

THE ON-HIGH CALLING

**OR, COMPANIONS OF CHRIST
AND OF A HEAVENLY CALLING**

**Volume 2: The Great Transition
As Inherent in the Gospel by John**

by

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Preface

In Volume 1 we have considered the comprehensive presentation of this transition as contained in the Letter to the Hebrews. In this second volume we are taking note of the concentration of that transition as in the Gospel by John. This "Gospel" has been expounded in many ways, mainly in relation to certain specific subjects, as contained in the separate chapters. This method has provided an immense amount of helpful instruction. But the Gospel has rarely - if ever - been shown to have ONE matter governing it from beginning to end. Our object here is to do this and to show that there is one comprehensive issue lying behind the whole. Our method is to indicate this by some sixteen particular connections in the narrative. There are, however, more than sixteen. The messages having been given in conference, the number of meetings only allowed for what is here presented. The spoken form is retained.

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FOREST HILL, LONDON, 1964.

Chapter One

Let me remind you of the all-governing truth which we are considering - that is, what God is doing in this dispensation in which we live. We must be completely clear as to what it is that God is particularly concerned with at this time in the world's history, and, therefore, what it is that we who are the Lord's children are called unto.

The thing that God is doing in this dispensation is the formation of a spiritual and heavenly Israel. In doing that He is repeating the laws of the old Israel IN A SPIRITUAL WAY. He is following along the lines of His ways with the old Israel, but now ON A HEAVENLY AND NOT AN EARTHLY BASIS, because, while God's methods may change, His principles are changeless. He has left the earthly basis of the Old Testament and has moved on to a heavenly basis in the New Testament. He has moved from the temporal to the spiritual, and the spiritual is far greater than the temporal.

We are now going to see this in the Gospel by John. This Gospel is all one with the Letter to the Hebrews, because it is just a part of the whole thing that the New Testament represents. It is the embodiment of this matter of the spiritual Israel in a very wonderful way. There are two things that are so clear in this Gospel: one is the Jewish background of the Gospel and the other is the spiritual background behind the Jewish. That spiritual background is in this Gospel being brought to the front and is being made the ground for the whole new dispensation.

Let us look at this. There are at least sixteen marks of the Jewish background in this Gospel by John.

Before moving on to a consideration of these, let us note again that the introduction is a presentation of God's Son. He stands right at the door in the new movement of God toward the heavenly Israel. We are all familiar with this wonderful presentation of Him at the beginning of the Gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made"...* and there is much more than that, as you can see.

Corresponding to that is the introduction to 'Hebrews': *"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."*

The point is that God has founded the dispensation upon His Son and He is the governing factor in it.

Now we go on to what we have called the 'Jewish background of Christ'.

(1) The Foundation of All - the Lamb of God

"On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!... And he looked upon Jesus as he walked and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29, 36).

We know that the whole Jewish system was built around the Passover lamb. It was the very basis of everything in Israel: the constitution of them as a nation and the greatest governmental factor in all their history. It would be impossible to count the lambs that were offered in Israel through those many centuries. There would have been many millions of lambs slain and rivers of blood from them all!

John sees Jesus and says 'THE Lamb!' 'This is GOD'S Lamb!' "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*" Thus he distinguishes Jesus, marking Him out as the unique Lamb, the one toward whom all the millions of lambs had ever pointed. And just as the Passover lamb was the foundation of the old earthly Israel's life, so we know that this Lamb of God is the very foundation of our whole Christian life. He is the foundation of this dispensation. In the upper room in Jerusalem, on that Passover night, Jesus laid the foundation of the Church for this dispensation, and, while there are other features of the Church's life, the central one is the Table of the Lord. Everything centres in that Table, gathers around it and issues from it. If you had gone into any assembly of the Lord's people in any part of the world in New Testament times, you might have found different things in the different assemblies, but you would have found one thing that was the same in them all, and that was the Lord's Table: the Lamb of God at the centre of everything.

We only make the statement, and note that, right from the beginning God takes up the figure of the old and makes it the spiritual reality of the new. That which was earthly and temporal in the old Israel is now heavenly and spiritual in the new Israel.

That is the first thing about the Jewish background leading to the heavenly foreground.

(2) The Closed and the Opened Heaven

Reading: John 1:43-51.

Do you need to have it pointed out to you that there is quite a lot of Jewish Old Testament in that section? "Moses and the prophets" (verse 45), Jacob and his ladder (verse 51) - they are all there. But Jesus is saying: 'There is a transition from that old to a new, and that is in Myself. Moses and the prophets spoke of Me and the new Israel is centred in Me - an Israel which is not the Jacob in whom there was guile.'

However, the really deep thought and truth in this part concerns the closed and the opened Heaven.

When Jesus said to Nathanael: "*Ye shall see the heaven opened*", He was pointing to an entirely new dispensation. The one characteristic of the Old Testament Jewish system was a closed Heaven. You know that in the old dispensation it was on pain of death that any man came into the presence of God. What a terrible place was that mountain where God was! There were thunders, lightnings and earthquakes, and even Moses said: "*I exceedingly fear and quake*" (Hebrews 12:21). So terrible was the sound that the people dared not draw near, and if a beast touched the mountain it had to die. During the whole of that dispensation it was 'Keep out! Do not come here where God is, or you will die!' Jacob said: "*I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*" (Genesis 32:30), meaning that it was something unusual. It was a closed Heaven and there was no way for the people into the presence of God. Everything said 'Stay out!' and the people knew it. It was a terrible thing to come into the presence of God, for it just meant death. The High Priest had to have very special provision to go into the most holy place, and when God made that provision He said: 'Lest he die'. The Jewish

system was a system of judgment and death, of the closed Heaven. There was no way through for man.

But Jesus says: 'You shall see the Heaven opened, and a way between Heaven and earth, between God and man, made clear. I am that way. I will open Heaven by My own blood.' Therefore we can come to Him *"by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way"* (Hebrews 10:20). Jesus said: *"I am the way... no one cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6).

So the second Jewish feature is a closed Heaven, and the second feature of the new Israel is an opened Heaven. And we are enjoying that! We do not stand outside in fear and trembling, wondering whether, peradventure, we dare draw nigh. We can come *"with boldness unto the throne of grace"* (Hebrews 4:16). Oh, this new dispensation is a better one! This new Israel has privileges which the old one never had.

That is what God is doing in this dispensation, and He has done it in His Son, so that many, many who have been shut out are now finding their way in. God has provided in His Son an opened way for all.

(3) The Marriage Failure and Resurrection

Reading: John 2:1-11.

(Note in verse seven: *"Jesus, knowing in his heart that the Father's time had come..."*. That was a very important factor for, remember, Jesus would never move on any ground whatsoever without the knowledge that His Father wanted Him to move. He waited for that. When He knew in His heart that the Father said 'Yes, go on', *"Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water pots with water"*.)

Now where is the Jewish background? We have said that the Lord's Table was, amongst other things, the time when the Lord instituted His marriage with His people. In the Old Testament a marriage covenant was made in the Passover. Jeremiah spoke of this when he said: *"the day that I took them by the hand... I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord"* (Jeremiah 31:32), and that was on the Passover night.

Jesus knew what He was doing at Cana. How many times we have heard people talk about Him being of a social disposition and, therefore, He was quite happy to attend marriages! That might be true, but it is not the meaning here. Jesus was always acting on spiritual grounds. The marriage between God and Israel had broken down, for Israel had violated the terms of the covenant of marriage with Jehovah. They had, as the prophets said, become an adulterous nation and had gone after other gods. Therefore the marriage had broken down. That is here, in figure, in Cana.

I don't know what was behind this, but we can judge from a lot of other things that God was behind the failure of the wine. It just HAD to fail because of the spiritual significance. It represented the old marriage relationship which had broken down, had come to an end. There had to be a new basis and a new marriage supper of the Lamb. The salvation of the marriage relationship between God and His people is in Jesus only. It was He who saved the situation here, and everyone knew that something very wonderful and supernatural had happened. It was not natural or earthly. It was heavenly, spiritual, supernatural, and so is that marriage relationship between Christ and His people.

There is a movement from the old Israel, which has failed and has been put aside, to a new Israel which lives by this life of Jesus Christ.

(4) The Temple of God - Temporal and Spiritual

Reading: John 2: 13-22.

There is no need to point out the Jewish background! It had the temple in Jerusalem as its centre. For the Jews that temple represented everything - and Jesus speaks of the destroying of the temple! In another place He said: *"There shall not be left here one stone upon another"* (Matthew 24:2).

Well, what is going to take its place? God MUST have a temple! Jesus said, in effect, 'I am the temple of the new dispensation. I am going to take the place of this old temple and I am going to be ALL that that temple represented, but in a fuller and better way.' Was the temple the place where men thought that they would meet God? Men will meet God in Christ in a more real way than that. Was the temple the place to which people went to be taught about God? They will learn more about God in Christ than they ever learned in that temple. Was the temple the place where men went to worship God? It will be in Christ that men will come into touch with God for worship.

And that leads us to that wonderful revelation which we have in the New Testament - the revelation of Christ and all His members being made one temple for God.

Christ is our Temple, and in Him we find all that a temple was ever intended to be. Oh, how people have gone astray over this! We go to many places that are called 'churches' and the word is applied to the building. When people pray in those places they usually say something like this: 'We have come into Thy house today. We are in this house of God.' They are really talking about a building. But we don't need a building to give God a temple! *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). People gathered into Jesus Christ constitute the temple of God. It is not a special building, but people who are in Christ Jesus. This is what God is doing in this dispensation.

