

# THE HOLY SPIRIT'S BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIST

by

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## Chapter One

### THE 'PARCHMENT', THE 'PEN' AND THE PURPOSE

*"For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).*

*"He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10).*

*"My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).*

*"...to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).*

*"...being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (2 Corinthians 3:3).*

It is very important for us to recognize just what those last words are saying. What is the meaning of 2 Corinthians, chapter three and verse three? To begin with, we can break it up into three things.

Firstly, it says that the Holy Spirit is writing a life of Christ. Secondly, this writing of the life of Christ is in the inner experience of believers. Thirdly, this biography of Jesus Christ is for all men to read. Is that perfectly clear? Well, let us break it up again.

#### The Parchment

We will begin with the parchment. You know that the New Testament was written originally upon parchment. At one time the Apostle Paul asked someone very particularly to bring his parchments to him, and probably they were his epistles. Now he says that the Holy Spirit is writing a life of Christ on parchment, but this parchment is the inner life of believers. He says: "Not in tables of stone", and although he does not actually say so, he means that it is not on parchment. The writing material of the Holy Spirit is the inner life of believers. The born-again believer has a new inner life upon which the Holy Spirit can write, but the one who is not born again is not suitable parchment for the Holy Spirit. The Apostle said quite a lot about that in the first letter to the Corinthians. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14). In other words, the natural man is not suitable writing material for the Holy Spirit, and it is only the spiritual man who is suitable for the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus said this to Nicodemus, who was very familiar with the parchments of the Old Testament. He knew all about those manuscripts, but the Lord Jesus told him that he was not suitable material for the Holy Spirit. He could not receive Him, and therefore he could not understand what He was doing. The Lord Jesus told him: 'You must be born again, for you must be a new man to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying.'

This new man is made alive to the Holy Spirit and is sensitive to Him. We have here a tape recorder, and all that is being said is being received because the tape is sensitive. If anyone coughs in this meeting we shall hear it for months, and

perhaps for years to come! So it is with the spirit of the new man in Christ. The Holy Spirit is writing a life of Christ, and I do trust that we are all going to be very sensitive to Him in these days.

### **That Which is Being Written**

The next thing that we note is that the spiritual experiences of believers are a repetition of the life of Jesus Christ, and it is upon that statement that our morning meetings this week will be founded. It may take you some time to understand it, but I do want you to recognise what this word is saying. The Holy Spirit is writing a biography of Jesus Christ, and it is a spiritual biography, written in the spiritual life and experience of believers. All that which was true of the Lord Jesus, excepting His deity, is going to be written in our spiritual experience. That is a tremendous statement! And it is going to be a tremendous thing to recognise. You have spiritual experiences, things come into your spiritual history; but if you understand what the Holy Spirit is doing, you should realise that He is writing something about the Lord Jesus, and that something that was true of the Lord Jesus is being reproduced in you.

You will recall the passages which we read: "Foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son... Christ fully formed in you... that he might fill all things." Our spiritual life belongs to the "all things", and your spirit is one of the "things".

Let me repeat: The Holy Spirit is now writing a biography, the life of Christ, in the spiritual history of the Lord's people.

### **Sonship the Basis of All God's Work**

The first great thing about the Lord Jesus was His Sonship, and the Holy Spirit is writing sonship in us. Remember that sonship always relates to God's purpose, for it is the beginning and the end of His purpose, which is in humanity. While Jesus Christ, as Son of God, is God Himself, sonship relates to humanity. It is in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus that His Sonship is manifested. You see, I am leaving deity aside, for the deity of the Lord Jesus is not something that will be reproduced in us, but, leaving His deity aside, the Holy Spirit is writing His sonship in us. The little fragment that we read said: "That he might be the firstborn among many brethren", and by new birth we receive the gift of sonship.

So, sonship is the basis of all God's work. It begins in Jesus Christ, and then it is carried on in the born-again believer.

### **The Testimony of Jesus**

We often use the word 'testimony' in relation to the Lord Jesus. The 'testimony of Jesus' is used in various ways, but it is not a system of doctrine. It is the continuation of the life of Jesus. You can have the doctrine of the testimony and not be an example of the life of Jesus. Our basic word says that we, as living epistles, are to be read and known of all men, but *WHAT* are all men to read and know? Is it a system of doctrine? Is it a form of Christianity? It is not one of the many things that are said about it, but just Christ going on living in His people. We sing:

"Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son!"

and we put everything on that! He is the risen, glorious Son of God, reliving His life, by the Holy Spirit, in us.

Perhaps that is not very encouraging to us, but that is because we are trying to get it all at once. No, this is a whole lifework of the Holy Spirit, and then, after this life, there is that wonderful parenthesis, that interval between this life and the next when we shall all be changed. So we are back at the beginning: "Foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son", and we are being "changed into his likeness" (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is going on through this life - or, it ought to be! - and then there comes the interval when we leave his world and we awake in His likeness.

So the testimony of Jesus in this world is not only that Jesus is alive, but He is alive in us.

Now let me repeat: The life of the believer is intended to be the history of Jesus Christ rewritten. "Ye are an epistle" - or a biography.

### **The School of the Holy Spirit**

That leaves us with two things. It brings us into the school of the Holy Spirit, where we are learning our lessons, but we are not learning them from a book. We are learning them by what the Holy Spirit is doing in us, which means that when we are in His hands everything that comes into our spiritual history has in it a lesson about Jesus Christ.

