

THE RECOVERING OF THE
LORD'S TESTIMONY IN FULLNESS

by

T. Austin-Sparks

CONTENTS

Chapter 1 - The First Movement	3
Chapter 2 - The State of the Wall	10
Chapter 3 - The Fundamental Matter of Worship	17
Chapter 4 - The Principle of Resurrection	23
Chapter 5 - What the Wall Speaks of	29
Chapter 6 - The Work and the Workers	36
Chapter 7 - The Warfare	45
Chapter 8 - A Peculiar Treasure	53

Chapter One

THE FIRST MOVEMENT

"And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3).

"And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:12).

These two fragments - "I am doing a great work", "what my God put into my heart to do" - give us the entrance into the great matter which is historically set forth in the book of Nehemiah.

Three Things Essential to a Fullness of the Christian Life

There are three things which are essential to an adequate life with God, to a fullness of the Christian life.

Firstly, the realization that God is concerned with the accomplishment of something worthy of Himself. We shall not get very far toward a full Christian life, or a life with God, until it breaks upon us and takes hold of us that God is really concerned with the accomplishment of something worthy of Himself.

The second thing is that people shall become aware of what that great something in the heart of God is, what it is that God is so concerned with, and then that they shall be moved to co-operate with Him in it. That is an essential to a life of fullness with God, that we His people shall come to see what it is that He is really set upon, what it is that will really be worthy of Himself, and, more than that, that we shall become so deeply moved about this matter as to co-operate with Him in it.

And then, in the third place, that we recognize that this object in the heart of God and this co-operation with Him by His people involves very real conflict and cost, and that His people must face that and be ready to accept it.

These three things comprise the elements and features of a full life with God, and not one of them can be lacking. The very conflict and cost will themselves be the evidences of the value of the thing into which the people of God have been brought, and the thing which is so dear to God's heart. Where there is no conflict and no cost, there may be reason to feel that the outcome is not worth while. I think that the view of the Apostles, at any rate, was that the conflict was the complement of the calling so great and so high.

So that here in this book of Nehemiah we have those three things brought before us in a very full and a very powerful way. They are: a great Cost, a great Work, and a great Conflict.

The book of Nehemiah, as you will know, and indeed Nehemiah himself, is a great historic illustration of a much greater spiritual reality. What we have here on the earth in literal history is but a reflection of what is going on in this dispensation in the spiritual realm, and what in this dispensation is so much greater than anything that ever was in days gone past on this earth.

Now we have these three features here. They are: the wall or its rebuilding - that is the object, that is the purpose, that is the thing in view. Then we have the

work of rebuilding, and the workers; and then we have, going hand-in-hand with the purpose and the work, the warfare. The Wall, the Work, the Warfare; or; in other words, the Calling, the Conduct and the Conflict. These comprise what we can now call, in present-day or present-time language, the recovery and completing of the Lord's testimony, for that is really what is before us at this time. And so we may set over this whole matter, this little fragment: "a great work" - "I am doing a great work"; and it is with this great work that we shall be occupied, as the Lord leads us.

God's Reaction in a Day of Spiritual Declension

Nehemiah is the last great character of the Old Testament and his book the last historic book of the Old Testament. Those who do not study the chronological arrangement of the Old Testament books may not be altogether alive to these facts. Because the book of Nehemiah comes in our Bibles so much before the end of the Old Testament, it is taken by many to relate chronologically to a very much earlier period; but it really ought to be alongside of the prophecies of Malachi. When we come to Nehemiah we are contemporary with the prophet Malachi.

Haggai and Zechariah uttered their prophecies and passed on. Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest, had accomplished their ministry. Ezra had fulfilled his part of the work, as the prophets mentioned had inspired the people to finish the rebuilding of the Temple. And then there set in a course of spiritual decline. Great things had taken place under Haggai, Zerubbabel, Joshua, Zechariah: but that glory faded; that promise seemed to be short-lived. We come to Malachi - and you know the content of Malachi's prophecies. Indeed, a 'radiant morn had passed away'; indeed things had become over-clouded; deep shadows of spiritual declension filled the sky over Jerusalem; and all those sad, yes, terrible things mentioned by Malachi are found, after all, amongst the people of God: so that only within the remnant that had returned from the captivity was there found a remnant of the remnant - "they that feared the Lord" (Malachi 3:16) - and it was into those conditions, in the midst of such a state, that Nehemiah came to fulfil his ministry.

This man came to Jerusalem and set about the undertaking which is indicated at the beginning of the book which bears his name - the rebuilding of the wall. I think that that carries with it a wonderful, yes, inspiring significance: that in a day, such as that day in which Malachi prophesied and uttered his terrible words from the Lord, the Lord has not abandoned - the Lord acts again; and this rebuilding of the wall is God's action in a day of spiritual declension. It almost shouts to us that God, after all, and in the worst times, is still committed to the recovery and completion of His testimony. It is most impressive that the book of Nehemiah - the last historic book of the Old Testament, with Nehemiah the last great man of the Old Testament - is marked, in a day of terrible spiritual decline, by God acting again in relation to His testimony. Sometimes we are tempted to feel that the time has gone and conditions are too bad, and we can hope for nothing very much in view of the situation; but this book and this man administer a very sound rebuke to any such pessimism.

Travail in Prayer

Now, before we take up the three main features of the Wall, the Work and the Warfare, we must begin with an essential factor which is embodied in Nehemiah himself. We have to go back a little, because the beginning of this thing was many years before, more than seventy years before, and it began in the heart of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a man with a broken heart, a man of a sorrowful spirit - a man whose heart was broken and whose spirit was sorrowful

because of the conditions amongst the Lord's people; and Jeremiah in that travail fulfilled his ministry, and gave utterance to a declaration, a prophecy, that the people would go into captivity for seventy years. That, as we know, came to pass; and then, as the seventy years were expiring, another man right in the heart of the situation in Babylon took up Jeremiah's travail. Jeremiah fulfilled his ministry of travail: Daniel took up the travail in prayer. Daniel tells us (chapter 9) that he came to know, "by the books", that the captivity was to be for seventy years; and now he sees that the seventy years are coming to an end, and so he gives himself to intense prayer. Note: a ministry of travail by Jeremiah, an enlightened intercessory travail by Daniel - or he has become aware of the time in which he lives. He has come to realize *by the books* that the time is fulfilled, and so he takes up the travail in this tremendous prayer in the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel.

God's Sovereign Reaction

Now we have the next move. Because the time has come and God is on the move again for the recovery of His testimony, He sovereignly stirs up the spirit of Cyrus, who makes a decree, and the remnant return to Jerusalem. The last two verses of the second book of the Chronicles, as you know, state the fact, and then the very first verses of the book of Ezra following repeat the words exactly. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia", and Ezra was one of the fruits of that sovereign movement of God. When Ezra fulfilled his part of the ministry, we come to Nehemiah, and we find again the taking up of that essential factor which has led to this co-operation with God.

In the first chapter of Nehemiah and into the second chapter, we find Nehemiah gripped, deeply and terribly gripped, by this travail - this travail which commenced with Jeremiah, this travail which was born in the heart of Daniel away in Babylon. Here it is in Nehemiah - travail which is an echo of the very heart of God concerning His people. We have to fit a great deal of prophetic utterance into this situation, to hear the cry of those prophets, all of them, as they express God's mind and God's heart about the state of His people. Now that cry - shall we say, that sob - in the heart of God is born into this man; it finds its culmination, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, in the heart of Nehemiah.

Note, before we go further, these two factors, these two main aspects. Firstly, God acting sovereignly. That is where the movement begins. God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and you have all that wonderful movement of sovereignty as recorded in the book of Ezra. Those of you who are familiar with that book will recall at once the marvellous facilities which God brought about through the Persian ruler for the rebuilding of the temple: every provision made, everything seen to that the thing should be done; God acting sovereignly. That is one side.

Man Suffering in Fellowship With God

But here in Nehemiah you have the other side - man in suffering fellowship with God. Ezra is the sovereignty of God; Nehemiah is the fellowship with God by man. Ezra is God acting directly and independently; Nehemiah is man acting with God, or God acting through man. Those two things always go together - remember that. We must never think, because God is sovereign and His purposes are fixed and settled and He can do as He will, act independently, He is self-sufficient, that He will in fact act like that. He never has done so. Since the creation He has always brought men into fellowship with Himself in His sovereign purposes - into deep fellowship and travelling fellowship. So however great may be the need, whatever may be the demand, the call, the tragedy, which makes it necessary for God to act sovereignly in the first place, He is not going to do it until He can find

an instrument which shares His heart feeling, carries His heart burden, enters into heart co-operation with Him.

Nehemiah was such a one. So far as the practical side was concerned, in this final movement of God in that dispensation, everything had its beginning in the heart of Nehemiah. That man's heart is revealed in the very first chapter of this book. It is therefore very necessary for purposes of today - for I am not stopping now to try to make a parallel between our time and the time of Nehemiah: that I take it is patent and obvious to anyone with spiritual perception - but if God is going to do something today with regard to the recovery and completion of His testimony, which needs recovering and needs completing, He will have to have the counterpart of Nehemiah - a vessel with a great concern, the very concern of God Himself, born in its heart.

For a few minutes, then, let us look at Nehemiah's concern.

Nehemiah's Concern

This man had a true appreciation both of how things ought to be and of how they actually were. We will never get anywhere as instrumental in the purpose of God until those two things are clear in our hearts - how things actually are, and then how things ought to be, how God would have things if He had them according to His mind, His heart, what things would be like if they did reflect and express the purpose of God. You and I will never get very far, if we get anywhere at all, in our relationship with God, until we are seeing something of the real state of things in contrast with the mind of God - until we have seen really what God wants, what God really has His heart set upon, exactly how things would be if they were according to His will.

Then, of course, we must see the contrasts, the conflicting factors, the nature of the situation as it is not according to God's mind. Nehemiah was such a man. He looked, he formed his judgment upon the data: he saw - on the one hand, what God would have; on the other hand, how different things were from what God would have. There are, of course, many people who can be very critical of Christianity, very critical of the Church, who have quite a lot of mental appraisal and judgment of the situation, who in a very superior way talk down about the bad conditions which exist among Christians and in the Church, and who can give themselves quite cheaply to deploring the state of things.

Nehemiah was not of that kind. Nehemiah was not just negative; Nehemiah was positive, he was constructive. He was not only the one who could say, 'Now, look at the situation - look how different it is from what God intended and what God willed - see this and see that and see the other thing'. Not only was he able to do that, but he was able to bring forth a positive remedy and to show how the thing could be changed to provide a way for recovery. He was a man of positive vision. There are so many people who take a negative line, and when you ask them what ought to be done, what is the thing we must do about it, they have nothing to bring forward. It is all negative - and very plentiful, at that! - but there is nothing to present or provide. Nehemiah was not that kind of man. He was fully acquainted with the situation; he knew just how deplorable it was. You notice several times he speaks of it, but he had the remedy. He was a positive man and a man of action, because he was a man of vision. He was not just 'visionary', in the negative sense: he was a man of action in relation to what he saw.

And that, dear friends, does present us with a challenge I have no doubt but that most of us could point the finger at things which are not according to God's mind amongst His people, in His Church; could point out how different things are from

what we can see they ought to be - how bad this is and how bad that is. Oh, that is easy and that is very cheap - to criticize and to listen to criticism and to agree with it, to take it in, and to nurse the complaints, to keep them alive. But it is another thing altogether to be able to come forward and say, 'Look here, this is not good, this is not as the Lord would have it, and *this is what we ought to do*. This is the thing that the Lord would have done, this is the thing to which we must give ourselves, to change this situation'. I venture to say that we have no right to criticize and judge and condemn if we have not got a remedy, if we have not got something positive to put in the place of what we see. So let us be quiet if we cannot provide something better, but the Lord save us from having to be quiet just because we *are* negative, and make us active because we have got vision.

I ask you: How true is this in your own case? What vision have you? Do you see what the Lord has ever meant, has ever intended? - what really is in His heart, what He would have, and how He would have things? Do you see just exactly how things would be if the Lord had His way and reached His end? Do you? Are you able to see how different things are from what the Lord would have, and then are you so exercised in your heart, as were these men and as was this man, that you say, 'Something must be done about it, we must get to work, by the help of God we must change this situation' - believing that it is God's will that it should be so? Are you of that kind? Well, that is the appeal of this book.

The Features of Nehemiah's Travail

Let us spend a little while in looking still more inwardly into this travail of Nehemiah's. What were the features of his travail? I have been trying to understand him, to read him, to get into his heart, to get behind his cry, behind his sorrow, his burden in his distress. As I have done so, it has seemed that these are some of the things which lay behind this travail of his.

Nehemiah saw how things ought to be, and how things really were; and then he saw his own position. There he was, away there in Shushan the palace, cupbearer to the king. He was an exile, and he was virtually a slave, one who had been taken on as a servant in the palace. From the standpoint of that palace, and from the standpoint of Babylon, it may have been an honourable position; but from his own standpoint he was like a slave in the world: he was spending his time in *the world*, the business of *this world*, and his whole soul was groaning. 'Here am I in the business of this world, having to go to work every morning and finishing late at night, and this is repeated day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year - and my soul cries out to be doing something about the purpose of God and the situation of the Lord's people'. This cry against his own position was a feature of his travail.

God is sovereign even in that. Perhaps that touches you who are reading these lines. You are going to work every morning and coming home every evening, and by far the greater amount of your time and strength is occupied with serving this world. You feel like a slave to this world, and you say, 'Oh, that I might be free to do something for God!' My dear friend, there is value in travail like that. There were many in Babylon who had settled down and accepted the situation, who were taking up business and earning wages, and were making this now their life. They saw nothing more than that, or other than that. But not so Nehemiah. His soul revolted against his position in the world. 'Oh, to be free to do something for God!' That travail meant something to God. That travail was the birth pangs of something for God.

If you are not knowing something of that - the drudgery of the home-life, perhaps you might call it 'the trivial round, the common task', the going to work

by morning and coming home by evening - and there is at the same time in your soul no cry for the interests of God, you are a tragedy indeed. But it may be that all the time, in and through it, you are longing to be able to do more for the Lord. Let me say that that is the kind of travail that is going to be fruitful. It is going to be fruitful in some way or other. It will out - it *will out* in some way or other. Something will come of that. I am not going to say that the day will come when you will be released from your worldly occupation and set free for what you call 'full-time service'. I think it is a very real mistake to talk about the service of God in that way, for you may in your own travail be serving God in a potential way where you are. There may be tremendous potentialities in this travail in your heart as you go about your daily work, all the time more concerned for the Lord's interests than for this world.

I think it must have been like that with Nehemiah. 'Here I am, the king's cupbearer!' You can almost hear the revolt in his heart. How little he thought of this - because how much more the Lord's interests had become to him! That man, that ruler, that king, was a great man, the greatest man in the world at that time. It was no small thing to be his cupbearer, and to be in the palace of Shushan, the same place where Esther and Mordecai were. You know all about them from the book of Esther, and all that was represented there. Yet when Nehemiah came to the point of answering the king's question as to why he was sad of countenance, his prayer to the Lord was not couched in language of great respect and honour for the king. "Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of *this man*" (Nehemiah 1:11). A great king - *this man*!

Oh, this was all so mean compared with the Lord and His interest! He could not accept this, he was in travail. You see, the greatest honours that this world can give, the highest position that we may occupy here, are just *nothing* to men and women who have seen what the Lord is after. All honours, all degrees, all positions, are as nothing when once you have seen the on-high calling. 'I count them as very refuse', said Paul (Philippians 3:8), 'these things of honour and glory in this world'. He had seen the Lord and the heavenly calling. Nehemiah's position was, I am sure, one great factor in his travail.

And then there was the long delay. 'Oh, the time is so long! Oh, that we could do something!' The Lord is demanding such patience; we kick against the delays of the Lord. We are so deeply tested by deferred opportunities. Is it not true? Nothing opening up; no way. But the point is - are we really in travail about this thing? I am sure that the Lord uses delays and deferments in order to test us as to our real concern. Some people have not to be put off very much before they give up altogether. Some people can have only a little discouragement, a little trial of patience, and they say, 'Well, it is not worth it', and they quit. Here is a man who went on all these years in deep trial of patience, tested by the long-delayed opportunity to do something; but he held on to the end, and the fact is that he was most vigorous after all in his quest for the Lord's interests.

