

MEN WHOSE EYES  
HAVE SEEN THE KING

by

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## Chapter One

### EYE WITNESSES OF HIS GLORY

*Reading: Matthew 17:1-21*

*"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. And this voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mount. And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:16-19).*

That little clause in the hymn by M. E. Gates that we often sing might be the title of our present meditations - 'men whose eyes have seen the King'. Men whose eyes have seen the King! As we, in that hymn, pray the Lord to send such men, I am sure we all feel deeply and strongly that that is the great need of our time. The world needs such men; the Church needs them; and at all times when the Lord has had such men, and has sent them forth, the need has been met - His need and the need of others.

I think it is the 'seeing of the King' that really sums up this whole matter of the Transfiguration. That is why the Lord took the three leaders from the twelve up the mountain, in order that presently, with that vision made alive with meaning and power by the Holy Spirit, they might go forth as men who had seen the King. And what happened? We are living today in the ever-growing value of that vision.

#### **The Setting of the Transfiguration**

The very setting in the Word, in both of the places in which the Transfiguration is referred to, as we have read, is significant and helpful. As you know, three of the four Gospels - Matthew, Mark and Luke - record this matter of the Transfiguration, indicating, surely, that with these men this matter was of some particular importance. If John did not actually record the event, I am not sure that he passed it over, or did not have it in mind. We may come to that as we go on. But you will recall that, at the time of the Transfiguration, things were becoming increasingly difficult for the Lord. The growing hostility in all directions was pressing Him in, weighing heavily upon His spirit, and making His ministry more and more difficult, more and more limited. The shadow of the Cross was lengthening on His path. It is of this very matter that He now speaks frankly to His disciples for the first time: He speaks frankly about the Cross. The atmosphere was just charged with a sense of pending crisis - something is going to happen. It was at that time, in those conditions, that He took three from the twelve into the mountain apart, and was transfigured before them. It had a great relatedness to the situation which was developing.

In the case of the many years later, when Peter wrote about the Transfiguration, we know from his letters something of the situation. He begins his first letter by addressing himself to the saints 'scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia' - scattered *SAINTS*. Perhaps you know what it means to be of the "scattered" people of the Lord, in distant places, in lonely places; distance and loneliness creating their own problems and heart-aches. How things seem to ease up when we are together! There is such a sense of fellowship, a sense of life and of joy, when we are all together. These saints had

perhaps known something of the great 'togetherness' of Jerusalem or elsewhere, but were now scattered, with all that that means.

Peter goes on to speak to them about the 'trial of their faith' - 'the trial of your faith is more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried in the fire' (1 Peter 1:7). These scattered saints were knowing something of the 'fire' of tried faith. There is much more in his letters indicating a not too helpful situation for the people of God. The key-note to his letters is 'grace'; they needed to know grace. There was opposition; there was persecution; there were false prophets, false teachers. And, in that situation, Peter wrote and introduced this matter of the transfiguration.

This is significant. There is something for the people of God in this great matter in days of difficulty and adversity: indeed, what they and we all need at such times is a new vision of the King. That, amongst other things, is what the Lord Jesus meant for that little band of men. The three were commanded to say nothing about it for the time being, until He was risen from the dead. Someone has used his imagination in that connection, as to how difficult it was for these three men to hold their tongues, and say nothing about it, even to the others; but then, when He was risen, how gladly and eagerly they told the others and everybody of this wonderful experience. It goes to the heart of everything. If this is true - that is, if the Transfiguration was true - then anything and everything in the Bible can be true. If it was not true, then we can doubt everything. *BUT IT WAS TRUE!*

### **The Significance of the Transfiguration**

You are aware that the Transfiguration marked the turning-point in the mission of the Lord Jesus on this earth. He had gone to the farthest point of His travels north; from that outermost rim of His ministrations, He would immediately turn about, with face to the south - to Jerusalem, and to the Cross. A resolute, purposeful, meaningful decision was reached on the mount; it was a crisis, a turning-point. We might say that it represented the very heart of His time here on this earth, if we could see it. But what did it mean so far as He was concerned?

#### **(1) Humanity Perfected**

I think it meant two things in one. It certainly represented and set forth the absolute perfecting of His humanity. Here He has reached the point of His own personal perfecting as a Man. This glorifying, this transfiguring, was Heaven's testimony to His utter and perfect sinlessness as a Man: that in all respects, whether of Hell's assaults and temptations and subtleties and efforts, or men's hatred, malice, trickery and what not, He had triumphed, completely triumphed. If we were to analyse it, we should have to look at the word *SIN*. But we can say this, that the sum of sin, from the beginning in the garden to the end, is *UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD* - a breach of fellowship with God through mistrust. That is the very core of sin. Everything was concentrated upon Him, from every realm, if by some means, in some way, a breach could be made between Him and God. That would be sin.

But in His case it never happened. He met it all and triumphed. The first Adam failed, and all his seed have been involved - but here is a Man perfected. Humanity that God intended is here achieved and realized, and is therefore glorified. So far as He was concerned, that was the first meaning: Sin, with all its horrible entail, has been completely defeated in and by this Man; and therefore death must go. There can be no death, for death is the result of sin. If Adam had never sinned, he would never have died. This One never sinned: He could not die - He could only be glorified!

## **(2) The Return Of His Glory**

There is another aspect as to its meaning to Him. I think it is quite clear that the Lord Jesus carried in His heart a great longing and a prayer for the glory that He once had. This is where I think John touches this matter very closely. In the seventeenth chapter of his gospel, he records that great prayer of the Lord Jesus: 'Father, glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was' (verse 5). That opens a window and lets us see that the Lord Jesus had a consciousness of His eternal glory past: He carried it with Him; He knew about it - marvellous thought! - and that the consciousness of that former glory was ever prompting Him to pray toward, long toward, the day when He would return to it and it would return to Him. 'Father, glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.'

The Mount of Transfiguration had become an answer to His heart's prayer and cry and longing - at least a touch of it. A fleeting touch, but for Him it was one of those things which perhaps you know a little about in your Christian life. The Lord just does something - it passes, but you know by it that you have been heard; you know that there is sympathy in the Father's heart for your need and situation. It may only last for a day, or a night, for an hour, or for a little while, and then pass, because the end of the road is not yet; the eternal glory has not yet come; but the touch by the way is something that carries us on. We know the Lord has heard; we know the Lord has taken account of that inner cry and longing, and has given us a token of His sympathy. It was like that with the Lord Jesus - the answer to His own cry.

## **(3) The Offset To The Cross**

Now, it is here that the Lord Jesus introduces, in a direct, frank way, the matter of His Cross. If there had been any hints before, the apostles and their representative, Peter, were completely oblivious of those hints; but now, at this time, the Lord Jesus comes to the matter quite positively, quite deliberately. Peter rises up as the spokesman of the others, in rebellion; he will not have it. But here it is. The Transfiguration was to be the offset to the Cross for these men, at the time when they should come to realize that the Cross was not (as they were then thinking it would be) the end of everything: shame and failure, reproach, dishonour, and despair. When they should come to see that the Cross was just the opposite of all those things, then the Transfiguration would take a new place, and they would see, as Peter says in his letter.

If you will read back in his first letter, you will hear Peter saying this: "The prophets sought and searched diligently... what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them" (1:10-11). Peter has got it right now; he has got it round the right way. First, when he would repudiate the sufferings, he is all for the glory - he is putting that first. The disciples were after the glory and were not going to have any of the sufferings; the Cross was something they would not hear about or accept. Glory, yes, but not the suffering. He has got it round the right way now: 'the sufferings, and the glory that should follow'.

Is that what Moses and Elijah were talking to the Lord Jesus about on the Mount? - 'the exodus that He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem' - the suffering and the glory? The Transfiguration was the great offset to the suffering, to the Cross; and it was intended not only for the Lord Himself. It was intended for these leaders amongst His servants, that they should have the ground laid, the foundation put down, upon which presently the Holy Spirit would alight for seeing

that not only the Cross of Calvary, but all its outworking, were in the light of the glory, had in view the glory at the end. These sufferings were toward the glory. They came to see that later.

You and I need that message. The message of the Transfiguration at this particular point is this: It is not now all 'transfiguration'; there is a lot that is of the plain and of the valley; there is the Cross. You notice that the Lord Jesus, in speaking of the Cross, said: 'He that would save his life shall lose it'. There is much of that to be gone through and experienced. But this is saying that all that - the Cross, His Cross, and the outworking of His Cross in the experience of His own servants - is unto this glorious end, that they shall be glorified together with Him.

### **The Issue of the Transfiguration**

We have to look for the issue of it in the incident that immediately followed, as they came down from the mountain. It is full of truth; too full for exhausting at this time. They came down, and are met by this distracted father - distracted over his boy, whom (in the original language) he calls 'my only begotten son'; his one boy. There are many emotional elements bound up with it, of course, which we can leave. But here is this father with his boy, distressed over the situation, and disappointed over the nine representatives of the Lord Jesus, the majority of His disciples whom He had left down below. He describes what is the matter with the boy, what happens to him, and tells the Lord that, although he had brought the boy to His disciples, they could not help him or do anything about it.

#### **(1) An Impotent Church**

Here, surely, in the Holy Spirit's thought in giving these details, is the suggestion of an impotent church in the presence of this demon-driven humanity on the plain. It is representative of a condition in this world and in humanity. Would it be going too far to say that the description of this boy's trouble and how it affected him can be seen in counterpart in the world today? The world is under the domination of a power with which it cannot cope; a driving force, driving toward destruction; always driving toward self-destruction. It cannot help it; it is mastered by an evil power in this universe, driving, dominating, frustrating every effort; and in this scene of humanity's helplessness and need, a Church that does not know what to do with it, unable to cope.

That situation can be found in ten thousand things. We are all up against situations with which we cannot cope. Perhaps in your assembly, perhaps in your own family, perhaps in your own self, you meet with forces that are too much, driving; and it is always in the direction of self-destruction, of evil, of harm, of hurt, of injury; toward the fire and the water, to destroy and to quench. That is a good description of the evil work of the evil one in human life, and we have this small representation of it in this boy. Without indulging in unworthy criticism, and taking account of all the noble sacrifice and service and labour and toil of the servants of the Lord, we have, nevertheless, to say that the Lord's people, very largely and in a great many things, are impotent in the presence of these forces. The evil powers are holding the ground; they are defeating and defying every effort.

It is quite patent that those nine disciples had made an effort. 'Why could not we cast it out?' They had evidently tried and failed. Their effort and labour was for nought, and the enemy was laughing at them, holding his ground, while no doubt the critical world around was very pleased that these disciples were such poor expressions of their Lord, letting Him down like this.

What is the issue of the Transfiguration? Surely it is this, that there must be brought upon these situations an impact of the exalted and glorified Christ. It is a question of *IMPACT!* When I use that word, I am quite sure you will say, Yes, that is what we need: that is what the Church needs; that is what local companies need; that is what I need in my own life - an impact upon situations, upon places. This is what happened later, did it not? These men who had come to understand the meaning of the Transfiguration; these men whose eyes had seen the King - Jesus, perfected, glorified, exalted, attested by Heaven - men who had seen Him thus, went everywhere; and what an impact! Rarely, if ever, did they fail to register on this earth, in the kingdom of Satan.

## **(2) The Impact of the Presence of the Lord Jesus**

And do you notice how Peter describes this? "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty" - His *MAJESTY*. Is not the need for the impact of the *MAJESTY* of the Lord Jesus upon this earth? It should be. Again, he says: "We made known unto you the *POWER* and *PRESENCE* of our Lord Jesus Christ..." I am sorry they have not translated that word thus; they have put 'coming'. Of course, the word is very frequently related to the coming again of the Lord Jesus, but the word itself cannot be isolated to that. The same word is used of the apostles, when they *CAME* into a situation. It is the same word, whether the 'coming' or the 'presence'. And Peter describes this as the "power and presence" of His *MAJESTY*. Yes, that is the issue. The power, not as abstract and unrelated, but the power of His presence in His majesty - that is the holy mount; that is the high place; that is what the world needs.

Let me use the word again - 'impact'! If it should be ours to see the King in His glory; if it should be ours to catch a fresh glimpse of the glorified Lord, that is going to answer the cry and the need for *IMPACT*. And conversely: there will never be an impact until we have seen Him as the glorified Lord. He is the answer to every need, and a vision of Him as exalted and attested by Heaven will bring new impact into our lives, into our ministries, into our churches, upon situations. Does not your heart cry, as mine does, Oh for a recovery of the Church's impact upon this world! And this is none other than the impact of *the majesty of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Now, we know that that is how it will be when this word is actually fulfilled by His appearing at the end. When He comes, He will 'smite the earth with the rod of His mouth' (Isaiah 11:4). The brightness of His presence will be devastating to evil. There is no doubt about it that when that presencing, that 'parousia', takes place, there will be an impact. We cry for that; we pray for that. But the word is used not only of that, but in other connections, on different occasions. The same word, exactly the same word, as is used for the coming again of the Lord Jesus, is used of apostles coming into a situation, or being present there. It is used of the Lord Jesus too in this motional sense. He *CAME*, in that sense, on the mount of transfiguration; it was His *PRESENCING* in glory. Again and again He *PRESENCED* Himself, and every time there was impact - all pointing to His final great *PRESENCING* in glory. It is interesting, is it not, that Peter uses for the event on the mount of transfiguration exactly the same word as he uses for the coming again of the Lord at the end - the *PRESENCE* of the Lord.

## **The Present Need**

All these are statements with which I imagine you will agree, both as to the significance and as to the issue. But we need an anticipation of the day of His coming, in the Church today - now. We need something of the meaning of that final impact *NOW* - His presence in majesty and in power. What about it? One of

the writers who recorded this event tells us that Jesus went up into the mountain to pray; 'and as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was changed' (Luke 9:29). And when He came down, the key which He used for that desperate situation was the key of prayer: 'This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting' (Mark 9:29). What are we to pray for? What is to be the burden of our prayer in relation to this matter of impact, recovered power? If you have any sense of this poor world's distracted condition, and desperate need, you will not control your praying; you will not regulate your praying; you will not make prayer a legal system of 'you must', 'thou shalt...', and so on. If you are touched, as the Lord was touched, with this situation and this need, be it in an individual, or in a company, or in the world, or in the whole Church, the only thing that you will do - but you will do it - is pray.

And what will you pray for? What is it that will answer the need, the situation; what will touch it?

Now here is the point of departure. We feel the need; we are aware of the situation here and there, in this one and that, in this place and that; and of course, we do pray to the Lord and ask Him to do something about it; we do that. I trust I am not saying a wrong thing when I say that too often it is like the effort of the nine - nothing happens! The thing goes on, persists and defies you. You see, the need is not for that kind of prayer. What is needed is the kind of prayer that brings in the *MAJESTY* and the *POWER* of Jesus Christ; that is born out of a mighty apprehension of His glory, of Who He is, what He has done, where He is, and what He is doing now. That is what we need to recover.

About that we have much more to say. But - let us recognize it, face it, and acknowledge it - what is needed is this: the secret of bringing the majesty of the Lord into a situation; putting that power upon it. It is executive; it is dynamic; it is something which registers, and the thing is done. Do you not agree with me that that secret is what we need? And for that, I repeat, we need a new, mighty mastery, in our inner being, of the greatness of the Lord Jesus. We all agree that He is great; we will sing 'How great Thou art!'; we will not reserve or trim our words about the Lord Jesus in glory: but there is a gap between that and this situation. That is the tragedy and that is the problem and the perplexity of it. *HE* is like *THAT*, and yet *THIS* is like *THIS*, and the two things are not brought together.

Why did He take those three disciples up? Not simply because He had a heart that longed for human fellowship. No! He knew who they were; He knew their future; He knew the position that Peter was going to take, and He knew the ministry that John was going to fulfil, right on beyond the lifetime of all the others. He took them there with Him with this one object, I believe, in view: that, in those coming days, when they would meet these situations on this earth, in this world, they should be in possession of the secret of His majesty, and that they should be a link between Him in glory, and this situation of shame and evil.

Is not that the vocation of the Church? - to be His link between Heaven and earth; to be the instrument of the registration of His Kingdom upon the kingdom of Satan? Is not that what we are called for? If that is not it, I do not know what we are for. And if we fail in that, we can do ten thousand things, and still the enemy will laugh at us. With all our efforts and expenditure, he still holds the ground so terribly. Oh, for men whose eyes have seen the King! To have done so means a tremendous thing in the life of such men. That we shall see. But here is the preparation of the way.