You know, a lot of people have lost their special buildings, or are not allowed to meet in such places. In some places they are gathering in twos and threes and are enjoying all the privileges of the house of God because the Lord is there. No, the temple now is Christ and those who are in union with Him. So He said, in this way which they did not understand, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"*. Christ in resurrection is the temple of this dispensation. He knew that He was speaking parabolically and what they would say: *"Forty and six years was this temple in building"*. It looked as though He had deliberately misled them, but He was enunciating the change of dispensations.

(5) The True Seed of Abraham

Reading: John 3: 1-14.

What have we here in Nicodemus? Surely he is a representative of the old Israel! He is of the sect of the Pharisees and they claimed to be very representative of Israel. He is a ruler of the Jews, so he is indeed Israel in representation. He is a son of Abraham after the flesh, the embodiment of the seed of Abraham.

What does the Lord Jesus say to him? In effect, He says: 'You, a son of Abraham, an inclusive representation of the children of Abraham after the flesh, an embodiment of Israel, I look upon you, Nicodemus, as representing all the seed of Abraham after the flesh, as all Israel present here tonight in you, and you, Nicodemus, in that representative capacity, must be born again.' The seed of Abraham after the flesh does not stand in the Kingdom of God.

You know, that is Paul's argument in his Letters to the Romans and the Galatians. He says they are not all Israel which are after Israel. There is a natural seed and there is a spiritual seed.

Jesus was saying to Nicodemus, in his representative capacity: 'The natural seed of Abraham does not stand. Israel after the flesh is no more. You must be born again. There must be a seed after the Spirit. In other words. there must be a new spiritual, heavenly Israel. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh"* and *"They that are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Romans 8:8). *"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew".'*

The new Israel of this dispensation is the Israel of the 'born from above' ones. These are not the sons of Abraham, but sons of God.

And so we are back in chapter one: *"As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God."* There is a great deal of difference between children of Abraham after the flesh and children of God after the Spirit! And not only a great deal of difference: it is not just an improved species. It is an altogether higher race, a heavenly people.

Chapter Two

(6) The Serpent, the Curse: Jesus Lifted Up

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Here is the Old Testament background, which we have in the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Numbers. There the incident begins in this way: *"The people spake against God, and against Moses... our soul loatheth this vile bread"* (Numbers 21:5 - R.V. margin). They used very strong words about the manna, the food from heaven. They spoke against God and Moses and said: 'We hate the thing God has provided.'

Do remember that God, in all that He did, always had His Son in view, and this was so when He gave the children of Israel the manna from heaven (as we shall see when we come to John 6). The manna was a type of Christ, who said: *"The bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world... I am the bread of life"* (John 6:33, 35). The people of Israel said: 'We loathe this vile bread'... and you can hear the Jews in Christ's day speaking like that: 'We hate this man!' That was their spirit.

God saw the spirit of these people in the wilderness. How antagonistic it was to Him and to what He gave! Therefore *"the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died"* (Numbers 21:6). *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."*

Oh, there are deep and terrible things here! From the beginning to the end of the Bible the serpent is ever and always the symbol of a curse, of the judgment of God. You know that from the very first mention of the serpent in the Bible. This serpent lifted up in the wilderness was the symbol of the judgment of God. The judgment and curse of God which rested upon the rebellious people were transferred to that serpent. It was transfixed to the cross, carrying the curse and the judgment of God upon itself for the people, and whosoever looked to the serpent was saved.

In using that bit of the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus was only saying: 'I am going to be made a curse for you. When I am lifted up I shall bear YOUR judgment upon Myself. I shall carry YOUR sins in My body on the tree.' There is deliverance in Christ crucified from the curse and from the judgment, and whosoever will look shall live. And here comes in the greatest Scripture that we know! *"For"* (I like the conjunction. Conjunctions are always significant things in the New Testament. When you get a 'for', 'wherefore' or 'therefore', always look all round) *"God so loved the world."*

We so often quote John 3:16 without the context. Ah, what a tremendous thing this is! God has laid on His only-begotten Son the iniquity of us all, allowing Him, His well-beloved Son, to be made a curse for us. Why? *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."* You have to lift that out and put it right into Numbers 21, or take Numbers 21 and put it right into John 3:16.

Here is the background and here is the foreground, the transition from the old to the new. The new heavenly Israel is built upon this ground: *"Whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life."*

What a lot more we could say about that! But we must pass on.

(7) The Opened Way to the Springing Well

(Here is another unfortunate dividing of chapters. For spiritual purposes it is a great pity that John 3 and John 4 are divided.)

Reading: John 4: 1-42.

The heart of the whole talk between the Master and the woman of Samaria is in verse 14:

"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

I have just said that there ought to be no division of chapters here, because the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Numbers is not divided. Immediately after the incident of the serpent being lifted up there comes the incident of the springing well: *"Then sang Israel this song: Spring up, O well:"* (Numbers 21:17). When the Cross has done its work, when Christ has borne the judgment and the curse resting upon us, then the Holy Spirit is released and springs up as the well of eternal life.

There, then, in chapter four is the background of Numbers 21 - the springing well following immediately upon the serpent being lifted up. In John 3 and 4 you have these two things: Jesus lifted up, being made a curse for us (for it is written: *"He that is hanged is accursed of God"* - Deuteronomy 21:23), and bearing the judgment of our rebellious hearts. Then, when He has done that, He has made a way for the springing well of eternal life.

The Holy Spirit makes a wonderful connection in the Bible, does He not? How He brings things together! We would, perhaps, have never thought of finding the third and fourth chapters of John in the twenty-first chapter of Numbers, but there they are.

(8) The Word of Life and the Law of Death

Reading: John 4:46-54.

Here we have the incident of the nobleman and his dying son. He has come all the way from Capernaum to find Jesus and to persuade Him to go home with him and heal his son. Jesus tested his faith, and, finding that it was quite genuine, said: *"Go thy way. Thy son liveth."* The man believed Him, went home and discovered that it was just at the very moment that Jesus said: *"Thy son liveth"* that the boy began to get better.

What is at the heart of this incident? Why did Jesus not go to Capernaum with that man? He went there on another occasion and healed a lot of people. Why did He not say: 'Well, I have to return to Capernaum at some time and do a lot of works there. I may as well go now. Here is the opportunity. It is an invitation and I suppose I ought to take all invitations'?

Jesus did not do that. He stayed where He was and sent the man home all those miles. It took from twelve noon until the close of that day, and then on into the next day, for the man to get home. Why was it that Jesus adopted this method on this particular occasion?

We have a Jewish background. What is it? It is the background of the law: *"The letter killeth"* (2 Corinthians 3:6). Jesus said: *"The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life"* (John 6:63). It does not matter how far away the case may be, if He speaks His word is spirit and life.

The Old Testament speaking of the law brought death. *"The letter killeth"* (that is, the letter of the law). *"The spirit giveth life"* (2 Corinthians 3:6) and *"the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life."* Jesus had only to speak and He reversed the effect of the law. The law could never have done this. You may bring all the scribes and Pharisees down from Jerusalem to this boy and they can recite all the law of Moses, and nothing will happen. He will die right enough, and probably all the quicker because of their reading of the law! Jesus had only to open His mouth and speak a word, and the boy many miles away began to get better from that moment.

Yes, Jesus is saying that the law of His mouth is life. The transition is so clear - from death unto life in the Word.

(9) The Release From the Bondage to Self

Reading: John 5:1-9.

In this story of the impotent man the heart of the matter is in verse five: *"And a certain man was there, which had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity."*

What is the Jewish background? There is very little doubt that it was Israel's journey in the wilderness, the thirty-eight years of their wanderings. What cripples they were! They could have made the journey from Egypt to Canaan in eleven days, but it took them thirty-eight years and during that time they were really making no progress at all. They were in bondage to their own self-life. They were impotent, helpless cripples because the self-life was in the place of mastery. You have no need for me to tell you how that self-life governed them in the wilderness. They never looked at anything in the light of how it served God and how far it satisfied His interests. They looked at everything in the light of how it affected them. All their murmuring and rebellion was because THEY were not getting what THEY wanted. It was never what God wanted. They were just a self-centred people, and the self-life was their bed, and they were cripples lying on that bed. They were never really able to get up and march straight forward into God's purpose.

Well, that is the Jewish background, and Jesus takes up an illustration of that right in the presence of the Jews when He puts this man on his feet.

The members of the new heavenly Israel are people who have been delivered from self-interest into God's interest, who have been put on their spiritual feet by Jesus Christ and are walking in strength in the way of the Lord.

Do you not think it is a very significant thing that the first miracle after the Day of Pentecost was the raising of an impotent man at the gate of the temple in Jerusalem? These are not just pretty stories put together to make an interesting book. God knows what He is doing, and when He makes the first miracle of the Christian era the raising of an impotent cripple, He is saying that the people of this new Israel are people who have been delivered from this impotence and put on their feet spiritually.

There are a lot of Christian cripples about! They cannot get on their own feet, nor can other people put them there. You try to pick them up! They may take a step

or two, and then down they go again. There are many like that, and you can spend your life trying to get them up on their feet. What is it that is eating the very life out of them? What is it that is making them such helpless cripples that they cannot walk? It is self-centeredness. Make no mistake about it, it is self in some form. It is self that wants to be taken notice of. It is self in the form of pride. This poor man was delivered because he knew his own helplessness and he believed what Jesus said. He believed on to Jesus Christ, which means that he believed out of himself. Yes, that is the secret - that we shall turn from our miserable selves and cease to be occupied with them, saying once and for all: 'I am done with you, wretched self. I throw myself on to Jesus Christ. I take the one great step of committal.' Jesus never lets such a person down.

