

# FAITH UNTO ENLARGEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

by

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## Chapter One

### FAITH UNTO ENLARGEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

Reading: Psalm 118.

*"Oh give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His loving-kindness endureth for ever. Let Israel now say, That His loving-kindness endureth for ever. Let the house of Aaron now say, That His loving-kindness endureth for ever. Let them now that fear the Lord say, That His loving-kindness endureth for ever" (verses 1-4; A.R.V.).*

*"Out of my distress I called upon the Lord: the Lord answered me and set me in a large place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? The Lord is on my side among them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. All nations compassed me about: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off. Thou didst thrust sore at me that I might fall; but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and song; and He is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly" (verses 5-16; A.R.V.).*

The real title of this Psalm is the 'Passover Hosanna Psalm', and its theme is faith unto enlargement through adversity. Martin Luther called this Psalm *his* Psalm, and I think his life is a very good commentary upon it. We know why he made it his Psalm. He might well have been the originator of it, so true was his life to all that is here. It is just an explanation and a summing-up of all his experience. 'This is my Psalm', he said.

This Psalm was really born out of experience, and it is that that makes it live. There lies behind it very deep history, especially in two particular connections.

#### The Background of the Psalm

In the first place, this Psalm, whose composer no one seems to know, was at least adapted to, if not composed for, the Passover after the dedication of the second Temple. You are probably acquainted with the history of the second Temple. You have to turn, of course, to the Book of Ezra, and alongside of it to the Book of Nehemiah, and then to the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah; and when you have read those four books, you have the setting of Psalm 118. Read again verses 5 to 16 of the Psalm in the light of that, and you will see what light is thrown upon these verses. Or take a fragment - verse 10: "All nations compassed me about: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off. They compassed me about..." And turn to the Book of Ezra, chapter 4, verses 9 and 10. Here you have a whole host of nations all gathered against Ezra and the building of the second Temple. They compassed him about - all these nations compassed him about - they compassed him about like stinging bees. Thus this description of adversity, of opposition, gives this Psalm a very real, practical application: for the remnant which had escaped from captivity had returned to the land with the building and dedication of the Temple in view, and if this Psalm is a description of things as they were then, it is indeed the story of life out of death.

## **Life Out of Death**

We must remember that the 'I' and the 'me' repeated in this Psalm represent the personification of the remnant or of the nation. It is as though the nation were speaking as an individual; it is a collective 'I'. The nation is here saying: "The Lord hath chastened me sore" - how true that was for the seventy years in captivity - "but He hath not given me over unto death" (verse 18); "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (verse 17): so that the remnant speaking in these words does really embody this great truth of life out of death and life triumphant over death.

The Lord had promised His people, when they were in that far-off exile and captivity, that He would 'open their graves' and bring them out (Ezekiel 37:12-14), and here it is. They are out - out of that grave of captivity; and a grave it was. There is no singing in the grave. "The dead praise not the Lord" (Psalm 115:17) is a phrase of Scripture, and how true it was away there. "Upon the willows... we hanged up our harps... how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137:2-4). 'The dead praise Thee not.' But listen! "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His loving-kindness endureth for ever" - four times repeated at the very beginning of the Psalm, and then added as the crown at the end. It is a new Psalm on resurrection ground. So the Psalm, to begin with, is one of life out of death.

## **Release From Bondage**

And then quite clearly it is one of release from bondage. These people are so rejoicing in this aspect of their position by the loving-kindness of the Lord, that they are reminded of their earliest great deliverance, and you will see here in the Psalm a reference to the great deliverance from Egypt, and a quotation from the Book of Exodus. They bring the two together - deliverance from Egypt and deliverance from Babylon - and the deliverance from Egypt is always, in the Scripture, termed deliverance "out of the house of bondage". The Psalm, then, is the Psalm of release from bondage.

Now, bringing that into the rebuilding of the second Temple, you can see how the remnant were straitened, were pressed, by the nations represented by these people who had been brought into Samaria. What a time Nehemiah had from these people in building the wall! He was pressed on every side. What a time Ezra had! How those prophets suffered! The work was held up for more than a decade by reason of this opposition and adversity all around. But the point is that the Temple was built and finished and dedicated, and this Psalm was sung at the Passover which followed the dedication. It says: 'Let men do their worst, let them oppress from every side, let them oppose as they will. The thing is done: the Lord has done it in spite of everything, and we are out.'

## **From Limitation to Enlargement**

So "the Lord answered me and set me in a large place" (verse 5). From death to life, from bondage to liberty, from limitation to enlargement - into a "large place" - and this represented a very great thing on the Lord's part. Consider all that the Lord had to cope with - though of course it is putting it in a wrong way to say the Lord ever has to 'cope with' anything, for He is so supremely superior to every situation. Yet what was against His people was no small thing. To bring them out into this enlargement meant the overcoming of tremendous difficulties. "The Lord answered me and set me in a large place." We are reminded of another word, so familiar to us: "Thou broughtest us into the net... Thou didst cause men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water; but Thou broughtest us

out into a wealthy place" (Psalm 66:11-12). It is a Psalm of triumph over limitation, bringing into enlargement.

### **God's Faithfulness Over His People's Unfaithfulness**

The version from which I have quoted uses the word 'loving-kindness'. The version which is perhaps more familiar has the word 'mercy' - "His mercy endureth for ever". I think there is a note about 'loving-kindness' - God's loving-kindness' - that touches the heart, when you think of the failure and the unfaithfulness of His own people. What a story it is all the way along, right through the lives of the major and the minor prophets. It would seem that if ever the mercy of God, the loving-kindness of God, could have been exhausted, it would have been so with these people, so terrible were their reactions to the mercy of God. How far they went against the Lord! But here in the end - and with Nehemiah we are in the last Book of the Old Testament in historical order, we are at the end of a dispensation - the great note is: "His loving-kindness endureth for ever". When they used that language, these people knew what they were talking about. It was not just poetry or sentiment.

It is, therefore, a Psalm of tremendous consolation. We know our weakness, we know our unfaithfulness, we know how we have failed and do fail. The end of the story is - "His loving-kindness endureth for ever". You see, this is the experience - and, out of the experience, the testimony - of a people who have proved the Lord to be faithful over against all that men could do against them. It is a Psalm worth having. No wonder Luther said, 'That is my Psalm!'

### **Sung by the Lord Before Gethsemane**

But there is something even more than that. The second thing about this Psalm is that it is believed to have been the Psalm sung by the Lord Himself and by His disciples on the Passover night. Before I knew this, I used to say, 'I wish I knew what it was they sang when it says that after the supper, "when they had sung a hymn, they went out"' (Matthew 26:30). I have discovered that, on very good grounds, it is strongly believed that this was the Psalm that they sang. The Lord Jesus actually sang this Psalm! And His disciples sang it with Him - I wonder if they really knew what they were singing? Let us look at it.

There is no doubt that this Psalm is very largely, if not altogether, related to the Lord Jesus, because it is quoted in immediate connection with Him in several places in the New Testament. For instance: "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord" (verse 26). But the titles of the Psalm, the 'Passover Hosanna Psalm', is not based upon that incident of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, when they cut down palm branches and went before Him singing out of this Psalm: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord", but upon other grounds. And then you know that on several occasions in the New Testament the words are quoted: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner" (verse 22). The Lord Jesus used them concerning Himself (Matthew 21:42), and Peter used them concerning Christ (1 Peter 2:7). So this is in a large sense what is called a 'Messianic' Psalm. It is related to the Lord Jesus.

### **The Triumph of Faith**

Now, if the Lord did sing this Psalm on that dark night of the Passover and betrayal, what a triumph of faith it was! "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (verse 17). Going straightway to Gethsemane, the trial and the Cross - "I shall not die, but live". In faith He has leapt the garden, He has

leapt the trial, He has leapt the Cross, right over into the resurrection. "I shall not die, but live." What a triumph of faith through adversity, through suffering! But oh, what a meaning this gives to Gethsemane. Look at the Passover. "This is My body, which is for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24). "This is My blood... which is shed for many unto remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). And they sang a hymn; and after the hymn, the next thing - Gethsemane. Look - "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar" (verse 27). What was Gethsemane? They bound Him and led Him away from the garden, but His interpretation of that binding was of "a sacrifice... even unto the horns of the altar"; not tied to the horns of the altar, but bound with a view to being led toward the altar. That is the meaning here: 'Bind and lead to the altar.'

This puts a new light upon Gethsemane, upon the bonds, the captivity, does it not? This is not man's prevailing, this is not man overcoming, this is not man's triumph. This is the Lamb of God allowing Himself to be led to the altar. For that is the next thing after the singing. He has sung: "Bind the sacrifice... even unto the horns of the altar"; and forthwith He goes. He goes to Gethsemane, then to the betrayal, then to the judgment hall, and then to the Cross. There is the Divine side of all that, but here you see faith taking hold of this human side, as men regard and interpret it, and turning it into the redemption of the world.

### **The Lord's Enlargement Through the Cross**

In verse 5 again - "Out of my distress I called upon the Lord: the Lord answered me and set me in a large place." Are these words of the Lord Jesus? Yes: out of His distress He cried: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me". "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly..." "Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, Thy will be done" (Matthew 26:39, 42; Luke 22:44). "Out of my distress I cried..."; and, although it does not seem that the Lord answered and delivered, an Apostle says that He was heard (Heb. 5:7). And how was He heard? Have we the proof that He was heard and answered? "The Lord answered me and set me in a large place." A large place? Yes, a very large place He is in. How enlarged was our Lord through His Cross! "How am I straitened", He said - "how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). This was enlargement through suffering: His passion meant enlargement, release from limitation. But it is the voice of faith. As He goes to the Cross, faith goes beyond the Cross and claims the answer of life, not death; enlargement, not limitation. We could dwell quite a long time upon the enlargement that has come to the Lord Jesus through suffering by faith, and this we hope to do in later messages.

### **Life, Liberty and Enlargement for Us in Christ**

But what a testimony this is to the mercy of God. This is the point. I said a little earlier that this 'I' of the Psalm is an inclusive and collective 'I'. In the first place, it is the nation speaking in this personal way, using this personal pronoun "I". Now it is taken up in relation to the Lord Jesus - "I shall not die". But, you see, it is not just personal. We know that the Lord Jesus had no need to go to the Cross for Himself. It has often been pointed out that those words used much later by an Apostle - "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2) - should be translated: "Who, instead of the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despised shame, and sat down...", and it takes you to the mount of transfiguration.

The mount of transfiguration was the seal to the perfection of His moral character. There is no transfiguration or glorification apart from moral perfection, and so God gave Him the great witness that He was perfect, that He saw no fault

in Him, that He had passed the scrutiny of the eyes of Divine holiness, and there was not a flaw or a blemish in Him: He was perfect. Therefore He had a right to go from the mount of transfiguration right through to the glory for aye. The glory was His: it was declared His, it was shown to be His, it was His. But instead of the joy that was set in front of Him, He turned round and came down and endured the Cross, and if you will look at the context of these words in Hebrews, you will find that it was all because of ourselves - that He was not going to glory without us. Bringing many sons to glory necessitated His coming down, foregoing for the time being His right, His immediate right, to the glory, and enduring the Cross. You remember how, in that same letter to the Hebrews, it is put into the mouth of the Lord Himself: "I and the children whom God hath given Me" (Hebrews 2:13). "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (2:11).

So this glorious Psalm, with its wonderful background in the life of the Lord Jesus and by the Cross of the Lord Jesus, gathers us in. We are in this collective 'I'. We come into the good of this. "I shall not die, but live." "The Lord answered me and set me in a large place." It is true, is it not? It is true. We have that life triumphant over death. He has given that life to us; it is ours. It is not only ours in that general way - "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23) - but it is a testimony for all our life, something for now. It is a life which has come out of His death, and has overcome death in Him. It is *for us*. Do not let us lose the force of that by familiarity. It is to be a testimony *every* day. What we have in Christ is to be experienced and manifested every day, and it can be.

But then - and upon this we shall dwell very much more fully - what enlargement we have in Christ from our limitation! How infinitely great is the place into which we have been brought, how immeasurable are the resources, how vast are the ranges, how potent are the forces into which we have come in Christ through His death!