Before we begin to pray over situations, let us pray for a new vision of the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus, and then nothing will be impossible. I believe that is what was in the thought of the Lord when He said: 'If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed...' It is not merely psychological make-believe. If only you have grasped the smallest meaning of His *MAJESTY*, anything is possible; it is so great!

## Chapter Two

### THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-19

*"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:10-12).*

In our earlier meditation we saw that the word 'presence', used here by Peter, and by other writers, is a word which links the Transfiguration with the coming again of the Lord Jesus. The phrase is rightly translated 'power and presence' - the *PRESENCE*. That word, as you see, is applied to the Transfiguration: the presence of the Lord Jesus in majesty, in power, in glory. That same word is used, and in the same way, concerning His coming again. It is called His 'presencing', His 'being present'; and we know that that presencing will indeed be in power, majesty and glory. If these are the accompaniments of the presence of the Lord Jesus, as they are clearly seen to be, again and again - we shall indicate some of these occasions as we go on - if these be the accompaniments of His presence, then the issue, not only in transfiguration and what it means, and in the advent at the end, but surely upon every occasion of the presencing of the Lord Jesus, must be to bring an impact upon the situation, the conditions, the place where He is present.

#### The Impact of the Presence

There is here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, an impact. The three men who were there in His presence fell on their faces with great fear. The Lord Jesus had to approach and lay His hand on them, and say: "Arise, and be not afraid" (Matthew 17:7). The presence of the Lord Jesus will lay waste all our own strength; all our natural wisdom; all our pride; all our impetuosity. Peter - and another evangelist recording it tells us this - Peter said: "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles..." The evangelist adds: "not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33). Here he is in his own impulsiveness again, obtruding himself into this situation, taking the speech upon his lips, and the situation into his hands, wanting to organize this, and to perpetuate it, and to make something of it. In Matthew's version he says: "I will make... three tabernacles..." 'I!' - Peter! - "not knowing what he said", truly perhaps with the best intentions; nevertheless Heaven had to rebuke him, and put him in his place, and this was a devastating experience, both for him and for his companions.

From one standpoint it is a glorious thing to see His *MAJESTY*; from another standpoint it is always a fearful thing - that is, for the flesh, for the natural life. We cannot walk into this and take hold of it, make something of it for our pleasure and satisfaction. There is an impact in it, that is the point; it registers. If we pray for, and seek - as by His grace we surely shall - new vision of the Exalted Lord, we must be prepared to be brought very low, and to have all our own natural energies wasted; to realize that that Majesty demands nothing other than that we shall be on our faces. That is a good place to be when it is before Him.

It was a tremendous thing when Stephen saw his Lord in majesty and glory. It carried him through the awful ordeal of martyrdom, of being broken, shattered and slain, with all the hatred and malice that was being poured out by those who gnashed their teeth and ran upon him. It was a glorious emergence for Stephen to see the Lord in glory as he did: but it was a tremendously devastating thing for at least one man there. More than that, we could say that it was devastating for that nation; for, in what they were doing, they were only setting their double seal to what they had done to the very Man in the Glory. Again, it is impact. What I am trying to say is, not that such and such things characterize a visitation or a vision, but that we can never really see the Lord, and be in the presence of the Lord, without knowing it, and something happening - without it being tremendously effective.

Saul of Tarsus saw the Lord glorified, and no one will argue as to there being an impact on that occasion. John saw Him; when he was in Patmos he saw his Lord glorified, and he fell to the ground - it is like that. And, whatever might be the consequences and effects, we would all say, Let us have it so, rather than this impotent, helpless, weak, ineffective state, in which we so often find ourselves. The effect of the Transfiguration, that is, of the seeing of the Glorified Lord, is always something tremendous.

### **The Fact of the Transfiguration**

Now here, in his letter, Peter is affirming the *FACT* of the Transfiguration. He is setting it over against what he calls "cunningly devised fables" - cleverly concocted reports, over against anything merely fictitious or imaginary. He says, 'This is a *FACT!* We were with Him; we saw; we heard'. And, he says, 'This has been abundantly confirmed: "we have the word of prophecy made more sure"' - probably referring to what he said in the passage from his first letter that we read. The prophets all pointed on to that, to that suffering and glory which met on the Mount of Transfiguration, as Moses and Elijah spoke to Him about the Cross, His 'exodus', about to be accomplished at Jerusalem. The suffering and the glory met there on that mountain. Peter says that the prophets were all pointing to that, and seeking and searching diligently to know what manner of time it would be, when they prophesied the sufferings and the glory. He says that the prophets searched *DILIGENTLY*. And then he crowns it all by saying, 'This is something that angels are desirous of looking into!' He says, 'We have got it - we have got it all in fulfilment! We were there on the mount, and we have seen it working out ever since; we are living in the light and the power of that blending of suffering and glory, glory and suffering. The word of the prophets is confirmed, both in the event and in our history ever since the event - it is made sure.'

Probably Peter meant more than that, but he meant that. That is not the whole interpretation, but it is a part. What I am trying to underline is this *FACT* that Peter himself is affirming here - *THE THING HAD HAPPENED*. But, when Peter adds his word about "more sure", you notice he carries it beyond the event, that historic event, that occasion on the mount. There is something added to this, something added to the (if we may call it) 'incident'. Mighty incident! Something more - it has been "made more sure" in our case. What is it?

### **An Inward Reality**

Well, just this, that is so true in the other cases, it was not only something *BEFORE THE EYES* of Peter (and the others); it was something that happened *TO* him, and afterward came *INTO* him. True, there was the event, the happening, in time, at a certain place. But, with it, something happened *IN* Peter. You notice the immediate context: he is speaking of his departure. "Knowing that the putting

off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me". 'I will seek that you have these things after my departure....' He is at the end of his life, at the end of his ministry; but something has happened that has carried him through. It is not that something has remained as the memory of an objective experience, but that something has happened *IN* him.

This is more than a doctrine, more than a theory, more than even something in the Holy Scriptures. To see the Lord does something *IN* us. We can get the 'truth' about anything and everything: all the truth that is available about the Lord Jesus Himself - His birth, His life, His works, His words, His death, His resurrection - all that there is; we can have all the 'truth' about the Church - and what a lot there is available; we can have it all, know it all - nothing fresh to know about it; and any other thing you like to mention, in the Scriptures - and yet the fact can remain that nothing has happened in us as a result. I ask you: What has all your knowledge of the Church meant, as a 'happening' in you, to effect something, to put you in a new place, with an entirely new conception, revolutionizing your whole life, so that one whole order of things just falls away as empty, and another heavenly order comes in? That is how it ought to be. True spiritual apprehension ought not just to be something in front of us - it ought to be something *IN* us. It was so with Peter, and we can trace this in his life.

Take again his great contemporary, Paul. Here is this fact, that, on the Damascus road, Jesus appeared *UNTO* him in glory - 'brightness above the brightness of the sun'. It was a tremendous objective 'something' that was before him; it struck him as from the outside. But as you know, when speaking of it years afterward, he says: "it pleased God... to reveal His Son *IN* me" (Galatians 1:15-16). It was not only to him - it was something *IN* him. The Apostle Paul's whole life and ministry was based upon and sprang out of that double event, *TO* and *IN*. And the Majesty of the Lord Jesus became an *INWARD* thing with him, and therefore a tremendously effective thing. The answer to the critics, who say that Saul of Tarsus was in a frenzy, and therefore was overtaken by a terrible hysteria, and began to 'see things', and believed that they were real, and that that is the psychological explanation of the conversion of Paul - the answer is his life of endurance, and suffering, and service, and love; and his death for his testimony. You do not go that way, like that, on a dream, on an imagination, on an hysteria. I venture to say that a very small proportion of what Paul had to meet during the thirty years of his ministry would knock hysteria out of most men. No, something happened inside; the vision did something in him, as well as being something to him.

And so we could go on with the other people, like John, who saw the Lord in His glory. But that is enough. The thing happened *TO* him, but it happened *IN* him. It was an event, true; but it was also an abiding process. For, right on through their lives, this was the thing that was growing - this marvellous greatness of the Lord Jesus. They did not get it all at once, even in the wonderful event, but throughout their lives the one mighty thing that was happening was this growing realization. Jesus, in all the greatness of His glorified Person and position, was dominating their whole horizon and the whole course of their lives.

### **The Principle of Spiritual Vision**

Now that brings us to the principle of all this, which opens up a very large field, in which we could move for a long time. The principle is the principle of true, spiritual, inward vision. Not 'visionariness', but inward vision, which is specific, which is definite. Visionariness can be very abstract, but what we mean by 'vision', spiritual vision, is very concrete; it is very specific. It is a Person Who is

in view, and this mighty Person is no abstraction. There is nothing unreal or imaginary when we see the Lord Jesus.

Let us weigh this whole matter. You and I and the Lord's people, as we said earlier, in our various places, various situations, various experiences, scattered and tried and pressed, need something very mighty to carry us through to the end. Things are becoming very grim, are they not? Most of us are aware that we are in a most terrific spiritual conflict, and the Christian life is not getting easier. It is becoming exceedingly difficult just to hold on, keep on, and especially to be triumphant. That is how it was when Peter wrote his letter.

Now, we need more than words, and more than visionariness, to get us through. Our Christian lives ought to be based upon something like this: 'I have seen the Lord'. We shall only go through if that is true. By the operation and activity of the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven we must have an inward vision of the Exalted Lord. For all endurance, and for all service, that is essential. Life that has to go on without that is just a drag; it is an existence. Work or service without that *INWARD VISION* has nothing in it to lift us, to carry us on. For everything - life and work and endurance - it is indispensable that we have this inward vision of the Lord in majesty and glory, kept fresh, kept clear, constantly revived. With such a vision all the essentials of effectiveness are bound up.

### **A Sense of Purpose**

First of all, what we all need, what the Church as a whole needs, and what every part of it needs, is a mighty governing sense of purpose: that there is something for which to live, and something for which to work, and something for which to endure and go on: a real master-purpose in our existence. If you look into this matter in the New Testament, you will find that these men and the Church were brought into this master-purpose. We are so familiar with the very word that it has lost its music in our ears - 'the eternal purpose' - 'called according to His purpose'. They were governed by this objective, this goal, this something toward which they were being moved, drawn, constrained, urged and held; which, again and again, when they were cast down, and it seemed that everything was hopeless, revived in them, and revived them, and brought them up again. It was not a mentality, not a theory, not an idea, but what Paul calls "the power that worketh in us" - "according to the power that worketh in us". The word 'worketh' there, as you know, is the one from which we get our word 'energize' - 'the power that energizes in us'. What is it?

Look again, and you will see that it had to do with that great, great end which God had fixed concerning His Son, the Lord Jesus, in universal majesty and glory and fullness. They had seen something of that in Him. It had become the great purpose which bound their lives, and drew them out in a sense that life is not empty, meaningless; it has some great end: 'We see what it is - it is concerning the Lord Jesus'. We, too, must have that sense of purpose, or we shall not get very far. Not only was it *A* purpose, but this inward spiritual vision gave the incentive to life. Through days and years of wearing out and wearing down, weariness and disappointment, over many things, disillusionment and heartbreak, it is not difficult to lose incentive; to ask, Is it worth it? Is it all justified? Are we not just spending our strength for nought? We need incentive. It was this apprehension of Christ as having gone that way of weariness and devastation and triumph, and having been glorified, and now being there in the glory, which gave them the incentive; it imparted to life an incentive, a motive, a power.

## **Cohesive Power**

Further, in this vision, there is the effect of cohesion. A vision is a very cohesive thing: that is, it has the power of drawing people together, holding them together, making them a 'together' people - those who are going on together. They have one vision. The great illustration of this is Nehemiah and the people of his time, with their one vision. Look at all the variety of people, and variety of gifts and qualifications- every kind of artisan and profession mentioned; every sphere of life; but they are one people, a solid whole, simply because they have got one vision. That wall and the rebuilding of the city dominated everyone's heart and everyone's mind, and brought them together in a wonderful unity. There is no other way of having unity but really to see the Lord Jesus, and have Him in view as on the throne, above all, over all. It will bring us together.

I have said that what we all need is the power to endure; and it is just there, as we have seen, that Peter introduces the Transfiguration. He speaks about 'the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth...' - the *TRIAL* of your faith. 'Manifold temptations' - he brings in the vision as the power for enduring and going through. We are told that Moses endured 'as seeing Him Who is invisible' (Hebrews 11:27). This is the power. Now, you can see this from the opposite and contrary standpoint. See the effects of loss of a vision! However many other visions the Lord's people may have, as soon as they lose the vision of the Lord Himself, as Lord over all, as on the Throne, what happens? They lose their sense of purpose; they lose their awareness of a true objective in their existence. They then have to have substitutes for that vision, to keep them going; but these things wear out and disappoint. The loss of vision always results in the loss of an incentive, real incentive for life.

In the same way, it is true of this matter of cohesion, coordination: lose vision, and the result is always disintegration, division, separation, confusion, and the loss of strength and stability. This is no matter of theory or technique - it is very true. Some of us know - and that is why we are speaking like this just now - we know that when a people have really been gripped by the vision of the Throne, the Majesty of the Lord Jesus, the Authority of Christ, a wonderful sense of purpose comes on that people, and a wonderful incentive, and a wonderful unity: they are a one people. It is the Throne that has done it, and their apprehension of that Throne. And when things take the place of the Lord - anything that you like to mention - then the falling apart begins. Sooner or later the disintegration sets in, the confusion, the loss of heart, incentive and purpose. A real *INWARD* seeing of the Lord Jesus, as in the place of Authority and Government and Majesty, is the answer to our every need, personally and collectively. It was so of old; it is so now.

## **Four Major Elements**

Do you notice how this Transfiguration was the confirmation and complement of all the teaching? Look again at the record of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. What have we? We have the four major elements of the Christian faith and the Christian life:

### **(1) The Person of the Lord Jesus**

*"When Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him,*

*Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father Which is in heaven" (Matthew 16: 13-17).*

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." I think that there it might have been said that Peter, once again, did not know what he was talking about! It was a tremendous utterance: 'Thou art the Messiah! Thou ART the Messiah!' Both 'Christ' and 'Messiah' mean 'The Anointed One', and, as such, the Son of the Living God. Here is the basic fact of Christianity - the Person of the Lord Jesus. For a man like Peter, a Jew, versed and saturated in the Old Testament and Jewish history, to say that, meant far more than we realize. Think of the tremendous things that were bound up with that word 'Messiah'!

There were three great conceptions of the Messiah in Israel. The first we find in the first part of the prophecies of Isaiah - the 'Son of David'; the Seed and the Son of David. You remember Isaiah's prophecy about 'the shoot of Jesse' (Isaiah 11:1): that was the first conception of the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, Who should take over the Throne of David, and all that that meant.

In the second part of Isaiah, the Messiah is the Suffering Servant of Jehovah; King-Redeemer, Redeemer-King; and Isaiah 53 stands right at the centre of that conception of the Messiah. We see the Throne, and Redemption: how it is going to work out.

We find the third conception of the coming Messiah in the Book of Daniel, chapter 7. It is a very wonderful passage.

*"I beheld till thrones were placed, and One that was Ancient of days did sit: His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand of thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened... I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a Son of Man, and He came even to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14).*

That was their coming Messiah: King, Saviour, reigning Lord for ever and ever, in universal sovereignty. When Peter said, 'THOU art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God', all that was present in the declaration. Hence, Jesus said, 'Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you. My Father knows the meaning of the Christhood, the Messiahship, the Sonship, and it is all that!'

Now, I have included that, only with a view to trying to revive this conception of the greatness of our Lord Jesus; to help toward the vision. I would that, as we speak of it, read of it, you might see that your Lord Jesus is no little, defeated Lord - defeated at the hands of the great enemy. Only as we have such a conception and apprehension of His Person shall we get through in triumph.

## **(2) The Church**

The second thing is the Church. The Person always does lead to the Church, in Divine sequence. *"I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16: 18).* Why? Well, for that very reason. It is His Church, the Church of this One - this One to Whom the Kingdom is given, and the Throne; before Whom all

nations shall bow. The Church is the embodiment of the vision of the Exalted Lord. If that is true, it will make it a great Church, a powerful Church. If this One - this One of the Transfiguration mount, this One of Stephen's vision, of Paul's vision - if this One, by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven, is embodied in the Church - then what a Church! What a Church! Is that the Church with which we are familiar? Have we really understood that that is what is meant by the very term 'Church' - the embodiment of Himself as Lord over all?

### **(3) The Cross**

The third thing is the Cross.

