

DISCIPLINE UNTO PRAYER

by

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Part One

UNMOVED AND UNDISMAYED

And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem;) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, AS HE DID AFORETIME. (Daniel 6:10)

There is something tremendously impressive about a man who is beset and attacked from every side, apparently overwhelmed, and who yet maintains a quiet, dignified persistence of faith and goes on with his God, unmoved and undismayed.

Daniel's troubles sprang from the fact that he had been marked out for advancement. "The king thought to set him over the whole realm" (verse 3). There were two presidents equal with him as well as many satraps under him. All these reacted violently to the decision about his promotion, so violently that they plotted to destroy him. At first they had a great deal of success. It seemed unlikely, or indeed impossible, that Daniel could ever obtain the supremacy planned for him. Yet he did! The evil scheme failed. The servant of God was delivered and placed over the kingdom. The means by which he was advanced must have seemed very strange. Yet they are in full harmony with all that the Word teaches us about spiritual progress. Especially is Daniel's experience in accord with what is shown in the case of the Lord Jesus, that the way to the throne is by death and resurrection.

"As He Did Aforetime"

The lions' den was a kind of grave. Daniel was not spared the grave; he had to go right down into it. Since, however, he was God's man and kept true to his God, he lost nothing and gained everything by that descent. His rivals went down into the same grave, and they stayed there. By the end of the chapter we find no more mention of presidents and satraps. They could not stand the test of the grave. Daniel, on the contrary, was given his place over the whole realm, not by any effort or planning of his but simply by his maintained position of faith in God. The lesson is for us. We, too, in His amazing grace, have been marked out for advancement, chosen for the throne. This explains for us, as well as for Daniel, the peculiar bitterness of the conflict in which we are often involved. There are great issues in view; we need to know how to behave in the midst of it all, and what is the secret which will enable the Lord to fulfil His purpose in our case as He did in Daniel's.

We find that he came through wholly and solely on spiritual grounds. His own wisdom, his earthly authority, his influence among men, his experience, his friends - all these counted for nothing. As he was hurried away and thrown into the den, he must have been a picture of complete helplessness. There was nothing he could say, and nothing he could do. He did not try to wrestle with the lions; it would have been useless if he had. In a spiritual conflict - and ours is that - nothing but spiritual strength is of any use. For all his apparent helplessness, Daniel had a standing with God. The key to his emergence from the conflict in such complete triumph is found in our verse about his praying, and particularly in the last words, "*as he did aforetime*".

He was steadfast in his faith. Yet it would not be enough to think of his having faith in a merely general way, or being a man who habitually prayed for all sorts of things. We can only understand the nature of his steadfastness if we realize

that he was keeping true to a definite and God-given vision. He had understood the purpose of God with regard to His people. Moreover, he had adjusted his whole life to that vision, as the open window and the "three times a day" prayer-watch show. He knew what God wished and intended, and had given himself wholeheartedly for its fulfilment. Day in and day out, fair days and foul, he kept himself in God's direction and stood for God's will. No wonder that human jealousy and spite were used by Satan in a determined effort to silence him! But he could not be silenced. He could not be made to close his windows. "Aforetime" he had persisted in his faith vigil; now that trouble was pending he refused to be turned aside from his set course with God. He had a spiritual 'routine', a holy habit, a steady heart purpose. When this brought him into the cross-currents of conflict, and the writing was signed against him, he seemed to take no notice at all, but calmly continued in his watch with the Lord - "as *he did aforetime*".

We may be tempted to wish that we were that kind of man, calm, steady, unmoved - wrongly imagining that this was a matter of Daniel's temperament. If so, it is good for us to remember the kind of man he could be. "I was affrighted, and fell on my face..." (8:17); "I Daniel fainted" (8:27); "Then said he unto me, 'Fear not, Daniel...'" (10:12). This was no man of steel, but one very like most of us, with all our inward quakings, our timidity and our tendency to faint. Yet he was undismayed. In the midst of plots for his destruction, in spite of tremendous pressure to panic or compromise, without any show of strain and in quiet dignity of faith he went straight on with the Lord. And so must we. Perhaps it will help us if we try to discover some of Daniel's secrets.

The Largeness of His Vision

The first reason why Daniel was able to proceed so calmly, as though nothing had happened, was found in the largeness of his vision. If we have a vision that is chiefly concerned with ourselves, our circumstances or our ministry, we shall be puzzled or offended when things begin to go wrong with us. We need, indeed we have, a vision of God's universal and eternal purpose in His Son, and this alone will save us from being overwhelmed in the hour of spiritual conflict.

Daniel looked back, far beyond his own time. The open windows looked out on an original purpose for the people of God, who had had their origin long before his own generation. The Jerusalem which he remembered was a poor affair compared with the true glory of Zion. Most of us are apt to dwell with regret on things as we once knew them, and to sigh for the days of the past. But it is vain, and altogether inadequate so to limit our vision. We have been called for something much bigger than that. We have a part in the Divine purpose which was conceived in eternity and realized in Christ by His Cross. If we set our hearts only on what we have known or experienced, on the limited sphere of our own past, we shall get into confusion when for the time being everything seems to be going wrong. Our natural vision is limited to the immediate, to the present experiences or to the tiny span of our own lives. We need to be saved from ourselves, and this will be by receiving spiritual vision as to the vast range of the Divine purpose in Christ. Like Daniel, if we look back far enough we shall be kept steady by the reminder of God's original intentions.

Daniel also looked forward. We are told that he not only prayed, but also "gave thanks before his God". Of course there was much cause for thanksgiving in Israel's past history, but to the man of faith, the man of vision, the real motive for praise lies in the future. He had received assurance that there was to be a future for Jerusalem, a future even more glorious than the past. He knew that God would realize His end. It mattered little to him, therefore, if all the fury of hell raged around him for the present; it was of very small importance if he,

Daniel, were swept off the face of the earth. Nothing could prevent the fulfilment of the purposes of God. Whatever else happened, the Lord would go marching triumphantly on to His goal. With this conviction, and his windows opened in this direction, Daniel could afford to ignore his enemies, and to treat all the decrees of men with dignified contempt. "And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he... prayed, and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime.*"

The little calamities of the present time are contemptible in the light of the certain glories that are to be. We are meant to be people of eternity; we are called to view all present problems and difficulties in their larger setting. It may be true that we, like Daniel, seem to be involved in disaster, that for us the writing is signed which makes our own future quite hopeless. Our vision is not a personal one, nor is our ministry personal, so we must never allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by what is only personal. In Christ we have become closely associated with God's eternal purpose for the greatness of His Son. This is the largeness that will lift us out of our own natural pettiness.

Daniel saw far beyond his own surroundings. He had gone to his house and entered his own chamber. It may well have been a large room, as rooms go, but in any case it was bounded by the four walls of what was essentially his. He did not look at the things around him, but away through the open windows towards the city of his God. How important it was at that critical moment that he should not look around to what was merely local, to the unpromising circumstances in which he himself was found, but should keep well in view the Divine prospect of the God-filled glory of Jerusalem. Only the eye of faith could see that city then, but Daniel had the eye of faith. Surely it was this vision that kept him steadfast.

There is a sense in which men who are under great pressure to capitulate or compromise can only resist the temptation by remembering that their 'cause' is much greater than themselves. They are kept true by the realization that, provided they do not despair, the cause with which they are associated will ultimately triumph in spite of anything which may happen to them. How much more is this the case with those whose 'cause' is spiritual! Had Daniel's main preoccupation been about his own survival he could not have behaved as he did. If he had been thinking chiefly of how he himself could be preserved, he would probably have made terms with his enemies or in some way capitulated. To him, however, the vision was so great that his biggest concern was, not as to whether he could survive, but as to whether he could remain faithful. He felt that he had to be faithful because of the very importance and vastness of the issue.

This constraint to be faithful was noticeable in every part of Daniel's life. It was true, not only in the prayer chamber when he was on his knees, but also in every feature of his ordinary daily life, that "he was faithful" (verse 4). There can be nothing mean or insignificant in the life of a man who finds himself associated with a great Divine purpose: he realizes that this association demands a very high standard in every aspect of his daily life. Few of us can be placed in such difficult circumstances as Daniel was in Babylon. And very few indeed have kept as faithful as he did in the many tests and temptations which came his way. Perhaps it was because he had so learned faithfulness in the smaller matters that he triumphed so completely in this supreme testing.

If Daniel had considered it most important that he himself should survive, it would have been very simple for him to have refrained either from praying, or from kneeling to do so, or from leaving the windows open for all to see. After all, he was no slave in Babylon, but a man of great importance. He was no enemy of Darius, but his good friend. Had he wished he could have kept his personal safety, and no doubt he could think of many very good reasons why he should try

to do so. But then what would happen to Jerusalem? What would happen to the purposes of God for His people? To Daniel it was the vision that mattered, not his own personal good. And in this very way he found his own deliverance. The man who remains true to the God-given vision can afford to leave the question of his own fate in the hands of the Giver of that vision.

This, then, is the challenge which comes to so many of us, the call to be faithful to the vision. Daniel reminds us of how important it is that one man should remain steadfast to the Lord. None of us knows how much of great Divine purposes may be served by our simple faithfulness.

In a sense we do not matter at all. It is not important for us to avoid the den of lions, to be saved from difficulties, to justify ourselves or fight for our own position. But in another sense it matters supremely that we should be true to the Lord. In order that we may do so, we need to keep in view the largeness of the vision.

The Greatness of His God

To Daniel God was greater than all. It was as simple as that. He had many visions, concerned with all sorts of people, places and events, but he had one transcendent vision, and that was the vision of his Lord. None of the historical or prophetic allusions can be without significance, for the Word of God is never without meaning; but we shall have missed the essence of Daniel's story if we become occupied with things or people rather than with the Lord Himself. This is the second of Daniel's secrets of a steadfast life: to him the Person of the Lord towered high above all others. Prophetic truths may interest or enlighten us, but they will never save us in the hour of testing. Daniel's chamber was not a study - at least it was not then being used as such; it was his prayer-room, his audience-chamber with his God. As we tend to hurry to our best friend when trouble comes, so Daniel, when he knew the writing was signed, went straight home to his prayer chamber to commune with his Lord. He knelt on his knees not as a matter of routine or ritual, not to list a number of items for prayer, but to worship and to wait upon his God. As we have said, he was associated with a very great vision, but the central and supreme feature of this vision was the Person of the Lord.

This is as important to us as it was to him. When we come to the New Testament, we must be careful to give due weight to every detail of its teaching. It is very wrong for us to ignore or disobey the injunctions, the admonitions and the explicit statements of the Word of God. Yet our supreme concern must be with the Lord Jesus Himself. To follow all the teachings and methods associated with the House of God and yet lack the overwhelming Presence of the Son and Owner of the House is to substitute an empty shell for the living reality.

Daniel's vision of the Lord was so great that it involved the eclipse of all his enemies. No doubt they were very imposing, 'the presidents, the deputies, the satraps, the counsellors and the governors' (verse 7). Whatever Daniel thought as he considered this long and formidable list, he gave no indication of being greatly concerned by it. He went off home to meet with his Lord... *"as he did aforetime"*. To have his eyes on the Lord did not mean that he ignored his enemies or pretended that they did not exist. It only meant that because of their hatred he drew nearer to his Lord, realizing that at all costs he must not be drawn away from that committal and that communion which represented the very heart of the Divine purpose. He was determined to keep on positive ground. It can be merely negative to get preoccupied with our enemies, or with the things

that menace God's purpose. We shall never reach God's end by chasing negatives.

Daniel refused to be diverted from the main issue. He would not even turn aside to pray about his own perilous position. He had but one answer for his foes, and that was to continue straight on in his devotion to the will of God. We need to follow his example. Satan will always try to divert us from the positive end of God. If we can be drawn out into side issues, he will always provide such for us. They may be things that provoke us, some matter that never fails to arouse our irritation or anger. If we turn aside to pray too much about them, we shall have missed the real call to positive prayer. It is true that Ephesians 6 stresses the call to prayer conflict, but it comes at the end of a letter that is devoted to the main vision of God's purpose in His Son. It is for this, and not for lesser or personal matters, that we are called into the spiritual battle. Or the devil may even keep us busy with some side issue, which we like, good things in themselves, perhaps, but diversions from the principle one. The man of the Spirit refuses to be diverted. Like Daniel, he goes determinedly on.

Daniel's vision was so great that it also eclipsed his friends. There is no mention here of Shadrach and his two companions. We do not know where they were. Perhaps they were praying for him in secret. We do know, though, that there are times when we must go through alone with the Lord. This is no contradiction of spiritual fellowship. Such fellowship can only be healthy and vital if in all things the Lord Himself is the One we keep in view. Darius was also Daniel's friend. As a matter of fact he did his sincere best to help him. But it is not recorded that when Daniel knew that the writing was signed he sought out Darius, to talk the matter over with him or to seek his help. No, he went straight away to the Lord. With all his apparent power, Darius proved helpless in this matter. Daniel knew the Lord as 'high over all'. He could not have held quietly on his way as he did if he had not known a constant walk with his Almighty Lord.

The Power of Prayer

In the third place Daniel had learned complete confidence in God's ability to answer prayer. Nothing could deter him from waiting on God, for he knew the power of prayer. Daniel was well acquainted with power; he had lived at the seat of it for many years. As a lad, he had seen in his own land the amazing things that could be done by this world-power. Together with his fellow Jews he had been taken captive by the mighty emperor, the "head of gold" surmounting all the Gentile kingdoms; and now for a very long time he had had his place at the heart of that terrifying world authority. He knew all about the decrees of an absolute despot and about the "law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not" (verses 8, 12). And when he had considered it all, he was more than ever convinced that one man on his knees was more than a match for it all, that there is more power in the simple prayer of faith than in the greatest empire that this world can ever produce. He had learned his lesson. To him it was no mere theory, as, alas, it often is to us. He had proved it in the past and he was content to go on proving it. It was a special occasion, but he sought for no special remedy. He just went on praying "*as he did aforetime*".

When a man is up against something of satanic origin, he is forced back to prayer, for only God can deal with the great enemy. It is significant that the signed decree was based on a lie. Darius put his signature to it because of deliberate untruth. Those who brought it to him insisted that it had been agreed among "*all the presidents of the kingdom...*" (verse 7). Daniel was at least equal to his fellow presidents, and he had had no part in it. Had Darius known the truth it is certain that he would never have agreed to pass the law. Wherever there is a

lie, Satan is not far away. And when we get involved in his activities we do well to stand back for a moment, to consider the whole thing, and to decide - as apparently Daniel did - that only God can deal with this situation. Of course we may need to state the truth or point out the lie, but how often God's servants have only got themselves into greater difficulties by trying to grapple with something that was too much for them, too strong or too subtle, when the very presence of a lie in the situation could have warned them that this is not a matter of opinion or judgment - we all make mistakes - but of an untruth in the realm of facts. What do we tend to do when we meet such a lie? Usually we want to fight it, to argue about it, to try to deal with it by our own actions. What did Daniel do? He went straight back to God, got on his knees and found a place of spiritual authority over it. He dealt with it all in the place of prayer.

That is where it was all done. The rest was simply the outworking. A painful outworking if you like, for it did not relieve him from the necessity of going down into the lions' den, to the great distress of his friend, Darius, who spent a wakeful night worrying about him. He need not have worried. His own power had failed to deliver Daniel - human power always does fail in the face of spiritual opposition - but the man on his knees is the man in touch with the Throne. We are not told what sort of a night Daniel had, but it may well have been one of great inward rest. And this not because he had prayed about himself, but because he had devoted himself to the Lord's interests and could therefore afford to leave his own needs in the Lord's hands. He did not pray because he was faced with an emergency; he prayed because he was a praying man. He believed in the supreme power of prayer, and he practiced what he believed. If only we would do the same!

Daniel had had to pray in order to obtain his vision. A man is no prophet unless he is first a man of prayer - "... he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee..." (Genesis 20:7). But that was only the beginning. We must not think that revelation as to the will of God is an end in itself; it is but the first phase of a prayer ministry. When Daniel had prayed through to an understanding of the ways of the Lord, he then set himself three times a day to persevere in prayer for their fulfilment. His prayer ministry took him into the lions' den, but it also brought him out again, and he was able to see the thing right through to its glorious end. "So this Daniel prospered." (verse 28). So - by praying through, unmoved and undismayed by plots and threats - this Daniel prospered. *This* Daniel - not the Daniel of the presidential office, but the Daniel of the lions' den - this Daniel prospered, not only in the reign of Darius but also in the reign of Cyrus the Persian, who was the liberator and restorer of Jerusalem.

This all happened in the last years of his life. That may be because the time of Jerusalem's liberation was at hand, and Satan the more fiercely attacked the man who was standing for it in prayer. If so, there is a special message for us, who surely have our testimony to give in the closing days of the dispensation. The kingdom for which we labour in prayer is not earthly, but heavenly: it concerns "the Jerusalem that is above" (Galatians 4:26). Let us therefore encourage one another not to be moved by the things which threaten to quench or divert our prayer life. And let us remember that this very experience was the way by which Daniel was brought to his appointed advancement. He went to the Throne by way of the lions' den. Our Saviour ascended to the Throne by way of the Cross. We can only reign with Him if we suffer with Him.

Part Two

“WINDOWS OPEN TOWARD JERUSALEM”

“And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem;) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before His God, as he did aforetime.” (Daniel 6:10; A.S.V.).

The key to this verse, and indeed to the whole chapter, is that little parenthesis - “his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem.”

These chapters of Daniel are not in chronological order. Chapters 7 and 8 both come before chapter 5, and then after chapter 5 comes chapter 9 which occurred in the first year of Darius. Chapter 6, although it does not say so, clearly occurred after the first year of Darius: there was an order of things already in the realm, there was a relationship between Darius and Daniel, there were enmities which must have taken time to mature: so that chapter 6 follows chapter 9, and chapter 9 explains the open windows.

A Revelation of God’s Purpose

Daniel had a revelation from God. Chapter 9 tells us how he humbled himself before God over the state of God’s people and of God’s city, and how from heaven there came illumination, and Daniel, with the eyes of the spirit, saw the Divine purpose in its immediate effect (for Jerusalem was to be rebuilt) and in its larger, fuller and final out-working - the day when the people of God and the city of God should indeed be a praise to Him, all transgression forever finished, everlasting righteousness brought in, all the prophecies fulfilled, and God’s dwelling-place with men. Daniel saw that; he was able to enter into God’s purpose concerning His people; and, whether his windows had been open before that or not, from that day onward they were open - the windows that looked toward Jerusalem - and Daniel made it the persistent, continual, purposeful exercise of his heart to get down before those open windows and pray for God’s purposes.

Daniel’s Committal to God’s Purpose

The opening of the windows was a symbolic act. It meant that he was committed to God and to that to which God was committed; he was with God for that which God intended to do; and the open windows were, humanly speaking, his undoing. Other people saw him at the open windows and realized that here was a trap, a way by which they could ensnare him. And that is, as I understand it, the setting for this chapter 6 - not a young man, but the old servant of the Lord, being faced with two alternatives, either to close his windows and leave off pursuing this utter attitude of co-operation with God, or else to go into the lions’ den.

The Enemy’s Antagonism

Of course, as far as the story goes, it was just the hatred of men and a convenient way of getting rid of him. But we know that there are spiritual lessons in it, and that it always happens like this - that heavenly revelation, and the committal of the heart utterly to the Lord for its fulfilment, provoke an assault which is meant either to make us desist or to destroy us.

Earlier on, Daniel’s companions had been in a similar position with regard to the fiery furnace; but for them it was a matter of whether they were on the Lord’s

side or not. If they were on the Lord's side, well then, the fiery furnace; if they wanted to avoid the fiery furnace, they must break with the Lord. And we know, and Daniel knew, how the Lord delivered. We all know something of that as Christians. So soon as we are truly on the Lord's side we meet, as they met, an antagonism which calls upon us either to desist or to know the fiery furnace.