I close by reminding you of this - that while it is all concluded in Him, that where He is concerned there is nothing more to be done in this matter: it is full and it is final, and He has entered into His rest, has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; nothing through which we go can add to that, nothing which we experience can take from it; nevertheless, in a sense - not vicariously, not atoningly, not in the sense of His great redemptive work - but in a sense of fellowship with Him while He is still rejected in this world, and of humiliation in fellowship with Him, the principle still remains: that is, that life and enlargement come through adversity and faith's triumph therein. It is the law of life. Faith's triumph in adversity issues in life and enlargement.

We shall see more fully how true that is. The Bible is just full of it. Given a real test of faith, much adversity and opposition, everything hemming in, circling round - 'all nations compassed me about, they compassed me about, they compassed me about' - you see, it is reiterated, it is very real - nevertheless, nevertheless, that only constitutes the challenge to faith. Faith looks upon that as its opportunity, and when faith comes out in its declaration over against all that, and says, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord", that is the highway to a new experience of life and a new range of fullness - to enlargement by way of faith's challenge and faith's victory.

## Chapter Two

### THE KEY OF FAITH

*"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." And Abram said, "O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir." And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "This man shall not be thine heir: but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And He brought him forth abroad, and said, "Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if thou be able to number them:" and He said unto him, "So shall thy seed be." And he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:1-6; A.R.V.).*

*"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God'" (Genesis 17:1-8).*

*"For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made thee") before Him Whom he believed, even God, Who giveth life to the dead, and calleth the things that are not, as though they were. Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So shall thy seed be." And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.*

*Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on Him That raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Romans 4:16-25; A.R.V.).*

*"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8; A.R.V.).*

In these passages, we find five things. One, enlargement; two, establishment; three, life; four, faith; five, consummation. All this is to be brought into fullness at the end of the dispensation. The Word of God gives us to understand that at the end God will have a state of Divine fullness corresponding to the word



'enlargement': at the end, God will have things established, fixed: at the end, God will have things wholly characterized by life: and all this will be through tried and proved faith. You will recall how this end is brought into view in the symbolism of the city - the holy city, new Jerusalem, seen as coming down from God out of heaven in the last chapters of the Bible. Here is Divine fullness: everything brought to a state of finality, establishment, and all characterized by life - illustrated by the tree of life, the river of water of life, and other symbols. But leading up to this, all the way along, is the matter of tried and proved faith.

As we look at the Christian world in our time, we realize that these are the great things which are supremely necessary. There is need for spiritual, Divine, enlargement - things are so small spiritually; for spiritual establishment - things are so weak and uncertain, so variable and inconsistent, without assurance, without certainty; for Divine life - how great is the need for more life, heavenly life, a greater fullness of life amongst the Lord's people! But, while we recognize these things to be the crying needs, we should probably all be prepared to admit that the only way to these things is for the Lord's people to be really tested, really tried. We do not like the idea, but we realize that everything needs to be put to the test, to be proved, in order to be established. And we are in fact already very conscious of a new movement of God amongst His people really to test their faith, to try their faith, to bring faith to maturity.

Now this would seem to have been God's pathway for His people all down the ages: by tried, tested, proved and established faith to bring to enlargement, establishment and life more abundant. These are laws of the ways of God, principles of His dealings with His people. Let us, then, in the first place, take a comprehensive view of this matter, before coming to the practical applications. The Bible has many angles. If you take it, and look at it from one standpoint, you may think that that is all that the Bible is about. You seem to be able to gather up the whole of the Bible into that one thing. It might be sin, judgment, death - it is an aspect, an angle. Or it might be righteousness and life - it is another angle. Give the Bible another turn, and the same thing seems to be true again. It has many such angles, and every one of them seems to be comprehensive. If the Bible is like that, you can see the whole of it by just turning it a little from one angle to another.

### **Faith the Key to Life and Enlargement**

Now, you will see how true this is in the very clear instance that we have before us - the matter of enlargement by life through faith. It would be very easy to gather all the Bible into that, and to say that is what the whole Bible is about. Of course, it is not, but it is one very comprehensive angle. You will at once see how that theme runs right through. But suppose we change the metaphor, and say that there is a whole bunch of keys to the Bible - quite a large bunch of keys - every one of which seems to be a master key to open the whole of the Bible; and on this large bunch of keys there seem to be three that are linked together, so to speak, on their own separate ring. Those three keys are - faith, life, enlargement.

Faith opens the first door. That door leads to the next, which is life, and through life to the next, which is enlargement. Those three things always go together through the Word of God. Of course, this is clearly seen by the opposite. Unbelief is always shown in the Scripture to result in limitation. Where there is unbelief, you just do not get any further - you stop short and stop dead: there is no enlargement, and therefore there is no life, no greater, fuller life, beyond. You cannot separate these things; they always hang together - faith, life, enlargement.

All the great crises in the history of God's people, as recorded in the Scriptures, had these three features. Beginning right at the beginning, with Adam, in the first chapters of Genesis, it is perfectly plain there that the whole question of establishment, of enlargement and of life hung upon faith, and that when he refused, or ceased, to believe God, that was a dead stop, a full stop. There was no more. At that point death entered in. The possibility of fellowship with God, and of all that God can mean in the life, hung entirely upon his faith - or upon his refusal to believe. If only he had believed God, the way would have been wide open to enlargement, establishment and life, continuous and unceasing.

Moving on in the Book of Genesis to chapters 15 and 17, some passages from which we have placed at the head of this meditation, we come to Abraham. The Lord comes in with Abraham on this line of enlargement, of establishment and of life. Those are the three great things that sum up Abraham's life with God. And everything hung upon faith. All that God said about this multiplying, this tremendous increase and enlargement; about the finality of things - establishing him in the covenant for ever; and about this wonderful principle of life - so apparent in the case of Abraham, when death would argue that there was no prospect at all in himself or in Sarah or any situation, yet life is in view in spite of it all - all those things just hung upon faith. He believed God. If he had not, there would have been nothing.

In the Book of Exodus, we find the great crisis in the national life of Israel - the deliverance from Egypt. Chapter 12 of Exodus just rests upon this: 'The whole question here is that of your release with a view to your enlargement; it is a question of your being established and brought to finality, to fullness; and it is a question of your life.' The central thought of that chapter is perhaps life, is it not? The slaying of Egypt's firstborn, on the one side, and the deliverance of Israel into life through death, on the other. But it all hung upon this matter of faith - faith in action: whether they would take the lamb, whether they would sprinkle the blood, whether they would gird their loins and take their staff in their hand. Everything depended upon an attitude and spirit of believing God.

Passing through Numbers into the Book of Joshua, we find that here it is the land that is in view - the land of promise, with all that it meant to them historically and all that it means typically and spiritually. What a matter of enlargement that was! From the wilderness, with all its emptiness and 'pent-up-ness', into the largeness, fullness and liberty of being established in the land. There was never, in God's mind, any thought or purpose of permanence in the wilderness at all. That was only a phase of things to be got through quickly as the spiritual condition of His people would allow. His thought for them was - into the land and established for ever. The promise to Abraham was that the land was covenanted for ever: finality. And then through Jordan, running there between Numbers and Joshua, between the wilderness and the land, and overflowing all its banks, speaking of death to be overcome in its fullness, in its depths; and into the land: here is life triumphant over death. But again, everything hung upon their faith. Would they move in faith? One generation could not do that, and perished in the wilderness. It was left to the next generation to enter the land. These three things rested upon faith.

Passing over the terrible four hundred years covered by the Book of Judges - the most terrible book in the Bible, I think - into the Books of Samuel, we find a transition toward a new state of enlargement. This phase will end with David and Solomon, with the enlargement of the kingdom beyond anything that had ever been before, with establishment and life. Again, it is all on the basis of faith. It was faith in Samuel's mother, for instance, that brought in Samuel. But we cannot stay with all the detail. At last, as we know, faith was lost, and unbelief

prevailed. Once again we see a return to limitation, to bondage, to uncertainty, to spiritual death. It all hangs upon faith.

As we take up the New Testament, we find that the issue is still that of enlargement, of establishment, and of fullness of life, and the question now is - Believe it! - a question of faith. These are the things, for instance, governing the first chapters of the Book of the Revelation, where the churches are dealt with. It is a matter here of spiritual enlargement or spiritual limitation: either of being established, or of having the lampstand moved out of its place, with nothing established, nothing final. It is a matter of life, through the Living One Who became dead and is alive for evermore. The challenge is on whether it is to be life or death, and it is focused in the one question of faith. Finally, as we reach the last chapters of the Revelation, we find these things brought to fullness, in the great City as a symbolic representation of the Church. How great it is, how full, how enlarged, how solid! It is established. How living it is, too! Abundant life is its most central feature. And it is the very embodiment of tried, tested and proved faith.

Here, then, is the whole Bible gathered into this, and our Christian lives are based upon the Bible, the whole Bible. What does that mean? It means this, that our lives are concerned with spiritual fullness, as we shall see as we go on; with our being established to eternity, and not carried away with time; and with the great matter of Divine life brought into complete triumph over the last enemy, death. And the thing that governs and comprehends the Christian life in these three aspects is the whole matter of faith: tried faith, proved faith, established faith, perfected faith.

### **God's Reaction Against Emptiness**

Let us now look for a few minutes at these words, these terms, that we have been employing. We will take for the present just this matter of enlargement. We can use the alternative word 'fullness' - and we shall do so, quite extensively - but I have here a special thought in my mind in preferring this word 'enlargement'. This whole matter of enlargement, whether the Lord is going to enlarge us, whether we are going to be enlarged, is a very living question and issue, for enlargement is a governing thought of God. All the way through the Bible, as we have seen, God's thought is enlargement. God is always thinking in terms of enlargement, of increase, of final fullness. God never finds any pleasure at all in emptiness and in smallness. God dislikes emptiness, and always reacts against it.

As we open our Bibles at the first page of Genesis, what is almost the first thing that we read? After: "In the beginning God...", and then a few words more, we read: "And the earth was without form and void" - that is 'waste and *empty*' - "and the Spirit of God..." The earth was empty, and the Spirit of God - did what? - reacted against the state of emptiness. It was as though God said, 'This is not My mind at all; this is altogether contrary to My thought. I am against this, and I am going to do something about it.' God would have everything in Divine fullness - that is, in abundance. That is His thought for the earth, and for His people. And so the Spirit of God, brooding over this void, this emptiness, begins to work, and every stage and phase of the Divine activity is to fill. He fills the earth with the vast range of the vegetable kingdom - seeds in abundance and life within the seeds capable of endless production and reproduction. He fills the earth with the immense variety of the animal kingdom. He fills the sea, and says: "Let the waters *swarm* with *swarms* of living creatures" (Genesis 1:20). And then, creating man, He says: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (verse 28). 'I am against this emptiness, this void'. And on He moves on that principle,

governed by that thought. Reaching Abraham, He says: "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore" (Genesis 22:17). Comprehend that, if you can! That is Divine thought. Beyond all comprehension, God thinks in terms of enlargement.

How much can be gathered up in the Bible on this matter! The Lord Jesus, for instance, came to express the thoughts of God in practical terms, and, amongst many other things, He spoke of a great feast which was made. The guests were bidden, but they did not come - they made excuses. And so the man who gave the feast said to his servant: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be *filled*" (Luke 14:15-24). Here we see Christ bringing God's thoughts into this world - 'That my house may be *filled*.' But perhaps in the New Testament the day of Pentecost is the greatest example and expression of this Divine thought. When the Spirit came, a mighty, rushing wind "*filled* all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). And then it is applied to each believer: "Be *filled* with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

### **The Danger of Passivity**

It is thus clear that enlargement is a governing thought with God. But the Lord Jesus has not only pointed out that this is what God would have, but He has said on the other hand that it is exceedingly dangerous to be empty. He spoke of a certain 'house', which was a man, possessed of a demon, an unclean spirit; and He visualized the casting out of the unclean spirit: but, although the house is 'swept and garnished', it is left empty; and, because no other occupant takes possession, the unclean spirit comes back to his old home, taking seven other more evil than himself, and fills the empty house (Matthew 12:43-45). It is a dangerous thing to be empty, to leave a void. If God does not fill, the Devil will. Beware of negative conditions, of not being positive and not being definite. Beware of vacuums in your heart, in your mind, in your life. David was one day on the house-top in a state of 'vacuum', at a time when kings go out to war (2 Samuel 11:1-2) - and he was a king, and a warring king. But instead of being occupied in a positive way, he was in a passive state, and we know the disaster that overtook him, from which he never recovered all his life. It is a dangerous thing to be empty. The Devil will see to the filling up of any space that he can occupy. The Lord wants to fill to the exclusion of all else.

