same order of manhood; indeed, in the Spirit, we partake in it, and as, appreciating Christ and abiding in Christ, we may take character from it, so that we ourselves become incorruptible, as it says in John's epistle, "We know that every one begotten of God does not sin, but he that has been begotten of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him," 1 John 5: 18. It is a kind of answer in the saints to what the Lord said of Himself in John 14: 30, "The ruler of the world comes and in me he has nothing."

When Christ came into this world He came in as cherishing all that was in the mind and heart of God to establish. He was going to carry it through and establish it whatever Satan or man might do, and the Lord carried through in triumph every item that was in the will of God. He surrendered nothing. In John's gospel, we hear Him saying, "My food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me and that I should finish his work," John 4: 34. Then again at the close we hear Him saying, "*I* have glorified *thee* on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest *me* that I should do it," John 17: 4, showing that He had carried it through. What He had cherished in His heart He had completed. Not a single item of the will of God was left uncompleted. He went into death in order to establish the will of God for ever. In His death a basis was laid upon which God could effectuate His thoughts in mercy. So we find that upon the ark of the testimony was placed the mercy seat, and from that standpoint God would speak with Moses and communicate His mind to His people. Moreover, in the ark was to be placed the "testimony that I shall give thee." It is once mentioned before the mercy seat is introduced and after the mercy seat is introduced it is mentioned again; it is set in the ark, "the testimony that I shall give thee." I believe the bearing of that is that in answer

to all that Satan brought into this world in introducing into God's creation a will contrary to God's will. God has first of all brought in in Christ One who loved His will and was governed wholly by it, and came in for the express purpose of effecting it, and then on the ground of mercy based in righteousness on His death. God is securing men of Christ's order,

who likewise are governed by delighting in God's will, and are regulated by no other. That means in the full result that we see in Christ in God's presence the pledge of the bringing in and establishing of another world where the will of man in opposition to God is entirely set aside; a world composed of those who take character from Christ, and delight in God's will, so it is a world in which God can dwell complacently.

So the testimony in regard of Christ now, as we have it in Ephesians is "He that descended is the same who has also ascended up above all the heavens, that he might fill all things." He has already gone up far above all heavens with a view to filling all things. There is nothing more striking than that. I urge the brethren to contemplate it that there is a Man now in the presence of God who is going to fill all things. Let the power of it sink into our hearts, that the day is near when there will be no longer room for anything that does not take character from Christ. What a day for God! The day of Christ in contrast to this present scene and all that marks it; a day when the whole universe will be filled with what takes character from Christ, and the greatest influence to bring that to pass will be the assembly, His fulness, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. I trust that what I have said will give you some little impression of what the ark of the testimony is. It is Jesus, known in the truth of His Person, a divine Person become Man, bringing into manhood an order of manhood wholly His own, a wholly incorruptible order of manhood, the great characteristic feature of which is that God's will is delighted in, and God's will is to be established. Moreover, He is apprehended as having already gone through death and triumphantly risen again and been exalted to the right hand of God, indeed, far above all heavens, and from that point He is going to fill all things. That being so, what is the effect of it upon us, dear brethren? This is an item that we carry in testimony, these things having place in our hearts' affections. Obviously, one important result is that no other will than God's will, nothing else but what is taking character from Christ, should prevail in the assembly. The bearing of the assembly at the present time as in testimony here is that it is a sphere where God dwells, and where all things that are going to obtain publicly in the world to come have their answer morally at the present time; hence the more we get the light of this in our souls, the more we shall be regulated by Christ in order to see that conditions in the assembly are, in fact, pleasing to God as governed entirely by His will.

Then there is another thing, and that is illustrated by Asaph in Psalm 73. It has its result in preserving us from becoming affected by influences that otherwise might have a harmful effect upon us in this world. Asaph was a godly man, but he says, "As for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped," the reason for that being as he says, "I was envious at the arrogant, seeing the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs in their death, and their body is well nourished. They have not the hardships of mankind, neither are they plagued like other men." Then in verse 13 he says, "Truly have I purified my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency: For all the day have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." There is a child of God, one of God's people, and he is conscious of what it is to be continually under discipline. Every one of God's children is in greater or less degree under discipline; not necessarily chastening in a severe form, scourging because of failure on our part, but every parent knows that his children, while they are children, always have to be in greater or less degree under discipline; that is to say, there is a certain rule, involving sometimes limitations, which has to be maintained in the home for the instruction and preservation and development of the children. So with God's children, every brother and sister, if he is sensitive, knows that in some way or other he is constantly conscious of God's hand upon him, and necessarily so. We are conscious of the necessity for it, for we are to become partakers of His holiness. The more we understand God, the more we realise the necessity for it, but Asaph was feeling that he was plagued all the day long and chastened every morning. He looked upon the wicked and he saw their prosperity, apparently having no difficulties, and so on. That was the point of view that Satan was careful to present to Asaph. So powerful was the effect of this upon him that he said his feet had well nigh slipped until, as he says, "I went into the sanctuaries of God; then understood I their end." That was his salvation; he went into the sanctuary of God. If we resort to the holiest, we shall get an apprehension of Christ in His ability to establish God's will and bring in a world entirely according to Himself for the pleasure of God, and that means we see that this world, whatever conditions are like and however the wicked may seem to prosper for the moment, is bound to come to an end. You see the utter worthlessness of all that pertains to this world, if you have in your soul the light of One in a dominant position from which He will fill all things. That means the setting aside for ever of the system of things in which the wicked flourish. To have Christ in our hearts as the ark of the testimony is more than preservative; it gives us a right judgment as to what this world is morally, and enables us in a satisfied way to be completely apart from it, and wholly given over to the testimony of God to which we have been called.

Now I speak of Christ as presented in the ark of the covenant. The ark of the testimony, as I see it, is the One who enshrines a testimony which God is giving and which the saints are carrying, that a day is near when God's will will be established publicly. The ark of the covenant is the one who enshrines and gives effect to all God's thoughts of love concerning His people, and it is a very great thing to appreciate Christ in that light also, as the One who is powerful to make good every thought of love and blessing which God has formed regarding His people. I have read the three passages, in Numbers 10, Joshua 3 and 1 Kings 8, because they present the ark of the covenant in three positions. In Numbers we have Him as coming into view when the people of God first set out upon their first journey in the wilderness as committed to His testimony. In the second we have Him as the ark of the covenant as setting aside the power of Jordan so that God's people might pass over into their inheritance. In the third passage He is brought into His final resting place and the glory of God fills the scene.

In Numbers 10 it is when the people were about to set out on their first journey as committed to the testimony. It says, "They set forward from the mountain of Jehovah and went three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them." Notice what is said, because often you hear it quoted that the ark of the covenant went three days' journey before the people. That is not what is said. What is said is, that *they* went three days' journey, and the ark of the covenant went before them in the three days' journey; that is, the three days' journey is their journey, only the ark goes before them in it to search out a resting place for them. I believe what is intended to be conveyed in this is, that we may well afford to commit ourselves thoroughly to the testimony of God in the wilderness whatever it entails, because the Lord Himself, in His love for us, will undertake everything that has to be encountered in relation to it. The three days' journey would be a full experience of what it meant to be in the wilderness committed to God's testimony. Two days would be a witness to it, but three days' journey would be the full experience of it, a complete testimony to what it meant to be in the wilderness as identified with God's testimony. It would mean testing, and rigour, and encountering enemies; it would mean all that, but then there is what the ark does entirely of itself: it moved out of its ordinary place in the midst of God's people in their journeying; it leaves that place and takes a place in front of them and goes before them to search out a resting-place for them, and to meet every enemy that had to be met, a most touching thing.

So we read in John's gospel, chapter 3, "Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his

own who were in the world, loved them to the end." That is the Lord taking account of the fact that His own were now to be left in this world in His absence. That would constitute the world a wilderness, and they were to be left in the wilderness entrusted with God's testimony, and having that in mind, and knowing full well what the world was, the Lord set Himself to love His own right through to the end. That is most encouraging. Before we commit ourselves to God's testimony in this world, there is one thing we may be assured of, and that is, that the love of Christ will see His people right through everything; whatever has to be encountered. He will encounter it; that is what the Lord would assure us of, and that is what this movement of the ark conveys. When they began their journey, as identified with God's interests in this world, the ark went before them to search out a resting-place, to make sure that it is not all conflict, but that they should have resting-places, and in searching out a resting-place, to meet the enemy; as it says, "And it came to pass when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered; And let them that hate thee flee before thy face. And when it rested, he said, "Return, Jehovah, unto the myriads of the thousands of Israel." This was not the final resting-place that was in mind, the final place was Canaan, but this was a resting-place sought out while they were still in the wilderness, and I believe it has its answer in what the Lord's supper affords to us on the first day of the week, for our position publicly is that we are in the wilderness committed to God's testimony, and passing in it through all the exercises that are connected with it, but we appreciate that the Lord provides a resting place in that position, a place where, for the moment, we may lay aside the exercises connected with the testimony, and enjoy His love and the way His love would serve us, and we enter into that resting place in the sense of His complete victory over every enemy that has challenged His way. So the ark of the covenant represents in that way Christ as great enough to give expression and effect to all that is in the heart of God in regard to His people.

This, in Numbers 10, is only a provisional resting place while we are in the wilderness, but the great thought of God is that we should pass over into our inheritance, and finally that we should constitute His inheritance. Joshua presents to us our inheritance, while that which is arrived at under David and Solomon, in finality, represents God's inheritance in the saints. So in the book of Joshua we have the ark presented to us again as the ark of the covenant, and it is presented as moving into Jordan, and it says,

"When they that bore the ark were come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (and the Jordan is full over all its banks throughout the days of harvest), the waters which flowed

down from above stood and rose up in a heap, very far, by Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan; and those that flowed down towards the sea of the plain, the salt sea, were completely cut off. And the people went over opposite to Jericho." This presents to us Christ as entering in irresistible power into death in all that death meant, in order to break its power and make a way through, so that God's people should be able to pass over into the inheritance which God's love had provided for them. It has been well said that the ark in Jordan is not so much expressive of the love of Christ, though, of course, love is there, but it is particularly expressive of power, the power that disposed of death. It says in Psalm 78: 61, "And gave his strength into captivity, and his glory into the hand of the oppressor"; that refers to the ark. Christ is the power and the glory of God, and that was seen particularly as He entered into death, for when the Lord Jesus went into death, all that was involved in death as the judgment of God and the power of Satan, all was concentrated there. "The Jordan is full over all its banks throughout the days of harvest." It was overwhelming to anything else but the ark, but the ark moves into it, and as the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the edge of the water the waters went back, and the waters that flowed down toward the sea failed, and the people passed over; so no water was seen and the victory was complete, and that is exactly what we have in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. It is true that it says here in verse 17 that the ark remained in the midst of Jordan until all the people had passed over, but that is rather to emphasise the completeness of the victory. For us the completeness of the victory is seen, not in Christ in death exactly, but in His resurrection, that is where death is seen to be completely overthrown.

The completeness of the victory which Christ has accomplished over death is to enter into our souls. We are to contemplate it, because what He has done has been in view of us. God having marked us out for an order of life and blessing which stands related to Christ beyond death; therefore, if we see Christ going into death as the power of God to dispose of death and overthrow it, and rising triumphantly out of death, we understand that He is setting out what is in God's mind for us. It says in Colossians, chapter 2, "Ye have been also raised with him through faith of the working of God who raised him from among the dead." When we come together in assembly, and our hearts are freshly touched by means of the Lord's supper, and He comes in in response to the affectionate desires of His own. He is able to present Himself as for ever beyond the power of death. That is an actuality. We are not yet actually risen but Christ is. The position is actually held by Christ, and faith apprehends that what has actually come to pass in Christ is God's mind for us, so faith enters into it. Just as the people had to keep their eyes on the ark and to move, their

movements being determined by the movements that they discerned in the ark, so we keep our eyes on Christ; not exactly Christ in death, but Christ as out of it, because the standing of the ark in Jordan until the people were passed over was to demonstrate the completeness of the victory, and that for us is seen in the position Christ has as risen from among the dead. So, not only is there faith in the operation of God who raised Him from the dead, but also, quickening comes in; there is power in our souls, as our affections are quickened in relation to Christ where He is. The element of power enters into this matter of passing over the Jordan, in that there were twelve men who had power each to take up a stone from the bed of the Jordan and to carry it to the other side. I only touch on this as that which enters into our passing over in assembly to take up our proper position with Christ; to enter upon the position that is ours according to God's purpose. We are entitled in that position to view ourselves in the light of God's purpose as wholly of Christ's own order. God has quickened us together with Him, we who were in a state of moral death. This is witnessed to in the action of Joshua, who, doing it intuitively, took twelve stones and placed them in the Jordan; "in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant had stood firm; and they are there to this day," Joshua 4: 9.

In closing I would refer to the passage in 1 Kings 8: 6, "And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Jehovah to its place, into the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubim." I believe it refers to the way the saints, as having their own part with Christ consciously as brought into the immediate presence of God, and enjoying their part with Him in sonship before the Father, are privileged to take account of Him, not now as on their side, which is what is typified in David and Solomon, but as the One by whom and in whom all God's purposes of love have been secured. David and Solomon typify Christ on our side as Head, the One by whom we are introduced into the presence of God, and under whose direction and influence we have part in the service of God; but there is also another view of Christ, a glorious view, and that is typified in the ark of the covenant of the Lord in its final resting-place when everything is reached, and the saints are conscious of being holy and without blame before God in love in the liberty of sonship, and in the enjoyment of having part in the service of God. In that liberty we appreciate that all this has been in God's mind, it is what His own love has purposed for His own satisfaction, and we appreciate Christ as the One who has been God's power for the bringing to pass of all His pleasure. It is a question of apprehending the ark in His own glory when everything is reached, as directing attention to God as the One from whom all has emanated, and yet it is as though God would bring us into some apprehension

of how He has Himself been dependent upon Christ for the effectuation of all His pleasure. You can understand what a glory Christ assumes in our eyes in that light; the ark of the covenant of Jehovah in His final resting place; all God's thoughts brought to pass; the saints in the liberty and joy of it; God Himself receiving His portion from their hearts' affections; and as in the enjoyment of all this, we are in the presence of God, the most holy place indeed, and privileged to apprehend One without whom God could not have effected His pleasure. In Him divine glory shines, and divine complacency is established. That, I believe, is the final thought in relation to the ark of the covenant of the Lord. So we can understand that it says, "When the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of Jehovah, and the priests could not stand to do their service because of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of Jehovah," 1 Kings 8: 10, 11. That is to say, God is so delighted with the results achieved for Him by our Lord Jesus Christ, the saints themselves rejoicing before Him and responsive to Him, that He claims the whole scene and His glory fills it.

I trust one has been able to convey some definite impression of these glories that attach to Christ, the ark of the testimony and the ark of the covenant.

I believe they will bear pondering and contemplating so that we may be enlarged in our appreciation of Christ, and enlarged also in our apprehension of the glory of Christianity, glorious from the point of view of the testimony we are carrying and glorious from the point of view of the holy privileges into which we are already able to enter in the power of the Holy Spirit under the hand of Christ.

GOD AS BUILDER

Genesis 2: 18 - 23; Genesis 11: 1 - 9; Genesis 13: 18; Hebrews 11: 8 - 10; Hebrews 12: 22 - 24

We were speaking together this afternoon, dear brethren, of the thought of building as connected with the saints, and I wish this evening to speak of God as builder, and to seek to show something of the stability and glory of what He builds, so that we may be stable, and that, in any little measure in which we may be able to have part in furthering divine interests, we may be working with God; that is, working intelligently. We read of Jonathan that he wrought with God, which is a very important matter, because there is much energy and labour in Christendom that is misdirected and misplaced simply because saints are not in the intelligence of what God is doing, and therefore they work according to their own ideas, instead of having their ideas and aims regulated by the light of what God is working for.

The first reference to building in the Scriptures, is in the second chapter of Genesis, the passage I have read, where the word which is rendered 'made,' "the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman," is actually *builded*; He builded a woman. We were speaking this afternoon of the edifying of the body of Christ. Edifying is, of course, the thought of building, and building involves a constructive process. It is not like creation which is done in a moment, but it is done stage by stage and done systematically, and done, if one may say so, according to plan, and so we find that God was the first builder. Afterwards we shall find, in chapter 11, that man began to build, and he has been building up a world of his own for his own pleasure and his own glory ever since; but the One who inaugurated building was God Himself.

It is well that we should see in what setting this building of the woman comes. Adam, as we know, is a type of Him who was to come, and the antitype is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the present view that we have by the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ is, as we have it in Ephesians 1, that God has set Him at His own right hand in heavenly glory, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, ... and hath put all things under his feet." That is the position which faith recognises. It is not known in the world, but it is known by the people of God. It is the position in which Christ has been placed by God; as it says elsewhere, we do not yet see all things put under Him, but faith apprehends that God has already put Him in that position and has put all things under His feet. God has determined that, and is therefore entitled to regard it as done. Now that answers very much to the position in which Adam is seen in this second chapter of Genesis. He is

presented to us placed as head of the whole system that God had brought into existence on the earth. God not only created the earth, but He also brought into existence a world upon the earth, a world of life, a world of great variety of life, a world composed of many different characters of creatures, some of them having their existence on the earth, some of them constituted to have their existence in the heavens, the birds of the air, showing that God delights in great variety and delights in different spheres of life and blessing. All that was intended to foreshadow typically the system of blessing which God has in mind to establish in the world to come, consisting as we know of various families, some earthly, some heavenly, as it says in the epistle to the Ephesians, "the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named." So there were these creatures suggestive of what was heavenly and what was earthly, but all to be under the hand of Adam. He was put as head over all and his intelligence was seen in that he gave names to everything that God had made. I have no doubt that every creature that came from God's hand presented some feature of divine glory. There is very little doubt as to that. We may not be able to see it in detail in every creature, but there is no question about it, that every creature that came from God's hand was intended to present some feature of divine glory. It is marvellous, dear brethren, how God can come down to the smallest things. There are creatures on the earth at the present time, so small that the human eye can hardly see them, showing how wonderfully able God is to come down to that which is very small. How comforting! How comforting to know this, that God, so great though He is, is able to come down to what is so very small; and He is sympathetic, as it says in the Psalm, "These all look unto thee; ... that thou givest unto them, they gather; ... thou hidest thy face they are troubled."

As I was saying, every creature expresses some feature of divine glory and Adam's intelligence is seen in that he was able to give names to them all. But then, in that position, God said it was not meet that the man should be alone. *He* would make him an helpmeet for him. It is just here that this first thought of building comes in, and the idea of the building of the woman involves a process, not an act of creation, but a process. It is what is going on at the present time by means of the work of the ministry. It says that He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and he slept. It is, of course, typical of Christ in death; not that Christ is still in death, of course, actually, but I suppose publicly the position is that this is the time of His death. That is to say,

the world has not seen the Lord Jesus since His body was taken down from the cross. The world never saw Him in resurrection and the world will not see Him again until He comes in power and glory and the saints with Him, in that day of which we have been singing, when He will come to be glorified in His

saints and admired in all them that believe. Until that day comes, the position publicly is that Christ has died. Of course, faith apprehends, and affection rejoices in, the fact that He is alive, that He has, as we were saying, gone up far above all heavens that He might fill all things; but the One who has gone far above all heavens is identified as the One who first descended into the lower parts of the earth.

Now God is building a counterpart to Christ. The conception is marvellous, for the body of Christ is composed of all those who receive the Holy Spirit, from the day of Pentecost right on to the time of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ for His saints. Hence the body is an immense vessel, and the wisdom of God enters into the formation of this vessel in which Christ is to be perfectly expressed, and the process is going on. The work of the ministry is going on. We are to grow, as it says, "we may grow up to him in all things." Faithful ministry keeps Christ continually before the hearts of the saints, and will not allow any other ideal but Christ, and will not allow any other man but Christ, and the power by which God works in the souls of the saints, is that they are affected by the influence of the love of Christ. He descended first into the lower parts of the earth; not only into death, but into the grave. He has gone right beneath, so to speak, all that lay upon us, in order that He might establish an indisputable claim to have us in life, that we might be brought into what has been from the beginning in God's mind for us. And so we are to be formed according to Christ. Love has been supremely expressed in Christ, and what is being formed in the saints is love. If I have not love, I *am* nothing, scripture says. I might have prophecy and faith to remove mountains, and understand all mysteries, and yet if I have not love, *I am nothing*. Scripture says, "Nothing." Just a mere cipher, so to speak, of no account whatever. It is a most challenging statement. Whatever ability I might have, whatever gift I might have, I am nothing if I have not love, and love is learned in Christ, and one's wish today, dear brethren, is that we might see to it that nothing that is not love is allowed to have place with us. The love of Christ is a holy love; it is not tolerant of evil. It is expressed thus in Jesus, that He Himself would go into death and endure judgment in order that evil might be dealt with according to God and righteousness established; that love might prevail and that those who are involved in evil might be delivered from it and secured for the pleasure of God. We are to be formed in love. We are also to be formed in other things. We are to be formed in righteousness, and we learn righteousness in the light of the death of Christ. We learn the true measure of righteousness there. "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant instruct many in righteousness," Isaiah 53: 11. We get a right estimate of what is right and wrong in the light of the death of Christ. We are apt to be superficial in

our judgment of evil, but as we contemplate it in the light of the death of Christ, we see it as it really is. Then we learn holiness too. Much else we learn in the light of the death of Christ, but the great thing is that God is working in the saints now in order to bring about in the assembly, a vessel which corresponds in every way to Christ, especially as formed in love and intelligence, and as having moral sensibilities and an absolute appreciation of good and an absolute abhorrence of evil. All this is being wrought in the saints at the present time by means of ministry which connects the hearts of the saints with Christ in glory, but apprehended as One who has been down into the lower parts of the earth.