I think this experience of Daniel's marks a step in advance of that. This was not for him a question of whether he was the Lord's or not. He could have closed his windows, he could have desisted from this which was the cause of his being thrown into the lions' den, without breaking with the Lord; in the quietness of his own heart, in the seclusion of his own room, he could have prayed. It was not now the question of whether he was the Lord's or not, but the question of an utter position in the light of heavenly revelation, or of desisting from that. It is always so. That is the treatment that we may expect if we too have seen something of what God is desiring and intending to do, and have given Him our hearts and our hands that we are with Him for it.

The Delivering Power of the Heavenly Vision

But the message of this verse to my own heart lies here - in such conditions, in the midst of that bitter assault and antagonism, how did Daniel behave? What a lesson for us all! When he knew, he just went on praying toward Jerusalem. It did not make the slightest difference to him. It was not that he suddenly opened the windows - the windows were open; not that he suddenly began to pray - he had been praying and giving thanks three times a day toward Jerusalem. All the threats and fury of the adversary made not the slightest difference to him. Without any sense of strain, without any twisting of himself up and suddenly getting into a tense condition over it all; in quiet, noble dignity, he went on with the Lord. How important for us to be ready for the assault when it comes! I think one of the reasons why Daniel was so steady and calm under it all was that his revelation was something so much bigger than himself that it carried him through. What I mean is that if Daniel had seen Jerusalem being rebuilt and himself a kind of Nehemiah or Zerubbabel taking the lead: if his vision, while being of Divine things, had brought himself into prominence: well, the lions' den would have been a first-class problem. How could the vision be realized if he went into the lions' den? And that is the disturbing feature in our spiritual lives - that so often, when God reveals Divine things to us, we somehow manage to introduce ourselves into the picture. A certain thing is going to happen, and we are going to have a part! and all too subtly we begin to see ourselves having a prominent place in the realization of it. Then, when the assault comes upon the revelation, and upon us because of it, we are disturbed, we are worried. But Daniel was not going back to Jerusalem, though, as we find, he was told that he should have his place in the end (Daniel 12:13); so far as he was concerned, he forgot himself, he was nothing. The people of God and the city of God, and the purpose of God in that people and city - they were what he saw when he opened the windows. Excuse me putting it this way - it was not a mirror he went to pray in front of, it was an open window. He did not see himself as the chief feature; he saw - though no human eye could see it at that distance - the city of God, he saw the Divine purposes. What did the lions' den matter to them? What did it matter what men did to Daniel so long as that end was realized? In the light of what God had shown him, he could not stop praying for Jerusalem, and, what is more important, he could not stop giving thanks for Jerusalem.

We need a little imagination to put ourselves in his place. When he knew that the writing was signed, what did he do? Begin to pray for Daniel? No, that is what Darius did. Daniel gave thanks that Jerusalem was going to be rebuilt. Oh, the delivering power of a vision big enough, heavenly enough, Divine enough to

swallow up all our little petty and personal interests! That is the secret - the open windows. Dear brother, dear sister, look out to God's purpose! Of course, if you do, it will involve the lions' den. What did Daniel care for the lions' den? When he had heard all about it, he just went home, went on praying, went on thanking God.

The Futility of Earthly Endeavour

I like to compare Darius with Daniel. Darius was supposed to be the king, but Daniel was the man reigning in spirit. What a bad time Darius had! and that does not express to us the bad time that evil people have, but the bad time that the well-intentioned man has, who is concerned for the interests of the Lord without really knowing the Lord. It was to Darius' credit that he was so moved and terribly anxious. You notice what it says: this shows the difference of attitude: Darius, when he had been tricked into this experience, "was sore displeased, and set his heart on *Daniel* to deliver him." That is a good enough, reasonable enough, sincere enough exercise. "He set his heart on Daniel to deliver him." And what happened? "He laboured till the going down of the sun to rescue him," but all his labour did not make the slightest difference to the lions' den; nor did it make the slightest difference to the Divine deliverance when it came. You can imagine those men who were the means of bringing Daniel into the lions' den. How they enjoyed the problem, the dilemma in which Darius was! He laboured, but they outwitted him; he tried in vain to think how he could outwit them and express his power, and they laughed at him. And the devil laughs at us when we are in the position that Darius was in. And, while the Lord did not laugh at him - I am sure the Lord appreciated the good that lay behind it all - He would have said to Darius, Don't trouble, you are wasting your time, I can manage without you.

Then the night came and the matter seemed irrevocable. What a night the king had, the restlessness, the bitterness, the disappointment! Bring him food - he doesn't want food; music? - he cannot listen to music; sleep? - he cannot sleep. What a night! While Daniel, down among the lions, was having a nice, peaceful, quiet night! Which things are a parable. Daniel or Darius? I am afraid I am often Darius. Darius was a man of the earth, Daniel was a man of heaven. When you are a man of the earth and when you face Divine things as here on earth, that is the kind of condition you work yourself into. Darius was frantic, strained to breaking point. He wanted to deliver the Lord's interests and he laboured and he fought and then he broke his heart because he felt all the Lord's interests were in the lions' den. He tried to meet the enemies of the Lord's interests on their own level. They plotted - he tried to counter-plot; they had exercised their power - he sought the means for overruling with *his* power; he was wrestling with flesh and blood, and he was losing and he was suffering. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:12). When Daniel knew that the decree was signed, he did not set his heart to deliver Daniel. He did not labour till the going down of the sun to try and find a way out. Daniel went on looking to Jerusalem, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding kept his heart and mind. But Darius, with the best of intentions, was struggling and striving and trying to do something to help the Lord, and he only succeeded in working himself into a state of restlessness and strain that are beyond description.

What is the secret? Surely it is as I have said - Darius was concerned for Daniel, for the human side, for the servant of the Lord - a very good concern in his case, because quite unselfish - but it did not help. Daniel was not concerned for the servant of the Lord, he was concerned for the interests of the Lord, for the heavenly revelation, and the result was that he was kept in perfect peace while Darius was worked up into a fever and a fret.

Well now, let the Lord apply the message and the lesson to each of our hearts. How does it work out with us? Are we on earthly ground or on heavenly?

The Devil's Seeming Triumph

The devil seems rather to be limited in his ability to foresee the deliverances of God. He thinks - and indeed it looks as if he is right - that he can engineer situations in which there are only two alternatives; it was so with the three young men, it was so with Daniel, and in His time it was so with our blessed Lord. Two alternatives face the servant of God. Either he must relinquish the vision or he must be destroyed; and having, like some diabolical chess-player, engineered a situation from which there are only two possible moves, Satan stands back. In either case he is triumphant. If those three young men will avoid the fiery furnace at the expense of denying the Lord, the devil does not mind their going free - they have denied the Lord, the spiritual interest is marred. Daniel can, if he will, save himself from the lions' den, he can close his windows, he can relinquish that utter position of abandonment to the heavenly revelation; he can - and alas many do - avoid the lions' den. It can be done, and Satan has triumphed either way; and that is the diabolical ingenuity of it. It is a cleft-stick. Either we must relinquish that utter position concerning that which the Lord has shown us, or Satan will break us, he will finish our usefulness, he will mar our lives. So we have to sit down with the two alternatives.

God's Counter by Resurrection

But the devil is limited, happily. There are not really only two ways, there is a third way. The young men proved it, Daniel proved it. In the case of our Lord, and in New Testament language, it is Resurrection. The word used in Daniel is "deliverance". There is a third way; the young men may not have known about that, Darius did not know about it. Did Daniel know? I wonder. Neither he nor the three young men stopped to think when the alternatives were placed before them. They did not take any time to decide, they were committed to the Lord; what happened to them was a secondary thing. Yet I think Daniel did know. He knew in the way in which we may all know. He could not foresee the way in which God would deliver him. That is what we want to know - we want the Lord to explain, we want that somebody else should have gone the same way, and nobody has gone that way before: it always is to us as a new experience, we cannot see the way out. Nor could Daniel in that sense; but spiritually he could see that his association with the Lord was the safe way, and though with his mind he could not understand, with his spirit he knew that to be on the Lord's side was the safe way, and that is why there is this air of quiet calm about him. He did not see the way out, but he did know the Lord; so he would open his windows and pray and praise.

"Is thy God, Whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Well, let the next morning and the light of day show, and the king shall see there are not the two alternatives. That is what the devil thinks - maybe even persuades himself. That is what man thinks as he looks at it from a human level. That is what we shall think unless we have the windows open toward Jerusalem. Two alternatives - either we must compromise in this matter of utter abandonment to what the Lord has shown His will or we shall be broken - one or the other. If we say, in any case I cannot abandon what the Lord has shown, my heart is set upon Him: we shall find that there is a third way. There is the vision, and there is deliverance. Thank God, that is true for us, He is the God of resurrection, the God of deliverances. So let us keep the windows open.

A Great Victory

See what happened as the result of this. There is always spiritual gain when we are faithful to the Lord. Daniel heard all their threats, knew what was going to happen, foresaw it all, and quietly went on with the Lord. That is all Daniel did, but you see the extraordinary results. This experience of his was a great victory. Without feeling revengeful about men, we must feel there is a certain spiritual satisfaction at the end of the story in the fact that the ones who had plotted Daniel's overthrow were cast into the den themselves; and the spiritual lesson is a true one. Daniel's quiet faithfulness and his deliverance were not just things in themselves, they were the overthrow of the enemies of the Lord. It was a great victory. And it is always like that. Daniel did not wrestle and strive. He did nothing concerning his enemies; he kept his windows open to Jerusalem. But so long as he did that, God was quite capable of dealing with his enemies. Let the rest, the quiet, the calm dignity of that assurance flood our hearts. Darius was trying to deal with the enemies and could not; Daniel was holding fast to the Lord and his steadfastness was the undoing of all his enemies.

"The God of Daniel"

And the second feature which emerges from this story is the great testimony to the Lord which was set up because of Daniel. The Book of Daniel has a number of titles of God which are very striking, and some of them very wonderful. He is the "Living God"; He is the "God of heaven"; He is the "Ancient of days"; and so on. But come to chapter 6:26, and He is "the God of Daniel". In all that list of glorious titles, here is one more - "the God of Daniel". What a testimony! It is not that Daniel stands for anything, but what makes the King and all others to marvel is, 'What a God Daniel has!' *Would that that might be added to the many titles of the Lord, with my name and yours in the place of Daniel's!* We are not important, but nor was Daniel in his own eyes.

Our windows open toward Jerusalem, our going on with the Lord, mean the lions' den; but we go on with the Lord, and after all we come out of the lions' den and there is a great victory, something established in the earth that never was before of a testimony to the greatness of the glory of God. "The God of Daniel." *The Lord grant that this may be true in our case.*

Part Three

MEEKNESS OF THE MAN OF GOD

"And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face; in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land; and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror, which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel." (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3).

The prophet Micah described the man who pleases God as the one who loves mercy and walks humbly with his God (Micah 6:8). Moses was outstanding in his humility, not only in his own days but through all time. In connection with this, it is helpful to realize that he was a man who loved mercy. He had reason to do so, since he himself owed everything to the grace of God. There seems to be no greater man in all the sacred record - certainly not in the Old Testament; and the mark of his greatness is that he was very meek.

A Christlike Virtue

His meekness was not a superficial guise which he assumed, but a profound characteristic of the man. The actual statement about him was made in connection with a period of great provocation. He was tested - tested severely and often; and from it all emerged the Divine verdict that he had passed the test: he was indeed a truly meek man.

Meekness is, of course, a Christ-like virtue "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Perhaps it is one of the greatest virtues, for it was the Lord Jesus Himself Who not only pronounced a special blessing on the meek, but promised that they should inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). He knew very well that meekness is not natural to humanity; indeed it was in order that men might be instructed in this quality of life that He called them to come unto Him and to take His yoke upon them. "Learn of Me...", He commanded, with the clear inference that we sinners would never be meek or lowly unless we did.

This was certainly true of Moses. Nobody would suggest that the man Moses was naturally meek. Nor would the years of training and luxury in the Egyptian court have taught him such a lesson. He learnt much from the Egyptians, but he certainly never learned meekness. His outburst in Egypt, and the one flash of impatience in the wilderness which cost him so dearly (Numbers 20:8-12), give clear indications of the kind of man he was by nature. The more wonder, then, that this man, of all men, should be meek, and the supreme wonder that he surpassed all others in this Christ-like virtue.

Not that Moses was a mere dreamer. Meekness is not a characteristic of the contemplative; it is a virile virtue. Moses was a man of action. "In all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror..." He was the leader of the greatest venture of all history, the pioneer of the Israelite nation. God was mightily with Moses. When Joshua took over the leadership of the people there was no greater encouragement which God could give him than to assure him that he should have the same backing: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Joshua 1:5). What was the explanation of the wonderful experiences of Divine power which Moses had? Surely this very fact, that he was meek above all other men. His meekness was his strength.

Meekness Because of Mercy

As we have said, the prophet made a close association between mercy and meekness: the man who loves mercy will walk humbly with his God. It may well be that the greatest contributory cause to the supreme meekness of Moses was that his life was transformed by an overwhelming realization of God's mercy to him. It is possible, of course, to take God's blessings in a wrong way; to become conceited, as the Jews did, vainly imagining that God's kind treatment of them was due to some innate superiority of theirs. Such men may use the right phrases, and talk of God's grace, but it is only phraseology; they cannot be said to "love mercy". If, however, we do appreciate the amazing patience of God, and His goodness to the utterly undeserving, then we begin not to boast of mercies, but to love mercy. There is surely nothing so calculated to make us truly lowly in heart as a realization of the greatness of God's grace, even to us.

Mercy at His Beginning

Moses' life began with a very great mercy. At that time every other baby boy had to be drowned. He alone was saved, and saved by the mercy of God. We can give every credit to his mother who thought of the plan and executed it, to the sister who watched by the ark of bulrushes and intervened so successfully, and even to Pharaoh's daughter who showed such true and unexpected compassion. But it was not the mother, the sister, the ark, or the princess, who delivered him, but the great mercy of God. Moses himself contributed least of all. When the casket was opened, he just cried - that was all he could do.

Probably it was the one thing which his mother hoped would not happen, and it may be that Miriam stood by, tense with concern, lest the baby should spoil everything by not smiling at the appropriate moment. All that the babe could do was to wail in complete weakness and so fail to give any help at all. His deliverance was all of God. The name given to him, Moses (Exodus 2:10b), was a lifelong reminder of how he had been pulled out of the waters of destruction by the mercy of God. Such a beginning should keep a man humble.

Yet this, too, was our beginning. We would have been swallowed up by destruction had it not been for Divine intervention. Like the baby Moses, we could contribute nothing but a cry, a despairing wail. It was God Who showed mercy to us and drew us out of the waters of death. We might well ask, as Moses must often have done, why we should have been the favoured ones when others all around us have no such history. Many have had the same opportunities, the same, or even greater privileges; yet we are the Lord's, and they are not. The grace of God is amazing. 'Tis mercy all!'

Mercy of Recovery

A time came when the Lord met him at the burning bush, met him with a commission and a promise. "Come now therefore, and I will send thee", He said to him (Exodus 3:10); and later, "Certainly I will be with thee" (verse 12). It would be impossible to imagine the overwhelming sense of the mercy of God that must have filled Moses' heart as he heard those words.

What a lot of history had intervened between Moses' first sense of call to be the Deliverer, and this present commission! He had begun - where we must all begin - by making a great renunciation. At forty years of age he let go of possessions, prospects, everything selfish and earthly, in order to be a servant of the Lord. This was not wrong; it was right, and nobody can serve the Lord without such a complete renunciation. He let everything go - or at least he meant to do so. This,

however, did not make him meek. Many of us have passed through a similar experience, and been most sincere in our dedication, but it did not make us meek. Perhaps it made us the very opposite, giving us a false idea of our superiority to other Christians.

For Moses there followed a complete fiasco. He tried to serve the Lord in his own strength, in his own way and at his own time. Meek men don't do that sort of thing. The result was abysmal and utter failure. Away he fled into the land of Midian, and for forty years he had to live with his own sense of complete breakdown. Perhaps it was borne in on his soul that God's work could not be done by the kind of man he was, even when such a man had made great sacrifices. There must have been a collapse of any imagined ability, a sense of deep disappointment, in the conviction that he had spoiled every chance he ever had, that he had disqualified himself from ever being a servant of God.

We, too, must go this way, though happily it need not last for forty years as it did with him. But there is a spiritually symbolic meaning in that number: it is meant to indicate the thoroughness of the weakening process. He had learned his lesson.

At least, he thought he had. But in fact it was only the first half. He had settled down with his own failure, but now the Lord appeared to him, with this surprising call to go back again to the work which he had ruined by trying to do it in his own strength. He went back, unwillingly, hesitatingly, full of doubts as to his own ability or worthiness, but he went with the new and emphatic assurance: "Certainly I will be with thee". How amazing the grace of God must have seemed to him, rescuing him from his failure and despair, offering to one who had broken down in the past such high and privileged service. We know, of course, that it was this very self-despair which made possible such power as he had never known before. It was the proof that the forty years, far from being wasted, had done the necessary work of undoing. To receive back his original commission by such a miracle of mercy was calculated to make Moses feel deeply humbled.

There is a sense in which God's true servant is always a defeated man. The one who drives on with the sense of his own importance, who is unwilling to appreciate the worthlessness of his own best efforts and is always seeking to justify himself - that one will not be meek, and so will lack the essential power by which God's work must be done. Our brokenness must not be feigned; we must not be content with the mere language and appearance of humility. We, too, must be as conscious of Divine mercy in our being recovered for God's service as we are of the original mercy which drew us from the waters of death.

Mercy of the Exodus

God abundantly fulfilled His promise to 'be with' His servant: Moses was used in a unique way to do the work of God. This, too, he realized, was pure mercy: "Thou in Thy mercy hast led the people which Thou hast redeemed" (Exodus 15:13). Moses did not need the deliverance for himself. He was free; he had never been a slave; he could walk in and out as he pleased. He was sent, however, to his people who were in 'the house of bondage', and was faced with the impossible task of getting them released so that they might worship and serve God. The miracle happened; the great emancipation came; and Moses had been the man whom God used to bring this about. The old Moses, full of his own importance, might have been ready to take some credit to himself for this. Alas! it is all too easy for the servant of the Lord to get puffed up, even if he has been used in only a small way. Even the new Moses, deeply aware of his dependence on the Lord, had severe tests in Egypt which threw him back even more on the absolute grace

of God, and he was only able to share in the great Exodus when it had become abundantly clear that God alone was doing the work.

This is the case with every spiritual servant of God. He has to be so dealt with that any tendency to imagine that he is anything in himself, or at all superior to others, must be purged from him. Then, to see God working in power and deliverance, as Moses saw Him, to be the instrument of a work which is so wholly and absolutely of God - this can only bring a man very low in humble worship. Really, the man who is most used should be the meekest of all. When Christ turned the water into wine, we are told that, while the ruler and the guests at the feast did not know the secret, those who did the carrying did. "But the servants which had drawn the water knew" (John 2:10). They knew how gloriously Christ had worked, and that they themselves had been spectators, rather than agents, privileged to be so used, well aware that all the glory belonged to the Lord and none to man.

Mercy of Answered Prayer

Think, also, of the wonderful way in which the Lord answered Moses' prayers. There were miracles of preservation, miracles of provision, miracles of progress. Every time when a new crisis of need came upon them, Moses turned to the secret place of prayer and called on the Name of the Lord. And on each occasion there were fresh blessings which could only have come by way of the trials. The people could not pray for themselves. More often than not they doubted and complained. Moses was the man who prayed, and so Moses had the full spiritual blessing which comes to those who see their prayers answered, especially if these prayers are for others rather than for themselves. After all, when the people lacked food, Moses was as hungry as any of them. He, too, could have died from thirst, just like the rest. When they were attacked by their enemies, Moses was as much in danger as any of them - possibly more. It seems, though, that, as a true intercessor should, Moses forgot himself and his own needs in his shepherd-like concern for the people. He prayed for them, not for himself; and, as he did so, he could hardly ignore the fact that they were as unworthy as he. When the prayers were answered - and what a wonderful record of answered prayer the wilderness journey provided! - then anew he would be impressed with the greatness of God's mercy.