(10) The Miracle and Mystery of Heavenly Sustenance

Reading: John 6.

We have already said something about this. The Jewish background comes in verse thirty-two: *"It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father"*.

Right in the presence of the Jews, Jesus is saying: *"The bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world... I am the bread of life"*.

With John's extensive context of the manna in the wilderness covering seventy-one verses there is one issue which plainly arises. It is the issue of divine sustenance in humanly impossible conditions. That this matter is taken out of the natural into the super-natural realm is clear. Nicodemus - that representative of Israel - had confronted a demand made by Christ with a mighty 'How?' *"How can a man be born when he is old?"* That question postulated the miracle of the beginning of the Christian life. In the chapter now before us the Jews raised another question: *"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* (verse 52). This question - with the context of the feeding of the multitude in the wilderness - postulates the miracle of the continuance and support of the Christian life in naturally impossible conditions. That Christ Himself as "The Bread of Life" maintains the life of God's people when there is nothing but spiritual desolation all around is, firstly, a miracle; secondly, a fact; and thirdly, a test of the reality of union with Him. This miracle and fact are attested by a long history of the stamina and persistence of so many who have had no EARTHLY means of spiritual support. If our life is centred in Christ Himself, and not merely in religious things, it will be a miracle how we go on.

Perhaps this is one of the ways in which the manifold wisdom of God is made known, by the Church, unto principalities and powers, and we are 'unto the glory of His grace'.

(11) All Sacrifices and Offerings fulfilled

Reading: John 7: 1-2, 14, 37-39.

We are here in the presence of the feast of tabernacles and that goes back to the twenty-ninth chapter of the Book of Numbers. If you look there you will see what led up to this great day of the feast. All the different kinds of offerings had been presented to the Lord (I need not enumerate them - they are all mentioned in the chapter), and then came the last great day of the feast. It is called the 'feast of tabernacles', but it is also called 'the feast of trumpets'. On the last great day the

priests brought out great vessels of water and poured it out on the top of the steps of the temple in Jerusalem so that it flowed down in great volume.

Jesus stepped forward at that time. In Him all the offerings are presented to God. He in person is the embodiment of all the sacrifices and all the offerings and He, as the completeness of all God's requirements, presents Himself to the Lord. Then He comes to this day of the feast of tabernacles. In Numbers it says: *"It is a day of blowing of trumpets unto you"*. Jesus, so to speak, took the trumpet and 'cried with a loud voice'. Here, in figure, is the trumpet of the feast of tabernacles. In Him all the offerings are perfected. God is fully satisfied and, therefore, He can pour out His Spirit in fullness. Jesus cried like a trumpet: *"He that believeth on me... out of him shall flow rivers of living water."*

This is the heritage of all who are of the new Israel. It is your inheritance. If the Word of God is true, if what Christ has said is true (and He wanted it to be known that it was true by crying with a loud voice), and if you and I will accept Jesus Christ as God's full satisfaction on our behalf, as the One who has brought every offering that God has stipulated to God Himself, who has answered to every sacrifice and every offering, then His great cry is true for us. Rivers of living water can flow out of us and others can receive His life through us, who are His channels. That is how it ought to be with every true believer, and Jesus has made it possible by satisfying God completely on our behalf.

So people of the new Israel ought to be people with a river flowing out of them. Believe, proclaim your faith, do not be silent, take the trumpet and let people hear, and you will be surprised that, when you begin to testify to the Lord Jesus, other people will receive life. Something will happen to them. If you keep your mouth closed and refuse to testify to the Lord Jesus in your home, in your village and in your work, then you are holding up the river of the Spirit. You are checking the flow of the river that ought to be flowing out from you.

Now, if you have never done it, you try it! I want to tell you that the first soul who comes to the Lord Jesus through your testimony will release something in you, so that you will never want to keep your mouth closed again. There are a lot of miserable Christians who will keep their mouths closed. I know there are those who talk too much, but there are quite a lot who do not talk enough and so they are spoiling their own Christian life. Take the trumpet of the Lord Jesus and cry with a loud voice and the rivers will begin to flow.

We - the new Israel - must keep the feast of tabernacles by proclaiming the all-sufficiency of Jesus, to God for us; from God to us!

Chapter Three

(12) Human and Religious Blindness, and Heavenly Sight

Reading: John 8:12-9:41.

It is a pity that these chapters are divided, because in chapter nine Jesus is showing the truth of what He has been saying in chapter eight in a very practical way.

It is perfectly clear that this incident is set in the background of the earthly Israel, and this long section of the record is intended to show that Israel after the flesh is blind. If ever men demonstrated how blind they were, these people did in all this argument! Jesus is making them give themselves away. That is, He is just compelling them to betray their own blindness. The fact is that these people were just not seeing. They were spiritually blind, as that man was naturally blind. So that what we have here is set in Israel's blindness, all with the object of showing this specific characteristic of the new spiritual Israel which the Lord Jesus was bringing into being.

Will you retain that for a few minutes, as we are going away from it for a little while - because there is one marvellous truth which embraces all these things which we are saying, and that is that no thought that God has ever expressed dies. There is no lapse of any thought that God has expressed. God expressed His thoughts in the very conception and constitution of the Israel of old. They were in all that was said about Israel and in all that was revealed as to God's purpose in Israel. God expressed His thoughts concerning Israel in a multitude of ways. That Israel failed to answer to the thoughts of God. His thoughts concerning Israel were never fully realized because of their rebellion. So that Israel was passed by, but God's thoughts were not put aside. All those same thoughts are taken up in a new Israel.

Jesus Himself becomes the inclusive new Israel. You remember that when He referred to Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, He said to Nathanael: *"Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"* (John 1:51). So Jesus is the new Israel in person. All the communications of God and Heaven to man are by way of Jesus, the new Israel. All God's thoughts in the past ages are taken up in the Lord Jesus in the first place. All that was ever intended by God concerning Israel and was lost by them is carried on in the Lord Jesus, and then transferred by Him to His companions and the companions of the heavenly calling - the new Israel, which is spiritual.

This opens up a very big realm for you. It would be impossible to number all the characteristics of God's mind concerning Israel, but let us just indicate what we mean.

You know, God marked Israel off as a people distinct from all other people in appearance. Some years ago, before he went to the Lord, I knew a very distinguished Hebrew Christian. He used to travel all over the world, and he once said this to me: 'Wherever I go, in all parts of the world, I always know when I meet a Jew. They may have lived for generations in this country or in that, but there is something about them that they never lose. I always know they are Jews without being told.' God marked them out as a people distinct from all other races.

Now see how that is taken up in the Lord Jesus and in His true companions. Whenever you meet a true Christian in this world, you know it before he or she is

introduced to you. It is not the shape of his or her face, or, indeed, by any outward form, but there is never any need for anyone to bring them to you and say: 'This is a Christian.' You come into their presence and there is something about them that is different. Then when you begin to talk you know that you have met one of your own race. Their outward features may be those of the Chinese, Indian, British, or anything else, but there are spiritual features which mark them out as different from all others: *"They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus"* (Acts 4:13).

That is a truth, but we must very sacredly safeguard that truth. There are far too many who bear the name of Christ who cannot be distinguished from the world.

However, our point is this: Whatever the expressed thought of God was, in any one of a thousand ways, if Israel lost that thought, it is taken up in Jesus Christ and is transferred by Him to His companions. The companions of Christ always take some of His character. That is why someone started the name 'Christian': *"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"* (Acts 11:26). Someone said: 'These are *Christ ones*.'

That is a very large truth within which we are speaking in these chapters. Israel was called to be God's instrument of light to the world. He raised them up to be for Him light to all the nations. They were all intended to come to know God through Israel, to see what He was like and to come into a knowledge of Him. Israel was set in the nations to be the light of the world. God intended to reflect Himself on this earth through Israel. It was intended that the light of God should fall upon Israel like a mirror and then be reflected from them to shine forth to all the nations. There were times when it was like that to some extent - but what a tragedy Israel became in that particular! The time came when God was veiled by Israel rather than revealed. Israel became a terrible contradiction of God. When you pick up these Gospels and read all these arguments between Jesus and the leaders of Israel, and all that is in them as to the Jewish rulers, the way they behaved, the way they talked and the spirit that they showed, you say: 'Well, if that were God, I would want to have nothing to do with Him.' That is a terrible misrepresentation of God! And because of that God put Israel aside, but in this particular respect He did not put His thought aside.

At that time, when Israel was about to be rejected, God's Son came into the world, and He took up the thought of God that was intended to be realized in Israel and He said, right in the midst of this dark and blind people, *"I am the light of the world"*. 'Israel has failed. I take the place of Israel, and in Me and through Me shall all the world know what God is like.' *"While I am in the world I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."* God always intended that the races of this world should have the light of life, life-giving light, liberating light.

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." How does the Son make us free? *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" ... "I am the light of the world"*, and the effect of the light is to set men free.

Do you remember the commission given by the Lord to the Apostle Paul at the time of his conversion? It is most illuminating and instructive in the light of what we are saying. The Lord said to Paul: *"Unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God"* (Acts 26:17-18). He was to be sent to those who were prisoners of Satan and therefore in the dark, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. Every member of the human race is by nature in the devil's prison.

You will remember that in Bunyan's *Holy War* there is set forth the battle for man's Soul, and all the forces of Apollyon are attacking to capture man's Soul, which is represented as a city. Apollyon calls his leaders together and says: 'If we are going to capture Mansoul we must first of all capture the burgomaster. His name is Mr. Understanding. We must capture him and put him in a dark dungeon so that he does not see what is happening.' There is a stroke of genius in that! The Word says: *"Having the understanding darkened"* (Ephesians 4:18 A.V.) *"The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them"* (2 Corinthians 4:4). If light comes from Jesus to any soul, that soul is liberated, and the whole strategy of Apollyon is upset.