*"From that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem" (Matthew 16:21). "The Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men" (Luke 9:44).*

His wonderful Cross! I like that thought, that idea, that a certain writer has expressed when he has spoken of Christ 'reigning and ruling by His Cross'. There is no doubt that that is right. What looked, humanly, so much to the contrary - defeat and failure, loss and despair, weakness and helplessness - has proved in history to be the most potent force in the universe - the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Saul, before his conversion, looked upon the Cross as the very symbol of ignominy, of shame; something despicable, to be hated. Afterward he said: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14, AN). From the shame to the glory. The Transfiguration transfigures the Cross. In other words, a vision of the glorified Lord will transfigure our sufferings, will altogether transform our afflictions. We see what that Cross meant really in the mind of God.

### **(4) The Coming Of The Lord**

The fourth thing is the coming of the Lord.

*"The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then shall He render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:27).*

The point is this, that the Transfiguration was the crown and confirmation, the complement of all those four things. It was the crown of the Person: Peter had said, 'Thou art the Christ!' Well, the mount of Transfiguration gave good evidence to that fact as he saw Him transfigured. The Lord had said to him: 'I will build My Church'. The mount of Transfiguration gave good hope for that Church, if He, that One, was going to build it. If the Lord was speaking about the Cross, the mount of Transfiguration will give an altogether new and different interpretation to the Cross. If He has spoken of His Coming Again in the Glory of the Father, the mount of Transfiguration explains that, demonstrates that.

Yes: to see the Lord in that way, glorified, is the confirmation of our whole faith; the establishment of our whole position; and the assurance of our final triumph with Him. *The Lord give us a new vision of Himself - His power, His majesty and His presence.*



## Chapter Three

### OUR ANCHORAGE - THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS

*Reading:* Romans 8: 31-39

Our hearts have been directed to the glorified Lord Jesus, as the object and as the inspiration of Christian life, endurance, and service. We have looked at Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and have seen a little of what that meant, for the rest of their lives, to the men who were with Him, and what Christ glorified meant to all the others who, at different times, and in different ways, and at different places, saw Him in glory - Stephen, and Paul, and later still, John.

John, in speaking many, many years afterward of the sole impression that remained with him from the time spent with the Lord Jesus, summed it all up in one marvellous phrase: a parenthesis it is in his gospel, but was there ever a more important and wonderful parenthesis? "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). What they saw, when they saw the Lord Jesus in His glory, was the manifestation of the grace of God.

This portion of Paul's Roman letter, which we have just read, seems to me to be Paul's way of stating what he saw in the face of Jesus Christ. After dwelling much upon this part of the Word, the impression has come to me, at this point, that this is what the apostle was working toward all the way through; this is his release. He has been doing a piece of very laborious work; he has set himself to a great treatise - and it is that - it has defeated all the greatest minds, ever since, in their efforts to fathom this letter and to interpret it. But you have a feeling as you read, and arrive at this point, that now the apostle said, 'Now that is that; let me say what I am after all the time, what I have really had in mind; let me unburden my heart'. And he does so here. 'These things' to which he refers - 'What shall we say to *THESE THINGS?*' - all *THESE THINGS* that he has been saying, what is the upshot? What do they all point to? 'What is the supreme significance and implication of all that I have been saying?' And he goes on to answer his own question, and to release from his heart this thing that has been there, prompting all his effort and undertaking. It is this mighty, mighty revelation of *THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST*.

I say he was working toward that. It is a painful process. The first stage of the letter, as you know, is occupied with that painful necessity, that so unpleasant necessity - the exposing of sin. He does it very thoroughly; he goes through the whole Gentile world, and gives, not an exaggerated picture, but a very terrible picture, of sin. There is no place in the whole Bible where sin in its awfulness is more exposed than in the early part of this letter. It is a terrible picture of human sin in its natural state. And he proceeds from the Gentile world to the Jewish world, the world of Israel. Although elect, chosen, called, separated, and given so much of Divine deposit and trust and revelation, Israel had to have the Law. You do not need a police force in a perfect State; you do not need law if there is no lawlessness. The very giving of the Law, Paul says, is only another proof that in this matter of sin Jews are no better than other people. 'By the law sin is manifested.' I have spoken of the Police Force: the very presence of a policeman says that there is wrong in the world; the very presence of the law means that there must be lawlessness. And so Israel is no better than the rest. Sin is universal; sin is in every creature; sin is the state of the whole creation. It is a terrible exposure, uncovering, but very necessary. I am quite sure that, when Paul got to the end of it, he sighed a sigh of relief, he was glad to get past that, to get on to something better than that - really what he was after.

You see the point: *THIS* is what he is after! he must do that - and God must make us know sin, the reality of sin, the awfulness of sin; sin must become a terrible thing with us, before ever we can appreciate the grace of God. No one ever appreciates Divine grace who has seen little or nothing of the sinfulness of sin in their own heart. Great pains, then, are taken in this letter to expose the reality and the nature of sin, and its effects; not in order to bring condemnation, not to make people miserable, but just to lead to the grace of God - to enhance Divine grace. So, the apostle says, 'where sin abounded' - bounded over Gentile and Jew, over the race, over the whole world; a great wave has passed over and inundated the whole creation - where sin, like a great ocean, spread itself, *ABOUNDED*, grace did *SUPER-ABOUND!* Grace was greater than the greatness of sin!

So he comes to this at last: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" It is a marvellous thing: and, as you can well see, the apostle is speaking much out of his own experience and history here, when he catalogues these things which are a real threat to hope and to life and to prospect. Very real and terrible things they are that he catalogues here. 'Shall tribulation...?' Paul knew something about tribulation; tribulation in his experience was a very real thing indeed. 'Or anguish...?' - yes, we find Paul more than once in anguish; anguish over the spiritual state of his beloved converts, and the churches. To the Thessalonians he speaks twice of his 'travail' for them - his anguish. 'Or persecution...?' Paul knew quite a bit about that! 'Famine...' - he tells us he was in hunger; 'nakedness...' - yes, in nakedness; 'or peril, or sword...' And if that is not enough, 'death... life... angels... principalities... things present... things to come... powers... height... depth...', 'and', he says, 'I cannot go on enumerating and analysing any more' - '...or any other creation' - that covers everything! 'I am persuaded that there is nothing in creation - all these things and anything else that you would like to gather into that - I am persuaded that none of these things shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.' That is *GRACE!*

Sin need not separate us from the love of God! Do you believe that? Sin need not separate you from the love of God, because of Romans 8: 'One died...'; 'it is Christ Who died, yes, rather, that is risen'; and, further, He is 'at the right hand of God making intercession'. Therefore, sin need not, and, on that ground, cannot separate us from the love of God.

Now, whether we individually experience all the things that are mentioned here, or not, the fact is that there are a great many things that are given a complexion by the forces of evil, with the object of separating us from the love of God. Suffering, anguish, persecution, death, and even life - for life can be a terrible thing for some people - many things that come into our experience, are just played upon by these forces of evil everywhere, to tell us that the love of God is not a reality; that God does not love us - this is proof positive; this is the evidence! In this storm, when the winds blow from every quarter, when all the elements are against us, we need an anchorage; we need something that will hold.

There is no question about Paul's devotion to the Lord; he knew in his own heart that there was no controversy between him and the Lord; he was not aware of being in revolt against the Lord, or being contrary to the known will of God; his whole being was poised and focused upon the pleasure of his Lord, to be well-pleasing unto Him - he knew it. And yet, with that in his heart, he is meeting all these things: his ministry is being discredited; his name is being defamed; he is suspect wherever he goes; he moves all over the world in an atmosphere of suspicion and ostracism, and not only in the world, but amongst Christians; he is

not universally loved even in the churches that had their existence through his ministry. No, this thing has spread, like an awful vapour, everywhere, to somehow destroy this man and his ministry; and there were not a few who would be glad if he were dead. He knew it. And in these many forms of expression he met it almost every day of his life.

A man, or a Christian, meeting things like that, needs an anchorage. When things beat on you, and sorrow overwhelms you, you need an anchorage. Your anchorage will not be self-vindication - or self-justification - you will not get anywhere along that line; your anchorage will not even be your own sense of rightness. The only anchor that will hold in all this is God's love for you. You may make mistakes - and we are always wrong when we think of Paul or any other apostle as being faultless. I used to feel, in younger days, that it was a terrible thing to allow myself to think that Paul could be wrong, or that any other apostle could be wrong, or make a mistake. I thought these men must be infallible. Oh, no, it is we who are wrong when we take that attitude. Paul made mistakes, and he let himself in for difficulties by his mistakes; but what he came out with was this. The love of God is not changed when I make mistakes; the love of God does not let me go when I make mistakes. When I default, make wrong decisions, take wrong directions, perhaps say wrong things - that does not break the cable between my soul and the anchor of His love; it holds! 'I am persuaded... persuaded that none of these things - anything in the creation that you can mention' - "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord".

That is what Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. John's word for it was: "full of grace and truth". Paul would have endorsed that; indeed, this is his great endorsement. Sin - yes, horrible, awful, despicable, wicked, cruel; unfaithfulness, on the part of Israel; departure from Divine intention - yes (for you know he throws in a section immediately after chapter 8; the next two or three chapters are a section by themselves to illustrate his point). But it does not make any difference to the Divine love. Let us think about that just for a moment - this section that he puts in to illustrate his point. Israel: 'Hath God cast off His people? God forbid!' (11:1) - it is one of his nine 'God forbids' in this letter. Yes, but look what Israel has done! Look at Calvary - look at their work; look at Stephen - look at their work; look at what they are doing everywhere - *ISRAEL!*

Yes, they may be under judgment; they may be suffering for their sin, their wickedness, their iniquity; they may have been set aside for the dispensation as God's instrument because of their unfaithfulness. 'But', says the apostle, 'that has not ended God's love for them'. Judgment in this world, and in this life, is never a proof that God's love is at an end; it may be the very proof of His love. It is better for us to suffer when we do wrong, in order to discover something new of His love through suffering. I venture to say that many of us have come to what little we do apprehend of the Divine love, through the realization of our own faultiness, and what it leads to. But Israel is a great illustration; and even yet, a spiritual company from the natural Israel will be found in the Kingdom, and in the Church. God has not washed His hands of them eternally as a people, and said, No Jew, no Israelite, will ever again have a chance. Not at all! Bad as they have been, and done what they have done, He has set His love upon them, and His love will keep the door open.

But you see the message. 'Who shall separate us from the love of God?' 'What shall we say to these things? If God is for us' - and this is how He is for us, and where He is for us, and when He is for us, and through everything His love - what shall we say? Well, after making this tremendous sweep of Divine love, and then illustrating it with Israel in this most impressive way, he answers his question, his

interrogation, by saying: "I beseech you therefore... by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (12:1). What shall we say? The answer must be not in words, but in an act - 'present your bodies, by the mercies of God'. That 'love so amazing, so Divine, demands our souls, our life, our all.'

'Sirs, we would see Jesus.'

What are you looking for? This is what you ought to see when you see Jesus - the Love of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.

## Chapter Four

### BEHOLDING... CHANGED... TRANSFORMED

*“And after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: and He was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light... and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (Matthew 17:1-2, 5).*

*“We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit” (or, “the Spirit which is the Lord”) (2 Corinthians 3:18).*

The link between the two passages lies in one word, unfortunately slightly obscured in translation. In the King James' Version it is 'are changed into the same image'; in the Revised, 'are transformed into the same image'. The Revisers certainly have made a slight improvement on the other, and perhaps with a fine sensibility, or sense of fitness, they avoided putting the true translation, and made this slight change into 'transformed'. The fact remains that we have the same Greek word here as that which is used to describe what happened on that Mount - 'and He was *TRANSFIGURED* before them.' That is the same word exactly as is here translated alternatively 'changed' or 'transformed'. The exact rendering here would be 'are transfigured into the same image'. So that the children of God have a transfiguration, even as the Lord Jesus had. His was an event, an act; a thing, shall we say, as of a moment. We do not know how long it lasted, but it was at a definite time point. Ours is a long process; indeed, right from the beginning of our Christian life to its climax, this is what is supposed to be going on with us: we are being 'transfigured into the same image, from glory to glory.

### The Outshining of the Glory of a Perfect Man

That at once is very challenging to us, for Christian history, life, progress. There may be - and I am always conscious of being on very delicate ground in making any comparison between the Lord Jesus and ourselves - there may be something different about Him. It has been said that the transfiguration was the outshining of His Deity, and I have no quarrel with that; if that was so, all right; it does not affect the issue at all. But we have reason to believe that it was something other than that also - that it was the perfecting of His humanity, and the outshining of the glory of an absolutely Perfect Man. We do believe, and we feel we have ground for believing, that something like that was God's intention for all men, when He said, 'Let us make man in our own image'. And when there is so much in the Word about the glory and the glorifying which is the consummation of our pilgrimage, surely there is something in the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus which is not altogether isolated from what the Lord intends for us.

That is where I would put the emphasis in our present consideration; that is the point. Indeed, in an earlier meditation on this matter we said this very thing. We said that the glory which took hold of Him, and emanated from Him, filled Him, and transfigured Him, was the glory of His personality as utterly satisfying to God. For God's satisfaction is always the ground of glory wherever you look in the Bible. Whenever you find in any place that state of things with which God can be well pleased, you will find the glory there - the glory fills and breaks forth. That is supremely the case in the Lord Jesus, and that is why at this point the voice from Heaven attested Him, marked Him out, and said, '... in Whom I am well pleased'. The Father was completely satisfied.

I repeat, then, that it was the glory of His personality as the Son of Man; for, almost in association with that, He spoke of His coming again as being 'the coming of the Son of Man in the glory of the Father'. This, so far as His perfecting was concerned, was not something that took place on the Mount. The Mount was the mark of the *CONSUMMATION* of His perfecting. I do not mean in the matter of sin - sinfulness or sinlessness - but the perfecting of His character, the perfecting of that inner man which we call personality. Personality is a strange thing, an elusive thing, something that you cannot get hold of, but you cannot mistake; it is *THE* person within - the man inside. Now, He, in that inner life of His, had worked out this whole matter of God's pleasure, God's satisfaction, through His life. There was the Divine approval at His baptism in similar words, indicating, probably, that His thirty years were approved; certainly indicating that the step that He was now taking, right out into public, with the Cross accepted (for His baptism certainly implied that) was approved. That brought the word from Heaven: 'My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased'.

But now this period, between the baptism and the Cross, is concluding, and what a period! One New Testament writer says that He was 'tempted in *ALL* points like as we'. And that was crowded into a short three years and a few months. Yes, hell tested Him; the world tested Him; in a sense Heaven tested Him. He was put through it in every detail, and won through. He, in that time, was 'made perfect through sufferings', 'learned obedience through the things which He suffered'. That time brought that inner life, that inner personality, to perfection. Now, you will see why I am saying this at the outset; it is not new, it is not fresh, but it is basic to everything else. That is the point.

### **'We ALL... Are Transfigured'**

The apostle takes hold of that very word, and says: 'We all... are transfigured into the same image'. I am glad he uses that little word with its so comprehensive meaning - 'we all...'. He is not talking only about himself and his fellow-workers, brothers in the work; he is talking about the Corinthians and all believers. 'We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transfigured into the same image'. He takes hold of that same word, and brings it over to all saints; making of that which had been perfected and completed in the Lord Jesus a continuous process in the life of believers. He is but saying: What was completed and perfected in that One, has now to be reproduced in us progressively; that perfection, that character, that personality - the personality of the Lord Jesus - perfected, brought into us, developed in us, manifested through us. For 'personality', we could equally well substitute the word 'character'.

Now the first thing to note about this, which is, of course, so helpful and encouraging, is where the apostle finishes this statement, 'as by the Spirit Who is the Lord'. With all that we know about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit, all the effects of the Spirit's advent and indwelling, let us recognize this as supreme: The inclusive work of the Holy Spirit, in all His manifold activities, is one thing - to reproduce the Lord Jesus in a people. When you pray about the Holy Spirit, and you speak about the Holy Spirit, remember that. The Holy Spirit's supreme and comprehensive object is to reproduce the Lord Jesus, in His character, His personality, His perfected manhood or humanity, in a people.

This is very testing to you and to me. If we really contemplate it - and it has challenged my own heart to the point of making me very hesitant to speak freely - the test of the Holy Spirit having His way in your life and mine, the proof that He is there and that He is doing His work, is our transfiguration. In other words: Is what Christ is in His perfect humanity becoming more and more true of us, in

our natures, in our hearts? The real test of a Spirit-governed life lies here: the progressive increase of the character of Christ. If we are going to meet one another as really Spirit-governed men and women, what we must meet in one another is the Lord Jesus; and that must be, not just today, not just in one time of our lives, but going on, going on all the time.