There were, of course, deeper spiritual needs than the physical and material perils of the wilderness way. There were times when the whole nation was likely to be destroyed, because of its disobedience and sin. There were individuals, like Aaron and Miriam, whose only hope of survival could be in the mercy of God. Moses was the man who prayed for that mercy, and God graciously responded to his selfless intercession. There are two ways of receiving answers to prayer. The wrong way is that of conceit, as though we or our prayers had some kind of merit in them. A prayer ministry will not continue for long, nor remain effective, if any such spirit is allowed a place in the heart of the intercessor. But there is the other way, when those concerned are humbled to the dust by the sheer goodness and grace of God. Even more than suffering, even more than chastening, the very abundance of God's mercy can melt our hearts in lowly gratitude. Such people do not have to try to be meek. They do not even have to pray to be made meek. It is the goodness of God, so amazing and so undeserved, which produces such meekness.

Part Four

THE TRAGEDY OF THE UNFINISHED TASK

This evening we move in thought into the Book of Judges - and how very different it is from the Book of Joshua! I think the Book of Judges is the most terrible book in the Bible! And why is it such a terrible book? Because it is the book of the unfinished task.

In the Book of Joshua the people of Israel went into the land, and had a wonderful history of victory after victory, moving more and more into God's full purpose. Then, before they had finished the work, they settled down. In the last chapters of the Book of Joshua we see the people just settling down before the work is perfect. They had heard the great call of God. God's purpose had been presented to them and they had made a response to it. They had moved so far, and then, before it was all finished, they settled down. The Book of Judges follows, and that is the book of the tragedy of the unfinished work.

None of us will say that there is nothing like that in Christianity today! There are many Christians who make a wonderful beginning. They see the vision of God's great purpose, and certain words in the New Testament make a great appeal to them, such as: "Called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). That is a wonderful vision! "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11). Such a thought makes a great appeal to these people and they make a heart response. They go on so far, and then many stop too soon. They lose the vision; they lose the inspiration; they lose the sense of purpose; they lose the energy to go on, and of some we have to say: 'Something has gone out of their faces. What was there with them once is not there now. They were so positive once, so occupied with the heavenly calling, but something has happened.' These people may not be altogether conscious of it, and they would not tell you that something has happened, but it is quite evident that something *has* happened. They have just lost something, and you do not get the response now from them that you once got. They are not so interested now as they were. The heavenly vision has gone out of their lives. That is true of many Christians, and it could be true of all of us.

And the Book of Judges is our instructor in this matter. What I say now is not in judgment - although it is from the Book of *Judges*! I have a very great deal of sympathy with these people. Oh yes, I know how wrong it was, and how this book spelt the failure of these people. I know how sorry the Lord was about it, but from my own experience I cannot help being sympathetic, for I think I understand.

Weariness in the Battle

Why did these people stop short of finishing the job? I think that very likely it was because they became weary in well doing. The battle was long drawn out. It was spread over years and was very exhausting. No sooner had they gained one victory than they had to start fighting again. They did not have much rest between one battle and the next one. It was a long drawn-out warfare; they got weary in battle, and in their weariness they lost the vision, they lost heart, and they lost the initiative.

I am so glad that with all the strong things that the New Testament says, it says some very kind and understanding things about this: "Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9); "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, ... your labour is not vain in the Lord" (1

Corinthians 15:58); "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love" (Hebrews 6:10). What a lot of things there are like that! And Jesus said to His disciples, who were being brought into the battle: "Let not your heart be troubled!" (John 14:1), while we can hear the Lord's words to Joshua: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed" (Joshua 1:9). Again, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "He that endureth *to the end*, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

These people in the Book of Judges were discouraged by weariness - and we are all capable of that! Sometimes it is not easy for us to give up - or perhaps I ought to say that it is not *difficult* for us to give up! - because we do not want to get out of the battle, and yet, at the same time, we do want to get out of it. The battle is inside, and even so great a man as the Apostle Paul had that battle. He said: 'I really do not know what to do! I have a strong desire to depart and be with the Lord in order to get out of the battle, and yet I know that duty to the Lord would keep me in the battle. I do not know whether to give up or to go on!' I say that that is a possible temptation to every Christian, and the Lord knows all about that! The New Testament is full of understanding things about it.

The first reason why these people settled down too soon, then, was discouragement. It was not because they had had no victories - they had had many - but because they said: 'There is no end to this battle! It looks as though we shall *never* finish!' So in weariness and discouragement they settled down too soon.

I feel sure that this Book of Judges recognizes that. Every time these people stirred themselves again they found that the Lord was very ready to go on with them. This book is a picture of an up-and-down Christian life. One day these people are down in despair, and another day they are up in victory. It was that kind of Christian life which was always up and down, but when they turned their faces to the Lord they found that He was waiting for them. The Lord had not given up. He was always ready to go on. I think that is the first great lesson in this Book of the Judges.

The Loss of Heavenly Vision

But what was the effect of this loss, of this stopping too soon? It was the loss of vision. They only saw the things that were near and lost sight of God's eternal purpose. They lost sight of what Paul calls the "prize of the on-high calling" (Philippians 3:14). Now this sounds like a contradiction, but they lost sight of the things that are not seen! You say: 'What do you mean by that? That is nonsense! How can you see the things that are not seen?' Paul says: "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). They lost sight of the things which are eternal because they were looking too much at the things which are seen. They lost the heavenly vision for they became satisfied too soon. It was all good so far, but the good became the enemy of the best.

The first thing that happened, then, was the loss of the heavenly vision. It works both ways. If we lose the heavenly vision we settle down too soon. If we settle down too soon we lose the heavenly vision. And what do we mean by settling down too soon? We mean: losing the warring spirit. In this Book of Judges the Philistines resorted to a very subtle strategy: they took all the weapons of war away from Israel, and all that they had left was one file to sharpen their agricultural instruments, so that every farmer in Israel had to take a journey to the blacksmith to sharpen his farm instruments. All the sharp instruments had been taken away and the spirit of *war* was undermined. The Philistines had made

it impossible for Israel to fight and you know that there is a very big Philistine about! The strategy of this great enemy of the inheritance is to take the fighting spirit out of us. Oh, what a lot of mischief the Philistines have done to Christians! What about our prayer life? There was a time when we were mighty warriors in prayer. We fought the Lord's battles in prayer. What about our prayer meetings? Where can you find the prayer meetings now that are out in spiritual warfare? Yes, we ask the Lord for a hundred and one things, but we do not battle through to victory on some situation. There is some life in terrible bondage, there is some servant of the Lord having a hard time, and there are many other calls for battle, but where are the prayer groups who take up these issues and will not give up until they are settled? The warring spirit has gone out from so much of the Church. That is a clever strategy of the devil! Lose the spirit of spiritual battle and you will stop short of finishing the work.

The Spirit of the World

The next thing that caused these people to settle down too soon was the spirit of the world getting in amongst them. What is the spirit of the world? It is the spirit of: Have a good time! Let us have a good time! Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die! And these people of Israel looked at the world around them and, if I understand it rightly, they said: 'These people do not have all the hard time that we do. Our life is a life of continual battle. They do not know so much about that, but they believe in having a good time.' I think that is how it was at this particular time.

Of course, up to this time Israel had given the people round about a bad time! But Israel had lost the fighting spirit now, and the world was having a good time because the Church was no longer fighting it. Instead of fighting the world they made friends with the world. They made the world their friends, and so they did not finish the work. Compromise is a dangerous thing to the inheritance! Trying to be on good terms with the world and having an easy time will result in our losing a large part of the inheritance.

Recovering the Fighting Spirit

But let us finish on a better note. As I said before, God did not give up, and whenever the people took up the battle again and turned again on the Lord's side to fight the enemy, they found the Lord waiting for them. So we have the story of Deborah, the story of Gideon - and dare I mention Samson? However, although Samson was a poor sort of man, if only the Lord gets a poor chance, He will take it. You may not think much of Samson - but do you think better of yourself? We are all poor creatures! We have all been discouraged, we have all been tempted to give up, we have all stopped too soon, we have all been weary in well-doing, but take the sword of the Spirit again! Take up the battle again, and you will find the Lord is ready and waiting for you.

Gideon - Deborah - Samson - and all the others. But I think there is one who is better than them all - do you remember that beautiful little Book of Ruth? Everybody is charmed with that book! What a lovely book of spiritual recovery it is! What a picture of the Lord's patience, the Lord's readiness to take advantage of every opportunity! How does that book begin? "And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged..." The Book of Ruth was in the times of the Judges, which until then was the most terrible time in history of Israel, but God was ready to change the whole picture. There are the two different pictures: the Judges and Ruth, but both were in the same period. Do you see what I am trying to say?

Dear friends, we are in a great battle, and it is long drawn out. We can get very weary in the fight. We can become discouraged and give up too soon. We may have to stop before the work is finished. That is always our temptation, the tragic possibility in the Christian life, but the Lord does not give up. He does not faint, nor is He discouraged, and if we will turn again to Him, rise up again, recover our fighting spirit and continue to fight the good fight, we shall find the Lord is ready every time, and He is always wanting to help us to fight to the end. He will help till the day is done!

Part Five

“GATHER MY SAINTS TOGETHER”

“Gather My saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” (Psalm 50:5 A.S.V.).

“Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him.” (2 Thessalonians 2:1).

“Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.” (Hebrews 10:25).

In all of the above passages there is this one common factor, that an end-time movement and feature is dominant. It must be remembered that the Psalms themselves represent what remains when a history of outward things as to the general instrumentality has ended in failure. The history of Israel in its first great phase closed with the Book of “Kings” in a calamitous and shameful way. Weakness, paralysis, declension, reproach, characterized the instrument in general. But out of that history now so concluded the Psalms are carried forward, and they represent what has *spiritually* been gained and is permanent. This is pre-eminently a personal, inward, spiritual knowledge of the Lord gained through experience. That is why they always reach the heart and never fail to touch experience at every point. To them the saints have turned in times of deep experience. They are the ministry of experience to experience, the only ministry which is permanent. The end-time instrument will always be that which inwardly knows the Lord in a deep and living way through history fraught with much experience of the heights and depths. What David gave to the Chief Musician for the wind instruments and the stringed instruments touches the highest and deepest note of a mortal’s knowledge of God. Worship, Salvation, Sorrow, Appeal, Victory, Battle, Faith, Hope, Glory, Instruction, are all great themes interwoven with the mass of matters touched, but the point is that all came in *real life*; He passed through it all. It is this, and this alone, which can serve the Lord when what He first raised up has failed Him as a public instrument. So the Lord would take pains to secure this, and this may explain much of the suffering and sorrow through which He takes His chosen vessels.

It does not need pointing out that, in the other two passages with which we commenced, the end-time is in view; they definitely state it.

There is a further common feature, however, which is more particularly the subject before us. They all definitely refer to gathering together as something related to the end-time. The Day is drawing nigh, therefore there is to be a “so much the more” assembling together. The Lord is coming, and there is a gathering to Him.

A history of a religious system which sprang out of something which the Lord raised up in the first place has ended in weakness, chaos and shame. Therefore, there is to be a re-gathering to *the Lord* of His saints.

Before we deal with the nature of this end-time gathering, we must get clearly in view those that are concerned in it. The passage in the Psalm would embrace and include those referred to in the other two passages.

“My Saints... Those That Have Made A Covenant With Me by Sacrifice”

It need hardly be remarked that when all has been said and done through type, symbol and figure, the covenant means an entering into what the Lord Jesus has done by His shed Blood. It is an appreciation and apprehension of Him in His great work by the Cross. The Lord, by His Blood, has made a “New Covenant” by sacrifice, and we, His spiritual people, have entered into that covenant and set our hand to it. Christ as “the mediator of a new covenant” stands for both parties, for a covenant requires two parties. On one side He is God, “The Son of God”; on the other side He is Man, “Son of Man”. In Christ we are made the humanity side of the covenant, and by taking our place by faith in Him we enter into the covenant. Just as, in Christ, God has come out to us in a great committal, so also - as in the case of Christ - we in Him go out to God in a like utter committal. The Blood seals the covenant, that is, makes us wholly the Lord’s, and the Lord wholly ours.

If we see the meaning of “a covenant by sacrifice” then we shall see who it is that will be in this gathering together. It will certainly be only those to whom the Lord is everything, to whom He is all and in all; and those who are all for the Lord without a reservation, a personal interest, or anything that is less or other than Himself. Spiritual oneness is only possible on this basis.

The Lord’s word to Abraham in the day of covenant was, “Now I know that thou fearest God”. Malachi’s end-time word was “Then they that feared the Lord...” The fear of the Lord is an utter abandonment to Him at any cost; His will being supreme, claiming and obtaining the measure of a whole burnt-offering.

The Nature of the Gathering Together

Having then in view the kind who are concerned, which forms a test as well as a testimony, we are able to look at the nature of the gathering together.

We are well aware that there is a widespread doubt as to whether we are to expect anything in the way of a corporate movement or testimony at the end. Indeed, it is strongly held by some that everything at the end is individual, and this conviction rests, for the most part, upon the phrase “If any man”, in the message to Laodicea.

Let us hasten then to say that we here have nothing in mind in the nature of an organized movement, a sect, a society, a fraternity, or even a “fellowship” if, by that, any of the foregoing is meant.

Having said this, however, there are some things on the other side which need saying quite definitely.

The Church of the New Testament never was an organized movement. Neither was there any organized affiliation of the companies of believers in various places with one another. It was a purely spiritual thing, spontaneous in life and united only by the Holy Spirit and mutual love and spiritual solicitude. There were other factors which acted as spiritual links which we will mention presently. Further, and still more important, was the abiding fact that a “Body” had been brought into being. This is called “the body of Christ”. You can divide a society and still it remains, but you cannot divide a body without destroying the entity.

Are we to understand from the exponents of the individualistic interpretation that all the teaching of the Lord, in nearly all the Scriptures concerning the House of

God, and in nearly all the Letters of Paul concerning the Body of Christ, is now set aside or is only an idea without any expression on the earth? Are we to blot out the mass of the New Testament and live our own individual Christian lives with no emphasis upon working fellowship with other believers? Surely not. This would be contrary to all the ways of God in history, and would certainly spell defeat, for if there is one thing against which the Adversary has set himself it is the fellowship of God's people.

Ultra-individualism is impossible if the truth of the "one body" still stands, and what is more, the Lord's people are becoming more and more conscious of their absolute need of fellowship, especially in prayer. The difficulty of 'getting through' alone is becoming greater as we approach the end.

What then is the nature of this gathering together? It is a gathering to the Lord Himself. *"Gather My saints together unto Me"; "our gathering unto Him"*.

In times past there have been gatherings to men, great preachers, great teachers, great leaders; or to great institutions and movements, centres and teachings. At the end the Lord will be very much more than His vessels or instrumentalities.

God's end is Christ, and as we get nearer the end He must become almost immediately the object of appreciation.

Our oneness and fellowship is not in a teaching, a 'testimony', a community, a place, but in a Person, and in Him not merely doctrinally, but livingly and experimentally.

Any movement truly of God must have this as its supreme and all-inclusive feature, that it is the Lord Jesus Who is the object of heart adoration and worship.

The two great purposes of the 'gathering' are prayer and 'building up': "supplication for all saints", and spiritual food. These two things have ever characterized Divine gatherings or convocations - representation before God, and feeding in His presence.

This, then, is the meaning of "call a solemn assembly" (Joel 1:14; 2:15). The need more than ever imperative as "the day" approaches is the gathering together *unto Him*.

May we see more of this as His Divinely inspired movement to meet the so great need!

Part Six

“WHITHER THE TRIBES GO UP”

“Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord.” (Psalm 122:4).

“Gather My saints together.” (Psalm 50:5).

It was a beautiful thought in the mind of God when, in His divine economy, He prescribed for the periodic convocations of His people. Away back in the time of Moses, He commanded that all the males in Israel should journey three times in every year to some place of His appointment (Deuteronomy 16:16), the details of which are worth noting. It is clear that David laid great store by such convocations. Psalm 122 is by its heading attributed to David, as were other “Songs of Ascent”, or pilgrimage. It was due to division resulting from spiritual decline that such gatherings ceased for so long, until Josiah had a great recovery celebration (2 Chronicles 35:17-19). It was therefore a sign of spiritual recovery and strength when the Lord’s people so gathered from near and far.

We can briefly summarize the values in the Lord’s thought for such convocations:

1. They were times when the universality of God’s church, or “Holy nation,” as on the basis of the Passover (the Cross) was preserved in the hearts of His people. “They left their cities”; that is, they left exclusively parochial ground. By the gathering from all areas they were preserved from all exclusivism, sectarianism, and the peril of isolation. They were made to realize that they were not the all and everything, but parts of a great whole. Thus the ever-present tendency to make God in Christ smaller than He really is was countered.
2. Thus, they were times of wonderful fellowship. People who belonged to the same Lord, but had either never before met, or had been apart for so long, discovered or rediscovered one another, were able to share both “their mutual woes, and mutual burdens bear,” or tell of the Lord’s goodness and mercy. Loneliness, with all its temptations and false imaginations, was carried away by the fresh air of mutuality. New hope, incentive, and life sent the pilgrims back to their accustomed spheres with the consciousness of relatedness.
3. They were times of consolidation. The Psalm says: “For a testimony unto Israel.” The testimony of the great thing that the Passover (the Cross) means in the heart of His people. A testimony to the unifying power of the blood and body of Christ. The gatherings held a spiritual virtue in the livingness of the presence of the Lord. If they had been assailed by doubts, fears, and perplexities, they went away confirmed, reassured, and established in their common faith.
4. They were times of instruction. The Word of God was brought out, read and expounded. They were taught, and they “spake one to another.” In a word, they were fed. There was spiritual food. The initiation of these convocations was connected with three “Feasts” (Deuteronomy 16). Eating and drinking in the presence of the Lord. They returned fortified, built up, enlightened, and with vision renewed.
5. They were times of intercession. Possibly not every individual was able to “go up.” For various reasons - infirmity, age, responsibility, or some other form of detention - kept some from the blessings of joining with the pilgrims. But God’s idea of the gatherings was - as put into later words - “My house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples.” The New Testament is clear and strong on this point,

that the representation of the "Body of Christ" in any place *can*, and *should* have real spiritual value for all its members because "the Body is one."

So, let the lonely, detained and isolated ones realize that when the Lord's people are together, they are being supported. And let those who are not so deprived of the "gathering together" realize how vital it is, and what a necessity there is in expressing this Divine thought.

Would to God that all our gatherings were after this sort!

Part Seven

GATHERED OF GOD

"Also the foreigners that join themselves to the Lord, to minister unto Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from profaning it, and holdeth fast My covenant; even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God, who gathereth the outcasts of Israel, saith, 'Yet will I gather others to him, besides his own that are gathered.'" (Isaiah 56:6-8 A.S.V.).

In the latter part of his prophecies Isaiah concentrates on the return from captivity and the restoration of the Lord's testimony in Zion. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this recovery, for at its heart, the goal and explanation of it all, we find the house of God. It is God Himself Who is most concerned about re-gathering His people, for this is essential to His own will and glory.

Scattered Ones Gathered into Fellowship in God's House

The Lord's declaration that His house *"shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"* does not primarily mean that it shall be a place from which prayer shall go out on behalf of men everywhere. It is true that the house does become a centre from which there radiates a ministry of life and blessing in answer to believing prayer, but the context shows clearly that the first thought is of that house as a centre of gathering, a rallying point to which all who will may come. The Spirit's work is to unite in practical fellowship those who have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness, and to unite them under His own authority in His own house. It is, of course, a blessed privilege for those concerned. They have trusted and proved the Lord in their scattered state, but they have known that they were not experiencing the fullness. There is always something lacking when believers know the Lord in isolation only or in sectional groups.