Yes, how important it is to the god of this age to blind the minds of men and to put Mr. Understanding in a dark dungeon, thus making sure that he does not see what is going on!

And that is the state of every child of Adam after the flesh. The Lord was saying to Israel: 'That is where you have got to. You, who were intended to be the light of the world, are now involved in the very darkness of the world. You are a contradiction of God's thought and intention.'

That is quite clear and evident, is it not? However, it is the negative side. We repeat: what Israel failed to realize is taken up in the person of God's Son and is transferred to the new, collective Israel, called in the Hebrew Letter 'the companions of Christ'.

Do you see what the companions of Christ are supposed to be like? They are supposed to be the very vessels in which this truth is fulfilled. They are supposed to be the very temples of Christ, and in them He is the light: *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27).

That would lead us to a very large study. You know that the New Testament has a very great deal to say about spiritual understanding, and the tremendous importance of spiritual knowledge. It puts a very high and great value upon this faculty of spiritual sight. You will remember that it says: *"It is God that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves"* (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). Do you notice what surrounds that marvellous statement? It is connected with Moses going up into the mountain where God was, receiving the law at the mouth of God, and then coming down the mountain, not knowing that his face was shining. It says: *"Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone"* (Exodus 35:29), but the people saw it and could not look. The light was too strong and they could not look upon the face of Moses, so Moses took a veil and put it over his face and hid the glory of God behind the veil. 'Now', says the Apostle, bringing this right up to date 'from that time unto now there is a veil upon the heart of Israel. They are incapable of looking upon the glory of God... *"But whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"* (2 Corinthians 3:16-17).' When the Holy Spirit shines Christ in, there is liberty. The life is liberated.

Oh, it is wonderful just to see something of the Lord by the Holy Spirit!

What we have said is the statement of fact, and when the facts have been stated we are only at the beginning of the matter. You will never be liberated by a statement of fact! We may state facts for years, but they will make no difference.

Something has got to happen. It has to begin to happen if you are not already born again, but what has to happen at the beginning of your Christian life is what happened to this man who was born blind: you have to be able to say exactly the same words that he used: *"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."* 'There are a lot of things that I do not know, but one thing I do know.' That is the characteristic of the beginning of a true companion of Jesus Christ.

But that is only the beginning of seeing. The Apostle Paul had given a tremendous amount of teaching to the believers in Ephesus. He said to them: *"I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27). He spent some years with them and just poured out to them the light that he had. They were therefore Christians who had a lot of instruction. After that Paul went to prison and when there he wrote a letter to them, in which he said: *"Making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened"* (Ephesians 1:16-18). That was not for their salvation. They had been saved a long time and had been taught very much. They had gone a long way with the Lord - but Paul still prayed this prayer. In effect he was saying: 'All that you have received and all that I have given you is nothing to what there is yet to see in the Lord Jesus. And for all that you need to have your eyes opened. You need the spirit of wisdom and revelation.' How important this is!

Do you notice how Paul finished that Letter? *"Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness"* (Ephesians 6:12). What is it that these are seeking to do? They are trying to rob you of the light. Paul says there: *"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Ephesians 6:11). The WILES of the devil are, among other things, to stop you getting more light, to rob you of the light that you have, to bring in something that will blind your eyes, and to get them off the Lord Jesus on to something else, perhaps on to yourself, or on to some worldly interest. As soon as that happens you will go into bondage and will be helpless prisoners again. The evil forces are "the world-rulers of THIS DARKNESS" (Ephesians 6:12).

This matter of spiritual enlightenment is a great battle. Indeed, there is always a battle bound up with receiving more true spiritual light.

We must leave it there for the present, though we have come only to the threshold of a very great matter. We close by repeating what we have already said: This great thought of God is taken up in Christ and transferred to His companions.

We might have said something about Christ's battle with His own companions in the days of His flesh about this matter. He had chosen twelve, the number of the tribes of Israel. He had made them His companions, but, oh, what difficulty He had in making them understand! He had sometimes to say: 'Do you not yet understand?' and He had to put His teaching into parables for little children, to try to get through their dark minds some understanding of spiritual truth. *"The sower went forth to sow"* - you know the picture. But it is a picture for little children, is it not? And He told them all the other parables. When He had finished them all, He had to tell the disciples that it was necessary to speak to them like that because they had no understanding. All the way through He was battling with their dark minds, and was pointing on to a day when they would understand. However, because He knew that day was coming, He did not give them up. 'In

that day ye shall ask Me no more questions... *"When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth"* (John 16:13).'

I have often thought that the Lord Jesus must have been very happy on the Day of Pentecost! Have you read Peter's address to the multitude on that day? (Here is a nice little bit of Bible study for you - make a list of all the subjects included in that address.) It is packed full of the Old Testament, and Peter is saying: 'Why, it is all being fulfilled in Jesus Christ!' That is what Jesus laboured for three and a half years to get them to understand! And on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had come, why, the Bible was wide open to them. They saw it all and were set free by the truth and the light. I think Jesus must have been saying: 'This is what I lived and suffered for! These men are seeing at last. They are My companions now.'

The companions of Jesus are those who see as He sees. How true that is of all companionship! There is really no companionship between two people if they do not see alike. You might want to keep together, but, oh! how difficult it is when one does not see what you see. You can go so far and no further. The Scriptures say: *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* (Amos 3:3). Real companionship rests upon mutual understanding, and I think there are few things that Jesus wants and longs for more than to have people who understand Him. This is what God ever wanted, and this thought is taken up in His Son and is passed on to the Son's companions. John says: *"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another"* (1 John 1:7). Fellowship with the Lord and with one another - if we walk in the light. I dare to say that you have received, at least in word, a good deal of light. All I can say is: Walk in it, and you will be set free.

Chapter Four

(13) The Shepherd of Israel

Reading: John 10.

The heart of this chapter is in verse eleven: *"I am the good shepherd"*. Let us put alongside of that the following passages of Scripture:

"Thou leddest thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psalm 77:20).

"He led forth his own people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock" (Psalm 78:52).

"Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will" (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Here we have the flock spoken of, both in the Old Testament and in the New. There need be no argument about the fact that the Lord looked upon Israel of old as His sheep. The nations were judged by God because of their treatment of His sheep: they destroyed and scattered them. God was very angry with the fake shepherds in Israel because they failed to fulfil their trust to the sheep. There is more, as we have seen, in the Psalms about Israel as the Lord's sheep.

We begin our meditation on this matter by speaking about the Lord as the owner of the sheep. That is the great point which governs this whole matter. The sheep belong to the Lord. They are His, and His ownership of them is emphasized everywhere. The sheep exist for the Shepherd, and the Shepherd exists for the sheep. The love of God for Israel as His sheep is to be noted everywhere. They were *"the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand"* (Psalm 95:7). The love of God for the old Israel was a very wonderful thing. What care He showed for His sheep in the wilderness! How, as a Shepherd, He provided water and pasture for them, even in a desert. How angry He was when anyone touched His sheep! Touch one of His sheep and you touch the Lord! The Lord claimed the ownership of His sheep, and because He owned them and they were His sheep, everything He did was because of that.

In these days we are seeing how God, on the one side, had to forsake Israel. The God who had so loved Israel, had been so jealous for them, had done everything that He could for them, had at last to accept their repudiation of Him as their Shepherd.

Why was that? It was not like God! It seems to be such a contradiction of Him. He would never, never do that if He could possibly avoid it. He had said: *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love"* (Jeremiah 31:3). It was a terrible thing for God to have to forsake Israel, but He HAD to do it. And today Israel is in that condition - no longer God's flock, as in old time. Those sheep are scattered over all the world, without a shepherd.

Why did that come about? Simply for this one reason: Israel's fatal sin was their repudiation of God as their one Shepherd. They turned to other gods and made them their shepherds. They followed their voices, and repudiated the sole ownership of the Lord. That great chapter, Isaiah 53, shows their attitude toward the Shepherd. A word rises out of that chapter: *"All we like sheep have gone astray"*, and it goes on to show how Israel treated God's provided Shepherd.

It is impressive to note that the Apostle Paul quotes this very thing in his Letter to the Romans: *"But they did not all hearken to the glad tidings. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?"* (Romans 10:16). Israel refused to believe the message of the prophets, and that message was all about God as the Shepherd and Israel as the sheep. And the prophet says: 'This is why they turned away from Jehovah... *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way"* (Isaiah 6:6)... Away from the way of the Lord to their own way.' And their own way was to choose shepherds other than the Lord.

It is also impressive to notice that in Psalm 95:7, where the verse begins: *"We are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand"*, it goes on with this strange word: *"Today, Oh, that ye would hear his voice! Harden not your heart".* *"We are the... sheep of his hand"* - but the sheep can have very hard hearts and refuse to hear the Shepherd's voice. So to His sheep of old He said: *"Today, Oh... harden not your heart"*.

Do you know that that very word is quoted at least three times in the Letter to the Hebrews? *"Today if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:7-8). So it was hardness of heart, refusal to hear His voice, that lost Israel their Shepherd. Paul says in the Letter to the Romans: *"I would not, brethren, have you ignorant... that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel"* (Romans 11:25), and you have only to read this chapter, John 10, to see the hard heart of Israel. It is a terrible thing!