### **The Fullness of God**

The ultimate word in this matter in the Bible is: "that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). Think of that! This is said to believers together in their corporate, related life - to the Church, which is "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Think of it: the fullness of God! - that is, God coming in such a way that there is no room for anything else. It was like that at the dedication of Solomon's temple, in the Old Testament. When the priests moved out of the sanctuary, the glory of the Lord moved in and filled the house, and the priests could no longer stand to minister (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:11-14). When the Lord fills, there is no room for anything or anyone else. That is the fullness of God.

### **Emptiness the Result of Judgement**

Returning to that word 'void' or 'empty' that we find at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, it seems to me that this represents the result of a judgment. That, of course, has already been surmised on other grounds. But the following considerations are perhaps confirmatory. When the Lord sent His people Israel into Babylonian captivity for seventy years, the land became waste. The land fell

into a state that could well be described in the terms used to describe the state of the earth at the beginning - void, waste and empty. Now, the Babylonian captivity of Israel was a judgment upon their unbelief and their idolatry, and the waste state into which the land fell was surely a part of that judgment; and it would therefore seem that "in the beginning", also, the desolation was the result of a judgment upon a former creation.

But what is the point of this? The issue must have been this - as it has always been - that God was not allowed to fill all things. God's place was either shared with other things, or God was driven out. The end of this present world, as is shown to us in the New Testament, is going to be like that. There will be a point at which God will be finally rejected by this world, and will have no place. We are moving fast toward that time. What will be the result? It will be the burning up of this world - judgment, destruction - and a longer or shorter period of desolation before there is a new heaven and a new earth, and all things are created anew. Judgment is always upon this one thing - as to whether God is all and in all, or not. Therefore enlargement - the fullness which is God's thought - rests upon this matter of God having full place; and that is the basis of all testing of faith. God presses this point closer and closer as we go on: whether we will believe God sufficiently to let Him have His place in an impossible situation.

### **The Fullness of God as Light**

Now, what do we mean by the fullness of God? It is nothing less than the nature of God filling all things. "God is light", the Scripture says (1 John 1:5): then where God is there is no darkness, there is no room for darkness; and when God comes in fullness there is "no darkness at all." It is all "light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8). And the Lord is moving on this line with you and with me. He is seeking to get us completely out of our darkness into His light; to bring us into the light as He is in the light. And how great a factor is faith in this matter of coming into the light of the Lord, coming to know the Lord, coming into understanding, or whatever expression you may use for light. It is seeing, it is knowing, it is understanding.

But you and I never come into one additional ray of *real* light - I do not mean information, I mean *spiritual light* - except along the line of tests of faith, faith really tested. A sister in the Lord, who felt that she was far too short-tempered, too quickly provoked, said to a dear servant of God, 'Oh, I do need more patience - do pray for me that I may have more patience!' The servant of God said, 'All right, let us get down and pray now', and so they knelt down and he prayed, 'Lord, do please send more tribulation into this dear sister's life.' And she stopped him and said, 'No, I did not say I wanted tribulation - I want patience.' 'Ah, but', he replied, 'the Word says: "tribulation worketh patience"!' (Romans 5:3).

Yes: we want more of the Lord, but we are not always so ready to go the way that He would take us in order to have more of Himself. But it is that way - the way of tribulation; and what is tribulation if it is not the testing of faith? We are put into situations where only faith in God will enable us to live and to go on. Yet it is possible - it is so possible. Early last year, during my visit to California, a brother there proposed that we should go to see some dear friends, living about sixty miles away, who had begged that we should visit them. These dear children of God were living in perhaps one of the most worldly, unpropitious, impossible situations imaginable - the week-end resort of all the Hollywood stars. I cannot describe the utter abandonment to the flesh. Our two friends were living in a large trailer, or caravan, right at the centre of a great trailer park, surrounded by all these worldly people in their luxurious trailer homes, in an atmosphere of the utmost sensuality, fleshliness, indulgence. We went in, and had a most blessed

afternoon with them on the things of the Lord - a most precious time, with a real touch of heaven - and when we had spent the whole afternoon with them, a brother said: 'Perhaps you will not believe it, but there are sixteen out-and-out Christians in this trailer park. I am going to fetch some of them'. He went across to another trailer, and brought back two dear children of God, elderly, saintly people; and, without any going round matters at all or talking on generalities, we were right on the things of the Lord instantly, and we could have gone on all night. The brother told us, 'We all meet here in this trailer, sixteen of us, and have most blessed times of fellowship.'

Why am I telling you about this? In the most unlikely place on earth - yes, the most impossible place for anything of a spiritual character, for anything really of the Lord - there, right in that terrible place, are saints walking in white raiment, in living fellowship with the Lord. Do not say, 'Oh, the place I have to live and work in is impossible for any spiritual life or spiritual growth - everything is against me.' Remember that the Lord can enlarge you anywhere if He calls you to be there. Never use the argument of the impossible. Just think of Abraham and the impossible. He came into enlargement, but not because everything was propitious, not because everything made it so easy and was so helpful. No, there can be light in the darkest place if the Lord is there. When I first heard of that situation, I had expressed the wish that those dear friends could have been got out of it, but when I left them I changed my view entirely. I do not know that they would really be the better for getting out of this. This is the thing that is enlarging them spiritually: it is throwing them on the Lord, it is making them prove the Lord. There is nothing here for them but the Lord; everything else is against Him.

The fullness of God is in terms of light, even in darkness; of love - for God is love - in a realm of hatred; of life in a realm of death; and of holiness in a realm of unholiness. "That ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

There is much more about this matter of enlargement. It was the governing thing in the sovereign gifts of the ascended Lord. "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men... and He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets;... and some, pastors and teachers" - for what? - "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:8, 11-13). Every Divine gift in ministry has fullness as its object and its governing motive.

Let me close with this for the moment, that the test as to whether a thing is of God is always spiritual measure. It is not the measure of our doctrinal knowledge, nor even the measure of our Bible knowledge as such. It is not the accuracy or correctness of our technique in form and procedure. It is the measure of God. We can have all those other things, without there being really any measure of God. That is what counts.

## Chapter Three

### THE KEY OF FAITH (CONCLUDED)

Reading: Genesis 15:5, 17:1-8; Romans 4:17-24; Hebrews 11:8-10; Revelation 21:9-18, 22:1-2.

We were speaking about God's governing thought of enlargement, bringing to remembrance His words to Abraham concerning the immense increase which He purposed for His servant; and then we saw how every bit of that increase came along the line of a testing of faith.

This is not just teaching. These things are very pertinent and appropriate to our need at the present time. The whole work of the enemy is by every means and agency to limit what is of God, to reduce it, to make it as small as possible and keep it so. God's thoughts, of course, are entirely to the contrary; but God's thoughts do not just operate and come to realization automatically. He is dealing with living people, not with a mechanical world. It is in a people that His thoughts are to have their fulfilment, individually and collectively. For the realization of His thoughts, therefore, all the work of the enemy has to be overcome.

#### The Battle of Unbelief

Now the work of the enemy is not only from the outside - it is from the inside. The enemy has got a very strong and deep foothold in man by nature, in you and in me, and it is no small thing to enlarge us unto the enlargement of God. There is very much in us that ever seeks to frustrate and limit God. That foothold of the enemy in us by nature is something that ever stands in the way of God's thoughts, as a positive force to resist God. The essential nature of the foothold is *unbelief*, and there is not one of us, no matter how advanced may be the point of our spiritual progress, who has no battle remaining with the unbelief of his own heart.

"The sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1), which impedes, retards, and arrests us in the spiritual race, is unbelief. You know that this letter to the Hebrews is all concerned with going on - going on to fullness; and here, in this metaphor of the race - 'running with patience the race that is set before us' - we find the exhortation to lay aside this impeding thing that so easily besets us. It is unbelief. In the original text, the passage follows immediately, without any chapter division, upon the eleventh chapter of the letter, which is the chapter of faith. Thus, in that quite general way, it is very appropriate to our present need to speak about this matter of 'faith unto enlargement', for as it was with Abraham, so it is with us all.

But of course it has particular and specific applications. In the work of the Lord, in a ministry, in a testimony, in an instrumentality for Divine purpose, there are times when the direction and course of everything seems to be to close it down, to thwart, frustrate, and bring it to an end; and because of that, a very great test of faith arises. Those concerned are thrown into the vortex of a great conflict as to whether God, after all, wants this, means this, is after this - or whether, in view of the accumulation of frustrating, crippling, limiting efforts and activities, some mistake has not been made, and the whole thing needs to be reviewed and revised. At such times, the enemy does press very hard with questions. It is a time of severe testing of faith. And what is true collectively becomes so true in individual lives from time to time.

## **Abraham's Tests of Faith**

Now, the point and the argument of all that we see in the Bible is this: that the very testing of faith is God's way of enlargement. Fresh enlargements will come by fresh testings. That is the order of things. It ever has been so. You see, here is Abraham. With an oath and a covenant, God has announced to him His thoughts about this great enlargement. "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" (Genesis 13:16). "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore" (22:17). God has not left Abraham in any doubt as to His thoughts about enlargement.

But look at the testings into which Abraham was immediately brought. He had, speaking naturally, every ground and reason for saying, 'I have made a mistake in thinking that God meant that. I have misunderstood what the Lord meant; I have been caught in some illusion.' It would have been very easy for Abraham, under the pressure and the trial, to have so reacted. But the point is this, that the Lord has done, where Abraham is concerned, far more than Abraham ever thought. For you see, all that great multitude presented to us in the last book of the Bible - 'a great multitude, which no man could number' (Revelation 7:9), 'ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands' (Revelation 5:1) - Paul says they are the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29): not Jews, but believers, the children of faith (3:7). Every one who has reposed faith in God is the seed of Abraham - a countless seed. It has come to pass. But see how Abraham's faith was progressively tested on this matter of enlargement. It was not one battle fought once and for all, and settled; but over a long life, till he was a hundred years old, in different forms, at different stages and with accentuated poignancy, again and again the test of enlargement was raised.

But every test passed meant some further enlargement. We have said that that is a way and a law of the Lord. It is something to hide in our hearts. The Psalmist said: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11). The sin of all sins, where God is concerned, is unbelief, and here is a word that we must hide in our hearts against the day of trial - the day when we feel our faith is being so tested and tried and pressed by the situations in which we find ourselves, that it must mean limitation - it must work out to curtailment, if not to an utter end. The Bible all the way through argues the other way: that such tests of faith are ever alongside of God's expressed and revealed mind, that these tests are the way for the realization of His purpose, and that the thought of God is, in the first place, enlargement.

## **Establishment**

But if spiritual enlargement is a need, and if the work of God, the testimony of Jesus, needs releasing and enlarging, is this not equally true in the matter of establishment - the establishing of the Lord's people? If God is after enlargement, He is certainly revealed to be equally desirous of, and working toward, that which is solid, that which is substantial, that which is characterized by stability, endurance, steadfastness, trustworthiness, faithfulness, responsibility, depth. These words touch the situation very, very closely.

We may recall that the New Testament was written almost entirely for the establishment of believers. Typical phrases are: "I long to see you... to the end ye may be established" (Romans 1:11); and: "Now He That establisheth us with you in Christ... is God" (2 Corinthians 1:21).

God works for that which will endure. A characteristic of God is the "for ever" feature. "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). The



chief factor in establishment is faith. Firstly it is the establishment *of* faith - the objective ground. This is the message and meaning of the Letter to the Romans. There can be no subjective work unto this objective position is secured. Indeed, it would be very dangerous to proceed with the subjective otherwise. All further and fuller work *in* us necessitates a strong and settled faith in what has been done *for* us, and in what our standing is by grace.

Then comes the establishment *in* faith This means the removal of all false ground - any ground of confidence or trust which is other than God Himself. In this category of false ground come our feelings, theories, traditions, and all external supports. All these will prove false and incapable of bearing the strain of true faith's testing. In order to keep to reality and true life God shatters all false positions, shakes all false ground, and strips off all vain confidence.

This applies to our lives and our work. It is very impressive to note that, when Paul was a prisoner and when many old friends forsook him, when churches which were his life-work turned from him, he then wrote such tremendously assured and confident letters as those called "To the Ephesians", "To the Colossians", and "To the Philippians". This does not look as though he believed that the real work was breaking down. "Unto the ages of the ages" is characteristic of these messages.

Paul knew what he meant when, in writing to the Thessalonians, he used the phrase: "Your work of faith" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). His was that, and it paid large dividends, although both the faith and the work underwent severe testings.