### **Transfigured Through the Liberation of the Spirit**

That is the test and the proof and the challenge of the Holy Spirit's presence, and of the Holy Spirit's liberty to work. You see, the apostle says that here, just in a sentence earlier: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). He is, of course, making a comparison, or a contrast, with the old dispensation of the Law - Moses coming down with the Law. There it was all compulsion; there it was all 'you must' and 'you must not'; bondage, thralldom, limitation, suppression, repression, and anxious fretful striving. Now, all that has gone, and the Spirit comes and has His way. Moses, even, as representing that order of things, and that dispensation, had to put a veil over his face - not to hide the glory, but to hide the departure of the glory, and pretend, pretend - for you know it was a dispensation of pretending, on the outside. That was what the Lord Jesus was up against in His day, with the Scribes and Pharisees. He called them 'hypocrites', that is, pretending something that was not true; it was all put on, on the outside. The glory that had gone was not seen through this veil of pretence.

But with Christ, says the apostle, all that has gone; the Spirit has come, and come within; now we are set free from all that sort of thing. When the Spirit is Lord, it is liberty; everything is spontaneous, it is free, it just happens. You do not have to make believe, strive, fret, worry, and suppress: it happens if the Holy Spirit is there. And what happens, what happens? The glory of the Lord - that is, the Perfection of His Manhood - begins, and continues, to express itself in us spontaneously. That is the 'life of the Spirit'. It is 'normal Christian life'; there is something subnormal if it is not up to that, and something abnormal if you are putting on to that. But the 'normal' is that the Holy Spirit, having His way, does this one thing: He makes Christ more and more manifest in our mortal bodies.

So that is the heart of this. Now, the point is that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. That helps us very much, that the Holy Spirit has taken the responsibility for this into His own hands. You and I have not to strive to be Christ-like. With all due respect for Thomas a Kempis, it is not an 'imitation' of Christ - something that we *TRY* to do. It is this: to a true child of God, who is not putting something definitely in the way of the Holy Spirit, it is as natural to become more Christ-like, as it is to breathe. Now, you do not stop to discuss the question of whether you are going to breathe, how many more breaths you are going to take; whether you are going to breathe now, or save it up till later on, and make a theory of it - you just do it without thinking. And it is as natural as that, because the Holy Spirit is our breath, our life. Set that over against the many difficulties that people find to be Christ-like!

### **Transfiguration Through Trials**

Now what is said here is these two things: First of all, there is the Pattern, perfect, complete - Christ glorified. The Holy Spirit comes to work that pattern out progressively in the children of God. He has come for that purpose, to take it over, and to do it. We are not allowed to say how He shall do it; He chooses His own way. That will lead to this next thing. The apostle goes on: 'We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves' (2 Corinthians 4: 7). Now, how is it going to be done? how are these vessels of fragile clay going to contain, and increasingly

contain, and manifest, this glory of the character of Christ? Not in the way that we would think, perhaps, or choose: 'We are pressed on every side... we are perplexed... we are pursued... we are smitten down... we are always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus... we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake... death worketh in us...' (verses 8-12).

That is rather a disconcerting, discouraging view of things, but that is how the Spirit does it. The fact remains, whether we like it or not just this: being pressed on every side means that we are pressed into something more of the Lord Jesus, and that something more of the Lord Jesus is pressed into us. It means that you and I would never come to this transfiguration, only through these trials and these adversities. These are the Holy Spirit's means of our perfecting, of our growth in Christ.

It is a pity that it has to be like that; a great pity that we cannot be Christ-like, without being put into difficulty and trouble and suffering, but that is how it is! Give people absolute exemption from all kinds of difficulties and troubles, and see what kind of people they are - self-centred; self-sufficient; self-assertive. People who are never ill have very great difficulty in being sympathetic and understanding with the sick. They have, at least, to make a great effort to be patient with them - that is why I like doctors to be ill sometimes! But sympathy, understanding, patience, come to us along this line of painful experience; it is a matter of character, is it not?

And so the apostle puts alongside of our transfiguration, all these difficulties and adversities, and in effect he says, This is the Holy Spirit's material; these are the Holy Spirit's instruments for working Christ into us. If we are not rebellious, if we do not allow bitterness to creep into our spirit, it works out that way. Under the government of the Holy Spirit, suffering and trial, difficulty and adversity, will effect this.

### **Occupation With the Lord**

But then the apostle checks us here; he says: 'We all, with unveiled face, *BEHOLDING* as in a mirror...'. The revisers have had some difficulty here, as the translators of the Authorized Version had, and they have not settled their difficulty. Here is a matter in which they did not really know exactly what Paul meant, so they put it in these different ways - what we have in the text, and what we have in the margin. Did he mean that we are a mirror? that the image is thrown upon us as upon a mirror, and then rebounds - is that what he meant? Or did he mean that Christ is the mirror, and we are looking into Him, and He is reflecting the glory of God? I think that is what he meant. He spoke about the 'glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' - I think the word 'face' there is really equivalent to 'mirror'. I know that it is not the same Greek word, but it is just another word in meaning; it is 'in the face of Jesus Christ'. 'And we *BEHOLDING*, as in the Face of Jesus Christ' - that is what the apostle is talking about here.

Now the word 'beholding' is a strong word; it is not just taking a look, it is 'fixing our gaze'. That is what the New Testament means by beholding, behold. We all, fixing our gaze upon Christ, as He mirrors in His own Person the glory of God, the satisfaction of God, the mind of God in perfection. The point is that you and I must contemplate the Lord Jesus in spirit, and be much occupied with Him. We must have our Holy of Holies where we retire with Him. We must have a secret place where we spend time with Him. And not only in certain special seasons, but we must seek, as we move about, ever to keep Him before us. Looking at the Lord Jesus, contemplating Him, we shall be changed into the same image. The Holy Spirit will operate upon our occupation.



You become like that which obsesses you, which occupies you. Is that not true? You see what people are occupied with, and you can see their character changing by their obsessions. They are becoming like the thing which is obsessing them; they are changing; they are becoming different. Something has got a grip on them; they can never think about anything else, talk about anything else; and it is changing their character. Now Paul said, 'For me to live is Christ - being occupied with Him'. It is the wrong word to use, but nevertheless it would be a good thing if He became our 'obsession', our continuous occupation. As we steadfastly fix our gaze upon Him, the Spirit changes us into the same image.

### **'This Ministry' is for All: A Matter of Character**

Notice the context of these words in II Corinthians. The apostle here is mainly concerned with the effect of the life of believers in this world, on this earth. He calls the effect 'this ministry'. Perhaps that word needs transfiguring for us. Note that when he says, 'we ALL, beholding...', he includes all believers in that word 'ministry'. It is ALL believers he is speaking to about ministry. And herein lies a tremendous difference. Our technical, professional conceptions of 'the ministry' are mostly external: that is, you give a title; you, more or less, put on a uniform; and so you are 'the minister'. It is all put on the outside, therefore it can be artificial. But what the apostle is saying here, is, that the ministry is not something that you put on, but something that comes out from within. We ALL - and that includes you, my brothers and my sisters - are called to the ministry. Any special application of that word would only be permissible, in the New Testament, in *MEASURE*, and not in kind. That is, some have a special ministry, and they are God's ministers in that particular way, with that particular measure. It is not that they are a class called 'ministers', and other people are 'laity' - such ideas are altogether foreign to the New Testament. 'We ALL, beholding', have the ministry, resultant from the beholding. And so we are all called to the ministry; it is just the effect of our being here.

Now, what is the apostle saying about this? He is clearly saying that the personality and the ministry must be one. How searching that is, but how very meaningful. The ministry must not be some 'thing' - preaching, teaching, and all those things that are called 'ministry' - something just done, whilst the man himself is different, and the person is apart. What Paul is saying so emphatically here is this, that when you meet a truly Spirit-indwelt and Spirit-governed man or woman, what they say comes out of their life - is a very part of their life. Their teaching can be seen to have been wrought into their history and their experience. When that man or that woman seeks to teach, to 'minister', to say something to someone else of a Christian character, it is known that that has come out of some secret history with God, something that the Holy Spirit has done in them. Their ministry and their character are identical.

That is very important indeed; it is indispensable. That is why the Holy Spirit is so meticulous about character, so careful about the personality, about the inner man, the inner life. That is why, if we are under His government - and this does not apply to everyone who ministers, or is in Christian service - but if we are really under the government of the Holy Spirit, if we, in word, exceed what is true in our own lives, the Holy Spirit will soon take us up on that, and, in effect, will see to it that we are brought abreast of our teaching - that the thing is kept in correspondence and balance. Have you ever said something, and the Holy Spirit has checked you up, and said: Is that true of you? is that something you have said? It is very important, and, if we were honest, we would not really have it otherwise. We want it to be like that.

## The Impact of the Glory

But this is something that involves the glory - that is the point. There is such a thing as the *POWER* of the Holy Spirit in the glory. We spoke of it on a previous occasion as the 'impact' - the impact of the transfiguration upon those men; and the impact of a seeing of the Lord by anyone afterward - what it registered of power. Now, you and I perhaps covet and crave as much as anything that there should be impact in our lives, that there should be power, that our lives should register, that our presence should not just leave things as they were. We long that, as we go on, and when we have passed on, something may have been left of an impress, at least through our presence, and perhaps through our ministry - something that shall remain. Yes, impact is a very good word.

That is bound up with the glory - that *IS* the glory. It registers; it is something that remains. Things may come in, and for a time the glory may be veiled, but there is something there that will come up again. I confess that I have had difficulty in understanding - and yet there is some understanding, because we are all made alike - how three men, and one of them in particular, could be on the mount of transfiguration, yet in His hour of need they all could forsake Him and flee for their very lives; or how one amongst them, who by a revelation of the Father had declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God - how that man could yet, when it came to it, deny Him with oaths and curses. And yet all this was only a veiling for the time being; the glory came up afterward. It came up with Peter at the end. Many years afterward he remembered: 'We were with Him in the holy mount'. It remained. There was a temporary eclipse, but it was something that they did not forget. God forbid that such an eclipse should ever be true of us; perhaps we shall never have to go quite the same way as they went. But there is a permanence about this matter - an abiding effect of really having Christ revealed in the heart; and, by that inward revelation of Him, there is a manifestation of His character, something that remains.

Now it is clear that we cannot say this of all that is called 'ministry'. It is a sermon, an address, something given, and it passes. And it goes on like that in a routine, week after week, week after week. But, of course, we do not want it like that; we really do not want that we should come and go, should be just passing things, and not leave any abiding mark. No, there is an impact bound up with this. So, it is not a matter of what we call 'the ministry' - something external. The 'ministry' with Paul is nothing less than, nothing other than, what is true of Christ coming out of the life of His servants, of His people; being there, and coming out.

*"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy... we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).*

## Chapter Five

### BORN OF GOD

*"The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).*

*"As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).*

*"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).*

*"These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).*

*"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).*

*"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4).*

In bringing these Scriptures together, that about the birth of the Lord Jesus and those about the birth of believers, I am not failing to recognize a great difference. One has always to safeguard this matter of the Person of the Lord Jesus. He was Very God of Very God; 'God manifest in the flesh'; 'Emmanuel, God with us'. In that He stands alone, unique; there is not another like Him. His birth was different, even, from the new birth of every child of God: it was different in kind; it was different in degree.

#### **The Correspondence Between Christ's Birth and Ours**

Nevertheless, there are factors in His own birth which constitute the nature of the birth of every believer. Deity apart - Godhead left with Him - there is yet something in these passages about the believer's new birth that corresponds to His birth. It is to some of these features that we are now to give attention. You will not confuse the two, I trust, at any point, on that matter of His uniqueness. At the same time, and on the other side, I do trust that you will be able to recognize what John said, that that which is true in Him is, in its own realm, and after its own kind, also true in us (1 John 2:8). And, in this matter of the birth and the new life of the children of God, we shall be able to understand better if we recognize some of these features in the birth of the Lord Jesus. For His birth does, as I have said, hold all the factors which go to make up a true child of God.

#### **The New Birth A Divine Intervention**

The first thing, which is quite patent, is that the birth of the Lord Jesus was a Divine intervention in human life: and that is true of the new birth of every believer; it is nothing less than a Divine intervention in human life. We do not stay with all the minute details of Christ's birth, but it is perfectly clear in this way, that out from Heaven there came a Heavenly Visitant, making an announcement; and, from the same heaven, the Holy Spirit came into human life

and intervened, and did something - something that we shall see, I trust, in a minute. The point is that here is a breaking in of Heaven into human life.

Perhaps you wonder why this should be stressed, and given such emphasis. But let us be clear that that is not what is very largely conceived and taught about the new birth. Even with the best intentions the new birth is so often placed to man's side - it is what man does. Man has got to do something - either raise his hand, or make some statement, or sign some document, or make a decision, make a profession, accept certain things that are being stated, and so on. Perhaps such things are meant to open the way for God; but, even if we allow that, people are often left with this idea that it is something they have done. They have accepted Christ; they have accepted Christianity; they have made a gesture; they have done something; they have become Christians by what they have done, by their own act.

### **Born Not of the Will of Man But of God**

Now, being fully generous, and not critical at all, it is very important to recognise that the new birth never necessarily takes place by anything that we do. It never really is consummated by some act of our own will, or of our own desire, or of our own mind - not at all. 'Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man...' - the man being the case in point, or the other man who would seek to bring it about - '... but *OF GOD*'. If God does not intervene in human life and in human history; break right in, as it were, from Heaven; if the Holy Spirit does not overshadow, and Himself produce that new life, that is not new birth; there is something lacking.

You are wondering, perhaps, why this message. I will tell you why. With a growing concern - and concern is a weak word - as one moves about the world touching Christians and Christianity, the one thing that is borne in upon one's heart, overwhelmingly, sometimes almost to the point of despair, is the need that those who bear the name of 'Christian' should know the real nature of what it means to be a child of God. They seem, so many of them, to have taken on something from the outside, by their own volition, choice and act, and so many have really not the faintest idea of what it means to be 'born' out from Heaven. And in all the needed work of recovery, in every department of Divine purpose at this time, this is one of the needs - a recovery of the real meaning of new birth, of what it is to be born from above, to be a child of God.

### **The Coming Test of Our Standing**

I have sometimes wondered - maybe wrongly - whether the enemy is not very pleased with putting countless multitudes of people in a false Christian position, because he knows the day is coming when the winds will carry them away; and for a Christian to fall away is a greater reproach to the Lord perhaps than anything. Oh, how we do need to get our roots down; how we need to be grounded in the truth, and in the truth of our very nature as children of God. That is why we come to this message. The day is coming when our standing as Christians will be deeply and terribly tested - there will be a great shaking. The Prophet Ezekiel is very up-to-date; I believe these words will have perhaps a larger fulfilment in a not very distant future, than they had when Ezekiel uttered them: 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn... until He come whose right it is' (Ezekiel 21:27). There is going to be a great overturning of what is not true - of what is false. This judgment must begin at the House of God. So you will understand this present emphasis.

We begin here. As with Christ, so it must be with every child of God: they must, at the very beginning of their Christian life, be the result of a Divine intervention in human history, in their own human history, in their human life. But that is the great basic fact. Thank God that there are many who understand that, and know what it means. They are able to say: 'God intervened in my life; God broke into my life; God came out, even, as it were, from Heaven, into my life.' If we have the experience, we know the truth; but it is sometimes helpful to have it defined. This is it: When you and I were saved, God broke out of Heaven - nothing less than that. It was as though God Himself came out of His Heaven into a human life; broke into its world, and interrupted its course of history. Things could never be the same after that.

### **Not Only A Newness, But A Difference**

That is perfectly clear, is it not, in the case of the Lord Jesus? An angel indicated this intervention of the Holy Spirit from heaven - and it is no less than that in principle and fact with each new birth. But the next thing that is clear in the case of the Lord Jesus is that this was something different; it was not only something new that had not happened before, but it was something different. This birth is different from all other births. We cannot dwell too much upon the details of the account, but that is what it amounts to. The angel made that perfectly clear, and Mary knew it; that was her problem, her perplexity, her wonder - How? how? It was the perplexity of Nicodemus, his great question - How? This contains a profound mystery which constitutes a deep, a mighty difference. This is not the common thing; this is not the usual thing; this you cannot find, except here; it is different.