Just look at it! Jesus has been speaking of Himself as the good Shepherd, who gives His life for the sheep. He has said: *"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish"* (verse 28). There are all these wonderful things about Himself as their Shepherd and about His sheep - and do you notice what happened? *"There arose a division again among the Jews because of these words. And many of them said, He hath a devil" ... "I am the good shepherd... I lay down my life for the sheep I came that they may have life... I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish."* He has said all these wonderful and beautiful things and the Jews said: *"He hath a devil"!*

Now do you understand why God had to cast them off? 'We have hardened our hearts. We have turned every one to our own way. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have gone away from the Shepherd because of self-will. in other words, we have said: *"We will not that this man reign over us"* (Luke 19:14).'

That is the Jewish background of this chapter. You can feel the atmosphere of antagonism, and you can feel how they hated Him. Presently they will take counsel that they may kill Him. He was right when He called them wolves who would destroy the sheep!

Jesus came right into that atmosphere and said: 'I am the good Shepherd, and I am going to lead My flock out of this. I am going to take them out of this setting and out of this false flock.' And so He leads the nucleus of His new flock and gives unto them eternal life. He begins with a nucleus out of the old. A dividing work takes place.

I did not read all that the Jews said because I wanted to keep it until now: *"There arose a division again among the Jews because of these words. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the sayings of one possessed with a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"*

Evidently the Lord Jesus is getting some other sheep. There are those out of the old flock who are inclined toward Him. They are the new beginning, the new Israel, and He says: 'I will lead them out, right out of that whole setting'.

And we see that nucleus on the Day of Pentecost, beginning with twelve - then one hundred and twenty - then more than five hundred brethren at once - then three thousand - and then five thousand. There is the new flock.

Well, here is Jesus building upon the Old Testament principle. If He cannot take the Old Testament sheep, He will take up the principle of shepherd and sheep and will carry it over into His new Israel of this dispensation.

The position is quite clear, is it not? You have it there quite plainly. One Israel is being put aside and another Israel is being put in its place. The earthly is going, the heavenly is coming in to take its place, and this heavenly Israel becomes the new flock under the Shepherd.

We have to note some of the marks of these true sheep. Jesus says in this chapter: *"I know mine own"*, and there are certain marks by which He knows His own sheep. If you have any doubt as to whether you are one of the Lord's sheep, you can prove it, and the Lord Himself knows by these marks.

You know, shepherds put a mark on their own sheep. It may be a red mark, or a blue one, but on their sheep they put their own mark. Jesus is saying here: 'I know My sheep because there are marks on them.' What are these marks?

The first one is this: *"My sheep hear my voice"*.

You know, this is an illustration of a great truth. The Gospels are but illustrations of great truths. If you go on into the rest of the New Testament you will read a great deal about spiritual intelligence and about spiritual understanding, and about having 'an ear to hear what the Spirit saith'. You have that seven times at the beginning of the Book of the Revelation - *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith"* (Revelation 2:7, etc.). Of course, that is not our outward ear. The Lord's sheep have an inward ear given to them, that is, a faculty of spiritual intelligence and an ability to hear what no one else can hear. It was to that that the Lord was referring - 'My sheep know when I speak. They have an ear for Me and are always listening for My voice. They hear My voice.'

Every truly born again child of God is given this faculty of spiritual hearing. That is why, in the early days of your Christian life, you say: 'The Lord seems to be saying something to me. He seems to be saying that I ought not to talk as I do, that I ought not to dress as I have been dressing, and that I ought not to go to the places to which I used to go, and many other things like that.' The Lord seems to be saying something to us. He is speaking in the heart, and as we go on in the Christian life that becomes the governing thing in our lives. We seek to hear what the Lord has to say to us, and when we hear His voice a crisis arises. Are we going back to the way of the old Israel? Or are we going to hear that voice and obey?

That is the message of the Letter to the Hebrews: 'Do not go back on to that old ground. Today if ye shall HEAR HIS VOICE, harden not your hearts as the old Israel did.' It is a very wonderful thing to see people who are obeying His voice! Other people do not have to tell them these things. They are a poor kind of Christian who have to be told all the time what they should do and what they should not do. The true sheep hear His voice and they follow Him. It is something that comes out of the heart - they have heard Him speaking in the heart.

This, of course, is the whole of that New Testament subject of spiritual understanding, and you and I, as Christians, are supposed to have that faculty.

We were speaking earlier about Nicodemus. He was a ruler of the Jews and a great man in Israel. He had a high position and a great education, and yet he had not the first idea of spiritual things. Jesus had to say to him: *"If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?"* (John 3:12). Nicodemus could not see beyond the natural to the spiritual. When Jesus said 'You must be born again', he could not see beyond the natural, and said: *"How can a man be born when he is old?"* (John 3:4). He had no spiritual intelligence. He was like a little child, although a great teacher in Israel.

I have a little grand-daughter about four years of age. She went to Sunday School and when she came home she said to her mother: 'Mother, will you get out for me all my baby toys which we put away?' Her mother said: 'Why do you want your baby toys out again?' 'Oh,' she said, 'my teacher says I must be born again!'

Well, that is a little child and you might expect that of her, but here is the great big grown-up Nicodemus and he is no better than that! You might expect more of him, but you do not get it. Spiritual intelligence belongs to the born again ones, and we are given that gift with our new birth. We have a whole new set of faculties, to hear, to see, to feel, and so on. And I repeat that it is about that very thing that the New Testament speaks when spiritual understanding is mentioned. That is what Jesus meant when He said: *"My sheep hear my voice"*.

The next mark of these sheep is: *"My sheep... follow me."*

Those words are simple, but they have a very deep meaning. They mean that His sheep never have to be driven, never have to be compelled to go His way. His sheep follow Him in a voluntary, spontaneous way. The Lord never has to say (or ought never to have to say) to His sheep: 'You MUST go this way.' The Lord is going a certain way and His sheep see which way He is going and follow Him.

Of course, in the western world, it is just the other way round where sheep are concerned. Sheep have to be driven, but it is not like that in the East, and Jesus takes the principle of government from the East. He says: 'I don't drive My sheep. I never have to get behind them and force them to go on. I never have to send a dog after them to get them going. My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me.' It is a spontaneous movement of the heart to go after the Lord.

Let us apply the law. These are the marks of the Lord's sheep. Are you one of His sheep? Do you really hear Him speaking in your heart? Do you listen for His voice? Do you seek to have your life guided by that voice of the Spirit within speaking to you through the Word of God, through the circumstances of your life, through your sorrows? The Lord always has something to say to us. There are very few things which happen to the Lord's sheep which do not have some meaning. It is for us to seek to know what it is the Lord is saying to us. The government of the life of the Lord's sheep is by hearing His voice. Do you know

anything about that? And what about this spontaneous response to the Lord? Is yours a heart that readily goes after the Lord? Is it one that has only to know that the Lord wants something and it responds with a hearty 'Yes, Lord'?

What is the bond between us, the Lord's sheep, and Him, the Shepherd? It is the same bond that existed between the old Israel, with whom the Lord had so much difficulty, and the Lord. This same principle of His ownership is taken over. That which unites us with the Lord is the realization that we belong to Him, that He is absolute owner of our lives. To quote another Scripture: *"Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and we have the mark of the Lord put upon us, which is the seal of His ownership. Paul tells us that the seal is the Holy Spirit - *"Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit"* (Ephesians 1:13). When you look at a seal you know to whom the object belongs. It says: 'This is the property of a certain person.' The Lord gives us His Spirit as the seal that we belong to Him.

What a sheep the Apostle Paul was! He said: *"Let no man trouble me (that is, try to draw me away): for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus"* (Galatians 6:17) ... 'The marks of Jesus mean that I belong to Him.' He said on the ship when he was travelling to Rome: *"There stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve"* (Acts 27:23). The true sheep of the Lord Jesus are never ashamed to say: 'I belong to the Lord Jesus. He owns my life and everything that I have. I am completely committed to Him.' That is a true sheep!

Well, these are the marks of the Lord's new Israel. And you can now understand why we have these words which have been the key to our meditation: *"Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling... companions of Christ"* (Hebrews 3:1, 14). There is a kind of companionship between this Shepherd and His sheep. They are not just animals, they are friends. There is a wonderful friendship between the Lord Jesus and His own - *"Companions of a heavenly calling"*.

Chapter Five

(14) The Glory of God in Resurrection

Reading: John 11; Ezekiel 37:12-13; Isaiah 11:11; Romans 9:27-29.

In order to see the setting of this point it is necessary first to look back to what is marked as chapter 10:

"They sought again to take him (Jesus): and he went forth out of their hand" (John 10:39).

"The Jews took up stones again to stone him.... The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:31, 33).

Then verses 7 and 8 in chapter 11:

"Then after this he saith to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again. The disciples say unto him, Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?"

You see the Jewish background. Repeatedly the Jews attempted to stone Jesus. They wanted to do with Him what later they did with His servant Stephen - just stone Him, and leave Him there broken in body and dead. Again and again they took up the stones to stone Him - *"They took up stones to cast at him"* (John 8:59). That is the Jewish background of chapter eleven, and it shows us very clearly why Israel of old had to be set aside, and why God had to have another Israel. That kind of Israel could never serve the purpose of God! And so it was rejected.

If you remove the mark 'Chapter 11' and read through from chapter ten right on, you find that this account of the death and raising of Lazarus is set right in that background. We must never just take some story as an incident in itself. We must always recognize that it relates to something else, and this dying and raising of Lazarus is set right in that Jewish background. This was not just a coincidence, a thing that happened by chance. Jesus made it perfectly clear that it was in the plan of God. If you read the story you will see that it is quite clear from what Jesus said that this is all planned and arranged by God. He arranged that Lazarus should die, and Jesus is not going to interfere with that. It HAS to happen because it stands related to some very big thing that God is doing.