## Chapter Four

### FAITH IN RELATION TO LIFE

Reading: Romans 4:16-25.

We are being led to see the relationship of faith to three things.

Firstly, faith in relationship to *enlargement*. We have taken note that God's thought revealed for His people is enlargement unto His own fullness. "All the fullness of God" is the word which indicates God's thought concerning His people. But every fresh movement toward enlargement, or every stage in enlargement, comes about by a fresh challenge to faith - faith being tested in a new way as not hitherto - and by faith's triumph there is further enlargement. The Scriptures show, from beginning to end, that there is no enlargement, no increase of God, in any other way.

Secondly, we see faith in relationship to *establishment*. We have seen the thought of God to have things in a state of stability, endurance, steadfastness, trustworthiness; something substantial, something deeply rooted and grounded and immovable. God works along that line, seeking to eliminate all those elements in us which are weak, unreliable, unable to carry a weight and take responsibility; to bring us to the place where we are established in Christ. But every bit of this work of confirming, establishing, rooting and grounding is connected with some further testing or proving of faith. Every fresh storm sends our roots deeper down, to take a firmer hold. It is along the line of faith's proving that we become established. Where there is no testing or trying, no adversity, we are weak and unreliable. So we see that, right through the Scriptures, God is moving towards having things settled and fixed, after His own nature: eternal, abiding, enduring for ever. The whole Bible shows that this is brought about by faith.

In the third place, we see faith in relation to *life*. That is to be our occupation at this present time, with just a closing word on faith itself.

#### Faith in Relation to Life

I need hardly take you through the Scriptures to see how these two things go together. Much will come to mind as we proceed. I just remind you of the familiar fact that this matter of life bounds the whole Scripture. The Bible opens with the tree of life, and it closes with the tree of life, and that is the great issue from beginning to end. From one angle, as we were saying earlier, the Bible is all about this issue of life as over against death. We find, therefore, as in the case of the other two things - enlargement and establishment - that God has left us in no doubt whatever as to His mind on the matter. He has made it perfectly clear that His thought is life, and life in fullness. So much so that the Lord Jesus, in His coming into this world, reaching with one hand right back to the beginning, and with the other hand right on to the ages of the ages yet to be, declares that He is in that position on one ground and with one purpose: "I am come that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

#### Enlargement Depends Upon Life

Now these two things of which we have spoken - enlargement and establishment - are inseparably bound up with this matter of life.

All God's enlargements are by life. We see a parable of this in the work of creation. At the very beginning we find God filling the void, the waste, the emptiness which was the primal state of this world - we find God filling it in every realm in terms of life. His increasing fullness was along the line of life. That is a parable of God's way. Increase and fullness in the Christian life, in the people of God, is always in terms of life. When God adds, it is always additional life. All God's work has the issue that there is more life present than ever there was before. And so progressively, by crises and stages, God is moving with His people - where they will let Him, where they will not waver through unbelief - in the direction of His ultimate fullness on the basis of constantly increasing life.

### **Establishment Depends Upon Life**

The same is true in relation to establishment - the work of confirming, making things stable, solid, deep. This again is always in relation to life: confirming in life, making strong in life. The essential element in this life is its eternity. An increase of life is always an indication of something deeper having been done in the heart, the emergence from some state of uncertainty, some difficulty, some dark experience, in a crisis, through the victory of faith. The emergence just adds more life - that is all. It is like that every time: we find that we are experiencing and enjoying more life. Life is the basis of our becoming more settled.

There are many people who think that there are other things which lead to consolidation and establishment, to certainty and assurance. But it is not that way at all. You do not get established by more teaching, or by additional information, even about Divine things. You do not even become spiritually established by knowing your Bible better. That is not to say that you should not seek to know it better, but the real establishment is that which comes through life known in ourselves. "And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life" (1 John 5:11). The testimony is not a form of teaching, an interpretation of truth, a system of doctrine, or a way of doing things. "And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life", and to be established means to be knowing this life in constant increase.

### **The 'Evidence of God' is Life**

We will now take a look at what we will call some of the 'evidences of God'. Let us say at once that the inclusive evidence of God is just life. The *evidence* of God - the proof, the testimony to God, and the testimony to what is of God - is life. Let us go back to that original criterion in the symbolism of the beginning: the tree of life. It is perfectly clear that that tree of life, and what it represented and symbolized, held the whole issue of whether God was going to continue with man or not, whether man was going to continue with God or not, whether their relationship was going to remain intact. The 'evidence' of God was centred there.

Now that tree evidently represented another and different life from what man already possessed. God had brought in the living things. The waters swarmed with living creatures; the air swarmed with the living fowl; the earth was full of living creatures and living vegetation. Then man had been created, into his nostrils there had been breathed the "breath of life" (Genesis 2:7), and he had become an animate being. He had what we all have by nature - this natural life. It was *after* the imparting of that kind of life, and man becoming a living soul, that God pointed to the tree of life, and made that the issue of life and death. It was not the life that was in man that was the issue of life and death, because man did not forfeit that life which was in him when he disobeyed. The tree evidently represented and symbolized another life than that which God had already breathed into him - a different life altogether.

## **Divine Life Forfeited**

Death, therefore, came to mean two things. In the first place, it came to mean a change in man as he was. Although he would continue as an animate being over a tenure of years, a change took place in him. We will not stay to analyse that change, but by disobedience he became different even in his own natural being. Secondly, he forfeited his right to this other and extra and really true life, as represented by the tree. He never inherited that, he never possessed that. It throws a little light upon John's words about the Lord Jesus, that "to as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12). You see the whole question of faith coming in relation to the right. It is the right, in other words, to this other, Divine, life, which is through being begotten of God. The right to that life was forfeited by Adam through disobedience, or unfaith. The right to that life is restored through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Now Satan said, 'Hath God said, Thou shalt surely die? Thou shalt not surely die!' What a categorical statement! Now note: Adam, apart from his known rupture in fellowship with God through his disobedience because of unbelief, probably was not conscious of what had happened. True, a frown and a shadow came over the face of God; there was no longer the light and the clearness of fellowship; but man went on living. He did not there and then fall dead and perish. He went on living quite a long time, went on growing, developing, enlarging. When you see the tremendous enlargement after its kind that came from that man - his children, family, tribe, race - it looks very much as though the Devil was right. 'Thou shalt not surely die'. God was wrong, the Devil was right.

## **The Delusion of a False Life**

But what has happened? There has entered into man a deep and terrible delusion - the illusion of a false life, in which there is a lie right at the very core. And that has surely worked itself out, and is still working itself out. There is increase of days, unto many years, it may be; there is development and enlargement, of its kind, in the matter of this world; but right at the core of it all there is bitterness and disappointment. At last, at most, emptiness, disillusionment. What has it all been for? What is it all about?

And the most dissatisfied people are always those who have the most. That is true, is it not? The people who have the most and have not the Lord are the most dissatisfied people in this world. The evidences of it are patent. As I was saying on a previous occasion, a year or two ago I was in a part of the world where the last whim and fancy is satiated to the full. Everything that the soul of man could crave or ask for seems to be available. In Southern California, you see acres and acres and miles and miles of the most wonderful fruit. I picked sackfuls of the most beautiful grapefruit and oranges that you ever saw. But my friend, on whose fruit-farm I was staying, said, 'Do you know, it is so prodigal that, in order to keep any market at all for it, tons and tons of this beautiful fruit are put into a ditch, and acid is poured over it, so that no one will get hold of it to try to make a business out of it.' Poor people who might make a little out of this surplus are deprived of it in order to keep some sort of market.

And it is like that, not only in natural products, but in pleasure. The word 'Hollywood' has come to connote the very ultimate in the gratification of human desire. You can see it all there is display. But oh! The feverish, the restless, the uncertainty, the anxiety! The biggest hospital in the world is there in Los Angeles, and four thousand cases are treated every day, in a country like that where every possible aid to health is available. What is it all about? It is the strain of coping

with life. Out in a very beautiful suburb, I saw, as I went along, house after house up for sale, or to let; and I asked my friend, 'What is the meaning of this?'; 'Oh, everybody within miles of this city is living as if they were on the edge of a volcano, over this atomic bomb business. They are all moving out, as far out as they can get, because they think that any day the atomic bomb may be dropped on Los Angeles.' With everything conceivable to fill life, people are living in strain and tension and fear. I have not exaggerated the picture, because I could not.

I have cited this as an illustration of the truth that the more men have, the more dissatisfied they are. The more you give to this life, the more it will take - and can take - and the more it will demand, and the more unsatisfied it is. It wears out in no time. The whole thing fails to last - it just does not last; and that is the life that the Devil has given in place of this other life. You and I may have very little in this world - nothing at all comparable to a Californian set-up - and yet have the Lord Jesus in our hearts and be perfectly satisfied. The difference is a very practical thing. The Devil said, "Thou shalt not surely die", and man just swallowed it: he thought that God was wrong, and the Devil was right; and this is what it has led to - a false life, hollow at the core, never, never answering to man's real need; a mockery in the end, the fruit looking beautiful but falling from the trees before it is ripe.

But in that other life, represented by the tree of life, it is all the other way. This life has nothing to do with things at all: it has to do with a Person. This life does not wear out: it wears infinitely - it survives. It is not, like the other, kept going by artificial respiration and stimulants - and how artificial they are! This life is maintained from a living source.

That is very searching. It is very, very important to be quite sure that this thing has taken place with every new convert: that there is no illusion or delusion about this, but that they have really become, definitely and surely, the recipients of this other life - this life that will not require a constant succession of stimulants from without, but which, when all outward things cease, will still go on. That is going to be the test.

Now this illusion can get into religion, and that is the place where the Devil likes to have it more than anywhere else. The Lord had something to say on that very matter to the church at Sardis: "Thou hast a name" - a reputation - "That thou livest, and thou art dead" (Revelation 3:1). A reputation for life - and yet dead. The eyes of flame see through the false situation - the false reputation, the false name. It would not be difficult to imagine or portray what a church like that would be. We need not stay with it. There are many things that have a semblance of life, that look like life - what people call life - but they are not life. They require external 'stimulants' to be applied all the time to keep the thing going. What the Lord calls life is another thing altogether.

## **Marks of Divine Life**

### **(1) Freshness**

One of the thoughts associated with this Divine life is newness, or freshness. "That... we... might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). That word 'new' in our English versions has two Greek words behind it. One means something that never was before; the other carries the thought of that which is young and fresh. This Divine life is, of course, something that no one has ever possessed before, outside of Christ, but its mark, its characteristic, is its freshness - its freedom from the 'earth touch'. This earth is an accursed earth; it is in death, it is under judgment, and all that belongs to it is under judgment: if this earth touches

anything, it touches it with death. This life of which we are speaking is completely free from the earth touch, and free from the touch of man as he is by nature. It is fresh, therefore, and for its freshness it demands that it shall be kept free from this earth and kept free from man's touch.

That has been the issue all the way along. The life of God comes in, and is regnant and wonderfully fresh and beautiful; and then what? Man must needs take hold of it in some way, put it into his mould, run it according to his ideas, organize it and set up machinery for it, and it is not long before the freshness has gone. It is touched with something that takes the bloom off it; in the course of time it has become old; and - perhaps I may be permitted to say this, as one who is no longer young! - God has no interest in anything that is old. God is only interested in that life in us which is of Himself, and His interest is to keep it fresh. "Even to old age... and even to hoar hairs", there is still freshness if the life of God is the principle upon which we are living.

Yes, but we must keep our hands off, and we must keep the earth touch away. Oh, man's terrible habit of wanting to take hold of, and run, the life of God. It has killed more works of God than anything else, brought an end to wonderful movements of the Spirit. Man has taken hold, brought things into his framework, under the control and direction of his committee. Very well; the Lord withdraws, and the freshness of His life is no longer found. Freshness, newness, is the mark of God's life.

The Church is His new creation. The Church is His new cruse, to refer to Elisha and the falling fruit of the trees of Jericho because of the lack of this vital element in the water. "Bring me a new cruse", he said, "and put salt therein" (2 Kings 2:20). The waters were healed. And Pentecost is the counterpart of that. The Church is the new cruse with the life in it, to counteract all the death in this world: there is newness of life, and newness of vessel. The Lord Jesus put His finger upon this very principle when He said: "No man" (He might have added, 'much less God') "putteth new wine into old wine-skins" (Mark 2:22). It is folly. 'If you do that, you will lose everything', He said. "No man seweth a piece of undressed cloth on an old garment" (verse 21); neither does God do that kind of thing. He must have everything new and fresh. We are citizens of the *new* Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12; 21:2); and so we could go on. If you look up the words 'new' and 'newness', you will be surprised how much they cover in the New Testament. Everything is new where this life is.