And that which results from this intervention contains this fundamental difference in its very constitution. Oh, that all who bear the name of Christian, all who are children of God, were fully alive to this! I think this is where the weakness lies with so many, and it will not hurt us, even though we know it well, to be reminded of it, to face it again. It is something that we need to keep with us in our consciousness continually. Our new birth is different from all other births, and by new birth we are made fundamentally and constitutionally different from all other beings. You know it perhaps in some measure in experience. The birth of the Lord Jesus was so patently a different kind of birth. It was not in the usual natural way; nature had nothing to do with it; man's will, choice, decision, had nothing to do with it. And 'that which is born shall be *HOLY*': can you find *THAT* in nature anywhere? It is of a different kind and a different order of being - that which is, in its very essence, *HOLY*. That is the contrast with every other creature and every other birth. The Psalmist cries: 'I was born in sin, shaped in iniquity' - and that is true of us all.

### **The New Birth Brings Into A Heavenly Kingdom**

Now when I say that that principle holds good in every new birth, it needs this explanation. We know quite well that it is not our bodies that are born again; therefore they are not holy. We know that it is not our souls that are born again: if our souls are our minds - our reasoning powers, and our emotions, and our power of choice - well, they are not different. It is the trouble of our whole Christian life that we still have so much of that which is not holy with us, in mind and heart and will. It is the realm of our conflicts, our battles, our sorrows. Nevertheless, something, somewhere, has happened, something has come in, that is not of that kingdom at all, that is of another heavenly kingdom; and *THAT*, which is born of God, is holy. Do you know that? Even if it has never been explained or defined to you, you know it in experience. You know that there is that within you that revolts against sin and unholiness; you know that one of the

great blessings of your life is an inward power of reaction when things are not right, not good. As we go on, we do become more and more sensitive to evil, to the sin of this world. Our peril may be sometimes to accept its presence; to take it just because it is there.

Now, we are in a world like that, but nevertheless it is true of every child of God that there is that feeling about it - something of a tremendous inward revolt and reaction to sin, to evil, to unholiness. What a safeguard that is! what a gift of God it is to have that! God forbid that ever we should lose our sensitiveness in that realm, or cease to be moved by the sinfulness of sin.

### **The Need for Sensitiveness to this Difference**

Beware, young people, that you do not blunt the edge of your new birth, by accommodating yourself to this world's ways, its forms and customs and acceptances, and taking it all as something inevitable. Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you very sensitive to sin, very sensitive to evil; to keep alive this *DIFFERENCE*, which is your birthright - a part of your very birth. If you are a true child of God, you know something about the difference, as you go out into the world, not only in the matter of sin, but in all kinds of ways. You are different; something has happened to you.

At some point, this difference should have become quite clear to you, so that you know it - not just because you are told, not because your parents are Christians and do not like you doing certain things and you have got a sort of conscience which is your parents' really, and not your own - but in your own heart, in your own self, you have got this consciousness of being *DIFFERENT*, fundamentally different, from those who are not the Lord's. If that is not true as to a crisis in your life - for all do not have a violent breaking in as in the case of Paul on the road to Damascus - nevertheless, there has to arrive at some point this sense: 'I am a child of God; I am different; something has happened; a great difference has been made deep down somewhere; I am not the same; and I am not the same as those who are not the *BORN AGAIN* children of God.'

But, also, it is the nature of spiritual growth that that difference becomes more and more accentuated. It is the thing that is making this world more and more a 'strange and foreign' land to us - it is not our home, not our place; and conversely, 'making heaven' truly more and more to be our home. Now, where heaven is I cannot tell you; but I do know this, that, whatever heaven means, that is where I belong. And more and more I am discovering that I belong there, and that I do not belong here.

### **The Divide of the New Birth**

I speak to young Christians particularly, that this is the very nature of your new birth, that more and more it must be like that. And do not be afraid of it; do not rebel against it; accept it. It is a proof of something, of the greatest thing that God is doing in human history - breaking in to make this tremendous difference. It is on that ground that the Great Divide is going to be set up. We get our mental pictures of the judgment; well, we will not argue as to the material side of that. But I do know that this judgment has already begun, and it is going on (1 Peter 4:17), and the finality of it will be here: that there are those who belong here, and there are those who belong there, and there is no mistaking to which realm these people belong. The great divide has been made. The Lord is seeking to bring that about now. But oh, the tragedy of many Christians, and many young Christians, trying to bridge that gap - to hold those two things together; instead

of allowing the gap to widen, whilst they stand on the side where they are moving further and further away from a judged world.

### **An Inherent Power to Overcome**

The next thing that comes out in this matter of Christ's birth, and the birth of the children of God, is that by this birth there comes into us an inherent potency, an inherent power. Now, the Lord Jesus said: 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33b). And John says: 'Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world' (1 John 5:4). In Christ, in the born anew child of God, there is an inherent power and virtue which is going to overcome the world. It is there in the very nature of things, in the very constitution of the new life: it is going to overcome. There may be failure - there may be frequent failure; there may be falling in the battle; there may be some casualties; there may be some dark patches; there may even be some going away. But it is a most remarkable thing, and a most heart-ravishing thing, to see how this life persists.

I sometimes have to smile. People tell me that they are going to give it all up; they cannot go on any longer; and off they go, and you do not see them for a little while. But they are back again. And that happens a hundred and one times. How many people have said to me, and quite recently, 'I am giving it all up; I am finished; I am going.' And as far as they knew themselves, they meant it. But they cannot do it; they are just like moths round the lamp - they cannot keep away; back they come, and, yes - crestfallen and ashamed! You know, if it were natural, they would not do it; I would not do it; for very face saving, I would not come back again, show my face again after that. But there is something else, something more, that is stronger than our shame, stronger than our self-reproach, stronger than our self-despair, stronger than our constant delinquency: there is a persistence that brings us up, and brings us back. It is the history of most children of God. 'That which is born of God overcometh the world.'

It was true of Jesus. How did He overcome? Not by physical force; not by resolve of will, not by power of brain and mind and argument. He never did bring the world under His feet in those ways. By sheer force of Divine character; by the kind of Man He was; by the Divine nature in Him, He overcame. And so, with every child of God: in so much lesser degree than in His case, perhaps; so much slower in expression and manifestation; nevertheless it is there. Every true child of God knows quite well that, had it not been for that inward grip of something, or Someone, not themselves, they would not be where they are today, still seeking the things of God. No! It is inherent in that which is born of God to overcome!

### **The Inevitable Antagonism Against Heaven**

The next thing, of course, is the inevitable antagonism. It was not very long after the birth of the Lord Jesus before it broke out. The kingdom of Satan knew who He was, and what He was. That kingdom had many a powerful instrument and means at hand, and Herod was one such. We are not to know what happened during the thirty years of His boyhood and young manhood - that is passed over. It would not be surprising if there were many narrow escapes even then. But we do know that, from the moment of His stepping out from His anointing at Jordan, to take up this work of bringing 'the other sheep', bringing the other sons to glory, all hell was on His track. Whenever He came into a place, the atmosphere became charged with antagonism. We perhaps know something of those atmospherics, but how infinitely worse it must have been for our Lord, with His very sensitive spirit, to have known this terrible hatred and animosity of the evil powers toward Him, and working through men. Oh, the constant, almost

monotonous repetition: 'They sought to destroy Him... they sought to destroy Him... they sought how they might destroy Him.' That was the atmosphere in which He lived. Why?

Well, it might be put down to many causes, but the fundamental cause was this: He belonged to Heaven, and the destiny of the Heavenly One and the heavenly ones is to possess this world and govern it, by the final abolishment of its prince and his whole kingdom. And they know. Said they: "I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). And they know every one who is holy, in that sense. There is an inevitable antagonism in the spiritual realm. Often it cannot be traced to any physical, material, or temporal cause, or to people; it is just there in the air. We know something of the antagonisms of a spiritual kind that the Christian has to meet in this world, without provoking deliberately or knowingly or really, by words or deeds. When you are born again, somehow or other the consciousness comes alive that you are a speckled bird, a marked man or woman. And so John says about these that are born of God: 'For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not' (1 John 3:1b). It '*KNOWETH*' us not. There is a deeper meaning in that word 'knoweth' than just being aware of us, knowing who we are. It is being able to place us; being able to explain us, being able to trace us, as to what we are and where we came from. To the world there is something about us that is inscrutable; and that constitutes an antagonism.

Let me appeal once again to young Christians. Do not try to cut out that kind of antagonism. Be careful not to give unnecessary offence; try to 'commend yourself to every man's conscience in the sight of God' (2 Corinthians 4:2b); do things honourably before all men (Romans 12:17b); give them no occasion for accusing you fairly as a Christian. But when you have done all, do not think that you will not meet this antagonism - if you are a child of God you will. You just cannot avoid it. Do not try to eliminate it; recognize that this is a part of the very fact, a wonderful evidence of the fact that you are in the company of Jesus Christ. The world knew Him not; therefore it knows us not.

### **The New Birth is All of Grace**

In conclusion, let us think for a few minutes of Mary herself, because she is characteristic in some ways of the vessel of the new birth. To whom, to what, upon what ground, will the new birth take place? Here there is a correspondence between the birth of the Lord Jesus and the new birth of every child of God. We have, of course, to recognize the Divine sovereignty of eternal election: 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world'. Let us accept that, and leave it for the moment. We come into the operation and activity of God in time. Upon what ground in time, in our own lives, will this thing come to us? Are there some grounds, are there some occasions, are there some conditions which will always obtain where God comes in this way?

Yes, always. One of the beautiful things about Mary, as characteristic of a vessel of new birth, was that which the angel said to her: 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured of God.' The margin perhaps gets nearer to the true meaning: 'Hail, thou that art endued with grace'. That is the beginning of every new birth - *ENDUED WITH GRACE*. If there was one person in that little country in those days who was aware - and this comes out so clearly - of the wonder of this, the condescension of this, and her own unworthiness of it, it was Mary. 'How should this thing be?' Before this wonderful thing can happen to us, we have often to be brought to the place where the only word that suits the situation in our consciousness is *GRACE*; it is God's grace; it is all of grace. 'Thou art endued with grace'.



That is simple, I know, but that is the beginning of everything for the Christian life, for this wonderful miracle of God: that we must see and be deeply impressed, as she was, with our own utter worthlessness in this matter: that this could never be to us if we, in ourselves, in our own state, were the deciding factor. It is only God's infinite mercy, His infinite grace. That is a humble and a contrite spirit, and God is with that. But the new birth is but the beginning. This which is of God and of Heaven, has to grow and grow; more and more there is to be an increase of Him; but it is all on the same basis - the emptying of ourselves, the pouring out of all that is selfhood, to make way for the grace of God.

### **Submissiveness and Simplicity**

The next thing about Mary is her simplicity and her submissiveness. There is something very beautiful about her simplicity, is there not? We are often too complicated about all these things. We make the Christian life far too complicated - projecting our mentalities and our arguments, our contentions, and our demands for explanation, and what-not - and we are standing in our own light as we do so. The Lord cannot get on; that is all rubbish in the way. He needs a heart like Mary's (and I am not setting up Mary to be worshipped): a heart that is simple, in this sense, that there is nothing argumentative, querulous, awkward, about it. It is an open heart: perplexed, it is true; not understanding; wondering how it can be, and saying so. Nevertheless, because of the simplicity, honesty, purity of her heart, she arrived at this: 'Be it unto me according to Thy word' - absolute submission, even to the mystery, and what it would involve. The trouble with so many of us is that we are so slow in our submission, our surrender, our giving way, our letting go. We will argue; we will demand an explanation. We go round and round this eternal circle, getting nowhere, because we will not let go - we just will not let go; and so we come back to the point from which we started a thousand times. Mary put her whole life into this: 'Be it unto me according to Thy word'. And the angel departed. That was what he was working toward.

It involved Mary in suffering - it involved her in suffering immediately. And then, forty days after the birth, Simeon told her: 'A sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed'. I think there is something there that is very helpful. When the Cross is at work in a life, people begin to betray themselves; their thoughts begin to accuse, to make charges; to say, This is because of so and so.... When someone is having a bad time, thoughts come out: people divulge what they are thinking and feeling about the one concerned - some are sympathetic and some antagonistic. 'A sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.' It was necessary that men should show themselves, show where they stood, on that day of the Cross; Mary's suffering was a part of that.

This may seem to us something of a mystery. But the point is that this kind of thing that happened to her, and which happens to us, involves us in suffering. It involves us in the offence of the Cross; it involves us in much misunderstanding, even much ostracism. The angel left her. She knew what it meant then. But later on Simeon told her what was coming, along the line of this child. What it amounts to is this: that to be a child of God is no ordinary thing. It is something unusual, something different, something of God. It is the result of an intervention of God from heaven.

## Chapter Six

### THE GLORY OF THE LORD

*Reading: Ezekiel 1*

*"Above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above" (Ezekiel 1:26).*

*"That working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come: and He put all things in subjection under His feet" (Ephesians 1:19-22).*

*"We behold Him Who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus... crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:9).*

Let us focus, for the moment, upon the twenty-eighth verse of Ezekiel 1:

*"As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness roundabout. This was THE APPEARANCE OF THE LIKENESS OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD."*

That fragment seems to me to sum up all these prophecies. Not only does it apply to the first chapter in particular, but it can be taken all the way through; for everything in these prophecies is being governed by *THE GLORY OF THE LORD*.

There is a very practical and immediate relationship between this word and ourselves. I am quite sure that most of us have a deep and strong sense of the need for the Lord to do a new thing. I believe that is felt very widely. What that new thing is may be given different interpretations. In the evangelical world there is much prayer and talk about 'revival'; that is perhaps only another way of expressing this sense of a need for the Lord to move in, in a new way, and do a new thing. Others would put it in other ways. But it is there amongst Christians everywhere: the Lord must do a new thing; the Lord must take a fresh step.

### God's End is Glory

We need to be very intelligent and understanding about this matter. The Lord has His ways and His means, and we need to know something about them if we are going to be in line with the Lord in any movement that He purposes to take. This word is therefore very appropriate to the situation. For whenever God has moved in a new and further step in His Divine purpose, He has prefaced that movement by bringing, first, an instrument, and then, through such an instrument, His people, to a fresh apprehension of His glory.

That is a statement which will bear investigation and confirmation. *GOD'S ONE END IN ALL THINGS IS GLORY*. Make no mistake about that. If you want to know what God is after, what He is moving toward, in all things - and that compasses countless details in every realm; in personal life and corporate life; in the nations - the answer is that God's end is *GLORY*. That being so, it is to be noted that He always establishes that principle at the outset of every movement. He sets it there as the thing which is going to govern the step, or movement, or whatever it is, that He is about to undertake: it is going to be governed by the end which He

has in view, in this as in every new beginning. That may sound a little difficult for the moment. But let us take some instances.

### **Some Examples From the Old Testament**

#### **(1) Abraham**

We would all agree that, when God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, and separated him to Himself, that was a new movement of God. There is no doubt about that. It was a clear-cut and defined breaking-in to human history on the part of God, with a further stage in the Divine programme in view. Now Stephen tells us that "*THE GOD OF GLORY* appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7:2). Why the God of *GLORY*? The end toward which God was moving was *GLORY* - His own glory in a people, to be manifested among the nations. And so, as the God of glory He appeared to Abraham. He put the glory there as the principle, the law, the basis upon which He was taking that step, and upon which He was going to follow it through.

#### **(2) Moses**

Some centuries later (revealed to Abraham even to the very period: see Genesis 15:13, 16; Acts 7:6), the Lord had that people out of Egypt. He brought them to Sinai; and there He changed them from a rabble crowd, an unconstituted and unorganized multitude, into a corporate nation. That was the new move at Sinai. By the law and the testimony and the revelation given in the mount, the people were constituted a nation. And it was done in *GLORY*. Moses went into the mount, and saw the God of Glory, and came down with that glory on his face. Again God had put the principle at the beginning of His new move: He was moving on the pathway of glory.

#### **(3) David And Solomon**

A further step in the Divine plan was reached in the days of David and Solomon. The temple was indeed a development of the Divine thought in representation; and it is all in *GLORY*. The issue there is *GLORY*: "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:11, etc.). It was a glorious time; it was a glorious place. It was all just enunciating and preserving this principle: God is moving all the time with this thought governing - *GLORY!*

#### **(4) Ezekiel**

But we are told that the day came when the glory departed from Jerusalem. We know why. And that brings us to the prophets of recovery, and to this prophet Ezekiel in particular. Here, at the opening of these prophecies, in the day when the glory is eclipsed amongst the Lord's people, as lifted up and departed from Jerusalem (9:3; 11:23), the Lord of Glory appeared to Ezekiel: 'This was the appearance of the likeness of the *GLORY* of the Lord.' It is impressive that that comes right at the beginning of the prophecies, is it not? Now everything that follows is going to be but the outworking of that law of glory. God is more concerned, and in these various ways He is showing His concern, for the end of *GLORY* to be reached.