And so, it has often been said that the deep sleep of Adam does not typify the death of Christ in relation to any issues that were raised by the incoming of sin, because it took place before sin had come into the world, and that is perfectly true. Thus it does not contemplate the death of Christ in relation to setting us free from our sins or anything of that sort, but at the same time we have to be formed in holiness and righteousness and love, because a merely innocent being would not in any way satisfy the heart of Christ or be a true counterpart to Him. The counterpart of Christ must be characterised by holiness and righteousness and fashioned above all in love, and in intelligence too. And so the divine conception is marvellous, dear brethren, that while other families doubtless will bear some impress of divine glory as the creatures in the physical creation did, the assembly is to be the fulness of Christ, and Christ is the fulness of God. "In whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily." God has come into perfect expression in the Man Christ Jesus, and that Man is to have a body in which His fulness as Man can find perfect expression. God has first come out in the Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus, a divine Person become man, and that glorious Man has a vessel which is in turn His fulness, so that what God is as known in the creation perfectly expressed in Christ, is to be expanded, not added to, but diffused, so that the whole redeemed creation, heavenly and earthly families, shall be in the light of God made known in Christ, that light diffused by means of the assembly, His body.

Now, dear brethren, I think you will be able to see the immensity of the conception, and the immensity of what we have been taken up for, and what God is working at the present time, and how important that we should not allow individually any other ideal before us but Christ. We must all realise how far short we come of it practically, but do not let us allow any less ideal, any less aim, before our minds, than what God is after. Paul says he laboured to present every man perfect in Christ. He had no less standard than that before him, and we ourselves, in our exercises and prayers, are to have that in mind. We are to understand that God, in the skill and wisdom that He has at His

hand, uses everything in our circumstances to further this work which is being carried on at the present time in our souls. All is in view of the formation of this vessel to be the counterpart to the Man. And so Adam slept, God took a rib from his side, and the rib which He had taken from the man, builded He into a woman, and brought her to the man, and Adam says, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: this shall be called Woman because this was taken out of a man." There was nothing in the woman, as brought to the man, that did not come out of the man, she was entirely of him. She brought in nothing extraneous, nothing outside of the man. In that sense she added nothing to him, and yet, in another sense, she added much to him, because he would say, 'Now I have a counterpart, one to be with me intelligently, sympathetically, able to move with me in all that is under my hand, as perfectly answering to myself.' There is no disparity between the man, and the woman as answering to the man in feminine features. I want to seek to convey something of the glory and immensity of what God is building at the present time, so that we might in our outlook be with God, and that our exercises might be in the same direction as that in which God Himself is working.

In Genesis 11 we have the thought of man combining to build. We read of building by man as early as Cain, that he builded a city and called it after the name of his son Enoch, so that the idea of building, which was originated by God Himself, was quickly taken up by man, by man away from God, by unregenerate man, and was taken on as a means by which he would perpetuate his own name. He called the city after his son Enoch. In chapter 11 we find a further feature in connection with man's building, and that is, that they were uniting to do it, combining to do it. It says that the whole earth was of one language and of one speech, "And they said to one another, Go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." That is morally a picture of what man has been doing ever since. I believe that it is the first occasion on which we have men presented as combining together. Combinations of men are a feature of the present time and a sinister feature too, so far as the saints are concerned, because it involves that there is great concentration of power in the hands of the combinations of men and Satan understands that, and however logical and reasonable from man's standpoint, men's combinations may seem to be, they serve in the hands of Satan to provide a powerful means of opposition to what is of God, because men's combinations do not take God into account, nor His will, nor His name. They

have in mind only the improvement and establishment of their own world, their own will, their own glory. Hence it comes about that those who seek to be true to the Lord find themselves opposed by the combinations of men in various forms at the present time. The principles governing Christians are entirely different from the principles governing men in the world. Christians are governed, or should be, by the will of God, and seek the glory of God. Men are governed by their own will and seek their own glory, and hence the Christian, as seeking to be faithful to the Lord and pleasing to God, holds himself aloof from entering into any association with ungodly men. There is no affinity between them, no fellowship of light with darkness. At the very beginning God called the light day and the darkness night. He stamped each with its own true moral character. He separated the light from the darkness, and that is a principle with God that is to be maintained by those who would be pleasing to God. There can be no affinity, no fellowship between light and darkness, and therefore, Christians seeking to be pleasing to the Lord find themselves unable to have part in these various combinations of men, and the position is becoming testing. Satan is behind the matter, seeking to make it impossible for those who would be governed by the truth to go on. But then the comfort of this scripture is that God overlooks nothing. He comes down to see what men are doing. He says, 'If I do not hinder them, there will be no limit to what they will do.' So He hinders them and confuses their language. And this is a matter, dear brethren, at the present time of the greatest importance, but if we are prepared to be faithful and to suffer rather than surrender the truth, we can count upon God to weaken the combinations of men in favour of the saints. I do not say that He will not still allow them a large measure of strength, but He will not allow them to go the full length. He did not allow these men to go the full length, but he confounded their language. That is often the way God takes to weaken men's movements. They are no longer able to see eye to eye, they begin to speak different languages, so to speak. One has an aim in one direction, and another in another direction, and God confuses them in that way and weakens them. So this first combination of men in opposition to the truth is very encouraging as showing that God will take account of all that is moving on the earth, and when necessary will weaken it so that it may not go the full length that men themselves would desire.

Now in contrast with all that, it says of Abraham, who, it must be borne in mind, is the father of us all; that is, we are to learn from our father Abraham, that he removed his tent and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre which is in Hebron, and built there an altar to the Lord. Now Hebron is always typical in Scripture of the purpose of God. We read in Numbers 13 that Hebron had

been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. Zoan, I understand, was a seat of learning, representing the wisdom of this world, but there is that which is before the wisdom of this world. God's purpose was entirely before it. Whatever men may be doing in their ability, with Satan behind them, building up their own world according to their own thoughts, there is that which was before it and that is the purpose of God, and the purpose of God is going through. The first one to build was God Himself, and He is going steadily on with His building. What man is doing does not affect what God is doing, save that under God's hand it all works out to further His work. The more saints are under the influence of Christ, the more they will be concerned to be faithful to God. He was faithful to God. He would die rather than surrender what was due to God, and the very presence of difficult conditions that seem to threaten those who desire to go on with the truth, is only an occasion for God to develop in the saints that feature according to Christ, that they will be faithful to God at all costs and maintain the truth of God. Only in that way can they possibly be developed as in keeping with the idea of a counterpart, a helpmeet for the man. And so it says that Abraham came and dwelt at Hebron. He pitched his tent and settled there. He was stable in his soul, he was entirely unmoved. He had in his soul the light of Hebron, God's purpose, and he abode there and built an altar unto the Lord. He would keep himself in the light of what God was doing according to the purposes that had been formed before the world's foundation. I have no doubt that is what is alluded to in Hebrews 11 where it says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

As you take account of the city which men were building in Genesis 11, you will be struck with the absence of any foundations. There can be no moral foundation to anything that has in view man's glory. Nothing that has not in view the glory of God has any moral foundation that will abide. Abraham looked for a city evidently in contrast to Babel which had no moral foundations. "He looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." That is to say, he looked for a city which would express the glory of God, which would not be to make a name for man, but would be to make a name for God, and so, having that in his soul, he was content to be a pilgrim; and not only was he a pilgrim dwelling in tents, but he was great enough morally to impress the same character upon Isaac and Jacob.

“Dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.”

This is a most important matter for those of us who are older, for if we would see (as every one who is in any way with God would desire to see) the younger generation go on and maintain the truth in a living way, it is essential that we should be concerned as to having moral power to exemplify the truth ourselves. That is exactly what Abraham did, in moral power. It is a question, dear brethren, not of what we say, but of what our outlook is as shown by what we do. If I am seeking a place for myself in this world, I show clearly that I have not in my soul the light of a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We are here for the testimony and the pleasure of God. The question of earning our living and maintaining righteousness and having wherewith to give, will all enter into it and if we are with God. God will see to it that we do find a way to meet every righteous obligation and have something over to give, coming out like God, as it says in Ephesians, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” It is a question of fulfilling righteousness, and having something also by means of which we may come out like God, as a giver. That is why Christians are here. They are not here to make a name for themselves or a comfortable home for themselves in a scene in which Christ is not. It is a question of having what is necessary and of going on with the testimony and truth of God. So Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob the heirs with him of the same promise. You know how Isaac had a brother Ishmael, but he was not affected by his father’s faith. He, alas, was affected by his mother. It says that he dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer and his mother took him a wife from the land of Egypt, so that he did not continue in the faith of his father Abraham, not very effectively, at any rate. Then Jacob had also a brother, Esau, and he was far worse than Ishmael. He was a man of the field, skilled in hunting and an out-and-out worldling, and married those who were enemies of God’s people. He married out of the house of faith, a sorrowful thing for one to do who has been born into the household of faith. God puts these things in the Scriptures for us, so that young people should be warned, as having been brought up in the household of faith, lest they should in any way think lightly of their heritage and lose their part in it through marrying outside the household of faith. Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, and he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. That, so to speak, as to its actuality, is still future. It looks on to the heavenly city which will come down from heaven from God having the glory of God. But while what God is building is not yet

completed, there is already on the earth a system of glory in connection with the assembly which we may well take pride in belonging to.

That is why I read the verses in Hebrews 12. The eleventh chapter looks on to the world to come and the full completion of what God is building at the present time will be seen in the day to come. At the same time, though from one point of view the building is still going on, the assembly is here. It is here and Christians are connected with it. They belong to it, indeed they compose it, and in the twelfth chapter the writer of the epistle is concerned that the believers to whom he was writing should understand the greatness of what we belong to and have come to, so that it should suffice for us and we should not look outside the assembly and the things connected with it for our life and interests. So he says, "Ye are come unto mount Zion." He begins with mount Zion, for it refers to the absolute stability of what we have come to. Psalm 125, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed but abideth for ever." One thought connected with mount Zion is its absolute stability, and why it is stable is that it represents the great principle of sovereign mercy on the part of God, the establishment of God's thoughts on the principle of sovereign mercy, when in the hands of man's responsibility, everything had broken down. It refers to the history of Israel in the days of Eli when the ark was delivered into captivity. The Lord awoke according to Psalm 78: 65 - 72, and established all His thoughts on the principle of pure sovereign mercy, rejecting the tribe of Ephraim, and choosing mount Zion which He loved. That is seen in Christ risen from the dead and glorified. We see there the One in whom God has established everything on the ground of pure mercy. That being established as the basis, then the Spirit of God can open up the glory of the system to which we belong and it says, "And to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." That is what the assembly is. It is the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Jerusalem is God's centre on earth, but the assembly is the heavenly Jerusalem, and it is the city of the living God. God is known there livingly, and light radiates from it, and there is an influence and an administration that is of God. So it is the city of the living God. It is not a sphere for man's glory, it is for God's glory, and we belong to it, as it says in Ephesians, fellow-citizens with the saints.

The next statement is "And to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly." What a comfort that is for the saints. The second chapter tells us that they are all sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation. The angels, great though they are as creatures of God's hand, are sent forth to minister to the saints of today,

so great are the saints in the mind of God. What are we to make then of difficulties that may arise to alarm us, if all the angels of God are at our disposal? It is a question of going on patiently, if need be sufferingly, as Jesus did, to maintain the rights and pleasure of God; but to understand that, if need be, the whole company of angels may be called upon. The Lord said as He was about to be delivered to His enemies, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" It is a question of going on with the will of God. There is an innumerable company of angels and many a time will they be used. We are to understand that they are at our disposal. And so Elisha, when the king of Syria sent to take him, was perfectly restful although the army surrounded him, but he prayed to Jehovah to open the eyes of his young man, "And Jehovah opened the eyes of the young man and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." He was there as in the testimony, and the angels of God were there to protect him, that the testimony might continue.

Then it says, "and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." That is to impress us with the dignity of the saints. We are all firstborn ones, registered in heaven, and it is intended to lift us up, and to make us feel superior to the greatest of men in this world. I do not mean in the way of looking down on them, but to lift us up in the sense of what we really are and belong to. Paul was able to say in the presence of king Agrippa and his queen and the Roman governor and all the grandees of Caesarea, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am." He was consciously greater than all of them, yet in the feelings of God towards men, he said, 'I wish you were all as I am.' And then we have come "to God the judge of all"; that is to deliver us from the fear of man. We have to say to God, and everyone else has to say to God, and the fear of God delivers us from the fear of man. Daniel's name means, 'God is judge,' and I have no doubt that he carried in his soul the truth of what his name implied, and therefore if Nebuchadnezzar said that Daniel was to do something contrary to the will of God, Daniel would say that God is judge. If Darius passed a decree that no one was to make any request to anyone save the king, Daniel would say that God is judge. God will have the final word. And so we have come to God the judge of all.

Then it says we have come "to the spirits of just men made perfect." I believe that is to impress us with the greatness of what may be seen in the assembly. "The spirits of just men made perfect." We are not yet made perfect as to our bodies. We await the coming of the Lord for that. We shall be perfected as to

our bodies, we shall have spiritual bodies, bodies of glory like Christ's, then we shall be perfected. We are not yet perfected as regards our bodies, but we may be perfected already as regards our spirits. If you see a brother in perfect liberty with God, addressing God in true liberty in the consciousness of his relationship with God as a son, he is a just man whose spirit has been made perfect. He could never have any liberty with God unless he was practically righteous, and then he can become spiritual. There is no reason why we should not see, and we do see in the assembly, the spirits of just men made perfect, men not yet perfected as to their bodies, but perfected in their spirits, men perfectly at home with God. These are wonderful realities that we may see in the assembly, and the more we have our eyes opened to the greatness of the assembly, the less we shall want to find our life and interest in anything else, because of the greatness that we have come to, the assembly of the living God.

"And to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant." The word *new* means fresh; it is not the usual word for the new covenant, but means a new, a fresh covenant. We have come to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant. How constantly we feel it at the breaking of bread. How blessedly fresh everything is as we have to do with the Lord Jesus and are there in the gain of His love expressed in death. It is a wonderful thing that we have to do with the Lord Jesus who expressed His love in death and yet is alive to convey livingly to our hearts its wondrous import. Then finally, "and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." The blood of Abel simply called for vengeance. The blood of sprinkling speaks of the way divine love has claimed us by means of the death of Christ. It means that divine love has claimed us and put its mark upon us. That is where we stand as separated from this world of evil, sanctified in Christ Jesus, set apart to God, yielding ourselves to the claims of divine love over us by means of the redemptive work of Christ.

May God help us to weigh these things over and to see that, if men are building on the one hand, God has been the first to build and He is building what is going to abide in glory to eternity, the city of the living God, a heavenly city that will come down in eternity, not only in the world to come, but in eternity. God is building that which is viewed at the present time as the body, the fulness of Christ. As we take account of the greatness of these things to which we belong, we shall be more and more satisfied with them and more and more delivered from every adverse influence that we may encounter in this world. May the Lord bless the word.

UNRIGHTEOUSNESS AND UNBELIEF AS HINDERING THE SAINTS

2 Corinthians 1:19-22; Colossians 3:1-4; Genesis 45:3-15; Genesis 45:21-28

There are two things, dear brethren, which often tend to hinder the saints from entering into the enjoyment of their proper portion, and one is the failure rightly to judge some practical unrighteousness, resulting in a lack of nearness to Christ and a certain uneasiness in the presence of the Lord, and the other is unbelief, or unreadiness to avail oneself of the service of the Spirit of God to make the things that are connected with Christ where He is a present reality to us. Now, I believe these two things are illustrated on the one hand, in the history of Joseph's brethren in the latter part of the book of Genesis, and on the other hand, in the history of Jacob in that part of the book, and the New Testament Scriptures which will help in relation to these two matters are in 2 Corinthians in connection with Joseph's brethren, and in Colossians in relation to Jacob.

We well know, of course, that Joseph is one of the outstanding types of Christ in the Old Testament. He is presented as the beloved son of his father, his father loved him above all his brethren, and made him a coat of many colours, and the very fact that his father so distinguished him, aroused jealousy in the hearts of ten of his brethren. We know what the sequel was, that they sold him into Egypt as a bond-slave for twenty pieces of silver, having previously proposed first of all to slay him, and having cast him into a pit, but as the scripture says, there was no water in the pit. That is to remind us that while he had to go into the pit in order to typify the Lord Jesus Christ as going into death, yet in fact, only the Lord Jesus personally could enter into death in all that it really involved and hence there was no water in the pit in which Joseph was placed. In due time Joseph was brought up out of prison and exalted to the highest place in the land of Egypt under Pharaoh and became the great administrator of food. There was no food, in the ordering of God, anywhere to be had, save in the land of Egypt under the administration of Joseph, and Joseph's brethren, impelled by the need of food, came down to Egypt to buy corn, and Joseph immediately comes into view as labouring with remarkable skill and patience and feeling, with a view to bringing his brethren, whom he recognised though they did not recognise him, into right and happy relations with himself. One cannot go into all the detail of chapters 42 to 44, preceding chapter 45, but the history is well known. When Joseph saw his brethren, he spoke to them roughly and put all ten of them, for Benjamin did not come, in custody for three days, and then released them, but bound Simeon before

their eyes and placed him in prison and sent the rest home with food and with their money returned in the mouths of their sacks.

Now let us bear in mind that in all this, Joseph is typical of the Lord Jesus in the way that He acts in discipline with regard to any one of us who is not at ease with Himself. There are many things that operate to hinder those who are truly saints, truly brethren of Christ, from being at ease in the presence of the Lord, and one of the things that is most effective in preventing us from being at ease in His presence is some past unrighteousness of walk or conduct that has not been properly judged. Thus it was in the case of Joseph's brethren, and Joseph understood perfectly, as representing God, that there could be no disclosure of his own thoughts and feelings towards them, and no bringing them into restful conditions in the enjoyment of his presence, while certain moral questions remained unsolved, and the whole point in Joseph's dealings with his brethren was to bring them to a right judgment of what had marked them in their attitude and conduct toward him. Let us remember, dear brethren, that in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, God has signified His disapproval of the first man and His approval, in an unqualified way, of Jesus. His action in giving up Christ and allowing Him to be put to death by wicked men, was the exposure, in the action of wicked men, of what the first man is capable of, his heart fully exposed in the presence of perfect goodness in Jesus, so that the first man is exposed as utterly and irreparably opposed to God, and opposed to Christ. In the death of Christ, God indicated that the first man must be brought to an end in death; only in grace, that was effected vicariously in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order that all those who are prepared to obey the gospel, might be brought into life and blessing in Christ in the Man in whom God does delight.

Now, in the dreams that Joseph had, there was clear indication that God intended that Joseph should be supreme, and it was that that stirred up, in addition to the fact that Jacob his father showed him preference, the jealousy and hatred of his brethren, and likewise with us every working of our own flesh and our own wills, is really hostility to Christ. It is really that the flesh in us resents being set aside, resents what God has already given testimony to in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that the first man must go and that Christ only must be exalted, One who always delighted in the will of God, and afforded unfailing pleasure to the heart of God in every detail of His path here, and is now established in the presence of God for His abiding pleasure. Hence the jealousy of Joseph's brethren is but a picture of the working of the natural heart in every one of us, save as we are brought into true subjection to Christ and the Holy Spirit, that refuses to have self set aside in order that Christ may have the place that God intends He shall have.

Joseph was dealing in wonderful skill with his brethren, and Genesis 45 indicates the end to which Joseph was working, "Come near to me, *I pray you.*" His heart was in it, and when they did come near to him, he kissed them, and he spoke to them and they to him. Moreover, he proposed to them that they and their wives and little ones were to come to him and he would maintain them, so that there was nothing in the heart of Joseph for them but perfect blessing in nearness to himself, but conditional on the right moral relations being maintained. So long as anything contrary to God was being cherished or excused, there could be no enjoyment of nearness to himself. Hence he adopted measures which seemed severe, but at the same time, if we read the history, we find that his heart was greatly moved, that he turned aside to weep more than once. This ought to affect us, if we realise how much pain and sorrow we cause to the heart of Christ if we are going on with any kind of unrighteousness. It brings in distance from Himself and the Lord feels it. It is not His desire, so here Joseph moves in remarkable skill, combining severity with remarkable grace, for he not only gave them the food that they needed, but returned their money in their sacks. We have to be established in grace, or the Lord will never effect anything with us. It is a great thing to be established in grace, and Joseph, in his dealings with his brethren, maintained that principle that everything that they received must be on the principle of pure grace, and therefore their money was returned to them in the mouth of their sacks.