How is this long delay, deferred opportunity, affecting you? Is this purpose of God so deep in you that it is stronger than all other deferred hopes, disappointed expectations? This man's soul was starved - his *soul* was starved. I mean by that he was always anxious and eager to *do* something; in *doing something* he would have found his real gratification and satisfaction and pleasure. His soul would have gone out at liberty to do things, but he was starved in his soul and brought more and more to the place where, if ever anything was going to be done at all, it would be God who did it - 'I will never be able to do this'. That is a great place to come to. 'God has to open this door, God has to provide this opportunity, God has to see that this thing is done. I can do nothing, I am helpless!' But that soul

starvation, what it costs us! If only we could do something, how much easier it would be, or if we could do more, how much more satisfaction we would have! But that is a part of our preparation. Indeed, it is out of that that real spiritual values come.

Nehemiah had the report from his brethren who came back as to the state of things in Jerusalem. The walls were broken down, the gates were burned with fire, and the people were in a deplorable position. He had the report, he knew all about the need, but he was totally unable to do anything. Only God could do it. Do believe, dear friends, that that is a position which gives great promise. That is a position to which God works. Those who are going to be most used of the Lord and most fruitful in fellowship with the Lord will come to the place, not once nor twice, but again and again, where they know they can do nothing; only the Lord can do it. But their soul is in travail over the whole thing. It is not a matter of throwing up the hands and sitting back and saying, 'I can do nothing, therefore I do not care'. That is not Nehemiah, not at all. He turned his travail into prayer; and you know when travail becomes prayer and prayer is travail, things are very real, things are very pure - because that kind of prayer and travail deals with all the *self* elements.

How often there are elements of ambition in our wanting to do something, that we should come into the work, that we should come into the picture, that we should come into the satisfaction of doing something, that we should be in some position; and when the Lord deals with us like this and the whole agony turns to prayer, in that prayer all these self elements are dealt with very thoroughly and go out. The very fact that it is travail prayer when nothing else can be done proves that there is no self in this. Our praying is travail. It is not asking for something for ourselves - it is agony for what is of God.

Presently Nehemiah will be charged with having personal interests. His enemies will say that he is wanting to set himself up as the king, and he is appointing prophets to preach him. What a subtle assault of the devil to bring an accusation upon the man to undo him! If it were true, how he would be undone by that assault of the devil! If the devil ever has real ground to say, 'After all, it is Number One that is governing this whole thing: it is your own ambition, it is yourself!' - if he has ground for saying that, we may well be floored and undone. But it had to be so with Nehemiah that such accusations had no ground. He was able to say: 'You feigned this out of your own mind' (Nehemiah 6:8). 'This is not true. God has dealt with me in the depths. He has sifted my soul of all such interests for myself'. The ground had to be undercut from the enemy so that he had nothing personal upon which to work.

Now, Nehemiah's countenance was sad before the king, and the king noted it. But his countenance did not speak of self-pity or of personal frustration. It spoke of grief concerning spiritual conditions.

The Lord knows how things are at the present time. The Lord sees how different they are from what He intended. He knows all about this. He must bring some people to see as He sees, and feel as He feels, and commit themselves to that which He shows them, at any cost. This introductory word is the challenge. We cannot go on with the work or the warfare until we are like this, really like this - people after the kind of Nehemiah. The Lord make us that.

Chapter Two

THE STATE OF THE WALL

Nehemiah's Action

Now from Nehemiah's concern we move on to his action - for, as we have said, Nehemiah was no detached, negative critic of the situation. He was not just one who was pointing out all that was wrong, without knowing what ought to be done for the glory of God, and doing something about it. So he took action, and if there is one book in the Bible, or at any rate in the Old Testament, which is characterized by action more than another, I think this book is such.

When Nehemiah took action, he first of all fully and accurately acquainted himself with the situation. We have such words as these: *"Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, that were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem"* (Nehemiah 1:2).

And then when he came to Jerusalem, we see him moving, in these descriptive words: *"And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem; neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night... and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire"* (Nehemiah 2:12-13).

So Nehemiah took pains to get to know exactly what the situation was. It is true that he had information. Report came to him, or he made it his business to get to know from those who had first-hand knowledge, as to what the situation was, but as soon as it was possible for him to do so on the spot, he verified the report and accurately informed himself at first-hand exactly how matters stood. And I would suggest that, in like manner, when the Lord is speaking concerning the recovery of His testimony which is the matter before us, those who are going to co-operate with Him must be accurately and fully informed. While their information may come indirectly, they must not be content with the best second-hand report, they must know at first-hand exactly how things are. You and I will never be of much use to the Lord until we know exactly what the spiritual state of things is and what needs to be done. We must really see and know this for ourselves, not just get it from the many people there are who tell us about it.

It is a fact that we can hardly go anywhere today in any part of the world, without finding people deploring the spiritual state of things amongst the Lord's people. Their sense of things is in the main a right one - although, as we said earlier, many of them just complain and murmur and grumble and criticize without having anything to offer in the way of remedy and improvement. Nevertheless, their registration of the spiritual state of the Church is very largely true. It is very widely true, today, that everything is not right with the Church; things are not as they should be, as the Lord would have them. But we cannot go on a general - even though it be a very general - feeling that things are not right. This must come into our own being; we must know it for ourselves. I am not suggesting that we should go and try to find out all that is wrong and make a long list of all that is so defective and deplorable today; but I am saying this - that if we are to co-operate with God in getting things as He would have them, the matter must be a first-hand one in our own hearts. We must know it for ourselves. We must not just be professional grumblers, but those who have real travail of heart because of what we know to be the case, because of what we see, what is clear to our own eyes and what troubles our own hearts.

So Nehemiah did, in the first place, inform himself directly as to the situation. And it was a situation calculated to take the heart out of anyone. It really could have been so disconcerting that Nehemiah would not have gone on any further with it, but returned to Babylon and said: 'We must make the best of a bad job. Things are not as they ought to be, they are quite hopeless. It is no use trying to do anything about it.' But he did not give it up as a hopeless situation, bad as it was. I am quite sure that if you had been one of the men going round with Nehemiah that night, you might well have said: 'This is something altogether beyond our handling; we will never be able to make anything of this. This is hopeless.' Nehemiah was not like that. I think Nehemiah was one of the most courageous men of the Old Testament - a true hero: faced with a terrible situation, but facing it with confidence in God, because he knew, not only that this was a bad situation, but that God was on the move to put it right, to make something different of it. It was God's will that it should be otherwise; and if God wills a thing, then we have a ground of confidence, however impossible it may seem to us. So he did not give it up, but faced it - faced it squarely.

I have a very great deal in my mind that will not find expression in these messages, but I have been taking in the whole compass of the Bible in connection with this, and I am especially moving in the New Testament, as you will see as we go on. I am thinking of the Apostle Paul, the great Nehemiah of this dispensation. What a situation he had to face amongst Christians! What a condition of things he had to meet and deal with! We feel, as we read his first letter to the Corinthians, that we would have given it up and said: 'This is a hopeless mess - is this Christianity at all?' But see how Paul heroically and courageously faced that situation. He did not give it up.

Today, we might be greatly discouraged, we might easily feel that it is not possible to have a full, clear testimony that glorifies God, seeing how the Church is destroyed, how "the wall... is broken down", how "the gates are burned with fire" - that is, how the whole testimony is rent, and torn, and in ruins, as we might say. Yes, the situation is a disconcerting one and we have to face this question: Does God want it to be otherwise? Does God mean it to be otherwise? Is it the will of God that it shall be otherwise? Has God given it up? Is He desiring and intending - nay more, is He moving to secure a different state of things? If there is anything to prove that God is actively concerned about this matter, then we dare not abandon it. But it takes a great deal of courage, all the courage that God can give us, to face the present situation. Those who know it know that I am not exaggerating.

The Vision and Inspiration of Nehemiah

And then, once more, in his action Nehemiah brought others into his vision and into his concern. First of all, it was in his own heart and it was hidden in his heart. He said nothing to anyone of what God had put on his heart. It was something between himself and the Lord, in the first place, and it was not until he had reached a certain position, and made a certain decision consequent upon his investigation, that he opened his heart to others. I think that is a splendid thing, a thing of which to take note. It is so easy to have ideas and then to begin to broadcast your ideas and unload them on to other people. It is quite another thing, between yourself and God, to have got to grips with the situation and become fully impressed with the greatness of it, and then to resolve that this thing must be done and to bring others into your vision and inspiration.

You see, Nehemiah was made to be a tremendous inspiration. You read through this book and see what you might almost call the magnetism of this man's personality, the inspiration that he was. People leapt to the impossible under the

inspiration and vision of this man. There were times when they were very low in despondency, but then he pulled them out of their slough. What a force he was as a true leader to bring others into his vision! And do you not feel strongly that that is the real need today - of people who have vision, who have weighed up everything, who have faced the whole issue, and then who have such confidence in God, with the assurance that God wants and means something different, that they have come out with their positive impact upon others, so that others come into line? That truly is a great need. It is the easiest thing in the world to be a passenger, always to be carried. Ah, it is so easy to be a parasite, just living on and draining others. But it is quite another thing to be an inspiration, to be one who really does help others into the thing that God is after, to be an inspiration to them to come along to help in the work of the Lord. Nehemiah was that; and I put it to you that if we have any sense of things being other than according to God's mind, and that God would have them otherwise, we ought to be positive people in this matter, and be an inspiration to others about it.

And so Nehemiah, having taken the full measure of it, and having weighed it all up, and having impressed himself with the greatness of the task in hand, without despairing, turned to it and so inspired the other men to whom he opened his heart that they said: "Let us rise up and build". Oh, for a people like that! A people today who know all about it, and, seeing how things are, will say: 'Let us do something about it - let us rise up and build!'

Well, that is the beginning of his action, and you will agree that that is action indeed. Of course, we are not just looking at this as a human matter, because none of us can be like this for very long, at any rate not unless we are energized by the Spirit of God. Consider the Apostle Paul again, who knew all about it, all about the conditions, and knew how discouraged and despondent the people of God could be about the situation. His prayer was this: "that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory... that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Ephesians 3:16); "that ye may be... strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and long-suffering with joy" (Colossians 1:9, 11). The mighty energies of the Spirit of God inwardly are the only energies by which we shall be able to go on. We must allow a large place for the inward working of God in the life of Nehemiah, because we know full well that only so can we do anything about this situation.

The Object - the Wall

Now let us come to the main features of the whole matter of this book. We said, in our first study, that they are three: namely, the Wall, the Work and the Warfare, or the Object, the Conduct and the Conflict. We begin with the object, the Wall, and we must be very clear as to what is represented by this wall that Nehemiah was going to repair - what the wall stands for. May I say three preliminary things about the wall, as to what the wall really was and what it is now.

First of all, the wall was a *definition*: that is, it defined. A definition: that means, spiritually interpreted - interpreted in our own time, according to Divine thoughts - a clear defining of what is Christ and what is not Christ. That wall of Jerusalem defined a certain area, a certain territory; and it stood there originally to say: 'Now, what is within this wall, this mark, is of a certain order, of a certain character; within this, things are so and so.' Of course, the character was given by the temple, right there at the centre, so to speak; but the wall was a defining factor, and we need not stay with detail about that. It is only necessary for us to say that in the recovering and completing of the Lord's testimony there is the

necessity for clear definition of what is of Christ and what is not. Things have become terribly confused. Here the wall is broken down and there is much rubbish. I am going to deal with the rubbish presently, but here is the fact - much rubbish where the wall had been. Multitudes of people today have no clear discernment, perception or apprehension as to what is Christ and what is merely 'Christianity'. In evangelical Christianity things have become terribly mixed up, and what is necessary, it is evident, is the reconstituting of that which clearly and exactly defines what Christ is; that Christ shall be clearly understood and known and all the confusing and complicating and mixing elements shall be eliminated.

The wall was a defining thing. That means, spiritually, that it stands to represent the real character of Christ. I said a few pages earlier that there is very much behind what I am saying that cannot now find expression. but I have been thinking about walls - looking at walls in general through the Bible and passing from all the historic walls to the great inclusive wall at the end of the book of the Revelation, the wall of the New Jerusalem; and I find amongst other things that a wall is to define the character or nature of what is within. That is true, is it not, of the great wall of the New Jerusalem at the end of the Bible? Its main feature, we may say, is its character: its glory, its beauty, its purity. It is the character of Christ that is the first thing about His testimony, and that has to become established and very clearly defined.

And then - you may think that this is a distinction without a difference, but there *is* a difference - the wall represented a *demarcation*, that is, a distinction. Here things are not mixed at all; here at the wall there is a declaration and an establishment of the fact, that this testimony is a distinctive testimony. It is not a general thing; it is not something that brings into itself all sorts of different things. It is clear; it is distinctive. It has one thing to say, and that one thing is: 'Only what is of Christ can pass this, can be within this'.

Now that is very, very searching, and very arresting. We shall find as we go on that this brother of Nehemiah's, Hanani, was eventually made a policeman. And he, as policeman, was in charge of the gates, to deal with intruders, with merchants - and there are plenty of merchants finding their way into the testimony of Jesus, who have their own interests to serve, their own business to do, and all sorts of merchandise to bring into the confines of God, of Christ. And this wall said. 'No!' You read on to the end of the book, and see how Nehemiah and his policeman dealt with the merchants! They were having none of that - they chased them, they used strong measures with the merchants. But they did not do any more than the Lord Jesus did with the merchants of His day, with His knotted cord. No, the simple word is this: the wall spoke of a distinction between the precious and the vile; and that is covering much ground; it puts very much between what is of the Spirit of God and what is of another spirit.

And in the third place, this wall represented a *defence*. It was something which was placed as it were in a position of responsibility. It was responsible to protect the Lord's interests and the Lord's people from that which would invade, which would attack, which would corrupt, which would change the character. The Lord needs a testimony which challenges everything, a testimony which will not let anything pass that is not wholly of the Lord. That is where things have gone wrong with the Church, with the people of God, with the Lord's interests. So much has been allowed to creep in, to have a place, that is not of the Lord, and there has not been a sufficiently strong testimony to what is of the Lord to meet it.

Again, in your New Testament you find that at the beginning, when the spiritual wall was first built, it was such a strong, clear thing in the power of the Holy

Spirit, that first of all there were many that durst not join themselves - they *durst not*, they were afraid. The situation was such that fear was created in the heart where things were not right with God. On the other hand, people coming in fell down on their faces and said 'God is in the midst of you'. The Lord needs a testimony like that, does He not? - something so clear, so strong, that those who do not mean business with God are afraid, and in our common expression, just 'clear off'. "They went out... that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19), and that is a very healthy sign. Things are in a good condition when that happens. Ah, yes, but when things are in a bad condition you are afraid to lose anybody - you hold on to anybody. The Lord said: 'No; don't try to hold on to everybody, don't try to bring in everybody'. This testimony, this wall, is a defence, a protection against anybody, anything. How necessary it was to Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day! The whole book shows that. You look at these other people, and see what this wall meant to Tobiah and to the rest of the company. They knew the implications of this wall; they knew that they were not getting into this.

Well, that is the meaning of the wall in the first place. But let us go just a little further in the matter. The wall represents Christ on two sides. On the one side, it represents Christ outwardly to the people of the world and the nations. On the other side, it represents what Christ is to the Lord's own people themselves. In a phrase, the wall is a testimony in fullness to the Son of God: what the Son of God means, as seen in this world, to the world and to the people of God.

The Need for Repairing the Wall

It is necessary that I should put in a word here, lest there should be a misapprehension of our meaning. Nehemiah was not building the entire wall all over again from the foundations. If you look closely, you will see that it is the *repairing* of the wall that is going on, the repairing and making complete of what had been broken down. Why do I say that? Well, it is not given to us, we are not called upon, to build this thing from the foundations. Thank God, the foundation was laid, and thank God, the wall was built, in the beginning. The book of the Acts shows the wall, the testimony, in fullness and completeness, and in glory and strength and grandeur: a mighty defence, a mighty revelation of Christ to the nations and a mighty meaning of Christ to His own people. It was there at the beginning. Nehemiah did not come to commence, to initiate this thing. He came to a scene where what had once been full, clear, perfect, was broken down, ruined, and his work was to repair it and make it complete again; and that is where we are. If we are called into anything, we are called into *that*. We are not called upon to do what the Apostles did. They did their work, and it stands; but since their time there has been a good deal that speaks of the conditions of Nehemiah's day - a good deal of collapse, of breakdown, of disintegration and of spoliation; and the Lord calls in to recover, to recover what was. That, surely, is the work to which we are called.