## **(2) Productivity**

The second feature of this life is its productiveness, or productivity. That is God's method of increase. There is all the difference between putting on, adding to, accretion, from the outside, and increase from the inside. That is God's principle, the organic principle of increase and multiplication by life from within, and it really does happen that way. Life produces life, and life produces organisms after its own kind: the seed has the life in itself to reproduce, to multiply a hundredfold.

That is a testimony, but it is also a test and a challenge. If there is no increase, then there is something wrong in the matter of the life. If you and I are not bearing fruit, if we are not really in the way of increase, then we need to look to this matter of our life. For it is inevitable, it is spontaneous. If there is to be productivity, there must be life: and if there *is* life, then there is reproduction - unless, of course, we thwart the life or get across the life. If somehow or other we block up the wells, then our fruitfulness ceases.

### **(3) Inexhaustibility**

Further, this life is characterized by its inexhaustibility. There is no end to it, no exhausting it; it just goes on. As we have already said, it does not get old. We may get old, but that life in us does not get old at all. It goes right on; it is inexhaustible.

### **(4) Incorruptibility**

And then, because it is God's life, it is incorruptible. Life is symbolized by salt in the Bible. The symbolism of the new cruse and the salt is just that of the vessel of God with the life of God in it. The presence of that life is the counter to the presence of corruption, wherever it is.

This, of course, is quite clearly seen in the first chapters of the Book of the Revelation, containing the challenge and message to the churches. It was clearly a time of spiritual decay: but we would go further, and say 'of spiritual corruption'. Strong language, but justifiable. "Thou sufferest the woman Jezebel" (2:20); "Thou hast... some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel" (2:14). Here is corruption, and the challenge to that state of corruption in the first place is indicated by the announcement of the Lord Himself. "I am... the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore" (1:17-18). It is as though He were saying, 'I am measuring you by the standard of this incorruptible life, on the principle of this incorruptible, deathless, death-conquering life: I am challenging you in your corruption.' The import of the message is this: 'These conditions of corruption are due to something having arrested the life. If you had the life vibrant and regnant and triumphant, there would be none of these conditions at all.'

The issue, then, for the overcoming, the setting aside, of all corruption, is that of life. The corrective for false teaching - for heterodoxy - is not orthodoxy. Let us say, changing the words: the corrective for error is life. That is what the Scriptures show. It was so with the seven churches. John, who wrote the Revelation, at about the same time also wrote his letters, and these likewise deal with falsehood, error, decline, decay, corruption, Antichrist, and all the rest - a bad state coming amongst believers; and John's great word in his letters and in the Revelation, as well as in his Gospel, is *life*. That emerges from the most elementary study of his writings.

John begins his Gospel: "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" (1:4), and that is the keynote to the Gospel all through. His letters are on that note all the time. "The witness (testimony) is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; He that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (1 John 5:11-12). At the beginning of the Revelation you find: "I am... the Living one" (1:17-18); you pass on to the "four living ones" (4:6), and their testimony and influence; and you close the Revelation with the "tree of life" and the "river of water of life" (22:1-2). It is all about life. But that is all presented in a day of corruption. The answer to corruption is not argument, but Divine life.

### **(5) Intelligence: Life Recognizes Life**

This life is something which is only appreciated and understood by those who have it. Those who do not possess it can see its effect or its fruit, but they do not understand it at all. They may say, 'Well, those people have got something that I do not know anything about: I do not understand it at all, I do not know what it is. They seem to be happy about it, but I am certainly a stranger to all that.' Or it

may not affect them at all. They may come in where there is abundant life and go away unaffected. They just do not understand it or appreciate it. But those of us who have this life both appreciate and understand it. We cannot explain it to anyone else, any more than we can explain what natural life is. No one can explain what life is. But if we are spiritually alive, really spiritually alive, and we go in amongst other children of God, we sense something. It may be we feel death, a lack of life, something here that is not alive; there is some check to life here. On the other hand, we may sense the presence of life. Now, that capacity to appreciate and to understand is the guide of the Lord's people. It is a very intelligent faculty - it is, indeed, our 'intelligence', in more senses than one. Why do we say, 'Something is wrong here', because we do not sense the life; there is something that is not alive. We are '*alive*' to the fact that something is wrong!

I believe that is exactly what Paul knew when he found those disciples at Ephesus. They were having some wonderful Bible teaching from Apollos, who was a man mighty in the Scriptures; but Paul had to say when he came down to them: 'You have a lot of Bible teaching here, and you are professing disciples of the Lord - but what is the matter with you? There is something amiss here. Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' (Acts 19:2). The Holy Spirit in Paul, as the Spirit of life, registered here the absence of life: there was no witness of life, even with all the Bible teaching and the profession. The Spirit enabled Paul to put his finger upon the situation, and to clear it up.

### **Life Through Faith**

Now, all the Lord's progress with us, as we have said, the Lord's enlarging, the Lord's establishing, is along this line of life. But this life is all governed by faith. We are thinking much of Abraham, and we have something to say about him yet. With him, every fresh movement toward enlargement and consolidation and increase of life was by way of fresh testing of faith. Everything rests upon this matter of tried and proved faith.

If you and I pass, then, into a time when our faith is being sorely tried, really being put through it, let us ask the Lord to help us to adjust ourselves to this: for this is not unto death, but unto life. This is not permitted by the Lord in order to bring an end in death. This is meant by Him to bring us into larger life yet. If only we could rest in that assurance, it would rob the dark times and the difficult times of their deathliness, and make them the very ground upon which we might come into newness of life through fresh victories of faith. Faith is the way to life through trial, testing, suffering, adversity.



## Chapter Five

### IN RELATION TO GOD'S PRINCIPLE

*"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went... By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back"* (Hebrews 11:8, 17-19).

We have so far spoken in a very general way about these matters related to faith - what God is seeking in enlargement, establishment and life. We will now go a step further, and see these things being worked out in the life and experience of His people, individually and collectively, bringing these truths into practical application and relationship to life. We shall therefore return first of all to the very practical outworking of truth in the life of Abraham. Abraham's life can be gathered up into four things: faith in relation to God's purpose, faith in relation to God's principle, faith in relation to God's patience, and faith in relation to God's passion. That comprehensive statement covers the whole course and meaning of his life.

#### God's Purpose in Calling Abraham

We know, I think, without any further comment or explanation, what God's purpose was in calling Abraham. That is perfectly clear in the very statements that we have read from the Book of Genesis. The Lord told him that He was going to do with him and through him: to make of him a great nation, and from him a multitude of nations - here was a great purpose, to have a seed according to God's own heart. Into that purpose Abraham was called. But the realization of the Divine purpose and the calling - for you notice that that is the word that is used: "Abraham, when he was *called*..." - was along the line of many testings of faith.

#### The Covenant Sign

I want to come particularly, at the present time, to the second of those four things - faith and God's principle. We know that, at a certain point in Abraham's relationship with God and God's dealings with him, a covenant sign was established, in the form of a rite, which was indelibly registered in his flesh and became the covenant sign for all his seed (Genesis 17:10-14, 23-27). That covenant sign or rite became the central meaning of Abraham's life, the very basis of all the thoughts of God where he was concerned. Its significance - for it was, after all, only a sign; Paul makes it perfectly clear that this is not merely a rite, but a principle - the significance of this sign or rite gathered into it everything of God's meaning. The principle of the thing had already been at work in the life of Abraham before it was formulated into the definite act, and it continued to be applied in principle right to the end of his life - that is, from the introduction of Abram on to the platform of Divine activities. It runs, moreover, not only through his life, but through the whole history of Israel, and is then taken up in its spiritual meaning in Christianity. The spiritual significance and principle of that rite is always the basis upon which God works.

It is found here right at the beginning, then, with the introduction of Abraham into our known history: "By faith Abraham, when he was called..." Stephen said: "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7:2); and you remember the terms of the call. "Get thee out

of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee" (Genesis 12:1). "By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed": he went out. The principle of circumcision began to work right at that point. It was faith's basic renunciation, by which there began to be placed between the old life and relationships and an entirely new one a severance, a cutting, a separation. On the one side was the ground of judgment - Ur of the Chaldees, and all that that meant; on the other side, the ground of righteousness. This is Paul's whole argument about Abraham in his letter to the Romans. So far as God's mind was concerned, it was intended to be a distinct act of severance from the ground of judgment to the ground of righteousness.

### **Separation From Country and Kindred**

We are told in the Book of Joshua that Abraham "served other gods" beyond the Euphrates (Joshua 24:2). Recent excavations in Ur have revealed a good deal about the times of Abraham, and amongst these uncoverings there have come to light the names of no fewer than five thousand gods who were worshipped at that time by the people of Chaldee in Ur. 'Your fathers worshipped other gods beyond the River'. "Get thee out of thy country". The significance, then, is: Come right out from every other object and form of worship, right out from anything and everything that shares the ground with God, right out from all that which disputes the rights of God - that is, from all the ground which lies under judgment.

Idolatry is a principle, not a form. When we speak about idolatry, there is usually conjured up in our minds some form of idols which the heathen worship, to which they bow down, or the icons and images of a false 'Christian' system - paganism and heathenism of any kind, wherever it is found. But idolatry is a far, far bigger thing than that. If there were five thousand gods in Ur of the Chaldees, there are five hundred thousand in the world. They are everywhere. They are in your heart and in mine - that which challenge's God's ground, that which disputes the rights of God, that which shares between God and something else. That is idolatry. I repeat: it is a principle, not just a form. The principle of circumcision is so much bigger than the rite. That is what the New Testament seeks to make clear. This thing is so much more than a rite in the body: this is something that ranges the whole realm of the flesh, the natural man. "Get thee out of thy country". This is thorough-going, drastic, tremendous; it leaves nothing outside.

"From thy kindred, and from thy father's house". Well, Abram started out from his country, as we know; but instead of fulfilling the whole commandment, he took his kindred and his father's house with him, and so the journey was arrested. The fact is that they moved to Haran, which was still in Chaldea, and so still under the government of these gods. They were even yet in the old territory, on the ground of judgment, still in the place where God's rights were challenged and disputed. And so God said, 'We cannot go any further while there is anything of that left.' And the move never came until Abram's father died.

Now, this may represent many things, but for the present I want to indicate that this means that we are not only called upon in an objective way to leave the world. The world has got to leave us. You can take a certain position in an outward way in relation to Christianity, but you may have carried it all with you in your heart. That is what Israel did in the wilderness. They left Egypt, but Egypt did not leave them: Egypt was still in their hearts, and they were constantly harking back to Egypt. This has got to become no mechanical profession, no association and attachment in an outward way to the things of God. This must be a matter of the heart. The father's house, the kindred - the sentimental associations, the affectionate relationships, the deep-down hereditary connections - these have to be severed. It has got to be a fundamental and drastic

renunciation. "Out of thy country... from thy kindred... from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee".

### **Abraham in the Land**

So, when his father was dead, he moved. But he still took some of his kindred with him who, until that connection was finally severed, were a constant nuisance to him. There were Lot and his family. However, he did move into the land. Yet here he is moving up and down in the land and not possessing one foot of it, dwelling in tents; he is in the land, but with no possession.

### **A Deep Work of the Cross**

Why? I think for two reasons. On the one hand, something had still to be done in Abraham; but, on the other hand, the land itself was full of idolatry. So that on the one side there was the idolatry of Chaldea, on the other side the idolatry of Canaan: and in between a wait, a long wait, before his seed could possess the land. You see, God is not realizing His full purpose while there is any idolatry at all on the right hand or on the left. God is establishing and standing by his irrevocable position: 'I am going to be all or nothing. Whether it be Ur of the Chaldees or whether it be the land of Canaan, I am not going to share with anybody. And so, Abraham, I have got to bring you to the place where I am your all, and you have nothing else, before we can realize our full purpose'.

That is the principle of circumcision - of the rite of the covenant. It is the registration of a very, very drastic work of God. Paul says that it is a type of the Cross of the Lord Jesus. He puts the two together, and says quite clearly that the circumcision of the Old Testament was only a symbol of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, by which this very utter separation is made, between all the ground where God's rights are challenged or disputed, and the ground where God is all.