So the second thing is that we have to look at our experiences and ask: 'What have I to learn about Christ in this? In what way does this experience provide the Holy Spirit with an opportunity of teaching me something about Jesus Christ?' Sometimes we cannot understand what the Lord is doing with us! We cannot see the meaning of an experience, but if we are really in the hands of the Holy Spirit, our experiences are going to lead us on to know the Lord better. Therefore we must not reject our experiences; we must not think of them as unnecessary, we must not rebel against them, we must not think that they have no meaning, but we must take every experience into the presence of the Lord and say: 'Now, Lord, You must teach me what You mean by letting me have this experience.' That is the foundation of this ministry: learning Christ, but not just in our heads. You may have your heads and your notebooks full of information this week, but it has to go down deeper. The New Testament speaks about "the eyes of your heart" (Ephesians 1:18).

So often at the beginning of a conference people come to us with a lot of problems and questions and they would like to take all our time getting answers to their problems and questions. They are not always very pleased when we say: 'Wait until the end of the conference, and perhaps you will have no more questions to ask!' If the Holy Spirit is with us He is going to enlighten the eyes of our hearts, and we are going to see with our hearts. That is the best way to see, and the only way.

You know, a mother sees in one way, and a woman who has had no children sees in another. When our eldest daughter was a little baby she was in her pram, crying very loudly, and a lady came along and said: 'What is the matter with her?' She had not got a wedding ring on. My wife said: 'Oh, she is tired', and the good lady said: 'Well, why does she not go to sleep, then?' The mother understands what someone who has not the heart relationship cannot understand.

The best knowledge is heart knowledge. That word: "The eyes of your heart" is sometimes translated: "The eyes of your understanding", and understanding is the best knowledge.

Now have you got this clear at the beginning? You see, during this conference I am going over the life of Christ and will take up a number of His experiences and will try to show you how those experiences are reproduced in believers so that we become the living biography of Jesus Christ, for that is what those words mean.

I would like you to think about this. The four Gospels have a literal biography of Jesus Christ, but they were written *AFTER* the epistles. They tell us of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, but when you have that you have not got everything. Indeed, you have only a very little. The epistles were written in order to show us that all that which was in the Gospels has to be made real in us. I have always had a question about going to the Holy Land! If you do not agree with me, well, that does not matter! But, you know, I have been to the Holy Land spiritually. I have seen so much of it in my inner life. I do not need to go to Mount Calvary, for I understand much more of Calvary by not having gone there. I need not go up to the high mountain of the Transfiguration, for I have seen that in my heart. All these things that happened to the Lord Jesus only happened in a temporal way, in order to lay the foundation. The Holy Spirit had not come down then, so in the Gospels He was only writing a historic life of Jesus. He was not writing the inner spiritual experience of that history. That is what He came down to do, and that is very much better than going to Palestine. Well, go to Palestine if you want to, but remember that the Holy Spirit has come to write Palestine in us, and we are going to think about that this week, if the Lord helps us.

Are you clear about what I have tried to say? "Ye are an epistle [or biography] of Christ... written not with ink... not in tables of stone", and we may add, 'not on sheets of parchment, not by the finger of man, but by the Spirit of God, who is writing upon the tables which are hearts of flesh'. Does that give you a new idea about what is happening? Remember, then, that if you are in the hands of the Holy Spirit, He is trying to write the life of Jesus Christ in you so that all may be able to read.

The Christians in the early days were known by different names. They were known as Christians, and by other names, but one of the names by which they became known everywhere was: 'The people of the way.' I wonder where that name came from, and how people got that idea? Was it the Christians' different way of life? Yes, perhaps so. Was it their teaching and their practice? Yes, perhaps. But was it because Jesus said: "I am the way", and the Christians were going the way of Christ, and people saw that they were going that way? Perhaps that was what it was, and that is what it is meant to be. These people were going the way of Jesus Christ, and not trying to follow His example. That may be important, but they were going that way because the Holy Spirit in them was taking them that way. The Lord Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. There is, or should be, in us an inward urge to go in a certain way, and that way is the way of the Lord Jesus - and in that way we learn Christ. We are 'People of the Way'.

## Chapter Two

### 'LIFE... PROMISED BEFORE TIMES ETERNAL'

Our basic passage for these messages is 2 Corinthians 3:3: "...being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh".

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

#### The Beginning of the Biography

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

Now, when we open our New Testament, we have the biography of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus in three of the Gospels, and two of those Gospels tell us of His earthly beginning and birth. They give us His genealogy, tracing Him right back to the beginning of man on the earth. The third Gospel gives us the beginning of His ministry, but has nothing to say about Bethlehem, nor His earthly mother, nor His home. It just begins with the ministry of the Lord Jesus, when He was thirty years of age. But the fourth Gospel ignores all that. It has nothing to say about Bethlehem, nor about Nazareth. It says nothing about David, nor Adam, but just leaps right back over all earthly history and takes us into eternity before time was. You know that I am speaking about the Gospel by John, which begins with that dateless time before the world was, and shows us that the Sonship of the Lord Jesus was not a thing of time only, but that it was eternal and supernatural, and not natural. John describes it in this way (and he includes us with the Lord Jesus in this matter): "...which were born, not of bloods (that is, the blood of Joseph and Mary), nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Born of God! When was the Lord Jesus born of God? Not at Bethlehem only, but away back there before time was. And the wonderful thing is this: that the deepest truth in the life of a child of God is that he or she is not a child of time, but a child of eternity, born from above - not in Bethlehem, nor in Switzerland, nor England, nor Germany, nor in any other place here on this earth - but born from above. That is a supernatural act of the Spirit of God.