Well, let us look at Lazarus. Lazarus is sick, and it is a sickness for which there is no cure. I do not know how many doctors there were within reach of Bethany, or in Jerusalem, which was just a few miles away, but I am quite sure that if there were any doctors about, the sisters could have sent for one during those four days. But whether they did or not, the doctors could have done nothing. Lazarus just HAS to die in the plan of God. He has a sickness for which there is no cure, and even Jesus, who had raised the dead more than once, will not interfere in this matter. He just positively refuses to prevent Lazarus from dying. It tells us here that when Jesus heard about it He stayed where He was for four days. That, of course, made the great problem for the sisters, and it gave something to the enemies. They said: *"Could not this man, which opened the eyes of him that was blind, have caused that this man also should not die?"* Well, let the sister misunderstand and the enemies misjudge! Jesus is not going to be moved by anything, so He lets Lazarus die.

Is this a hopeless situation? Well, what does Jesus say about it? When He received the message from the sisters He said: *"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby."* ... This sickness is not unto DEATH, and yet He let him die. He evidently meant: 'This sickness is not unto death for ever. It is not final death.' Later He said *"Lazarus is dead"*, and yet He said *"This sickness is not unto death"*. So He meant: Death is not going to be the last word.

Now let us note this as we go along: the spiritual knowledge of Jesus. Although He was a long way away from Bethany, He knew exactly when Lazarus died. No one sent Him a second message to say that Lazarus was dead. He said to His disciples: *"Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep"*. They replied: *"If he is fallen asleep, he will recover."* ... *"Then Jesus therefore said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead."* Jesus knew in His spirit that Lazarus had died, and He always knew in His spirit when there was death and when there was life anywhere.

If the Lord Jesus is in us by His Spirit, we always know whether things are alive or dead. We may go amongst some people and say: 'My word, there is no life here! It is dead.' Or we may go amongst others and say: 'Well, there is life here.' We know it in our spirit. No one has to tell us that those people are dead or alive. And that is a mark of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus knew the moment that Lazarus died. Thus we have the Jewish background, the immediate connection of this incident, that is, the connection of the old Israel. That is why I read those Scriptures from Ezekiel and Isaiah. When Israel was in captivity in Babylon and Assyria, the Lord said they were dead and buried, and He said *"I will open your graves"*. To the Lord they were in their graves. And then Isaiah said that a remnant would return, and that remnant was the people who came out of the grave of Assyria and Babylon.

Did you notice that in Romans Paul takes that up and brings it over into the New Testament? He quotes Isaiah's word about a remnant and says that out of the old buried Israel there is going to come a remnant that is resurrected by the Lord, and that remnant is going to be incorporated into the new heavenly Israel.

That is why this story of Lazarus is put right in the Jewish setting. You notice that Jesus deliberately moves into the hostile Jewish area. It was there that they had repeatedly tried to stone Him, but He said to His disciples: *"Let us go into Judea again."* They said, 'Lord, they have only recently tried to stone you there. Why go back?' But He would not accept their argument. He deliberately went back into the hostile area although it was so opposed to Him. Why did He do that? The story of Lazarus is the answer. This death and raising of Lazarus was set over against that situation. Right in the midst of the rejected, dead and buried old Israel He is going to raise a new one.

You might have thought that when the Lord wanted to start His new work He would have gone to some other country. He might have said: 'Well, I can do nothing in Jerusalem or in Palestine. Let Me go to India, or to China, and start all over again', but He deliberately went back into Judea and said: 'In the place of death I am going to have resurrection.'

The Day of Pentecost is wonderful for that fact alone. If ever there was an impossible situation, it was Jerusalem on that day! The old Israel had been rejected by God and was dead from His standpoint. It was buried - and right there God brought in by new birth His new Jerusalem. That is the immediate setting and meaning of this incident.

But we said that Paul carries this whole thing right over into the New Testament and says: 'God has sent the old Israel away, but He is going to bring out of that very place of death His new Israel. A remnant is going to be saved through union with Jesus Christ in death and resurrection.'

What is the new Israel? What are marked chapters nine, ten and eleven in the Letter to the Romans deal, on the one side, with the death of the old Israel, the rejected nation. And then the Apostle says that out of that a remnant will be brought. But you see chapter eleven goes straight into chapter twelve. And what is chapter twelve about? It is about the Body of Christ. And what is that Body? It is not Jew and Gentile brought together, but it is both, having lost their own distinctiveness, becoming one in Christ. In another place Paul says: "*There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free... for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:28). So that when the old Israel is removed and a remnant is taken out of it, buried with Christ and raised together with Him, it does not come back as a Jewish remnant, but as a part of the Body of Christ. That is the new Israel.

Well, I have said that that is the immediate connection. What will help us most, however, is to see the wider connection.

We go back to Lazarus. The New Testament teaches us this: that the Cross of Jesus Christ does not cure the old man. It crucifies him. That is the trouble with most of us. Let us be perfectly honest about it! We are wanting the Lord to cure our old man, to make him a good old man, and to remove from him all his faults, all that is wrong with him and all his sinful nature. The Cross of the Lord Jesus does not do that. It says: 'In the sight of God the old man is dead and buried.' "*Our old man*", says Paul, "*was crucified with him*" (Romans 6:6). Jesus never came to any old man to heal him and make him better, and yet we, all the days of our lives, are wanting the Lord to make us better. Right to the end of our lives the old man will still be the old man, but with this difference - that God looks upon him as buried, as in the grave, as crucified with Christ. 'In Christ (risen) there is a new creation.'

That is Lazarus. Jesus would not cure Lazarus of his sickness. And God would not cure Israel of its evil nature. He said: 'It must die!'

That is only half the story, but let us be quite clear about it. There will always be an incurable background in our life and it will not be healed. It is there all the time and will not be cured of its spiritual maladies. Any day, if you like to go back on the ground of the old man, you can commit the same sins. That is what the New Testament teaches on the one side.

But the glory will be in that which stands over against the background. It will be in what is in the foreground. We may have a sick body, for the Lord does not always heal sick bodies. He does sometimes, but not always, even with the very best saints that He has had. We may have a sick human nature - and we all know that is true. We are all the time up against the troubles in one another. 'Oh, if only I could forget what that brother or that sister is in himself or herself, I would have a happy time! But, you know, he is such an awkward man! He loves the Lord and wants the Lord's best, but if you come up against him naturally you don't find him a very easy man to get on with.' Grace does make differences, but it transcends, not eradicates. As in the case of Paul, we shall all be saying at the end of our course: "*Not that I... am already made perfect*" (Philippians 3:12). Perhaps in our last days, before going to the Lord, people will find some difficulties with us. I am not saying that we ought not to lose some of those strong, wrong ways in our lives. Grace can work miracles in our human nature,

but if you are looking for the day in this life when you are going to be absolutely free from that nature, you will be disappointed. Perhaps you say: 'That is a very poor Gospel to preach!'

But there is another side to it. You and I can live in the power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with a very sick body and with a very poor human nature. Yes, the power of His resurrection can cover so much. The foreground can just be the power of His resurrection. We have to say about some people: 'Well, you know, they are so weak physically. They know so much about sickness, and yet, look at what the Lord enables them to do! It is a miracle how much work they get through! They ought to have been dead long ago, but they go on. Not in their own strength, however. There is another strength that is over their weakness.' Paul said: *"When I am weak, then am I strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:10). The power of Christ's resurrection was overcoming his weakness. He said: *"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). He was speaking of his physical infirmities and of the power of Christ's resurrection.

What is true in the physical realm is true in the spiritual. If we live in ourselves we will give up. Oh, what a lot of infirmities there are in our natures! We are always carrying about a lot of spiritual weaknesses. Do you understand what I mean? What a trouble are these natural infirmities of ours! If ever we say 'I cannot', and then, because we cannot, we say 'I give it up', we have forfeited the greatest blessing of the Christian life. Think of all that the Apostle Paul had to do and to suffer! It was a terrible life that he had to live, from one standpoint. He had infirmity in his body, he had enemies wherever he went and he suffered numerous adversities. He was in the sea a day and a night. He was in nakedness and hunger. He had to travel on foot mile after mile, month after month. So we can gather up all the difficulties in that life, and if ever a man ought to have said 'I cannot go on', that man was Paul! But what did he say? *"I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4:13). Not 'I can do all things' - Paul would have said 'I can do nothing' - but *"I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."* There was a day when naturally he despaired of life. He said: *"We ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead"* (2 Corinthians 1:9 - R.V. margin).

Lazarus was absolutely hopeless and helpless. He could do nothing - and that is how we are naturally. But Jesus said that it was *"for the glory of God"*.

Dear friends, the glory of God is manifested in those who in themselves are as good as dead, but whom He enables to go on and do much for Him. Jesus may not always heal us in body or in nature, but He can give us divine life and that is a great thing.

Perhaps some of you have heard of God's great servant, Dr. A. B. Simpson. He was a great believer in divine healing and wrote a book on it. But, in spite of his belief, he said this: 'So that no one will misunderstand my position, I do not say that everyone has to be healed, but I do say that everyone can know divine life, which is something more than natural life.'

Well, back to Lazarus. The Lord did not heal him, but He gave him resurrection life, and that is the hope of everyone. The Lord may want to heal you in your body, or He may not do it. However, whether He does or does not, He does not want us to live on our own life, but by resurrection life. That is what Jesus meant when He said: *"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God"*. If you

look through your New Testament you will see that God is always glorified in resurrection. That is where the glory of God is.