So we look first of all at the wall in brokenness. Here it is: "*Then said I unto them, Ye see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach*" (Nehemiah 2:17). The last word touches the spot, does it not? See the great enemy of God, of Christ, of the testimony of our Lord, having it as his one abiding object to bring reproach upon the Name of the Lord - anyhow, by any means, whether by direct assault or by subtle under-working; somehow to bring the Lord's Name and testimony into reproach. "*That we be no more a reproach*". What a motive to govern the people of God, to save the Lord and His people from the reproach of this broken-down condition!

Idolatry the Cause of the Broken-Down Condition

We must, before we can move to the recovery, examine and trace the fundamental and ultimate reason for this state of things. We are taking our cue from the illustration in this book and in the other books leading up to it. There is one word that goes to the root of the whole matter, and that word is *idolatry*. If you look at the wall in its ruins, its wreckage; if you meditate and contemplate and ask questions - 'Why? Why this? How is it that this is come about? What are the reasons for this state of things?' - the inclusive and fundamental answer is - idolatry.

Is it not very impressive to recognize that, because of the idolatry in Israel, the nation was sent to the very heart of idolatry to be cured of it? Babylon was the world centre of idolatry - you know that from the great image set up. Now Israel had allowed idolatry in her midst, and the Lord sent her to the world centre of idolatry to be cured of idolatry. I say that it is impressive, and it just means this: that sometimes the Lord's way of curing is to give an overdose of the thing with which we flirt. They hankered and they flirted. The prophets cried, pleaded, wept, appealed, agonized, that the people would break with this thing, cease their flirtations with the gods of the heathen nations round about them: but they would not, they were wedded. 'All right', said the Lord; 'have what you are after - have it to the full' and indeed they had it to the full, and it cured Israel of idolatry in that form for the rest of their history. I am not saying that it cured them of the spirit of idolatry; we shall see that later. But that form of open complicity with the power of evil was destroyed by their being given that upon which their hearts were set.

Here is the extreme instance of the working of a certain law. The Psalmist said about Israel in the wilderness: "And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). They refused to let go. They would have; they said 'yes' in the face of God's 'no'. 'We will have.' 'All right', said the Lord - and they were the losers in their getting.

Now that principle does work, you know, and I am not so sure that it is not working today. In the Church, in Christianity, the world has found its place. The Church of God went out to the world and brought the world in. There has been complicity with the spirit of this world, it has found a large place in Christianity; and while it is not my desire to speak in this way, we must be very faithful. Perhaps all unperceived, all unrecognized - God grant that it is so - even in evangelical Christianity, there is a good deal of worldly principle, the bringing in of unspiritual things - names, titles, resources and what not, to do the work of God. There is a hidden complicity to get favour, to get advantage; there is behind all that another spirit - the spirit of idolatry - which is getting a grip upon the Lord's people. Very well: what has happened? The Lord has let the Church have what it wants, and today it is feeling that it has lost its power, lost its position, because the world has too much of a place. In its gaining it has lost: that is very patent, is it not?

That principle works - and mark you, it works personally too, if your heart is so set upon something that you will not take 'no' from the Lord; you insist, you will have it; and your threat to the Lord, even if it is not put in the form of a threat, is that unless the Lord gives you that, or does that for you, you are not going on. If there is anything like that, the Lord will give it to you, He will let you have it. It will be a curse to you. Abraham did that over Ishmael - and what a curse you see, there is the principle. Now the point is this, that these people allowed idolatry to come into their lives, in spirit and in principle; and the Lord, through His prophet, "rising up early", appealed; but they refused to listen to the voice of

the prophet, so the Lord said: 'All right, have what you want - away to Babylon!' They lost everything.

What is idolatry? If it is not bowing down to idols of wood and stone, it takes many, many subtle forms, and very often indirect ways. It is just heart communion with anything that takes God's place, that gets in God's way. What a lot of ground that covers! The ultimate effect is that the Lord is frustrated, the Lord is hindered, the Lord cannot have what He is after. That is idolatry in principle. It displaces the Lord, it makes difficulties for the Lord.

I said earlier that, although Israel was cured of that outer form of idolatry, the principle or spirit of idolatry was not eradicated: for in the days of our Lord they were worshipping tradition - and tradition can be an idol. Yes, tradition can be an idol: you can be so committed and devoted to tradition that the Lord does not have a chance. It obstructs the Lord's way, like the rubbish that Nehemiah could not pass - the beast that he rode could not pass the rubbish. Very often the rubbish in the Lord's way is the rubbish of a dead tradition, of a dead history, something that belongs to the past and is not alive now. That is the principle of idolatry. That was the fundamental and ultimate cause of the brokenness of the wall, the wreckage, the rubbish, the debris: idolatry, heart union and communion with that which is not of the Lord.

Remember that this book of Nehemiah is full of bad conditions, of evils and errors, and these things correspond to the state of the wall. I want you to get this, although I shall come back to it again. You look at that wall and examine it, and you can look through it, so to speak; and in looking through you see that the conditions of the Lord's people tally exactly with the condition of the wall. There are all sorts of wrongs and evils and errors, and that is the rubbish, that is the broken-down state of things. You see, the people's state corresponded to the state of the wall; the wall was just an illustration of spiritual conditions: so that when you come to 'look through' this wall, you find that what you are dealing with really is not a wall but spiritual conditions; and as Nehemiah went forward to deal with the wall, he found that he had at the same time to deal with spiritual conditions in the people. They were one and the same thing. It would in effect be foolish to put up a beautiful wall when the conditions behind the wall were a contradiction. You see the point? The two things must be consistent - the spiritual state and your testimony. The testimony must have a spiritual condition behind it. A spiritual condition must support the testimony. You cannot work upon building up something that is not in the energy of truth.

We shall see further what the wall means, and what the wall is made of; but for the time being, the Lord bring us into His own vision, into His own intention, and energize us with the same energy as that which possessed His servant Nehemiah and His servant Paul, and many others whom He has used to recover something more of the testimony of His Son.

Chapter Three

THE FUNDAMENTAL MATTER OF WORSHIP

We are occupied with what is represented by a clause in a statement made by Nehemiah when, being invited by his enemies, in their subtlety, to come and meet them in some place apart, in order to ensnare him, he said: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down". We are shortening that statement to "a great work": for this book of Nehemiah sets forth, in figure, in historic illustration, the great work of God. Nehemiah, as we have seen right at the beginning of the book, says that he disclosed to no one what God had put in his heart to do. Later he did disclose it, but this great work to which he refers was something that God had laid upon his heart.

Before we proceed with this matter of the rebuilding of the wall of testimony, I want to put in here a very important and inclusive parenthesis - not based upon any particular clause or text, but upon that which pervades and underlies the whole: that is, *worship*.

For when we come to think about it, Jerusalem, defined by its wall, just speaks inclusively and comprehensively of the matter of worship. Indeed, Jerusalem's very existence was for that purpose. Babylon, as we saw earlier, was the seat and centre of false worship, idolatry, something that was not of God. Jerusalem always stands over against Babylon in the Bible as the opposite of that. It stands for the worship of God; it is the place of God's worship. So this wall of Jerusalem is a figure of that which encompasses the worship of God, and is in itself a figure of worship. Worship is the first thing in the whole history of relationship with God, and worship is the last thing. We find reference made in the Bible to worship going on before the world was, before the creation was undertaken - the "sons of God" occupied with worshipping Him before the foundation of the world. Who those sons of God were we do not know, but there is the statement. They sang together for joy, they worshipped the Lord. It was there, it was happening.

Then worship comes in as the governing factor in the Creation. As we know, it was a breakdown in worship which was the basic sin of Adam: then, when that matter has been upset here in this earth, God institutes the whole course of worship during the ages and maintains a testimony to Himself. One of the last things we have in the Bible is this universal worship of Him. And Jerusalem was, I repeat, so far as type and figure and historic illustration are concerned, the Lord's earthly seat of worship - of the maintenance of worship unto Himself. We are carried in the New Testament and in this dispensation from the earthly to the heavenly, we are come to "the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels to... the church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:22-23): and it is worship. It is worship re-established in heaven.

Worship is Redemption Unto God

So we look at this matter of worship for a few minutes. We are seeing that Nehemiah's work was the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, and really it was a redemptive work - the work of redeeming the situation, redeeming the testimony. It was a work of redemption. Now, we know quite well that redemption is unto God. "Hast redeemed us to God" (Revelation 9, A.V.) - that is the phrase. And worship just simply means that - everything redeemed unto God, brought back to God, recovered for God; and that mighty work of redemption is still operating - in this sense, that it is against a certain natural trend and course of things which has come into the creation through what happened between Satan and Adam. Redemption is recovering from a certain trend. The trend of the creation now is

always downward. In every part of the creation, the natural course is downward. You are contending with that in some way or another every day. Anybody who has a garden knows that it is a constant day-by-day work of redemption from a downward tendency. Any doctor or nurse is day by day contending with the downward course of physical life. Unless the body is looked after, unless there is a 'counter operation' brought in, the course is naturally downward, there is deterioration; and so the medical profession are in their realm occupied with redemption. And so we might go on into every realm, because everywhere and in everything that is the natural way - decline.

And if that is true in the natural creation, the physical creation, how true it is in the spiritual. The Bible is one comprehensive revelation of the fact that, unless there is a counter power brought in from heaven, everything goes down. Again and again and yet again, in the Bible, we find these movements downward taking place - decline, degeneration, and God reacting to redeem from that course, to redeem unto Himself. Worship, then, means the redemption of everything unto God, giving the significance of God to things.

Worship a Matter of Motive

Let us think for a moment of the rudimentary element in worship, leaving religion aside for the moment. Worship goes on altogether apart from any religious system or form. It is there in the very constitution. What is worship in its elementary principle? Well, it is just the element of *motive* in life - that is, worthwhileness to live, it being worth while to live. The very lowest, the very saddest and most tragic state to which anyone can come is to have lost all interest in life, to be saying, 'There is nothing now for which to live, I have nothing to live for'. You could not get lower than that. Life has been given up; life holds nothing worthwhile. That *worthwhileness* is the principle of worship. It is a motive for living, something for which to live, and that is present in all the world, except in those tragic realms where people have already given up life because they have no more interest and no more motive. I say that is the saddest and the most terrible thing that can ever come to anyone. Except where that obtains, worship is just this, that there is something to live for, that there is something worth while in being alive. That is the *principle* of worship.

Now you carry that into a much larger and higher realm. What is there to live for? What is the greatest thing for which to live? And there you bring worship into its right realm, and worship becomes this - 'Why, the greatest thing to justify life and to give meaning and value and worthwhileness to life is the Lord!' Not this world, as something to be worshipped, nor its kingdoms, nor its princes or its god; but the Lord being worthy, the most worthwhile object in life, having all the worthwhileness of our very being and existence: so that He holds the full place, the central place; the Lord is the object always in view.

Worship is not going to some ecclesiastical building week by week, perhaps once or twice, to attend what is called Divine worship. That is not worship. That may be just empty form; that may be patronising God. It may be anything short of the reality. Worship is a life thing, not a weekly thing; certainly not once a quarter at the 'quarterly communion', or on the great feast days of the Church - Easter, Christmas and so on. Worship is this, that *life* is for the Lord. Every moment, every hour, every day, every week and every year - it is all for the Lord. That is worship. Our first thought in the morning is the Lord, and our last thought at night is the Lord; and although there are many occupations of mind and hand during the hours of the day, there is something behind the one who has been redeemed unto God that is always reaching out to Him.

The lives of such are the prayer of worship. They are not always putting it into language and phrases, and they are not always on their knees, and they are not always in meetings; but from behind them, so to speak, there is that which is reaching out to the Lord - they long for the Lord. It is true of them, as it was true of those in Israel in the days of Jerusalem's glory, though they were far from Jerusalem, that they long for Jerusalem. 'Oh, to be there, the place of the altar, the place of God, the place of worship!' Their longings were there, and away they could never be satisfied. They expressed this true principle. When in Babylon they were taunted, this remnant whose heart was in Jerusalem - taunted by the Babylonians: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion" (Psalm 137:3). 'Sing us one of your folk-songs of Jerusalem'. "Upon the willows... we hanged up our harps... How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Their longing was to be there. They were drawn. We should understand that in a spiritual way. Our Jerusalem is no focal point on this earth, but there ought to be that about us which is always out to the Lord; which asks: 'How much more of the Lord can there be in our lives?'

If you read this book of Nehemiah in the light of that, it will be entirely revolutionized for you, marvellously illuminated. Nehemiah begins with this tremendous yearning for the Lord, away there in Babylon. He comes to Jerusalem and takes in the situation and deplores that this is not to the honour of the Lord, and he weeps and he prays and he sets to work and he draws others in, and he is not at rest until this thing is finished at all costs - a testimony to the Lord raised up in fullness, in completeness. It is all a spirit of worship; and the people who came in, of whose work we have yet to speak, they had a mind to work, they were of a willing spirit; but, you see, it was the spirit of worship. They, in their own way, were fulfilling what Paul says in his letter to the Romans: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1, A.R.V.). They were giving their bodies to this work, and it was spiritual worship in motive. Worship, then, springs out of a motive.

The Lord Draws Near on the Basis of Worship

Now that is just the divide point in the Bible. When God made man and brought him into fellowship with Himself, everything was for the Lord. Man had no other object in view for which to live and work than the Lord. It was a beautiful state of things. It was man and the Lord, and the Lord, it would seem, coming in the cool of the evening, walking in the garden to receive those whom He had made and there was joy in their life and in their work. The Lord had pleasure in that. It is always shown in the Bible that the Lord has pleasure in, and draws near to, those who are in a state of worship. That is to say, the Lord's drawing near is on the ground that their heart is out to Himself. You never find the Lord drawing near when it is otherwise, unless it be in judgment. But when the Lord comes in blessing, in benediction, it is because there are hearts out to Himself, and if the Lord came there into the garden, as He is shown to have done, it was because there were hearts toward Him, because He found there that which satisfied Him. When the Lord Jesus was here it was like that. He loved to be where He found a heart open to Him, ready to receive Him, ready to answer to His desires. That is why He went to Bethany so often. There was a heart there for Him, for the Lord. There was a spirit of worship.

The Devil's Deception of Mankind

But then there came the terrible break, and the enemy came into the garden to divert from God, to divert to himself. But how? - and this is a terrible thing to recognize. He brought man's own personal interests into view, man's own

personal interests first, and showed him that he could have something - he could get something. Up to that point it was all that the Lord could get, and now the situation is that man can have something. The enemy was working in a deep and subtle way to draw away from God to himself; and so, getting man into alliance with himself; he deceived man into thinking that he was going to have the benefit, when all the time it was the devil who was going to have the benefit. That is the deception of mankind. He was turned from God to get something, a good time, this world, and all that, and in the end he finds he has been duped, and the devil has got it all - and him into the bargain. That is the tragedy and the deception. But you see the point: it was in order to draw away from God by this self-interest, this self-ishness - and that broke the worship. From that time it has been like that. The world is a selfish world, a world that draws to itself, that does not give God His place, does not let Him have everything, first and last. That is how things are.

But now God wants His spiritual Jerusalem: He wants that recovered where everything, voluntarily and gladly - delightingly - is for the Lord; a people who delight in the Lord. Our Lord Jesus was the embodiment of this principle. "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psalm 11:8). His delight was in the Lord. He is the true embodiment of the spirit of the heavenly Jerusalem, where everything, not under constraint but wholeheartedly, is unto the Lord.

A Divided Heart

Now you look at this wall in its ruin, in its brokenness, as we are doing at this time, and you say again, 'Why this state of things? Why this picture of tragedy? What is come to pass that everyone seeing it wags the head or heaves a sigh? What has happened that that which was once so glorious has come to this? Why is it?' And the answer is: 'Their worship went away from the Lord; the very thing for which Jerusalem existed, that is, to be wholly for the Lord, was broken into; they allowed other objects of worship to seize upon their hearts and lives'. Yes, the Lord was displeased, and therefore Jerusalem had no justification in continuing in the sight of God. God sees no reason why it should go on at all, and so He hands it over to destruction. It was not what it was meant to be.