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

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

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

You ought to look up all those references to "before the world was", "before times eternal", and see us in the mind of God away back there! "Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29), and the first thing in that image is the eternal life which is in Him. So John begins his Gospel with: "In him was life" (John 1:4), and later in that same Gospel Jesus will say: "I am come that they may have life" (John 10:10). In both of those statements it is taken for granted that no one outside of Jesus Christ has that life. If they already had life why should He come from heaven in order that they should have it?

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

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

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

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

### **Eternal Life the Governing Factor**

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

*"For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one, much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass the judgement came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life" (Romans 5:17-18).*

*"...in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal" (Titus 1:2).* That life, then, links us with what is eternal.



*"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:1).*

Now I want to say one or two quite important things at this point. This that is called eternal life is the factor which determines everything in history and destiny. Not religion, nor ritual, nor orthodoxy, but life determines history and human destiny. It governs everything. The Bible is God's Book of world history and human destiny, and it is wonderful how universal the Bible is. It comprehends the whole human race, it governs the destiny of all the nations which make up the human race, and it contains the principles of destiny. And the centre of the Bible, from the beginning to the end, is this that is called eternal life. It is the all-governing factor.

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

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

### **Babyhood**

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

One simple thing governed the babyhood of the race, and it is the characteristic of all spiritual babyhood. In doctrine we call it 'Justification by Faith'. I am afraid I am rather tired of that phrase, for it sounds so theological! Justification by faith is the mark of spiritual infancy, the beginning of spiritual history, but I think some of the music has gone from that phrase. What is justification? Another word used is, as you know, righteousness. But what is righteousness by faith? I love a certain translation, which translates that word 'righteousness', or justification, like this: 'Right standing with God.' Is that not lovely? 'Being in right standing with God.' Is not that what the whole world is craving for? Is that not what the whole human race longs for? Is that not what we all desire more than anything else? God, being what He is, so perfect, so holy, so particular, is it possible that you and I, being what we are, should be in right standing with Him?

You know, in business that is a very important thing. In the commercial world, if one business is asked to do something for another, they look at their books to see what transactions they have had with them before, and they say: 'Are they in right standing with us? Have they paid all their accounts? Are they in our debt?'

Are they on good terms with us? Are we quite satisfied with them? Can we trust them? Can we commit our business to them?' It all depends upon whether they are in right standing or not.

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

What about Abel? Do you think that he was a perfect man? But the whole of Abel's life is gathered up into one thing: he believed God, and he knew that he was in right standing with God. (Hebrews 11:4)

What shall we say about Enoch? I think he was a very wonderful person. If you read the chapter in Genesis where Enoch is mentioned you find that it is all about people who are dying because of sin. This one lived so many years and died, that one lived so many years and died, and you are ready to go on with the whole miserable story - but it is interrupted. It just says, in Genesis 5:24: "Enoch walked with God - he was in right standing with God - and he was not, for God took him." Then you go back to more of the miserable story, until you come to Noah.

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

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

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

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

### **Childhood**

The second stage in the life of the Lord Jesus on this earth was His childhood, His boyhood. We have not a great deal about His boyhood in the New Testament. There are only one or two things said about it, but it was a long period, and we

cannot believe that it was an empty period. It does say that He "grew in stature, and in grace with God and men" (Luke 2:52). He grew in right standing with God.

The second period of the spiritual biography of Jesus Christ is much fuller than that, indeed, it occupies practically all the rest of the New Testament, for it is the period between being born and being perfected. It states that He "was made perfect" (Hebrews 5:9). What does that mean? It may create a problem for you in that He who was without sin, whom we think of as being perfect, should have to be *MADE* perfect, but, of course, our idea of the word 'perfect' is not the New Testament idea. The New Testament meaning of the word 'perfect' is 'being made full, or complete'. While for us it may mean being made different in nature, it was not that with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was working upon that which was not yet complete to make it complete.

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

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

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

Who are the Patriarchs? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. Do you not see what a period of education that was? God had these men in His school and He was teaching them the laws of Divine life. Visit Abraham at school and see what he is learning about the laws of Divine life! Was Isaac at school? Was he learning the great laws of Divine life? Let me put that in another way. Was Isaac being taught the principles of resurrection life? You know, we have some wrong ideas about these men, and we often think that Isaac was a little boy and Abraham could pick him up and put him on the altar. From our standpoint he was a grown man at that stage, not even a teenager. He had grown to have a will, a mind and feelings of his own, and he could have resisted his father. He could have rebelled against him. He was in a hard school, for he had to surrender everything to death in order that he might learn the law of resurrection life.

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

### **Manhood**

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

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

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

I have said that the third period in the Old Testament, that of the Prophets, is the travail of life. How the Prophets are suffering to bring back that Divine life in fullness to the people of God! Yes, the Old Testament closes - but what are you going to say about closing the Old Testament? It closes in tragedy, in hopelessness? Not at all! It closes in order that the New Testament may open, and what does the travail work out to in the New Testament? A new history begins. Out of the travail 'a child is born, a son is given', the Old Testament is lifted up on to the heavenly plane, and the Holy Spirit begins all over again in the spiritual realm. He begins with our new birth, takes us on into the period of spiritual growth, where we learn the laws of spiritual life, and then on into the travail of life that the Kingdom should come, and we are called upon to share this part of the biography of Jesus Christ - "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). And what was the suffering of Jesus? It was the travail of His soul that He should see His seed, prolong His days and be satisfied. That is what He is doing in us now by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is working

toward that end - that He should be satisfied, and we shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness.

## Chapter Three

### THE TRUE LIFE AND THE FALSE LIFE

As you know by now, we are occupied in these morning meetings with what we are taught through the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:3, that is, that the Holy Spirit is writing a spiritual biography of Jesus Christ in every member of the Body of Christ. To put that in another way, the spiritual history and experiences of true believers are a repetition of what was true of the Lord Jesus, excepting His deity. So we have to understand that the Holy Spirit is repeating the life of the Lord Jesus in us.