But then he said that they would not see his face unless they brought their youngest brother with them. Now the youngest brother was Benjamin, and of the ten brothers who up till then had come down to Joseph, six were sons of Leah, two sons of Bilhah and two were sons of Zilpah. Joseph was a son of Rachel and Benjamin was a son of Rachel. All the twelve were sons of the same father, but they were sons of different mothers, and Joseph insisted that their younger brother Benjamin must come down with them next time they came, or they should not see his face. I believe that Benjamin, as being of the same mother as Joseph, represents a subjective answer to the truth; that is, Joseph is a type of Christ, and Benjamin as born of the same mother as Joseph, represents a subjective correspondence in the saints to Christ, and Joseph in insisting that they should not see his face again unless their younger brother was with them, was raising with them the exercise as to what was befitting in those who were sons of Jacob. Jacob the patriarch; what is befitting in those who are born of God, so to speak. That is, we are kindred to Christ, thank God, we *are* kindred to Christ. We remember well how the Lord Jesus, on the morning of His resurrection, said to Mary Magdalene, "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my father and your Father, and to my

God and your God." We are brethren of Christ, but what befits those who are brethren of Christ? In the conduct of the ten brothers there was that which was entirely unbefitting to the brethren of Joseph, and in saying that they should not see his face unless Benjamin was with him, I believe he was, in type, raising exercises with them as to what was befitting to those who were really the brethren of Christ.

Well, we know that in the sequel, Benjamin does come down with them, and the result is that they are brought into Joseph's house and partake at his table and he speaks to them graciously and he sends them back again with further corn in their sacks and again with their money returned, including the money for the first supply of food, which they had brought back again. He is emphasising, insisting on, the principle of grace, feeding them, encouraging them, so to speak, as soon as they begin to move on right lines. As soon as we begin to move on right lines, we shall find God is supporting us. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. One often reminds oneself of that, dear brethren. There is always a way in which we may receive grace from God. Whatever it may be we are having to face in our own soul exercises, there is a way in which we can surely secure grace from God, and that is by humbling ourselves.

But then as Joseph sent them back again the next time, he tells his servant to put his silver cup in the sack of the youngest, and then to pursue after them and charge them with stealing his cup, and the servant does that, and they let down their sacks to the ground and opened them out, and the servant searched carefully, beginning at the eldest right down to the youngest. It is a question now of the Holy Spirit, for the servant is a type of the Spirit of God pursuing His work with us. Everyone is to let down his sack, what we are carrying, and have it searched diligently, and the Spirit of God would subject every one of us to a searching process. What for? What does Joseph's cup represent? It was that out of which he drank. It evidently suggests that which is intended to minister pleasure to the heart of Joseph, and I believe he was seeking to bring home to his brethren that in their past conduct what had really marked them was that they had robbed him of his pleasure. That is, applying it to ourselves, any conduct on our part unworthy of us as saints, is robbing Christ of His pleasure. Every one of them had to be subjected to that searching examination on the part of the servant, as to whether he was the one who was robbing Christ, so to speak, of the pleasure He was entitled to expect from His people, a very searching process, dear brethren. So the cup was found in the sack of Benjamin. Of course, we well know that Benjamin was not guilty. I have no doubt that all was in wisdom, because if any saints in a locality are going on with anything marking them that hinders liberty with

God, something amongst them that has not been judged, those who are personally without blame, as well as those who are to blame, must all share the blame together, and indeed those personally free from blame are those most able to accept responsibility for it. And so the cup was found in the sack of Benjamin, one against whom there was no charge, but then he was identified with his brethren, and they are brought back again to Joseph's presence, and in chapter 44, Judah, who acts as spokesman for them, does not attempt to say he is quite sure that the cup was not stolen. He says, "God has found out the iniquity of thy servants," showing that the whole history is not to be regarded literally, but morally, and the idea in the whole history is that, as the result, first of Joseph's skilful acting, combining severity with grace and insisting on their bringing the younger brother, and finally the searching process of the servant, the Spirit of God, the brethren are brought to acknowledge what was iniquitous about them. It had happened twenty-two years before and it had never been faced or bottomed, but now the Lord, I use Joseph as a type of the Lord, was bringing it to light, and as the result of all the searching, Judah says that God had found out their iniquity. He does not attempt to excuse it, or explain it away, he is there in full confession.

He is prepared now to lay down his life for the brethren, because when Joseph proposes that Benjamin should stay as a bondman, Judah comes forward and offers himself in Benjamin's stead. He is now coming forward, on the one hand, having completely judged on behalf of himself and his brethren what had marked them that was so evil, and on the other hand, as marked by the spirit of Christ, prepared to lay down his life for his brethren.

I have just indicated all that in order to show what I believe is the moral line of teaching in this part of the history. Now we come to chapter 45, where it says that Joseph could not refrain himself any longer and he says, "I am Joseph," and "Come near to me, I pray you." And they came near. And he said, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither for God did send me before you to preserve life." That is to say, that now that they have come to acknowledge the truth and to judge themselves in relation to it, Joseph is assuring them that nothing whatever is lost, but that everything now for their blessing is secured and established in himself. That is where I link on the passage with the verses in 2 Corinthians. The apostle Paul found that there were certain at Corinth who were charging him with vacillation, saying one thing at one time and another thing at another, what he describes as yea and nay; that is, his word could not be relied upon. He passes that over lightly, and says, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was

yea." He does not admit the charge of vacillation, he explains why it was that he changed his plans and gave some who opposed him occasion to suggest that he was vacillating, but having done that he says, the One whom I have presented is not marked by vacillation, no yea and nay about Him. In Him is the yea; that is, the absolute confirmation of every promise of blessing which God has in His heart for us is there in Christ. Whatever promises of God there are, in Him, in the Son of God, is the yea and in Him the amen, for glory to God by us.

Now I understand that to mean this, that whatever promises of God in the way of blessing for men there have been, and there have been many promises, the fact that man has proved to be a failure, has sinned and come short of the glory of God, has become exposed to His judgment and liable to death, has not in any way thwarted God in carrying through His thoughts of blessing for men. He has found a resource in the person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God has come, and in the coming in of the Son of God, we not only have a glorious Man who is entirely apart from the sinful history of the first man, who has had no part in it, nor could He have part in it, for He is entirely holy and sinless, but He has brought in an entirely new order of manhood. Although come of a woman, come of David's seed, truly a man, yet He brought in an entirely new order of manhood. That being so, and He being who He is, He was great enough in Himself, by means of His death, to take up and remove every liability that lay upon men. All that had come in through sin has been perfectly met in the precious death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the death and burial of Christ, man himself has been vicariously removed from before the eye of God. There is one Man in the presence of God in whom there is no failure, in whom God finds pleasure of a most complete kind, and He is One great enough in His Person to communicate His own life as Man to men. The last Adam, it says, is a quickening Spirit. How glorious that is! It is the way by which God effects all His promises of blessing in spite of the failure of the first man. He has brought in another Man, and everyone who turns to Him in faith, receives life in Him. That is a very blessed thing. It shows in a most indisputable way that God is absolutely for us. In Christ is the yea. In Him is not only the yea, but there is also in Him the amen. The yea is the positive setting forth of the thing in an indisputable way from God to us. The amen is the perfect answer to it in a Man. In Christ we see a perfect answer in Man to all that shines out from God through Him. In Christ there is a Man who affords infinite pleasure to the heart of God, and we are before God in Him. That is a wonderful thing to come to, and it goes on to say in Corinthians, "Now he that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God." God has done that by giving us the Spirit. He has firmly

established us in Christ. That is what results from the giving of the Spirit. We are absolutely set up before God in an abiding way in Christ, the Son of God. That is a very establishing thing. And then it says, "who also has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."

To go back to Joseph, he now called upon them not to be grieved, nor angry, "for God did send me before you to preserve life," and again in verse 7, "And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth." That is, once we have come to complete self-judgment, then in the light of the death of Christ, we are entitled to have done with the past and no longer to refer to it. If God has closed up the history of the man that has sinned, so long as you are in accord with it in your conscience and heart, there is no occasion to refer to it any longer, and you can rejoice in the One who has established every thought of blessing that is in His heart. Joseph was anxious that they should be no longer grieved with themselves. He even says that it was not their action that brought him there, it was God who did it. All that we have done necessitated the death of Christ, but once we are in accord with that death in our mind and heart, we are entitled to say God has done it; sending Christ before us that, having accomplished redemption, He might take His place in the presence of God as the last Adam, in whom we live and in whom He has set us up before Him for His pleasure.

Paul says in Corinthians, not only that "he that establishes us with you in Christ is God," but also that He "has anointed us." That is, there is now power; the anointing is power, and it is also character. It means that in the Spirit we have power to walk in a way that is worthy of the saints of God, worthy of those that belong to Christ. The anointing gives character too. It would impress the character and grace of Christ upon those who are His. It is not only a question of light, but also a question of power in the Spirit that answers to the light, so that we are not only conscious that we are established by God in Christ for His pleasure, but we have power in the anointing to walk here worthily of that position. It says further, that He "has sealed us." That is most touching. It means that God has put His own mark upon us. The Spirit is that, the indication of divine ownership, that we belong to God; it is a very blessed thing to carry in our souls the sense of it. The Spirit is witness to us. The anointing works out in something that can be seen publicly, but the sealing is a private matter, that everyone carries the sense of in his soul, that he belongs to God. God has put the mark of His approval and ownership upon each one. And finally, He has given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. The earnest is the power by which divine things can be entered upon now, so that their enjoyment is already known.

One must now refer briefly to Colossians in connection with Jacob in this part of Genesis. It is not a question of some past unrighteousness that has not been judged, but a question with Jacob of unbelief in regard of Joseph's being living and being in a glorified position. Joseph as in the position that he was filling in Egypt, so great among the Gentiles, in that way answers to Christ as presented in Colossians. At the end of Colossians 1, we read, "Now, I rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, for his body, which is the assembly; of which I became minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given me towards you to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to his saints; to whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." What Paul gloried in was, that the mystery, the truth concerning the assembly, the body of Christ, gave Christ a great place among the Gentiles. In practically all God's ways previously, save in isolated instances, blessing was connected with His earthly people, Israel, but now God has brought in that which had been hidden as a mystery from the ages. God has now revealed His choicest thought, that out of all nations, and especially from among the Gentiles, He has gathered out, by the gospel, a body of persons who form the assembly, the body of Christ. Paul gloried in that, that Christ was among the Gentiles, and that is typified by Joseph in this part of his history. He has been separated from his brethren, according to Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, pointing to Christ separated from Israel by death and resurrection, and He is great among the Gentiles. Jacob was not in the light of that. Joseph was in glory, having a wonderful position which God had given him, but Jacob was entirely unaware of it, and even when his sons told him that Joseph was still alive, he did not believe.

It is this which often hinders true believers, that they are not in their souls in the light of the glorious position that Christ has at the right hand of God and of the assembly as given to Him, His body. It is not a question of things on the earth being our concern. We have to go through the world as pilgrims and strangers, fulfilling righteousness, having our part in the testimony, proving His mercy and faithfulness to us while we are in the world, but our real interests are bound up with Christ and the assembly, and Christ is at the right hand of God. Jacob was entirely unaware of all this, and Joseph told his brethren to tell his father of all his glory in the land of Egypt, and Pharaoh himself commanded them to take waggon. The waggon refers to the power there is in the Spirit to carry us in our thoughts and affections to Christ in glory and sustain us in relation to heavenly things, that is the assembly.

It says of Joseph that to each of his brethren he gave changes of raiment. That is a very important thing, dear brethren, that we are to have put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new. We need change of raiment as saints. He gave a special portion to Benjamin. He sent food for his father, and sent away his brethren and told them not to fall out by the way, a very practical matter we always have to see to. "And they told him, saying, Joseph is still alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt; and his heart fainted, for he did not believe them; and they spoke to him all the words of Joseph, which he had spoken to them, and he saw the waggons that Joseph had sent to carry him, and the spirit of Jacob their father revived." It is a question of our just awaking to the fact that the Spirit of God has come down from Christ in glory for the express purpose of connecting us in our faith and affections with Himself where He is and opening up to us that where He is, He is the centre of a great system of glory which has its existence in the purpose of God, which has now begun in Christ and the assembly. Other things are to be brought into display in due time; many families in heaven and earth are to be brought into view, all headed up in Christ, but for the moment the great thing is the assembly, the body of Christ, a vessel being formed now capable of entering sympathetically and intelligently into every interest of Christ and having part with Him in it. If He is engaged with maintaining the service of God, an answer to the heart of God as He is revealed, we will be thoroughly with the Lord in it, going along with Him in every exercise, following up every bit of light and help He gives in relation to it, because it is a question of our having part with Him in every interest of His, just as a true wife expects to have an interest in every interest of her husband.

If it is a question of maintaining the testimony here on earth for the moment, in a way that is worthy of God, the assembly is the vessel of that too. Hades' gates shall not prevail against it. We want to learn from the Lord to handle matters of administration in a way that is worthy of the blessed God, a way that is morally above the level of this world. So it says in Colossians, "If ye then be risen with Christ." The *if* is not a question of doubt, but a question rather of setting forward the first part of the sentence, so to speak, as a certain position taken up, and the rest is what necessarily follows from it. He says, if this is the position that you are risen with Christ, then seek those things that are above. Colossians is very much a question of *with Christ*, dead with Him, buried with Him, raised with Him, quickened together with Him. It is a question of with Christ,

our affections being in the matter. Thus Christ was buried and we are buried with Him. We do not want a place in this world where Christ is not. If Christ has been raised from the dead, as He has, we are entitled to take account of

ourselves as risen with Him and quickened together with Him. God works in our affections with that in view. Four times this expression *the* Christ comes in in these four verses. That is, it is Christ personally viewed as the One who is the centre of all God's thoughts, the One to whom the assembly belongs, who is shortly to be seen as the Head of the whole universe. It is *the* Christ. "If therefore, ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things which are above, where the Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God: have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth." That, so to speak, is the boundary of our inheritance. The children of Israel had certain well defined boundaries, but for us it is *not things on the earth*, for our inheritance lies beyond death where the Christ is. "For ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God." That is where our life is hid. Christ is hidden in God. He is hidden from the eyes of men for the moment. He will shortly appear, but for the moment is hidden in God. God has raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, but men cannot see Him. They have no idea that He is there, nor of the things connected with Him there. He is hidden in God until the moment comes in the ways of God, and He knows the moment when the Christ shall appear, and when the Christ shall appear, or be manifested, then we also shall appear with Him in glory. In the meantime, let us be content to be hidden in regard of things here, but to be very much alive in regard to our affections and interests in relation to the assembly, which is the body of Christ. Things which are above does not mean things literally in heaven, but things morally above, the things to be found in the assembly, because the assembly is of Christ and belongs to Him, and the things connected with the assembly are completely above the level of this poor world.

May the Lord graciously stimulate us in this direction. On the one hand, if there are any here at all in the case that Joseph's brethren were in, something remaining unjudged which brings in distance between themselves and the Lord, disqualifying them from having part in any effective way in the service of God, the Lord's word is, "Come near to me, I pray you." The Lord has intense feelings in regard of us and would operate in our souls to set us free from everything that disqualifies us, that we might be maintained in nearness to Him. "There will I maintain thee." And on the other hand, if we are at all like Jacob, unbelieving in regard to the position that Christ fills in relation to the assembly, and the service and power of the Holy Spirit to make these things real to us, then I say, Let us awake. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." That is what happened in Jacob's case, "the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, It is

enough: Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die." May the Lord graciously bless the word.

HOW THE SAINTS ARE TO BE IN THE WORLD IN THE ABSENCE OF CHRIST

2 Kings 2: 1 - 14; 2 Kings 6: 8 - 17

There is no doubt, dear brethren, that the history of Elisha in its typical bearing, fits in with the present time, for Elisha represents the saints as left here in the absence of Christ who has gone into heaven, but set up in the power of the Spirit who has come down from the ascended Christ. Elisha was left here in the absence of Elijah, who had been taken into heaven, but was left here to fill the position in the power of Elijah's mantle, suggestive of the Spirit of God; and I believe the passage in the second chapter is intended to instruct us how we are to be here in the absence of Christ.

You will notice that it says first of all, in verse 1, "That Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal." That is, the suggestion is that the Lord wants to be with us. Indeed He says at the end of Matthew, "I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age." That is what the Lord has in mind, completion of the age, this wonderful age which is characterised by God making Himself known to men in grace, and the age is to be completed in a way worthy of God, and with a view to that, the Lord is prepared to be with us, and so Elijah went with Elisha. But there are certain conditions under which the Lord is with His people, and that we get in one of the chapters in the second book of Chronicles, where a prophet says to king Asa, "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him." That is the great point, but if we go off, so to speak, on lines of our own, we cannot expect the Lord to be with us, but He is prepared to be with us if we are exercised to be with Him, and that is what follows in the chapter, that Elijah was testing Elisha as to whether Elisha was prepared to be with him. He kept on saying, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me," first of all to Bethel, then to Jericho, then to Jordan. He was simply saying that to test him, to bring to light what was in Elisha, and each time Elisha answers, "As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Elisha was determined to be with Elijah wherever Elijah was; whatever feature of the truth was being emphasised at the moment, Elisha was concerned to be with Elijah.

Now, all that, dear brethren, is of great importance to us. The Lord is prepared to be with His people, even to the completion of the age, but if we would have that realised by us, we must be prepared, like Elisha, to say that at all cost we will go on with the Lord. Whatever feature of the truth He is calling attention to, and I have no doubt these different places that Elijah and Elisha visited are all different parts of the truth that Elijah was calling attention to, we have to

be concerned to be with the Lord as to each. That involves constant movement, but only so can we expect to be able to complete our day here in testimony in a way that is pleasing to God. And so Elijah starts. Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. That was a good commencing place. Elisha was already there. We cannot have any part effectively in God's testimony if we do not know what Gilgal represents, and if we are not there, so to speak, in our souls. Elisha was there. Gilgal, as is well known, represents the cutting off of the flesh; the place where the children of Israel were circumcised again as they came into the land, and the Lord said, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you." It is a reproach to the saints, dear brethren, if we carry along with us any taint of this world. If any feature of the first man is in evidence it is a reproach to the saints. The saints are heavenly, and if we would be here in testimony to God, we have to be concerned that what has come to pass before God in the death of Christ, the circumcision of Christ, as it is called in Colossians, is made effective in us and maintained in us in power. Elijah went with Elisha from that point. Elisha was there in Gilgal.

The first place they come to is Bethel, the house of God. The Lord would direct our attention to the house of God, which, Paul says in the epistle to Timothy, is "the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." The first epistle to Timothy is written especially that we might understand the importance of the house of God. The house of God is where God dwells, *His* dwelling place on earth. We ourselves, all of us, who have received the Spirit of God, are constituted the house of God. Let every believer understand that, that we are the house of God in virtue of God dwelling among us by the Spirit. We are not simply the house of God when we are assembled. We are always the house of God in virtue of the fact that God is dwelling in and among us by the Spirit, and hence it is something always to be borne in mind, that there is that which befits the house of God. Anyone who has a house expects to be able to have things in his own house suited to his own tastes. And God expects that His house should be such that those who have to do with it will get right impressions of God from what they see in His house. If you take notice of the features to be seen in a person's house, you get a fairly good idea of what the person is like to whom the house belongs. Believers are to bear in mind that there is a certain conduct and order and demeanour that befit those who are constituted God's house. And so, for instance, Paul in writing to Timothy, says, "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of

the truth." That is one thing that is to mark the house of God, dear brethren, not simply at the prayer meeting, but also in our homes. Supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks continually. We are to remember kings and all in authority, a most important thing in days when lawlessness is so much on the increase and when government generally is so weak. I am not speaking in any political sense, or as having any biased view of matters. Government as such is constituted of God, but in the hands of men tends to be palpably weak. It is of the utmost importance that the saints of God should continue unceasingly, at home and in the meetings, praying for all men, for kings and all in authority, that government, which is of God, and has in mind the enforcement of what is right and the repression of what is evil and the punishment of evil doers, should be maintained, and the saints go through leading quiet and tranquil lives in all piety and gravity. And then it goes on to say that men ought to pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath or reasoning. What men are to be characterised by in praying everywhere, is lifting up holy hands; that is, that in the recognition that we are having to do with God holy hands are necessary, involving what we put our hands to. It is intended to raise wholesome exercises as to what we do, so that there may be no hindrance to our filling out the position proper to us as men in God's house. And then it speaks of women and what is to mark them, their demeanour, their deportment, their dress, all these things are not to take character from the world around, but to be governed by the fact that God is dwelling amongst His people by the Spirit and what is suitable to God is to regulate us in all these matters, for the house of God is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. It is a question of our position in the testimony, and so Elijah calls attention, first of all, to this great idea of the house of God, the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

The apostle, in his epistle to Timothy, goes on to emphasise the importance of piety, which should characterise every brother and sister. It means bringing God into our ordinary circumstances of daily life, and moving in relation to God. "Great is the mystery of piety, God was manifest in the flesh." Think of the wonder of that, beloved brethren, that God Himself should have come down into circumstances of human life in the Person of Jesus, and as having come down into these circumstances, filled them out in a way that glorified God. Jesus was always marked by dependence on God, was always marked by confidence in God, was always marked by the spirit of thanksgiving. How that glorified God. There was never a suggestion in the Lord Jesus of any discontent. In Psalm 16, the Spirit of Christ says, "the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage." Think of how that glorified God, and what a testimony to God it is as the saints move on quietly,

dependently, finding their resource in God and satisfied in the circumstances God has ordered for them, no complaining, discontent, or lawlessness in a world marked increasingly by these things. What a testimony there is to God as the saints who compose His house are governed practically by piety. That saves us too, from wanting to become rich. You see the truth of God touches all these matters. The epistle to Timothy teaches us that those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare. See how practical Christianity is, and it is practical because it is concerned with the knowledge of God. And if we bring God into our own life here, which is piety, then we shall find, not only that God Himself will be glorified, but we shall be preserved in contentment and happiness whatever the circumstances of life. And so it says, "Piety with contentment is great gain. For we have brought nothing into the world: it is manifest that neither can we carry anything out. But having sustenance and covering we will be content with these." Much more could be said about it. We need the first epistle to Timothy to give us the full thought as to the house of God. I have only touched on one or two details in it, but I believe that is the idea represented in this movement of Elijah to Bethel and his testing Elisha as to whether he was ready to be with him there, a most important thing, that if we want to stand in the testimony, we must first face this matter of the house of God, with all its implications.