And may that not be the explanation of a good deal of weakness - yes, in our lives, and in the Church as a whole, in that which bears the name of the Lord; defeat, brokenness, the absence of those signs that the Lord is present those marks of the Lord's pleasure? May it not be that there is a dividedness of heart, a reservation in our lives? that there is, after all, somewhere deep down, some self-principle at work? May it not be that? I am not judging but I do know the deception of these hearts of ours. They are indeed "deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah 17:9). Very often, when we think that what we are doing is for the Lord, we are having a good deal of pleasure in it ourselves, and if in the service of the Lord the element of personal pleasure is withheld or covered, we have a very bad time - after all, it was somehow or other for ourselves. Yes, it is like that. We do not want to be too introspective, but you see what I mean. The Lord looks on the heart, and when He really sees that the heart is wholly toward Him, that there is no mixture, no other god, no other interest, then the Lord commits Himself to that life, to that Jerusalem. The Lord commits Himself where it is wholly for Him. That is worship.

Now you see, the ground of Satan's detracting and diverting from God is this wretched self-life in one or other of its numerous forms. Over against that, *God's* ground, where He encamps, where He commits Himself, is the ground of Himself alone. God commits Himself to Himself, and to no one else. If the Lord is here, if the Lord has His place fully and wholly, utterly, if it is all for the Lord, the Lord

will commit Himself to that ground; not to our ground and certainly not to Satan's ground; but to Himself. If it is for Himself, then He will be for Himself, and we all agree that that is perfectly safe and anything else would not be safe at all. The Lord is the only safe ground upon which He Himself can work and be present.

A Disposition for the Lord

Now, with just one little further word about this motive, I will close. The Apostle, in that great word on worship in Romans 12:1-2, follows on - and we must not stop short half-way through the statement, we must watch the conjunction as he goes on - "... which is your spiritual worship. *And* be not fashioned according to this age: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" - the 'making anew' of your mind. A 'mindedness' is the principle and motive of worship. What are we disposed to? Is our whole disposition for the Lord, all our 'disposedness' unto the Lord? "Be... transformed by the renewing of your mind" - your mindedness, your inclination, your disposition - unto a new disposition, altogether different from that which came in with Adam in what we call the Fall.

Thank God for this; it is true. It is more true, perhaps, than we often realize or recognize. I think that very often we are troubled and bothered about something that is not true as to ourselves. We are thinking untruths about ourselves. Of course, we know our proneness to sin, we know the evil that is in our flesh, we know how wicked we are and how unworthy, and all that; but then we allow that to go too far. I ask you this: with all our unworthiness, all our sinfulness, all that is evil in our flesh, have we not a heart for the Lord after all? We feel we blunder, we err - yes, but we have a heart for the Lord. Where did that come from? There was a time when we had no heart for the Lord, when we had no disposition, no tendency, that way; we were not inclined after the Lord. But something has happened in us deeper and stronger than all our weaknesses and our waywardness and our faults and our follies and our sins. There is a reaction that rises up every time we make a mistake, and sends us back to the Lord in grief, in sorrow, in disappointment, in longing, and we are not happy again until we have found the Lord.

Where does that disposition come from? It is something done by Him. That is the basis of worship; that is the ground upon which the Lord will get everything. So do not let us be discouraged by ourselves too much. You will never think that I am saying that we are to condone our sinfulness and our foolishness and to give place to them; but it is a glorious fact that, while all this is true, and Satan can tell us so much about ourselves that is bad, nevertheless we can reply in the words of the hymn:

I know it all, and thousands more:
Jehovah findeth none.

We can come back against all accusation and say, 'Nevertheless God has done something in me that has set my heart toward Him. With all my failures, my heart is toward Him. With all my breakdowns, I am for the Lord'. And so we go on. This spirit, this law of worship, consumes and consumes, and we find at last in His presence that there is nothing else left but Himself, just Himself.

That is a simple word, but that after all underlies all that is here about Jerusalem. All that we shall have to say, or could say, as to the details of this matter of the rebuilding of the wall has its roots in the soil of worship. This Jerusalem is to be a praise in the earth; it is to speak of the glory of God. It is all to point toward the Lord. It is all to testify to His glory and honour. That is what Jerusalem exists for, and that is what we who are of the spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem exist for - to

bring everything back to the Lord, to bring delight to His heart, and to constitute a testimony that He is satisfied.

Chapter Four

THE PRINCIPLE OF RESURRECTION

"... and salt without prescribing how much" (Ezra 7:22).

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men" (Matthew 5:13).

"Salt is good: but if the salt have lost its saltiness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves" (Mark 9:50).

We come back to the book of Nehemiah, and in connection with the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem under the inspired leadership of Nehemiah, we want to look at one more inclusive factor which this work represents. We are speaking about the recovery of the Lord's testimony - what Nehemiah spoke of as the "great work" which God hath put into his heart to do - and when we come to consider this recovery on the positive side, there is one great principle of recovery which includes all the other work. It is the principle of resurrection. It does not require very much profound thought to recognize that the rebuilding of the destroyed wall of Jerusalem comes into line with a testimony of resurrection, and to see how 'all of a piece' this is with Israel's history, because we are seeing - I trust we can say that - that this wall is an emblem of the spiritual history of the people. What is true of the wall at this time is true of the people. The wall only expresses the condition of the people - spiritually broken down, with many gaps, nothing complete or perfect, nothing to full satisfaction, and therefore nothing to the glory of God.

We pointed out, earlier, that Nehemiah was contemporary with Malachi, and Malachi's prophecies give us a very clear, though very terrible, account of the spiritual condition of the people of God at that time. So this wall, representing the state of the people, reveals very clearly the need for a resurrection. Israel's history repeatedly called for that, but in this very connection you will remember that, in looking on beyond the captivity, the greater prophets had spoken of their return as resurrection. For instance, Ezekiel, with the captivity fully in view, had cried to the people, as commanded by the Lord: "Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves" (Ezekiel 37:12); and in that great picture-parable of this - the valley of dry bones - we have undoubtedly the matter of resurrection in relation to Israel after the captivity, after the exile. So that their coming back a remnant from Babylon to Jerusalem, and building or rebuilding the wall, answers to the prophecies concerning resurrection, although in the temporal and earthly aspect the fulfilment is very imperfect. A much greater fulfilment is still in view.

But here is the point - it is a matter of resurrection. The going into captivity was first of all judgment, judgment for sin, and it is therefore represented as followed by death: for death follows in the wake of judgment, and Israel is represented as having gone into death, into a grave; their exile being in the nature of a spiritual grave. If we ask what death is, it is being put away from God, it is separation from God. And so it was with them. They were out of the place where God had appointed to meet them; they were away from the Lord. And if to be put away from the Lord in judgment is anything, it certainly is death.

The Resurrections of the Earthly Jerusalem

Now whenever God has moved again to recover His testimony in any part or in greater fullness, such movement has always been marked by that which is inherent in resurrection, namely, newness of life - or, to put it in another form, victory over death. It has always been like that, and it always is like that. A movement of God in relation to His testimony in greater fullness always has the character of a resurrection, the nature of a new life.

The historical records of Jerusalem show that the city has been again and again the scene of sieges, over-runnings and destructions. The very survival of Jerusalem just as an earthly city is nothing short of a miracle. There are other great cities which, so far as this world is concerned, have been far greater and more glorious than Jerusalem. Babylon, for instance, Ur of the Chaldees, and we might even say Rome, with others. They were great and mighty cities, from the standpoint of men greater and mightier than Jerusalem. But, so far as their former glory is concerned, they have gone down once and for all. Babylon - where is Babylon? Ur - where is Ur? A year or two ago I flew over Ur of the Chaldees - and what could be seen? Nothing but excavations of centuries gone by. And Rome - what is Rome now compared with the great and glorious imperial city of past centuries? a shadow filled with monuments and ruins, things which speak of the past glory. These cities have gone down, to rise again no more as they were.

But Jerusalem - she has come up, again and again she has come up after siege and destruction, showing quite clearly that God - the God of resurrection - is interested in Jerusalem. He is maintaining, even in the world, in a temporal Jerusalem - a poor thing from man's standpoint; I do not think any one would really choose to live in Jerusalem apart from sentiment - He is maintaining, in a Jerusalem that has been raised as from the dead again and again, a parable of the greater truth.

The Full Triumph of the Heavenly Jerusalem Over Death

And when we move from the earthly to the heavenly: when we move from the old dispensation - the dispensation of that Jerusalem, as Paul puts it "that now is", here on the earth - away to that other Jerusalem of which the Apostle speaks, in heaven, the "Jerusalem which is above" (Galatians 4:25-26), or to that Jerusalem to which we are now come, according to Hebrews 12:22, or to the Jerusalem which appears at last in fullness of glory (Revelation 21:10): what do we come to? We come to the full triumph over death, because it is in that final heavenly Jerusalem that the tree of life is found, and the river of water of life. Everything speaks of death fully and finally conquered. So that the wall in recovery is but a parable and a picture of this great truth, substantiated in history, but fully realized in glory in the spiritual realm. This is a monument to the principle that when God is associated, really associated, with anything or with anyone, or when they are associated with God, the mark will be resurrection - newness of life. It will be life. A testimony in life is the testimony that is here represented as being recovered, throwing its light right on to our own time, which is marked by so many features that characterized the days of Nehemiah spiritually. God will move again - shall we not say God is moving again? - to bring about in a new way, within a people, this great testimony to the indestructibility of His own life; something which declares that His life, though it may seem oft-times to go into death, to be swallowed up, to be overwhelmed, nevertheless comes up again; this life cannot be fully and finally destroyed. A testimony in life. It is a testimony to something that God does, that is the point.

Resurrection: the Unique Province of God

We have so often said that resurrection is the unique province of God. We may do a great deal at resuscitations artificial respirations, but we can do nothing in resurrections. Once death has taken place, that is the end of all man's power and hope, and then it is for God to act, or it is nothing. God is the God of resurrection - that is His alone prerogative: so that anything that really is a work of God bears this mark, that nothing can account for it but an indestructible, imperishable life. There is something there which is more than of man.

Sometimes man comes into the things of God - we shall see that in this book as we proceed - usurping the place of God in His Jerusalem, in relation to His testimony; and then death begins and destruction concludes the process; God hands the thing over to death. It is a solemn thing to realize that there comes a point where God has to stand back and hand over to death, because man has taken hold and got in His way. But when man does this the fires of judgment work. The result of such interference with God will work itself out; and then, when that work of fiery purification is accomplished, God returns and raises from the dead. That is the history of many things with which God has commenced, but from which in the course of events He has had to stand back, and then again He has come in. It is like that.

And it is like that sometimes in individual Christian lives. God finds that He can go on no further; He has gone as far as He can. Now He is obstructed; there is a will there that refuses to yield to Him. There is something there that will not let go to God. He stands back, and if it be through long, long decades - witness Israel's forty years in the wilderness, and seventy years of captivity; long years of barrenness, emptying and desolation - the Lord does not give up. He would recover, He would restore, He would come again, He would have a testimony even there. But oh, what a solemn warning not to lose life, to lose years to lose the fruitfulness which might be, by resisting the Lord, and knowing nothing but a barren death so far as our usefulness to Him is concerned. Something that God has done is the testimony that God would revive, not what man has done for God, but what God Himself has done, and more - a testimony not only in life, but a testimony of life; not only what God has done but what God will do through what He has done. He has raised an instrument, He has brought it back to life, He has a vessel resurrected - now see what He will do through it!

A testimony of life - that surely is the glorious triumph of the ultimate Jerusalem "coming down from God out of heaven". What a chequered history that name Jerusalem has had! But now at last there is triumph in connection with that very name. No longer does it represent or symbolize defeat and failure and tragedy. It is now the symbol of God's triumph. Here at last death is swallowed up in victory. And what happens? Out from that Jerusalem there flows a river of water of life. The nations are deriving the value. The tree is bearing its fruit, watered by that river, and the leaves of the tree are for the health of the nations. It is a testimony of life.

Everything Permeated by Life

Now, there is a good deal of difference between what is commonly called life and what God means by life, and that is why I read those fragments about salt. This life of which we are speaking has in it an element. I only pass from one language to another when I change from using the word 'life' to using the word 'vitality'. It is the same word in two different languages, but it is useful here. This life has a *vital* element in it. There is something here that really has got a sting in it. We sometimes speak of things having a 'kick' in them. There is something there, a

positive element which, if we touch it, makes us realize we are touching something mysterious, something vital. If that touches a situation, it registers; the situation knows that it has been touched by something. It is this element that is represented by salt.

Now, salt is a very interesting thing in the Bible. You notice we quoted from Ezra. Ezra, of course, precedes Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah are working together to the same end. They are all part of the whole. Ezra had to do mainly with the beautifying of the temple after it had been rebuilt, and with certain reforms, and with the recovery of the Word of God. But when God acted sovereignly - according to the first words of the book of Ezra, "that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom" and gave liberty and every provision and facility to those who voluntarily chose to go back to Jerusalem, not by law or constraint, but of a willing heart - in all this marvellous provision that the king made, there was this added, this strange thing. 'Give them this and that in abundance, silver and gold and all the other things': and then this - "and salt without prescribing how much". Limitless salt!

What was that for? Well, you see, salt is a synonym for life; even outside of the Jewish or Hebrew economy, salt was recognized almost universally as the symbol of life. In some realms they made a covenant in blood, by shedding one another's blood and then mingling it. That was a covenant in blood between two people or two communities. In other realms they took salt and mingled it, making a covenant in salt; but the two things meant the same thing. Blood and salt meant life. Without salt no sacrifice was ever regarded by God as acceptable. That meant, in the thought of those times, that God would never accept a dead sacrifice. Every sacrifice offered to God must be a living one. Yes, the animal was slain, and to all intents and purposes it was dead, but salt contradicted death, denied that it was dead, gave it that something, that vital element, that made it a living sacrifice. The Lord Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), and Paul said, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). "Salted with salt" was a phrase of the Lord Jesus (Mark 9:49).

"Salt without prescribing how much". This was in the recovery testimony of Nehemiah. That is, life more abundant; abundant life. That is the testimony that the Lord is seeking, this vital element. "Ye are the salt of the earth". In other words, you are the very life in this dead world. With all the death that is here - and everything as far as God is concerned is in death: only Christians know it, but they do know it: if we are really the Lord's, we know how dead this world is, it is death all around - the Lord says 'In the midst of all that, you are the life, you are very life, of this death-encompassed world; you are the life of the world, you are the salt of the earth'. "Be salted with salt". "Have salt in yourselves". 'Be alive'; to change the language again, 'be vital'.

Such is the testimony to be recovered - something, a mysterious something, that is not in the mineral: for there can be the mineral that has the show, the appearance, of the real stuff, but it has lost its vital quality. "If the salt have lost its savour..." You can have all the pretence, all the profession, all the outward appearance, but something has gone, and that missing something says the testimony that should be within is not there. To recover that something is what the Lord is after: not an outward framework, not so much material with a semblance - it was the charge laid at the door of a church in the book of the Revelation, that they 'had a name to live but were dead' (Rev. 3:1) - not that, but this something, this mysterious something, about the Lord's people which comes from God Himself and which speaks of the presence of God within them.

An Old Testament Illustration

We have illustrations of this in the Old Testament. We have Elisha and the men of Jericho who one day went to him and said, "The situation of this city is pleasant" - 'every prospect pleases' - "but the water is bad, and the land casteth its fruit" (2 Kings 2:19) - the mark of death. Of course you know where that came from. You remember that when Jericho was destroyed, the curse was pronounced upon it, and Joshua said, "Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: with the loss of his firstborn shall he lay the foundation thereof, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" (Joshua 6:26). Death, the mark of the curse, was pronounced upon it, and now these years afterwards the men of the city come and say that in the very waters of this city, with all the prospects that are fine and good, death resides; nothing comes to perfection, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit", all is disappointment. Elisha said, "Bring me a new cruse and put salt therein". They brought him the new cruse and put the salt in, and he emptied cruse and salt into the waters and the waters were healed. Death was destroyed by the salt, but it had to be in a new vessel. This is resurrection - newness of life in a new creation.

We could stay long with that, but you see the point. If Elisha is the prophet of life, as undoubtedly he is, for everything about him and all his works speaks of life conquering death, here is the testimony. The salt is the emblem of life which destroys the power of death and of barrenness, unfruitfulness and disappointment. A wonderful life is this. 'Ye are the life of the earth.'