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

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

#### Eternal Life All-Governing

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

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

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

Let us get away from the symbol and the type. That tree is a type of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for He is the tree of life, and our attitude towards the Lord Jesus is going to determine our destiny - whether we have eternal life or eternal

death. We know from Genesis that on that day when man showed that he was not faithful to God, that in spirit and in mind he was not true to God's Son, he died, and the whole race died in him. In Romans 5 Paul says that death entered into the human race because of one man's disobedience; so the destiny of the human race was settled on that day. The Lord had said: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Thus man died spiritually, because death is separation from God.

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

### **Eternal Life Reserved in Jesus Christ**

Now note the next thing. The Lord took action and set a fence around that tree of life. In so doing He said: 'No one shall have life apart from that tree.' In other words, it is impossible for anyone to have eternal life apart from the Lord Jesus, for this life is in God's Son. "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (1 John 5:12). Life, then, is reserved in Jesus Christ and cannot be had outside of Him. Well, of course, that is very simple and elementary but we have not finished yet!

You notice what happened in the Garden: Satan was there to make God a liar. Jesus said that Satan "is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44), and he was there in the Garden to make God a liar, Did he do it? Mark you, this is something very important for us to notice today, for this is always Satan's way. He did not accept the situation in the Garden, and he never does accept a situation. There will come a time when he will have to accept a situation and will not be able to do anything about it, but all through the ages he has refused to accept this situation and has told a lie. So man has fallen a victim to the lie of Satan. What is Satan's lie in connection with life? He offers false life, another kind of life that looks like the true one. Satan falsifies true life, and, instead of being spiritual life, it is just soul life. Do you know the difference between spiritual life and soul life?

Satan attacked the soul life of Adam. You know what the soul is, do you not? It is your reason, your emotions, your will. Satan began by *REASONING* with Adam, and, oh, what a dangerous thing it is to argue with Satan! Never reason with the devil, or, in other words, do not listen to his arguments! There is a sting in his tail! So Satan first came to man's reason and started an argument: "Yea, hath God said?" (Genesis 3:1). Immediately a question about God was lodged in the mind. There is a terrible destiny bound up with that question!

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

It is all symbolic, but, you see, it contains eternal principles. The whole kingdom and reign of Satan are built upon that basis. The mind, the heart and the will of humanity are captured by the devil, but it is false life. What about all the emotion in the world, even in Christianity? There is a vast difference between spiritual, eternal life, and soul life. There is such a thing as false life, and that thing is the

master-stroke of Satan! You will remember that there was a time in the history of Israel in the wilderness when certain sons of Aaron brought false fire and offered it upon God's altar. You know what happened! You know all about God's jealousy. There is a vast amount of false fire in this world today. It looks like true life, true fire, what is of God, but there is a lie in it, and the fruit of that tree is bitter fruit in the end.

I think this is a time in the world's history when we need to understand this more than ever. How can we discern the difference between the true life and the false life? Well, I think John is the great messenger of this, because his writings were particularly in this connection. He wrote in a time when everything in Christianity was being falsified. There was Christ and anti-Christ. In fact, there were many antichrists, for many false spirits had gone abroad. It was a time when Christians were being deceived, and John, writing for that time, said: "The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you" (1 John 2:27). In effect, John was saying: 'By the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the true life, you will be able to discern between the true and the false.' Even when they look so much alike, the Spirit in you will say: 'There is something not true about this!'

I think that one of the things that indicates whether it is true or false is whether man made it or not. You see, those sons of Aaron *MADE* their incense, and they did not make it of the same ingredients as those with which the true incense was made. It was something which looked like the true, but it was false, and the Spirit of God knew the difference. We have to be very careful that we do not create false fire, for that is the danger of strong personalities. Do you notice how many of these things which look like life have come from strong personalities? They are uncrucified Christian men! Is that a contradiction in terms? No, the Cross has to divide between soul and spirit, and if you see the fire coming from strong, forceful soulish men, you have reason to doubt the reality of it. When the true fire comes, it is always through crucified men.

I think the Apostle Peter could have created a lot of false fire. He was a man who was always trying to get things going! He would rush in in front of someone else, and would even tell the Lord Jesus where to get on and where to get off! It would have been a poor lookout for Christianity if it had come through Peter! But Peter had to go to the Cross, and the true fire of the Holy Spirit did not come until he was an utterly broken man.

Well, perhaps I have said enough on that matter, but it is something that should be an instruction to us in these days. We do verily need to know the difference between the true life and the false life, for Satan's master-work is to imitate God.

Now can we go on with the next chapter in this spiritual biography?

### **The Crisis of Bethlehem**

I want you to read these passages very carefully. You may think that you know them, but before we have finished I think you may find that you do not!

Luke 1:26-34,37,38. Mark 10:42-45. Philippians 2:5-8.

There has to be a Bethlehem in the spiritual history of every believer. What is the Bethlehem of the child of God? It is not in Luke's Gospel, for that is the Bethlehem of the Lord Jesus. John's Gospel is the spiritual history, and the Bethlehem of the child of God is in chapter 3: 'Most truly I say unto you, you must be born anew.' That is our Bethlehem!