Then Elijah moves on. He says again to Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." And Elisha says, "As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." He is prepared to go to Jericho and to see Jericho from Elijah's point of view. That is an important matter, dear brethren, to see all these features of the truth from the Lord's point of view. That is what Elijah had in mind, that Elisha was to be with him in these places, so he goes to Jericho. Now Jericho, I believe, represents the world as a great system built up by Satan, which seeks to oppose the saints and prevent them from entering into God's thoughts fully. At the day of Pentecost, it was, for the moment, overthrown in those to whom the testimony came with power, and not only at the day of Pentecost, but in the subsequent ministry of the apostles as they moved from place to place, and the testimony gained a place in the hearts of the saints in power, the world was largely overthrown in the souls of God's people, not publicly, but in the souls of God's people. In one place they said, "These ... have turned the world upside down," Acts 17: 6. That was their impression of the effect of the ministry of the apostles, that they turned the world upside down. But then, alas, when we come to this day, although Jericho had been overthrown under Joshua, it had been rebuilt in Ahab's day and that is our great danger; lest, although it was overthrown in the souls of God's people in the early days of Christianity, it should assert itself

in renewed power and seek to capture the people of God and prevent them from entering into God's mind for them. Hence the importance of seeing the world as the Lord sees it, and the Spirit of God has come for the express purpose of showing us the true character of the world. I do not say that He has come for that purpose only, far from it, but among other things, that is what His presence here demonstrates. The Lord says, "having come, he will bring demonstration to the world, of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe on me." It is very simple, and that holds good, that whatever form the world may take, however attractive the ideas in the minds of men for the betterment of things down here may seem to be, the Spirit of God remains true to Christ, and He says, 'Do not forget, they do not believe on Christ.' That exposes its true character. Whatever it may be, that is its true character, and the Spirit of God would maintain that character before our eyes. "Of sin, because they believe not on me." "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father and ye see me no more." What is the force of that? The Lord Jesus was the righteous One. He is called that in Scripture, "The just one." The saints of God are righteous or just, characteristically, as taking character from Christ, but He is the righteous One, the just One,

and He has deliberately left this world because there was no room for Him in it. On man's side, cast out as worthless; on His side, He has left it and gone to the Father; left it as a judged thing, and therefore, we are to have that estimate of it, that, whatever its outward appearance, it is a system in which the righteous One has found no place.

"And of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." That, I believe, answers to our going with Elijah to Jericho, that we hold in our souls the same judgment of the world as the Lord has. I quite agree that at the end of this very chapter there is a certain grace shown to Jericho. The men of the city come to Elisha and tell him that the situation of the city was pleasant but the water was nought and the ground barren, and Elisha tells them to bring him a new cruse and put salt in it. "And he went forth to the source of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith Jehovah: I have healed these waters: there shall not be from thence any more death or barrenness." I believe that refers to what provisionally took place in this world through the establishment of Christianity, the new cruse being the assembly, a new vessel, and salt being the principle of life, that is, preservation. It introduced an entirely new influence for God in the world. God is operating provisionally in grace with the world, and in a sense that continues, but the truth is being rapidly given up. Eventually the world will prove apostate, so when Elisha went to Bethel, little boys, the rising generation, came out and said to the man of

God, "Go up, thou bald-head." Think what God would think of that, that little boys should dare to speak to a man of God like that, and that is an illustration of what the rising generation will prove to be, utterly apostate in regard of the testimony of the Spirit of God down here, and that will seal the world's doom; hence we need to be aware what the true character of things is.

And then it says that Elijah said, "Tarry, I pray thee, here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan," and Elisha says again, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And so they went to Jordan, and what took place there? Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters and they were divided hither and thither; and they two went over on dry ground." It is a question, dear brethren, of our apprehending the glory of the Person of Christ, that He could go into death and rise triumphantly out of it, breaking its power, so as to bring to light conditions of life beyond death according to God's purpose for us. How glorious is the Son of God! Every other man has had to succumb to death, save in the cases of Enoch and Elijah where God intervened, to show that He had a right to set aside death in favour of man if He pleased, because He knew He would do it in the Lord Jesus. See the Son of God moving in the power of His own Person into death! Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together. The mantle speaks of the measure of the man, and the glory of the Person of the Son of God was seen as He moved into death and rose triumphantly from the dead. He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." It was not possible that He should be holden of death, and His resurrection from among the dead has meant the opening up, through death, of conditions of life beyond death, which have been in God's purpose from the outset for us. Are we going to attempt to continue to find our life and interests in things here, when the Lord Jesus has come forth from God, been into death and risen again in order to open up conditions of life beyond death according to God's purpose? That is what we are to take account of. "And it came to pass when they had gone over, that Elijah said to Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken away from thee." Now the position is becoming clear. Elisha is to be here in the absence of Elijah. You can understand his feelings. What a man Elijah had been, how powerful in testimony for God; how he had stood against 850 prophets on mount Carmel and maintained all that was due to God in the face of the current of apostasy that was then operating.

You can understand Elisha wondering however he was to be here without Elijah. He would be thinking to himself, 'Elijah was a great man and how can I be here without him?' And so he says, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." It was the confession of his own felt inequality for the position. It is

intended to teach us that if we are to be here in any little measure in the testimony of God, as the Lord Jesus was here so blessedly and perfectly, never surrendering anything due to God, but moving through this world in outward obscurity and smallness and content with that position, we need the power of the Spirit of God in full measure. It says in John 3 that God gives not the Spirit by measure. Thank God for that! That is, He does not *now* give the Spirit by measure. Past dispensations were marked by the Spirit in measure, but now the Spirit has fully come to indwell believers and to make it possible that the dispensation can be carried through in a way worthy of God. And so Elijah says, "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so to thee; but if not, it shall not be so." We were speaking this afternoon of the disciples seeing the Lord Jesus as He was carried up into heaven, and the impressions that they would get as they saw the manner in which He was taken up into heaven, the sense that heaven delighted in Him and the way He had carried on the testimony here. It must be carried on in the same way in which it had been filled out so blessedly in the Person of the Lord Jesus Himself. The eyes of their hearts would be fixed upon Christ. You can understand how Elisha would say to himself, 'I will not take my eyes off Elijah.' You can see how it would impress upon Elisha the need of dependence, the need of keeping near to Elijah, and that, dear brethren, is surely a matter of the greatest importance to us. There is a great need of our keeping near to the Lord and keeping our eye on the Lord and being available to the Spirit and to God if we are to be here in any way pleasing to God. "As they went on, and talked, ... behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire; and they parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into the heavens." Now Elisha saw it and says a remarkable thing, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." You might have said, he would say the chariot of Elijah and the horsemen thereof, but he says the chariot of Israel, as if he immediately grasped the idea that what was set out in Elijah as a man carried up into heaven, was God's thoughts for His people. He exactly set forth what God had in mind for His people, that they should have a place in heaven, and that there was power to set them there. It is a great thing to understand that our place is in heaven, that it is where He is, setting forth the place that belongs to the saints, and if we are left down here in testimony it is to come into the scene as from heaven; as the Lord, after sending the message to His disciples, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God," and then showing them His hands and His side causing their hearts to be glad, said to them again, "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The idea is that the testimony is to be carried on here in heavenly grace,

and the pattern of it is to be learned in the One who has been taken into heaven.

Now, following on that it says Elisha "took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him." He first rends his own clothes in two pieces as if he would say, 'I entirely discard anything that has previously marked me.' Natural features are not to be employed in the testimony of God. It is a question now of the power of the Spirit of God. He took up the mantle of Elijah; that was to be the only thing of any use. Elijah had given him that impression when he first called him, when he first sought him out; commanded to do so by God Himself, he found Elisha ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen and Elijah went up to him and cast his mantle upon him. He gave him that impression at the outset, an impression that if he was to be here in the testimony, it must be in the power that had marked Elijah, and must be according to the measure of Elijah too, for the mantle would represent the measure of the man. You may say that it is a high standard, but then the Spirit of God has come down from heaven for that very purpose. Paul represents the same idea, when in view of his departure, he says to Timothy to take the cloak that Paul had left at Troas and bring it with him. The cloak would represent Paul's measure, and Timothy was to get that and bring it with him. Paul was about to be removed and Timothy was to carry on and understand that nothing less than what had been set out in Paul was to continue in Timothy. And so it says of Elisha, "And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over." He is going back now into the sphere of testimony from the position he had been in beyond death with Elijah, but he goes back into the sphere of testimony, to fill it out in the power of Elijah. The sons of the prophets saw that the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha.

Now, I read the incident in chapter 6 in order to show that we may well afford to commit ourselves to God's testimony and to show the advantage we have in the presence of the Spirit of God here, the Spirit of truth, who, as it says, will guide into all the truth. It says that the king of Syria warred against Israel. Israel represents the people of God. I would just say, in regard of Elijah and Elisha, that their ministry was in Israel; that is, to the ten tribes, not the two tribes, so that they represent the ministry of God really in Christendom, for the ten tribes had departed from God's centre and had become largely idolatrous. They were still God's people, He had not entirely cast them off, but they had departed from God's centre and become idolatrous, and that is exactly the position of professing Christianity. Christendom embraces those who are true, but many of God's people are captive to that which characterises Christendom

and going on with what is merely formal and in character idolatrous, and yet God in mercy maintains a testimony. We ourselves, though through grace morally apart from it, are publicly part of it, and we cannot separate ourselves from it. The ministry of the Spirit amongst us not only has in view the maintenance and development of the truth to those who are available, but it is also a testimony to Christendom, and the presence of the Spirit of God among those who are available to Him, becomes a great barrier against the full development of evil. So it says that the king of Syria warred against Israel. Syria was a powerful enemy seeking to overthrow the truth, for the truth was held, if it was held anywhere, among God's people, and the king of Syria became conscious that his plans and movements were known in Israel, a remarkable thing. He became disturbed at the idea that someone was a traitor and all his military plans were known in Israel. How was that? A man of God was there in Israel; he represents the saints, in so far as they have that character, as of God, as in the gain of the presence of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God discerns all things. Every movement against the truth is discerned by the Spirit of God. He is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit is the truth. The Spirit in the saints discerns any movements in the world contrary to the truth, and discerns their character, and so one of the king's servants says, "None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." And he sends horses and chariots and a great host and they compass the city about.

And now it is a question of a young man having his eyes opened. The man of God is entirely undisturbed, but the young man needed to see how thoroughly worthwhile it is to be absolutely committed to the testimony, to the present truth, going on with it, being with the Lord at Bethel, with the Lord at Jericho, with the Lord at Jordan, and whatever feature of the truth He is emphasising at the moment, and how thoroughly worthwhile it is to be with the Lord in it and going on to the end. What is this host against a man of God? He asks Jehovah to open the eyes of his servant, the young man, and Jehovah opened his eyes and he saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. The man of God is the point, the testimony is the point, and the horses and chariots of fire, the mountain is full of them around about Elisha. If we are going on with the testimony, with the man of God, so to speak, we shall come into the gain of this wonderful protection that is there in virtue of the presence of the Spirit of God. You may say it refers to angelic protection, perhaps it does. I would not rule out the thought of angelic protection, for all the angels of God are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. It is there as much as it is needed. The Lord said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than

twelve legions of angels?" They were all there available, but it was a question of the will of God. There is no question about angelic protection if it is needed, but what is really in mind is the presence of the Spirit of God. In 1 John 4, speaking of the spirit of antichrist in the world that is opposed to the truth, it says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." That is it. The whole host of Syria might be round the man of God, but he had a power with him greater than all the hosts of Syria. The horses and chariots of fire represent divine resources; chariots of fire, God is Himself a consuming fire. Anything brought forward in opposition to the truth will finally be consumed by the fire that God Himself is. And in virtue of the presence of the Spirit of truth, all that is contrary to the truth will be exposed, and the truth will go through to the end, and the great thing for us is to see that we ourselves are with the Lord in it.

I trust that these Scriptures will be for our encouragement, as understanding that God has in mind that we should be committed to His testimony, the testimony of divine grace, righteous grace, and yet in holiness suited to God, to be carried through in the world till the Lord comes, and it is the saints who are needed that it may be carried through livingly by them. So we must be concerned to be with the Lord in whatever feature of the truth He is stressing at the moment, to have His own judgment of things, and as we are so, to go through with the Spirit of truth till the end.

THE CHILDREN OF GOD IN THE WORLD

John 1:10-13; John 6:37-39; John 6:54-58; John 10:27-30; 1 John 3:1-3

I have in mind, dear brethren, to say a word as to the purpose for which we are in the world, and as to the means for supporting us in the world according to the will of God. The verses we read in John 1 are striking because they show that the presence of Christ here in the world brought to light that there was in man no capacity to appreciate what is of God. The true light shone, but there was no ability in man to appreciate or respond to it, so that it says that "He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not." But then in that condition of things God wrought. There were certain ones who did receive Him and there are certain ones who have received Him, and that is what I want to call attention to, beloved brethren, that we are here as among those who have received Christ and believed on His name, we are here as the result of the fact that God has wrought, and that we have been born of God. It says, "as many as received him, to them gave he the right to be children of God ... who have been born, not of blood"; that is, not according to the natural order of birth, "nor of the will of the flesh," the will of the flesh has had no place in it, "nor of the will of man"; that is, it is entirely of God, sovereignly, "but of God." As we take account of ourselves in that light as born of God in the midst of a world which, apart from God's operations, would be entirely unresponsive to Him and incapable of appreciating His things at all, it must, I think, raise exercise with us as to what God has in mind in thus working. What has He in view for those who are born of Him? It might be said that He has in view for us eternal blessing and glory in accordance with His purpose, and other scriptures would show that that is true, but this scripture does not put it that way. This scripture says that to those thus born He gave the right to take the place of children of God. To take that place down here of children of God, and linking that with the passage in the first epistle of John, we read, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God." (The word is *children*, not *sons*.) Not merely are we entitled to take the place of being His children, but that we should be called such, that we should be known as such. Evidently what is in view is that the children of God are in this world in testimony. They are here to represent rightly the One by whom they have been begotten. I think you can see, dear brethren, as we take account of it, the moral darkness that marks the world, black darkness prevailing everywhere except where God has wrought. You can see what a privileged position, what a distinctive position, the children of God are in. They are here now as intended to be a testimony to the true God, the

blessed God, a testimony in a world which knows Him not, in order that in His children God might be rightly represented and become known - especially in the characteristics which John's epistle makes so much of - namely righteousness, practical righteousness in every detail of life, and love.

John in his writings traces things to their source and takes account of two generations - the generation that is of God, marked by righteousness and love, and the generation that is of the wicked one, marked by lawlessness and hatred, but in this passage in the epistle, the apostle says, "Behold, what manner of love the father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God." Not only that we should be it, but we should be called it, known as such. Therefore it says "the world knoweth us not even as it knew him not." That is a privileged position, that we become involved in the reproach and rejection of Christ in so far as we are in this world marked by the true features of the children of God. Not only so, but we have the distinction of continuing the true light as to God; the true light as introduced by Christ is to be continued by the children of God. It says, "the darkness is passing and the true light now shines." It shines among the children of God. There are doubtless other thoughts connected with children, but this position of testimony is, I believe, the main thought in connection with the children of God, and we may rest assured that in it we shall have the care of God as our Father; as a father He will care for His children, but particularly so as we are, in our intelligence and exercises, filling out the position that is proper to that of the children of God, and understanding that this is a definite matter of God's operation and of His sovereignty, that we are born of God, and that must be with a definite object in mind, and the object in mind is that the truth of God might be maintained livingly in those who are His children, in a world that otherwise knows Him not.

Then it goes on to say in John's epistle, "Beloved, now are we the children of God," showing the importance of the *now*. "*Now* are we the children of God." It is important to take account of things in that light. If we have been born of God and have believed on the name of Christ, as we have, it is not to be put off to the future as to what is in mind in that. It says, "*Now* are we the children of God." It has not been publicly manifested what we shall be, but we know this, that when He shall appear, or when it is manifested, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is, and that is to be in our hearts as a hope. One challenges oneself, dear brethren, as to how far it is a hope. The hope of seeing Christ as He is, and if we are to see Him as He is we must be like Him, and we *shall* be like Him for we shall see Him as He is, but it says everyone that has this hope in Him; that is, in the One who is to be manifested, everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself even as He is

pure. We can see how important this element of constant purification is, beloved brethren, for we are in a world of moral darkness, and hence the necessity, if we are to be in the world true to the position of children of God, the necessity for this process of moral purification, lest we should misrepresent, or convey wrong impressions of, the One by whom we have been begotten. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself even as He is pure.

I read the passages in chapters 6 and 10 of the gospel, because I believe they show the lines upon which we may be maintained in this position which God has in mind for us, and while the passage in the first chapter and the passage in John's epistle are largely a question of God or the Father, in chapters 6 and 10 of the gospel we have the Lord brought in. We have Him, of course, in the chapter in the epistle as the One whom we are to see as He is, but in the passages in chapter 6 and chapter 10 we have the present service of Christ to us, and the whole linked up with His Father's will. So in chapter 6 the Lord says, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." It is very touching that what belongs to the Father, what is in His hand, so to speak for the purpose He has in mind, has been given to Christ." All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out, for I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me, and this is the will of him that has sent me, that of all that he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up in the last day." Now I believe the idea in that is that the Lord is undertaking, as part of the Father's will, to see that those whom God has given to Him, those born of God, should be carried through and raised up at the last day. There is no thought of their being overcome by the influences of darkness that are in the world. The intention is that they should be carried right through and supported by Christ, as it is the will of God that they should be supported here. So the Lord says it is the will of Him that sent Him that He should lose nothing. As He is going to His Father he says "those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled." It was a necessity that one of His disciples should be the son of perdition, and therefore he was not carried through, but save for that one He had lost nothing, and He will lose nothing. But later on in the chapter we find that while the Lord has set Himself, so to speak, to carry those whom the Father has given Him right through, and to raise them up in the last day, it is on the principle of presenting Himself to us as living bread. That is to say, our side comes in.

We shall not be maintained in life save as we appropriate the food that is provided for the purpose, and I believe the great thing that is necessary if we are to be in this world according to God is that we should be maintained in

eternal life. Eternal life is, according to John's presentation of it, the means by which we are supported above and kept completely superior to the currents and influences that belong to this world. Here the Lord in chapter 6 proposes that He Himself should become the food of our souls with a view to our being maintained in eternal life. I cannot go into it in detail, I only stress it, that while the Lord says, it is His Father's will, that of all that the Father has given Him He should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day, it is on the principle of our appropriating the food that He has provided. The food is Himself, the living bread come down from heaven for the purpose of being appropriated by His own in their minds and affections. First in the character of the One who has given His life for us; for He speaks of His flesh and His blood, evidently alluding to His death. His flesh to be eaten, and His blood to be drunk. He says, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed," and also "whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." I believe it is an appeal to our affections, that the Lord Jesus came down from heaven and took up flesh and blood condition, for the express purpose, by means of His death which was vicarious, of closing up that condition of sinful flesh in which we were involved, so that we might partake by the Spirit in His life, in that new condition He has entered beyond death, and hence the Lord goes on to say "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him." He becomes a living object for the affections on the principle of our eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and then appropriating Him as the One who has ascended up where He was before. Christ is to be our life objectively, and the Spirit our life subjectively. As He says, it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. It is an individual matter which each of us must take up if we are to be sustained in life, and kept above currents that would otherwise affect us adversely as passing through this world. We must know what it is to be maintained in attachment to Christ by the Spirit on the principle of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and then eating Him and living by Him, so that as those who have been born of God we might be sustained in the position of testimony here.