## **Some Examples From the New Testament**

### **(1) The Incarnation**

So much for the Old Testament. When we come to the New, we shall all agree that the Incarnation - the birth of the Lord Jesus into this world - is a new movement of God. That is indeed a great step forward in the Divine programme. And therefore it is accompanied with glory - heavenly glory: 'Glory to God in High Heaven!' (Luke 2:14). We sing it in our Christmas hymn. There is glory again at the inception of this new, mighty movement of God, because the end of that thing is indeed going to be glory: He has come for the recovery of the glory of God in this earth. That is Heaven's psalm.

### **(2) Pentecost**

We move on still, and again we will all agree that the Day of Pentecost is another great step forward in the plan of God. God is moving on, and this is a clear mark of that progress of God through the ages. The Day of Pentecost was a step of God from Heaven. And what glory! John tells us quite clearly that the coming of the Holy Spirit was upon the basis of Jesus being glorified. He said: 'The Spirit was not given; because Jesus was not yet glorified' (John 7:39) - implying that when the Spirit was given Jesus was glorified. It was on that ground. God is moving on this basis all the way along.

### **(3) Peter**

And so we could go on. We think of the individual instruments of God's new movement. We will agree that a new movement was in hand through Peter. There is no doubt about it. It is a real new movement. Though Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, we must remember that Peter opened the door for the new dispensation both to Jew and to Gentile, in Jerusalem, and in Caesarea. It is a mighty new movement. But Peter had his ministry set in this glory. He tells us that he was with Jesus in the Holy Mount, and beheld His glory (2 Peter 1:16-18). That had undoubtedly been a tremendously dynamic thing in Peter's life. The Holy Spirit interpreted everything to him on the Day of Pentecost. He got a new Bible, because he had got a new Lord, and an opened Heaven! It was this great principle of glory which accounted for Peter's ministry, and Peter's work, and Peter's endurance to the end.

### **(4) John**

That is clear, too, in the case of John, who was with him for so long as his co-worker and fellow-apostle, in Jerusalem at least. When we come to the beginning of the Book of Revelation, we once again recognize that we are in the presence of a new movement - a new movement for the recovery of the *GLORY*, which has become so limited and obscured in the churches. The Lord comes to John in vision in Patmos; but it is such a glorious thing, and the visions are so glorious, that more than once John is down in utter prostration before the Lord, and has to be lifted up, helped to rise, because of the overwhelming impact of the vision of the glory (1:17; 19:10; 22:8).

### **(5) Paul**

And what shall we say of Paul? That wonderful ministry, so full, so rich, so glorious, was all born in the day when he saw the *GLORY* on the Damascus road.

The point is this. The Lord displayed the glory upon every occasion when He was going to move again with some new step in His purpose. All these things that I have mentioned were steps onward of God in His age-long purpose, and every one of them was based upon a new apprehension of the glory of the Lord by those who were concerned. So that, in the case of the prophets and apostles, their ministry was a ministry of the greatness and the glory of the Lord; and as those to whom they ministered saw that, they became a people with a very great significance in this world. It was this apprehension of the glory of Christ that gave character and meaning and power and value to their being here in this world. All this, then, has but one meaning: God's end and God's object is *GLORY*, and everything that He does is governed by that.

This is something that must really take hold of us, and of which we must take hold: that God intends that all things - *ALL* things, to the minutest detail of our life, should work out, under His hand, for glory; that God, in everything, is working with glory in view. Do you believe that? No doubt you believe it as a statement and a truth; perhaps you believe it in your heart; but it is not always easy to believe that, because we just do not see how it can be. Indeed, what we do see convinces us that anything but glory will come out of this! Oh that the Lord would just grip us with this - grip me, grip you - individually, and as companies of His people where we are: that what He is doing, what He is allowing, is under the control of this one law and principle - He intends it to be for His glory. That is what He has in mind, and what He will do, for He will not be finally thwarted in His purpose.

### **Ezekiel and the Glory**

True, everything may seem to contradict this. We come to the prophecies of Ezekiel, and there is plenty that seems to contradict this glory. But you cannot get away from the fact that the glory is disclosed in the very first chapter. It is not reserved to the end, so that you have to wade through all the wearisome tale of judgments and woe, and then at last find that God comes out with things in His own hands - so to speak just manages to survive. You are told right at the very beginning that everything is governed by *GLORY*. In everything that is going to happen, everything that is going to be said, right on to the end, the governing thing is *THE GLORY OF GOD*; it is there as the very foundation of everything. We must take note of that. What is God's end? Paul has seen it, and has given it to us in a matchless fragment: "Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages" (Ephesians 3:21). You cannot get beyond that! That is finality; that is the end - 'unto the age of the ages, *GLORY* in the Church and in Christ Jesus'.

We come then to Ezekiel. There is much here to help us as to God's own concern for His glory. *WE* may have a concern for the Lord's glory, the Lord has a far greater concern for His glory than we have. This book is a book just full of God's own concern for His own glory. Notice how precise Ezekiel is, even to the year, and the month, and the day of the month. "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi..." (1:3) - where he was, when he was, how he was. It is like the Lord, moving so exactly, so meticulously, in this matter, and laying hold of this man. Remember, it had to be a laying hold of him, because it resulted in a complete change in his whole vocation. Ezekiel was a trained priest; he belonged to the priesthood; he was a young man, who was expecting that through his life he would fulfil the ministry of a priest. This broke in and upset his whole career and his whole vocation: he had to change his whole manner and method of life, from priesthood to prophet. It was something very strong in this man's case. It is interesting to notice that his name, *Ezeki-el*,

means 'God will strengthen'. For the glory of God that is very necessary, especially in conditions such as those in which Ezekiel lived.

Ezekiel, thus, as a young man, was carried away with the captives to Babylon, and was 'among the captives by the river Chebar', he tells us (1:1, 3); and, from what we know, and what we read, it was a pretty hopeless situation. We know something of the conditions in Jerusalem from the prophecies and ministry of Jeremiah: it was pretty bad there; poor Jeremiah had his heart broken, as he had ministered in Jerusalem. But there are reasons for saying that, whatever it was like in Jerusalem, it was even more difficult in Babylon - that is, so far as the people were concerned to whom Ezekiel ministered. They were a difficult, recalcitrant people. Read these early chapters; see Ezekiel's encounter with them, and the measures to which he had to resort.

### **An Unpopular Man**

I do not want to stay with too much detail, but it is very necessary, for our encouragement, that we should get the setting of the glory of the Lord. Here he is with these captives. Now, a man who has to bring home to a people the reasons for their condition and for the judgments of God; to speak faithfully in the name of the Lord, without compromising on any principle; who will put his own very life and future in the balances of his ministry and be thoroughly faithful. He will not condone any wrong. He will not compromise on any principle in order to preserve their favour and his own position. The man who really has the glory of God at heart at any cost is a very unpopular man.

And Ezekiel was an unpopular man among the exiles - so unpopular that he had to resort to all sorts of seeming tricks in order to gain their attention, to get a hearing. Look at the things to which he resorted, and had to do - spectacular things; unusual things; unnatural things. Sometimes he seemed to act the fool to draw attention, so that people should look in his direction. It was a hard time to get a hearing, to have any attention at all; he was the most unpopular man, perhaps, in the country. It was a desperately difficult situation that he was in amongst his own people there.

### **The Heavens Opened in Difficult Situations**

In the midst of such a situation - which I do not think I exaggerate; indeed, I could add much more to it from these very chapters - in the midst of such a difficult and, for the time being, seemingly hopeless situation, he tells us that the heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God! There is no situation so hopeless as to make it impossible for the glory of God to break in; no situation that can shut God out and be too impossible for a fresh manifestation of His glory. Do you not take heart from that, if it is true? Well, here it is! It is an amazing thing when you take the whole setting, and the whole circumstances, and the whole provision. You could say, Well, that is altogether beyond any hope; that has broken Jeremiah's heart; that has brought the wrath of God - destroyed Jerusalem and sent the people far away: what can you hope for in such a situation? And, right in the midst of that, Ezekiel says: 'I saw the heavens open, and visions of God.' And he sums it all up: "*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*"

Now, difficult as it is for us to take hold of that, really to believe it, this may be a message to us. Perhaps we are sometimes very near to despair over the whole situation. Let it come to us as a message from the Lord. In our own lives, or in the place where we are, perhaps as a company of the Lord's people, things create such difficulty that sometimes we get near to giving it all up. Ezekiel might well

have done that, for he had far more occasion for doing it than you or I have; but right in there - *THERE* - "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord". "The heavens were opened!"

We have thought and said much about an 'open Heaven'. All we will say about that, for the present, is that, if there is any indication at all that the Heavens are open, that is always the most hopeful thing in any situation. You may be having some difficult times in your company of the Lord's people; perhaps you have some difficult people - well, Ezekiel had some difficult people; you may be having much discouragement; there may be things which you feel to be very wrong, and so on. And yet, when you come together and give yourselves to the worship of the Lord, there is a wonderful sense of unction. You just become occupied with the Lord! For the time being, at any rate, you let the other go, and the Lord becomes your Centre - the Heavens are opened! While that lasts, there is every hope for your assembly; there is every hope for the future. There is nothing more hopeless than a closed Heaven.

Look at Calvary: 'There was darkness over the whole earth... and Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?' (Matthew 27:45-46). Heaven was closed, because of what He was doing there - taking the sin of the whole world. Heaven was closed down, was shut; there was no way through. That is the most hopeless situation that could ever possibly be. The hopelessness of that situation killed Him. That was the final stroke to bring about His death. It was not the nails; it was not the thorns; it was not the action of men: it was the broken heart, because He had lived all His earthly life with a clear way through to the Father - with an open Heaven. All His days He had been in communication with Heaven, with the Father; He had never known until then one moment when He could not instantly get through. Here that all ended: there was no way through; no response; no answering voice: a closed Heaven. That is hope-less.

If you and I have any answer to prayer, any little indication or token that the Lord has not forsaken, given up, shut down on us; if we have anything like that, then Heaven is still open, and that is very hopeful for the future. Let us cherish the open Heaven in our times of worship. Many dark things may be about; many difficult things; situations, like Ezekiel's, may be full of evil, or perplexities, or problems, or difficulties, or sufferings. Yet when we come together, and focus upon the Lord, we sense His presence: that is our open Heaven; and an open Heaven is always a sign that there is hope yet; there is still a future for glory!

The Lord forbid that we should ever come to the time when we are closed down by Heaven, and cannot get through. 'I saw the heavens opened...', and that meant God had not finished with things yet; God had not closed down yet. There may be judgments; as the following chapters show. There may have to be judgments; there may have to be discipline; there may have to be chastening; there may be much yet to be done. But whatever it is that has to be cleared up - perhaps by the jealous wrath of God for His glory; whatever hard things, sufferings, afflictions, have to be gone through, because of the wrong; nevertheless, it is all governed by this: *A HOPE OF GLORY* - a hope of GLORY - if the Heavens still remain open.

### **The Supremacy of the Lord on the Throne**

"I saw visions of God" - that is, visions given by God. What did Ezekiel see? What was it that comprised those visions of God? Well, as we have seen in chapter 1, he saw a throne; and then he saw "a likeness as the appearance of a *MAN*" upon the throne above (1:26). And then he saw a two-fold symbolic medium of the administration of that throne - the cherubim and the wheels. (We shall hope to

return to these things later). Then, as we know, he saw a house' - *THE* House - which he was commanded to show to the people of Israel (43:10). He saw the House in later glory. He saw the river coming from under the threshold, circling the altar, passing through the court, and away down, broadening and deepening, and making everything live whithersoever it came (47:1-9). Then he saw the land and the inheritance possessed (47:13-48:29). And finally he saw the City, and the name of the City: "*The Lord is there*" (48:30-35). That is the end of it all - the Lord is there!

What I want to emphasize and stress particularly is that all that we see in this book is the result and the expression of that throne, and of the 'Man upon it above'. Of course that is very simple to understand: everything emanates and results from the great, inclusive fact that there is One in the place of supreme government and authority. And for us, and for them, and for all time, by the eternal appointment of God, that One is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. He has been exalted to the 'right hand of the Majesty in the heavens' (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1). 'We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour' (Hebrews 2:9). 'God raised Him and set Him at His own right hand, far above all rule and authority, dominion and power, and every name that is named' (Ephesians 1:20-21). Everything comes out of that. If that is true, then everything is all right; it will be all right in the end.

Now, this is very up-to-date, is it not? We have spoken of the conditions in which Ezekiel spent his life and fulfilled his ministry - the time and place and the state of things. Yes, he had a very difficult situation. But the Church has got a pretty difficult situation now; things are far from easy today. There is now, as then, very much that is wrong, and much that is evil. Who will say today that the *GLORY* of God pervades His people? Ezekiel's was a difficult time; but it was at that time, and in those circumstances, that this instrument, under the government of the throne, was brought in for a new movement of God. Or we might say, that this apprehension, on the part of an instrument, of the supremacy of the Throne and of the Man upon it led to the wonderful result that, in time, the whole situation was changed, and God had something for His glory.

### **The Vision of the Glory Saves From Despair**

That vision - the opened Heaven; the throne, and the Man upon it above - had a tremendous effect upon Ezekiel. It saved him, in his day, from despair; it saved his ministry; it saved his testimony; it saved his life. And it is only that that will save us; only that *CAN* save us. Perhaps that sounds a little pessimistic. I do not want to be a pessimist; but you cannot be acquainted with the state of things on this earth today, even amongst what is called Christian, or Christianity, without sometimes feeling fairly hopeless about it. Is it possible that the great revelation given to us of the Church, as we have it in the New Testament, can in any way be realized in our time? Look at the divisions; look at the quarrels; feel this awful atmosphere that has grown up and spread. In the United States, for instance, some 35 years ago, there seemed to be such an open, clear way for something new of the Lord: the atmosphere seemed so clear, and hearts seemed so open. But in that land today, everybody is suspecting everybody else; the spirit of criticism has got into the most devoted Christians, both about other Christians and about Christian things. You cannot have half-an-hour's conversation even with those who are most devoted to the Lord, without somebody being lashed, somebody being mentioned for warning, as suspect. It is like an awful miasma, or fog, that has crept in amongst Christians over the whole world. You cannot go into your religious bookshops without seeing line upon line of pamphlets and books that are occupied with denouncing something. Men are giving their whole lives to this horrible work of trying to expose what they think to be error.



That is strong language, but it is not too strong. It is the state of things, and you might despair of the realization of that which you have seen to be God's purpose. And yet you cannot; the Lord will not let you. If you really have seen the Lord, you just cannot give it up. You may say, like Jeremiah, that you will not speak in this way any more. He resolved that he would never speak again of the Lord. But then - "If I say, I will not... speak any more in His name, then there is... a burning fire shut up in my bones... and I cannot contain" (Jeremiah 20:9).

You and I may have often decided that we should just have to stop talking about it, and give it up, because it does not seem to work; things seem to go from bad to worse, and worse to awful! And yet we are still here. We cannot help ourselves; we are back again in full view of God's declared purpose. The Spirit will not give it up, and will not let us give it up, however bad the situation is. The Heaven is not closed yet; the Man on the throne has not evacuated the throne yet; there is still hope. We have got to have the mastery of that great reality that He is still there, where God put Him. And if this is true, difficult as it sometimes is to believe it, or at any rate to see it, - then He *IS* 'far above all rule and authority, and dominion, and power, and every name' - world dictators or anybody else - 'that is named, in this age or in the ages to come.' Only as that gets hold of us, and we take hold of it in turn, will there be any prospect at all; but that is the prospect.

### **Strategic Revelations of the Glory**

To reveal the glory is always a strategic movement of God in a difficult and unpromising day and situation. I think that was the meaning of the Transfiguration. It was a difficult day; things were closing in on the Lord and His little band of men; the atmosphere was impregnated with hatred; and the Cross was there immediately before. How will they meet it? How will they survive it? The strategy was the Transfiguration - they 'saw His glory'. And although for a time afterward it seemed to be eclipsed, nevertheless, when He was risen from the dead, they understood all things. In the light of the resurrection the Transfiguration took on its full meaning.

Things were going very hardly for the church in Jerusalem on the day that that wonderful young man, Stephen, was dragged outside and stoned to death, with that so vicious hatred of the Lord Jesus. But Stephen saw the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). It saved the situation for him, and I think it had a much farther reach than just himself; I think it handed on something. At any rate, one man there became a very potent factor in the Church for all time. He was tremendously affected by what he saw in the face of Stephen, and heard through the lips of Stephen; he never got over it. And he never forgave himself. He confessed afterwards: 'And I, I was standing by and giving my vote, my consent!' (Acts 22:20). The seeing of the glory was a saving thing in a dark and difficult day.