## **The Renunciation of the Lord Jesus**

Things did not begin with the Lord Jesus at the little town of Bethlehem in Palestine. I have called that a 'crisis', for it was a turning-point in Christianity, but it all began in heaven. You have to go back behind Bethlehem and into heaven, and see what was happening there. The eternal Son of God was there, and He was equal with God. He was one with God in position, having all heaven's fullness and Divine glory. In John 17:5 the Lord Jesus prayed in these words: "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory *WHICH I HAD WITH THEE BEFORE THE WORLD WAS*", and that was before Bethlehem! In heaven, then, before this world was, there was the Son possessing the glory of God, occupying the very throne of God, the throne of the universe. Then, speaking in human language, the point came when something needed to be done in this little world. God had lost His place, had been rejected, and man had lost what God had intended for him. He had forfeited the eternal life which God had intended him to have. So to speak Satan and man together had turned God out of this world, and it was in pride. Satan had said: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt *MY* throne above the stars of God... I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). We know the result of that! And man entered into a complicity with Satan and God's place and God's life were lost to man. There is so much more in that word 'lost' than we are accustomed to thinking! We sing: "I was lost, but Jesus found me", but when were you lost, and what did you lose?

Here we are in an eternal setting. Jesus said: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and as we go on we shall see what that was.

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

Can it be true? Is that little babe in that manger in the innermost reality of His being that eternal Son who occupied the place of supreme authority in the past ages? Is this little baby the same One who was filled with the glory of God and all heaven? Oh, wonder of wonders, He has indeed taken the lowest place! What ought He to have had? But what He did have was a manger in a stable! There was no place for Him in the world that He Himself had created. "He came unto his own things, and they that were his own received him not" (John 1:11). What a crisis in the ages!

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

### **Mary's Renunciation**

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

You know, for two reasons we have lost something very wonderful in this connection. It is the devil's trick again! Satan will always try to get hold of something Divine and discredit it, and the Church of Rome has discredited this living thing by the worship of the Virgin Mary. If you go into Roman Catholic countries and see the place that the Virgin Mary has, your whole being revolts against it and you do not want to talk about her. This is a great triumph for the devil, as you will see in a moment or two.

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

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

There is a link between that which happened in heaven with the Son of God when He emptied Himself, and Mary. Do not make any mistake! Mary had to make a great renunciation, for she knew what it meant to have a child without a husband. Is that not the deepest shame that a woman can know? Does that not mean that she has sacrificed all that is noble and honourable about womanhood? Supposing it became known that this child was born and Joseph was not the father! Who was the father, then? That is something for people to talk about! I am not sure that the people in wicked Nazareth had not already spread a rumour, because at one time some of the enemies of Jesus Christ threw this thing at Him, when they said: "We were not born in iniquity" (John 8:41). Is that not horrible, terrible? Ah, Mary knew what it meant! She knew that if this thing got out into the world she would be counted as one of the world's most disgraceful people. Everyone would look down upon her. She was afraid, and, more than that, "greatly troubled". The angel Gabriel read what was going on in her soul and said: "Fear not, Mary." Never in all history did a woman need that word more than Mary did that day! She had taken in the situation and realized in what she was involved. The angel Gabriel said: 'Mary, you are a very specially favoured woman. God has favoured you more than other women.' And the word that the angel used was 'grace' - 'God has put His grace upon you more than upon any other woman.' Well, she considered the whole thing, realizing what it meant, knowing that if she had to go out into the world, and the world knew about it, it would talk (and the world never gives a Divine meaning to a thing like that! You know the kind of world we are in!), and she said - note! - "Behold, the *BONDSLAVE* of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." I put a mighty emphasis upon that word 'bondslave'! Did Mary empty herself of a woman's glory? That is what it meant naturally. Did Mary humble herself to be obedient unto death? For, you know, a woman like that would have been stoned in Israel, and she knew it. Did she humble herself and become obedient unto death? Oh, yes, she did. She went down to the lowest place. But what is the word? "*BONDSLAVE* of the Lord" - the servant of God.

Now the whole Bible is opened up! Before the Bible began the Divine Son was saying: 'I will be Your servant, Father. I will go down to be Your bondservant.' And right from the beginning God has sought to have *SERVANTS*. You have a long line of servants of God in this world's history: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and on you go to Isaiah, the Prophet, who says: "Israel, my servant" (Isaiah 41:8). They were the people of service.

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

### **What is Service?**

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

Dear friends, is that what the service of God means to you? It is not the place, nor the person. The place may be a stable and the person a simple woman. It is nothing of the glory of this world. Oh, how men have made a mistake over this! They think that in order to have God present they must have a very elaborate building, with some very important persons, Lord this and Baron that, with a cathedral here and a cathedral there - and the Word says: "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48). Where is God? "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). That can be anywhere, in anything, but the point is this: we are here, dear friends, as the Lord's people to be His servants, and true service is bringing God back where we are. Do you understand that? Why am I here? Why are you here? Why are you wherever you are? Our presence ought to mean the presence of the Lord.

You see, God has been seeking a place for His feet all through the ages. He raised up the men I have mentioned in order that He should be brought back to this world. He raised up Israel in order to bring Him back, and said: "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). The Old Testament is just about that one thing - a few men bringing God back. That is the meaning of the priesthood, for it was just to bring God back. That is the meaning of the kingship. The supreme king said: "I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids; until I find out a place for the Lord" (Psalm 132:3-4). David was a very imperfect man, and Mary, I expect, was a very imperfect woman, but it was where their hearts were and what was the purpose of their lives that mattered, and that was to bring back the Lord. Israel was raised up to bring God back into the midst of the nations. In the end they failed, and you close the Old Testament. Then you open the New Testament with Mary of Nazareth, and God coming back through this simple woman.