In John 10 another feature comes in; that is, the thought of the flock, which is another very important matter, and while the exercises of chapter 6 have to be taken up individually, the intention is that we should move together, so the Lord speaks in chapter 10 of a flock of sheep. In John's gospel the sheep are those who are the subjects of the work of God and whose nature and instinct it is to hear the shepherd's voice and follow. It is important to see that the sheep in John's gospel are viewed as having that nature and instinct, they discern the shepherd's voice and follow; they follow in a flock, not individually.

Hence the voice of the shepherd in chapter 10 is of the greatest importance. The Lord says "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish." We are to be preserved from perishing in the wilderness, dropping out of the testimony here, and the thought is that as we are marked by hearing the Shepherd's voice, and following with the flock, we shall not perish. I understand that the movements of the shepherd, indicated by His voice, are discerned by the ministry that He gives in the assembly. That is, Christianity is a living thing characterised by movement, and the Lord's voice is constantly being heard in the assembly. The Lord is the great Shepherd of the sheep, and He leads by means of His voice. It is important, if we wish to be maintained in eternal life right through to the end, and supported in the position marked out for us, that we should have an attentive ear to what the Lord, the good Shepherd, is saying at any time, and then follow it up with the sheep. It is not contemplated that any sheep should stray. It is one flock and one Shepherd, and the Shepherd's voice, and the flock listening to the Shepherd's voice, and moving in accordance with it. "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

Our position as children here in testimony is that we should be representative of our Father. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." What a privileged position, and then how great is the service of Christ as presenting Himself as living food, and taking His place as the Shepherd of the flock, so that we should be maintained in eternal life and kept above all the influences that would otherwise hinder our testimony. May we be helped to have a more definite object in mind as to why we are here. The purpose for which we are here in this world is that we may fill out our place in the testimony of God and be here for His will, whatever that may involve.

DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN

2 Samuel 23: 8 - 17

I have the desire, dear brethren, to speak of what the Lord has at the present time in those who are characteristically overcomers. You will notice that this passage we have read follows on the last words of David; that is to say, it is suggestive of the end of the dispensation, and the Lord taking account at the end of the dispensation of those upon whom He could rely as faithful to Himself. These mighty men are not suggestive of gift; they are not suggestive of anything that man would take account of as particularly great. I think we shall see that they all represent in different aspects simple fidelity to Christ, and therefore, they represent features that can be found marking everyone of us, whether brother or sister, whether older or younger, there is no reason why we should not be marked by fidelity to Christ, and as we are thus marked we shall, I think, find that it is of great value to the Lord. It says, "These are the names of the mighty men *whom David had*."

It is a great thing to take account of what the Lord has at the present time amongst the saints and to be concerned to be ourselves adding to it, contributing to it. Paul, as representing the Lord, says of Timothy, "I *have* no one like minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on." Paul says, "I *have* no one like minded," as though Paul was looking round as the representative of the Lord and concerned about the ministry which the Lord had entrusted to him. He was concerned to see where were those upon whom he could rely to further the truth, and to see that the Lord's interests in every place where they had gained a foothold were in no wise being jeopardised. So the Lord also on a previous occasion in speaking to Paul at Corinth said, "Fear not, but speak and be not silent; because I am with thee, and no one shall set upon thee to injure thee, because I *have* much people in this city." *The Lord had them*. They had not been brought to light. Paul's ministry was to bring them to light, but the Lord spoke in that way of what He had in Corinth, just as He would speak at the present time, beloved brethren, of what He has in this place and in that place, in the various cities of the world and the smaller places too. Wherever men are set together, wherever wickedness is, wherever the principles of this world have sway over men, the Lord has in mind that in those places He would, so to speak, deposit and maintain something which He would regard as His own, something He has, something that stands in the place related to Himself and to the rights of God and the pleasure of God, and so this scripture speaks of "these are the names of the mighty men whom David had." As I said, it was just as David was about to pass off the scene, just as the kingdom was about to be introduced under Solomon, the Spirit of

God gives this review of the mighty men whom David had. It is intended, I believe, dear brethren, to provide certain stimulation of a spiritual kind with us to see to it that we, too, may be such, and that as the dispensation closes the Spirit of God may be able to record of us that we were such, the Lord could be regarded as having us available, so to speak, for His own interests in this world.

Now, I was saying that these persons of whom we read in this chapter were characteristically overcomers. That, of course, is apparent as we read the passage. The first one, it says, slew eight hundred at one time. He obviously was an overcomer. He overcame, he was not overcome, and so with the others that follow, they were all overcomers. *Overcoming* is an idea which appears very much in John's writings. John wrote for the last days, and he stresses the idea; that is, that one is prepared, in fidelity to the Lord and to the truth, to go against the stream in whatever way the stream may affect him, in whatever way he may be in danger of being influenced by it. An overcomer is one who in faithfulness to the truth and dependence on the Lord is prepared to go against the stream, and so in John's gospel the Lord presents Himself as the great Overcomer. He says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He said that triumphantly. He had passed through the world and every influence that Satan could bring to bear upon Him to divert Him from the path of God's will and testimony had been brought to bear upon Him, but He had passed through as an overcomer, in no respect surrendering anything due to God. He would die rather than surrender, and so, though outwardly it appeared as though He had been overcome when He was taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain, in actual fact He at that very point was overcoming, for He was there establishing, rather than surrendering, what was in the will of God. He was there establishing God's will and providing in His own death the basis upon which God would effect all His purposes of glory and blessing, so that overcoming is not to be judged by outward appearance. It may involve going to the wall so far as outward appearance is concerned, as it says of the Lord Jesus that He was "crucified through weakness." That is merely what it appeared outwardly. There was no weakness in Jesus, I need scarcely say, dear brethren, on the cross or at any other time. He delivered up His Spirit, crying with a loud voice. There was not the slightest weakness in the death of the Lord Jesus save as regards the outward appearance of things, but as to that it was said, "he has been crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power." Therefore, overcoming by the saints may involve, as men would say, going to the wall, but then all this is done in the light of resurrection, as the Lord says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, neither wilt thou allow thy

Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; thy countenance is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore," Psalm 16: 10, 11. Peter in quoting that Psalm on the day of Pentecost changes the language, and instead of saying, "Thou wilt make known to me the path of life," he says triumphantly, "Thou hast made known to me the paths of life," for the Lord was already risen.

In John's epistle he also speaks of overcoming, and says, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Then, too, in the book of Revelation we get constant references to overcomers both in church history and also in what will appear and develop in the world after the church is taken from it. I only mention that, dear brethren, in order that you may see the great importance, in the last days especially, of the overcomer. As a matter of fact, the truth of God has been maintained ever since sin came into the world on the principle of overcoming, for as soon as sin entered into the world Cain introduced false principles, false ideas contrary to the truth for the moment, and then the issue was raised as to whether the truth was going to be surrendered or whether it was going to be carried forward. Abel came forward to carry forward the truth; he would not surrender it, he would not give way to the stream that Cain had set in motion, but abode by the truth and he had to suffer for it, he had to die for it, but he was the overcomer. Abel maintained the truth and God raised up Seth in his place. Eve saying, "God has appointed me another seed instead of Abel, because Cain has slain him." We may rest assured of this, dear brethren, that if we on our part are prepared to stand by the truth we shall see that the Lord will carry the truth through, but it is to be carried through on the principle of overcoming, so that although Abel died for the testimony, he overcame in not surrendering to the current which Cain in opposition to the truth had set in motion, and the Spirit of God says of Abel that, "he being dead yet speaketh." Indeed, we are speaking of him today. The Lord is bringing the example of Abel to bear on any here to whom it may be necessary, in order to encourage us, whatever may arise, to stand by the truth, because it is in that way that the truth will go through to completion.

Well now, having said that much, I would seek with the Lord's help to speak very briefly in detail of these mighty men. We shall see, I think, that their might did not consist in that which the world would regard as great, but it is important as having part in God's testimony in this world that we should accustom ourselves to look on things as God sees them and as the Lord regards them and not as the world regards them. So we come to this one who was chief among the captains and we are given his name, and it says of him that "he lifted up his spear against eight hundred whom he slew at one time."

That is all the detail given us. We do not even know who the eight hundred were, whether Philistines, or Amalekites, or what kind of enemy they were. We are not told. We are simply told there were eight hundred and this remarkable man slew eight hundred at one time. You might wonder how he could do it, but then he did it, the power of God was with him. The point is not so much to occupy us with the detail, but for us to see what the spiritual meaning of it is as applied to ourselves, so that each of us may ask himself or herself. Why should I not develop mightiness of this kind? Not that it is a question of wanting to be anything; that is, not the question, but of being available to the Lord. "These are the names of the mighty men whom David *had*." I believe what answers to this chief of the mighty men we may see in Paul, but not in Paul as an apostle, but in Paul who was one who was himself formed by the truth, and therefore it is equally available to everyone of us. I refer to what he says in Galatians, "I am crucified with Christ." I believe this extreme might on the part of the chief of the captains, in the language proper to Christianity, is simply the power that marks one who is characteristically self-judged, because a man or woman who is characteristically self-judged is one upon whom Satan can bring eight hundred influences to bear at one time without effect. It is there that victory is gained. It is a question of self being judged, not actions being judged, actions are simply the fruit. Self is the root, and if the matter is judged at the root; that is, the person capable of the actions is in the Spirit's power and in the light of the cross of Christ, maintained in the place of death, then no suggestion of evil that Satan can bring forward, even though it be eight hundred influences at one time, can overcome that person.

Now that, dear brethren, lies at the very root of spiritual power, and I do not believe we shall ever be really effective, really mighty for the Lord, unless we have learned, and maintain in power, that elementary lesson of the true spiritual import of the cross of Christ. I might ask. Why was Christ crucified? It was not simply the act of wicked men. God was pleased to use wicked men instrumentally by which the crucifixion of Christ was brought to pass, but it was only instrumental. The crucifixion of Christ was a matter of divine love and wisdom and power, the love of Christ, too, entering into it, so that we might in the light of it learn to judge our own flesh. Paul could say, "I am crucified with Christ." We learn to judge ourselves in the light of what God has effected in the cross of Christ. The crucifixion is a very solemn matter. It is expressive of God's judgment of man in flesh. Christ took that place for us vicariously in order that that judgment might be expressed and executed, and the cross of Christ in its spiritual import is presented to us in the glad tidings to be received as glad tidings. God has expressed His judgment on man in flesh as incapable of good; it is of no use expecting anything from him. God

has ended his history judicially at the cross, and He expects that in obedience of faith and in affection for the Son of God who hung upon the cross, we should accept that truth, accept it whole-heartedly. Paul says, "*I am crucified with Christ,*" but he says, "nevertheless I live, yet not I," but Christ liveth in me"; that is, it is not an unreal thing. The person who says I am crucified with Christ is in fact actually living, but living now on what principle? He says, "not I, but Christ liveth in me." That is to say, the whole object now of Paul's life was that he himself in his body as a man on earth should be a vessel in which Christ should find expression; and he says, in order to show the power by which that may be sustained practically, "the life which I now live in flesh" (that is, in flesh and blood conditions), "I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." I believe Paul had had real transactions with Christ, and had learned from the Son of God what the bearing of the cross of Christ was, in its bearing upon Paul, and he had come to it that no less a person than the Son of God had loved Paul and given Himself for Paul, so that Paul might know the joy of walking in liberty, being entirely free from the dominion of sin and the power of law and all that would hinder, and that the life of Christ might find expression in him.

Now, dear brethren, if Paul could take it up, why should not I, why should not we, why should not each one of us take it up? "I am crucified with Christ," he says. That is to say, all that Paul was as a man in flesh, was, in the Spirit's power and under the influence of the love of the Son of God, maintained in the place of death, and his whole life was now held as available to Christ. Well, I say again, in the measure in which we know these things, in that measure we shall be proof against any form of Satan's influence brought to bear upon us. He can bring, if he wishes, eight hundred influences to which the flesh would respond, he can bring them to bear upon us, and we shall prove superior to them. This is in a sense very elementary, but I believe it is fundamental; it is striking to me that this chief of the captains is this one of whom we read simply that he lifted up his spear against eight hundred whom he slew at one time. It shows, beloved brethren, that spiritual power and availability for Christ commences with our learning and maintaining in our souls the import of the cross of Christ.

Well, then, the next one we come to is "Eleazar, the son of Dodo, the son of an Ahohite"; he was one of the three mighty men with David, when they had defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone up. "He arose and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave to the sword." In all the three incidents that follow the one relating to the chief of the captains, it is the Philistines that are in question. They were the great enemy of David, not that he had no other

enemies which he overcame, but the Philistines are the most prominent of David's enemies. The Philistine is always a menace to us, dear brethren. The Philistine represents,

as I understand it, the effort of the natural mind to compass the things of God, and if any of us has an able mind or an active mind, such an one has particularly to guard against what is Philistine. We all have to guard against the effort in natural ability to take up the things of God apart from the power of the Spirit of God. Where the Philistine gets a place, the results are disastrous to the people of God. You see it very plainly in Christendom around us. The clerical system around us is based on the principle that the Spirit of God is displaced and that men of education and training and learning lead in the ministry. Indeed it is all in their hands, and the position has become such that the truth of God by that very means is being entirely lost, and what is replacing it is just what has been conceived in the mind of man. We are allowed to see it in Christendom around us very plainly in order that we may be on our guard against anything of that kind having place amongst ourselves.

Well now, in what did the might of this man Eleazar consist? As far as I can see, it was that he sedulously stood by the word of God. His sword is made much of. He strove until he was weary and even then his hand was still cleaving to his sword. I believe it is the power that one may develop as knowing the Scriptures and knowing how to apply them, as being *with the Lord* in it, that is the important thing. It says, "And after him, Eleazar the son of Dodo, the son of an Ahohite; he was one of the three mighty men *with David*." That is the important thing, to be *with* David, so to speak, in the handling of the Scriptures. I trust that every young brother and young sister is concerned to acquire a knowledge of the Scriptures. We have to thank God for the abundance of spiritual ministry that we enjoy and the abundance of opportunities that we have for getting together: that is a cause for the greatest thankfulness to God, and we are in no way to despise or belittle it, but it is also of the greatest importance that each one for himself and herself should become fully acquainted with the Scriptures, and that we should go on day by day, year in and year out, all through our lives reading the Scriptures, reading *all* the Scriptures, becoming acquainted with the Scriptures. We do not realise what wealth there is in the Scriptures until we become acquainted with them, and the more acquainted we are with them the more we discover what wealth they contain. They are a valuable treasury, and they are a valuable armoury. You can draw out of the Scriptures by the Spirit of God an endless wealth for the satisfaction of the souls of God's people, and to give yourself substance in the service of God, and you can also find in the Scriptures that which will save you from every attack. There has not been a single attack ever

made on an individual saint, or on the brethren as moving collectively in the truth, to which the answer has not been found in the Scriptures. They are an extraordinary armoury that is never exhausted, and therefore it is of the greatest importance, if we would have part in what is for the Lord here on earth, that we should learn to avail ourselves of the Scriptures.

Paul said to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," or complete. It is complete as to equipment, fully equipped, a man of God is the idea of one who is standing for God in an evil day and one of the greatest elements in his equipment is the Scriptures given by inspiration of God; but then, of course, dear brethren, it is not only the Scriptures but it is the Scriptures as handled by one who is with God. We well know that Satan can quote Scripture: Satan quoted Scripture in the temptation of the Lord in the wilderness. He would use Scripture to divert the Lord, and therefore it is not only the Scriptures, but it is the Scriptures as held livingly, and dependently on the Lord. So it says, that the word of God is living and operative, not that I would say that the word of God is exactly the Scriptures literally, but the Scriptures applied livingly would convey to us the word of God; "the word of God," it says, "is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is not a creature unapparent before him, but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes with whom we have to do." The word of God brings us into the presence of God. The Scriptures are to be read in that way, they are to be read as having their application to one's own conscience and heart. In chapter 3 of Judges, we read of a judge named Ehud who represents one who is skilful in the use of the Scriptures and it says that he made himself a dagger or a sword having two edges. It does not simply say he made a sword with two edges, but he made *him* a sword; that is, he made it for himself. That is the important thing, and then he could go into the presence of Eglon, king of Moab, and could say, "I have a word from God unto thee." What was the message from God? It was the sword plunged into the king of Moab; that was the message of God. It was a question of overthrowing the king of Moab, and doing it authoritatively, and he did it with a sword of two edges that he had first made for himself. That is the secret of power, the secret of power in the handling of the Scriptures is that the Scriptures have first had their power in one's own conscience and heart, and then they can be applied powerfully as needed in other directions. Well now, it says of this man Eleazar, that he arose and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary and his hand clave unto the

sword. It was the word that he was holding; and so we read of Apollos, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, and then it goes on to say what power he had, he convinced the Jews and that publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. That was the Scriptures used in a powerful way by one who was mighty in them. I think you will agree, beloved brethren, that self-judgment as we have been speaking of it and a knowledge of the Scriptures, with ability to use them rightly as being with the Lord in the matter, are two elements of power that are open to every one of us. There is no reason why we should not be available to the Lord, as marked by these features. And then we come to the third, "Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite." It says of him that "the Philistines were gathered into a troop, and there was there a plot of ground full of lentils, and the people had fled before the Philistines; and he stood in the midst of the plot and delivered it, and smote the Philistines, and Jehovah wrought a great deliverance." We have here a piece of ground, which is suggestive of a local position. It is a question of a local position being defended and it is being defended on the principle of *standing* in it. That is another thing that we can all do in our own localities, understanding the truth, allowing it to have place in our own souls, and then standing in it wherever we are placed. If I find myself in a locality and there are certain influences at work in that locality, it may be a little element of personal feeling or of partisan spirit or something of that sort, well now, what is the best way to meet it? The best way to meet it is for one or two to be standing in the locality expressive of the truth. One or two in the locality moving among the saints in lowliness and in love and entirely free from partisanship, and set to serve in love without partiality, what a long way that will go in helping to bind the saints together. Suppose there is a little element of personal feeling, is there someone who is prepared to lay down his life for the brethren and let personal considerations go, in order that love may have its free flow? Standing in the truth is the way to help the saints in any locality. That is particularly illustrated in the history of Corinth.

You remember what was happening at Corinth, how there was great disunity there, and an effort on the part of certain leaders there to undermine the authority of the apostle and the authority of the truth that he presented. What did Paul do? He wrote to them authoritatively, bringing the mind of the Lord to bear upon the situation that existed, but then he did something else. He sent to them his child Timothy. It does not say he was to teach, but he would bring to the memory of the Corinthians, I have no doubt it means by his example, Paul's ways as they are in Christ, "as I teach everywhere in every assembly," he says. I picture to myself the influence that young man would have at Corinth. There would be the great leaders seeking to make something of

themselves, and parties ranged under these different leaders, and then there would be the young man Timothy among them, moving in and out in the spirit of Christ, and as he moved without partisanship, governed by the truth, the Corinthians would begin to say to themselves, 'that is exactly like Paul was.' They would see for themselves that the Spirit of God was supporting that young man, for the Spirit of God will always support the truth, and it is a question, dear brethren, of what the Spirit of God supports. That is what we want to go in for, and I believe, in Timothy going among them and in his influence in their midst as bringing to their remembrance Paul's ways as they were in Christ, there was, unknown to the great leaders in Corinth, the undermining of their influence and the re-establishing of what was of God in that place. And so one has often referred, dear brethren, to the importance of the exemplification of the truth. You remember when Gideon had to meet the host of the Midianites, it says that he divided his men into three companies of a hundred each and he said to them, "Look on me, and do likewise ... as I do, so shall ye do." And then they were to blow with the trumpets and they said, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." I believe the sword of the Lord is like Paul's epistle, it is the authority of the Lord, the authoritative word of the Lord that has its own way, but then there is also the sword of Gideon and I believe the sword of Gideon is the power of exemplification, for Gideon said, "Look on me and do likewise." So Timothy was to exemplify the truth at Corinth so that they might have brought to their remembrance Paul's ways as they are in Christ, as he says, "as I teach everywhere in every assembly." It is important to remember, dear brethren, that every assembly is intended to be patterned after the divine pattern. There is no reason why there should be features of Christ in one place and not features of Christ in another. The intention is that every local assembly should be patterned after the divine conception, and so Paul says, "as I teach everywhere in every assembly." And so, this third man Shammah represents the important principle of holding the ground in a locality, just standing, standing in the truth in a locality, and the Spirit of God will stand by those who are marked by these features.