The Word of God had set before the "outcasts of Israel" prospects which were far beyond their present experience - promises of the glory of God in the midst and of feasts of fat things in the mountain of the Lord. All this was to be accomplished by a great Divine gathering of those who had hitherto been scattered and in limitation. God would make them joyful in His house of prayer. The greatest values, however, were not to be personal and local, but universal and Divine.

It is God's great desire to manifest Himself in and through His people: *"that now... might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God"* (Ephesians 3:10). When God's scattered people are freed from every bondage and brought together in true oneness, the impact of His presence and kingdom will be tremendous in its range. This gathering is of supreme importance to the Lord, for it provides Him with His house and ministers to His satisfaction. Who can calculate the effect of the unrestricted and ungrieved presence of God in a people? The house of God is no hollow pretence; it is not a relic of what used to be, nor a vain ideal of what ought to be; it is meant to be a present, spiritual reality. *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20).

They are not gathered together for their own name, nor for any other earthly name; not for any personal interests, nor even for the furtherance of a cause. They have been drawn by the Spirit into the house of God where all things are of

Him and all things are for Him. In that house God is given His rightful place in everything.

During the captivity there was no place on earth where the Lord could truly reign among His people. There were individuals like Ezekiel, or those of whom we read in Daniel, who faithfully represented Him and maintained the testimony to His universal sovereignty. These, however, did not cease to long and pray for the day of recovery, when the house of God would once again come into being. They knew that the Lord's purposes required a re-gathering of His scattered people, with their establishing in a united fellowship in Him. This is the spiritual meaning of the house of God. For us it is not a building or a locality, nor must we be content to regard it merely as something doctrinal into which we enter when we become the Lord's. It is a practical life together in the fellowship of the Spirit.

Gathered on the Basis of Grace Alone

Isaiah's ministry was one of comfort, or perhaps better, of encouragement. The purposes of God are so often hindered by timidity or lack of inspiration among His people. There are so many objections, so many arguments and questions, that we tend to accept the low level of things as they are, instead of responding to the heavenly vision and call. The house of God seems to be a dream or a vision; we gaze upon it but take no active steps to enter it in a practical sense and to enjoy the blessings that are to be found therein. From the words of Isaiah we gather there were two groups particularly susceptible to a spirit of discouragement, the eunuchs and the foreigners. The prophet's message is to assure them that they are to share in God's gathering. He speaks to those who are ineligible on natural grounds, assuring them of the abundant grace of God. His house is not concerned with what we are in ourselves; admittance cannot be governed by human considerations; grace has made it a house of prayer for *all* peoples.

But there must be some qualification, for God's house is holy. Why are these outcasts received, and given so warm a welcome? How is it that God says, *"Even them will I bring... and make them joyful in My house of prayer?"* There are three statements which seem to give the answer to this question. They love the name of the Lord, they keep the Sabbath and they hold fast His covenant.

Gathered in Virtue of Christ's Finished Work

The second and central feature really includes the other two. They are true keepers of the Sabbath. This stress upon Sabbath observance is the more remarkable since the prophet is particularly strong in expressing God's indifference to mere ritual. Nobody could be more emphatic than Isaiah in assuring the people of God that the whole realm of religious observance, even though prescribed by the Scriptures, is in itself of no value to the Lord and rejected by Him. His message to the people was often in such terms as, *"Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth; they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary of bearing them"* (Isaiah 1:14; A.S.V.). In spite of this, Isaiah lays great stress on the need for keeping the Sabbath. This is surely because of the spiritual meaning attached to that day.

What is this spiritual meaning? It is simplicity and utterness of faith as to the finished work of Christ. This is a term which we make much of in relation to the salvation of sinful men; we rejoice that redemption is secured by the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. But what is true as to the justification of the ungodly is equally true in regard to every phase of spiritual life and experience. The whole work is completed in Christ. Human effort can provide nothing at all, for God's rest is based upon the fact that in Christ and by His Cross all the work is

finished. We are called on to find all our life and energy on this basis - that we keep God's Sabbath. Some people, of course, talk a lot about the finished work of Christ and yet live lives which are not glorifying to Him. This is as though they were approving of the idea of the Sabbath - marking it, as it were, upon their calendars - and yet failing to be governed by it in a practical way. God is calling for those who are true keepers of His Sabbath, those who by faith are proving in ever new ways and ever greater fullness the glorious perfection of the new creation in Christ.

We can profane the Sabbath in two ways. The first is by trying to do something, or thinking that we can do something, to add to God's work in Christ. It is the intrusion of self-wisdom or self-effort into the spiritual life. The second is by failing to count on the Lord's sufficiency. If we are governed by some lack or weakness of ours, or succumb to our own sense of unworthiness, the purposes of God in our life are hindered and we are in effect denying the finished work of Christ, profaning the Sabbath.

Gathered into Fellowship with God Himself

There is an indication in verse 3 of the doubts and fears of the stranger who has joined himself to the Lord. To him the house of God seems so high and holy that he is inclined to despair of having a place in it. Seeing that he has no nature standing, no virtues or abilities of his own, he is worried as to whether he can claim admittance. He begins timidly to enter in, conscious all the time of his strangeness, and half expecting that before long someone will come up to him and tell him that he is an outsider who has no right to be there. It is as though while he is thus troubled, fearing that any moment he will surely be separated from God's people and turned away from His house, the High Priest himself comes forward and gives him a cordial welcome. He is taken by the hand and led, stranger though he is, not just into the outer court nor only into the holy place of priestly ministry - which he never expected to see - but taken right through into the very presence of the Lord. Far from being rejected, he finds that God Himself gives him a warm welcome, giving him full right of access to His holy mountain. No wonder that his heart overflows with joy! *"I will... make them joyful in My house of prayer"*.

God comes out to the man who approaches Him on the grounds of grace. He had been forced to reject many who claimed a place of prominence, because they sought to be something in themselves, and to deal with Him on purely natural grounds. They felt that their name, their education, their orthodoxy or their experience gave them the right to demand God's approval. It was these men and this spirit which really caused the destruction of God's house. The greatest enemy to God's house has never been the enemy from without, but religious pride within. Uncrucified flesh spells the destruction of true spiritual fellowship. There is a spiritual significance in the fact that the foreigner, timid and diffident, and the eunuch, weak and despised, are particularly singled out as being welcomed to fellowship; in the restoration God bases His acceptance on pure grace.

This entrance into the house of prayer is described as being taken up into God's holy mountain. A mountain is a place of vision. The Lord's mountain is where everything is seen in its right proportions in relation to Him. When we are in the valley even small things seem to tower over us, and we are easily governed by petty and personal considerations. True fellowship in the Spirit will raise us into heavenly realms, not away from practical realities but into the clarity and breadth of things as God sees them - to spiritual ascendancy, and to fellowship with God in His great universal purposes of grace and glory.

Gathered to Enjoy God's Full Approval in Christ

The second reason for rejoicing is that *"their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar"*. What an amazing experience this stranger is having! He feared that he would not be permitted to enter at all, but now he finds not only that he is welcome, but that all his offerings are brought to the altar and receive the seal of God's approval. No wonder that he is glad! Somehow nothing else seems to matter if we know that the Lord is pleased with us. This is the meaning of the burnt offering - that God is well pleased with the offerer. It is a blessing indeed to know that our sin offering is accepted, for that means that God has nothing against us. Those who have known deep conviction and concern about their own guilt will know the value of the sin offering and the blessed relief of being sure that God has nothing against them. But when heaven's verdict was given upon the Lord Jesus the voice did not say, 'This is My Son and I have nothing against Him'. God affirmed, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). The burnt offering identifies us with this good pleasure, in Christ.

Many Christians who are rejoicing in the sacrifice of Christ as taking away all their sin, know very little of the deeper joy of being assured that in Christ God is satisfied with them. Does this sound presumptuous? What about Enoch? The whole secret of Enoch's walk of holy and happy fellowship with God was that he had the witness that he was bringing pleasure to the heart of the Lord. In ourselves we can never do this, but on the basis of Christ we can and we ought.

God does not merely tolerate the foreigner, but finds great pleasure in his company; and this, not because of anything inherently good in the man, but only on the basis of the altar. Christ is our burnt offering, to be daily appropriated as our sufficiency to bring pleasure to God. Even while we are seeking to walk nearer to the Lord, to be disciplined by His Cross and transformed by His Spirit, the very secret of our holy living is to rejoice in fullest acceptance in Christ. Thus the burnt offering will exercise a mighty sanctifying power in our lives.

And we are to do this in the house of God. Nothing must discourage or divert us from finding our place there. In active association with God's people we are to be rejoiced at the privilege of setting forth something of the perfection and glory of His Son. If we come by way of the altar God will welcome us and God will accept us - even the weaklings and the outcasts.

Gathered into the Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings

This sacrifice has cost the stranger something. When Scripture speaks of God's acceptance of our offerings it refers primarily to the acceptance of Christ's offering on our behalf, but it also includes our sharing in the sufferings of Christ and the sacrifice of the altar. Those who are pledged to walk in faithfulness with the Lord will find that this is a costly way. That cost may be ignored or despised by others, be treated as the stranger's sacrifice would probably be treated by those who resented his intrusion. How few know the real nature of what we are bearing for the Lord! Men do not appreciate; perhaps some even misunderstand and despise; but God takes full note of the value of the offering. The house of God is not for human glory. Our offerings are not made for men, to be approved or praised by them. When in some solemn hour we joined ourselves to the Lord to minister to His pleasure, we were given a place in His house, not that men might praise us but that our sacrifices, through Christ might bring joy to the heart of God. He is dealing with us on this basis. So often we are tempted to discouragement; it is as we come nigh to God in His house that we know our

sacrifice is precious to Him, and we hear His promise anew *"I will... make them joyful in My house of prayer"*.

Blessing for Others Because of the Gathered Ones

This will be bound to bring life and blessing to the scattered multitudes. True fellowship with God always provides a centre from which blessing is ministered. If God truly has the first place, if people live a life together in which Christ is supremely honoured, then this provides an expression of the house of God which is a house of prayer for all peoples. *"The Lord God, who gathereth the outcasts of Israel, saith, 'Yet will I gather others to him, besides his own that are gathered'"*. When God's own people are scattered, wandering in unbelief and profaning His Sabbath, instead of being strong and united in loving communion in and with Him, there is little prospect of blessing for the outsiders. The gathering work must begin with the Lord's people. The house of God must be the place of joyful worship and communion before it can become a centre of life and light. When the outcasts of Israel are gathered, then the Lord can gather in more, for there is a family and a home into which they can be welcomed. What the world needs is not merely a proclamation going out into all the nations, but a setting in the midst of them, however small and weak in itself, of a true representation of God's house of prayer, whose doors are wide open with a welcome for the lonely and outcast. What a need there is for a gathering into true oneness of the scattered people of God, and so of a further adding to Christ of others besides!

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Publisher's note:

Brethren,

As we were reading in the 1968 magazine of "A Witness and A Testimony", we came across an announcement by Brother Sparks. He wrote of two fellow-prayer warriors who were a true representation for God's House of prayer for all peoples. These testimonies were such a blessing to us that we would like to share them with you.

Gathering Home

"From time to time in the course of the years we have had, with regret, to tell of the home-call of friends and fellow-workers who have been our partners in this ministry. A third such one in recent times is our beloved sister, Madame Ducommun. We first met her when we used to go to Paris to minister in conferences of the 'white Russian' refugees. A link of fellowship was then formed which has borne much fruit. Our sister had made it her main ministry to translate the printed ministry into French, and these translations have gone from her little room in Paris, not only all over France, but to many other French-speaking areas. *A number of friends have met regularly in her room every week for prayer.* She has truly been a 'Mother in Israel' to them and to others. We shall miss her at our conferences in Switzerland.

"This is one of whom it can be truly said: 'Her works do follow her.' Will you pray for those who will miss her most in Paris, and that guidance may be given as to the carrying on of that ministry.

"Madame Ducommun passed into the presence of the Lord quite peacefully on Sunday, May 26th."

"We have now to report the home-call of another of those who have been so valuable a help in the work. Many of our friends in many parts of the world have known our sister Lady Ogle. For over forty years she has been very closely bound up with this ministry and has been a "helper of many". *Her prayer ministry* has been such a great strength, and she will be one for whom we shall give thanks on all remembrance. She was called Home on Monday, 27th November, in the late evening. After a short illness and no suffering she opened her eyes, smiled, and was gone. *May the Lord fill the gap made by this loss with others who will take up her ministry of prayer in - at least - as strong a way.*"

Beloved, when two or three are gathered together in any place, and they pray in the Holy Spirit, they represent the whole Church, and become the House of prayer, functioning for all peoples - a universal ministry.

Part Eight

“A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE”

Reading: 2 Chronicles 6; Isaiah 56:6-7; Mark 11:17; Ephesians 6:18.

“My house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.”

The sixth chapter of the second book of Chronicles is a magnificent example and illustration of these words of the Prophet. In the dedication of the House by Solomon, prayer of a universal kind inaugurated the ministry of the House, introducing its function. The characteristic words of that chapter are: “This house” and “Thy name”. “When they shall pray toward *this house*, because of *Thy name* which is upon it....”

You will remember the words of the Apostle concerning certain people, that they ‘blasphemed that holy name which was called upon you’. The House is the link between the two passages historically and spiritually, and the Name called upon the House.

What was true of the temple of Solomon, as the House with the Name called upon it, is true of the Church, the Church of Christ, with the Lord’s Name upon it. We have no difficulty in identifying the anti-type of Solomon’s temple as being the Church. You are no doubt sufficiently acquainted with the Word to make it unnecessary to quote Scripture in this connection. Many passages will come to your mind which bear out that statement. The Church is God’s House; “whose house are we”, says the writer of the letter to the Hebrews; “a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices”, says Peter. The identification is not at all difficult. And that the Name is upon the House is also quite clear. It was because of the Name which they bore at the beginning that the Church was so mighty in its going forth. The power of the Name was ever manifesting itself in their ministry. That is all very simple and needs no labouring. Then there are these other factors.

Sonship Marking the House of the Lord

The temple of Solomon was really the temple of David. It came in in revelation through David, and in realization in sonship, David’s son. We know that in the Word both David and Solomon are types of the Lord Jesus, that He is great David’s greater Son, and that He combines all that is spiritually represented by David and Solomon of sovereignty, kingship, exaltation, universal triumph and glory. You will remember how the Lord sent Nathan to David, to tell him that though he himself should not build the House, he was nevertheless to be the one to gather all that was necessary for it, and so be the instrument of making it possible. This so satisfied David that in the inspiration of it, and the tremendous stimulus of it, he went out and subdued all those nations which had been historic thorns in the side of Israel. And when he had subdued all the nations round about, and a universal triumph had been established, then the House came into being through Solomon.

We carry that forward into the triumph of the Lord Jesus by His Cross. He possesses the universal victory. He is exalted, enthroned, in virtue of all His enemies being overthrown by His Cross, and on resurrection ground the declaration is made: “Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.” A fresh declaration of sonship is made, by reason of resurrection, and in resurrection, and in that sonship He builds the House, and the Spirit of sonship enters into every

member of that House, and it becomes a 'sonship House' (Acts 13:33; Galatians 4:6).

The Ministry and Vocation of the House

That all leads the way to this particular thing, namely, the ministry and vocation of the House, of the Church. The House itself has to provide the Lord with a place, a sphere, a realm, a vessel, through which He can reach all people. That is the working outwards; that is God securing to Himself a means of universal blessing. God moves universally through His House, and therefore He must have a House constituted on a prayer basis. Do you notice the two movements in this chapter of II Chronicles 6? There is a movement outwards, and a movement inwards. The outward is through the House, with Solomon, so to speak, ministering the Lord. He is, as it were, bringing out from heaven the gracious goodness of God, the interventions, the undertakings and resources of God, world-wide. He is making the House the vehicle of what God is, and what God has, unto all peoples. When you reach a certain point in the chapter the movement changes, and you see people coming to the House because of the Name. That is the movement inwards. They shall "pray toward this house, because of Thy Great Name", said Solomon. That means that the circumference is going to find, not a direct access to God, but its blessing through the House of the Lord.

I suggest to you that those two things very greatly govern the New Testament revelation of the Church, and the Church's vocation. The one thing which embraces all is that God in Christ has bound Himself up with His Church, the Body of Christ, for this world's good, and that the fullness of the Lord will never be known nor entered into in an individual or individualistic way; that anything like mere individualism, separatism, will mean limitation. Any kind of detachment and isolation leads to being deprived of the larger fullness's of the Lord, or, to put it the other way, to come into the fullness of the Lord we have to come into the fellowship of His people as the House of God. That is one law, and that is established.

That is the line which is more severe. There is a frown, perhaps, about that. It sounds hard. But it is the warning note which is very necessary, and especially in the light of the fact that there is a continuous, unceasing, incessant drive of the adversary in the direction of separation, isolation and detachment. It seems that at times the devil releases his forces and concentrates them upon people, to get them to run away, to get out of it, to break away, to quit because the strain seems so intense. Their whole inclination is to get away alone. They think that they are going to get an advantage by that. They are sometimes deceived into thinking that it will be for their good if only they get right away alone. They sometimes put it in this way: that they 'want to get away and think it all out'. Beware of the peril of thinking it all out! You can never think out spiritual problems. The only way of solving them is to live through them. If you have tried to square down to your spiritual problems, and bring your mind to bear upon them, and to solve them by 'thinking it all out', you know that you never get anywhere, and that the Lord does not meet you in that way. Spiritual things have to be lived through to clearness. We can only get through to clearness in spiritual things by living through them. If you do not understand that now, you probably will understand when you come up against another experience of this kind. Thus one aspect of the enemy's drive is to get you to run away. Why does the enemy want us to get away? Why is it that this whole force, this whole pressure, is to make us quit? He has a very good reason. He knows that it means loss and limitation. The Lord, to put it in a word, has bound up all His greater fullness's with *spiritual* relatedness, and there can be nothing but grievous loss in failing to

recognize the House-law of God, the fellowship-law, the family-law. There can only be loss if we *take ourselves* out of God's appointed relatedness. Be very much aware of any kind of movement or tendency which is in the direction of either detachment or putting you into a place where you are apart. The enemy has many ways of getting his end. If he cannot drive us out from the midst of the Lord's people, he very often tries to give us a too prominent place in the midst of them. He can isolate us just as much by our being too much in the limelight, and we at once become uncovered, exposed. There is no more dangerous place than to be made too much fuss of, to be *someone*. There is such a thing as finding a hiding within the House of God.

But our particular consideration at the present time is this vocation and its outward direction, the House of prayer for all peoples. The Church, the Lord's people, form for Him a ministering instrument by which He has ordained to reach out to all the ends of the earth, a universal instrument wherever gathered together, even when represented only by two or three. The test of any company of the Lord's people, and of our position, is this vocation.

The Fact of Representation

You begin with the representative fact, the fact of representation. Representation begins with two or three, and that immediately swings us completely clear of all earthly grounds of judging and estimating. It indicates the essential heavenly nature of the Church. In the Lord Jesus every member of the Church is included. If Christ comes, the whole Church comes. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the whole Body, uniting all the members in one. You cannot be in the spirit and in Christ anywhere but what you are there in *the spiritual realm*, in *the heavenly realm*, with the whole Body, and the whole Body is there spiritually. Two or three? "There am I!" The whole Body, then, is bound up with the two or three. The fact evidences the heavenliness of the Church, the Body of Christ. This is not a possibility on the earth. You cannot bring the whole Church together in any one place on this earth literally. It is not the Lord's way, and it cannot be done. The Church is scattered worldwide, so far as the earthly aspect is concerned. And yet the Church is a heavenly thing gathered up in Christ, its Head, by one Spirit baptized into one Body, and when we come into the Spirit, into the heavenly realm, we are in the presence of the whole Body; not with earthly intelligence, that is, the whole Body is not conscious of the fact from the earthly standpoint, but spiritually it is true. That is the whole Church represented in the two or three if truly "in the Name". What the two or three may do in the Holy Spirit becomes a universal thing.