We have other illustrations, but I am not going to stay to give them. We said in a previous study that the book of Ezra represents the sovereignty of God, while the book of Nehemiah represents the co-operation of man with that sovereignty. Going back to Ezra: if that book is the embodiment of the sovereign activity of God, God acting from heaven on His own, right out from Himself, what is He doing? If He stirred the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, and if Cyrus made this decree, and if the decree was the result of a work of the Spirit of God in Cyrus, then, when Cyrus said, "And salt without prescribing how much", it was a provocation of the sovereignty of God that made him say it. Cyrus was undoubtedly an instrument of Divine sovereignty. You know how Isaiah speaks about him. "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus... I will gird thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isaiah 45:1, 5). An instrument in the sovereignty of God. And now this man, in the hand of God's sovereignty, is saying: "and salt without prescribing how much". All these other things may mean very little if there is no salt, no vitality. This element must so to speak pervade the whole.

God is after this something which is more than the framework of things. It is an indefinable something. Sometimes you may hear hymns - some of the good beautiful hymns - rendered on gramophone records. These hymns may be sung by two different kinds of people. Some of them may be sung by a very capable, a very artistic choir, sung with perfect technique, with beautiful artistry, and with fine voices and harmony. Others, on the other hand, may not be sung with all that professional skill, with all that artistry, or with all that standard and quality of voice - but you can tell the difference between the saved and the unsaved every time. You know that on this one side it is a church choir of unconverted people. I mean this - perhaps that is harsh judgment - there is something lacking. It is wonderful, it is beautiful, but there is something not there that you miss. On the other hand, you know these people are saved people, they are singing because they love the Lord, they have a relationship with the Lord.

Now of course it takes a Christian to discern the difference; but there is a difference. You know it, you have heard it yourself. It is just salt - this indefinable something that makes all the difference between those who are in vital relationship with the Lord and those who are doing the same thing without that relationship. They have got all the semblance, all the appearance. all the bulk, of the salt - yes, but there is something not there. The salt is without savour. We do not want just a technique, accurate, correct doctrine, proper Christian practice, forms, liturgies and all the rest. What is necessary, whether these are present or not, is that there should be this vital something that causes people to realize: 'Well, they may not be artists, they may not be tremendously capable people, there may not be all the marks of wonderful efficiency about them; but you meet the Lord, you register some indefinable thing that answers to your heart, and that is the thing that matters'. The recovery of that testimony counts for more than all the words, the phraseology, the form, the technique. It is quite possible to have a New Testament technique and New Testament churches, Christian doctrine and practice, but still be without that something that registers, and that is the testimony to be recovered.

So we see that the issue is one of life. Now, in order to get that, God often has to take very stringent measures. He will never be satisfied with anything less than that. However much else there may be, He will not be satisfied with less than that, and so He will be prepared to put the thing through the fire, even to seem to part with it for a time, if peradventure He might recover that which has been lost. He is the God of resurrection. Maybe the Lord is dealing with some of us on this line. There was more salt at one time than there is now. There was more sting in our testimony than there is now. The Lord may be leading us through a hard way. Or perhaps there never was that sting that the Lord wanted, and the Lord is trying to teach us that He is the God of resurrection - that we are helpless, useless, worthless, until God Himself acts and we cry out for that something which only He can give. Whatever it may be, this is what the Lord is after, and He will deal with us all the time, in this way and in the other way, with that in view. His dealings will be in order that at the end there shall be a testimony to His absolute triumph over the power of death - that which only the Lord can do; and if you feel today that you are there, that only the Lord can do it, believe me you are in a very hopeful position. Mr. Spurgeon once said that if ever you feel that it requires a miracle to accomplish a certain thing, you are in the right position to ask God for it!

Chapter Five

WHAT THE WALL SPEAKS OF

Reading: Nehemiah 5:2-6; Luke 4:14-21; 2 Kings 4:1-4.

In these messages we are allowing Nehemiah, that great servant of the Lord in the old dispensation, to illustrate for us, and to lead us in relation to, the recovering of the Lord's testimony in fullness. Nehemiah said that he was "doing a great work" and that God had put this in his heart. Our concern is with the great work, spiritually corresponding to that which Nehemiah accomplished historically in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, which God would do in our time. We are going to look now at some of those things which lay behind the broken state of the wall of Jerusalem. We have observed that the condition of the wall was an illustration or representation of the spiritual condition of the Lord's people at that time. The reasons for the condition of the wall were to be found in the life of the people themselves. We look through the wall to see why it was so, and in so doing we have no difficulty in making a transition from that time to our own time, with a view to seeing what the state is and what needs to be done.

A State of Bankruptcy, Bondage and Death

The fifth chapter of Nehemiah brings to us the first of the conditions, the particular conditions, which characterized this broken wall, or the people of God as they were at that time reflected in their wall. They were in bondage and bankruptcy. If you could have looked at that wall, you would have said: 'That is a fairly good picture of the bankrupt state of the Lord's people just now.' And that state was a complete contradiction to the mind and will of the Lord. It was a contradiction to the liberty and affluence of the Lord's people, as He willed it for them. *"We bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants"* (Nehemiah 5:5). And the Lord Jesus came and proclaimed in prophetic words: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,... to proclaim release to the captives,... to set at liberty them that are bruised"* (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18). That is really the mind of the Lord for His people. Bondage always speaks of law and tyranny, and therefore fear. Those things always go together - bondage, law, tyranny, and resultant fear, a life of fear.

The Rebuilt Wall A Bulwark Against Fear

You will recall another of those incidents in the life of the prophet Elisha, recorded in the second book of the Kings, chapter 4. You know the story, but here it is, gathered into a very few sentences. Death has entered in; the creditor has come demanding payment of that which it is impossible to provide. The law is at the door, threatening to bring into bondage, and fear has taken possession. Over against that situation there is Elisha, the man whom we know to represent and embody the law of the Spirit of life, who is always dealing with situations of death and their consequences. And so Elisha comes on the scene, and by providing life, by exercising "the law of the Spirit of life", he makes it possible to meet all the obligations, satisfies the creditor, destroys the fear, and releases the sons.

That is a beautiful picture of much New Testament truth. Indeed the letter to the Galatians is the interpretation of that little incident. That letter, as you know, deals with sonship in bondage, and shows that the way of release is by the Spirit of life, liberty by the Spirit.

Well, that sets the ground for this application of the message. The Lord Jesus, you see, said: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to set at liberty them that are*

bruised". It is the Spirit over against the law, the Spirit of life over against the law of sin and death. The Apostle says: *"For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father"* (Romans 8:15). To the Galatians the Apostle said: *"For freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage"* (Galatians 5:1). Again says the Apostle to the same people, 'We were in bondage under the law, but Christ has come over against our bondage to the law' (4:3-5). There are those words in the letter to the Hebrews, so familiar: *"... and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Hebrews 2:15).

What does that mean - "through fear of death"? If you look at the context in the letter to the Hebrews, it is perfectly plain that it is the fear of the consequence of violating the law. That letter is all over against the law, and those Jews knew quite well what the penalty was for violating the law. We know from reading incidents in the Old Testament what it meant for people who violated the law. In some instances they were taken out and stoned; it was death. And so the law hung over them like a sword; they lived in this fear and dread that they might violate the law, and so incur death. "All their lifetime", because of this law, they were "subject to bondage" "through fear of death". But hear the words of another: *"There is no fear in love: because perfect love casteth out fear"* (1 John 4:18). How true it is!

What is this wall then? Well, in its broken condition it means that something has happened to bring about death. That something is a reign of law which could not be met. The creditor could not be appeased, be satisfied. The law was the creditor. Break the law, and you go into bondage, into servitude; it is death, death to everything, death while you live, to be under that awful burden of the law. Rebuilding the wall, then, just means that in some way a testimony is being recovered that the Lord's people are a free people, that the creditor is paid off and sent about his business, he is satisfied. It means that death has been destroyed, bondage has been broken. They are not only out; they are not merely free, but left poor: they are made affluent with heavenly riches, as the Lord's free and wealthy people.

Do you not agree that there is a need for something like that to be recovered amongst the people of God today? Whether it is Old Testament law or New Testament law, a great many people are not enjoying the liberty of life in the Spirit. Even the New Testament, with its great doctrines, has been crystallized into a system of law, and people are browbeaten by it. Fundamentalism is like that. Fundamentalism, as such, can become just another system of law without life. The truths of it are right, but by itself it falls into the category of that of which the Apostle spoke when he drew a distinction between the letter and the spirit (Romans 7:6).

In effect he said, 'You can have the letter which is perfectly right, perfectly accurate, perfectly true, but even the truth in accuracy can become something that brings you into bondage and robs you of your liberty and your joy and your wealth.' In other words, the fact that you are perfectly orthodox and correct in your doctrine is not proof that you are one of the Lord's free people enjoying this wealth and this affluence of the Lord. You may be going about with that heavy burden of orthodoxy around your neck and not happy in your Christianity at all, lest you might be violating some principle, some truth. You can be a very miserable person in absolute orthodoxy and correctness of teaching and doctrine. No: while the doctrine must be right, and while we must be in the truth, there is that extra factor which means that you and I are God's liberated people; we are enjoying the liberty of the Spirit and the life of the Spirit.

So this wall represents or speaks of a bulwark against fear. Any city wall means that. That is what it is for, if it is worth its name; and, mark you, they used to build walls very soundly and very thoroughly in those days. They were no jerry-built things that would go over, whatever Tobiah may say - "If a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall" (Nehemiah 4:3). Let all the foxes in creation go up against this wall and they will not upset it. Walls are meant to be bulwarks against fear. You get inside that wall, and you are safe, you are free from fear - free from the sense of being brought into captivity. That is the meaning of the wall.

Now the testimony that the Lord would have should be after that kind - that the Lord's people *know* that they are in an absolutely sure and safe place. They need have no fear at all: all fear is destroyed; they are not in the bondage of fear. They have been gloriously delivered. To use the words of the Galatian letter again, they are *sons*. They are not slaves; they have come now to a Father. They are not just pupils - for the Apostle, as you know, says that the law was our tutor (Galatians 3:24). But we are not any longer under the tutor. We are sons, not pupils; we are sons, not prisoners. As sons, we are free.

The wall, then, speaks of safety, security, of deliverance from the bondage of fear - and oh that the Lord might have a people like that!

Now, what is your testimony? The Lord's testimony truly is like that. What is yours? Are you living in bondage - New Testament bondage - bondage to fear? Are you living every day in fear of doing wrong, under the threat of the 'big stick', even the stick of your own conscience? Are you in fear, with a miserable face, because of this awful tyranny? That is not the Lord's will for us. The Lord wants His people completely delivered from fear: for "*ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*" (Romans 8:15).

All Debts Paid

This wall, then, also speaks of debts all paid and the rich emoluments of grace. That is simple, basic Gospel, but it is glorious. All debts paid, the creditor satisfied. The Lord Jesus did that for us in His Cross. He paid all the debt to the law, satisfied the law, and sent the creditor about his business. He set us free from him - the law; set us free from all our debts. Oh, it is a wonderful thing to know that all your spiritual debts are paid. It is a terrible thing to know that you have to face up to that law of God and answer to it - that, if someone does not pay your debts, you have somehow to meet that demand in time and eternity. But the true child of God, who knows what Christ has done for him or for her, is always ready to sing -

Free from the law - oh, happy condition!
Jesus hath bled, and *there* is remission.

The Franchise of the Heavenly Jerusalem

Then this wall, being the wall of Jerusalem, pointing to another Jerusalem, a spiritual heavenly Jerusalem, speaks of the heavenly franchise, the franchise of the heavenly Jerusalem, heaven's free men.

You remember on one occasion, when the Apostle Paul was taken prisoner, he was brought to the Roman centurion, and was going to be examined by scourging; that is, they were going to apply the 'third degree' method of getting out of him what all this was about. Our translation does not give us the full force

of what was taking place. It just tells us that he was 'tied up'. Really literally it is: 'they had stretched him out'; and this method applied by the Romans was a very severe one indeed. So terrible was the laying on with the scourges, the man having been stretched out with his hands and feet securely tied, that it often resulted in death, or in being crippled for life. When Paul was placed in that position, he asked: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25). The officer, thinking he had a good case, replied: "With a great sum obtained I this citizenship". 'I bought my freedom to do as I like - I am just exercising my right as a free man, for which I have paid a great price.' Paul answered: "But I was free born" (A.V.).

Now, when the senior officer was told what Paul had said, a terrible fear came over him that he should have taken a free man, a free-born citizen of the Roman Empire, and not only brought him into chains and bonds, but have come within an inch of thrashing him. A free-born man should not be dealt with like that. He had the franchise of the Empire behind him. Even more was it to be free-born than to buy your freedom. To be free-born meant that you could not be brought into bondage, you could not be thrashed, you could not be dealt with like that, and woe betide the man who essayed to do it - he had to answer to the Emperor. All the strength of the Roman Empire was behind the man who was free-born, and Paul knew what that meant. So the officer became full of terror when he realized that he was treating a free-born man like this.

Do you see the illustration? Yes: we are first-born sons, says the Word; our names are enrolled in heaven, we have the franchise of the Kingdom of God; we cannot be brought into bondage, we cannot be thrashed by the law, we cannot be dealt with like this, dealt with so hardly, by this tyrant. No matter what his claims may be of right to do it, there is a higher claim. It is the claim of sonship. You cannot deal with God's sons as you deal with other people. It is a wonderful illustration of this great truth.

The wall of Jerusalem means that here is something which is the enclosure of a heavenly people, who have been delivered from bondage, set at liberty from all debts, and are walking in the good of sonship - God's free people and God's wealthy people. That is the truth of the Word of God. Sonship is something to be enjoyed, and *that* wall is no picture of joy and the state of those people is no picture of joy. It is a contradiction to what the Lord would have. *This* is how He would have it, as we have just seen.

A Restored Sabbath

Now the next thing - the Sabbath. There are fourteen references to the Sabbath Day in the book of Nehemiah. It is a matter of the nullified Sabbath. If you want proof of that, go to Malachi, the contemporary of Nehemiah; you know what he has to say about it. But here in this book of Nehemiah fourteen times the Sabbath is mentioned, so it has a very large place. We know that these people represented the nullifying of the Sabbath. Now I am not going to start on an argument for Seventh Day Adventism or for Sabbatarianism; the ground is very much higher and more glorious than that. But remember that the Sabbath was the oldest covenant in existence. God rested from His labours on the seventh day, and God hallowed the seventh day and demanded that it should be hallowed all the way through. If you will look the matter up, you will see how much in the life of the people of God, for good or for ill, was bound up with their observance of the Sabbath, the covenant of the Sabbath - perhaps the foundation covenant, the covenant of all covenants.

But what did it mean? Of course, it was a foreshadowing of Christ. God rested from His labour, from all His works, on the seventh day, *"and God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it"* (Genesis 2:2-3). Israel went into captivity in Babylon because they had not kept the Lord's Sabbaths - the seventh day, the seventh month, the seventh year and the sevens of sevens up to forty-nine. They had failed to observe the Sabbath in all its connections, so He sent them into Babylon for seventy years because of His Sabbaths. *"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (Galatians 6:7). It is the 'whatsoever' always. And now that broken-down wall speaks of the broken Sabbath, the nullified Sabbath: and Nehemiah is found restoring the Sabbath, and you know he did it in a very vigorous way. When the merchants came to the gates on the Sabbath Day, he chased them away, he handled them very roughly, and restored the Sabbath.

What is it all about? I have said that it pointed on to Christ - Christ who, in the new creation, has finished all God's works, the works of a new creation; has brought again satisfaction to God, and God into His rest, the rest of His satisfaction: so that Christ and His accomplished work are now the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not a day; it is a Person. The Sabbath is not a time matter at all. The Sabbath is a work finished, and so any violation of it is severely dealt with by the Lord. It means this - take one little bit away from the fully accomplished work of Christ and the absolute satisfaction of God with Him, and you violate the principle of the Sabbath, you undercut the covenant. If that were only realized, it would destroy Seventh Day Adventism in five minutes. Well, you say, are we not to observe the Lord's Day? Oh, yes - but as a testimony, not as a matter of law. We come together now on one day, the first day of the week, to celebrate the glorious truth that God is satisfied with His Son - that is, we gather around His Table and worship in the values of Jesus Christ, God's ground of satisfaction. Take anything from that and you violate the Sabbath.