Paul is in prison; he is nearing the end of his long, full life and ministry. He thinks of all those many churches - far more than we have tabulated by letters addressed to them - which he had been used to bring into being; of all his many converts, and of the many who owed everything spiritually to him and his ministry. Now he is in prison, shut up, and he cannot go to them; the churches are in a state of decline; many are turning against him and away from him as he is there. He is a lonely man - 'only Luke is with me'; a man in difficulty, if ever a man was, speaking naturally. What a situation, what an end, for a man like that! What saves him?

It is astoundingly impressive, that, in the midst of all that, knowing it all - knowing his own position, knowing his own prospects, which were pretty poor for this life; knowing the state of things far away in the churches; getting news of these secessions; faced with the seeming breakdown of his work; disappointed with believers and with churches - I say that it is an amazing thing that with all that, out of that, in the midst of that, enough to crush a man in despair, he has an open Heaven, and says: 'To Him be the glory unto the ages of the ages!' (2 Timothy 4:18). He is saved by the glory; he is delivered by the glory. What a different end it might have been but for this apprehension of the glory!

Here he writes then, that this One, this Man, is in the glory on the Throne above, far above all rule and authority. Caesar may be there next door, governing the whole world, bringing it under his mighty and evil heel, and seeming to be able to carry out all his fell designs against the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul, right along side of Caesar and Caesar's city and stronghold, says: 'He hath set *HIM* far above all rule and authority, and every name - Caesar or any other - in this age, or in any other age... hath put all things in subjection under His feet...' That is a saving vision of the glory.

It was that that saved John in his difficult and desperate situation in Patmos, for it was indeed something to break a man's heart and send him deep down in dark despair. John was the one lonely survivor of the whole apostolic band. They have all gone, he is cut off from his beloved church; alone; isolated; exiled; with all the conditions which must have accompanied that exile. That is enough to make a man despair, to feel that he has lived his life in vain, and that there really is no hope at all. But he had an opened Heaven, and saw a vision - and what visions he saw! It was the opened Heaven that saved him. *The Lord give us that, and a new apprehension of the Throne and of the Man upon it.*

## Chapter Seven

### THE THRONE - THE LIVING ONES AND THE WHEELS

With the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecies open before us, let us note how much it contains that is instructive and helpful in connection with the movements and ways of God in relation to the glory. As we pointed out in our last meditation, the key phrase, inclusive not only of the chapter but of the whole book, is found in the second half of verse 28:

*"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face..."*

That refers, as I have said, to all that is in that chapter, but it relates especially to the vision of the Throne in Heaven, and to the 'likeness as of a Man upon it above'. It is the glory of the Throne of the Exalted God-Man. And from that, everything else proceeds. All that is here, and all that comes later, right to the end of this very full book, is the expression of that Throne, of that government, of the meaning of that Man being there, where He is.

In summarizing the visions which came to Ezekiel, when he said: 'I saw visions of God', we said that under the Throne there was a two-fold symbolic medium of its expression; and that two-fold medium is the four living ones, or cherubim, and the wheels. To both of these quite a considerable section is given. You notice that they are not just mentioned and passed over, but they are very fully and minutely described. You have got to stop with this; you have got to take time and give attention. The prophet is giving us every detail. It is very difficult to understand; I certainly do not claim to understand it, but I think I see some things that are almost on the face of it. Nevertheless, since these things are brought in here in very clear definition, and in very full presentation, right at the beginning of all these prophecies and movements and visions, they must evidently be taken account of. They must have a place, and a very serious place.

#### **The Cherubim: Symbols of Holiness and Life**

Firstly, then, the Cherubim. We need not describe them; their description is here. We need say very little about the detailed features of their make-up: all that will be familiar. We want to come quite simply and directly to the real function of these living ones. Of course it must be underlined that this is oriental symbolism. It is a symbolic representation of something spiritual. People in the East reading these things would have a more ready apprehension of this way of presenting truth than perhaps we have. But God has chosen to convey His great truths in this symbolic and illustrative way; and we have to get through the symbolism and the illustration - if need be forget the forms, forget the characteristics described - and get straight to the heart of the matter: what is their message? What is it that they are intended to convey?

From a reflection upon the many appearances of the Cherubim in the Bible, it can be seen that invariably, on every occasion, they stand related to one thing; their function is ever and always to proclaim that the Throne of God is a *HOLY* Throne; that His government is a government of *HOLINESS*. It will at once be seen how vital and appropriate this is, standing right at the beginning of the history of judgment contained in these prophecies. For everything that follows, including the large section of judgments, both of Israel and in the nations, under this supreme Throne, is in relation to an unholy state, and a demand that that shall be judged and put away. The glory waits for that, and waits upon that. The glory ever and always waits upon holiness, because it is a Throne of Glory which is the

glory of Holiness. The government of that holiness is represented here in this Throne, and in the Man on it.

But that is not all. These cherubim are called '*LIVING* ones'. The idea of *LIFE*, of *LIVING*-ness, is always associated with them. They come up again and again in that connection. At the moment it is this, that *HOLINESS* and *LIFE* are combined in them: the life waits on the holiness; the holiness gives rise to the life. You cannot separate these two things. You cannot have the life without the holiness; you cannot have the holiness without it leading to life. It is always working like that, to and fro. More holiness, more life; more life, more holiness. These 'living ones' are, in representation, the custodians of the Divine holiness for the sake of the Divine life. For the things that are in the balances all the way through this book are life and death; that is where the battle is being fought out. It is a question of life and death for Israel, for the nations; but the deciding thing is this matter of *HOLINESS*.

### **The Cherubim in the Garden, the Tabernacle and the Temple**

Now, if you will briefly pass your mind's eye over some of the instances where the Cherubim are in view, you will see that that is the connection each time. When things went wrong in the Garden; when sin entered; when disobedience, through pride, came in and operated; when man was expelled from the place of life, where the 'tree of life' was: at the gate, to guard it, were placed the Cherubim with flaming swords. Their presence there said, That is a holy life, and that which is corrupt, polluted, tainted, unholy, cannot have it, cannot touch it, cannot come near it, is expelled from it. The Cherubim would say, We are the custodians, not only of that life, but of the essential holiness that it demands.

Then, figures of the Cherubim were interwoven on the screen, the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, and man would pass that veil in peril of his life - it would be death. They were inscribed again there in testimony of the fact that they were the guardians of what is holy, and as such, anything unholy would perish if it passed their way. They, on the veil, declared that things were wrong with man; they were a testimony against the wrong state of man, because of which he cannot come into the presence of the Glory, and the presence of the Life.

### **The Cherubim in Prophetic Visions**

But then we remember Isaiah: the features are impressive in this connection. Isaiah 'saw the Lord, seated upon a Throne, high and lifted up', and the Seraphim (only another name for these, I think) were heard crying: 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts!' Why was this? King Uzziah had forced his way into the temple, to serve unlawfully at the altar, and took the censer in his hand. Man had pressed in to the presence of the Holy God, and had touched holy things. The priests besought him, pleaded with him: 'Go out! It pertaineth not unto thee, King Uzziah!' But Uzziah asserted himself there, and he was smitten with leprosy, and remained a leper to the day of his death. He died a tainted, corrupted man. And "in the year that king Uzziah *DIED* I saw the Lord", and heard the Seraphim crying: Holy, Holy, Holy. The Throne is the throne of holiness and of life; but where there is not the holiness it means death. Life is on the ground of holiness.

Jerusalem has become grievously and terribly defiled - read Jeremiah. It is a terrible book, a terrible revelation of spiritual condition. In the resultant judgment the people are carried away into captivity. And we find Ezekiel there, with the captives of the southern kingdom of Judah, by the River Chebar. This is a scene of desolation, a scene of death; this is a scene of judgment; they stand in the

place of Uzziah, defiled. Judgment has come upon them, and death. If you have any question about that, or if you want that particularly emphasized, just turn to the great chapter in these prophecies about the 'valley of dry bones' (Ezekiel 37). That is God's conception of this people at that time. A valley of dry bones; very many, and scattered - that was Israel's condition as in Babylon, as in captivity. Are these people going to be saved from death, from judgment? How will it be? The Lord will say that He will have to take away their unclean, polluted, stony hearts; 'a new heart will I give you'. In other words, they will have to be cleansed from their iniquity, washed from their sin, made again God's *HOLY* people, and they will *LIVE*. The Cherubim are very active in relation to that matter. See them 'on the wing'! They are characterized by a deep concern that this people should be saved from death by being delivered from the bondage of corruption.

### **The Cherubim in The Revelation**

We come over to the Book of the Revelation - the marvellous fourth and fifth chapters. Here the Heavens are open again (4:1). What did John see? Here are the twenty-four elders, and the four 'living ones', and myriads of angels, before the throne of God and of the Lamb; here they are round the Throne, singing their song of redemption. But the four 'living ones' are there, not now feverishly, fretfully, hurrying hither and thither, concerned with this matter of getting a people saved and right - their wings are let down, and they are joining in the worship. The work is done! Their work is finished, and now they can worship and join in praise with all the redeemed. That is how it ends: it is the picture of *GLORY AND LIFE THROUGH HOLINESS*.

That is a message not for the days of Ezekiel only. It is an abiding message; the truth and the principle which runs from the beginning to the end of time. That Throne, if we want it on our side, demands that something be done to cleanse us from our sin, to deliver us from our way of wickedness, to bring us into the 'white raiment' of His Divine righteousness, sanctified. It is for those who are thus walking with Him in fellowship, and who, as far as they know, are eschewing every evil way, are repudiating all iniquity; are having no truck with iniquity, are not compromising, are not in any way condoning or dabbling in what is evil, what is wrong.

I know that the whole matter of holiness can become very oppressive; it can become very legal and bring us into bondage. But the fact remains that the Lord's Throne is a throne of holiness; His government is a government of holiness; and His life is *HOLY* life. We know quite well, in practical experience, that if we do, voluntarily or even involuntarily, touch something that is evil or corrupt, touch this world in spirit, the glory fades! We know within ourselves that, if we even say something that is wrong, the glory fades. We know it by the fading glory in our hearts; a shadow, a cloud, comes over our spirit; and it stays there until we have gone and got that cleaned up in the presence of the Lord.

### **The Wheels**

We pass now to the other side of this symbolic medium of the Throne: to the 'wheels'. You notice that these are quite definitely in union with the 'living ones', with the Cherubim - they move together. They are really only two aspects of one thing, but the wheels contain their own particular emphasis and message. What do they signify? What is the impression that is left with you after reading verses 15-21? If you just sit back after reading, how do you feel? Sometimes it is a good thing to put yourself into the Word, and take its temper - take its atmosphere. I venture to suggest that if you read these verses in that way, and sit back, you will heave a sigh: My word, they are moving! There is something doing here! At

least you will not be left with a quiet or passive feeling. We have the impression of tremendous energy; of motion with purpose; that is the atmosphere of the 'wheels'.

Wheels symbolize movement, motion, going; and here the 'spirit of the living ones' is in the 'wheels'. The energy of the Spirit is here; it is *ENERGY* and *MOVEMENT WITH PURPOSE*, is it not, of which they speak? They say to us clearly and simply that this Throne is a very energetic and active Throne in relation to the end which God is seeking. All the energies and activities contained in these prophecies are the expression of that Throne, and are, as it were, the carrying out of the meaning of the wheels. The Throne is on the move; the Throne is not passive; the Throne is governed by a tremendous energy: God is deeply and greatly concerned about this great end of His, to have everything glorious, filled with His glory, for His glory.

### **Suffering With the Glory of God in View**

It is no light or easy-going thing with the Lord, to have that end. If we did but know it, if we could only see it and understand it, we should be able to recognize that so many things in our lives which the Lord permits to come in, and which the Lord sometimes even sends into our lives, are the workings of His energy to make a way for His glory. John, the apostle, tells us that the whole of his Gospel which he wrote was written with one object, and that object was *THE GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS*; that governed all. All the way through, from beginning to end, it is that.

Take one fragment only - Lazarus. "This sickness is not unto death, but *FOR THE GLORY OF GOD*" (John 11:4). Strange event of providence; strange ways of God, causing deep sorrow, distress, perplexity. It is a distressing thing for those concerned, but quite deliberate on the part of the Lord Jesus. His attitude and His handling, His tarrying when He received the news (verse 6), were quite deliberate. He has it all in hand, and He says: 'It is for the glory of God, that the Son of God should be glorified thereby'. The end of this strange thing, this painful thing in human life, is the glory of God! Would that you and I could always look at our sufferings and our sorrows like that! Every time when some perplexing, bewildering, heart-breaking thing comes into our lives, if only we could say and believe and stand to it - 'God is going to get some glory out of this! There is some glory somewhere bound up with this!' He is working to His end in all things. Paul says: 'God works in all things good to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28) - and by that word 'good' he means glory - glory to God.

We see, then, that there is an energy of God, of the Throne, toward glory, and to glory through holiness.

### **Perfect Intelligence of the Throne**

Another feature of the wheels was that they were "full of eyes round about" (1:18; 10:12). Surely this means that the Throne is operating with perfect intelligence, with complete knowledge of everything; an utter apprehension and grasp of all the elements, of all the features, of everything that has to be dealt with. Perfect vision; perfect knowledge: that is how the Throne of Holiness works.

That is a solemn message, as well as perhaps an encouraging one. The fact is that that One on the Throne, whose 'eyes are as a flame of fire' (Revelation 1:14), sees right through, knows all the hidden motives, and acts accordingly. It is not what we see, and not what we are willing to see, but what He sees. The

eyes of His glory look us right through; they know all our self-deceptions; and all our deceivings of one another. They know us perfectly, and the Lord is acting with us according to that knowledge, and we are not going to get away with it. If the Lord takes in hand to deal with us in a form of judgment; if He really does take action in regard to us, it is because He has seen or is seeing something; something that is injurious to us; something that is limiting or hindering the glory in us, personally or individually, or in our companies. He has seen something that is against the glory, and so with energy He takes in hand, and He will judge it. He will go to great lengths in order to get that eliminated and put right, in order that the glory may come in, and make way for new life, and that we may go on anew in a fresh phase in His purpose.

We perhaps would not have it otherwise; we do not want to be deceived; we do not want to lose something by some unrecognized wrong; we want to have everything open. The end of the Bible sees a City which is absolutely transparent: God is really seeking transparency in His people - no duplicity, no deception, no questionableness. How we need to judge our motives! How we need to keep in the presence of the Everlasting Burning (Isaiah 33:14b)! How necessary it is to abide in the light of His countenance, so that nothing is allowed to go on with us, perhaps unconsciously, that is limiting His glory in our life. This is a message of very great concern.

Let us by all means pray for a 'new thing'; pray for revival; pray for God to move in some great way of power: but remember, all His movements are based upon this - a holiness that corresponds to His Throne; and He just cannot do anything until that holiness has been vindicated in His people. Does this not explain much unanswered prayer? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18). It is a very big principle, covering so much. May the Lord give us understanding, in the presence of what could be a very solemn word; and yet it has *GLORY* in view. The Lord give us understanding that the energies of His Throne are holy energies. His goings, His continuous goings, are in this very connection, that what is consistent with the Man in the glory shall be found in us, and amongst all the Lord's people.

### **The Throne Intimately Concerned With This World**

Lastly, notice that these wheels occupy a place between Heaven and earth. They are not wholly of the earth - they do not remain earth-bound, held by an 'earth touch'; there is a kind of suspendedness; they touch the earth, but they are not of it. They bound along in their energy in relation to Heaven, but also in relation to earth, as the embodiment of the Divine energies. What that says, amongst other things, is this: that God's interests and activities, and God's Throne, are not remote from things here on this earth. He is not just reigning on His Throne in remote isolation, somewhere away there in the undefined heavens. His energies relate to things here: His mighty interests are near, are imminent: they are concerned with this world, with this earth, and with what is on it. He wants this earth, and all that is here, to be holy. In Isaiah's vision there is that phrase: "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). That is the conception; that is what the Lord desires. He is working to that. And we know, from the description of the end, that that is how it will be when 'knowledge of the glory of God fills the earth as the waters cover the sea' (Habakkuk 2:14). Holiness everywhere!

The fact is, God is intimately, closely, and intelligently associated with the state of things here, both in the Church, and in the churches. He is cognizant of everything that we do not see or do not realize. His eyes see it, and He is active concerning this state, to have it holy, and to be able to bring back *THE GLORY*.