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

Oh, does this not throw a lot of light upon what is happening? Communism is anti-God, and is the most satanic thing that history has known. It is saying: 'Get rid of God!', and is the great instrument of Satan in the nations. The battle for holding the ground for God is becoming very intense.

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

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

## **Chapter Four**

### **CHRIST GREATER THAN ALL**

Reading: Matthew 3:1-6, 13-17; 4:1-11.

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

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

This was evidently one of those occasions in history when there was a new movement of the Spirit of God from heaven: what we would call in our time a revival. The Spirit of God was coming down upon that country and was convicting men and women of sin, and as they were convicted of sin they became afraid of judgment - and that is what every revival ought to be like. First of all there should be conviction of sin and then fear of judgment. John cried: "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" A great spirit of condemnation and conviction had come upon the people and they were fleeing to John to know the way of escape from the coming wrath of God. Of course, that was just the ministry of the Old Testament Prophets.

Then right in the midst of that revival, or that Holy Spirit-convicting of sin and judgment, Jesus appeared on the scene. It is wonderful that, while all this was going on, He suddenly came into the midst and right into that particular situation. The whole multitude were under a great burden of sin and fear of coming judgment, and the Lamb of God appeared in that - "Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

#### **The Two Prophets**

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

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

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

## The Two Baptisms

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

Now I do not advocate being baptized twice. I believe that in one country people are baptized every year, but, as far as I can tell, they are not any the better for that! However, here you have the two baptisms alongside one another. John said: "I indeed baptize you in water... but he that cometh after me is mightier than I... he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit." Water in the Old Testament speaks of judgment and death. You ask Noah about that! You remember that the Apostle Peter refers to the flood as the baptism of that time (1 Peter 3:21), and that was a baptism indeed! If you asked those people: 'What did your baptism mean to you?', and they were able to answer you, they would say: 'Well, it was judgment and death. That is what the water meant to us.' Go on a little further in the Old Testament and ask Pharaoh about water. You know that the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that the Israelites were "all baptized into Moses in the sea" (verse 2), so the Red Sea was a baptistry. If you asked Pharaoh and his army what their baptism meant, they would answer: 'It was judgment and death.'

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

## The Two Lambs

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

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

I wonder if that is what your baptism has meant to you? Those waters of baptism ought to have carried away all condemnation and all judgment. Charles Wesley wrote one poem that has never become a hymn to be sung, and I do not know

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

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

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

### **The Two Horizons**

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

When you are baptized into the Holy Spirit you lose your earthly nationality - and now you say: 'What is the proof of that?' My answer is that Hotel Bellevue, Hilterfingen, Switzerland, is the proof of that! How many nationalities are there in this room? And how many of you different nationalities will have nothing to do with those of other nations? 'Oh, he is German, or - worse still! - British, or Chinese, so we do not have anything to do with them!' No, a greater horizon comes into view in Christ. It is something that the Spirit of God does in us, so that we love one another without any regard for nationality.

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

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

## **The Baptism**

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

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

## **The Anointing**

We must recognize that the anointing must be kept related to the baptism. There cannot be the anointing until there has been the baptism. These two follow each other as day follows night, and in the beginning of the creation the day and the night were one. It is strange that it says that "there was evening and there was morning, one day" (Genesis 1:5). I think it just means that you cannot have a whole day until you have had the night of judgment and condemnation and come out of it into the new day of light. It is like that in spiritual experience. We know that there was one day in our lives, and half of it was night when we came under conviction of sin and under the fear of judgment. That was the dark part of another day. I am an old-fashioned Christian and I believe that this ought to be true of everyone who is born again. I think that the trouble with many Christians is that they never had a dark night, the terrible sense of sin and judgment which is a necessary preliminary to the day.

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

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

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



Spirit. I know I am on dangerous ground, but I am not going to be drawn into your argument! I am going right on. What does the anointing mean?

Notice that the anointing relates to only one thing, and that is the purpose of God in our salvation. I am going to call that purpose 'vocation'. It was here at the Jordan that Jesus took up His life vocation, the very purpose for which He had come into this world, the work that He was to accomplish. Get that and hold it for a minute!

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

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

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

We saw three things in the case of Mary. Firstly, we saw the Cross, the cost of this service - and how costly this was to Mary before this world! And the old man in Jerusalem said to her: "Yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul" (Luke 2:35). It was going to be a very costly thing to bring the Lord into this world! It was going to mean the Cross, because it was at Calvary that the sword went through the soul of Mary.

Secondly, we saw that the ability to fulfil this service was the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee" (Luke 1:35). He was the ability, or the resource, for fulfilling the ministry.

Then we saw the third thing - the devil. He had an instrument, that wicked Herod in Jerusalem. Shall we say that he was 'Satan incarnate', who focused all his malice upon this one little child. He would stop at nothing to kill that Babe! "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning" (Matthew 2:18), and do you think that Mary escaped? She knew about it, and she knew that her Babe was involved in that! The devil came out when she brought the Lord in - and what a lot of history there is in that!