The Prayer Meeting

What we are seeking to press home is that this is so different from having a local prayer meeting, in the usually accepted meaning of that term. Suppose that where such an outlook obtains the announcement is made: 'We will have a prayer meeting on Monday night.' Who will come to that prayer meeting? People will say among themselves: 'Shall we go to the prayer meeting?.' or, perhaps: 'Well, it is only a prayer meeting!' That is one way to look at it, as a local thing in a certain place at a certain time. But if I were to say: 'Will you come and minister to the whole Church of Christ universally in such-and-such a place at a certain time, and your business is to go and minister in that range to the whole Church!' that puts another point of view. It gives an altogether new conception of what we are called to. Let your imagination take flight, if you like, and see the whole Church from the ends of the earth literally gathered together, needing to be ministered to, and the Lord saying to you: 'Now you come and minister to the whole Church! Thousands of thousands; and tens of thousands gathered together, and I want

you to minister to them. I have placed the resource at your disposal and will enable you to do it.' Perhaps you might shrink, and be fearful, but you would see the tremendous significance. You would not stay away because you were unimpressed with the importance of it.

This is not exaggeration. We are not straining the point. We are seeking to get to the heart of this ministry which is ours. When two or three are gathered together in any place, and they pray in the Holy Spirit, that is what is possible and it happens. They represent the whole Church, and become the House of prayer, functioning for all peoples, a universal ministry. We need to lift the prayer business on to a higher level. When we see the range, the significance, the value of a time of prayer together in the Name of the Lord, we shall stop our trivialities and take things seriously. We shall come together saying: 'Now, here are nations to be entered into tonight, and things which are world-wide and of tremendous significance to the Lord Jesus, and we are called to deal with them in this place!' There is no greater ministry. It is a tremendous thing to have a ministry like that.

It all comes back to asking whether this is true of the Church. What does this mean? Is it merely a passage of Scripture? Is it a nice idea, but falling short of any real meaning? What is the meaning of: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people'? It certainly does not mean that the whole Church can literally be gathered together in one place to pray, and it certainly cannot literally mean that the whole Church can pray together at the same time, though scattered. The situation is different in all countries. Day and night govern different parts of the world, and other factors come in. It is necessary to get away from the earth to explain this. And if you get off the earth and see that where two or three are gathered together into the Name all the rest are represented, and because the one Spirit is there the whole is therefore touched through that one Spirit, as well as involved, then the possibilities are tremendous. "A house of prayer for all peoples" is God's ordained way of ministry.

The Need for Prayer Ministry

Leaving the great spiritual truth, and coming to what is immediate, so far as one's own heart is concerned, in this word, I do feel that there has to be a fresh registration in our hearts of a call to this ministry and the need for it. We may pray a lot, but I feel that we have to take this matter of the prayer ministry even more seriously, to regard it as our supreme ministry. The order is *everything by prayer*; not everything and then prayer, but everything by prayer. Prayer comes first. Everything comes by prayer. Prayer is the basis of everything, and nothing else must be attempted or touched except on the ground of prayer. We have to gather into our prayer the universal interests of the Name of the Lord. "Because of Thy Name!" The Name is in view, and is involved. It is the interests of the Name which govern the functioning of the House, and all the interests of the Name of the Lord have to become the definite and solid prayer business of the Lord's people. Oh, the Lord cut clean across that thing which makes us so casual, and which makes corporate prayer times so optional, and bring into our hearts, with a strong, deep, set conviction, the witness that prayer is universal business, and that we are called to it!

It may be that before long there will be very little else that we can do. It may be that before long the Lord's people world-wide will find that their other activities are brought to a standstill, and they are shut up. What is going to happen then to the Lord's interests? Is that the end of ministry? Is that the end of functioning, of value, of effectiveness? It may be that before long the Lord's people in all the earth will need, as they have never needed before, the prayer co-operation of other members. It may be that the Lord's Name has suffered because we have

not regarded this ministry as we ought to have done. We are not blaming anyone, but simply saying that there is room for far more serious entering into this tremendous thing which the Lord has appointed for us. Only to dwell upon the words quietly and thoughtfully will surely mean that their implication will come upon our hearts? The Lord has not said that He is going to move directly out to the universe. He has said: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.' To put that in other words we might state it thus: 'I have ordained to meet universal need through an instrument, through a vessel, and My people, My Church, form that vessel. That is My appointed way. If My Church fails Me, if My instrument does not take this matter seriously, is occupied with itself rather than with the great world-wide needs of My Name, then I am failed indeed!'

Now this means that we must recognize that where but two or three gather into the Name, where it cannot be more, there is nothing merely local about such coming together in prayer, but that the farthest ranges of the Lord's interests can be advanced, helped, ministered to, by the twos and threes. If it is possible for more to gather, then the Lord desires that, but it is ministry to the Lord by prayer for which He looks to us. We must see to it that it is our first, our primary business to pray. It is strange that so many more will come to conference meetings than to prayer meetings! Is the mentality behind that, that it is far more important to hear teaching than it is to pray? Would it not be a great day and represent some tremendous advance spiritually, something unique, if the prayer gatherings were bigger than the biggest conference gatherings, or at least as big as the biggest?

Let us lay this to heart! Remember that the enemy is always seeking to destroy the essential purpose of the House of God. "Ye have made it a den of robbers." That was one attempt of his to put out the real purpose by changing the whole character of things. God forbid that anything like that should be true in our case, but it is just possible to allow the primary thing to take a secondary place. The primary thing is prayer for all peoples. That, the Lord says, is what His House is for, and that is our real ministry. We cannot all be in the ministry of the Word, but we can all be in this ministry. We can all be in spirit out to the Lord for the interests of His Name.

There seems to be weakness and failure along this line: that we are not functioning in prayer to the point of seeing things through. We pray about many things, and we preach many things, but we do not see them through in prayer, and the Lord's Name is involved in that. You will know whether the Lord is speaking to your own heart. I believe this is a fresh call to the primary ministry which is so very, very much needed. All those who go out into the nations need very strong prayer support. If we fail them we do not know what may happen. They may be in all kinds of difficulties which they need not get into if we were wholly faithful in this prayer ministry. *The Lord lay it upon our hearts as a burden!*

Part Nine

THE CHURCH'S PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL INCREASE

"And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." (Acts 11:27-30).

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church... Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." (Acts 12:1, 5).

"But the Word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." (Acts 12:24-25).

We may get great help from the incident recorded in Acts 12 if we realize the vast implications of it. When verse 24 speaks of the Word of God growing and multiplying it is dealing not merely with what happened at Jerusalem after the release of Peter, but with the spread of the Gospel into all the earth. Here was a notable turning-point in the affairs of the people of God - *"But the word of God grew and multiplied."* The explanation of it, however, is surely in the earlier statement which discloses the secret crisis which brought about this turning of the tide - *"But prayer..."* (Acts 12:5).

Everybody knows, of course, that chapter 13 marks a new division of the Book of the Acts, and that it introduces a very important development in the life of the Church. From that point there was an amazing and altogether new sending forth into all the earth of the testimony of Jesus Christ; the Word of God was indeed multiplied. But the narrative runs straight on from chapter 12, and is closely connected with it. We must not imagine that this new development was unrelated to what had gone before, but rather take note of how closely related were the events at Jerusalem with what was initiated from Antioch.

Significance of the Time

(1) Spiritual Triumph at Antioch

"Now about that time..." What time? The time of great spiritual victory and blessing at Antioch. The Spirit of God was mightily at work in the city, and for a year Saul and Barnabas had been ministering there among the new converts who were notable for the great grace of God which could be seen in them. Then, in the midst of this happy time of fellowship and instruction, a practical matter arose. By means of a prophet who came down from Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit presented them all with a practical challenge. He always does this. And very much depends on how we react at such a time of challenge. The saints at Antioch were told of an impending famine in Judea, and thus, in a very practical way, they were tested as to how much they had really profited from what they had learned. It was a critical moment. By means of the Prophet Agabus they were being proved as to whether the grace of God was really working effectively in them. They stood the test. Their response was immediate and whole-hearted. They set aside any feelings which they might have had as to their remoteness from Jerusalem or their independence of it. Their brethren were in need. That was enough. Love triumphed, as they determined to send help, every man according to his ability.

"Now about THAT time, Herod the king put forth his hands." Is not that just like the devil? Just when there is a new movement of the Lord among His people and a fuller expression of the triumph of His grace in their hearts, Satan reacts with increased hatred and opposition. This is all so true in our own experience.

(2) The Beginning of an Apostolic Partnership

Another significant feature in the timing of this evil attack was that it also marked the beginning of a very important association of two men - Barnabas and Saul. They had known each other before, indeed it was Barnabas who first brought Saul to Antioch. Now, however, there was coming into being a most vital and significant movement of God, which demanded the joint ministry of the two men. In the providence of God they were found together at Jerusalem at this very time; it may be that they were present at the special time of prayer for Peter. We must not surmise too much about those movements of the apostles which are not recorded in the Word, but surely the Holy Spirit has a purpose in recording their presence in Jerusalem immediately before and after the story of Peter's deliverance from Herod. Chapter 11 ends with the arrival of Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem. They had come with their gifts for the needy saints of that city. It is true that no further mention of them is made up to chapter 12:24, but when the narrative is resumed at verse 25 we are told of the fulfilment of their ministration and their return from Jerusalem. This seems to show clearly that the chronicler wishes us to understand that Barnabas and Saul were still in Jerusalem during the intervening period. A further confirmation seems to be found in that the prayer took place in the house of the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), who was the very same young man who accompanied Saul and Barnabas back to Antioch. This Jerusalem prayer meeting seems to be taking on an altogether new significance. It is related to issues much larger even than the ministry of Peter and of the local church. It first checks and then reverses the rising tide of spiritual opposition, opening the way for a mighty release of the Spirit's energy through the whole Church.

(3) The Time of the Passover

There is one more point which should be noted with regard to the time element, and this is that it was the time of the Passover. *"Those were the days of unleavened bread."* It seems that in some general way the saints still kept the Jewish feasts; indeed in Jerusalem it was impossible for them not to do so. Even if they did not strictly observe the Jewish festivals, at least they would keep the Passover. We cannot fail to take some note of them. There is no doubt that as the Passover was being celebrated they would be vividly reminded of that other Passover, not so many years before, when the Lamb of God was offered up for their redemption. But there is always a danger that our commemoration of spiritual things should become formal and lifeless, instead of expressing up-to-date and living values. The Lord has to take precautions to deliver us from this peril. He may have seen that at Jerusalem they were inclined to celebrate the victory of Calvary as a matter of past history, a deliverance that belonged to a former day, and so permitted Herod to stretch forth his hands in a new attack, in order that the people of God, being forced into fresh conflict, might prove anew in a personal way the present power of Christ's glorious victory. So this was not so much Satan's timing as the timing of God. There was no question as to the ferocity of the assault upon them. *"But prayer..."* And we may truly add, *"But God..."*

Do not let us be discouraged when the enemy renews his attacks, nor fall into the mistake of imagining that the Lord is against us, just because life is difficult and full of problems. There is a timeliness about what is happening. Great things are

afoot. It was precisely when the church at Antioch was responding wholeheartedly to the Lord, when a new day was dawning for the world-wide testimony of Christ, and when God was about to give His people fresh proof of the completeness of Calvary's triumph. *"Now about THAT time Herod the king put forth his hands to vex certain of the church."*

This will help us to appreciate an important fact, namely that our personal difficulties and trials, our local, corporate experiences of spiritual conflict, have a vital relationship with far bigger activities of God than we can imagine. *"But prayer was made earnestly of the church..."; "But the word of God grew and was multiplied."* These two things are very closely connected.

God's Use of the Famine

It was the famine which occasioned the presence of Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem. We know that there was such a famine, and that it was very extensive. Not only are there other authentic accounts of the great dearth in Jerusalem itself, but there are also records of famine conditions in Greece and Rome. It was one of those times when the whole world was in straightness and suffering. While it may be exaggeration to suggest that the world situation happened in order that God's purposes might be realized among His people in Jerusalem and Antioch, there is no question but that world-conditions are used both by the devil and by the Lord for specific activities and interests among God's people.

Now, suppose that the saints at Antioch, who apparently were not themselves affected by the famine, had been unconcerned and unmoved concerning the needs of their Jewish brethren. Barnabas and Saul would not then have gone to Jerusalem at this time; they might have missed some Divine purpose, and there might have been no missionary developments at Antioch, as described in chapter 13. A great deal may have come out of the sending of relief to Jerusalem. None of us knows how closely interrelated are spiritual issues.

An ordinary Christian, one of those who met for prayer at the house of John Mark's mother, might have thought that he had nothing to do with the great apostolic mission, and the triumphs of the Gospel through Barnabas and Saul. He himself might have thought that he had nothing to do with it. God alone knows what spiritual energy is released to the ends of the earth when even a simple group of saints meet for prayer, and not only meet for prayer, but win through in prayer. The conflict may seem to relate to some purely local situation or personal need, but if those who are so beset rise up in the Name of the Lord, claiming the fullness of His victory, the local and personal victory will become the occasion for the release of spiritual forces in a widespread way.

The Test of Persecution

We find that the famine was followed by persecution, by Peter's imprisonment, and by severe testing for all the believers. What was the devil's purpose in this persecution? Was it not to scatter the saints, to divide them, to make them lose heart, and perhaps to compromise, or even to give up altogether? We, too, are affected by world-conditions, as they were by the famine. It may be that some of us are not involved in actual persecution, but we also suffer from Satan's attempts to discourage and divide us. Peter, it is true, was the one actually in prison, but the whole church was on trial; they were all being tested as to whether they would stand firm in the evil day and win through to victory. It is so easy to enjoy meetings, to appreciate Bible teaching and to be loud in our praise to the Lord, and then, when the conflict comes, to go all to pieces. It would not

have been difficult for them to lose heart. James had been taken violently from them; Peter was in prison and apparently finished; everything seemed to deny the reality of their faith. What would be the use of going to a prayer meeting?

And, of course, the human element usually corners in. We may be quite sure that Peter was not a perfect man, and that under such a stress it would be very easy to remember his faults. It might possibly have been argued that if he had behaved differently he might have avoided arrest. Satan's effort was to break into the midst of that flock, to destroy their close fellowship, to get them doubting, questioning and arguing - anything but standing firmly together in faith. They might have felt that this imprisonment was Peter's business and not theirs. They might have let him find his own way out, perhaps putting up a little perfunctory prayer for him, but feeling in general that it was his own personal concern. And we, too, are exposed to these same perils and temptations. We do not have to wait for active persecution, for Satan is always seeking to make us divided in spirit, suspicious and critical of one another, or at best rather coldly independent. The devil focuses his attention on making the church lose faith, lose hope and weaken in love. We are not now treating of whether one should go to a prayer meeting - some of the most important elders could not be present at this one - but remarking on the spiritual principle of resisting every attempt at scattering.

The church in Jerusalem did not succumb to this temptation, but rallied together in earnest prayer and love, not for Peter only but for the will and glory of their Lord.

The Victory in Jerusalem

"But prayer..." Here is the spiritual answer to a spiritual challenge, and very much depended on the outcome. If the victory had not been won at Jerusalem, if the saints had been scattered, disheartened and defeated, what would have happened to the Word of God? The real battle was concerning the release of that Word. The supreme concern was not what should happen to the church in Jerusalem, nor even what should happen to Peter; what really mattered was what should happen to the Word of God. When the saints gathered for prayer at Mary's home, though they probably did not realize it, they were fighting out the battle of world-evangelization, of the growth and multiplication of the Word of Christ. There are two 'buts' in this chapter. The first of them was the responsibility of the church: they refused to be moved. Satan was attempting to overthrow, to scatter, to destroy love and to turn faith into despair, when he was suddenly checked by a mighty spiritual resistance - *"But prayer..."* It was a turning point. The whole course of events was arrested, and there followed a blessed sequence of Divine acts of deliverance. It was straightforward after this, for God had taken matters in hand, and was sweeping aside all opposition, that His people might be led out and onward to new triumphs. In verse 24 we have the great Divine 'but', *"BUT the word of God grew and multiplied."* This was the answer to their praying; the first responsibility lay with them, then God took things up in a mighty way, and said 'but' by releasing His Word far and wide.

Like the church at Jerusalem, we too, shall be confronted with attacks upon our faith, our patience and our love. If we do not resolutely face up to these personal and local conflicts, pressing through to victory in the Lord's Name, what hope is there of increase and multiplication? On the other hand, if we do take up the challenge as they did, by stemming the onrush of spiritual disaster with our *"But prayer..."* God will surely respond with His 'but', and clear the way for increase and new fullness.

The Far-Reaching Effects

So it appears that there was a very large background or setting to the prayer battle in Mary's house. The Christians at Jerusalem thought that they were being assaulted on a purely local and personal issue. They felt, and rightly so, that by prayer they could win an immediate and local victory. Thank God they did. But what they did not know, what they could hardly have imagined, was that this was a turning point in Divine strategy, a victory which would produce a great release of the Lord's servants and of His Word. An ordinary rank and file believer in Jerusalem might have questioned whether it really mattered so much whether he was triumphant or defeated, whether after all very much depended on his loyalty and faith. It mattered far more than he could realize. It always does. It matters tremendously. There are far-reaching issues involved in the spiritual victories or reverses of the people of God.

And so when Peter was released, something else was released, the whole situation was released. For a time it seemed as though everything was shut up. The one man, Peter, seemed to be an embodiment of the whole state of affairs. He was shut up, he was in chains, and it seemed as if an end were coming to all the activities of the Spirit through the church. Everything then depended on whether the Lord's people would accept what appeared inevitable, whether they would give way to the opposition and be defeated by it. Had they done so, there is no guarantee as to what might have happened. But instead of giving way, they rose up in faith to assert that the Passover was no mere commemoration of a past victory, but the celebration of the ever-present power of Calvary's universal triumph. God responded by releasing Peter, but more than that, He gave new and mighty increase to the whole testimony of the church.

We now move on into Acts 13, to find that Barnabas and Saul are on the eve of being thrust out by the Holy Spirit into the uttermost parts of the earth. We must remember that they had just come down from Jerusalem in the spiritual good of a great victory, they had come down on a tide of glorious life and power, released in answer to believing prayer. From many points of view, Jerusalem and Antioch may have been different, but there can be no question as to their spiritual relatedness. The organic nature of the church means that we depend very much on one another. It is never the Lord's way to confine His working to limited and localized matters. He takes hold of our trials and conflicts, making them the occasion for the registration of important spiritual victories which will bring great and widespread increase. In actual experience the people of God are bound up together in vital association for the interests and glory of the Lord.

A Word of Warning

There remains just a word of warning concerning the young man who came down with Barnabas and Saul. Mark, of course, had every encouragement to be a missionary. He had been through all these thrilling events. With others he had been plunged into the darkness of battle, he had felt the sorrow of seeming defeat, he had heard the prayer and he had witnessed the wonderful answer. When Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, full of the story of God's marvellous deliverance, Mark went down with them, thrilled with a sense of the overwhelming power of God. So enthused and inspired was he that he had no difficulty in offering himself to go to the ends of the earth for Christ. We are therefore informed that when Barnabas and Saul set out *"they had also John as their attendant"* (Acts 13:5). But it did not last long. *"John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem"* (Acts 13:13). It seems that he was not prepared to travel quietly on into dark and forbidding territory, steadfastly believing that the God Who answered prayer at Jerusalem was still with them. Just the outward

experience of things does not carry us very far. Saul and Barnabas had something more than that; they had a deep inward knowledge of the triumph of Calvary, and of the ever-present reality of the conquering Lord.