Finally, we get the three mighty men who are so often referred to, and now it is a question of considering for the heart of Christ. I am sure that would appeal to everyone who loves Christ, the possibility of considering for the heart of Christ, the possibility of doing it now. The opportunity for doing it will soon be gone, dear brethren, at least in the way in which we have it now. The opportunity for considering for what His heart desires while He is still rejected, will soon be gone, and so it is an opportunity not to be missed, and it says, "David longed," showing how his feelings were in it. "David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem,

which is in the gate." The water of the well of Bethlehem. There is nothing Philistine about that; the water of the well of Bethlehem is what is fresh in the power of the Holy Spirit, what has proper assembly features about it, for Bethlehem is always typical, I believe, of the assembly in its local expression, and so as the Lord is looking down on different assemblies, where He sees us. He is longing that there should be something of the character of the affectionate response proper to the assembly seen in every place. That should find expression in our being of one mind and breaking bread in remembrance of the Lord, for the calling of Him to mind, not doing it as a formality, but bringing the affections into it; it is a question of answering to the longings of Christ. "Water of the well of Bethlehem which is in the gate." That is what the Lord wants. How He must feel the cold formalism in all that is around us in the religious world, what people call divine worship. How the Lord must feel it! How he felt it when He went into the house of Simon the Pharisee! He was invited into the house, outwardly patronised, but inside what was there? "Thou gavest me not water on my feet, but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair." On the other hand, what His heart enjoyed as the woman wept and washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed and anointed His feet! So it says, "David longed," and these three mighty men broke through the host of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and took it and brought it to David.

Is there someone here who loves Christ, and who has not yet moved in this way of bringing Him what His heart looks for? It is a great thing to break through, dear brethren. These three broke through. It is an important thing that there should be this element of breaking through too in every locality. If there is any locality where things appear to be a little dry or formal or stale, there should be exercise that there should be the breaking through of all that, and the bringing in of what is fresh and living in the power of the Spirit of God. That is what the Lord desires and we should all seek that it should be found among us, the breaking through of everything that is Philistine in character and bringing in what is fresh and living in the energy of the Spirit to satisfy the heart of Christ.

So they brought this to David and it says, "nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto Jehovah." That does not mean that he did not appreciate it; he very greatly appreciated it. When it comes to the antitype we see in one sense the Lord does drink of what is brought to Him. He does appreciate it fully. He will first of all have His own portion in it. Then David poured it out to Jehovah, and that is exactly what the Lord is doing at the present time in the assembly as the saints are found responding to Him and

affording Him assembly affection in response to His own heart. The Lord secures it first for Himself and then He turns it all God-ward, all is gathered up and turned to yield refreshment to the heart of God.

Well now, these things that we have touched upon, dear brethren, are not things that the world would regard as of any consequence at all, but they are very great indeed in the sight of the Lord. "These are the names of the mighty men whom David had."

It is a question of what the Lord has at the present time, and of the possibility of every one of us here contributing to it, so that there may be more for Him during the little while that remains to us. The chapter goes on to speak of others, it speaks about a man named Benaiah, a mighty man of valour who performed exploits. He slew two lion-like men of Moab, and then he slew a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and then he smote an Egyptian, an imposing man who had a spear, and plucked it out of his hand, and slew him with his own spear. They were great exploits, but remarkably enough these exploits were not so great in the sight of David as the things of which we have been speaking. It says of Benaiah he was a man of great exploits, but he did not attain to the first three, and so I urge on oneself and on the dear brethren the importance of this element of true self-judgment, maintained in the power of the Spirit, and then of the right application of the Holy Scriptures in the power of the Spirit, and then the standing in one's own locality in the truth, and then moving together to provide Christ with assembly affection, according to His longings.

These are the greatest things, and we shall minister greatly to the heart of Christ if we all are more and more marked by them.

May the Lord bless His word.

CHRISTIANITY CHARACTERISED BY MOVEMENT

John 1:32-42; John 8:12; John 8:31-36; John 10:24-38; John 21:18-22

I wish to say a word, dear brethren, as to the greatness of Christianity, in which, by God's grace, we have part, for it is characterised by the fact that the Son of God has come, and then by the fact that consequent upon His having accomplished redemption the Holy Spirit has come. I hope to be able to indicate something of the greatness of what results from these facts, and then further to show that Christianity is a system of movement, for each of these chapters from which I have read brings in the thought of "following," following the Lord; the Lord walking and the disciples following, which means that there is no such thought as stagnation in Christianity, no thought of being where we were ten years ago. Any such thought as that is foreign to Christianity. It is a system, if one may use such a word, characterised by life and movement. It is important that we should all understand that, because we shall not find satisfaction in the things of God, if we become stagnant, and the way to be preserved from stagnation is to be following, following the Lord.

Well now, we have, where we commenced reading, the witness borne by John the baptist; he says, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him"; that is, upon Jesus. We have previously had in this chapter the great fact stated by the Spirit of God, by John the evangelist, "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us." Prior to that we have the personal greatness of the Word. It says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." These are most absolute statements as to the personal greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ who is spoken of as "the Word." That He was in the beginning, that He was with God, that He was God, and then it goes on to say, "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." When we say, He was God, we do not imply, of course, that He has ceased to be God, for Scripture is abundantly clear on that point. Scripture, speaking of Christ as having become Man, says in the epistle to the Romans, "who is over all, God blessed for ever." So these great fundamental facts as to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ are to be held, and held, livingly, in our souls, because as they are thus held we shall become increasingly impressed with what has come in in virtue of the fact that the Son of God has come. Think of One who is so great become flesh. "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us"; that He who is God should in grace have assumed a condition of flesh and blood so that He might bring amongst men in a way that could be apprehended by them the testimony of what God's thoughts of love and blessing were for them. It says, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among

us," and the apostle goes on to say, "we have contemplated his glory," and what He speaks of as glory is a glory as of an only-begotten with a father; that is the kind of glory that they apprehended. It is not exactly what men call glory, but it was moral excellence and beauty that was attractive to the eyes of those in whom God wrought. They discerned in Jesus a peculiar glory as of an only-begotten with a father, and it was God become man that was setting it out; that is the wonder of it, dear brethren, that God should have come in in that way in Jesus, that what He had in mind for men was that sonship should become available for men, and sonship known affectionately, "an only-begotten with a father."

So John the baptist says, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it abode upon him." We might have thought it wonderful that one Person of the Godhead should come down to earth in the form of Man, but then the Spirit comes also, descending and identifying Himself in grace with the lowly Man who was there, indicating that if God was prepared to draw near to man in grace in the Person of His Son, the Spirit also was prepared to come in and fill His place in lowly service; He would identify Himself in grace with that lowly Man who was there in the Person of Jesus. And so He descended from heaven as a dove and abode upon Him. A dove speaks of that which is most sensitive, and the Holy Spirit took that form and abode upon Jesus in order to convey to us that in the Person of the Lord Jesus there was now here on earth as a Man. One upon whom God could rest with infinite complacency. There was not the slightest thing about that perfect Man who was there, the Lord Jesus Christ, that was in any way disturbing to the holiness of God. The Holy Spirit came down and abode upon Him. All this is very wonderful, because what it is leading up to is that redemption being accomplished we are to be brought to have part in the life of that Man. We are to receive by the Holy Spirit of His life, and to be brought into a position of favour and a relationship of affection, in Him. These are thoughts that divine love has devised and divine love and wisdom have carried into effect, so John the baptist says, "He who sent me to baptize with water, he said to me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding on him, he it is who baptises with the Holy Spirit," and he says, "I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God." The Son of God is, I believe, the title which is intended to convey to us the personal pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. It refers to Him in manhood, but it involves the truth of His Person, as to who it is that was there in manhood, and therefore it is intended to arouse attention, as John says in his first epistle, "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding that we should know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ." That is, He apprehended in the Person of the Lord Jesus

Christ, One come in to bring in the full revelation of God in the light in which He desired to be known, and to bring in conditions of life beyond death in Himself as Man in which we might be given to have part, so that it can be said, "we know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ." Now He says, "he it is who baptises with the Holy Spirit." That is a wonderful thing. The Lord could not do that until He had first accomplished redemption, removing by the sacrifice of Himself all that lay upon men, in order that He might have the right to baptise with the Holy Spirit. I have no doubt that it has the assembly in view, for as to the assembly the apostle says, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, "in the power of one spirit we have all been baptised into one body, ... and all have been given to drink of one Spirit," 1 Corinthians 12: 13.

It is a wonderful thing that we should be given part in the Holy Spirit. The Lord has the right to baptise with the Holy Spirit and He has done it. Peter said on the day of Pentecost, speaking of the Lord, "Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which ye behold and hear," Acts 2: 33. The Lord as Man received the Spirit from the Father, but He received it in order to shed it forth, as it says in Psalm 68, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them," Psalm 68: 18. The Holy Spirit is a wonderful gift to have received. I wonder whether we all appreciate the gain that is ours in having received the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Spirit of life in another Man. What a wonderful thing that is, to have received the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Spirit of life in the Man that has been in God's purpose from the very outset; "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death," Romans 8: 2. Then He is the Spirit of *God*, which is to emphasise divine power, that the Spirit of God in us is greater than the flesh and therefore there is no reason why we should be under the power of the flesh, for God's spirit dwells in us; then He is the Spirit of Christ; that is the character which the Holy Spirit produces, and it says, "If anyone has not the Spirit of Christ he is not of him," Romans 8: 9. Then He is the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from among the dead. I believe, that God in raising up Jesus from among the dead expressed His full delight in that Man. There were millions of men lying in their graves when Jesus lay in His grave, including men who had been great in this world's history, but God came in and raised up *Jesus* from among the dead, not Nebuchadnezzar, not any of the great men that had figured at any time in the course of the world's history. It was Jesus. He raised up Jesus from among the dead and left all the rest in their graves.

What an indication it is to us of the thoughts that God has with regard to Jesus, and the Spirit of Him who has done it dwells in us; that is, He is capable of producing in us the same feelings with regard to Jesus, the same appreciation of Jesus that is found with God. The Spirit is also the "Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Think of that, think of receiving such a Spirit. I am only running over this in order that we might get some impression of the greatness of Christianity, and of what it is we have come into, the possibilities of it in virtue of the fact that the Son of God has come, and having accomplished redemption, has taken His place in heaven in the Father's presence as Man, and then the Spirit of God has come, Christ having baptised with the Holy Spirit.

Now these things coming before us it is evidently contemplated that we should be affected by them and be marked by a desire to enter into what God has in His mind for His people. So it says, "John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked." They *looked* upon Jesus as He walked. Jesus was not standing still, He was walking. He was conveying, so to speak, that what He had now come to introduce was to be characterised by movement, so looking upon Jesus as He walked, John says, "Behold the Lamb of God." What an impression! Those who were godly in Israel would be accustomed to the thought of the Lamb of God. They would remember for instance that in Genesis 22 God called Abraham to take his son, his only son Isaac whom he loved and offer him up for a burnt offering. They would understand how God contemplated that there should be something wholly for Himself, that what had come in by sin was only to become an occasion for the fragrance of Christ in devotion to God's will and glory to come into expression. They would remember Abraham's word, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." Now here was the Lamb of God. We are intended, dear brethren, to fix our eye upon Christ, the Lamb of God. Take account of what has come in for God, the very existence of sin and what results from it having become an occasion for the devotedness of Christ to come into expression so that not only has God been glorified in regard of all that came in through sin, but there remains the fragrance of the love of Christ, in devotion to the will and glory of God, that fills the whole scene. I believe heaven will be pervaded with the fragrance of the devotedness of Christ. John says, "Behold the Lamb of God," and two of his disciples hear him speak and follow Jesus. They follow Jesus because they are attracted to Him.

We must be prepared for movement, because as I said at the beginning, Christianity is a system of movement, there is nothing stagnant about it. Jesus turned and saw them following; wherever there is any desire to follow the Lord, and the features of the truth He is bringing before us, the Lord takes

account of it. He turned and saw them following and said, "What seek ye?" He would have us say for ourselves what it is that we desire. If the Lord were to ask each one of us in this room, What seek ye? what would we answer? What do we want to know? He says to these "What seek ye, and they said, Rabbi, which is being interpreted, Teacher, Where abidest thou?" You might say, why did they ask that. There was something about the Lord Jesus that made them ask where He dwelt. They evidently wanted to see Him at home. There was something about Jesus that was so attractive that they wanted to see Him in His own sphere. We want to see Him where He is, entirely as He is in circumstances congenial to Himself. He says "Come and see." How encouraging that we have the Holy Spirit so that we can come and see where Jesus is, where He dwells. The Spirit of God bears testimony to it. The Spirit of God says, "who is in the bosom of the Father." The bosom of the Father suggests what is receptive and restful, a place of abiding affections. They say, "Where abidest thou?" and He says, "Come and see," as though He would say, the same place which I am filling as a Man, is what God has in mind for those whom the Father has drawn to Me. He would say "Come and see" to every one of us. John says, "they went therefore and saw where he above, and they abode with him that day. It was about the tenth hour." Now there is further movement. One of the two who heard John speak was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, and he comes and tells his own brother Simon. There is suggested to us in this, that Christianity is a system of personal intercourse, of knowing those in whom there is any evidence of the work of God and of seeking them out and saying to them "Come and see." Andrew comes, and finds his brother Simon and says, "We have found the Messiah which is, being interpreted, the Christ." He brought him to Jesus. It is not recorded that he said, Come and see, but it is recorded that he led him to Jesus. Philip said to Nathanael, Come and see.

I believe "Come and see," is a great word for this present time when there is very little readiness to listen to the word of God, very little interest in the gospel preached, whether it be in the halls, or in the open air, very little ear for it apparently. It looks as though the spirit of apostasy is rapidly creeping over the whole Christian world and there is very little ear outwardly for the gospel, but if there are any showing interest in these things it is a question of being able to say, Come and see. So Andrew brings his brother to Jesus and it says, "Jesus beheld him," and said, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona, thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone." A stone suggests a building. What is in mind is, that of a spiritual house in which God, as revealed in Christ, is to be served, and God *is* to be served. He has come out in Christ in that way which I have been seeking to set before you with a view to being

served in response in the affections which He begets. He has nothing less in mind for us than sonship, sonship set out in the Person of His Beloved Son. "Ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus," and "because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father;" Galatians 3: 26 and Galatians 4: 6. The Spirit of God's Son in our hearts involves that God is to be served in the true affection and intelligence of sonship, and He is to be served in a spiritual house, a structure of living stones; that is, of persons, persons with affections, persons with feelings, persons who can respond to God. The Lord looking on Simon said, "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone." You are to understand that you are a living stone, an essential part in the spiritual house, and not only are you to understand that you are essential, but you are *to be called* a stone. If a brother is always silent in the assembly will he be *called* a stone? Will he be called Cephas, will the brethren recognise him as a living stone? He is a believer, and has the Spirit of God, he belongs to the spiritual house. Is there evidence that he is a living stone? That is what the Lord has in mind. If there are any here who do not enjoy liberty, I would urge you to get to the Lord about it, and to contemplate Christ and follow His movements, to follow Him coming down from heaven freighted with the thoughts of God, and setting out amongst men sonship in a most attractive form, and then going down into death, and then going triumphantly to the right hand of God and receiving the Holy Spirit from the Father, and then shedding forth the Holy Spirit in our hearts, so that we might be brought into this matter in a living and feeling way. God desires living stones, and that is what He had in mind in the revelation of Himself, that there should be those who respond to it in a living and affectionate way.

I believe the first chapter sets forth these things objectively that we may understand what the mind of God for us is, but now in the remaining passages we have read we get the thought of following with something specific in mind. The Lord says in chapter 8, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." In John's gospel the Lord constantly presents Himself personally to our hearts. He says, for instance, in chapter 6, "I am the bread of life," intending that we are to understand that we are to feed upon Christ, and feeding in a spiritual sense is a matter of allowing our minds to engage themselves with Christ, and then the affections will follow. It is a question of the spiritual affections being nourished, but the spiritual affections will not be nourished if our minds are not rightly directed. Our minds are to give place to these things, to consider Christ and contemplate Him, to follow Him in His movements, and if we are exercised about these things we shall certainly pray about them. The first

chapter should encourage us to do that. In this chapter He says, "I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." In verse 31 He speaks to those who continue in His word, which is the same thing as following Him, for the Lord in His word indicates what is in mind for us. He does not say the same thing today as He said a week ago, for He would have us in movement. If He has to say the same thing today as He said a week ago it may indicate that we are stagnant, and it is a serious thing if the Lord has to keep on saying the same thing over and over again. If we are governed by what He says one time then He will have something different to say to us the next time, so the movements of the Lord Jesus are largely indicated in what He says, what His word is at any given time.

The Lord says, "If ye abide in my word, ye are truly my disciples and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." It is a question of believing and the truth setting us free and the Son setting us free. I believe the truth setting us free has in mind our being liberated from every form of the power of sin over us, and the Son setting us free has in mind our being introduced in liberty into the privilege and reality of sonship. He says, "The truth shall set you free." I believe this is a matter of following up the truth as it is presented in Christ.

I have been referring to the Lord's coming in and His going into death. We should inquire what the import of the death of Christ is. It is not only that by which we have relief from judgment that would otherwise have fallen upon us, but it becomes the power of salvation from this world. In the light of the death of Christ we are entitled to take account of ourselves as dead indeed unto sin. The world system is characterised by sin, but we are entitled to regard ourselves as having died to it, and having taken up this attitude in our minds in the light of the death of Christ, we find deliverance from the world. We have been committed to His death in baptism. It is part of the truth of Christianity and we are to continue in His word. We are to allow it to have a place in our hearts and minds. It is a wonderful privilege that the Lord has given us, that we are entitled to regard ourselves as dead to sin, and alive unto God. We are now for the pleasure of God in Christ Jesus in a place of unlimited favour. When the Lord says "the truth shall set you free," they immediately say, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man, how sayest thou, ye shall be made free." The Lord says, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." Sometimes we are inclined to say that we can do as we like, and we forget that if that is my attitude of mind I am lawless. I am simply doing what suits myself and not what suits Christ. So the Lord says, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant," or bondman, "of sin." The

bondman abides not in the house for ever. God has no pleasure in bondmen, in that sense. The Lord has died to set us free from the bondage of sin and every claim that is made upon us, in order to bring us into the liberty set out in Him in the presence of the Father. God has nothing less than that for every one of us, so it is a question of following, continuing in His word. So chapter 8 has in mind, as I understand it, our liberation practically from all that would hold us in bondage and our introduction practically into the liberty of sonship.

In John 10 we have following connected with the sheep. It is over against mere profession. In verses 22 and 23 it says, "The feast of the dedication was celebrating at Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in the porch of Solomon." It was winter, things were cold. The Lord was walking in Solomon's porch, which I suppose was the porch of judgment; that is to say, the movements of the Lord Jesus have a discriminating effect. They expose those in whom God has not wrought, and they bring to light those in whom He *has* wrought. The present ministry of the Lord is having that effect in Christendom, exposing apostasy and that which is only mere profession, and bringing to light as characterised by life those who are really Christ's sheep. The sheep in John's gospel are not quite the same idea as sheep in Matthew's and Luke's gospels. Matthew and Luke speak of sheep by reference to the propensity of sheep to stray. John speaks of sheep as those who are the subject of divine workmanship, and who have been given to Christ by the Father, and who are marked by certain features instinctive to them, namely, they hear the Shepherd's voice and follow. It is characteristic of sheep, the true sheep of Christ, to hear His voice and follow, and that is what should mark us. There are, alas, many dear sheep of Christ who are not marked by hearing the Shepherd's voice and following. They are so entangled in systems and associations that are displeasing to the Lord that they do not know what it is to hear His living voice. There is a place where the Lord's present living voice is heard, but, alas, there are many dear sheep so mixed up with what is contrary to the truth, in religious or other unholy associations or in their ways, that they are at a distance from the Lord and do not know what it is to hear continually the living voice of the Shepherd, but that is abnormal.

The Lord would have every one of us following with the flock. There is no suggestion of independence or insularity about a flock, and any shepherd will tell you that if a sheep isolates itself from the rest of the flock it is evident that the sheep is sick, so the Lord uses this illustration of a flock moving together as regulated by the Shepherd's voice and affected by the living food He provides. In chapter 10 the Lord says, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." It is a

question of perishing. You remember how the children of Israel fell in the wilderness because they were marked by unbelief and disobedience. The Lord says, "*My sheep* hear my voice, and they follow me and I give them life eternal." That is the result of following the Shepherd. You hear His voice and follow and eternal life is enjoyed. You are constantly in the enjoyment among the sheep of what is living, always sustained in the freshness of eternal life in the midst of all that is abroad in this world. "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." We know something of this, and it comes in in this chapter in contrast to what is merely religious. It is most important that we should be going on listening to the Shepherd's voice, and in the enjoyment of eternal life, because it is a testimony in the world to the reality of divine things.