Now you notice that the process and the progress of this application of a principle was from without to within, and ever more deeply within. From without: "thy country". That may be very much outward, and yet it is a very real thing. Unfortunately we still sometimes have to use a phrase which is a contradiction in terms - and a very, very terrible phrase it is, when you think of it in the light of the Cross of the Lord Jesus - 'worldly Christians'. That is a contradiction in terms. From God's standpoint there is no such thing as a 'worldly Christian', or a 'worldly church'. And yet, in some form or other, this idolatry that is in the world may be associated with Christians, and Christians associated with it. Perhaps the best way in which I can speak of it without going into details is this. You notice that when the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in a life on the principle of the Cross of the Lord Jesus - that is, our death and burial with Him and our resurrection with Him to newness of life - when He is allowed to apply the principle of the Cross, you see all sorts of things beginning to happen spontaneously in the lives concerned. As time goes on and they are seeking to follow the Lord, you notice that they are changing certain things, of which at the beginning they seemed to be hardly conscious, or they are dropping them. These people say, 'The Lord has shown me that He is not pleased with this, does not agree with that.' The ground that lies under judgment is coming under the Holy Spirit's conviction.

Now, as we have said, this process starts on the outside. But do not think that you have got a long way on when you begin to do that sort of thing! That is only the beginning; that is only leaving your country. There is a lot more to be done yet: but you will not get any further until that is done. It has got to be done. You may hold the Lord up on some little matter like that; perhaps a matter of dress - perhaps a matter of 'make-believe'. It is not a very advanced point when you

begin to deal with things like that; it is quite elementary. But do not do anything just because someone says you should - that is legalism. Ask the Lord that His Spirit may work in your heart on the principle of the Cross of the Lord Jesus. You will find that the Holy Spirit will be quietly singling things out, and there will be changes.

But that is only leaving your country. The Lord is working from the outward to the inward, getting closer and closer to the heart. He is going to press this thing more and more inwardly. From "thy country" to "thy kindred" - that is getting closer, is it not? Those affectionate relationships to which we cling. I am not going to dwell on this, but many a life has been held up by clinging to, and many another life has found its complete release by dealing with, some affectionate relationship. Oh, the tragedies of unequal marriages of Christians - all because of an unwillingness, at a certain point, before the covenant was entered into, to face this whole matter of common ground in the Lord. On the other hand, when the knife of circumcision is applied to something in that realm, to some relationship which is not on the common ground of Christ, yet very near to the heart, how wonderful has been the release that has come, even in the midst of great suffering. But everything is held up until it is done. That was the point with Abraham's hold-up: the whole purpose of God was held up too. This is applying principles in a practical way.

So the Lord goes on with His servant; and in the next phase he is in the land. He is in the land - but with no possession, and this represents a still more inward movement of the knife. Was there some mixture in the heart of Abraham? It is not for us to say that there was, to judge him; but, from certain things that arise, to which I shall refer in a moment, I wonder - was there, after all, in his heart some mixture of ambition in relation to the Divine call? "...Unto the land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation... and make thy name great". Did the thought enter his heart: 'I would like to be a great nation, I would like to be something great'? I am not charging Abraham with anything, but in a moment, in the next step, you will see that there may be some justification for raising a question like this. In any case, there could have been just some personal interest, some thought of self-realization, associated with his act of obedience.

Now, whether it was true in Abraham's case or not, you know there does come into our relationship with the things of God a good deal of personal interest. What pathetic stories can be told of the tragedy of *ambition* in the realm of the things of God. I have recently had very close and painful association with such a case: one who went into what is called 'the ministry', married a wife who was tremendously ambitious for her husband and did everything to push him forward, and he became actuated and obsessed by this idea of getting on. Now, that man started with a real sense of Divine things. He was closely associated with Oswald Chambers in the heyday of his ministry, and we together had much fellowship in the things of the Lord. And then, by this ambition of his wife and himself, he got on and got on. He got to the very top in one of the biggest of the denominations, and was granted a very high honour in a degree from a well-known university for his work. Today, now that he has got it all, that man has no assurance of salvation. He is a complete wreck - mentally, physically and spiritually. I have spent long and terrible hours trying to help him, trying to get his faith on to its feet, to believe God at all.

That is ambition in the realm of the things of God. You may say that I have given an extreme case: but you see it started in quite a simple way at a certain point - some opportunity of an advantage in the realm of God's things - and that led to the next step. Now, God is going to have none of that in relation to His full

purpose. Let us be before God about ambition: it can be a terrible, terrible snare. In the end, it can mean the frustration of all that God ever intended in our lives. Let us remember that Christ "made Himself of no reputation" (Philippians 2:7; A.V.).

Was Abraham's long waiting, between the two worlds, so to speak - the world of the past and the world of the promise - this marching up and down, this living in tents - was it God's way of pressing the principle of circumcision deeper still, in regard to this matter of dividedness of heart, really to sever the last remaining ties, to shatter the last fragments of personal interest? If that is true, it goes very deep, does it not? Take the matter of patience. If there is one thing that will slay anything like ambition more thoroughly than anything else, it is being kept waiting. There is nothing that disciplines our motives more than to be kept in suspense, to be made to know how impatient we are, and how much patience we need. Abraham had to be brought into oneness with God's patience. The sword was thereby entering his soul and searching out all this personal interest.

Now, in order that you may see that I am not altogether imputing something wrong to Abraham, we come to his supreme crisis - that of Isaac. Isaac became the point at which the sword entered most deeply. "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac... and offer him..." (Genesis 22:2). Can anything be more inward than that? No; God has driven the thing right to its innermost point now. But why? What is the explanation? We know that in principle and in figure God is bringing this man into fellowship with Himself in His own passion, the offering of His own well-beloved and only Son. Yes, but there is another factor. Do you remember, when the Lord one day was speaking to Abraham, what Abraham said to the Lord? In effect he said, 'Yes, that is all very well - but what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and that which is born in my house is not my child?' (Genesis 15:2-3). 'What wilt Thou give *me*?' God gave him Isaac, but even so this element of 'give me' had got to be destroyed - God had to root out the 'me'. And so Abraham was called upon to give back to God, to have the last fragment of 'me' eliminated; and then he got Isaac back, and there was no 'me' in it at all.

Now, I think we see what God wants, what God is after. Where are we? It may be that there is one reading this word who has not yet made the first response to the call to leave that which corresponds to their country. You are still on the ground where God has not got His place in your life, where other lords have dominion, where the principle of idolatry is in some way at work, keeping you from responding to the Divine call. Let me say this to you, that that to which God calls you is nothing less than the great, vast purpose of God in Christ. You are not called just to be a Christian. You are not called just to say 'I accept Christ as my Saviour', and to do what other people called Christians do. You are called with a great, an immense calling, which is only commenced in time and reaches to and spreads over all the ages to the ages to come. That is the calling with which you are called.

Abraham, while he emerged at last, in his life here on earth, into that of which I am speaking, is but a figure of that. When God said to Abraham, 'Thy seed shall be as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the sea-shore for multitude', and spoke to him of 'the land which I will give thee', it had its literal fulfilment; but it is only a figure. It is a type, as the New Testament shows, of something very much more than that. Its full realization is in Christ - so the Apostle Paul makes clear. We are called in Christ to the realization of a great, eternal purpose; but nothing is possible until we have made that first response to the call: "Get thee out of thy country".

It may be that you who read have made that response. You are no longer in the world, in that sense. You have made a gesture, a movement, and gone so far with the Lord, and then stopped - perhaps because there is still something from which you are not prepared to separate. So we could take it, stage by stage, right up to the final application.

But, taking it altogether, my point is this. *Have any of us stopped short?* Have we really made this fundamental and complete renunciation? You see, there is more in this than appears. The Lord Jesus said a drastic thing: "Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33). 'Renounceth all that he hath' - why? You see, dear friends, if there is anything less than that, it is giving Satan a foothold in our lives. It is dividing things with God. It is in effect saying, 'The Lord is not all'. Until it is 'No one else and nothing else but the Lord', it is a hazardous Christian life - our Christian life is in jeopardy. The Lord says, 'For your own safety, for your own eternal future, and for the realization of My purpose, I must just be *all*. You must have no gods besides Me; you must have nothing that divides the ground with Me at all'. Listen to Paul, whom we have already quoted: "...as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ..." (Philippians 1:20-21). The principle of circumcision is just this - that God has all the ground, and there is nothing else there to dispute it with Him.

### **An Act of Faith**

To give God that ground calls for an act of faith. "By faith Abraham..." God is not going to give you anything that will undercut faith. He will say, 'Look here, I am telling you nothing about it.' It will be 'into a land which I will show you'. Abraham "went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). God had not given him a rosy painting. Up to that time, God had not defined or described the inheritance. He simply said, 'I will show you: you go on - I will show you. When you have taken the step, I will show you'. In the meantime, it was not knowing, not knowing, not knowing - that principle of faith. His attitude was: 'I believe that, God having called me, God knows that it is worth-while to call me to make such a renunciation, and that is all I want to know.'

God does not do this sort of thing to get us into a trap, to deceive us, to rob us of anything, to take anything away, to lessen our lives. God does this sort of thing because He is the God of Purpose that He is, whose aim and end is fullness. That is all I want to know. This is faith in God - faith that believes that, whatever the step means, God means more. "By faith Abraham... obeyed... went out, not knowing..."; but faith was this - 'God has called me, and I believe that God never calls without some real justifying purpose.' If it costs, the compensation must be far greater; it must be, because God is what He is.

I ask you: Have all your gods of Chaldea been gods like that? Have they really 'filled your bill'? Have they really satisfied you? In holding on to that someone, or to those some things, do you find real contentment? If you are honest, you will have to say 'No'.

Let us, then, hasten to the point where we say, 'The Lord only! By God's grace, it is going to be the Lord only. It is not going to be a move just so far, and another move just so far, and then stop. It is going to be, by the grace of God, all the way - right to God's end, with no reserve; the Lord all.' Let Him make that real. As I have said, if God ever says a thing, you can believe that there is a great deal more behind it than appears in what He says. We should look at the Bible like this. If we find in the Bible a statement or a requirement, a command or an exhortation, where on the face of it just says that a certain thing is to be done, or

something else not done, we should never stop there. We should say Why? Or, Why not? What has God got in His mind when He says that? God is not just giving out platitudes, little rules and regulations for our life. Behind everything He says, God has got His full knowledge of the immensity of it all. There is such an immense reason behind the least thing that God says. It is as big as God Himself. So we need to enquire - What is behind this? We need to ask, in a spirit, not of questioning, but of seeking to understand: Why should I do this? Why should I not do that? There is a big answer to that 'Why?' You may take it that, if God calls, the reason for it is as big as Himself - something that you will never compass.

## Chapter Six

### LIGHT THROUGH DEATH AND RESURRECTION

*“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*

*Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: thy all gather themselves together, they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then thou shalt see and be radiant, and thy heart shall thrill and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee; they shall come up with acceptance on Mine altar; and I will glorify the house of My glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, for the name of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee.*

*And foreigners shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favour have I had mercy on thee. Thy gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the wealth of the nations, and their kings led captive. For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.*

*The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine, and the bow-tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious. And the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 60:1-14; A.R.V.).*

We are familiar with the fact that there is usually a twofold interpretation of Old Testament Scriptures. There is the historical, and there is the spiritual: on the one hand, that which is after the flesh, and on the other hand, that which is after the Spirit. To a large extent, it is on the one hand that which relates to Israel naturally, and on the other hand that which relates to the Church, and to Christ, as seen through and beyond Israel.

This, of course, is very apparent in the Prophets. Sometimes you do not know whether the prophet is speaking about himself, or about Israel, or about Christ. That very problem arose with the Ethiopian in the chariot in the desert, when he asked Philip: “Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other?” (Acts 8:34). Many have thought that Isaiah 53 related to Israel. It is perfectly clear that, while there might be a measure of truth in that, that is not the whole truth by any means. Here, as always, there are two interpretations, and what is true of that chapter is very true in the chapter from which we have read. It is said that this chapter relates to the remnant of Israel which will be found at the end in Jerusalem. We will not call that into question, but it is almost impossible not to see that there is another side to Isaiah chapter 60, and it is that other side with which we are to be occupied at the present time.