You may see a very weak Christian physically, but you may glorify God in that one because of the wonderful power of divine life. You may see a person who has many faults and lots of things about them that you do not like, and yet there is something more than that - there is the Lord's life in them. While you may not glory in what they are naturally, you can glorify God for what they are spiritually.

That is the real heart of this incident of Lazarus. Life out of death is God's secret, the thing that glorifies Him most of all.

Is that all a lovely story and wonderful truth? Put it into operation tomorrow morning! Say to the Lord when you get up: 'Lord, I am no good in myself, but I am going to live this day by the power of Your resurrection.' There may be impossible situations inside or outside yourself, but just say to the Lord: 'Now, Lord, you get glory today by enabling me to live in resurrection life.' It is something that we are to take by faith every day.

Timothy was evidently a physically weak young man. There was something wrong with his stomach and it was constantly troubling him. Paul said: "*Lay hold on the life eternal*" (1 Timothy 6:12), and spoke of his "*often infirmities*" (1 Timothy 5:23). If the Lord meant everyone to be healed physically, why did Paul not heal Timothy? Paul knew that there was something better than being healed physically. The power of eternal life in a weak physical body is a great testimony. "*Lay hold on the life eternal*" - that is resurrection life, and it is something that we have to do.

Chapter Six

(15) The Vine of God's Full Satisfaction

Reading: John 15; Psalm 80:8, 14; Isaiah 5:1-2; Jeremiah 2:21, 6:9; Ezekiel 15:1-6.

The fifteenth step in the transition from the old Israel to the new is here in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel by John: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."*

You have the Old Testament background to that in the passages we have read: What Israel was intended to be, failed to be, and their destiny - *"Cast into the fire"*. It is clear from these Scriptures that Israel was God's vine, but it became a false vine and God had to cast it into the fire, where it has been for nearly twenty centuries.

But when God cast that vine into the fire, He brought forth another. We have said that this Gospel by John sets forth the putting away of the old and the bringing in of the new. We have seen that various names of the old Israel have been taken over into the new Israel, and here in this chapter the vine is taken over. When Jesus said *"I am the true vine"*, He emphasized that word 'TRUE'. If you could hear Him saying that phrase, it would be like this: *"I am the TRUE vine"*. The implication is perfectly clear. 'I take the place of the false vine. That has been cast away and I am the true vine which takes its place.'

We have to spend a little while seeing how Israel was false to its very nature and purpose.

What is the nature of a vine? For one thing, it spreads out far and wide, on the right and on the left, always reaching out to cover more space. It is not the nature of the vine just to go straight up. It reaches out, expands itself.

Israel was raised up for this very purpose - to stretch out their arms and embrace the nations: *"I... will give thee... for a light to the Gentiles"* (Isaiah 42:6) is the word: *"Nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"* (Isaiah 62:3). God raised up Israel to be a testimony in the nations, to bring the knowledge of God to the whole world. It was Israel's calling to fulfil a world purpose and a world vision. They were intended to be His missionary nation to the whole world, but instead of embracing the nations, they excluded them. They drew a wall round themselves and said 'We are THE people and all others are dogs.' They called the Gentiles 'dogs'. They shut themselves in to themselves and became an exclusive people, thus contradicting their own nature and mission. Exclusiveness was a contradiction to the very nature of Israel - and it is ALWAYS a contradiction to divine nature. It is not written in Scripture: 'God so loved the Jewish nation that He gave His only begotten Son.' It says: *"God so loved the WORLD"*. The very love of God was contradicted by their exclusiveness. His very nature amongst them was violated in that way: and to turn in upon ourselves is always a violation of divine calling. It is a sin for any people to make themselves an end in themselves. That is why in the order of nature - when nature is normal - a family expands. The Lord laid down this law right at the beginning of human history, when He said to Noah and his sons after the flood: *"Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth"* (Genesis 19:1). It was in the very nature of things by the appointment of God. As I say, when things are normal, no lives are an end in themselves. Of course, I know of those exceptions when it is not possible to expand, but I am speaking of the NORMAL course. In the very nature

of things God intends life to be an expanding life. Anyone who violates that law deliberately will be an end in himself or herself and will sin against God's law.

Israel was called to expand and fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, but they withheld that knowledge from the nations and turned in on themselves, made themselves an end in themselves. So God came down upon that and said: 'All right! You shall be an end in yourselves.' God's judgments are usually the confirmation of our own choices!

That was Israel's violation of their nature as a vine. Instead of expanding to the world, it contracted into itself and anything like that is always fatal.

'What about the purpose? Quite obviously the purpose of a vine is to bear fruit. It bears grapes, and from grapes there is to come the wine. In the Old Testament wine is always a symbol of life. That is why we have it at the Lord's Table. It represents His blood, and in that there is life. He Himself called it the fruit of the vine. He did not say: 'I will no more drink of My blood until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' What He did say was: "I will no more drink of THE FRUIT OF THE VINE, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). The grapes and the wine are symbols of life.

Israel of old was called to minister the life of God to all the nations. When you read these Gospels and look to see what kind of fruit it is that Israel is bearing, you find that it is anything but life. It is really death. The fruit was sour. All those who were tasting the fruit of that Israel were turning away and saying: 'We do not want any more.' It was not life: it was death. The Gospels are just full of that truth.

Jesus said: *"I am the true vine" ... "In him was life: and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4). Men's faces grew light when they tasted HIM.

Did you notice one thing about the vine that we read in the Old Testament? We read, in Ezekiel 15, that the vine has no other purpose in its existence than to bear fruit. Have you ever seen anything made of vine? You have never seen a table, or a vessel or even a walking-stick made of vine! Ezekiel says that you can do nothing with the wood of the vine - you cannot even make from it a peg on which to hang things. The vine is absolutely useless apart from the fruit. The grapes are the only purpose of its existence, and if it does not bear them, then, says Ezekiel, you just cast it into the fire. There are no by-products of the vine, no secondary use. It exists for one thing, and one thing only, and that is fruit.

God raised up the old Israel to bear His divine fruit of life and light for the nations, but they failed to do that. God had no other use for an Israel like that, so He said 'Cast it into the fire.' He did that nearly twenty centuries ago and that is where Israel is now.

We can see from that what the Lord Jesus means when He says that He is the true vine and we are the branches. The TRUE vine is that which fulfils the one and only purpose of its existence.

So Jesus brings this illustration over to Himself and His Church, and it is perfectly clear what is the nature of the Lord Jesus. He is reaching out to all men, embracing the whole world. He asks ALL the nations into His heart. ALL men are His concern and not any one nation. He said to His disciples: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of ALL THE NATIONS" (Matthew 28:19). It is the very nature of Jesus to do that. It is quite foreign to Him to be exclusive, small and narrow and self-occupied.

Our salvation is to have our hearts enlarged so that they are bigger than ourselves. Anyone who turns in on himself or herself, and those who are always occupied with themselves, are dying while they live. It cannot be avoided. Let a little company of the Lord's people live just to itself, become wholly occupied with itself, and its days are numbered. They are living a living death. Their destiny is to fade out. That is true of any one Christian or of any company of the Lord's people, because Christ is in the believer and His very nature is to reach out like the vine. He would draw all men unto Himself, and for His people to be otherwise is a contradiction to His very nature, which is the nature of the true vine.

Jesus says: *"I am the vine, ye are the branches"*. The branches of the vine make one vine - they partake of the same nature. Do you notice that it is the very branches themselves that do the expanding work of Jesus? Yes, this expanding work is manifested by the branches.

That, of course, is what happened in Jerusalem right at the beginning, when some troubles sprang up in the Christian church there. It was the first bit of trouble that the Christian church had! Some of the first Apostles wanted to stay in Jerusalem and build up the church there. Forgetting the commandment of the Lord, they were just settling down to make Jerusalem the centre of everything and the church an exclusive body. Then there rose up in their midst a young man *"full of faith and of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 6:5), and his name was Stephen. If you listen to what Stephen said you will recognize that what he is saying has this meaning: 'This will not do. We have been called for the nations. We are not to be an exclusive people. We are called to a world mission and must not settle down in the old Judaism.' Some of the first Christians and Christian leaders did not agree with him. Of course, the old Israel did not agree with that! And so they stoned Stephen on this very issue of the world mission of the Church. I cannot help asking the question: Where were James and Peter when Stephen was being stoned? They were in Jerusalem, but were not present. Why was it that Stephen was stoned and not Peter or James? Because at that time they were not taking the line that Stephen was taking. They were making Jerusalem everything, and, of course, the old Israel would not stone them for doing that, so they were quite safe somewhere in Jerusalem. But Stephen was stoned.

Do understand that there is something here of which to take note: that this new Israel is given a mission to all the nations, and there is a great price to pay for that. The whole kingdom of Satan is against it. If you will just become a little, quiet, compromising local sect you will be all right. The devil won't worry you if you are just living within your own walls and closed doors, and the world will not trouble about you. It will leave you alone... but if you go out on this heavenly level of things and embrace all men in Christ, you will find that the world is against you and the devil is against you. You and I ought to see this in our day as no one has ever seen it before. Do you not see what is happening in the nations? There is not a missionary left in China! It is no longer possible for one to go into that country; and that same thing is happening in other parts of the world. They have tried to drive them out of Africa. Why is this? Oh, the kingdom of Satan does not want Jesus to get into his world. There have been literally many thousands of martyrs for Jesus Christ in China, and many others in Africa, and in other parts. It has never been quite like this before. It is a new phase of things. Satan knows that his time is short and that he must do all he can to close the nations to Jesus Christ. So there is a great price bound up with this world mission. Stephen is the great example of that.