This is a note of warning, lest we should be among those who take up the matter of prayer warfare in a superficial way. We cannot live on thrills and wonders. We shall not always get quick results. The increasing spiritual conflict will call for an ever deeper and inward knowledge of the Lord. Mark's enthusiasm did not carry him very far. Perhaps he did the best thing in returning to Jerusalem. It may be that for the time being it would have been far better for him never to have left it. After all it was there that he had learned something of the power of God. We do not know. But we do know that in a simple home in that city, a gathering of ordinary and unnamed Christians fought a mighty spiritual battle, and won through to a victory which had repercussions in the lands and nations far beyond. *And this may be true of us all.*

Part Ten

THE CHURCH HIS BODY

"The Church, which is His Body" is the vessel, the 'embodiment', of the Lord the Spirit, in which and by which He is to express Himself. If the Church, as we met it and moved amongst its members, accorded with the Divine idea, we should know what the Lord was like. Let us take this to heart: that our very existence as the Church is in order that people may know what Christ is like. Alas, we fail Him so much in this. It is often so difficult to detect the real character of the Lord Jesus in His people. But that is the very first meaning of the Body of Christ.

But further - and here we are on familiar ground - a physical body is an organic whole. It is not something put together from the outside. It is something that is marked by a oneness, by reason of a life within; it is related and inter-related in every part, dependent and inter-dependent; every remotest part is affected by what happens in any other part. That could be much enlarged upon. But we have much more yet to learn as to the actual spiritual application of this reality about the Church as the Body of Christ. We need to be brought right into that great 'sympathetic system' of the Body. And that demands a real work of grace in us. There are many ways in which that is expressed in the Word. We are to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; them that are evil entreated, as being yourselves also in the body" (Hebrews 13:3); that is, we are to get into their situations by the Spirit. It is an organic whole. 'If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it' (1 Corinthians 12:26). It is probable that we suffer a good deal for things that we know nothing about. There is suffering going on, and we are involved in it: the Lord is seeking to involve us in the needs of others, to bring us into their conflict.

But, whether or not we apprehend this truth, whether or not we are alive to it and understand it, it is God's fact that it is so. Believers in one place are dependent upon believers in another place; they are affected. This is such a whole; there is one sympathetic nerve-system running through the whole body. If only you and I really became spiritually more alive, the expression of the Body would be much more perfect. Our deadness, our insensitiveness, our lack of real spiritual aliveness, results in there being more suffering, more loss, than there need be.

If only we could - not mechanically, and not by information, but on the principle of the Body - be moved into a universal sympathy and co-operation with the people of God! Our moving is so often mechanical; we have to read or hear letters, somehow receive information, in order to be stimulated to some measure of prayer. But I believe that, altogether apart from those means, if we were really in the Spirit, the Spirit would lay burdens for people on our hearts. Do you not think that it is a matter that we ought continually to bring before the Lord? *'Lord, there is someone praying to-day for something: is it possible that I might be the answer to their prayer? If so, show me, lead me, lay it on me.'* That is spiritual relatedness, aliveness. The oneness of the Body is a great vocation.

Part Eleven

CORPORATE PRAYER

While it is true that a very large place is given in the Bible to individual and personal prayer, it is also true that a very great value is put upon corporate prayer. Indeed, a value is given to corporate prayer which cannot be known in individual prayer. In the New Testament the prayer-meeting has a very vital place in relation to the people and the work of God. It can be rightly said that the prayer-gathering is the index and register of the church's life. Show us your prayer-gathering and let us hear how the believers pray, and we will tell you what kind of church that is.

But what is church-prayer? In other words,

What Should the Prayer-Meeting Be?

It may seem a truism to say that it should be

(1) The Church AT PRAYER.

That is, the church as an entity, a corporate entity. Such a gathering together should be the solid expression of the organic oneness and spiritual unity of the local company of believers. The mere congregating of a number of individuals without an organic integration, and with so many personal interests to express or have expressed, may have values and would be better than nothing at all, but it would not be the solid and effectual prayer of the church as an entity.

There is a history behind the prayer of the church, as such. It is the history of a work of the Cross in which each member has been brought on to the ground of identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection, and by that common history has identical life and fellowship. Such a church has *gone through* something in experience and that something has become subjective.

If two people have gone through a similar experience which has deeply affected their inward life, they have a mutuality of understanding, and they can speak with one voice. So it was in the prayer-life of the New Testament churches. They shared and expressed locally what was fundamentally true of the Church universal. It was a crucified and resurrected Church, having been baptized into the sufferings and victory of its Head. That victory should be inherited by the local church, and be manifested in the effective working and issues of its corporate prayer.

There, in the gatherings - or coming together - for prayer, the very nature and vocation of the Church universal should be in expression. Its nature is that of a spiritual organism because it has been born "not of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God", "born of the Spirit". Its vocation is to express the greatness, the rights, and the authority of Christ. Prayer is essentially vocational, and this is pre-eminently so in corporate prayer.

Vital relatedness, both of the persons and of the prayer, is indispensable to effectual prayer. How easy it is for someone to come in with something quite discordant or irrelevant, and so swing the prayer away from its strength of purpose and positiveness.

While many particular matters may occupy the foreground of required prayer, there should always be a looking beyond the thing itself to how it really relates to

and touches those three factors just mentioned - the greatness, the rights, and the authority of Christ. We must have an adequate case in our prayer, and that is the Lord's glory.

(2) Corporate Prayer Must BE AUTHORITATIVE

The church at prayer must be on the ground of absolute authority. It must not be in doubt, uncertainty, or weakness, but in assurance and confidence. There must be the ground of authoritative appeal to God. There must be the ground of authority over the evil forces at work in any given situation. The church must have the assured right in its position and in its intercession.

That right and authority is respectively the infinite virtue and efficacy of the Blood of Christ and its testimony, and the Name of Christ as above every other name.

The church - at all times, but - especially when at prayer must be consistent with all that the Blood of Christ means as a testimony against sin, condemnation, and death. These things mean a closed door to Heaven and God. The Blood of Christ has for ever been the ground, and the only ground, of "the new and living way" to the Throne of Grace. The Name of Christ is the very synonym for supreme authority. *But* even so, it is not just a title, but the embodiment of a nature wholly satisfying to God; of a work perfectly accomplished; and of a position fully accorded Him. These are the elements of authority, and the ground of authoritative prayer. On this ground the church has a right to pray and expect. It can do more than ask upward; it can challenge outward - "in the Name."

(3) Corporate Prayer Should BE EXECUTIVE

When we use the word 'executive' we mean decisive. If you were a member of an executive body in any business concern, you would be a person marked by certain features, that is, if the concern with which you were connected was of a really vital character.

(a) You would be recognized as a person with a real business mind. That concern would give a seriousness to your demeanour and attitude. It would rule out diffusiveness and irrelevance, and knit you together with your colleagues as one with an integrating objective.

(b) You would be a person who would be marked by a will for decisions. Wasting of time; indecision; tentativeness; carelessness; and all such things would greatly disturb and trouble you. Your soul would be saying, 'Don't let us be always and only talking about things; waiting for something to happen, and hoping that it will, some day. Let us *be* executive, and have issues settled, and conclusions reached. Let there be an element of decisiveness and conclusiveness about our transactions. Let us reach for and be set upon a verdict.' Surely, such features are traceable in the prayers in the Bible, with Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah, etc., and in the New Testament Church and churches!

Our praying in meetings is all too tentative and indecisive. We do not really go out for a verdict. We stop before we have the assurance that we are *through* on that issue. There is such a thing as taking as well as asking. We ought to go away, not wondering, to say nothing of forgetting, but rather expecting and looking for Heaven's answer. That answer ought to be already in our hearts. If what we have said is true of any Executive worthy of the name, who has a serious Concern to serve, should it be less or otherwise with the church which has the greatest of all interests to serve, responsibilities to carry, and Name to honour? We should not go to the place and time of prayer just because it is

'prayer-meeting night'; or to do our duty to our 'church', or for conscience sake; certainly not to give certain others the occasion to pray while we listen and - more or less - agree. We *are* the church. We *are* in the greatest of all business! We should go thus-minded and with 'purpose of heart' determined to co-operate and - so help us God - to have outstanding, urgent issues settled for 'the sake of the Name'. On arriving our instant action should be to take the right ground and ask fervently that all should be taken into the hands of the Holy Spirit. One word remains for this present.

(4) Corporate Prayer Must BE COMBATIVE

It is impressive that in that part of the greatest *Church* letter in the New Testament where its militant character is emphasized and its armour portrayed, the Apostle gives such a definite place to prayer (Ephesians 6).

There is nothing which draws out the "wiles" of the evil powers so much as corporate prayer. Everything is done to smother, blanket, confuse, divert, pre-occupy, disturb, distract, annoy, hinder, weary, waste time, and many other things, all with the object to see that there is no real impact of Christ's authority upon their kingdom.

If we realize this we shall 'gird up the loins of our minds', we shall 'stand and withstand'. Being alive to what is involved and what is happening, we can be no more passive than a soldier could be if he saw his country's interests and his comrades' lives involved in his attitude and action.

There is a real combativeness in corporate prayer, and we shall not get anywhere if our fighting spirit - not in the flesh, but in the Holy Spirit - has been let go or taken from us.

Part Twelve

THE DIVINE MINISTRY OF DELAY

One of the great dangers of life is that of losing sight of God's great design in the details by which that design is worked out; and it has been well said that we entirely lose the value of any experience if we isolate it. That is, if you take your sorrow and regard it apart from the great designing love of God, if you take your losses, your temporary setbacks, your momentary depressions, and dwell upon these things as if they were the only experiences of God's providence, and as if they were not related to the great central control of His love - you will entirely miss their value. It is that we may be saved from such peril that we are meditating together thus on some of God's unlikely but never unkindly ministries.

With this brief recapitulation let me ask you to turn to the word which is the occasion of our thought this morning in regard to the Divine ministry of delay by which God oftentimes tests His people. I will ask you to turn to the words of Jeremiah the Prophet, in the book of Lamentations, in the third chapter, at the twenty-fourth verse:

"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (verses 24-26).

It is especially on those last words that I want our meditation to be based: *"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."*

Let us frankly admit at the outset that one of the great difficulties of life with many of us is concerned with the fact that God sometimes seems to delay His answers to our prayers. The most perplexing problem of many a Christian life is just this: that God apparently does not answer, and apparently does not even heed much of our crying. By His grace our faith in Him has not been finally disturbed. By His grace this conflict has been carried on courageously in secret.

Outside our own heart no one even suspects that there is such a conflict. But you know that there is, and I know that there is, and sometimes the only word that rises from our hearts when we come into God's presence is almost the last word which came from the Saviour's lips: "My God, why?" This is not the first question of the Christian life. Faith's first question is usually "How?" There is a stage in Christian experience when we are constantly saying "How?" - "How can a man be born when he is old?" "How can these things be?" "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" These are some of the first questions of the Christian life. But as we go on with God, as life deepens, as its necessities become heavier, its sorrows more acute, and our perceptions more alert also, the question which rises from the heart of many a disturbed and distressed believer is: "My God," not "how?" but "WHY?"

I have already suggested that what many of us are seeking at this time is not comfort, nor sympathy, nor even the lightening of our loads. We are seeking some explanation, some interpretation from God Himself as to what He is doing in these our lives. Some of us are distressed almost to the point of desertion - desertion of our own allegiance, and desertion of His colours, because He seems to delay, indeed almost to deny the things we ask Him.

Yet, I would remind you that there is nothing which the Word of God so amply encourages men to do as to pray. There are promises attached to prayer which

do not attach to any other condition. There are riches which are covenanted to men as the result of prayer and waiting upon God, which they can obtain in no other way. And it is just because the promises with regard to prayer are so great, so high, so wide, that these delays of God perplex us, and we cry out this morning, "My God, why?" There are times in life when nothing but sheer belief in God's goodness saves us from despair; when nothing but simple reliance upon God's love, without any present evidence of it, can save us from hopelessness; when nothing but almost reckless faith in His omnipotent wisdom, will prevent us from sinking into positive moral apathy and spiritual lethargy.

Therefore, it is my present endeavour to help some here to a recreation of that sheer belief, that simple reliance, and that reckless faith in God which trusts Him when His face is veiled, and they do not even feel the grip of His hand. Faber well sang:

"Thrice blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field, when He
Is most invisible."

That is the instinct which may God grant every one of us to have in these days.

Now these words were spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah in a day when the nation's desire, its best desire, was perhaps never so evident. The people had begun to see the fulfilment of God's promises and the working of His providence. Their foes were being pushed from their land, the beginnings of recultivation were taking place, and the broken-down altars of God were being rebuilt. But all was being done so slowly that they could not reconcile the slowness of God with the implicit assurances upon which their faith in Him rested. They were impatient and restive under His apparent inactivity. Faith saw God's beginnings and, like the disciples of later days, "thought the kingdom must immediately appear!"

There is a great deal to be said for the faith of a little child which cannot understand the reason of delay. But you will not misunderstand me when I say that there is a great deal more to be said for the faith of a grown man who has come to know that God has an entirely different scale for the measurement of time from those we commonly use. There is still more to be said for the faith of the man who is perfectly content to rest in the fact that a thousand years are as one day with Him, and one day as a thousand years. This was the faith of Jeremiah. He had looked into the depths of the Infinite God, and had seen that He was unhurried, and that His ways were the more certain because they were not the more obvious. So he waited calmly, and sought to renew courage and patience and hope in the people, just because these things were the expression of his own soul. Hence he says: "It is good for men that they are kept waiting, that they have to quietly hope for the salvation of God."

You will readily understand that these words of his are of infinitely wider application than to the Israel of that day. I believe they are apposite to the case of every one of us here today who is perplexed because, for instance, the expected deliverance from sin in his own life does not come as he thought it would. Or the petition he offers for some good of which he conceives himself to be in great need is not granted. Or the loved one for whom he prays is not immediately converted; and though he goes on praying he has almost lost heart about it. Or the revival in his work, for which he has conscientiously wrought to the very last ounce of his strength, does not seem to be even on the horizon. We want to know why this delay, and what the spiritual good of having quietly to wait and hope so long.

I am very sure that when the last word of human experience about prayer has been said, we are still in the presence of the greatest of all mysteries. The man who thinks he knows so much about prayer, that he can frame a philosophy of prayer, really confesses that he knows little indeed. How prayer liberates spiritual forces, who knows? Why God has ordained that men should wait upon Him, uniting their wills with His in order to exert the saving power of His grace both in their life and through them in the lives of others - who can say? With regard to this greatest of all subjects, there is really nothing further to be said than that which Paul said about all knowledge of God - "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." But, thank God, we do know! What we know we know with a certainty which nothing can shake. But we only know in part. Therefore they are mere suggestions that I venture to offer you today, suggestions which have come with some degree of light and encouragement to my own heart in regard to this assertion - that it is good for a man to wait and hope for the salvation of God.

It is almost unnecessary to say that there is no thought in this word of any man having to wait until God is willing to bestow upon him the primary gifts of pardon and peace and forgiveness, the salvation which is His free gift in Jesus Christ. The sinner who cries for pardon, the weary and heavy-laden who ask for rest of heart, the lonely who seek the fellowship of love, are never kept waiting for the fulfilment of their desires. The prodigal is welcomed before he utters his prepared confession. The sinking man who cries "Lord, save me", is at once conscious of being grasped by the Hand of power. The Evangel of Christ bears the ageless superscription that "now is the day of salvation". In this respect, indeed, it is never God who keeps men waiting, but men who keep Him waiting. But, in regard to that aspect of His mercy which is concerned with the strain of our present discipline, with the anxiety of future uncertainty, with the relief of immediate discomfort, with the weariness of unremoved burdens - it is in that realm of life that we want to know why God delays. Nor is it unnatural that we should be impatient.

For instance, here is a good man who reads that "All things work together for good to them that love God", but who sees nothing in his life today but chaos. His affairs have been completely ruined. His home has been invaded by sorrow and disappointment, until the nerves of all are on edge, and no one knows with certainty what an hour is going to bring forth of fresh calamity. That man has rested upon that Divine Word with implicit confidence in its truth, but the delay in realizing its fulfilment has almost staggered his faith. Is it to be wondered at that he should be asking today what it all means?

There is a young man yonder, and there has been illumined to his soul's vision this word: "In all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." And yet he has been defeated ever since he came to Keswick, and this morning his face is toward the ground, and not toward the Lord. He says, "What does it mean? I have rested my whole weight, as I believe, upon this promise of God, and my Lord delays His coming in power to me. What does it mean?"

There is the busy worker - I have met him since I came to Keswick - who has come from some far-off missionary field, in which for the last ten years he has been pouring out his life, seeking to live the life of a citizen of the Kingdom of God, resting upon that word - "My word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please" (Isaiah 55:11). And he confesses today that he has seen it accomplish hardly anything. What does it mean?

There is the great promise upon which every member of Christ's Church just now is building more solidly than ever a temple of hope: "Behold, I come quickly" (Revelation 3:11; 22:7). It seems as though Christ was never so much needed as

He is today. It seems as though international relationship can never again be restored as we have known it. It seems as though the scattered units of Christ's Church can never be gathered together again in one, save by His coming. And the Church cries out: "Amen. Come quickly, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). But there is not a sign of His coming. What do these delays of God mean?

I am going to suggest three things, and they are mere suggestions; but may they bring light to you, as they have brought to me in past days. The first thing I want to say about God's delays is this: It is only by *enforced* waiting upon Him that we come to know God with that knowledge which is the foundation of all character. I use the word enforced waiting upon God, because it is only by being forced to wait upon God that some of us ever do wait on Him. We are naturally impatient, we are naturally impulsive, we naturally chafe at anything like slowness; and God, by withholding the answer for which we have looked, keeps us at His feet in order that we may come to know Him. He is infinitely more concerned in the making and remaking of our lives than in the gratifying of our minds. He is infinitely more concerned in making us men and women of His own pattern, and to deepen His life in our souls, than to gratify some of the desires which we often express in unconsidered prayer. For we cannot come to know God, and inferentially we cannot come to know ourselves, in an hour. God's delays do not indicate any caprice on His part, but rather His concern and compassion for us. They are directed toward saving us from hurrying away from His presence before the lessons of His grace have been more than mentally received. God is preparing us, by keeping us waiting upon Him, worthily to receive, to interpret, and then to use the gifts He will yet give in answer to prayer and in fulfilment of His word.

I constantly see tourist visitors to London rushing about from Park to Palace, doing what they call the "sights". And after a fevered week they go back home thinking they know London. But do they? One of Ruskin's students once said to him, on returning from a first Italian visit: "Sir, immediately I entered the Gallery at Florence, I knew in a moment what you had always impressed upon us as the supremacy of Botticelli." Ruskin's reply was somewhat cutting. He said: "Oh, you found that out in a moment? Well, it took me twenty-two years to discover it!" And there are a great many people who think they know God in the light of a single experience! We are kept waiting upon Him that we may become of the number of those who really do know their God, and who consequently are empowered to do exploits.

God is making us; do not let us be impatient under the process. God is making us; do not let impatience and impetuosity take us, therefore, from under the hand of the Master Workman. He is eliminating the flaws, and remaking the marred vessels. The two qualities which we need most - endurance and radiance - are not imparted to any man in a single hour. God keeps us waiting that in His presence, beholding His glory, we may be changed into the same image from glory unto glory.

The second thing I want to say is this. Many of our prayers must be passed through the refining medium of God's wisdom, that is, of God's love; many of them must be edited by God before they are answered. For well-intentioned prayer is not always well-informed. Like those who made requests of the Saviour, God often has to say to His children, "Ye know not what ye ask". If some of our prayers were immediately answered, the consequence would be almost certain moral and spiritual disaster. Our prayers have to be passed, I say, through the refining medium of God's wisdom, sometimes with regard to their motive. "Ye have not because ye ask amiss."

There are men and women, for instance, who pray for power, while their real objective is pre-eminence. What they really mean by power is that which will make them prominent in His service. When our motives are altogether unworthy of the words we express, we have to be kept waiting until God turns upon us the searchlight of His love, and learning the untrustworthiness of our own impulses, we yield us to that gracious Spirit Who makes intercession in us according to the will of God.