Here is Zion, and Zion's light and Zion's wealth. You are very familiar with that name, and you know that our New Testament tells us that we "are come" - not that we are coming, not that we are 'marching to' - but that we "*are come*" to Zion, "the city of the living God" (Hebrews 12:22). And yet I suppose it is true that we are in a sense on the way to Zion, not as a place, but as a state of spiritual fullness. But if it is true that we are already come to Zion - and we will not for a moment dispute with the Apostle who says it - then may it not be equally true that the things that are said in the Old Testament, and here particularly, about Zion, if they refer in part to some later literal Zion on this earth, certainly refer more to the Zion to which we have come. The exhortation therefore is to the people of this Zion, this "city of the living God", to which we "are come" - indeed, of which we are a part. The exhortation is to us: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come".

### **Light Through the Experience of Resurrection**

Let us look for a moment at the ground and the nature of this light which has come to us. Again we are brought back to this open door to everything. Here everything begins and here the light bursts forth - the resurrection of our Lord, and our resurrection with Him. May I recall to your mind that wonderful twentieth chapter of John's Gospel. I confess that there is no chapter in the Bible which moves me more than that one. But to me the special thing about it is the breaking light. From early morning, even before it was day, there were hearts in darkness waiting, longing; and then it is as though, after the very dark night, the sun suddenly rises over the horizon, begins to throw its shafts of rays over the skies. We see the day opening, the light breaking and spreading, and one by one the disciples are caught in its rays. And what a transformation! Surely they did 'arise and shine', for their Light had indeed come!

Now, the setting of this chapter in Isaiah is just like that. There is a fragment in it in which we read about God's wrath, the dark night of God's wrath, which had passed (verse 10b). Certainly the people had been (to use the language of Ezekiel) in a dark place in their exile and captivity afar off. It was a dark night - a night of spiritual death; and it was therefore death to Zion during that time. Zion was dead and buried for that whole period of the captivity. But here, again using Ezekiel's language, the graves had been opened; resurrection had taken place. Isaiah is the prophet of resurrection, looking through and beyond the Cross. Here, in the latter part of his prophecies, we see the shadows departing and the morning breaking, and hear this triumphant cry - as the sun arises - "Arise, shine; for thy light is come".

It is on that ground of resurrection that the light comes, and that gives to the light its character. That being its ground, its nature is of that kind. We shall see, as we go on, how tremendously potent this light was - what it did. Here is light that is not just a mental grasp of things. It is certainly not the light of collected truth, of studied matter, of the intellect, even in the things of God. It is a different kind of light altogether. I want to press this - it is not just a statement of things. Dear friends, *light*, if it is to be as effective as the light in this chapter was shown to be, *has got to be of this kind* - the light of resurrection. You may collect what is given out in public ministry into your notebooks with your own ministry in view, and go and retail it. *That will not be light of this kind*. Too often, when we are reading and when we are listening, we have other people in view. We are thinking of how we are going to get this over to some others, and thereby we are more concerned for ministry and work, and having material to give others, than we are for the fundamental matter of Christ-likeness.

But the fact is that all real light springs from the realities of Christ as born in our own experience. Quite clearly, in the case of Israel or the remnant, and certainly even more so in the case of the Church, this light is the light that springs out of a deep experience, from which and through which resurrection was the only answer. If God had not done what He said He would do for the remnant - He said, "Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:12) - if the Lord had not opened their graves and brought them out, this part of Isaiah's prophecy would not have been written, because there would have been nothing to write about. It would never have been possible on any ground to say, "Thy light is come". The meaning of this is - 'You have been in the dark and you have been delivered; you have been in death and have come to know the power of resurrection'.

### **Resurrection Faith's Ultimate Point**

And therefore the very nature of light which is light indeed, light after this order of life, light which is to have this effect, is that it is born out of an experience, or out of continuous experiences of resurrection. One thing we have been trying to say all through these meditations is just this, that, through the necessitated exercises of faith again and again, we have got to reach the ultimate goal of faith, and the ultimate, the final issue of faith is resurrection. When the writer to the Hebrews is recounting the faith, and the faith activity, of those of old, and is dealing with Abraham, the last stage in Abraham's faith that is mentioned is that in which he received Isaac back as from the dead. That is always the ultimate point to be reached by faith.

This is not faith in the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, nor is it faith in the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is faith in the resurrection of Christ as a *present active power*. The resurrection of Christ has, so to speak, to be brought up to date. It has not merely to be remembered once a year at Easter. This is no merely sentimental thing. It is to be something for every day of our lives. Every new morning has to be a new occasion for our proving the power of His resurrection. It has to be so: and if so, then there will be a necessity for it. The Lord will keep us on the ground of a necessity for knowing resurrection power and resurrection life.

If you are in any way engaged in ministry, or the work of the lord, no matter how much you study, how much you read upon the subject matter, however diligent you are in your research, it will count for nothing if there is not behind it an experience which makes resurrection - that is, a deep experience which makes resurrection the only way out. The Lord has no place for mere mechanical teachers and preachers, reproducers of matter second-hand. The Lord's principle is to bring everything right into experimental relationship to the person concerned, and so it is kept in power and freshness and reality.

So the very setting of Isaiah 60 - "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" - is that of resurrection, in the experience of the people concerned. Let me repeat: Do not be more concerned with ministry that you are with knowing Him - and the only way to know Him is the power of His resurrection. You may be sure that, if you have this as the basis and background of your life, you will have ministry without the need of research! I am not saying that study is not important: what I am saying is that, while it may have its place, there has got to be something more than that. There has got to be the *experience* of the thing that we are saying - the experience of life saving us in deep and desperate situations. That is the ground upon which the Lord keeps His true servants. For, after all, light is not something objective to us. Light is what

we are - "Ye *are* the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14) - and what we are through deep history with God in our lives. So God makes us lights.

### **Effective Light**

Therefore, the light that is mentioned here is light which is vital, light which is pure, which is effective. Note that the rest of this chapter shows how effective the light is. What tremendous effectiveness is related to this kind of light, born out of an experience of resurrection. Underline all the words in this chapter which refer to *wealth* - "The abundance of the sea", "the wealth of the nations" (verse 5b), gold and frankincense (verse 6b), silver and gold (verse 9), and so on. That is the value, the effectiveness, of light after this kind. It means the possession of wealth. It means resources for the enrichment of people.

Do believe this: If you want to be able to help people, to enrich them, to bring them into the wealth that is in Christ, to deliver them from their poverty - and God knows how poverty-stricken His people are, and how little they know of His wealth - if you want to help others to a knowledge of this wealth, it is by way of the light which comes through resurrection. In more simple terms, if you are going through a deep and dark time, you may have very rich treasures of darkness. The right attitude toward our times of death and darkness is that this can mean wealth - the Lord means more riches out of this thing for others; something for their enrichment, is going to come out of our times of spiritual death. It is effective light that enriches, that brings into wealth.

### **Attractive Light**

And then note again how it attracts. "Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms" (verse 4b); "...the ships of Tarshish... to bring thy sons from far" (verse 9a); and so on. They are all coming, they are all coming. Why? Because you have got something to give, you have got the light which answers to their problems and their questions and their difficulties. As the light attracts the moth, so need is attracted to where there is supply. Out of these experiences of death and darkness, leading to resurrection, comes something that others want. And it is like that, if it is after that order, they come for it - yes, from the ends of the earth. Not just for teaching, for interpretations, for doctrines, but for real, living light born out of experience, the experience of resurrection, again and again.

I do not believe that it is necessary to have tremendous attractions of other kinds to get people together for spiritual purposes. I believe that, if there is real vital light, they will come, they will find their way to it. The answer to empty churches is not entertainments and attractions, but living light. That can be proved. Would there were more light - then there might be a drawing.

### **The Word Applied to a Corporate Vessel**

Now this word, while of course it applies, as it must always apply, to individuals, because you can have nothing collective unless there are individuals to make it so, is a word to a company, a group; it is a word to a collective vessel of life. 'Zion' is something corporate and collective, and the Lord wants these vessels, these vessels of light, after this kind. My point in saying that is this, that we not only go through deep and dark and trying experiences individually, but we go through them in relation to our fellow-believers. There is such a thing as companies of the Lord's people going deep down into experiences where only the power of His resurrection can meet the need. Let us therefore realize that we are

sharers in this ministry, that we are involved in something that may not just be personal.

Perhaps you are thinking, 'Oh, that is all out there in the air - it may relate to somebody or something, somewhere. I am just nothing, I do not signify; all that has nothing to do with me'. But it has in a related way. You are a part of that Body of Christ which is to be the expression of His risen life, and therefore you have a share in the suffering which comes upon the people of God: hence the necessity for knowing His resurrection-power. And we are suffering together with Him. Let us remember that. 'Together' means not only that we are suffering with Christ: we are *suffering together* - with Christ. It is our collective or corporate suffering with Christ - just as the reigning also is to be collective and corporate. Suffering together, we reign together with Him (Romans 8: 17b; 2 Timothy 2: 12). It is the Church that is in view.

So what might never come to us individually and personally comes to us by reason of our relationship with something much bigger than the Lord wants to use. We become involved in something that is not, after all, our own personal responsibility. The Lord is after a vessel, and we are a part of the vessel; and in a related way we have got to know this power of His resurrection, that the light may shine.

Yes, these things concern and relate to the Church. But many of you who read these words are just individuals, or twos or threes, scattered in distant places, and you might have some thought in the back of your minds - 'Well, that is for the Church, he is speaking about the Church, all that is concerning the Church. I am just one lonely one somewhere - we are just two or three together in some remote place. We cannot be regarded as the Church, and therefore - to some degree - all this can hardly apply to us.'

So it is necessary to say a corrective word about that, and the best way of doing so is to remind you that when Paul wrote his final letters to Timothy and Titus, mainly to and about the Church, he did not write them to any one collection of Christians in any one place, nor did he write them just to several large companies of Christians. They were for *all* Christians, whether in companies or scattered and alone, and they have remained that ever since. Paul thought comprehensively and inclusively of all believers, and just called them 'the Church' - that is all. They may have been here and there or in many places, just ones or twos or little groups, or there may have been the larger assemblies; but as far as he was concerned they were all the Church. What he had to say applied to them all - for this reason, as we shall emphasize later: that he never at that time thought of them finally as on this earth. So far as geography and time were concerned, he had got completely away from earth conditions, from the merely physical, and he was seeing the Church from the standpoint of God and Heaven, as one thing. And so this matter of scatteredness and individual situation did not come into the thing at all, except in this way, that every fragment, wherever it was, was a part of a whole, as in Heaven; so that everything applied to every fragment.

The practical value of that as I said earlier, is this, that wherever we are and however alone we may be, we may yet be involved in *all* that the Church is involved in. You may be in a remote place alone, but you are bound up with all that relates to the Church, all that is happening to the Church, all that the Church is knowing, all that the Church is suffering, all that the Church is called to. You are bound up with it, you are in it; you are not apart from it, wherever you may be. It is necessary for you to grasp that and say, 'Although I am here, alone or with another, in this remote place, I am as much a part of the whole of the Church as that group at so-and-so, or any other group.'

For in the Spirit, and in the heavenlies, you are always in the whole congregation of the Church. You may not see them, may not have, perhaps, the extra benefits of close personal fellowship and association with all the others on the earth, but you are in the whole Church, wherever you are, a part of the congregation. You see, we “are come... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn ones” (Hebrews 12:22-23); and that means not just a few somewhere in one place, or even a big crowd in some place. It means all the children of God. We are *all* come to the general assembly, the Church of the firstborn ones. It is said to us all, wherever we are.

## Chapter Seven

### THE SHINING OF THE LIGHT

*"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee"* (Isaiah 60: 1).

We have said a good deal about the ground and nature of this light. We now go on to ask, and briefly to answer, the question: What is this light which is come, and the glory which is risen? And I have no hesitation in saying that, inclusively, it is that which has come peculiarly and particularly through the instrumentality of the Apostle Paul. I know, of course, that much light has come through others; but the full light, concerning the Church and for the Church, the spiritual Israel, has come through Paul, and it is mainly stored up in the full and concentrated ministry of his last letters. The final letters of Paul, that is, his Church letters, are undoubtedly the light which has come, and the glory which has risen.

#### Light and Glory

Those two words - light and glory - are characteristic of those final letters. Not only are the words themselves there, but the truth is there. What light! You find no such light anywhere else in the Bible. Indeed, you are amazed at what this man came to see. Light shining right back into eternity past, light shining right on into eternity to be, light shining right down on to this dispensation. And as for the glory, again, it is a characteristic word - but it is also a characteristic feature, is it not? "Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 3:21). What glory has arisen through that ministry! But let me safeguard this by saying: this is not all the light that has come, nor all the glory; but in its fullness, its meridian, it has come through this channel.