The Throne is not far away after all - it is here, in representation. If the first section (chapters 1-3) of the Book of the Revelation means anything at all, it means that this very God-Man, this Man of the glory, is here; He is imminent, moving amongst the churches, the lampstands. The Throne is fully cognizant of everything; it is not blind; it is never deceived by anything at all. The Throne is active and its activity may be found in many, if not all, of the experiences into which we come. The Throne is determined to have one end, everywhere, in all things, and that is *GLORY*.

This wonderful symbolism of the 'living ones' and 'wheels' is but a declaration of this activity of the Throne. That Throne has not given things up because they are so bad; it is still pursuing its goal, to have a state that can be filled with *GLORY*. *May the Lord interpret this to us, and write it deeply in our hearts, and keep it every day in our consciousness.* This message is intended to be "not unto death, but for the glory of God".



## Chapter Eight

### HE MUST REIGN

*"He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25).*

In these past messages our eyes have been turned to that Throne that was seen by Ezekiel through the open heaven, with the 'appearance as of a Man upon it above'. And we have seen, I trust, how everything that follows is just the expression and manifestation of that Throne - of the absolute exaltation of the Lord Jesus above all things.

Now, when Paul wrote these words that we have quoted above, he was not thinking of some future time when Christ would reign and put all His enemies under His feet. He was not thinking of Jesus as waiting for a time to come, when something would be done that would put Him in that position and bring about that result. Whenever Paul - or, for that matter, any of the apostles - referred to Christ's exaltation and Lordship, he and they always regarded it and spoke of it as a present thing. Whilst they looked on into the future and saw something more of its outworking, in its beginning and in its actuality it was not to them a future thing; to them it was now. And when Paul said, 'He must reign', he meant, 'He is reigning, and must continue to reign, until He has put all His enemies under His feet.'

That is something that has to be recovered in our consciousness and in our conviction. That is *THE* thing that needs to be restored to its place in the Church's life and consciousness continually. For, to a very large extent, while the Church adheres to the doctrine of the exaltation of Christ, His Kingship and Lordship, the reality, the power and the consciousness of it has been to a very large extent lost. The Church, in the beginning, lived in the consciousness and the power of the fact - as it was to them - that Jesus was on the Throne; undoubtedly, unquestionably He was on the Throne; He was Lord of all. Peter affirmed it: "He is Lord of all"! (Acts 10:36). Paul said: 'God *DID* set Him far above all rule and authority' (Ephesians 1:20-21). It was something accomplished. That was their view of the matter; that was their conviction; that was their consciousness; and it was so powerful with them as to affect every aspect of their lives.

And until that is as true in the life and realization of the Church in our time as it was at the beginning, the same results and effects will not be found in the Church or through the church today. If the mighty impact and registration of Christ at that time was something incomparably greater than the deplorable state today in the Church, it was due to this one thing. If you wish to trace the secret of their power, their influence, their progress, their onward march - for in spite of a world of terrible hostility, persecution, martyrdom and every other kind of adversity, they marched forward 'terrible as an army with banners', and were described as the people who had "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) - if you wish to discover the secret, you will find it here: 'He *MUST* reign - He *MUST* reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet.' He is reigning.

We have said that, for the apostles, the reign of Christ had already begun; it did obtain in their time. How did they come to that conviction, to that knowledge? We will keep, for our purpose, to the man whose words we have extracted, the man Paul. Paul's knowledge of Christ as reigning sprang out of his personal experience of that fact. He had had an encounter in his life with the reigning, glorified Lord; and the Lord from Heaven had had an encounter with him. It had become something in his own personal experience, history and life. It was something very

personal; and it has to be that. Until it is that, it can be very theoretical. It has to be personal and experimental. And it was so with Paul. In that encounter, on the way to Damascus, two very personal words had been used, and I think it all centres in that fact.

### **Two Personal Words**

First of all, Paul had been spoken to by his own personal name: 'Saul, Saul!' His own name was called and reiterated. He is being nailed down to this personally; he is not getting away with it; he is not being allowed to mistake what he hears. It is being directed to the man in his own personal name. He is not mixed up in a crowd; he is not just met in a teaching; the thing has come quite straight at him as a man, as an individual - 'Saul, Saul!' I am not suggesting that we all have to have the same form of encounter. But we all have to have the same crisis; that is, we are all to have, and can have, a point in our life when we come face to face with the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ; and there is *THE* crisis upon which all the future turns. It is a tremendous thing to come face to face with the Lordship of Christ; it is a greater thing than coming face to face with His Saviourhood. There are many people who are saved by the Saviour, and own Him as Saviour, but whose lives are seriously lacking in the power of His Lordship. That is a statement - we leave it.

The other very personal word to Saul was the one that came when he asked, "Who art Thou, Lord?" The answer came: "I am *JESUS*..."; and, lest Saul should prevaricate, try to evade, get round it, by saying, 'Yes, but our country is full of men by that name; which Jesus do you mean?' - the Lord safeguarded it by adding: "... Whom thou persecutest" - 'the Jesus Whom you are persecuting - that is the One!' And Saul knew Who that One was, right enough. He had but one Jesus in all his thoughts and in all his plans, and *THAT* Jesus he was determined to blot out and wipe out from the world's memory; he was out to eradicate every trace of that Jesus. 'I am Jesus - the One that you are persecuting'. You see how personal the Lord made this matter. He brought it right home, first to the man himself, and then to the very purpose of his life - the very object to which he had dedicated all his strength of mind and body for its destruction: 'I am Jesus.'

Something like that is really necessary if there is to be any kind of repetition, in the Church and in us, of the after results in the life of Paul. There has to come a point where, instead of being just one of a multitude, we come, personally and individually, under His absolute personal domination and Lordship. Our whole life - all our ambitions, all our enterprises, all our commitments, are now brought under His Lordship. It is a tremendous thing, but the glory of that Throne waits upon the acceptance of its Government, its Lordship.

### **Paul's Transfigured Bible**

From that crisis, that encounter, that vision, that 'seeing' - that transaction, shall we call it - everything else took its rise in the life of Paul the apostle. Everything from that moment was transfigured, transformed, seen in an entirely new way, in the light of Jesus as on the Throne. After that, Paul went for a little while to Damascus, and then he went away into Arabia; and he went there with his Bible, I am quite sure; there are all the evidences of it. And he spent a long time there, with the Bible in one hand, and Jesus on the Throne, so to speak, in the other. If you want to know your Bible, that is the way; that is the key; that is the door - Jesus on the Throne, and the Bible. And Paul got a new Bible, a transfigured Bible! He saw his Bible, his Old Testament, with which he was very familiar, in a new and a living light, through that great truth - Jesus on the Throne! And as he went back over the Bible that he had, he saw this inherent everywhere. 'Yes, yes,

that is what is here!' He saw that the Bible was really the Book of one thing - God's intention to have a Man and His kind in dominion, reigning in glory. This matter of the glory of a Man in Heaven interpreted everything, explained everything.

After all, when you come to think of it, it does open the Bible. Why these awful conditions that we see? Because that is contrary to what God intended; it declares it. We look out on the world, and see the awful conditions in the nations, and round about us in our own country - the terrible conditions of suffering, of misery, of evil - and we may feel inclined to ask the question of the doubter, of the cynic: Why? Why? Why does God allow it? The answer is here: God allows that which is contrary to Him to shout at men that it *IS* contrary - He never meant it to be like that. When something goes wrong, God does not just pass it over, smooth it over, let it go as though it did not matter: He makes it shout its own crime and its own tragedy. The world is screaming with its own tragedy, and it is the tragedy of a missed purpose of God. Interpret that to the world, and you have an effective way of bringing in the Gospel.

But the Bible sprang into life for Paul, and it is an amazing thing how, from that moment, as he took his Bible with him everywhere, the one thing he is preaching is: 'Jesus is Lord; Jesus Christ is Lord!' The exalted Lord, the exalted Christ, the glorified Christ, was his theme; and Paul preached from the Bible. It had changed his Bible for him. It was responsible for, and accounted for, his whole mission and work. What was the great business to which he was committed? What was it that constituted him an apostle? Well, his mission and his work was impassioned and motivated and controlled by just this one thing - the absolute glory of the Lord Jesus; that Jesus should come into His rightful place in this world and in human hearts. That was the one motive, the one object, the one dominating thing in all his work, in all his mission. It was not this and that, and a number of other things; it was one central, but all-inclusive passion - Jesus as Lord, to be that in human lives. His work and his mission were both transfigured and controlled by this that had come into his experience.

His sufferings and his endurance were made possible by this vision. Sometimes he makes light of his sufferings. If ever a man suffered, I think that man suffered. I do not know that there were many ways in which he did not suffer; he suffered greatly, many sufferings, and heavy sufferings. But listen! 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen' (2 Corinthians 4:17-18); and amongst those 'things not seen', supremely and over them all, was that Exalted One in the glory, 'Whom', says his fellow-apostle Peter, 'having not seen ye love; on Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Peter 1:8). But the point is - how was it that he was able to endure and suffer triumphantly? It was just because of this basic and central consciousness - the deep, strong conviction that Jesus was on the Throne.

### **Paul's Understanding of the Church and Concern for the Churches**

I believe that this also was the key to Paul's understanding of the Church. Paul, as no one else, perhaps, had the greatest comprehension and understanding of the Church 'from eternity to eternity'. He goes right back into the Divine counsels 'before the world was', and sees it there in the heart and thought of God; he comes right through and sees it in the great consummation of the age of the ages. He has a marvellous comprehension of the Church. But of all the things he says - the highest things, the fullest things - the most complete expression of the

meaning and vocation of the Church is contained and summed up in this matchless phrase: 'Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (the Church), unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever' (Ephesians 3:20-21). 'Glory in the Church' - what glory? The glory of the glorified Christ! I could stay long with that matter of the Church and its eternal vocation and election, to be the vessel of the glory of Christ. John saw it at the end, in characteristic symbolism, in terms of the City - it is simply the glory of Christ in expression at last. It is that for which the church was chosen; it is that to which the church is called - to be the vessel, the seat, of this authority, this government, and this glory. Christ in glory gave to Paul the clue as to the church, and an ever-growing explanation of its meaning.

This same thing accounted for his concern for the churches. No one will question that Paul had tremendous concern for the churches. He says that he travailed for them; he wept day and night for them; he longed and yearned over them, spent himself for them. But why? What was the motive? What prompted all that? Ah, it was the glory of his Lord Jesus! The churches existed for the glory of Christ. He said so. It was all just for that one thing - the glory of Christ. And if there was any deflection, if there was anything that was not right in the Church, or in the churches; if anything whatsoever could be done to help them, it was all motivated by this one thing, that the Lord Jesus should in all things be glorified.

And if we pass to the end of it all, and look at Paul's writing about the Lord's coming again, what is it that is uppermost with him in relation to that coming? Is it the end of his troubles? Is it just his own joy and pleasure in getting to heaven? Oh no, it is the reign of His Lord the fact that His Lord is coming into His own, coming into His kingdom, coming into His rights, coming into the place that He ought to have, to be ceded that place universally - that is the great thing, the one thing giving birth and giving rise to everything else. "He must reign".

### **Christ is Actively Reigning Now**

And He reigns. Christ *IS* reigning. Christ is active. On several occasions He is spoken of as having, on His ascension, 'sat down' in heaven: He "*SAT DOWN* on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3); He 'sat down'. But if you notice, whenever it is said that He 'sat down', it is invariably related to the finishing of His redemptive work. That is done. On the other hand, He stands. There is no contradiction; it is only an implication of a different meaning. Stephen saw Him - "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man *STANDING* on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). He is spoken of as 'standing'. When it is a matter of the work of redemption, it is finished; there is nothing more to do - He can sit down. When it is a matter of the working out of that redemption here in this world, He is on His feet. When there is a challenge to what He has done, He rises up. Stephen is in the presence of that challenge, and the Exalted Lord is on His feet, for the sake of His testimony. He is active, that is the point. He is not just passively sitting down, waiting till His enemies are put under Him: He is putting them under! He stands to work this thing out.

Now, the activity of the reigning Lord is seen in several ways, only to be mentioned. Firstly, He is 'taking out from the nations a people for His Name' (Acts 15:14). The great illustration in the Old Testament, of course, is that of Israel in Egypt. The taking out of a people for His Name is a tremendous business - you cannot do that sitting down! He extended the prince of this world, exhausted all his power and all his resources and all his endurance, and got them out. We are left in no doubt about it that that was the Old Testament demonstration of the supreme power of God. There is only one demonstration that exceeds that, and

that is New Testament - 'the exceeding greatness of His power when He raised Jesus from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand.' That is *EXCEEDING* greatness of power! But it was a tremendous thing to get Israel out of Egypt as a people for His Name.

And it is no less a thing to get this people out of the nations for His Name. The prince of this world withstands and challenges at every point, in every way. No soul is going to be released from that bondage and that kingdom without a fight. It is often made out to be far too easy; people are put into a false position by it being made too easy. If we did but know, we have got to stand into the Throne for souls, to get them out. Perhaps you have some experience of those parts of the earth where the prince of this world has a terrible hold, a very terrible hold, and so much at his command; and you know something of what it means to get just one soul out of that. The suffering, the travail, the anguish, the cost bound up with getting one soul out of a nation for His Name! It needs the Throne, the mighty Throne. But, in spite of so much, He is doing it. The point is that there is so much like Pharaoh and Egypt - but even greater than that - set against this; and yet He is doing it.

The second thing He is doing is that He is constituting the life of that people on heavenly principles. We wish He had freer, fuller scope to do it. But He is doing it. That is, He is inculcating the life and laws of Heaven into that people. And again the illustration is Israel at Sinai, and in the Wilderness. There the heavenly laws were given, and they were constituted according to heavenly principles. They were tested, tried, proved according to the laws of Heaven. Their very daily bread had to come out of Heaven: they had to live out of Heaven, live on Heaven; their life had to be, indeed, a heavenly life. There was nothing here to constitute them God's people. They had to be constituted on a heavenly basis. And that is what the Risen Lord is seeking to do with His people. If only we understood, again, our experiences, we should see that that is the explanation and interpretation. He is seeking to re-constitute us on a heavenly basis of life. He is energetically trying to do it. Because we do not understand what He is doing, we are so slow in the change-over. Let us recognize the fact and take it to heart.

The third thing that He is doing is putting all His enemies under His feet. And that takes us, with Israel, over the Jordan, into the Land. See there how those nations were put under the feet of Joshua through the people. The counterpart of that now is that it is through His Church that the Lord Jesus is bringing His enemies under His feet. Oh that we were more efficient in this! Oh that it were more true of us that we, like the people, were putting our Joshua's enemies under His feet! That is a challenge; it is a truth. But He is doing it, putting His enemies under His feet, and doing it through His church - so imperfectly and with such limitations, but that is His way. Old William Gurnall, the writer of *The Christian in Complete Armour* (1655), speaking of the serpent's head being put under the Lord's heel, pictures the Lord saying to His Church: 'I have put him under My heel, come you and put your heel upon him!' We should be co-operating with the Lord Jesus in this matter.

See how He has done it through the centuries. It is a tremendous story! The very long-term nature of it, the extension of it over time, may rob it of some of its force in our consciousness. But if you could just put it all together, the story of how He has done it through the centuries, what a story it would be!

Israel vaunted itself against Him and His Lordship - where is Israel? Can Israel lift up its head? Through all these centuries it has been bruised, unable to lift itself up; impotent; paralysed; it vaunted itself against the Throne of the Exalted Christ. Rome entered into the battle to try this thing, and there was Caesar, with

all his mighty power and resources, determined to destroy that Name and that power. Where is Caesar? Where is Rome and all its mighty power? It has gone down into shame and into the dust, and has not been able to lift itself up again. So we could go on. In our own life-time, many of us have seen men who have made a bid for world-dominion, and Heaven says: That is reserved for One only! And what has happened? Man after man has ended his career in ignominy, and worse than that, who made that bid for the place of God's Son, for the Throne, right up to date. And it will be the same thing with the rest of them. It is reserved to Him. 'He must reign, till He has put ALL His enemies under His feet.' And He will do it.

How does Ezekiel put it? Right in the midst of his prophecies, right at the very centre of the book, with Israel in captivity; the captivity itself; the mighty power of Babylon and all these world powers enthralled, holding, seeking this place of absolute supremacy - Ezekiel cries, as from God: 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn... until He come Whose right it is to wear the crown!' (Ezekiel 21:27; Amplified Bible).

'He must reign, till He has put all His enemies under His feet.'

*May that transfigure the way for us.*