Now the testimony to be recovered just means that there must be a people who are enjoying the fact, rejoicing in the great reality, that the work of redemption is finished gloriously: God is at rest, completely satisfied, and His people have entered into His rest. It is very simple, perhaps, as it is put like that, but are we not tested on this thing? Almost every day of our lives we are tested about the Sabbath - not merely as a day, but as to our rest in God's satisfaction, as to our contentment with God's contentment: in other words, as to our apprehension of the fact that Christ has altogether finished the new creation in Himself, and has brought God an answer to His last demand and requirement. God wants a people who are rejoicing in that; He wants a testimony like that. The Lord make us a people after that kind! The wall speaks of that, because, as you notice, as soon as the wall is completed, Nehemiah, who had paid his visit back to Babylon and returned, began to put the Sabbath in its place and clean up everything in relation to the Sabbath.

Restored Purity of Blood

One more thing for the moment - the state of mixture which existed. We are told that the children of the people could not speak in the Hebrew language. They spoke half in one language, half in another. And then we read about the mixed marriages with the people of the nations outside - so many of the men had foreign wives. Here were elements, features, of mixture amongst the Lord's people, and Nehemiah set to work to clean that up. He did it very thoroughly - and, thank God, the people co-operated with him. It was necessary as a spiritual principle that this should be done; but here again, mixture being one of the conditions represented by the wall - the wall was broken down and destroyed because there was not a purity in Israel - in its rebuilding it was a bulwark against mixture of blood.

That says something very strong and very definite - the necessity for everyone who claims to have any place in the city of God, in the Church of God, in the Kingdom of God, to be able to prove that their blood is pure, that they really are born from above, they have the pure life of the Lord in them, they are not a mixed people in their constitution - they are a people of one tongue, of one language, of one blood, of one life. The wall being re-erected was to be a testimony to a 'cleaning up' in this matter of mixture among the Lord's people: a purity of blood, a purity of language, a purity of worship.

You know how possible it is to mix these things up. You very often find people who are talking the language or the phraseology, but you hardly recognize it as the language of the Spirit. Oh, they have got all the Christian phraseology, but there is a lot of mixture here, a lot of contradiction in the life here. There must be a people of a pure language, those who truly speak the language of the Spirit. Is it not true that there are many professing Christians who do not speak the language of the Spirit? Many of you know what I mean. Yes, you miss something. There is something about their way of speaking of 'Christianity' and 'religion' which does not say that they have really been born from above.

The Restored Tithe

And I close with this other thing - defaulting in the tithe. Malachi, who depicts the conditions at that time, charges the people with defaulting in the matter of the Lord's tithe. He says, speaking from God: *"Ye rob me, even this whole nation." "But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings"* (Malachi 3:8-9). There was default in the matter of the tithe.

But what is this? Oh, do not think that we can get out of this by just taking a tenth part of our earnings and giving it to the Lord. You can do that and not be giving the tithe at all. What does it mean, this tithe? It was like this. Tithes were given of everything - of their earnings, of their field, of their vineyard, of their flocks; and what happened was that the farmer or the husbandman or the shepherd would watch carefully for the first ripe fruits, the first product to reach maturity, the first animal to come forth, to come into life, to live. He watched, as, supposing it were the field, the corn was growing, and as the time drew near he would take a walk out to see the state of the corn and watch for the first ripe ears: and as soon as he saw ripe ears, he did not wait for the whole harvest to ripen, he took them to the house of God, and he said, in effect: 'This represents the fact that all belongs to You, Lord. This is a forerunner, a first-fruit of what is to come. It is all Yours, and I give this as a token that it is all Yours, that You have the first place and the whole place.' If it were the fruit, the husbandman did the same. If it were the shepherd, he took the firstling of the flock and said: 'Lord, this is the firstling of this flock; it betokens that all is Yours - Yours is the first place, and Yours shall be the whole place.'

That is the tithe. The tithe is not something detached and given to God, while we have the rest. It is a token that the Lord has *the* place from beginning to end. Now, you see, that was the trouble with Israel - defaulting in the matter of the tithe - and that was why the testimony had broken down. The Lord did not have the first place and the whole place in all their interests, in all their matters, in all their possessions. The Lord wants a people like that, who really do bear that testimony. He would raise up the wall of testimony again in a people who do not just give Him a place, a part, but who give Him the *whole* place, and are always on the look-out as to how they can bring Him that which is His right - a people like that.

Suffer the simplicity of these words, but they go deeper than perhaps you recognize. They touch very vital matters. All this is very practical. When Nehemiah put these things right, he was not just building a wall. He was putting right the things which the wall represented; the testimony was supported by spiritual reality behind. That is what the Lord wants.

Chapter Six

THE WORK AND THE WORKERS

When the writer of the letter to the Hebrews had been saying many things, he evidently had a feeling that it all needed to be gathered up into one clear, precise statement, and so he wrote: "Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this". The margin says, "Now to sum up what we are saying..." (Hebrews 8:1). Such a need is present with us at this point, so let us try to collect and to focus what we have been saying thus far.

Divine Reactions

The history of God's work is the history of movements and counter-movements, of action and reaction, of incline and decline, of advance and arrest or reverse. In one of the earliest books that we published, these words occurred at the commencement: 'There are two things which it is very important that we should have clearly before us. These two things, as we put them, may seem to contradict one another or to be paradoxical. One is that all the way through the ages God has constantly done a new thing. The other is that what has always been God's new thing from man's standpoint, has not been new from His own.'

And then we went on to point out that God always begins from completeness. He has everything in Himself fully and finally before He makes a beginning, and all His subsequent activities are really working backward to fullness, although to man they appear to be the new things of God. The course, then, has been that God begins with fullness. Man falls away and loses that fullness. Then God reacts and steadily moves in progressive and gradual recovery of that fullness.

And every fresh movement of God is marked by two features.

In the first place, intrinsic fullness; that is, although it may be for the moment a partial thing only, it has intrinsic values in it. It is something which has all the potentialities of the whole, because everything that God does, however small it may be at the moment, has all His mind in it and behind it. God is not just occupied with fragments as though they were the whole, but with parts in which the whole is potentially included.

And then, in the second place, His movements are always an advance upon those which preceded them. That is, every movement of God sees an addition to what He has done before. Although He may have taken these steps from time to time in the way of recovery, it has been progressive, and now the next step will represent something added, something more, a stage further on in His work of recovering the original fullness. I hope that is clear. It is very important to get that background and that foundation.

Then we find that there are some inclusive or major factors in these movements of God - what we have called, in the title of the volume just quoted from, *The Divine Reactions*. One of those major factors is *an instrument raised up by God in sovereignty*, with God's vision and God's passion; an instrument raised up by God in sovereignty - which means that this is an act of God, and, being a sovereign act, may have nothing at all to account for it from any other standpoint. It is not that the instrument is one which all observers would say was the right instrument; not that the man or the vessel is such as would win the approval of the world's mind. God acts sovereignly, and very often in these reactions He has chosen instruments which, both in their own judgment and in that of others, were not the ones to have been chosen. They themselves were very conscious of their

own lack of qualification for their calling, and very often other people had the same kind of thought about them - that they could do better, that they were not doing what was expected of them and in the way in which they should do it. But God sovereignly chose them, in His own wisdom, and stood by them, and proved that this was of Himself.

A Vessel Marked by Vision and Passion

But such a vessel, be it personal or be it collective, has always been in possession of God's vision. Such an instrument had seen the Lord, seen the mind of God, seen the purpose of God, become captured and captivated by that thing which God had purposed from eternity, and seen it in very much greater fullness than others: not only seeing, being in principle a 'seer' of the mind and will and purpose of God, but also being mastered by the passion of God for it, brought into what we have earlier in these meditations called the travail of God unto His end. These are major factors in all Divine movements. Every fresh step that God has taken has been marked by these two things. Let it be recognized, because it explains so much.

The Peculiar Treatment of the Vessel

Then this vessel, that has seen the purpose of God - this calling, this "great work" embodied in any present movement of God - has its own very peculiar history under God's hand. It is something to take very careful note of, that God deals with such an instrument as He deals with no other. He deals with that instrument - again I say, it may be personal or it may be a collective body, a company - God deals with that instrument called for this specific end of His in a peculiar, a strange way. He deals with it differently from all His dealings with other people and other things; it is never safe for any called into the full purpose of God to judge the dealings of God with them alongside of His dealings with other people. That will always be dangerous. His ways with such a work and such an instrument are His own peculiar ways, and therefore vessels for this purpose, instruments to this end, have their own peculiar perils. They become involved in peculiar conflict, strange pressure, strange happenings, strange ways of God. God is dealing with them in relation to specific purposes.

Now, the book of Nehemiah, with which we have been occupied, the last book of Old Testament history, is an inspiring and instructive representation of all that we have just said. We have said that the natural divisions of that book are in relation, firstly to the wall, the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, secondly to the work and the workers, and thirdly to the involved warfare. We have spent most of our time so far with the wall. Let me quickly go over that ground again, perhaps in a slightly different way from the way we have so far taken.

The Wall of Jerusalem a Figure of Christ

What is the wall? The wall of Jerusalem is a figure of Christ - first of all in the sight of Heaven, in the light of Heaven, in the eyes of Heaven; how Christ is from Heaven's standpoint. That is always the starting-point of any appraisal or judgment. The wall is also a figure of Christ as presented to the world, and then as presented to the kingdom of Satan, the hostile forces. It is Christ in those three outward senses - toward Heaven, toward the world, toward the forces of evil. They are all very interested in this wall. You can see that in the book of Nehemiah.

Heaven is very interested in this wall. That is where we begin. God acts, and it is a grand thing when the wall is finished. And all those hostile forces were so angry

that Nehemiah was able to say - and they were compelled to admit - that this work was of God. God was interested, Heaven was interested; it was something in the light of Heaven. Then, as to the world, the wall had its own testimony, its own declaration; we will not stop with that for the moment. So far as the kingdom of Satan was concerned, it is very clear that that kingdom was intensely interested. We shall probably occupy ourselves later almost entirely with that aspect, when we come to the warfare.

But then there was a fourth aspect, namely, what the wall means to the Lord's own people: in other words, what Christ means to the people of God as a great, inclusive, defensive stronghold, and in the glorious impartation of His excellences and perfections to His own people. The last mention of walls in the Bible is of a wall of magnificence, a wall of gems. It is the perfections, the glories, of Christ, and the people of God in the good thereof before God.

So, then, the wall is a figure of Christ in this fourfold aspect.

Going back, you remember that Abraham, or Abram, as he was then, was separated from Babylon and Chaldea and all that that meant, and we are told that he 'looked for the city which had the foundations' (Hebrews 11:10) - the type of that heavenly city, that new Jerusalem, which eventually, in its completion, will 'come down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God' (Revelation 21:2). Abraham's vision of a city was the type of that heavenly Jerusalem. These two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem, have always been in conflict. When the Lord's people declined from His glorious conceptions and intentions concerning Jerusalem, the only alternative for them was Babylon - the false thing from which God had called them out in their very father, Abraham. They were going back into that from which they had been separated in Abraham. As we have pointed out, the Lord let them have a taste of that, and for many of them the taste was too much. They were glad to get back to Jerusalem at any cost, however Jerusalem might be at the time.

Now, when the Lord Jesus came, He did two things. He repudiated the world, as represented by Babylon, the false kingdom, and He repudiated the earthly Jerusalem, because it no longer expressed the Divine thought; and He gathered into Himself all those Divine thoughts as to what the city was meant to be. He not only personally took the place of the temple, but He took the place of Jerusalem, in a spiritual way. He was and is the embodiment of all God's thoughts about this city, as encompassed and delineated by the wall. So that if we enquire into what this wall means and what this city means, we shall not be merely studying a theme, or some object; we shall be called to contemplate the Lord Jesus.

It is very important that we should forget our illustrations sometimes, get behind our types and our figures, and look straight at that which they represent - shall I say, straight at Him whom they represent. A critic of Francis Thompson, the poet who wrote *The Hound of Heaven*, said that you could not see his landscape for his churning sea of metaphor. And sometimes our typology veils, hides, obscures, that which is typified. I hope that when we speak of the wall and of Nehemiah we are not going to fall into that snare, but that our eyes will all the time be seeing through Nehemiah, through the wall, to Him who is the One really in view.

The Correspondence Between Nehemiah and the Book of the Acts

Well, we have to move on still further, because God did recover His testimony in fullness on the day of Pentecost. It is helpful to see how there is a correspondence between the book of Nehemiah and the book of the Acts of the

Apostles. The testimony is raised again in fullness; the testimony of the Lord, "the testimony of Jesus", came into completeness and fullness on the day of Pentecost, and all the features of the book of Nehemiah are found in the book of the Acts, especially in the first chapters. We shall look at that more closely in a moment. I mention it because it may be helpful to you, in reading the book of Nehemiah, not just to read it as a book of history, or even as the last historical book of the Old Testament, but to read it with the book of the Acts before you all the time, and just see how these two books correspond all the way through.

But what I want to say here, before going further with that, is this: that, although the Lord, on the day of Pentecost, recovered His testimony in greater fullness than ever before (except for His original intention, which was in His view before all things), it was not very long before the counter-action set in again, the decline. Before we are through our New Testament we are beginning to see gaps in the wall, weaknesses in the testimony. We can indeed go much further than that, for when we read the first letter to the Corinthians, and see all the rubbish there, we would say that the testimony seems to have been almost completely destroyed. What rubbish is revealed in that first letter to the Corinthians! What a state of wreckage and breakdown! And when we come to the end of the New Testament letters and take up the book of the Revelation, with its messages to the seven churches in Asia, we have undoubtedly a yet further picture of a broken wall: the testimony is disrupted again, there is nothing whole. "I have found no works of thine fulfilled" (Revelation 3:2). The testimony is broken, there are big gaps in it, and that is its state as the New Testament closes.

Since then, not once nor twice, but many times, God has acted again to bring back bit by bit His original purpose and testimony. I am not going through the history of those past centuries. You meet the testimony in various forms, but you know that God has not given it up. God has not abandoned it; God has come back, and He has come back again, seeking to recover now this, now that, now something else; ever moving towards the original fullness, to have it in completeness. Thank God that today there is very much more of His testimony than there was in the Dark Ages. Today many of the great things of the New Testament are established in the Church. They are great factors. It is not necessary for me to mention them, but God has moved on steadily with His remnants, ever bringing something back.

The point with which we are concerned is this. Is He not at this very time in need of further recovery, and giving Himself to it? and might it be, in His sovereignty and in His grace, that we are related to the present movement of God in recovering the wall in fullness and in completeness? It may not be ours to build it, it may not be given to us to make it full; but it may be our calling to add something to do something toward this matter of finishing the testimony of Jesus; and if this time corresponds to the book and work of Nehemiah, that is, the end of the dispensation, we may feel that we are in the last stages and the last phases of the testimony of Jesus. We are, indeed, not without some reason for thinking that that is so.

Now let us come back and look more closely at this matter of the correspondence between Nehemiah and the book of the Acts, for we shall now be engaged not so much with the wall as with the work and the workers.

A Movement From Heaven

In the first place, as you take up both of these books, Nehemiah and Acts, you become aware of the fact that there is a movement from Heaven, that the brooding, all-pervading Spirit of God is on the move. In the book of Nehemiah, it

has commenced there in Babylon. The Spirit of God has started to move. First of all, He stirs up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to make that facilitating decree and provision. There is a movement from Heaven. And then it has moved into the heart of this man Nehemiah, and has created this deep concern and unrest, this discontent with things as they are. The Spirit of God is on the move. And then, by the facilitation, Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem, and the spirit that is in him, that urge that is in him, spreads - first to some brethren and then, with very few exceptions, to all the people. It is said of some that they "put not their necks to the work" (Nehemiah 3:5), but they are the exceptions. The Spirit is on the move, creating first of all this dissatisfaction with things as they are, this unrest about the situation, this sense that things ought to be different. It is not, as I have said earlier, just a spirit of grumbling and of criticism; it is a work of the Spirit. It is positive, not negative; it is constructive in its object and not destructive. The Spirit of God is on the move again, as He was in the first earthly creation, brooding and moving to bring order out of chaos. Here it is again in the beginning of this book of Nehemiah.

You pass to the book of the Acts, and you know only too well that Heaven is on the move, the Spirit is on the move. Something is happening: the long night seems to be passing, streaks of light are shooting across the horizon, there is a sense of awakening and movement; and on that great day the thing breaks - Heaven is cleft, the Spirit descends, and the Spirit's movement begins. It begins with a nucleus, but then through the nucleus the Spirit moves out and lays hold of others and brings them into the one vision and the one passion of the heart of God. In Nehemiah we have it put this way: "for the people had a mind to work" (Nehemiah 4:6). But now look at the book of the Acts and see these very people! That is the only way in which you can describe those early chapters: "the people had a mind to work".