Not only in regard to the *motive*, but in regard also to the content of our prayers, Christ has to say again and again, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of; are ye able to be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?" For often we know not what we ask, and hence God's delay in response. I have seen children - we have all seen them - who have been utterly spoiled by the weak good-nature of parents who gave them at once everything they wanted. For human love may be entirely lacking in wisdom. But the love and wisdom of God are one. When He keeps us waiting for secondary mercies, it is in order to make us know the value of the primary and spiritual. We have to learn that God's "No" is just as much an answer as God's "Yes". We have to learn that God's "Not yet" is just as truly an expression of Divine love as God's "Immediately". The day will come to every one of us when we shall know that God's silence was in reality His most loving speech to us. For we shall see that while seemingly inactive God has all the time been working in us, bringing us into moral correspondence with His will, which alone capacitates men to receive His gifts.

Well do I recollect, some years ago, in the city of Dublin, a man coming into the vestry-room of a church and saying: "Sir, I want to thank you for that message about God's love. I believe every word of it now, but I did not six months ago." His eyes filled with tears; and as I said: "What does it mean, my brother?" He went on: "Six months ago my home was bright and happy, and the shadow fell. I prayed earnestly that God would save my wife and our infant. But He took them; and I have come to know that He took them only in order to bring me back to Himself, from Whom I had wandered." God's silence in that man's life was His richest and kindest speech. And others of us have found this to be true also; and more of us will find it so ere these dark days in which we live have passed away.

The things we try to get rid of by prayer are often the very things we can least afford to lose. Some of those things we call burdens, of which we try to get rid in the Sanctuary, are the things that God has placed upon us for the steadying of life and the guiding of our energies into channels which otherwise we should overlook and miss. Paul learnt that there was something infinitely better than the removal of the thorn-pain - infinitely better! Thrice he besought the Lord to remove it - with what interval between those prayers we know not. But surely Paul, like the rest of us, was perplexed at God's delay. And he ultimately found that God was preparing something far better than the extraction of the thing which caused a throbbing wound - "My grace is sufficient for thee." If he had not had the thorn-pain, like the nightingale which is said to sing sweetest when its breast is pierced, he had never learned the song: "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me!" We learn, as we are kept waiting at His feet, that the cord which we would have had God cut, He disentangles, and so saves for purposes of His service. God's ways are always justified of His children, if they will patiently tarry His leisure.

Ere I pass on to the third and last suggestion I have to make, may I say that surely we get an illustration of all this in the burden of prayer which is increasingly descending upon us for our nation. There are not a few of us who are perplexed that God has not already intervened to stay this terrible conflict. We look out from this place of quiet rest, and see across the Channel the sons of God

being butchered upon the fields of France and Belgium; and we cry to God to give victory to the cause which is inherently right, and about which we have no shame. Yet He does not do so. After a whole year, and despite the sacrifice of thousands of precious lives, the battle-line is drawn substantially as it was at first. Why does God not put forth His power through our Forces, and by scattering the nations that delight in war bring this unspeakable strife to an end? Why have we no answer back from Heaven that our cry is heard? Why does He delay His coming when by one word He could end the whole conflict?

An! it is not that God cannot, nor that He will not; but that an immediate victory for our land might only mean a revival, in the basest form, of our national sins. As a nation we are far from being morally ready for victory, for there are few signs in our common life that we have learned and taken to heart the lessons of this chastisement. That is why God is keeping our nation waiting. We have to be brought infinitely lower yet. We have to learn yet what the law of God stands for. We have to learn yet what the hideousness of sin in a man or nation means. We have to learn that sin brings pain and bloodshedding to man, as it brought pain and bloodshedding to God. Then when the nation is morally prepared and renewed I believe that victory will not be delayed by an hour. But it will not come one hour sooner. Hence the necessity of our quietly waiting for the salvation of God. Though remember, in the last analysis, it is not He Who delays the answer to our prayer for victory. It is we who delay Him.

The third thing I want to say is this. Faith can only be trained by being tested. As a man's muscles are only hardened by exercise, so his faith only becomes strong and ultimately invincible by being subjected to the discipline of strain. For until it accepts the will of God, not under compulsion, nor because there is no alternative, but by free choice and glad surrender, faith is lacking in essential quality. But when we are unmoved by the fact that we are kept waiting, calmly conscious that God's glory is intimately bound up with our lives and prayers, and content that if He can afford to wait, so too can we, one of life's greatest lessons has been learnt. For faith reaches its triumph only when its exercise ceases to be a deliberate activity and becomes an instinctive attitude.

Sometimes we learn this by our own impetuous efforts to hurry God. There are two conspicuous examples of this. Do you remember Moses and his undisciplined effort at the deliverance of his people? How disastrously it ended for him! God had to take him into the schoolhouse of the desert and keep him there for many a weary year. By his impetuosity he had embarrassed God; and so, too, do many of us. Do you remember Abraham with a wonderful promise to support him, with a vision so great that it staggered him, attempting to expedite God's purpose? You know the dark story of Hagar and Ishmael, and all that it afterward led to. Sometimes God likewise delays the promises of His faithfulness in order that we too may learn the utter futility of our every effort, and all the sweat of our souls, apart from Him. For remember that the faith of God must be vindicated in us before it can be verified through us, and before we can be His effective messengers to the world.

One last word. There is nothing in common between quiet waiting upon God and lethargic indolence. We have known those who excuse their non-participation in the enterprises of Christ's Church because of this necessity of quiet waiting on God. Let me say that there is no greater mistake than to wait for subjective manifestations and to neglect objective opportunities. True waiting upon God expresses itself in the expenditure of every energy of the soul at the clear directions for whose interpretation we do not need to wait an hour.

Oh, the supine folly of the man who in these days of tremendous opportunity is content to "wait upon God" to open doors, to "wait upon God" to enlarge opportunities, to "wait upon God" to organize success and influence for him, while he himself does nothing in the way of sacrifice - of giving himself, of losing his life, for the Kingdom's sake! God does not co-operate with dreamers. We cannot live in fellowship with God and let evil stalk unchallenged, by neglecting the wide-open doors of the world which call to our faith and our loyalty.

I cannot forget that God did once say to His people: "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." But I also remember that that word was given to men and women, a great host, who were walking in implicit obedience to His leadership, and who in that pathway had come up against the impassable. There are times in life when God says these words to us, but only when, like Israel, we are walking in the light of His will.

"We are not here to play, to dream, to drift;
We have hard work to do, and loads to lift;
Shun not the struggle! face it! 'Tis God's gift.

Say not, 'The days are evil! Who's to blame?'
And fold the hands, and acquiesce - oh, shame!
Stand up, speak out, act bravely in God's Name.

It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong,
How hard the battle goes, the day how long;
Fight on! fight on! tomorrow comes the song!"

As we wait upon God in this energy of implicit obedience to Him, He will vindicate all His delays. He will do it as we stand, like men who wait for their Lord, doing His will to the very utmost of our power; knowing that when He comes He will perfect that which concerns us; pushing the battle to the gate, in the confidence that at the strategic moment He will bring up reinforcements which shall mean the final factor in victory; quietly hoping for that we see not; saying to our souls again, and yet again, "We see not yet all things put under Him, we see not yet the fulfilment of our every desire; but we see Jesus crowned. Blessed be His Name for ever!"

Part Thirteen

THE ETERNAL REWARD OF LABOUR AND SUFFERING

Reading: Numbers 27:1-7; Joshua 15:13-19; Romans 8:17.

I have just one thought that I want to pass to you here. It relates to inheritance. In the New Testament that word is found to compass quite a lot. In the first place, inheritance is there shown to be a matter of birthright; then it is extended to a bequest, a gift; and then still further it applies to reward for labour, for service. It is in this last connection that my word lies.

While it is fully recognized - not for a moment would we detract one iota from the grand fact - that everything is of grace; even enablement to work for reward is of grace - while that is true, this other aspect of inheritance, or heirship, as a matter of reward for service and suffering, is very fully revealed. Inheriting by labouring, entering into the fruits of labour; inheriting by warfare, entering into the spoil of battle; entering into suffering and being recompensed for suffering. It is surely inherent in labour, in suffering, that there should be some gratification, and the gratification is the wages. While we know that it has been grace that has enabled to suffer and to labour, nevertheless we *have* suffered and we *have* laboured and we *have* battled, and there is something for that, by the faithfulness of God - there are wages, there is that sense of achievement. There is no greater gratification than to know that, through labour and suffering, something has been achieved.

Inward Relationship to the Object in View

It is just there that I put my finger. The very heart of suffering, the very heart of co-heirship with Christ, is this wonderful sense of inward relationship to the object in view, inward relationship to the inheritance, inward relationship to the result, the reward. And that is the explanation of suffering, of labour, of conflict. The Lord does not just give to us without cost. He always brings us into the cost of that which He is going to give. It will be grace all the way through, but He brings us into the cost of the reward. In the end, let us repeat, we shall acknowledge that any part we have had in it of suffering, labour, warfare, has been infinitely outweighed by what He has given, and that is where grace will always be our theme; but I do believe that mingled with our gratitude will be this sense that the Lord enabled us to achieve, that He did not act without us and apart from us. He brought us into it, and there will be this deep, inward, heart-relatedness to the result, that we share with Him the gratification. That is the very heart of suffering, I believe.

Now why am I saying this? Where was this born? How was this born? Well, in a very practical way. I have just returned from a time in the United States, and it has not by any means been an easy time - very much otherwise. But we have been profoundly grateful all the time that you dear friends were so many hours ahead of us. In the Eastern part of the States you were five hours ahead. When we got further West you were six hours ahead, and we constantly reminded ourselves that your prayer gatherings were ahead of us. They had gone before and we were just following on, in our own prayer and in the conflict and the pressure; following on, and, as we believe, being carried through. And there came to me this: Those dear friends are right in the battle, and if there is anything here that really is for the Lord, if anything results for the Lord, it belongs to them, quite as much as it belongs to us. It is theirs; in a certain sense they will own this; it will be, so to speak, their property. They have battled for it,

suffered for it, endured for it, toiled for it. They have gone on ploughing the way, pioneering the way, and it is theirs.

That is the thought right at the heart of this word, that there is something that becomes ours through suffering. Yes, it is the Lord's, and it is all of His grace, but it is ours.

Suffering is a Purifying Thing

And that means surely that what we have laboured for, suffered for, travailed for, becomes something over which we are very jealous. Suffering for anything is a very purifying thing. Take the matter of the child for which there has been suffering, travail. Well, other people who have not so suffered and travailed and gone through for the child can see all the defects and pass all the criticisms and arrive at their judgments, good or bad, about that child, and just stand apart and say their say about the child. But the mother may see very little of that. There is something for the mother which transcends all that. 'Oh yes, you may say that, but that child is very precious to me. I have suffered for that child, that child is my child, the child of my heart and the child of my travail, and, while I may see its faults, there is something which covers them all, there is the jealousy of a love born of suffering'.

Now you see what I am getting at. There is nothing that is precious to the Lord, and which He would make the property of His people, but there will be suffering for it. It will only become their property - in that sense - as they suffer for it, and then woe betide who criticizes that! If you are detached from a thing, if you are detached from a testimony, from a work of God, you can do all the criticizing you like. You have no inward heart-relationship to it, and so you pass your judgments upon it. But if you are in it and you have suffered, if it has been a costly thing where you are concerned, then you are seeing more than all the failings, more than all those faults. The people who can criticize like that and judge and point out faults are the people who have not suffered.

On the other side, we may know all the terms, all the phraseology, all the doctrine, all the truth, and it may be just objective, something we have heard; we have lived in the midst of it, it is familiar to us. But what the Lord will do if that is to become ours is to take us into travail over the matter. He will relate that thing to our hearts in a deep, inward way, so that none of us will be able to say, 'I know all about that, I have heard all about that, I could tell you all that you could tell me about that'. The Lord would so work in a costly, deep and painful way in relation to that, to make it ours through travail, that we are brought into a new position. We are not spectators, looking on, criticizing; we are on the inside, looking out, defending. We are jealous over it. Suffering is a great purifying thing. It destroys selfishness. It destroys that self-interest that is the cause of so much of the trouble. It makes us in a disinterested way jealous for what is of God. Yes, suffering purifies, and suffering makes this deep, inward link.

It gives an extra feature to things. That extra feature where we cannot just be occupied with faults and be people of a criticizing attitude, the extra feature with a love which covers a multitude of sins. We have suffered together. When we suffer together, what a lot we get over! We have gone through it together, perhaps through the years. We have been in the fire together, and there is a love, there is a jealousy which, let people say what they will about the other persons, simply rises up in us because we have suffered.

Joint-heirs with Christ Through Suffering

"Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him" (Romans 8:17; A.S.V.). This is not just an official thing, something that is a gratuitous gift in a mechanical way, as much as to say, 'Well, you have done a bit of work; here are your wages'. That thing has been wrought in us through the suffering and the cost and the warfare and the labour, and there is this sense of an inward co-heirship with Christ, if we suffer. It will be a very blessed thing, to us who know how much we are dependent upon the grace of God, how little we can even bear without the support of His grace; it will be a wonderful thing when at last He says, 'This is the reward of your suffering'. We shall say, 'Well, after all, it was our *light* affliction - in the light of the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. How have we earned this?' But there will be some gratification in recognizing that the Lord has taken account of what we have gone through, and has brought us into a sense of His own gratification, and given us to feel - 'Well, it was not in vain, it was not for nought'.

Why did I read those passages in the Old Testament from Numbers and Joshua? They both have to do with inheritance. I read them for this reason, that here were people who, in the first place, were concerned, were jealous, for the inheritance. And then they were people who were prepared to enter into the cost of the inheritance, after which, when they had got it, it was theirs. Yes, it was the Lord's, but it was theirs. Do you see what I mean? It is theirs. And many of us have gone through the years in toil, in suffering, in labour and warfare in the Lord's interests, and if there is anything that comes out of that at all, it is ours, in this sense - that we are jealous over it with a right kind of jealousy. It belongs to us in the Lord. Yes, it is the Lord's, but it belongs to us in the Lord, the fruit of suffering and of travail and of cost. Your faithfulness in prayer, and in prayer-gatherings - it is not without cost that you continue like that. Your faithfulness in the upholding of those who go out - it costs. Taking the years over, it is not without price if there is anything. The Lord has given it to you as your inheritance; that is yours. All that eternal spiritual value is yours in Christ. Now look after it, cherish it, watch jealously over it, and from all attacks defend it. If only we had this inward sense of relatedness to everything that costs, what a difference it would make, how less ready we should be to see the defects and the faults!

The Lord bring us to understand that the meaning of the conflict and of the suffering, from His standpoint, is not only - and I say this quite reverently - not only in order to get something for Him. It is because He wants us in an inward relatedness to it, as a very part of ourselves. I believe that is the very essence of this joint-heirship with Jesus Christ. What does it mean to inherit if we suffer? Surely it means - 'This is what you have earned through the grace of God. Here it is: you have paid for this in fellowship with Christ'. I do not understand all this in the New Testament about 'suffering together with Him', 'filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body's sake, which is the Church' - I do not understand unless it is this, that the Lord wants us not just as bits of a machine to work out some piece of work for Him. He wants a real heart-relatedness; so that, as we suffer with Him - and we are suffering with Him, there is no doubt about that - as we suffer with Him, we shall be gratified with Him. Glorified - yes, but gratified; the deep sense of gratification that we had a share in this. *The Lord give us a right attitude toward all the cost.*

Part Fourteen

RECOVERY OF THE GLORY

"And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken." (1 Samuel 4:21-22).

"And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." (1 Kings 8:10-11).

Ichabod! This dying widow spoke a good deal of truth when she lamented the glory that had gone, but she did not speak all the truth, for she could not foresee what would follow. The Ark of the Covenant was more than a material emblem: the Lord's Name and honour were associated with it. Israel had suffered a great loss, but the Lord was still well able to look after His own interests and act in jealousy for His own Name. The subsequent chapter relates His immediate reaction with regard to that Testimony and that Name.

Jealousy and Mercy

If the Ark was taken into the house of Dagon, then so much the worse for Dagon. When God's people tried to make selfish use of the Ark, bringing it out to back them up in their conflict though their hearts were estranged from the God whose covenant it represented, they found that the Ark seemed powerless. It was as if God had no interest in it - did not care what happened to it. But when the Philistines presumed to take liberties with that same Ark, they found, to their cost, that it mattered very much to the Lord. Dagon, their god, was first humbled, then smashed to pieces, as the Ark was placed in his temple. And the Philistines concerned had no doubt about the supernatural power involved, for it left a lasting impression of awe upon them all. Jehovah is a jealous God, and He showed His ability to crush this would-be rival, Dagon.

If the men of Ashdod thought that they could trifle with Divine things, they, too, had to learn a painful lesson. "But the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod..." (1 Samuel 5:6), so that they soon took steps to get rid of this troublesome Ark. To Israel it seemed powerless, but to those in Ashdod who trifled with God's glory the power of Divine judgments was overwhelming. It may be, then, that some godly Israelites who heard of these events would take heart, in the realization that God was still God, jealous in holiness for His great Name; so that, mingled with their regret at their own sin and failure, there would come the assurance that He would still take care of His own interests. His power was the same, even if His people had failed Him. 'He cannot fail, for He is God!'

The Lord is also great in mercy. Perhaps Ichabod's mother was so overcome by her own sorrow that she forgot that most precious part of the Ark, the Mercy Seat. The longsuffering and grace of God were represented in an integral part of that Ark of the Covenant. Even when His people had so badly failed Him, seeming to throw away all right to a further place in His purposes, recovery was still possible, because the holiness of God had also the accompaniment of the blood-stained Mercy Seat. 'God does not cast off His people whom He foreknew' (Romans 11:2). He is not only able to take care of His own interests, but able also to bring back the glory to an undeserving people. Thank God for the Mercy Seat. The Ark came back, and more quickly than might have been thought

possible. It needed no army, no rescuing party, no help at all from the Israelites. God made His presence felt in such a mighty way that those who held the Ark were glad to be rid of it, and themselves arranged for its return to Israel. 'Ichabod' was not the last word.

Priestly Intercession

When Phinehas' widow expired with the pronouncement of "Ichabod", she was overlooking the fact that God had already laid His hand on a man who would be the instrument for bringing back the glory. Samuel had lived in her house. He must have been always around, and she would know him and see him often. But he was so small and insignificant that she would never expect him to influence events. He was not even a priest. If the High Priest and his two sons had gone, then it must have seemed that there was no one left to take responsibility for the interests of the Lord. So we see Samuel set over against Ichabod. The Lord had already provided Himself with this instrument of recovery - so humble and small that men took no account of him, but so wholly given over to the will of God that he could provide that priestly intercession which Eli and his sons had failed to give. Here, then, is a further cause for wonder. Not only can the Lord look after His own interests, not only will He in mercy bring back the glory to His erring people, but even before the disaster He has provided Himself with the human instrument needed for the purpose. Eli's daughter-in-law knew nothing of this. The natural eye could see only tragedy - the tragedy of the departed glory. Ichabod.

What was the cause of Israel's tragic failure? In part, at least, it was due to the failure of the priesthood. We read in the story of the sad conditions in Eli's household, and we are told little about Eli himself to suggest that he exerted any spiritual influence for good in the whole situation. So it is plain that the priesthood of that day was gravely at fault. In reality, however, that breakdown was only the end of a long process, just the last stage in what had been wrong with the people of God for many years. When Joshua's days were finished, Israel passed into a period when there was no God-given leadership. Occasionally judges were raised up by the Lord, and for a time there was some semblance of order among the people, but it seldom lasted for very long.