Let us go on to John the Baptist. His vocation was to prepare a way for the Lord, to bring the Lord in. Was it a costly thing for John? Yes, John brought the Lord Jesus in, but the same devil was watching and he had a Herod again, and this Herod beheaded John. Behind the incidents that led up to that there was this sinister power that says: 'If you are going to bring Jesus Christ into this world, I am going to be your enemy!' It was costly indeed for John to bring the Lord in, but he fulfilled his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, and although Herod

took off his head, later that same Herod was afraid that John had risen from the dead. When Herod heard what Jesus was doing he said: "John the Baptist is risen from the dead... John, whom I beheaded, he is risen" (Mark 6:14, 16). I think John the Baptist haunted his dreams! However, the point is that the work was accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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

Dear friends, it revolutionized my life. You see, I was what was called 'a minister', and I wore a clerical collar and all that kind of thing. I thought 'the ministry' was mostly to do with getting up sermons and preaching them on a Sunday. Really, for me, 'the ministry' was climbing steps up into a pulpit and preaching a sermon. Well, as you can see, the Lord has done something! He has shown me what the ministry really is, and if this ministry is not being fulfilled, I am ready to go out at once. If I am not bringing the Lord Jesus in, if the result of any life is not more of the Lord Jesus in this world, then my life is a failure. I have missed the meaning of service. And this belongs to you, whoever you are. You may not be a great public figure, you may never be called a 'minister', you may never preach in a pulpit, but you can be a servant of the Lord as much as John the Baptist was. It can be said that because people met you, they met the Lord, because you lived in that village, people knew the Lord was there.

Are you taking this to heart? You see, this is the principle of the New Testament. It is put in this way in the Gospels: Jesus sent His disciples into all the towns and villages *WHERE HE HIMSELF WOULD COME* (Luke 10:1). Why did they go? To bring Him there. That is the principle throughout the New Testament. Oh, no, they were not sent into all these places to form churches, but to bring the Lord Jesus. I do not think that the devil cares a little bit about people forming churches, in fact, I think that many of the churches that are formed please the devil very much! He does not find that they are a challenge to him, but where these New Testament servants of the Lord went, the devil recognized the significance of their being in that place. 'They are to bring Jesus here, and that is the most dangerous thing to our kingdom!' So, if we have something of the Lord, if our presence means the coming in of the Lord, what do we expect?

### **The Temptation**

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

My time has gone, but I will just say one thing and leave it there. Baptism, the anointing and the temptation are all one thing. If you are in right standing with God, for that is what baptism really means, if you have received the Holy Spirit, the anointing, you must expect that the next thing that will happen is that the devil has put his mark upon you, and his one object will be to break up your

testimony concerning the Lord Jesus, to nullify the presence of Jesus in your life, or to get you right out of the way. The enemy will be watching you all the time to try to destroy the presence of the Lord Jesus and to get you out of the way.

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

May the Lord write this chapter in our hearts!

## Chapter Five

### OUR HEAVENLY VOCATION

Reading: Matthew 3:13-4:11.

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

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

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

Now we pass over some centuries and come to Israel, and this same issue was presented to them. It is the key to their history. When they were brought out of Egypt into a wilderness for forty years (and I hope you are reading Matthew 4 in this: Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, so the same principle is there) the question was: Would they live by Divine life, or, in rebellion, seek to be self-sufficient? Well, we know that in that probation Israel also failed.

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

Now we come to the third thing. First Adam, then Israel, and then the last Adam, and we find Him in the very place where both the first Adam and the first nation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Life For Our Vocation

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

The first thing about this life-bread is that it is a different kind of life from natural life. That is what is hidden in this first temptation. There is a great deal of difference between natural life and Divine life. I think we should notice that the Lord Jesus, in quoting that Scripture from Deuteronomy 8, quoted it correctly. Presently Satan is going to quote the Scriptures, but he is going to do so incorrectly, and that is one of his ways. He takes up Divine things and gives them a twist. In quoting that Scripture the Lord said: "Man shall not live by bread alone." He did not say: 'You do not need any natural bread.' There are certain kinds of Christians today, and have always been through the ages, who think that they are very spiritual because they starve themselves. They fast as much as they can, usually looking very miserable. They are always very finicky about their food - and they think that is being very spiritual! But the Lord does not say that that is what we are to do. He says that there is the natural bread, but that is not the only thing, for there is a bread which is much more important, and that is the *TRUE* bread. That is quite different. How men are trying to fulfil the work of God on natural grounds! Their resources are natural resources which are produced by themselves and the Lord says: 'No!' There is all the difference between the earthly and heavenly worlds, between natural life and Divine life. But that life is not only different; it is something extra. It is not bread only, but something more than that, something extra to the natural. You may have your breakfast in the morning - and there is nothing wrong in having a breakfast, or any other meal - but if you think that you are going to do the work of God on a good breakfast, you make a mistake. Do you see what I mean? This is something extra to the natural, something much more than anything that natural food can give us. It is the great Divine extra.

You see, we are repeating the life of Christ, and I can give you examples from His life. Just take one: His meeting with the woman of Samaria. The Lord Jesus, being wearied with His journeys, sat on the well and sent His disciples into the city to buy bread. Then the woman came from the city, and you know the conversation they had and how the whole of the life of the Lord Jesus was poured out to that woman like living water. As He spoke of heavenly things, as He gave to that woman the heavenly secrets, and as He spoke about the heavenly life, deeper than that well and more eternal than the water of that well, although it was Jacob's Well, all His weariness went and He was a renewed Man. The disciples came back to Him with their loaves and said: 'Master, eat.' Then they looked at Him. 'Has anyone given Him bread to eat? What has happened to Him? Why, He is a new man and He does not want our bread.' You see, He had been talking about life, and it is no use talking about life if you are not an example of it. He said: "I have meat to eat that you know not.... My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" (John 4:32, 34). Think about that for a little and remember that you are dealing with these eternal principles. This is the *EXTRA* bread, which is more than the natural.

Some of us who minister a great deal find that when we face new ministry we often feel very weary, and naturally the question is: 'Can we do it? Can we get through that long conference?' But when we get to the end of the conference we have new life. It really *IS* like that. The fact is that when tomorrow night comes

and this conference is over, I shall have just as much in hand as I have given all the week - and we shall want another week! Well, I am not an example, but I am trying to enunciate the principle: "Not by bread alone, but..." This is one of those very many occasions when those two words are put one against another - "Not... but..."