The Governing Motive of the Full Testimony of the Lord

The purpose - the full, complete testimony of the Lord - is common to Nehemiah and to the book of the Acts. We could dwell with that, but I think it is only too obvious, from those early chapters, that those early proclamations, that early preaching of the Church and the apostles and the evangelists, was a testimony to the absolute supremacy, fullness, completeness, sufficiency and finality of Christ. It was to that, in figure and type, that Nehemiah and the people were committed in their day.

But let this thing take hold of *us*. Let us not be thinking back centuries, but bring this right into our own present. Are we people with a mind that there shall be a full, unlimited and unbroken testimony of the Lord - people dominated by God's purpose and moved with God's passion? Are we?

The Government of Christ as Lord

Now let us look at some of the factors involved. Firstly, it is a very impressive thing how everybody submitted to Nehemiah. That is saying more than you realize unless you have read very carefully the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. If you read the book of Ezra, you will find that there were a good many recalcitrant people and rulers and priests, who had their own mind about things and their own will and their own way. They were just not going to have Ezra, and his ideas. There is a good deal of the personal and the selfish coming out and asserting itself. But when you come to Nehemiah, that is all gone. When this man comes in, everybody seems to give him his place, everybody seems to recognize that he is the man: they all do as they are told, they fall in - he can do what he likes with them. You see, some of these rulers have bought the people's property and land:

they have enriched themselves at the expense of the people, and the poor people are in a grievous state because of them. And Nehemiah says, Now then, you give it all back, every bit of it; you refund every penny!' You put that suggestion to any man of the world and see what you get! But these people do it: it seems that it does not matter what Nehemiah requires or demands - they do it.

Come over to the book of Acts. Here all recognize that Jesus is Lord and subject themselves to Him. There is only just the one rebellious element, in Ananias and Sapphira; but it did not pay them to break the regime of Christ's lordship - it broke them. But for the rest, everything went - properties, lands, money, themselves, everything - all came into wonderful subjection to the Lord Jesus; and you will never get anywhere with His full testimony until He takes pre-eminence and precedence over all life and all that life contains.

There is a corresponding factor which is perfectly clear. The people, the priests, the rulers, all gave Nehemiah the place of headship. In this other movement of God, everybody gave Jesus Christ His place as Head. He was indeed not only preached as Lord, but was yielded to as Lord with everything.

A Master Passion for the Testimony

And then another thing common to these two books is how the testimony mastered everything and everybody. It was not only Nehemiah, but the thing for which Nehemiah stood. This is seen in two respects.

Firstly, the wall: how the wall became the dominating object and interest of everybody. If the wall is a type or figure of the testimony of the Lord Jesus, it just means that the testimony of the Lord Jesus in fullness became the master-concern of everybody. They had nothing else, for the time being, for which to live, but His testimony. The wall overshadowed everything and everybody. And so it was in the first days of this dispensation. The testimony of Jesus so overshadowed everything else that they lived for its furtherance. They just lived and thought and planned and dreamed of the furtherance of this testimony.

The Voice of the Spirit

But then you notice that there was another factor in Nehemiah. It was the trumpet. The man who had the trumpet was stationed by Nehemiah, and you remember the words: "In what place soever ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us" (Nehemiah 4:20). The trumpet was in charge. What is the trumpet? I think that the trumpets of the Old Testament are always types of the voice of the Holy Spirit; in other words, "what the Spirit saith unto the churches". It was by the sound of the trumpet that Israel moved through the wilderness, whenever they were to move, the trumpet sounded. In figure, they moved by and in the Spirit, under the government of the Spirit.

That is, of course, too obvious in the book of the Acts - the government of the voice of the Spirit. We cannot too strongly stress that. Perhaps I am in peril of trying to crowd too much in, without giving due consideration to every point. But do give heed to this. I am saying a very terrible thing now, but I am perfectly aware of what I am saying. I have tested it well over a wide area of this world. *There are very few Christians indeed who know the meaning of life in the Spirit.* Multitudes know what life in the Christian soul is, with all its emotions, its feelings, its impulses. To know "what the Spirit saith", to know life in the Spirit, to be guided by the Spirit, to be checked up by the Spirit, for the Spirit within them to say 'No' or 'Yes' - they know very little about it; very few know anything about that. They are either guided by tradition, how it has always been done; or they

are guided by some set and fixed system of truth or doctrine, by what is 'the done thing'; or they are guided by the present crystallized, organized form of Christianity, which is so rigid and established that nothing else can be allowed to have any place: if they were to deviate one hairsbreadth from the way it is done in 'Christianity', they would be wrong - they would be heretics. They are governed and guided like that. They do not know life in the Spirit.

I am not saying that life in the Spirit is a contradiction of truth, or of the Word of God, or of anything that is vital to God, but I am saying there is something more than just a set traditional system. There is such a thing as being led of the Spirit of God, and if the book of the Acts says anything, it says this, that you are not allowed to settle down into an immutable, irrevocable position, which is fixed and final.

That is one of the great movements in the book of the Acts. The Apostles were all disposed to make Jerusalem the 'headquarters' of Christianity. Jerusalem was going to be the centre of everything for the world, and so the thing was being built up and consolidated in Jerusalem. The Holy Ghost stepped in and said, 'No - headquarters are in Heaven, not down on this earth at all', and just rooted them out, drove them out from Jerusalem. They were scattered abroad everywhere. The Apostles remained there to stand by something for the Lord, but it was no longer headquarters, although they fought to have it as headquarters. For quite a time they tried to rule everything from Jerusalem, but the Holy Ghost was against them. This great world work was never afterward centred in Jerusalem.

No: the Holy Spirit is a great 'decentralizing' factor when men try to establish something on this earth. Get into the Spirit, and you do not know what is going to happen next or where you will be next. You cannot say, 'I am going to be here, or there.' The Holy Spirit has His own way: He "bloweth where he listeth" (John 3:8). That is the great truth here. Life in the Spirit is like that. You can never say, 'Well, I am going to be in such-and-such a place for so many years, and then I will change my location.' You may be altogether surprised by what the Lord will do. Even the most spiritual men in the New Testament were not given their programme in advance. They were only allowed to take their course so far, and then they were interrupted by the Holy Spirit. When they essayed or sought, the Holy Spirit suffered them not. These men are under the dominion of the Holy Spirit. *He* has things in hand; headquarters are in Heaven.

That is how it was, then: all things under the government of the trumpet, the voice of the Spirit.

The Corporate Relatedness of All in the Testimony

Then, further, all other things were brought into line with and made subject to this one thing - the testimony. I am impressed - as I think, if you read the book of Nehemiah again carefully, you will be impressed - with this wonderful movement. There were all the trades, all the callings, all the professions and all the positions. There were priests and there were goldsmiths and there were apothecaries and there were rulers; and it speaks of a man and his daughters, who all became stonemasons! The priest did not say, 'Oh, it is beneath my dignity to take a trowel and mortar.' The goldsmith did not say, 'I shall spoil my hands for my fine work with gold if I go and do stone-heaving.' The rulers did not say, 'Well, you ought to give me a foreman's job - I can stand by and see that it is done properly; to go down and do it myself!' Not one of them. Everyone - the priests (I was impressed with the fact that a dignitary built the Dung Gate!), goldsmiths, apothecaries, rulers, men and their daughters - all came into this

work. Everything, position, vocation, qualification, was subjected to the one interest - the testimony.

I expect, when the wall was finished, they went back to their jobs; I hope they did. If the Lord does not fill your hands continually with that full ministry in His testimony that demands your separation for the time being, do not think that you do something wrong if you go back to your job. You still remain an apothecary, or a goldsmith, or whatever you may be. Paul remained a tentmaker to the end; you have no point noted in the record of his life at which he gave up making tents. He used it, apparently, alongside of the testimony, and for the testimony, all the way through. Be clear about this. Do not get that false idea about 'full-time ministry'. Be what you are. Use it for the Lord, but make it subject to the dominating interest of the Lord's testimony. That is what happened here.

In the Acts, it seems to have been like that. Although all their trades and their positions are not detailed, you have quite a considerable mention of these things in the letters of Paul, as to who people were, and what people were, and so on. But they were all gathered in, so to speak, within the 'wall': they all governed by the testimony, and everything is made to serve the testimony. No one says, 'No, I am superior, it is beneath my dignity', or, 'That is not my calling - I am called for something else.' Everybody is seeing that, no matter what they are or what their qualifications are in this world, the thing that matters more than anything else is this testimony.

In Nehemiah 3, you see coming out this beautiful feature, the corporate relatedness of all in the testimony. You notice the little phrase, so constantly recurring through that chapter - "next unto him", "next unto him", "next unto him". Now that is just the repeated statement of a fact, but you are always allowed to use your imagination when you are reading the Bible, and it will always be a good thing if you do. We have the bare fact stated, but I venture to suggest that there was probably very much spiritual history behind those facts, the history of many a personal victory. 'I do not like working alongside of him - put me next to someone more pleasant, someone I could get on with better!' The fact is just stated - "next unto him", "next unto him". For all we know, in the natural they may have been people who could never get on together at all, never work together. But they work on in this corporate relatedness, and this surely speaks of the great victory within them which the wall was to represent when it was finished.

For it was a great victory when that wall was finished. It was a great victory over all personal interests, over natural dispositions, likes and dislikes. What a victory it was in every realm! That wall was the testimony to victories in the personal life, victories in relationships - "next unto him" and "next unto him" and "next unto him". And it may be, if you allow your imagination to go, that you would find real contradictions in the positions and qualifications and callings of these people who were next to one another. I will not say what I could say there, as to who might be alongside of the other, but looked at from the world it was a glorious mix-up: there was nothing that tallied - priests and goldsmiths and apothecaries and so on, nobles and commoners, all working together alongside of one another. It was no mix-up at all. It was a glorious harmony, because of the victory in their own hearts. What a grand testimony!

Come to your New Testament. How true that was in those first days in the first chapters of the Acts! Personal interests set aside; people of different positions, different qualifications, different outlooks on life, different constitutions and temperaments, were all brought together. Is not that band of twelve men, the nucleus, a glorious and marvellous proof of a mighty victory inside? When you

think of what they were naturally, and how they had been before - how they had quarrelled with one another, argued with one another, disputed with one another as to who should be first, and so on - and yet now they stand together; they are as one man. Something has happened, there has been a victory inside, to make this "next unto him" relationship true. When the Apostle Paul brings before us the fullness of God's thought as to His Church, he presents that relationship so beautifully in his picture of the Body of Christ, with the relatedness and inter-relatedness of its members. Every part is in the place appointed by the Lord, and working in relation to every other part. Oh, for this victory in the Lord's people! This will be a testimony - no jealousies, no rivalries, no criticisms, no malice, no personal considerations or feelings; nothing of this kind at all. The Lord's interests come first. The testimony to the Lord Jesus rules all these things out.

Let us ask the Lord to give us a mind like this, to come under this pervading influence of the Holy Spirit, this passion of God, for such a testimony. And let us take the practical aspects of it very seriously to heart. It means all that we have been saying. Again I appeal to you to get away from the types, the figures, the illustrations, to the practical spiritual realities. We are called, in the grace of God, at least to add something to that which has been the Lord's concern through the ages - the bringing of the testimony nearer completion; but in every age the same principles are involved, the same features must characterize - all these things must be true.

Chapter Seven

THE WARFARE

A Peculiar Warfare

We come now to the warfare, the warfare related to the full testimony of the Lord or the Lord's testimony in fullness and completeness. Let me say again at once that this is a peculiar warfare. There is a warfare relating to the salvation of the unsaved, which involves all who seek to bring to the Lord those who know Him not. We know very well that it is a real battle and there is real warfare associated with that. There is that warfare which relates to being a Christian and just going on as a Christian. It is not an easy thing to continue in the way of the Lord. Most of the militant hymns that we sing have to do with the Christian life in general, and they certainly have a rightful place, because the Christian life on one side is truly a warfare. But when we have said that, we have not said all. There is a peculiar warfare connected with the Lord's ultimate purpose. The warfare becomes of a different character, is in a different world, and takes different forms, when it is related to this, and it is with that that we are occupied in our present meditation.

So, coming back to this book of Nehemiah, which, after all, is only an illustration of the spiritual and heavenly realities which we find in the New Testament, particularly in such parts as the letter to the Ephesians and the book of the Revelation, we find ourselves in the presence of a very great deal of conflict, which takes on a peculiar form because of the thing that is in view. It is that wall that is the trouble, or the cause of the trouble; that is to say, the recovery of a full expression of what the Lord wants concerning His people; and that provokes a great deal of very positive and persistent antagonism of a particular character.

The Enemies

If you look into this book, you will find that there are a number of people mentioned who are the sworn foes of this particular object, so we look at these before we look at their methods and the forms of their opposition. There is Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. Who are these people? what are they? what are they doing here? how have they got here? And when you answer those questions you get very near to the heart of things as to spiritual opposition. You go back to the second book of Kings, chapter 17, and you read from the twenty-fourth verse to the end of the chapter, and you have the whole thing explained. We will not read all those verses now, but just enough to lead us into the situation.

"And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Avva, and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel and they possessed Samaria and dwelt in the cities thereof. And so it was, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them. Wherefore they speak to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast carried away, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land.... Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord. Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt... So they feared the Lord, and made unto them from among themselves priests of the high

places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away" (verses 24-29, 32-33).

These are the people with whom Nehemiah had to contend, and who sought to frustrate or hinder the continuing of this work. Let us look at them, and see what they are made of, what is the stuff of which they are made.

Superstitious People

First of all, they are superstitious people. They see certain things happening and they draw the conclusion that those happenings have some background of a supernatural character. They do not know the Lord and they do not know that this thing is from the Lord, but they come to the conclusion that it has a supernatural background, it is something occult. They think if only they can find out the secrets of the supernatural realm, can be initiated into the mysteries of it, they will be able to clear up this situation, and so they proceed. They make their complaint to the king of Assyria, mark you, about the Lord, and he sends one of the priests who had been taken away from the land, and he tells them about the Lord - but the thing is so unreal, so false, in such a wrong, altogether wrong realm. You have a statement here which is almost unthinkable: "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods". 'Fearing the Lord' there does not by any means mean what the fear of the Lord means amongst the Lord's people. To fear the Lord means that He really is the Lord, and that you have become utterly and completely subject to Him as Lord. That is fearing the Lord in the true sense. But that was not true of these people. They had superstitious recognition of Him, born of fear, misfortune, difficulties, things going wrong, but their knowledge never brought them really to the Lord. They went on serving their own gods. These are the people. That is the first thing that we take account of.

This statement, made more than once, that they feared the Lord, must have implied something. I do not know what to say about the priest or what to think about him. He evidently spoke about the Lord, about Jehovah, taught them something, but they merely received it second-hand *for their own convenience*, to save them in their troubles. So we may conclude that they used the Lord's Name, they probably offered Him some kind of recognition. They took on a form of worship which was ostensibly to Him, but right deep down they knew not the Lord. They were using the Lord's Name and using the Lord's things, but were mere professors, without any real knowledge of the Lord. Their religion was an imitation, a second-hand thing, not something of the heart.

And then you notice that, in any case, they are all the time referring and deferring to Babylon. They are in servitude to the king of Babylon. And so, because of all these things, there was plenty of ground for this hostility to Nehemiah. The real test of them was their attitude toward this thing which is of primary importance to the Lord, the thing which is truest and nearest to the heart of God. How do they stand related to that? That finds them out.

No Living Relationship With the Lord

We could have proceeded from the other end, and said, 'Now, here we have some people, with leaders whose names are mentioned, who are hostile to this that is so important to God and to Heaven. That is their position, that is their attitude, that is their spirit. Why is it?' The answer essentially is that they have no real relationship to the Lord. Whatever may be their profession, whatever may be their phraseology, whatever may be their pretence, their form, they themselves

have really no living relationship to the Lord. That is where we begin with these people.

But we go a little further, because we have some of their leaders mentioned, and these men were outstanding men.

First of all there was Sanballat, who is called "the Horonite" (Nehemiah 2:10). That simply means that he came (probably) from Beth-boron, a Samaritan city; he came from one of the towns of Samaria. He was one of those people who had been placed in the land by the king of Assyria; they are described in the chapter from which we have read. He was one of them, he was after that kind.