Even more notable was the lack of priesthood. Only in the last chapters do we find mention of Levites, and then in the most depraved and lamentable connections. It would be a true comment on those times to say that there was no priest in Israel, just as much as there was no king. Even in the brighter days, when for a season leaders did arise, bringing relief and victory to a defeated people, even then there is no mention of this basic, essential, though often hidden, serving of the Lord's interests by a ministry of intercession. The reader passes from the unwholesome records of Judges into I Samuel (though with the inset of Ruth), only to find this ominous opening: "And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, priests unto the Lord, were there" (1:3), which is soon followed by the further comment: "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord" (2:12). 'Ichabod' indeed! It is always true that, when there is no vital ministry of intercession, then there is no glory.

This is the negative side. But it was not the end. Later the glory came back, and it came back in very great fullness - "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord". As we have already said, this was due to the sovereignty of God, and also to the greatness of His grace. But it was also due to the fact that first a prayer ministry had been provided. Behind it all we find the figure of Samuel, God's priestly instrument.

It may be objected that the glory was a long time in coming back. It was. Samuel's was a long life, and he never lived to see that day. But patience is an important feature of priestly ministry - persistence in faith and perseverance in waiting upon God. These were the secrets of a life which had such a tremendous influence on the whole course of the history of God's people; for surely it is no exaggeration to say that the man who contributed most to the recovery of the glory was Samuel. Samuel, the intercessor.

Samuel's Simplicity

If this is true, then it must be a profitable study to consider the essential traits which characterized Samuel. For many of us live under the shadow of Ichabod. We, too, feel, that the glory has departed. Although we could easily despair, there is with us also an inner conviction that the Lord's desire is to bring the glory back, once more to fill His spiritual House with His glory. There are many projects and suggestions that men may offer for the recovery of this departed glory. They may be right or they may be wrong, but they do not deal with the root cause or effect the radical cure. With us, as with Israel, the greatest need is for a mighty ministry of intercession - if necessary prolonged like Samuel's, if necessary to extend beyond our own lifetime as it did beyond his - but a ministry which will turn all the 'Ichabods' into 'Hallelujahs'.

The first thing to be noted with regard to Samuel is his simplicity. Samuel was not a priest. He had no official place in the priestly order. So far as we know he was never anointed by men nor ordained by them. It is true that his father was a Levite, but even so he does not seem to have been engaged in any Levitical work. People would have regarded him as a very ordinary boy in a very ordinary family.

Of course he was not this. One cannot class as ordinary a child who has such a miraculous entrance into the world as Samuel had. He himself was an answer to prayer. It would, indeed, perhaps be correct to say that this mighty ministry of intercession had its commencement with his mother, Hannah. This, then, was his beginning - God brought him in. And this is the way in which every true intercessory ministry begins: it is initiated by God Himself. This, surely, was what enabled Samuel to continue through all the long and testing years: this knowledge that it was no natural contrivance and no effort of his own, but an act of God which had brought him into being.

Even so, there was something very simple about this vessel of God's service. "The child was young" (1:24). "But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child" (2:18). "Moreover his mother made him a little robe" (2:19). All this seems to point to a homely insignificance, which meant that he was completely overlooked by Ichabod's mother. What could this feeble lad contribute to the recovery of the glory? This, however, is just the one who can serve God in the place of prayer, weak and despised in himself, but mighty in intercession. He turned the tide, for God. "The sin of the young men was very great... men abhorred the offering of the Lord. *But Samuel* ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod" (2:17-18). Once again there is a Divine "But...." And it was a child in all his natural inadequacy who faced and stemmed the flood of evil and hopelessness. He stood his ground with the Lord, and in the end the glory came back. No one need be ashamed of their simplicity or insufficiency! It seems as though this was what the Lord was needing, someone small enough and humble enough to be usable. In Samuel He found just what He wanted.

Samuel's Teachability

Furthermore Samuel was willing to be taught. His first uttered prayer, the introduction to a long and fruitful life of intercession in the secret place, was just the childlike request: "Speak; for Thy servant heareth" (3:10). The secret of a true ministry of intercession is to have an open ear to the Lord. The first utterance must come from Him, not from us; our speaking to Him can only have value when it is preceded by His first speaking to us. Great stress is laid on Samuel's growing up, itself an important spiritual matter; and as he grew it is stated that "the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel..." (3:21). It is not said that prayer became mighty in Shiloh, or that Samuel broke through to God in prayer. No, the emphasis is on God's side; He revealed Himself again, because He had found a young man who, in spite of his youth, was ready to be shown the will of the Lord, and to maintain his first attitude of the bended knee and the listening ear.

And as he grew old he still retained that sensitiveness to the Lord. He mistook Jesse's eldest son for the man to be appointed king; he went so far as to conclude, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him" (16:6); but he did not act rashly. God was able to check him, to correct him, and to show him how not to exercise natural judgment - "as man seeth" - but to receive Divine guidance. What a contrast to the blind and set old man, Eli! It is a great mercy, and an indispensable condition for a fruitful prayer life, that a man should always have his heart attuned to the voice of the Spirit.

Samuel's Heart Purity

The third great secret of Samuel's power in the secret place was the unblemished purity of his life. Did his mother know the corrupt influences to which he would be subject among Eli's sons? If she did, she must have been a woman of remarkable faith, to commit her young lad to live in Shiloh, in those evil days. Her faith was vindicated. It is quite evident that Samuel was never tainted by the evil all around him. It was a miracle, to keep pure in that atmosphere, and God did the miracle. There can be no power without purity.

Later on in his life, when Samuel was dealing with the matter of Saul's appointment as king, he was able to issue an open challenge concerning his procedure from his youth until this advanced time when he was old and grey-headed, and with one accord the people testified to his integrity (12:1-5). If it was a miracle that the boy Samuel should be kept pure, how much greater was the miracle of maintained purity of spirit, during years when he could very easily have made some personal profit out of his position. It was this which gave him his unique standing before men as well as before God - he could claim to be free from impurity in his daily walk.

Saul's reign brought him nothing but sorrow. Yet, just as he had meekly accepted being set aside at Saul's appointment, so he remained with an unoffended spirit through all the heartbreak of that unhappy reign. He reproved Saul, but he still mourned and prayed for him. He allowed no bitterness of spirit, nor did he of his own choice seek an alternative. He returned to his place of quiet at Ramah, to continue his ministry of intercession, until, by the urging of the Lord, he went to Bethlehem to anoint David.

These, then, were the features of God's man of prayer - Simplicity, Teachability and Purity. And this was the man who brought back the glory and reversed the verdict of 'Ichabod'.

Samuel Spanned the Gap

There may be some who doubt whether Samuel did, in fact, play such a vital part in spanning this gap between the departure of the glory and the full recovery in Solomon's Temple. Apart from the actual narrative, there is an indication of what both God and men thought of the part he played, in the titles given to the two historical books which tell the story. Up to I Samuel 25:1, it can be argued that Samuel was only one of the principal characters. Then he dies, and is no longer on the scene. Yet, in spite of that, both books are called by his name - First Samuel and Second Samuel - though originally, we are told, they were treated as one single book. Who gave the title of "Samuel"? We do not know. But it is singularly appropriate, as many have pointed out. It was Samuel's influence and Samuel's ministry, largely in the unseen realm, that reversed the tragic experience of 'Ichabod' and brought in the fullness of the glory. Where are the Samuels today? Surely they are as greatly needed in our day as he was in his.

When Saul turned against Samuel, we are told that the prophet returned to his home at Ramah (15:34). And Ramah, so they say, means '*heights*'. Earlier on he had built an altar at Ramah (7:17). How much Israel owed, and how much David and Solomon owed, to this man whose home was in the *heights* by the altar!

Part Fifteen

DISCIPLINE UNTO PRAYER

"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

There is a very striking sequence about the arrangement of many of the Books in the Bible; though chronologically it is all wrong to take the order: Nehemiah, Esther, Job; spiritually it is all right. Each of these books centres around, or emphasizes at least, this matter of intercession. Nehemiah is the work of prayer. Prayer is everywhere in Nehemiah; prayer at all times, long prayers, short prayers, but it is all prayer with the work, and work with the prayer. "In everything by prayer and supplication" (Philippians 4:6) - I think that is Nehemiah. In Esther we strike a deeper note: it is the prayer of love, sacrificial love, in the one great moment of intercession of Esther's life. And in the case of Job I think we go deeper still, including, of course, those other two. Here we have not somebody who is marked by what they do so much as somebody whose doing comes out of what they are, the *life* of prayer.

What Job went through! This verse seems to me a kind of peak and climax of his experience, as well as a turning point for him personally. He prayed for his friends. What a prayer! What a need! And what a man to pray it! We must not regard prayer as one of those lesser activities of life. It seems with Job that this is the culmination of all his life. Now he can pray! You may say: 'Now he is rich.' That is true. 'Now he is prosperous.' That is true. But I would say, when we have got through to chapter 42: *Now* he can pray. Not that he had not prayed before, but something had been done in the man himself which gave a quality to his prayer. We remember that in the case of our Lord Jesus the fruit of His conflict with Satan, the culmination of all His experience, is this very thing - that now He lives to intercede. This is not just the fact that we can pray, and the wonder that God answers prayer, or that "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of", or that sort of thing; but something far deeper. "He ever liveth to make intercession" (Hebrews 7:25). How much we owe to His praying! But how much His prayers owe to what He is! The quality of the prayer comes from Him, of course, as the Son of God, the perfect One; but also, as Hebrews tells us, it comes out of a deep experience of discipline and suffering which have made Him an able intercessor.

"The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." You must put the 'friends' in inverted commas. It is very easy to pray for your friends when they are friends, but I think it is not straining this story to say that when Job prayed, he was praying for his enemies. I fail to see anything more that they could have done to make life impossible for him than what they did. The only thing they could have done was to leave him alone, and he begged them to, but they would not. It was not out of affection - that sort of feeling we have for our friends that makes us want to pray for them. It was the men who had caused him so much pain and grief, but who so needed prayer. I wonder if we can see that! Here are men: they know all about God. Some of the precious things that are said about God in the Book of Job are said, not by Job, but by his friends. Job's friends said some of the passages you love. They were right, they knew all about Him, and yet they were utterly different from Him - hard, censorious, ungracious. That is a challenge to us. You may know all about God, but be very unlike Him.

It is very interesting that Job's experiences were taken by the Lord to bring to the surface and disclose, not only his own state and need, but the state and need of his friends. How much may circle round your experience, and mine, for other

people as well as for us! It was all coming to the surface; not only what Job was, but what they were, and it was how harsh and critical and unkind they were to him personally. I may be wrong, but I always feel that when Job began to curse his day, that was really caused by his friends. When all the sufferings came, he blessed the Lord and was patient. But these men came to commiserate with him, and for seven days they sat there and did not say anything; but seven days of a critical atmosphere, seven days of eyes upon you, and you know what they are thinking. It was too much for Job, and it is often too much for us. And then they began to open their mouths, and the second phase of their so-called friendliness came in. What a painful experience it was for Job to have the barbed arrows of their unjust interpretation of his experience, their wrong judgments, all thrust into his quivering, suffering flesh. *They* were the people that needed prayer.

You do not think of them like that. You think they need something else, but they need prayer. When God revealed Himself, not only was Job abashed, but these men were stricken. It is a new light upon the harsh, hard, critical people that make life more painful than it is. It is true that when Job saw everything in the light of God's presence, he saw himself, but he also saw the need of those poor men. *They* needed prayer. Well, they were new men in that sense; but what a new man Job was when he prayed for them.

New Power in Prayer

As we have said, he already, before these experiences, served in a priestly capacity. You read about it in the first chapter. He interceded for his family. Job could pray, and he did pray, but this is a new Job, and there is new power in his prayer. What is there that is new about it?

(1) A New Sense of Sin

First of all, strangely enough, there is a new sense of sin. You would not think that that would make you pray better, but that is just what is needed. According to God, Job had said the things that were right; but Job, according to Elihu (and he seems to have spoken for God) was the man who justified himself instead of God. Job was the man who said: "My righteousness I hold fast" (Job 27:6). He was self-righteous, and it was to disclose that fact that the devil was allowed to do what he did to him. Self-righteousness is a great hindrance to prayer. So the Lord brought Job to the place where every shred of self-opinion was utterly forsaken and repudiated. He had a new sense of sin.

You know how the Letter to the Romans makes the discrimination between sins and sin, and it was something like that that was borne home upon Job's heart. His friends were all the time saying: 'You must have committed sins'; and Job said: 'I have not!' But they said: 'You must have done', and he maintained: 'I have not'. When he saw God he did not remember, after all, certain sins that he had committed. Something much deeper came upon him - a conviction that, though he could face his fellow men and hold fast his integrity, when he came into the presence of the Lord it was not so much that he had committed sins, but he was a sinner; his very being was unclean before God.

If Job's friends had prayed for him instead of talking to him, they might have helped a little bit, but I expect they would have prayed very much as they talked: 'Now, Job must have done this. Show him he has done it.' If Job had been on that level - and he might have been! - when the Lord said, 'Pray for your friends', he would have fallen into exactly the same trap. 'Lord, so-and-so said this, and Bildad said that, and someone else something else.' But he came into a realm where he was not looking at particular faults of people, but was overwhelmed

with the sense of the holiness of God, and the deep, deep unholiness of man. "I abhor myself."

'Well,' you say, 'the man that is down in the dust abhorring himself will not be much good for prayer.' He is the man! We are not much good for prayer because we are not down. This sense of personal unworthiness and sin that humbles us before God, if it does its work in us, brings us to a place where we are able to pray as we never could when we were strong and self-confident. You notice that Job did not offer himself to pray for them. God said to Job: 'Now, you are the man to pray.' 'What me, Lord? But I am horrible! I lay my hand on my mouth, I am unclean, I am a sinner, I abhor myself.' The Lord said: 'You are the one to pray, for you are the only one that can pray the kind of prayer that I mean.'

(2) A New Understanding of Suffering

A new understanding of suffering. Job now knows, and we need to know, what God means by suffering. "My servant, Job." How these men must have opened their mouths and been surprised! The Lord says - and you notice how often He says it - "My servant, Job". If He had said: 'The man who used to be My servant', they could have understood, but He says: 'He is My servant.' But what has he been doing? He has been suffering. Is that all? Yes, suffering. He suffered under the hand of God, suffered in the will of God, and in that way he has been serving God. He was God's servant before. God said to Satan: "Hast thou considered My servant Job?" But there is a sense, it seems to me, in which the end of this book just concentrates on the fact that God says: 'This is the man that is serving. Not these preachers who are going around telling people what is right and what is wrong, what they ought to do, and all the theories of God's dealings with men, but the man who has been through the fire. He has been serving Me.' Everybody despised him. 'He used to be a servant of God, but look at him now, stripped of everything! He has nothing at all.' The children mock him, and everybody despises him. God says: "My servant", and the very people that mocked him and despised him had cause to thank God from the bottom of their hearts that Job was God's servant, for it would have been a bad day for them if he had not been.

Then Job found much more about suffering: how suffering brings you close to the Lord if it is taken in the right spirit. How much nearer to God Job was, and how much nearer to Job God was at the end of the book! And all he had done was to suffer. Suffering under God's hand brought that nearness, and it made Job a different man. That was one of the things Elihu said: "Who is a teacher like unto Him?" (36:22). God had been teaching Job, and it is out of such a background that he could pray.

(3) A New Conception of God

But I think that most of all it was out of a new conception of God that Job prayed like this. That was the value of his experience. He had known God before, and he had prayed before, but now he had a new conception of God altogether. He had been apt to treat God on equal terms. That comes out more than once, and he is charged with it - with considering God as though He were a man instead of realizing the utter transcendence of the Lord: "Behold, I will answer thee, in this thou art not just; for God is greater than man" (33:12). You would not think that a man like Job needed to be told that, but he did. The Lord took him and said: 'Now, Job, you have got on wrong terms with Me. I want intimacy, yes, but not familiarity.' And that is the danger with us all. We mistake familiarity for intimacy. So the Lord suddenly turns on Job and says: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (38:4). That is a question. But Job had been treating God as if he had been there. That is one of the dangers. I know prayer has its

realms - realms of executive prayer, realms of fellowship with God, but they are dangerous realms unless we realize, and have brought home to us in ever fresh power, how transcendent God is. This is the man who prayed: the man who sees how great God is.

When he used to pray he treated God as though he were more or less equal, telling Him what He had done and what He ought to do. Now he can only bow in utter worship and wonder. That is the kind of man who can pray. He knows how omnipotent God is. "I know," he says at the end, "that Thou canst do all things" (42:2). In a sense, he is answering all his own questions. It seems to me as though God deliberately baffled Job. You see, if you know everything that God is doing, somehow it has a bad effect on you. So God took hold of His choicest servant and took him through experiences that so baffled and perplexed him that in the end he did not know anything. "Oh that I knew..." (23:3). His friends, of course, knew it all - or thought they did. Poor Job says: 'I do not know; oh, that I did know!' And God has done that on purpose because Job, by all this, comes to realize the supreme power and wisdom of God.

If we knew all about Him, He would not be any greater than ourselves. But we see just the hem of His garment, the fringes of His ways, and the vast realms of His Divine counsels and His sovereign power we only glimpse here and there, and we say: 'How wonderful the Lord is! I do not know what He is doing, but I know He can do everything; I do not know why He is doing it this way, but I am sure He knows.' That is the man who can pray, the man with a new sense of God in all His greatness, His transcendence, His power, and, above all, His grace.

(4) A New Understanding of the Grace of God

I suppose we are apt to think of Job as reinstated, for he has everything back and more than he ever had, and feeling rather good and magnanimous, so he says to his friends: 'Do not say anything more about it.' Nothing of the sort! Job had nothing at this stage. This was the turning point. He was still as stripped, as poor, as low as ever he had been. What had he got, then, that made him pray, and able to pray like this? He had a new understanding of the grace of God, and that is the richest thing you can have. He knew how gracious God is. He could not have prayed for his friends properly if he had not known. He knew how gracious God is in terms of personal experience. God was gracious to him, and God had been merciful to him. Oh, the things that he had said and thought about God, and all the time love was planning and grace was being poured out upon him, so out of a new heart-overflowing sense of the wonderful grace of God, he could pray.

All this is surely for us, too, for if, as a people, we feel we have one thing more than another which is our essential ministry, surely it is prayer. The Lord calls us to prayer again and again. Perhaps the Lord is dealing with us so that we can pray. That is what He did with Job - and see what happened when Job prayed! His friends were delivered from their danger and their need, and the prayer was answered. But the whole point of the verse is, not that the prayer was answered, but that Job came into new fullness because he prayed. "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." So often we feel that if we could come out and be strong and prosperous, we could pray. But the Lord says: 'If you will pray, I will bring you out.' It is not, of course, a sort of catch arrangement that we make with the Lord - 'I will not pray for myself. I will pray for others and then You will help me.' It was not that. Job, I am sure, was not thinking of himself, but, out of this new sense of God, and of sin, and of the command to pray for these poor needy men who had been so hard to him, but who, he now realized, were in such a parlous state themselves, he prayed for them. We must be content to pray for the Lord's will far beyond our own interests and our own

borders. We must make our supreme prayer for the needy among the Lord's people and among mankind everywhere. Let Him fit us in where He will to the meeting of that need, but our first thing is to pray for the need.

That is just what Job did. He did not say: 'Make me a great man again so that I can serve You.' He said: 'Lord, have mercy upon these men, who ought to be Thy servants, but who are in need and have been revealed in all the nakedness of their spurious profession of spirituality. Have mercy upon them!' When Job began to pray for them like that the Lord gave him double.

Some of us may be seeking fullness and not finding it because we are critical of the Lord's people, because we are watching, because we have summed them up, because, like Job's friends, we can tell them where they are wrong. Perhaps we do not dare to, but we could if we had the chance. We are finding our emptiness, our leanness along that line, and we shall! Job found his fullness when, out of a deep sense of the grace of God, he prayed for his friends.

May the Lord make us those who have such an experience with Him that we are constituted able intercessors! Then we shall find our fullness; the Lord will give us double.