There is one other thing: This Divine life is a matter of faith. The Lord Jesus said: "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Well, there is the word in writing in the Bible, but do you think it is enough for it to be the Word of God, written in the Bible? No, you have got to lay hold of it by faith, and we have to lay hold of this life by faith. You remember the woman who came to the Lord Jesus in the crowd and said: "If only I could touch the hem of his garment I would be made whole", and although the multitude was pressing on Him, there was no one else in that multitude who received that life. It was that woman's hand of faith, and the Lord Jesus said: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." *LAYING HOLD* of the word of life by faith is something that we must ever do. Paul says: "Lay *HOLD* on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12), for it is there. Really exercise faith about it.

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

The passage that the Lord Jesus used in answering Satan is from Deuteronomy 8:2-3, and you need to look at the setting of it. It is at the end of the forty years in the wilderness, and says: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

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

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

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

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

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

The point, then, of the first temptation was this: Would the Lord Jesus use His own powers to save His own life, or would He depend upon God? Later on He will say: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39), and that is the principle. Satan has failed on that ground, so he is going to change his position, for he is not giving up yet.

### **The Methods of Fulfilling Our Vocation**

Now we come on to the methods of fulfilling our vocation. Satan took the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said: "Cast thyself down." Now Satan quotes Scripture, trying to take Christ's own ground and defeat Him there: 'You believe in the Scripture, do You? You are thinking of the Word of God. All right! Now it is written: "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone."' I say that Satan misquotes the Scripture, for is that what Psalm 91 really says? If you read that Psalm you will find that Satan left out the most important clause: "He shall give his angels charge over thee, *TO KEEP THEE IN ALL THY WAYS*" (verse 11). There are some ways in which the Lord will not keep people, but Satan leaves that out.

Yes, Satan is quoting Psalm 91, and what are "the ways" in that Psalm? I think it is very impressive and almost humorous. That Psalm begins by saying: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High", and *THAT* is the man referred to throughout the Psalm. Jesus had chosen to make His dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and every Christian knows what that is. You have a hidden life with God, and you abide in that. Have you a hidden life with God, a life that this world does not see, a sanctuary with God, a secret place with the Most High? Will you come out from that? You see the subtlety of Satan! 'Come out from Your secret place and adopt some worldly methods of fulfilling your vocation! Cast Yourself down and everybody will say: "This is something very wonderful!", and You will have all the people in Jerusalem rushing to You. They will say that You have come down from heaven, and You will be the most popular man in Palestine!' - and it will have been done by a trick. It would mean that the Lord Jesus was party to something in the natural man which likes to have evidences and proofs, for, you see, everyone in Jerusalem sought for a sign. They said to Him: 'Show us a sign and we will believe. Give us some evidence. Give us some proof that we can see and we will be Your followers.' This is the temptation: Use some methods in the work of the Lord which will make you popular, something that will appeal to the sensational in man, some tricks. Do you see what I am talking about? Is this not what the Church is trying to do? It is trying to recover



its lost power by a lot of tricks, by playing to this thing in man that wants the sensational. Surely we can see that this is what is happening! The methods that are employed in the work of God to attract the crowds, to get big meetings, are to satisfy this desire for proofs and evidences. Perhaps never in the history of the world has there been so much of this. I do not want to be critical, nor to judge too much, but I have a very great question about the guitar, and a lot of other things that are employed to try to make the work of God successful.

That was what was in this pinnacle of the temple. You will get the crowds if you do that kind of thing, but you may come out from the secret place of the Most High, that hidden place from the world which is the place of power.

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

### **The Purpose of Our Vocation**

We come to the third temptation, and Satan is now moving his position. He is gradually being uncovered and it is now going to be manifest what it is he is really after. He himself knows what he has been after all the time, and he has been moving steadily towards it. He took the Lord Jesus up into a very high mountain. I do not know, of course, how that was done, though I do not think that it was done literally. I think that the Lord Jesus was seeing all this in a spiritual way. However, in that high mountain Satan showed the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said: 'I will give You all this if You will fall down and worship me.' Ah, now it has come out! Satan knows what Jesus Christ has come into this world for, and that is to bring in the Kingdom of God. He knows that this One is destined to be the Divinely-appointed Lord of the universe. If Satan knew the Scriptures in Deuteronomy and Psalm 91, he also knew them in Psalm 2, which shows the final exaltation of God's Son. Satan knew that before the world was. His demons know this One, for on one occasion they said to Him: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?" (Luke 8:28). So the ultimate issue is world dominion, and that is the one thing that Satan is against, for he is the god of this world and he is not going to have that position taken from him by anyone.

But see how clever he is! 'I will give it all to You without You having to go to the Cross. You can have it all without suffering if only You will do one thing - put me in the place of Your God and worship me. And if You do that I know quite well that You will not get the kingdoms of the world. MY kingdom is established, and what You came for will be defeated.' That is what lies behind it all but what is Satan really saying? 'Compromise with me as the prince of this world' - and if we compromise with this world we are going to lose our spiritual dominion now and afterwards. You see, it is the Church that is going to reign.

There are some things in the Bible that I do not understand. For one thing I do not understand what Paul meant when he said: "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? ... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). I do not really understand that, but I do know that it is in keeping with the whole revelation of the New Testament: "If we suffer with him we shall reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). He will give us the Throne with Himself.

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

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

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

Dear friends, we have the anointing. Let us believe in it! There is *NOTHING* impossible with the anointing: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).