#### The Church the Vessel of Resurrection

First of all, it is light and glory concerning the Church's calling to be the resurrection vessel of the Lord. That is an early statement of the Ephesian letter. You will remember that Paul is here dealing with the Church. In other letters he deals with the individual, and refers to the individual's union with Christ in death and resurrection. That is the peculiar message to the Corinthians, for instance, where he says much concerning personal conduct and personal character. But when you come here to these last great letters, especially Ephesians and Colossians, the idea of Paul is all the time collective; and when he refers to our being quickened together and raised together, he is thinking of the Church - the quickened and raised Church. As such it is the vessel of the resurrection - the vessel of the resurrection power of Christ.

Now, of course, there can be no Church without individuals, and therefore these things have their personal application. The Apostle says that this light which has come, which has risen upon us, this glory which has appeared concerning the Church is in order that we might "know... the exceeding greatness of His power... according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:18-20). That is for the Church, which includes all individuals. But *the Church itself* is a resurrection vessel, to be the embodiment of the exceeding greatness of His power. No one of us individually, nor any number of us just as detached and unrelated individuals, can know the exceeding greatness of His power, any more than we can know any other aspect of His fullness. It is thus easier to realize how the Church - the great company of the elect, in its pilgrimage and its warfare, right through all the ages, with all that it has had to encounter, and all that is still set against it - requires

the *exceeding greatness* of His power to lift it up and out and clear, as an emancipated, established, heavenly people.

Is it not a very wonderful thing to realize that, wherever you and I may be as a part of that whole, we are by this illumination told that we are of the vessel of the resurrection - that is, of the exceeding greatness of His power? I do not know how much that comforts you, but if you had seen, as I have seen the terrible, heartbreaking state of Christians in certain parts of the world - the spiritual limitation and weakness, and all that is set to deep them so, and how little there is that can make it otherwise - you would have come, as I have come, very near to the point of despair over this matter.

May I say here that these meditations are coming directly out of my experience. This is no worked-up subject. I say again: if you really knew the state of Christians and of the Church in this world - the desperate situation, the need, the limitation and the lack of that which would bring them into greater fullness - you might well despair. You might even raise the major questions: Does God really mean to have His Church in fullness: Are we not attempting something impossible? Have we not committed ourselves to something that cannot be? Is it not going to break us, shatter us? Is it, after all, a fact that this is what God wants?

The answer is: *The light has been given - it "has come" - this IS what God wants!* And, blessed be God, because He wants it, the power is there for it, and it is the power of resurrection. Perhaps we want too much all at once, perhaps we are impatient; but God is going to have it. The vision has been given of a Church at the end filled with glory. The light has come that that is how it is going to be - spiritual fullness at last. God is not going to be defeated, and the Church is the very vessel or sphere of the power of the resurrection.

You and I well know that, in so far as we apprehend this truth by faith that we are a part of that, that we are on that ground and we stand there, we shall come into the good of this power of resurrection, and it will operate in us wherever we are. It is the light that has been given, the calling of the Church to be the vessel of resurrection life and power. Therefore: "Arise, shine; ...thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

Now you may recall that that was what we said about this light in our last message: that here, in Isaiah 60, we have the other side of the captivity - the other side, so to speak, of the grave of Israel, when their grave of exile has been opened and they have been called out on resurrection ground. The word is: "Thy light has come". So you see, this light is bound up with resurrection, and so Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with that. "You did He quicken... God raised us up with Him" (Ephesians 2: 1, 6); and "to us-ward" is the "exceeding greatness of His power", as in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

### **The Church the Vessel of Light**

The second thing in this Isaiah message, which find its spiritual fulfilment in the ministry of Paul, is that the Church is called to be the vessel of light, the light for all, unto the nations. We have already seen what that light meant, how it worked out, how effective it is shown to be in this chapter: what tremendous impact it registered to the ends of the earth, and how the nations are pictured as flowing toward that light.

Now, it is perfectly clear from this ministry of Paul that that is the vocation of the Church - to be the vessel and the vehicle of this light, the light which all need.

Paul's great prayer for the saints is for light - 'the eyes of their heart being enlightened, that they might know...' And then there follows the gradual unfolding of that light. What a wonderful fullness it is! How many beams there are to that light in his prayer! What there is to be known by the Spirit of revelation opening the eyes of the heart! The Church - and that means you and me - is definitely called to be the vessel of light. The Lord's intention is that, if people are wanting to see and wanting to know, He shall be able to transmit such knowledge through us. It will be found amongst the Lord's people.

That, as we know, is not generally true. But this is the calling of the Church: that wherever people are really seeking to know the truth, know the Lord, to come into the light, the Lord should have a vessel where that light can be found. It is a challenge, as well as a statement of fact. It is something that we must quite definitely lay hold of by faith. You see, it is God's intention: therefore it must be possible: therefore the Lord provides for what He wants. It is not necessary for any child of God, who is standing by faith in the good of the heavenly calling and vocation, not to be a vehicle of light to others. Indeed, it is a failure in our calling if we are not such - if others are not seeing the light through us. I am not now thinking in terms of our moving about with our Bibles, trying to give people light, but of our *being* the light. The Church is to *be* the light which is given, and we are to be all "light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8).

Now, the enemy's great work is to try to bring in darkness and shadows, by means of anything that he can do to eclipse the light that the Church is called to be. He has succeeded to a very large degree in doing that, and he is always at it. We know that as soon as there comes anything of difference, disagreement, division, lack of love, there is a shadow, there is darkness. But how blessed it is to realize that, given the conditions required, there can be light which radiates, as in this chapter, to the ends of the earth, and people will flow to it. The flowing is because there is something to which to flow, something that answers a need. May the Lord put us in the position where need is all the time being met, right out to the uttermost bounds.

### **The Church the Vessel of Wealth**

The next thing in this chapter, as we pointed out, is wealth. How much is said here about wealth! There is so much wealth that the whole world seems to be enriched by it everywhere. This is no mere fanciful imagination. This is something that the Lord has really provided for, because He has called to it - to have a people here on this earth who, wherever they are, are the channels of the enrichment of others in all directions, a people through whom there shall go out spiritual riches.

Now you see how true that is in Paul's ministry. What riches have been disclosed to us through him! Here is a man who was himself overwhelmed with the wealth into which he had been brought. He would cry - "O the depth of the riches...!" (Romans 11:33). He would speak of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8); and he has given us the light concerning a great deal of that wealth. Look again into his ministry with that thought in mind. What wealth there is! Ought we to be poor, ought we to be in a state of spiritual penury? Ought we to be living so that it is difficult to make ends meet? Ought that to be the state of the Church - as, sadly enough, is largely the case? Ought it to be so, in the light of all this wealth?

Look again at the unsearchable, inexhaustible wealth that has come to light through this man alone. If you are familiar with these vessels of light that are his letters, you will realize that you have been taken out of your depth. There is a



phrase in this sixtieth chapter of Isaiah: "the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee" (verse 5). It is a phrase which intimates, as perhaps nothing else might intimate, how vast are the resources that God has uncovered. A year or two ago we read in the papers about the return of the fishing fleet on the East coast of our own country. So great, so immense, was the haul that a whole fleet of fishing boats had to wait for hours because there were no berths for them. The harbour staff just could not cope with them, and the fear was that the great hauls of fish would have to be thrown back into the sea. But that is only one little spot on this earth, after all, a mere microcosm of the whole. We cannot faintly imagine the content of the sea.

What, then, shall we say of the abundance of the spiritual sea? What inexpressible wealth! I have been trying to cope with it for upward of forty years, and I am conscious yet that I am well-nigh drowned in this sea. Every time you come to it in the Spirit, you realize that its ranges are beyond you. Can you cope with the wonderful light as to the counsels of God before this world was? Can you cope with all that is said about what is going to be in the ages of the ages? It is beyond us altogether. But out of that fullness you and I are called to be enriched for the sake of others. The Church is called into this wealth. How wealthy we should be! If you do not understand this, ask the Lord to open your eyes to your inheritance in Christ. The Church is called to be the vessel of resurrection, the vessel of light which has come, the vessel of the wealth that has been disclosed.

### **The Church the Vessel of Government**

We find the matter of government clearly touched on both in Isaiah 60 and in these letters of Paul. Here is the picture from Isaiah: "Kings (shall come) to the brightness of thy rising" (verse 3). In a word - You shall have power, authority, government. Here are the rulers, the people who are themselves supposed to be in the place of government, and they are all bowing at your feet, they are all going down before you. Surely that is superior authority. Is there anything about that in Paul's letters? Indeed there is. "...Made Him to sit at His right hand... far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Ephesians 1:20-21). Yes, even over principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness. And the Church is called to that position. "...Raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus" (2:6). We have much to learn yet about that place and power of governing, ruling, of spiritual ascendancy; but we are saying that what the light has shown to us is that that is the Church's place according to God's mind. That is our place - the place of spiritual government, ascendancy, power, in Christ.

If only we knew more about it in practice! But may we be moved to realize that this is not something to which we are to climb by struggling. We have been brought there by Christ. He has seated us together with Him in the heavenlies. He has raised us, set us far above all. That is our place by right. I think one thing that you and I need to learn - although we have to be very careful about this, for some people have got themselves into trouble on this matter, developing a special phraseology and so on - nevertheless, we have to learn how, in our prayer times together, whether we be two or three or larger companies, how really to stand in our place of authority and government. We are all the time beseeching and imploring and entreating, and striving and struggling and reaching out to get somewhere, and we rarely take the position that is ours in Christ to govern situations and spiritual forces. And yet we are called to that - to rulership in a spiritual way. That does not call for loud voices and strident language. It is a spiritual position, but it is a definite, positive exercise, to be made by us together

as the Church: the exercise of authority over other authorities that are at work in this universe.

### **The Light for All**

You notice the universality of what is spoken of in this sixtieth chapter of Isaiah - how far-reaching it all is. "Thy sons shall come from far" (verse 4), "The wealth of the nations" (verse 5), and so on. It is very comprehensive and extensive. This ministry is universal; the value of this light is so far-reaching. And when you turn to Paul's ministry, you find the same thing. This is not just something for a little few in some odd corners of the earth. This is something for all. May God deliver us from exclusiveness - from tying up anything that He has given us to ourselves, and to just little companies here and there. God make us know that He has planted us right in the midst of the nations, and that He has given enough for all His people. We need constantly to watch this matter, lest we should preserve things to certain people who like this sort of thing. This light has been given for all, and we must watch carefully against anything and everything that prevents us seeing that it is available for all. The Church's light is universal: it is for everyone and everywhere.

And there is enough of it. We are not going to lose anything - certainly we are not going to run out of resources - if we enlarge ourselves to all the Lord's people. The real way of our own enlargement is the enlargement of our hearts to the Lord's people. Be careful, then, and watchful against all that which is ever the propensity of people who get light - to reserve it for certain narrow circles. Remember that it is not only for people who have seen it and responded to it. But many of the Lord's people are in danger of interpreting things in this way. The effect of that is pernicious. It is destructive to the very thing which the Church exists. The light is for all, as the love is for all. We must keep the open heart and the open mind. It is amazing how many hungry and longing people there are just shut up where there is no light. We have got to be always watchful that the light is available for them all.

This is a very necessary warning note. The Lord does not make His sun to shine upon the good only: the light of the sun does good to very bad people, very evil people as well. The Lord does not say, 'Only the good people are going to have the light, have the sun'. No, it is available for all. If the light has come, and the glory has arisen, then it is like the sun - for everyone. We get surprises, do we not? I am ashamed to say that I have had some startling surprises. One has met, say, some dear person with make-believe as thick as paint, and everything that would set you back, make you keep away: and yet upon making contact, beginning to speak, one has found a heart that is hungry and ready. That is not exaggeration, that is not fiction - that is true. Hungry hearts and ready hearts are hidden away behind things that would repel. We must keep the light available for all, and never be put off.

I have spoken of physical things, but there are other things that must not put us off - ecclesiastical things, religious things, denominational things - anything you like. Do not be put off; do not allow your light to be withheld from anybody because of these complexes toward what perhaps you think is not the Lord's full thought. Keep open to all. You will be in the way of surprises, and you will find that there will be wonderful responses to the light, from very unexpected quarters, if only you make it available.

It is a large thing, this light. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord will be unto thee an everlasting light" (Isaiah 60:19). That is something very much bigger than

natural luminaries. How great is the Lord! If our sun is great to the illumination and the warming of the whole earth, how much more so the lord! Do not keep His light to yourself, do not tie it up in compartments. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."