Then we come to chapter 21, and still there is the thought of following, and here it is a question of the Lord's word to Peter. I believe Peter represents the public history of the assembly; by that I mean the true assembly, not mere profession. What is true of Peter is that he undoubtedly loved the Lord. There is no question about that, but he had a chequered history publicly even to the extent of denying the Lord at one time, a most solemn matter, and we have to feel that, not only in regard to ourselves individually, but the unfaithfulness that has marked the history of the assembly. I believe Peter represents that, and yet at the end of John's gospel he is seen as recovered. We can take courage from that, for the Lord is working in the way of recovery in our day, so that what is proper to the assembly should come into expression in the assembly, and Peter represents that feature. John, I believe, represents the underlying work of God that goes through. He was leaning on Jesus' breast at supper, and Peter was not so near the Lord as that, but at the end Peter glorifies God by his death. That is something for us to have before us, that whatever it involves we are to finish to the glory of God. The Lord has to say to Peter, "When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest." The girding himself refers to service, and we sometimes find when we are young and girded for service that a certain amount of self-will and independence enters into it. "But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and bring thee where thou dost not desire." "But he said this signifying by what death he should glorify God." Peter was to finish up in conformity with Christ by glorifying God. The Lord was indicating in reference to his stretching forth his hands, that he would die by crucifixion, which we know by history is what actually happened. He finished up in complete correspondence with Christ as suffering for the will of God. He wholly yielded to that will whatever it involved in the way of public

reproach. Indeed that is what is before us and it is a question of our seeing to it that we follow the Lord, in view of finishing up to the glory of God.

Now the Lord having said that to Peter, says "follow me," and Peter turns, showing how constantly the Lord has to remind us time after time of what is essential. He says, "Follow me," and when Peter turns he immediately sees John following, and he says to Jesus, "What shall this man do," and the Lord answering says, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee, follow thou me." That is the last word to Peter recorded on the part of the Lord Jesus, and if we would finish well, as the Lord would have us finish to the glory of God, we can only do so as we set ourselves to follow the Lord, and that involves having an attentive ear to what He is saying in the ministry and giving it its proper place in our souls. May we prepare our hearts to have an attentive ear to whatever He is saying, because whatever the need of the moment is, and whatever He is seeking to secure in His people, the Lord will speak in relation to it. Christianity is a great system of movement. There is nothing stagnant about it, and if we would be in the current of what the Spirit has in mind the great thing for us is to have an attentive ear to what the Lord is saying and to follow it up.

May the Lord give us grace to do so for His name's sake.

THE ASSEMBLY AS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Ephesians 1: 20 - 23; Ephesians 3:8-11; Ephesians 3:20,21; Ephesians 5:23-32; 2 Chronicles 9:3-7

I desire, dear brethren, to speak of the assembly as it is presented in the epistle to the Ephesians. This epistle contemplates the assembly, not in its local aspect, as do the epistles to the Corinthians, but in its universal aspect, comprising all those who, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ have been sealed with the Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost until the day when the Lord takes His own to be with Himself. The first passage read in chapter 3 is more restricted in the sense that it refers to the whole assembly as it is on earth at the moment; that is, it is a question of what is seen in the assembly now, although, of course, it covers the whole period of the assembly's history on earth. Obviously it refers to what is seen at any particular time, in the assembly on earth at that moment. I trust all here are interested in the assembly, for it is the greatest conception of divine love and wisdom; it is to be both in the world to come and throughout eternity a vessel of divine glory, and it is the greatest conceivable privilege that you and I should have part in it.

John the baptist, as men would reckon him, was a much greater man than any of us; indeed, he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth, and yet the Lord says that he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. That gives us some idea, dear brethren, of the especially privileged place that belongs to us in the sovereignty of God as being privileged to form part of this wonderful vessel, the assembly, which is the body of Christ; hence I would urge on everyone here, old and young alike, to see that what little time remains to us before the Lord takes us is devoted to seeking an increased understanding of what it is we belong to, and seeking help from the Lord to function in it, according to His desire.

The epistle to the Ephesians, and, of course, all the epistles, are written from the standpoint of Christ having risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God, so that certain things are apprehended now as come to pass in Him. It says, for instance, in the early part of chapter 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us ... ", not 'who is going to bless us' but "who *has* blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." Christ being now in His position in the heavenlies at the right hand of God, having accomplished redemption, and the Holy Spirit having come down, it may be said in that way that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; because that is what is in

God's mind for us, and *all* that is in God's mind for us can be realised at the present time by the Holy Spirit, who is the earnest of the inheritance. When I say *all*, I mean *all*. There is, of course, the actual bodily condition, which is future, the bodily condition of conformity to Christ's own body of glory, and which is proper to heaven; but, subject to that limitation, there is no reason why believers should not enter already in the power of the Holy Spirit into the spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ which God has given us. Then, further, it says that He has made us accepted, or taken us into favour, in the Beloved.

Before I speak of the Scriptures I have read I would specially call attention to what is conveyed by "favour in the Beloved," because I believe it is of great importance to apprehend the settled place that Christ is filling at the present time in the presence of God, in which He is presented to our hearts as the Beloved in a most absolute way. He is beloved of God, and God would have us understand that Christ is now to be viewed in that position as loved of God in a settled way, the Beloved One commanding all the affections of the Father's heart. He is to be apprehended in that way, as the One in whom God has taken us into favour. There was no reason why Christ should have become Man if it were not that God had in mind for men the character of blessing which is now set forth in Christ as Man where He is. And therefore, if He is apprehended as He may be apprehended by us, as the Beloved, the Holy Spirit having been given to us, it is intended to convey to us that there has now come to pass in Christ in heaven, for ever beyond death and entirely outside of this world, a settled condition of love having its source in the Father, and its centre in Christ, and with ourselves embraced in it in Him; and all that, too, is according to divine purpose. It is not anything that we have devised, it is nothing we have thought of, it is something that God has purposed of Himself and for His own satisfaction before the foundation of the world. The bringing of the world into existence in due course, and all that has transpired in the history of the world, has just constituted so to speak the platform and surroundings on which and in the midst of which God is steadily carrying out His own purpose.

I would ask all to weigh that over, because I believe the more these things sink into our hearts the more they will develop a spirit of worship God-ward. That is what the Spirit of God is labouring to develop amongst us, that we should worship God not as occupied merely with the way He has blessed us, but rather, so to speak, as losing sight of ourselves and having God Himself in His blessedness before our hearts; that He should have thought of such things! that He should have desired them.

and then the wisdom by which they are effected, involving one divine Person becoming Man. The depths of love, too, in which they are effected, involving redemption through His blood, the blood of the Beloved; and then the power in which they have been effected, involving His being raised again from the dead and set down in the highest place at God's right hand in heaven. Then the coming in of another divine Person, the Holy Spirit, to bring the testimony of these things to our hearts and make them effective there, and to be in us the Spirit of God's Son, causing us to respond in sonship's affection to the blessed God. All these things are wonderful, dear brethren, and as we contemplate them and touch them they are intended to develop in us the spirit of worship, as Paul in introducing these things says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, coming to the scripture I read in the first chapter of the epistle, what is touched on is the mighty power of God, which the apostle mentions in order that we might understand that the mighty power of God is operating towards us. That is, we are not to think that the great things of God are so great that we cannot enter upon them, because the mighty power of God is operative towards us; and if we would allow its operation, so to speak, there is no limit to what we may touch in the power of the Holy Spirit. Speaking of the mighty power of God leads me to speak of the way that God has not only raised Christ from the dead, but that He has set Him down at His own right hand in the heavenlies "far above all principality and power and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come and hath put all things under his feet." The second chapter of Hebrews says, "We see not yet all things put under him," but God has *already* established Christ in that invulnerable position, and having done that He is entitled, so to speak, to regard all things as put under His feet. They are to be so actually very shortly, but Christ is now in an invulnerable position at the right hand of God and therefore faith takes account of all things as already put under His feet. So it says, "And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all." That is one wonderful conception which we are to have in our minds, that the assembly is Christ's body. It is a very great vessel because, as I said, it is composed of all those who, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, from the day of Pentecost right on till the moment when the Lord takes us to be with Himself. Who can number them? It is the greatest expression of divine wisdom that such a vessel, composed of those from every nation under the sun should be called out by means of the gospel and attached by the Holy Spirit to Christ, and formed by the Spirit's work, as one body; coordinated into one body as a

vessel in which Christ Himself shall find perfect expression in His moral features in His love, in His wisdom, in everything that marks Him as Man, all is to find perfect expression in His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

The filling of all things looks on to the coming day when there will not be anything that does not come under the effect of the influence of Christ, and that influence is to be exercised by means of His body. It is, so to speak, the mediatorial position that Christ has established in His place as Head, for He will exert His influence by means of which everything in all is to be filled through His body, the assembly. If that be so, you can understand how much God has to work out in us. The work will be complete in a day very soon to come. It will be understood what God hath wrought. It will be seen. He is working in mystery at the present time. It says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a thing," Proverbs 25: 2. That is our glory, because it is the saints who are referred to in the passage. It is part of God's glory that He can work all this out without the world's having the slightest conception of what is being done. It is no honour to us to be ignorant of divine things, for we have the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, and it is positively dishonouring to God for us to be ignorant of divine things. If these things are to be our inheritance, it ought to be our greatest concern to be searching them out in dependence on the Lord and the Spirit, and availing ourselves of every help both in the reading of the Scriptures and the reading of the ministry which the Lord provides, and attending the meetings where the Spirit's voice can be heard, availing ourselves of every help that has been given us, in order to become more intelligent in these great things of God.

Passing on to chapter 3, it speaks there of the assembly as that in which the manifold wisdom of God is now to be known to principalities and powers in heavenly places. Up till now, in speaking of the closing verses of chapter one, I have referred to what is as yet future in the actual display of it, but this passage brings us down to the present, and hence it is of the greatest importance. The apostle says, "To me, less than the least of all saints has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ; and to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery, hidden throughout the ages in God." "The administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God." It is not hidden now, it is being made known through Paul's ministry. But what is the administration of the mystery? I hope every believer is interested in the thought of the mystery, because the idea of mystery means that we are initiated into something of which the world knows nothing, something that God has carefully concealed from the wise men of this world; as the Lord says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid

these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." And so, as I said, there is something mysterious which God is working out at the present time.

We should be interested, dear brethren, in the mystery, for it belongs to us, and it says "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." When Satan first commenced his activities among men he had in mind, I believe, to rob God of His pleasure in men, and to show himself to be greater than God. Satan is very wise to outward appearance, but in the end it is going to be demonstrated that he has no wisdom. It says, "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly"; and God in speaking to the serpent said that the woman's seed should bruise his head. The head is the seat of wisdom. So it says in the end of the epistle of Romans, "to God only wise," or as it might read "the God who alone is wise ... be glory for ever. Amen." That is going to be shown, and is being shown at the present time in the assembly to principalities and powers in the heavenlies. We are not always aware how much interest there is among created intelligences in the heavenlies as to what is going on among the saints, but they are looking on. We are told in the first epistle of Peter that angels desire to look into certain things. They desire to look into them, and they are looking on, seeing what God is doing. Angels are presented as sympathetic with what God is doing; when He laid the foundations of the earth, they shouted for joy. The word here is "that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God." It is being made known in the assembly. How does it work out? I believe that is what is in mind in the idea of administration of the mystery. The idea is simply how it works, so to speak. How do these things take shape? If we consider the constant opposition on the part of Satan to the assembly, I think we shall get some impression of the administration of the mystery.

You will remember how, in the early history of the assembly. Satan tried to blot out what God was doing by persecution; and later, after the decline had come in in the early history of the church the persecution was revived in the ordering of God and for a long period it became very intense. Then by means of that thing, which shows how completely God has the forces of evil under control, fidelity to Christ was revived; so that in the Lord's address to Smyrna, which contemplates that period in church history when persecution was particularly rampant, we find no word of rebuke, but the saints are viewed there as being faithful unto death. And thus by the very means of Satan's animosity and opposition God secured in the assembly at that time this quality of faithfulness unto death, a feature of Christ indeed, for He was supremely

faithful to God, even unto death. I have no doubt that this was brought to pass actually by means of the faithful service of Christ, His love and sympathy, and by the service of the Holy Spirit; but then these things were unseen, but what is seen is what comes to light in the assembly. What came to light in the assembly at that period was that God is so wise, that He was able to make use of the very means that Satan was employing in his animosity against the saints, to develop that particular feature of correspondence to Christ which forms part of what He has in mind for the assembly. Then as time went on, Satan changed his tactics; and as we know Thyatira contemplates the great system which obtains in the world still, under the name of the church, claiming to be the church, but truly abhorrent to Christ and to God. It is Rome, and Rome maintains a place in the world, claiming to be the church having a recognised status in the world which has cast out Christ. It is Rome who rules the nations; it is she who says in her heart, "I sit a queen, and I am not a widow; and I shall in no wise see grief." Saints are called upon to rejoice over her overthrow and, dear brethren, it would give tremendous power in testimony in the world if all the saints of God were brought to this judgment now.

Later on God began to work at the time of the Reformation, and He overthrew some of Rome's power, preparing the way for what was to follow. He established the great principle of justification by faith and, by doing so, undermined the authority of the church of Rome in the souls of many, and established the great ground on which, in subsequent years, recovery to assembly truth has been possible. The Holy Spirit was not availed of by the saints in a collective way for many years, or until within the last 120 years or so, but in these last days, God has been working in a powerful way of recovering the truth of the assembly; that the assembly has a glorious Head in heaven, and that the Spirit of God is here on earth, so that we can be free from all domination of the mind and will of man in the things of God, for no man has authority over the saints in the things of God. Christ is Head of the body, the assembly, and the Spirit is here as indwelling the saints, and as these things have been practically recognised, what is contrary to God has been thrust out and the ground has been brought in upon which the saints are able to move together as governed by the light of the assembly. Many of the saints are not in the gain of this: alas! that it should be so, but the ground is there, and the Lord says to Philadelphia, "I have set before thee an opened door, which no one can shut." Therefore we are now in a position in which all God's thoughts regarding the assembly can find an answer, if we ourselves are walking in the truth.

Well now, let us see how these things work. The ground has only been secured through much conflict, conflict for the sake of the Lord and for the sake of the assembly, involving that we have even had to separate from our own brethren. What has that brought to light? Such sorrows here, in the wisdom of God, brought to light true assembly affections; that is to say, the very exercise involved in it has developed, in the hearts of the saints who have responded to the truth, a determination that by the grace of God they will be true to Christ whatever it costs; that even though it should mean separation from their brethren, they will be true to Christ. And thus, by the very means of these exercises the quality of assembly affection for Christ is being developed and has come into evidence, so that principalities and powers in the heavenlies may see in the assembly, through the working out of the mystery, the all-various wisdom of God.

Attacks of one kind and another are made on the position. The enemy seeks to introduce some false principle or false doctrine, but on account of the very fact that the saints are going on subject to the Lord, recognising His headship, recognising the Spirit of God, these things are discerned, and not only are they discerned, but they are dealt with. The saints refuse to go on with error, they come to a judgment about it and express it, they purge themselves from iniquity and all that is unrighteous. It means that in all these things the all-various wisdom of God is shining, whatever Satan may bring in in his insidious devices to nullify the truth. God through Christ, by means of the assembly, meets it and the ground is held. Then too, Satan has built up a great world, a vast system, with everything in it that appeals to men, and as different elements of the world seek to get in among the saints they refuse it and judge it. The devil is seeking to make it impossible for saints to earn their living, but the Lord is enabling them to stand, pledging Himself that He will see them through. As God says, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, ... and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you." God is pledging Himself to be faithful to those who are faithful to the truth. In all these things, beloved brethren, we are seeing the constant efforts of Satan to nullify what God is doing, and we are seeing the answer to it in the assembly. We know that the Lord is operating on our behalf and we know His love, and we know His sympathy, and we know the Spirit of God and what He is doing, but these things find their answer in what is seen, what takes form in the assembly. Thus in the assembly is being seen the all-various wisdom of God, that whatever move Satan makes wisdom is seen in the assembly to meet it and overcome it, and then there have been conditions in the world during the last few years which have been extremely testing. These have resulted in saints all over the world, who are walking together in the

fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, being drawn and knit together in holy affection; saints who have never seen one another moving out in love to one another. In all this is the wisdom of God shining out. Conditions are used of God in His wisdom, which can use even evil to further its own ends, so that by means of these things the reality of the body of Christ is becoming apprehended by the saints, as they become conscious of body feelings and affections which have been derived from Christ, knitting them together in love with saints all over the world.

Everyone will recognise that the world, the great system built up by Satan, is becoming increasingly difficult in every sphere, the political sphere, the social sphere, the commercial sphere, and every sphere; it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep it going, all the elements of disintegration are there. Over against that the body of Christ, the assembly, is becoming increasingly knit together, like Joseph's sheaf in the field. He says, "We were binding sheaves in the field, and lo my sheaf arose, and also stood upright." The supremacy of Christ's sheaf comes into evidence, the way saints are being bound together and are remaining standing in the power of the life of Christ. Every association, whether it be religious or any other association, carries with it the elements of disintegration, and will never stand; the only thing that will remain standing is that which is of Christ, the saints held together in one body in love which is the bond of perfectness. All the conditions in the world are only serving to develop His own thoughts regarding the assembly, and in the assembly is being seen by principalities and powers the all-various wisdom of God. I trust that our eyes may be opened to these things, for there are great things moving, and it is for us to spend all our spiritual energies towards the apprehension of what it is we are called to, and to learn how we are to have part in what God is doing at the present time. At the end of chapter 3 the apostle says "unto him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages." That is to say,

that in the coming day, and to all eternity, the assembly is to be the vessel in which will be ascribed to God the glory due to His name. As we think of that, dear brethren, when and how are we to acquire the spiritual substance needed in order to fill out this wonderful position? It is *now* that we are to acquire it. Therefore we are to be concerned to acquire by the Spirit impressions of God in His glorious greatness; so that the service God-ward which finds expression in the assembly now should develop and become richer and more and more varied, so to speak, in the scope and extent of what we can say to God about Himself and His own blessedness. For the assembly as immediately in touch with Christ, is capable of responding to the blessed God in a way worthy of His name. How near we are to God as united to Christ the

beloved Son! United to Him, in manhood, of course, but brought in with Him into His own place as Man in the immediate centre of divine love and glory! How near we are to God, and how we ought to be concerned to come under the touch of the Lord by the Spirit, in order that the blessedness of the Father's name and all that is involved in the fulness of God might be apprehended by us! The epistle to the Ephesians is written with that in view that we might be enlarged and enriched in our apprehension of the glory of the blessed God, for we are to be a vessel in which glory is accorded to God throughout all generations of the age of ages.

I pass on to chapter 5, because that speaks of the assembly particularly as the object of the love of Christ in the past and in the present and in the future. It says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the assembly and has delivered himself up for it." *"Delivered himself up for it."* That is what the Lord would constantly impress upon us, using the Supper which we take week by week to that end, that He has delivered Himself up for the assembly. The Lord would have us understand the distinctiveness of the place the assembly has in His own affections, and so we have been made accustomed in the ways of God to the thought of husband and wife. After Christianity was established on earth it became clear that it was right in the sight of God for a man to have one wife only, that is to say, at one time, of course; whereas before Christianity came in, men were permitted in God's ways to have more wives than one. It is significant that although Abraham had more wives than one, and also Jacob, Isaac only had one wife. Isaac, who is particularly a type of the heavenly Man, as Christ is the heavenly one, had only one wife; and now we are to take account of that as impressing us with the distinctive place which the assembly has in the affections of Christ. Christ loved the assembly and delivered Himself up for it. It is a question of the personal reciprocal affections existing between Christ and the assembly at the present time, and the Lord is nourishing and cherishing the assembly. Nourishing refers to food and all that is necessary for building up, and cherishing conveys the thought of endearment, so to speak, and Christ is nourishing and cherishing the assembly. It says He delivered Himself up for it in order that He might sanctify it and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, and present it to Himself glorious. That is what is to be before us. That is what is before the heart of Christ, that He will present the assembly to Himself, that He is to find in the assembly no disparity between Himself and her. She is to answer to Him fully in affections and intelligence and moral features, she is to be His counterpart. You know how God formed the woman from the rib taken from the side of Adam and brought her to the man, and as Adam saw her he said, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." That is what the

assembly is according to Ephesians, she is of Christ. That is what she is, and the Lord takes great pleasure in contemplating the moment when He will present it to Himself glorious, not having spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. His service is going on that He might sanctify it and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word. I have in my mind what the Lord says in John 17, when praying to His Father "Sanctify them by the truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world; and I sanctify myself for them, that they also may be sanctified by truth." I believe the Lord is continually keeping Himself before our hearts, and giving us to understand that our portion is to be with Him eternally. He is the heavenly One and we are the heavenly ones, and the Lord is bringing to bear upon us continually the glorious truth of the assembly; it is His body, united to Him, and a vessel for the expression of Himself, and so there is this service of the love of Christ. It is as Christ has His own place in our affections and we know what it is to be brought into immediate touch with Him, that He leads us with Himself as we are together at the present time, in assembly, into the presence of His Father and our Father, His God and our God, as in the enjoyment and power of His love for the assembly.

In closing one wishes to refer for a moment to the passage in Chronicles, which, of course, is typical. I wanted to refer to that in connection with what I have been saying as to what is seen in the assembly at the present time. It says the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon. Previous to that she *heard* the wisdom of Solomon, so she came to him with her question and he told her all that was in her heart. But then she also *saw* his wisdom.