The purpose, then, of Christ and His Church, of the vine and the branches, is to bring life to men all over this world.

I wonder if that is altogether true of the church today! Do you not think that even the Christian Church is failing in this matter? It is not really bringing life to the nations. Many a place called a 'church' is not bringing life even to its own little locality. This is a contradiction of Christ!

But it is all very well to think of this objectively. It has to come down to every one of us. What is the proof that Christ is in you and in me? How can it be known that Christ is in us? Only in one way - that others are receiving life through us, that we minister the life of Christ to others, that when hungry and needy people come into touch with us they feel the touch of life. They may express it in different ways, but it amounts to this: 'That man, that woman, has something that I have not got and it is something that I need. There is something about them that I feel, and it is what I really need.' That should be true of every Christian because Christ is in us, expanding Himself through us and ministering His life through us.

Oh, do pray, dear friends, every day as you get up: 'Lord, make me a channel of life to someone today. Lord, minister Your own life through me to someone today. May I bring life wherever I am.' The Lord has no other purpose for you and for me. We may try to do a lot of things, but if we belong to the Vine we are no good for anything but to bear fruit; and that is to bring life to others. We are not even to be a peg upon which to hang something, or a walking-stick to help someone to stand up straight. No, God has no use for us other than to bear fruit, to bring life.

Jesus said here in this chapter: *"Every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit"*. Of course, we understand that in nature and agree with it. Perhaps if you have had anything to do with grape vines, you have done it yourself. It is strange that we believe in it as a law of nature and say: 'It is the right and the best thing to do to cut this piece off so that it will do better', but we do not agree with the Lord doing it to us. When He begins to do it we are full of grumbles and complaints! When for a little while He calls us to do less in order that He might fit us to do more, we do not agree. When it seems that the Lord is taking away some of our fruit, some of our work, we are full of problems. We do not understand the Lord and begin to ask questions about His love.

Jesus has laid this down as a positive truth. Here is some branch that is bearing fruit (not one that is bearing no fruit: that, He says, will be cast into the fire) and it is THAT one that He prunes. Here is a branch that is fulfilling its vocation and the Lord looks at it. He says: 'That is very good! I am very pleased with it, but I can do better, and there is better that that branch can do.' So He takes the knife, and He disciplines us, He reduces us in order to increase us. He cuts some away in order that there might be more.

What a lot of history there is in that statement! The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews said: *"All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous: yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness"* (Hebrews 12:11). That is only saying in another way that the Husbandman does sometimes take the knife and He cuts deeply into our souls, but afterward there is more and better fruit than there was before.

Now we come to this last word. The wine comes from the grape through the winepress, which is the symbol of pressure. What pressure is brought to bear upon that fruit in order to get the wine! The winepress is the symbol of breaking, and that fruit is broken to pieces. The wine is wrung out of its agony.

The Lord Jesus said "I am the true Vine", and it was prophesied of Him that He would tread the winepress alone. The Cross was His winepress. How He was

pressed in the Cross! He was crushed and broken, but out of that breaking has come the life which you and I have, and which so many in all the nations have received. That is true, in a measure, of His Church. It was out of the breaking and crushing of the Church that the life came to the world. And that is true of every member, every branch of the vine. If we are to fulfil this true, living ministry, it will only be through suffering, through the winepress, through pressure and through breaking. Paul said: *"We were pressed out of measure, above strength"* (2 Corinthians 1:8 - A.V.) - but what life has come out of that man's pressure! It is like that. We are not talking about preaching and Bible teaching, but about this great ministry of Christ giving His life through us. It may be passed on to others through preaching, or through teaching, or through living, but if it is His life it will come out of experiences of suffering. A preacher or a teacher who has never suffered will never minister life.

Well, this may not seem a very pleasant outlook, but it is true. The best doctors and nurses are those who know something about suffering themselves. Some are just professional, treating you as a case - you are just case No. -. But, ah! there are others who treat you as a person, a human being, who care for you. If you ask why, you may find that they have a background of suffering themselves. They know just a little of what you are going through. We have read in the Letter to the Hebrews: *"We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are... he is able to succour them that are tempted"* (Hebrews 4: 15; 2: 18). He has been the way of the winepress and we have received the benefit.

Is this why Paul said: *"That I may know him... and the fellowship of his sufferings"* (Philippians 3:9)? He knew quite well that the sufferings of Christ meant life, and if there was one thing which Paul wanted for others, it was that they should have this life, and have it through him. So he said: *"That I may know... the fellowship of his sufferings"*.

That may not be our ambition, and we may not like the idea very much, but may the Lord help us to look at things in this way: 'The Lord is putting me in the winepress. He is putting me through a time of great pressure. I am being broken and crushed. Therefore the Lord intends to have more fruit, more life, and more people to have the life.' It is the very nature of this thing to reach out to others. That is the TRUE vine. Anything that is not like that is the false vine.

"I am the vine, ye are the branches."

Chapter Seven

(16) The High Priest of the Israel of God

Reading: John 13:1-16.

If there were space I would turn you to the Old Testament and we would read together four passages which relate to the making and setting up of the laver in the court of the tabernacle. You will remember that the Lord commanded Moses to make a laver of brass and it was to be placed right at the centre of the outer court. It was to be filled with water and there the priests were to wash their hands and their feet before they entered into the holy place. Although it does not say so, it is very probable that they washed one another's feet. Whether that was true or not - and I think it was - this laver was for such washing in relation to the sacrifice.

Here in the thirteenth chapter of John the Lord Jesus is acting in the capacity of the priest; in the seventeenth chapter is what is universally called the high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus. There is so much in that prayer which is taken up from the thirteenth chapter - *"Sanctify them in the truth... for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."*

So in chapter thirteen we have the Priest taking the water and washing the feet of His brothers - His brother priests. He is doing it in the light of a coming day. He said: *"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter"*, and afterward it became quite clear that all the Lord's people are priests. All are called into the sacred ministry of priesthood.

That is a very large subject, and I can do no more than just state the truth and leave it there for the time being.

What is the very heart of this chapter? It is in verse eight: *"Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."* Now we are back with our word in the Letter to the Hebrews which is rightly translated 'Companions': "We are become COMPANIONS of Christ". These words "part with me" are from the same root as that word "companions". Jesus is saying here: 'Unless I wash you, you can never become My companions. It is those whose feet I have washed who are My companions of the heavenly way.'

The companions of Jesus must have clean feet. In His prayer He made it perfectly clear what that means: *"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"* (John 17:16) ... *"I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one"* (John 17:15). The companions of Jesus are those whose feet symbolically are separated and cleansed from the world.

This world lies under a curse, under the judgment of God. It is an evil world and the Lord does not want His companions to be entangled in it, so His work for us is to separate us from it. Feet mean contact with the earth, and the Lord Jesus would break that contact where His own companions are concerned. If we want to be companions of Christ, we must be delivered from this present evil world. Contact with it means death, defilement. It is a world that is against the Lord Jesus. The Lord is saying here in this symbolic act: 'My companions are not of this world.' He has done it in Himself once for all.

Of course, there is far more in this than I am able to say at present, but we all know how true this is. Jesus has not taken us out of the world. We are here and

surrounded by defilement. It is indeed a sinful world! The Lord Jesus would have us delivered from it, and He has done the work by which we can be separated from its evil.

That opens up the whole subject of sanctification, but for our purpose it just explains that word in Hebrews 3:1: "Wherefore, HOLY brethren" ... 'Brethren who are sanctified', which means separated, 'unto God'. Such are the companions of Christ and of the heavenly calling.

But the Lord Jesus also instituted a ministry for His companions. He said: *"I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you."* He was saying, in other words: 'You must help one another to keep clear of the spirit of this world.' The word which explains that is: *"Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness"* (Galatians 6:1). The meekness of Jesus in this act offended Peter: 'You, Lord and Master, getting down on your knees and washing my feet! I could not think of it - I could not allow it. I cannot let you humiliate yourself like that!' ... *"Ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness."*

You and I have to learn more about this. It is a spiritual ministry that is very much needed. There are bodies of Christians in this world who practise this literally and have it as part of their service to wash one another's feet. Well, we will not discuss whether they are right or wrong. I think, though, that you might wash someone's feet literally and not do it spiritually. You might wash someone's feet literally and then go away and talk about their faults and their weaknesses to someone else. I think we are too much accustomed to pointing out the dirt that is on people's feet rather than removing it. Our criticisms and our condemnations of one another! It does not need an expert to see the spiritual uncleanness of people and the touch of this world upon them. Anyone can see their faults.

What are we going to do? Talk about them? Point them out to other people? Keep them always in view? Allow our attitudes toward them to be influenced by these faults?

If you read through these Gospels you will see that the disciples had plenty of uncleanness on their feet. They quarrelled as to who should be greater in the Kingdom of Heaven and strove together to have the first place. It is all an unpleasant story! They had plenty of faults and failings. Their feet were indeed tainted by this world, but what does it say here about the attitude of Jesus? Such men as they were, yet... *"Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end"*, and to show His love He humbled Himself. He laid aside the garment of His own glory and took the form of a bondservant. He girded Himself with a towel - the symbol of humble service. He did not say: 'Oh, what a lot of dirt you have on your feet!' - He washed it away.

Then He said: *"I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you"* - 'You are priests unto God. Take the water of the laver and wash one another's feet. Only thus can you be companions of the holy place, of the heavenly calling.'

Do you notice that there is a blessing attached to this? It is in verse seventeen: *"If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them."* So there is a blessing attached to washing one another's feet!