Where did she see it? She saw it in the regime, so to speak, which he had under his hand. It says, "And when the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, and the house he had built ... "; that is, his own house; for we read later on how he went up from it to the house of God. The house here is his own house, and that is what the Lord has been doing over many years among the saints, building a house for Himself, securing in the affections of the saints a dwelling place for Himself. The apostle prayed to the Father that He would strengthen us with power by His Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts; and that is what the Lord is labouring for still, to secure a dwelling place for Himself in the hearts of the saints, and I think in some measure He has got it. The queen of Sheba saw it. There is something that may be seen on earth. The assembly, with unified affections for Christ, is being maintained. It is for every brother and sister to see that he or she is doing everything possible to maintain it and contribute to it and to allow nothing which is contrary to Christ.

Then it says, the meat of his table. Thank God we know something of that. There is an abundance of spiritual food enjoyed in the fellowship, in which through grace we are moving. Do we appreciate it? Outside the fellowship there is a dearth of spiritual food, but that is not due to any fault on the part of the Lord, for in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. There is no lack of spiritual substance with Christ, but this only becomes available to the saints as there are suitable conditions for it. We thank God there is an abundance of food, the meat of His table. And then there is the deportment of His servants and the order of service of His attendants. There is a deportment that is suitable to Christ's house and the house of God. The Spirit of God gives dignity to the saints, in so far as they are affected by Him. Then the order of service of His attendants. The Lord has been greatly concerned as to that and helping us in it, the order of service, so that there should be evidenced in every detail the wisdom of Solomon, the wisdom of Christ; and it is divine wisdom available in Christ as Head of the body, working out in the assembly. There is also an apparel suitable to Christ's house and the house of God; and it speaks of the cupbearers too, that is, those who are able to minister pleasure to the heart of Christ. And then finally the ascent by which he went up to the house of Jehovah, and that too, may be seen, beloved brethren. I say this humbly, and realising that things are in small measure, but as desiring to enlist the interest of the brethren in the reality of what is here in the assembly, if we have our eyes open to see it; and what is possible if we go in for these things, and avail ourselves of the headship of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. There is the ascent by which Christ goes up to the house of God, the ascent by which He leads His saints upward into the full privilege of having part in the blessed service of God. In the light of all this, the queen of Sheba says, "Happy are thy men! and happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom." What she was impressed with was wisdom, typically divine wisdom, working out as from Christ and seen in the assembly. She was impressed with it, and possibly if our eyes are open we shall see what the principalities and powers are intended to see, the all-various wisdom of God working out in the assembly; the way in which His own thoughts, conceived before the foundation of the world, are being secured and coming to fruition in the very scene where every activity of Satan's subtlety and wisdom (if wisdom it could be called) is brought to bear to try to nullify God's pleasure.

May the Lord open our eyes to see what the assembly is; and then not only to see it but to realise that the Lord is working amongst ourselves to secure now an answer to His thoughts. If we have our eyes open, we shall see it all brought before us by God in order that we might contribute to it, and further it

more and more. In the presence of these great realities in which we ourselves through grace are called to have part, the great thing is to have recourse to prayer. To listen to an address can at best perhaps add a little to our apprehension of these things and stimulate desires to move into them, so that the Lord should have a real answer to His own thought; that is, that God should be glorified in the assembly, but the great thing is to have recourse to prayer, and so in this epistle to the Ephesians, in chapter one, the apostle prays at considerable length; and then in chapter three again he tells us that he bows his knees to the Father. This is intended to convey to us that these things can be entered upon by us spiritually only through this means, and the service of divine Persons themselves. Turn to God in prayer and God in answer will see that we are brought into His thoughts at the present time. May God greatly encourage us on this line for His name's sake!

PRAYER

Luke 3:21,22; Luke 22:39-46; John 15:7,8; John 15:16,17; Psalm 122:3-9

I feel impressed, beloved brethren, to say a word as to prayer, prayer characteristically and prayer specifically, both individual and collective, because prayer is one of the most important things that we are called upon to give ourselves to. It is not limited to those who are advanced in the faith, or specially spiritual, for the apostle in writing to the Thessalonian saints who at the time were very young in the faith, only perhaps a few weeks old, said to them, "pray without ceasing." Moreover, he said to those same saints, "Brethren, pray for us." It is a remarkable thing that the apostle and his fellow-workers should desire and value the prayers of very young believers, and I would commend that to young believers, to begin early to pray for other needs besides their own personal ones and their own exercises, because to have to do with God and with the Lord in prayer and to begin to take up in prayer divine interests however simply it may be done, will be of great help to oneself as well as, of course, tending to promote the interests of God, for we cannot cultivate being in the presence of God without being greatly helped by it. These are days in which it is of all importance that we should become stable in the truth and happy in it too, that we may have real liberty and also joy, mingled, of course, with right feelings, involving the sorrows of the testimony. It is a day in which it is urgent that we should prove the power and reality of Christianity, every one for himself or herself, and not leave it for a few. We are to pay attention to our roots and foundations, and to cultivate being in the presence of the Lord and of God will go a long way to helping us become stronger spiritually.

Now in the passage I commenced with, in the third chapter of Luke's gospel, the Lord is presented as praying. It is where He first comes out under public notice in the testimony. He had been under public notice to some extent before, for it is said that He "advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men," Luke 2: 52. Men had taken account of Him, but now as He is about to come out and take up His service publicly, He is presented not only as being baptised, but as also praying. We are not told what He was praying about, but the fact is simply stated that He was praying, and we are intended to gather from that, that it was characteristic of Him, that He was characterised by prayer, and that indeed is a feature of true manhood. It is man's glory, true glory, that he is dependent upon God, that he does not assume to be self-supporting or self-sufficient, but that he needs God and depends upon Him. That is true glory in manhood, and it was specially set out in the Lord Jesus when He first appeared to take up His service publicly. It was

then the voice from heaven said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight." God is referring to what Jesus had been under His eye during the period of about thirty years which had then elapsed. That is an important matter to pay attention to, dear brethren, that if we are to have liberty and power with God in prayer, it is necessary that we should be pleasing to Him in the circumstances in which He has set us. There is nothing necessarily showy about that, nothing that makes anything of us, nothing that appeals to the natural man, but to be pleasing to God in the circumstances which He has ordered for us, whether it be in home life or business or school life, to be pleasing to Him in them is one of the first things that we have to learn. Dependence upon God, lowliness, and contentment in the acceptance of everything as from Him,

are features of moral excellence which are depicted in Psalm 16, which sets out for us in detail the various features of moral excellence which were seen in the Lord Jesus in His pathway here amongst men. I have no doubt it was exactly what was of this character under God's eye during the thirty years of the life of Jesus, that called forth the statement from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight." If I may so say, it constituted the basis of the power which the Lord had in prayer with God.

So God takes notice of us individually, dear brethren. Perhaps we are apt to forget that God's government goes on all the time. If we do what is right, it is in our favour, but if not, it is adverse, and we need to remember that. You remember in Ezekiel 14, God mentions three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job who were outstandingly marked by practical righteousness, and God mentions them in that connection. He had taken account of their lives. Noah and Job had long since passed off the scene, but God was still thinking of them and remembering them by name, so much had their personal lives as characterised by practical righteousness come under His notice. So that centuries afterwards, God refers to them by name. Daniel, on the other hand, was still alive when God spoke thus through Ezekiel and was a comparatively young man. God was taking account of that young man walking in the midst of general departure, and it would seem that he had considerable influence with God. Then in Jeremiah 15, God speaks of Moses and Samuel as men who had had power with Him in intercession. What a thing that is, to have power with God! It is possible, if we have power with God, to exert a far greater influence by means of our prayers than by means of anything we may do or say. God refers to these men to show how bad the state of things was, that even though Moses and Samuel were interceding for the people their state was such that He could not come in on behalf of the people. That was to show how very extreme the position was, but it also indicates that God takes

account of what we are, and that it is possible for us to have influence and power with Him.

In Luke 5 we find crowds coming to Jesus, but He withdrew Himself into the desert places and was praying. That is a word for those who serve, that they are to beware of undue publicity or popularity, and if anything of that sort arises, their wisdom is to withdraw to desert places; that is, to withdraw from everything that would pander to the flesh. I am not suggesting, of course, that the Lord Jesus had any occasion to pay attention to that consideration; I am not suggesting that for one moment, but His actions were intended as an example to us. If there is anything in the course of our service that might tend to elate the flesh, then wisdom lies in withdrawing from it and praying. So that we come into the presence of God, and things are seen just as they are, and you are seen just as you are, and that is where safety lies. Then in the following chapter we find that the Lord went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. There was something special to pray about, something of great importance. It was a question of choosing the twelve, and one of them to be a devil, the son of perdition. You can understand what it would mean to the Lord Jesus to have to select the twelve and that it should be required of Him that one of those twelve should be a son of perdition. There may be occasions when the urgency of the matters to be prayed for and the amount that there is to be prayed for, call for a certain surrender of the time we may normally spend in sleep. You will remember that the altar of incense was part of the service of the tabernacle, and the altar of incense refers to prayer in relation to divine interests, and whenever the lamps were lit and trimmed, the service of the altar of incense had to be carried on. The candlestick has the testimony in view, but it is to be supported by prayer in the Spirit.

So, dear brethren, in chapter 9 of the same gospel, we find the Lord praying alone, and further, in verse 28, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. "And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering," showing that if we pray we may find ourselves introduced into heavenly scenes where for a moment, we may leave behind the exercises that call for prayer and find ourselves in a position of privilege. How suggestive it is, that it was "as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered." He took on, as it were, heavenly glory. All these things are delineated for us in the gospel of Luke, which particularly sets out the features of manhood according to God as presented perfectly in Christ, and intended to be taken account of by His people. Again, in chapter 11, the Lord is seen praying "in a certain place"; that is to say, prayer there has in mind local needs. That is something that every brother and

sister ought to take up in prayer not only at the prayer meeting, but privately as well. If I may be permitted, I would like to say to any brother who has not enjoyed much in the way of liberty in thanksgiving and praise in divine service, that I believe that if we cultivate private and specific prayer in relation to divine interests, it will promote liberty with God, and when the time for liberty arises, we shall find ourselves set free.

What comes into view in Luke 11 is not only the importance of praying in relation to local needs, but the need of being specific in our prayers. There is prayer as characteristic of us and indicating dependence, but there is also specific prayer. Hence the need of knowing what to ask for, and asking for it. So the Lord says, "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" The Lord is suggesting definiteness in prayer, that we are to know whether to ask for bread, or for fish, or for an egg. All these things are in relation to local needs, and the importance, therefore, of knowing what is needed in the locality, because the whole setting of that passage is that the Lord may come to visit that locality to see what is there, and the one who prays is faced with the possibility that he may have nothing to set before Him when He comes. "Which of you," the Lord says, "shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him." It is suggestive of the Lord coming unexpectedly to see what He finds in a certain locality, and the responsibility of those there who are concerned that the Lord will not find an absence of anything He can appreciate. So we are to pray, and know whether the need is food, which the bread might suggest, or whether there is a need for spiritual energy which the fish might suggest, or whether what is needed is, so to speak, life in embryo, which the egg might suggest, the need for the coming generation. The whole point I believe, in the passage is that we should have regard for what the needs are, and be specific in our prayers.

To refer now to the passage in Luke 22, we come to a most solemn moment in the path of the Lord Jesus, and it is a question of how the will of God is to be carried through to completion, for that is what was immediately before the mind of the Lord. The time had arrived when so far as His service was concerned, matters were to be brought to completion. It meant for Him not only the severest suffering at the hands of men, but it involved specially the bearing of sin and being abandoned by His God. In that, of course; He stands alone, but the scene in Gethsemane's garden is not the actual abandonment, but it is Satan bringing to bear upon the mind and spirit of the Lord Jesus before the moment had actually arrived, what would be involved if He

continued right through, and completed the work which had been given Him to do. In that sense, it may become pattern for us, not that we shall ever have to face any test that in the slightest degree approaches to the severity of this test, but at the same time, what is seen is that the Lord was facing the question of carrying through the will of God to completion, and it was the realisation of what was involved in this that He rightly and in holiness shrank from. He was free to pray, "if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." The incident is rather one for contemplation, beloved brethren, than for much to be said upon it, but here is the Lord faced with all that was involved in the carrying through of the will of God to completion, and as understanding all that it meant, in holiness shrinking from it. "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." God would have us watchful that no element of will that is contrary to His has place with us. Then it says that "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." A wonderful passage for us, showing that greater intensity of exercise is right at certain times than at others, not that exercise is not proper at all times,

but it is fitting that certain matters should call for it in greater degree.

The Lord says to His disciples in verse 40, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." Then in verse 45 it says "when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow. And said unto them, Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Now the point was that Satan was near, and Satan is near us, and we may rest assured that as the testimony is being carried to completion, he will do his utmost to overcome the saints in some way or another. And hence the need of prayer; "rise and pray." It is not the time for sleeping. I am not speaking, of course, of literal sleep; it is the time for rising up and praying, and praying that we may not enter into temptation. The dispensation is about to close and the Lord is looking to it that we should carry forward every feature of the truth to completion. It is urgent that we should be constant in prayer and not find ourselves in a position that we have not faith for, and thus be led into temptation and fail in regard of the testimony. There is no reason, of course, why we should fail. The Lord said, "rise and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

Well now, passing from that, I wanted in the passage in John 15 to show that the Lord contemplates that we should have power with God, and I believe the Lord has in mind in this scripture, what will mark us as moving on together. I

do not mean necessarily limiting it to collective prayer, though it would include that; but the point the Lord has in mind is that His disciples should be going on together as committed to God's testimony. And as feeling what it is to be in a world in which they are hated, the Lord stresses the importance of loving one another. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own." So it is contemplated that as we go on, and the nearer we reach to completion, the more we shall become conscious that the world hates us, but that is not to cause us to surrender or in any way to compromise, but we are to find support in the company of the brethren. The matter is imperative. It is one of the bulwarks of the testimony that whatever has to be met in the outside sphere, the support needed for the position will be found in the circle of the brethren. Hence how important it is that we should cultivate love and enjoy the mutual support and encouragement which the circle of love affords. So the Lord says in verse 7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." That is a remarkable statement, showing as I said before that it may be possible for us to effect far more by the power we have with God in prayer than by anything we can do ourselves, and this is evidently open to all. It is not a question of those who are gifted, but "if ye abide in me." As abiding in Christ we take character from Him; it develops that which will give us power with God. "If ye abide in me ... ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." It is a question of asking what we will and having it answered, which involves, of course, that our prayers are in keeping with the will of God and the needs of the moment.

These are very encouraging statements, and then the Lord says, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"; indicating, I believe, that this would be a feature that marked the Lord personally, and now it is to be continued in the disciples. You remember how at the grave of Lazarus the Lord said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always." Think of that! He had already requested something in relation to the raising of Lazarus, but He says, "I knew that thou hearest me always." That is, every time He prayed, He was heard; every time He asked, He was asking according to God's will and it was being answered. Think of the power there is in prayer of that nature! Think of the character of the Lord's prayer in John 17, beginning at the moment that had then arrived and continuing right to the time when we shall behold His glory!

What possibilities there are, beloved brethren, if we would only seek to cultivate the reality of abiding in Christ. Thus shall we become intelligent and understand what the testimony calls for and what the needs of the moment are, because the Lord will continue speaking to the end of the dispensation.

There is no question about that. It is an evidence of His love. He says in His word to Philadelphia, "because thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name ... behold, I will cause that they shall come and shall do homage before thy feet, and shall know that I have loved thee," Revelation 3: 9. Meaning that He will take us out of it to be with Himself; but He places it on the footing that we have kept the word of His patience. We were saying on a previous occasion that the Lord is patient, and we have to be patient. We have to go on with the testimony not knowing when it is coming to an end. Even the Son takes the place of not knowing the day or the hour. We know not what hour the testimony may end, but we may get impressions that the end is near at hand. Throughout the period of Christ's patience He will speak to those who love Him, and His speaking will afford us guidance; and as I was saying, He bases His promise to us on the fact that we have kept the word of His patience. It is for us to see that we do it and that we do it on these lines, that His word abides in us and we abide in Him. We can affect the whole course of things in the company, or in the world of Christian profession, by our prayers, if the testimony demands it. There is no limit to what we may do in our prayers if the testimony requires it. You will remember when Joshua was bringing the people into the land and a battle was being waged against the enemy, and, so to speak, the matter was not completed, Joshua called upon the sun to stand still. There was a man asking what the exigencies of the moment required, in order that God's thoughts in regard of His people should be carried through then and there to completion. He called upon the sun to stand still, and the result was that the victory was completed, and God came into the matter, so that there were more slain by the hail-stones which came down from heaven than were slain by the children of Israel. God will come into the matter if we pray as those who have power with Him.

In conclusion, I read the passage from Psalm 122 in order to add a little increased definiteness to this matter of our prayers. The psalmist is speaking of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem for us means the assembly. Jerusalem was God's centre of interest upon earth, and that at the present time is unquestionably the assembly. Jerusalem is not exactly Zion, for I understand that Zion in its typical bearing refers to the assembly according to God's thoughts regarding it, but Jerusalem is more the concrete expression of those thoughts down here; that is to say, when it refers to Jerusalem, it is the assembly just the same, but viewed as in actual expression amongst the saints. So it says, "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together," stressing the importance of love among ourselves, for there is nothing so compacting in its influence as love among ourselves. That is something that Satan will always

seek to attack, and we must therefore lay ourselves out to preserve love among us.

While I am speaking a great deal about prayer and the importance of making time for it, not only when we are together but also privately, it must not be thought that I am decrying right activity, for there is a call for right activity also. We are told to do whatever our hands find to do, with all our might. In chapter 10 of Luke we see the activities of love in the good Samaritan. "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." It is self-sacrificing love in care for the saints. So that while I am emphasising the great importance of prayer, it must not be thought that I am in any way belittling activity; there must be room made for both. We are to realise increasingly that divine things call for our whole time committal to them; there is no time for anything else. There are legitimate duties, of course, that have to be fulfilled, but the time is such, and the truth that the Lord is giving is such, and the state of the world is such, that divine things call for complete committal to them.

Referring again to this matter of Jerusalem being compacted together, each one of us contributes his own part in it, so that if there is any little element of personal disagreement among the saints which would interfere with this compacting together, it must be got rid of. Self-judgment and forgiveness must come in, forgiveness specially marking our day; "forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you," Ephesians 4: 32. What a glorious time was the year of jubilee in Israel, and that is what is characteristic of this day of Christianity, the glorious year of jubilee; see Leviticus 25: 8 - 10.

Then it says, "Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." That is suggestive of the service of God in the assembly. Thank God, we are being greatly helped in it.

"Whither the tribes go up ... to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." How it speaks to us of the breaking of bread in these last days. I am only indicating certain things in connection with the assembly that may well enter into our prayers, for they are to be preserved to the end. We are to be exercised to exclude everything that would militate against love. And then the service of God in the assembly maintained and taking on the spiritual features that the Lord intended it should take on. How necessary it is that we should understand the truth, in order that it may come into expression in the service of God. All those exercises, dear brethren, may be taken up in the service of prayer.

"There are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David." Matters are to be judged according to God and judged in a dignified way, from thrones. It is part of divine glory in the assembly that matters are dealt with according to God in power and with dignity. That is another matter that may well enter into our prayers, that whatever arises it may be dealt with in a way that glorifies God, and if it is a matter that the consciences of the saints should be exercised about, that they might answer to it. All these things are in mind, and so the Psalmist says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." We can rest assured that the more the truth of the assembly is finding expression among the saints, the more will Satan seek to get in by any way he can. And therefore we are to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Conditions may arise in the world that will threaten the peace of Jerusalem. You will remember that when the apostles were threatened in the fourth of Acts, being let go it says, "they went to their own company, and ... they (that is, the company) lifted up their voice to God with one accord." They all with one accord took up the matter in prayer, and it says that the place was shaken where they were assembled together. God answered them, and the testimony was divinely supported and protected. Finally, dear brethren, the psalmist says, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces," the walls suggesting the maintenance of divine principles by means of which all that is precious is preserved and all that is evil is excluded. And the palaces representing the side of privilege. So we see again the importance of prayer. You remember how Daniel when he knew that the edict had been signed that there should be no prayer made to God or man, with his windows open towards Jerusalem, he prayed three times a day as was his wont. He was praying for the peace of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in ruins and he was praying three times a day in relation to it as was his wont, although the edict had been passed. We know how God supported him. In chapter 10 an angel appeared to him and said, "Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words." The angel did not come to him till three weeks later, but he told Daniel that from the first day he had prayed, he had been heard. All this is brought before us that we may be encouraged to take up divine interests in prayer and to persevere in it, and if we do, we may know something of what Daniel experienced when he was told that he was a man greatly beloved.

It is open to us in our own measure to take up this service of prayer and pray in relation to divine interests, and as we do so we may become as the Lord says, disciples of His; we shall bear much fruit and in that way become disciples of His.

May the Lord strengthen us and encourage us to this end, for His name's sake.