Then you have Tobiah. You notice the pronunciation - Tobi-jah. It does not sound like that in your Bible, but that is the right pronunciation. You notice the end of his name is 'Jah', 'the Lord'. This man is ostensibly linked up with the Lord in some way. But Tobiah is an Ammonite, and you remember the word in Deuteronomy 23:3: "An Ammonite... shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation shall none belonging to them enter into the assembly of the Lord for ever". And then the reason is given: "They hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee". This is the background of Tobiah: something which is impinging upon God's inheritance, in a kind of link and association with Him, but really in nature inimical to the Lord. That is Tobiah, the Ammonite.

And if we get right back behind him, we remember that Ammon was one of those children of Lot through his own daughters - one of the most tragic and terrible things in the whole of the Old Testament. So that Ammon has to be numbered among those mentioned in Hebrews 12:8: "If ye are without chastening, ... then are ye... not sons" - false children, the horrible word which we refrain from using; false children, pretending to be children of God. That is Ammon through Lot: in association with God, with Abraham, but inwardly not of the pure seed of Abraham, not of the pure seed of Israel, not of the pure seed of God's people. He has his name mixed up somehow with the Lord's people, but he is not a true son - he is a false son. That is Tobiah: a fleshly association with the land, but a spiritual alienation from the Lord, and persecuting the truly spiritual. As Paul puts it: "he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit" (Galatians 4:29); and so it is always.

We come to another man a little later on. He is Geshem, at one point called Gashmu, the same man, and he is called "the Arabian". He was either an Edomite or an Ishmaelite: whichever it was, it was very bad. You know their history, how they both of them warred against that which was spiritual. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, dwells much upon that. This one, Ishmael, born of the bond woman, warred against him who was born of the free woman. So the flesh wars against the Spirit, the earthly against the heavenly. Or he was of Edom, of Esau. How Esau fought against Jacob! He was against that which was in the line of sovereign election; he would indeed slay that at one point. Both of these, whether it was Esau or Ishmael, whether it was the Arabian from Edom or from Arabia, represent the conflict between the flesh and Spirit, the natural and the spiritual.

Carnal and Fleshly Men

Now you will know how full the New Testament letters are of this very thing. You find not only what I have mentioned, the hostility to the salvation of souls and the general conflict bound up with being a Christian, but you find a specific kind of assault wherever God's fuller purpose is brought into view. If Paul represents anything at all, he represents the full and ultimate purpose of God. It is through

him that we have the wide, vast range of the eternal counsels and purposes concerning the Lord Jesus, and it was with assaults related to these very things that Paul was having always to contend, in peculiar ways. They did not seem to bother Peter so much. James had his difficulties, John had his difficulties, but Paul seemed to have difficulties of a peculiar kind.

Take these Judaizers, to begin with, who were always on his track. He never went anywhere but what they were soon on his heels to undo his work, to destroy his ministry, to defame his name, to undercut his apostleship. What sort of people were these Judaizers? They were not all the non-Christian Jews. If the letter to the Galatians is true, what these people were saying to the Galatian churches was: 'Christianity - yes, we allow it, we permit it, we recognize it; but after all, it is only an attachment to Judaism - it is a kind of supplementation of Judaism'. They would make it a Jewish Christianity. You remember how the Jews, the Jewish leaders, went down to Antioch to try to get the Christians to recognize the Jewish law and to incorporate it into Christianity, to observe all the Jewish rites and still be Christians. The whole letter to the Hebrews is on that matter. But here are Christians who are being tempted, not to give up the law, to depart from the law, to cease to recognize and own the law - that is not the question at all - but to add this Judaism, the law and its practices, to their Christianity, and combine the two. They were told, 'You must be circumcised, you must do this and that, observe this and that.'

Paul regarded this as subverting them from the faith. That was turning their back on Christ. The men who taught thus were Paul's real enemies. I am not saying that they were all converted men; but I am saying that they were in some measure associated with the Lord and yet were really inimical to Him. It was a strange mixture - taking the Lord's Name and yet being against the Lord's full purpose. That is the kind of thing that is related to the ultimate intention of the Lord. It is a peculiar kind of opposition. It comes, let us put it in a word, from carnal and fleshly men: men of influence, very often, who are actuated by natural interests and considerations. Oh, yes: they know the Lord, they will speak about the Lord, they will take certain forms of Christianity, they will be very loyal to fundamental truths of God and His Person, and so on and so on; but when it comes to this ultimate issue you find them out of sympathy and very often in hostility. They will go so far, but when the full thing comes into view they are not willing, and it is in that realm, in relation to God's full purpose, that the real and peculiar antagonism arises. Is it not strange that, when you are bent upon the whole counsel and purpose of God, you find your main opposition from Christians and Christian leaders, far more than from the world?

So it was when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem. These people were "grieved... exceedingly, for that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (Nehemiah 2:10). You cannot understand that. You say, 'Well, if these people had any knowledge of the Lord at all, any recognition of the Lord, if their talk about the Lord meant anything, they would say, "Anything you can do for the people of God, we are with you" '. But they are afraid - oh, strange anomaly! - they are afraid that if the Lord has more they will have less. It is true, and we have to be very faithful about it. It is a *fact*; it has always been so. These are the foes.

You find much of it in the New Testament - the envy of the Jews, the jealousy of the Jews. "If we let him alone... the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48). They are afraid of losing something that is theirs, that they have sponsored, that they have taken up. 'If this goes on, we shall lose, we shall lose people; we stand to suffer some loss if this goes on.' You know how true that is. It is a peculiar kind of fear. It is an unreasoning fear - fear

that they themselves have never analysed or looked into, as to why it is they are afraid; but there it is. We know, surely we know why, if they do not. There is a mighty kingdom which, while it will withstand the salvation of the unsaved and will try to make the Christian life at all times difficult, seems to be most malignant when the fullness of Christ, or Christ coming into His inheritance, is in view. That seems to arouse something extra, of a peculiar character.

The Forms of Opposition

For a moment or two let us look at the forms of the opposition. We have been saying that this particular object in view provokes a peculiar kind of hostility and conflict, and it will take any form that it can to defeat God's end. In this book of Nehemiah you find a constant opposition on the part of these enemies. They will try one form of tactic at one time; then, if that does not work and they are defeated, they will swing round to another angle and try from that; and if that does not work they will change again.

(1) 'Grief'

So you find in the first place that they were very "grieved" that a man had come. But that does not get very far, does not do much damage. We must look behind their great grief. Why were they grieved? Well, here again it would be such a perplexing thing, if there were a modicum of concern for the Lord's interests. Nehemiah explains his motive for doing this work of rebuilding the wall: "that we be no more a reproach" (Nehemiah 2: 17). The existing state of things means that the Lord's people are under a reproach. Dishonour rests upon the Church - that is what it amounts to; the world does not think much of it; the glory of the Lord is veiled and there is reproach. You might think that these people, if they had any sincerity of motive, would at least want to remove that reproach.

But there you get to the heart of things, because Satan's one object, as we said on a previous occasion, has always been to bring reproach upon the Name of the Lord. Always, by any means, along any line, if he can defame the Name of the Lord which rests upon the Lord's people, he will do it. They were very grieved that there was someone seeking to remove the reproach of the Lord which rested upon His people. A terrible thing, that. Paul got himself into a lot of trouble for that very reason. He tried to clear up that reproachful situation at Corinth, but there were those in Corinth who turned on him, who said all kinds of things about him.

(2) Scorn and Ridicule

Then they turned to scorn. "What do these feeble Jews? ... if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall" (Nehemiah 4:2-3) despising, scornfully trying to make out that after all this does not amount to anything, it is not worth taking note of - don't take it too seriously! Some of the Lord's people cannot stand up to that sort of thing. They just go to pieces under it. You have only got to try to transfer to them an inferiority complex, and that has done it - down they go. But not Nehemiah. Nehemiah knows the reproach is not levelled at him and his fellow-workers - it is levelled at the Lord; and he says here: 'O Lord, You take note of Tobiah' (4:4-5). He passes that back to the Lord. But this action and attitude of despising is a very real one, a very real and subtle art of the Devil to try to bring home the idea that you are trying to be something which you cannot be, you are trying to do something that does not count for anything at all. All that you are doing, all the labour, all the suffering, all the cost: after all, what does it amount to? There is nothing in it! You will have your day and pass on and the whole thing will fizzle out!

If you take that on, you will not go beyond the first stages of this whole business of recovering the Lord's testimony. Though it is not right to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think or to give an undue importance to the ministry committed to us, if we have seen the heavenly vision of what God in purpose is after, we are clothed with a dignity that is not our own. Nehemiah afterwards was able to say, with true dignity born of the deepest humility: "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life?" (Nehemiah 6:11). That is a dignity that is more than his personally. He says: "I am doing a great work". It is the dignity of a great calling. It is the great work, not what we are in ourselves, that gives the dignity.

(3) Wrath

The wall is now coming on, things are coming to an end and the finish is in view, and now the enemies are very wroth. There is much significance in that kind of ridicule. The fact is the enemy is deeply stirred. This wrath means that Satan recognizes that here is something that he should take account of. Whatever he may put on outwardly, underneath he is aware that there is something here that is going to shake his kingdom to its foundations. Remember all that, if a day of wrath breaks out! It is an indication - it is really complimentary. It is an acknowledgment that there is something here worth while. You cannot explain the Devil's wrath except that he must recognize something even more than we recognize. There must be something that matters to him.

These enemies were very wroth, and out of their wrath they conspired to come and fight. But this became known to Nehemiah, and he took special measures. He armed the people who were working, not only with a trowel in one hand, but with a sword in the other. When the enemy's plans are known, half the battle is yours. So the conspiracy failed.

(4) Subterfuge

The opposition took many other forms. You know about the letter. "Let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono" (Nehemiah 6:2), 'and talk this over'. Very cunning. Nehemiah is alive to it: they meant to do him harm, they meant to assassinate him - that is what it amounted to. And he said: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down". That failed, but the enemy is subtle. He will try to get us in some way to a place where we compromise, come to some agreement with him, find some terms where he can get an advantage, where we can be put out. The Apostle Paul concentrates all his great argument on spiritual warfare on that very point. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11) - against his subterfuges.

(5) Misrepresentation

Then misrepresentation. 'It is reported that you intend in the building of the wall to make yourself king, and to have it proclaimed that there is a king in Jerusalem, and you are appointing prophets to preach of you' (Nehemiah 6:6-7). When the enemy tries that line it is sometimes very disconcerting. It is a horrible suggestion. 'You are trying to make a name for yourself, to get a position for yourself; all this, after all, is only a secret motive of yours to get notoriety, to be something and to do something that will make the world take note of you.' If you have any meekness at all, that shaft is a very dangerous, cruel one - God only knows what it costs. The enemy tries to impute a false motive to all your labours. 'After all, you only have your own ends in view, trying to do something, to make a name.'

Yes, the enemy will stop at nothing - lies or slander. The answer is, 'What is the truth about this? is this true?' After all, let us stand back from these lies of the enemy, and say, 'Is it true? Have I anything to set over against that?' Nehemiah's reply was: "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart". Our answer is, 'These imputations are not true! If I had been seeking my own ends, I would have taken a very different course from this. If I had wanted to do something grand and great, that everybody would accept and recognize and acknowledge as a great piece of work, I should not have taken this course'. We can reply with Nehemiah: "There are no such things" - it is lies and slander.

(6) Intimidation

And then there is intimidation. Here is a man to whose house Nehemiah went. Nehemiah, with all his uncompromising spirit, seems to have been a very friendly soul, and he went to see this man one day in a friendly sort of way. This fellow feigned to be his friend and to be very concerned for him, and said. 'We had better go into the temple and shut the door, because they will come and kill you'. But Nehemiah retorts: 'Should I flee to the house of God to save my life? I will not go in'. This was a false friend, after all; right in close proximity, a Judas. This was such a one as would say to the Lord Jesus: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee". Although those words came audibly through Peter - none other than Peter - the Lord immediately says: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:22-23). Coming through a friendliness is a suggestion of the enemy to create fear. Nehemiah puts his finger right on the spot - 'they would make us afraid'. If the enemy can get fear in, we are finished.

(7) Tiredness

You read the book, and you can see all this from the outside. And then comes this from the inside: "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed" (Nehemiah 4:10). The people got tired, got weary. Perhaps there is no greater enemy to going on with the testimony than tiredness. You know something about that. Even when you get physically tired, what a tremendous force that can be to discourage. Does not the enemy rush right in on tiredness? Let us get mentally tired, where we feel we can no longer cope with things mentally - and what a perilous position that is.

"The strength of the bearers of burdens" went, and that was a perilous moment, and Nehemiah had to take special measures in the presence of tiredness. Oh, be on your guard. It is not just that the enemy makes you tired. Sometimes he does: I think sometimes a good deal of tiredness is due to his wearing out, his drive. But sometimes he gets us to do a lot of unwise things that we should not do, so that we bring tiredness on ourselves, and he thus gets an advantage to himself. But whether that be the case or not, always remember that the enemy will take hold of tiredness to stop you going on, to destroy your testimony. It is a perilous moment. You need to take special precautions in the moment of tiredness.

The Need for Watchful, Intelligent Prayer

This is the warfare. We have just entered a little into the nature of it, the forms that it takes, but you notice that the salvation of the whole situation was due very largely to close watchfulness. If Sanballat and Tobiah and all the rest had their secret informants of all that was going on inside, and they did, Nehemiah also had his information coming through. He kept very closely in touch with what was

happening in the enemy's ranks, and his close watchfulness, coupled with his persistent prayerfulness, was the secret of the victory. "Watching unto prayer" (Ephesians 6:18). It is not enough to pray - we must pray intelligently. We must pray with information, with knowledge, with discernment, with perception, for these things are the strength of effective prayer.

So the victory and the completion of the testimony were largely due to this watchfulness unto prayer, seeking at every point to guard against what the enemy was doing, in a suitable way. That is a subject in itself. Here, truly, is a warfare! The fact is, that, when God is seeking to do a new thing in recovering something more of His whole purpose, this is fraught with intense and peculiar conflict. The conflict may take many different forms, but the object of all is one - to make the work cease.

The Lord keep us moving on to the end.

Chapter Eight

A PECULIAR TREASURE

"And the princes of the people dwelt in Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts in the other cities. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem. Now these are the chiefs of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants" (Nehemiah 11:1-3).

"Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Malachi 3:16-17).

As we come to the last of this series of messages, it is necessary to have the whole background before us in order really to appreciate the setting of this final word. We have been led, as we have considered the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem by Nehemiah and those who were inspired by him, to see again that, as that was a movement of God at the end-time of the old dispensation (Nehemiah being the last historical book of the Old Testament), so there is a corresponding movement in our own time, as we move toward the end of this dispensation: that God would seek to complete, make full, the testimony of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We have looked at that testimony, as to what it is; we have taken account of the work, and the workers related to it; and we have also given some consideration to the conflict, the warfare, in which the workers in such a work are involved.

Now for a brief and simple word arising out of the two passages which we have just read. More than once in the course of these messages we have reminded ourselves that Nehemiah and Malachi were contemporary, that what we read of in the book of Nehemiah should be placed alongside of that which we have in the prophecies of Malachi. Malachi tells of the conditions in the days of Nehemiah, and here we come to what may be regarded as a final word in the matter. In this eleventh chapter of the book of Nehemiah, there is mentioned a peculiar offering to the Lord, and in Malachi 3 a peculiar treasure of the Lord.

A Tithe of the People

The peculiar offering, as you notice, was now not a tithe of *things*. Tithing of things was dealt with, but here was a tithe of the *people*, a tithe of the whole people, a tenth part of those who had come back and who had engaged in this work of rebuilding the wall, and that tenth part became a peculiar freewill offering to the Lord. Let us put a line under the tenth part for the moment: because, whether we like it or not, whether we are prepared to accept it or not, the fact remains that it always has been, and, so far as the forecast of the New Testament goes, it will be to the end, that there are only a certain few who go the full length with the Lord in His whole purpose. After all the sifting that had taken place - the first great sifting in Babylon when there came back a company, and then a second sifting when a few more came back - after the siftings, here we find ourselves at a kind of final sifting, when the number is still further reduced and it is only a tenth part who will voluntarily abide in Jerusalem by their own choice - just a tenth part. It seems that they correspond to Malachi 3:16-17, that company that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name: because you

notice that it goes on to say: "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure". and He has made a record of them - "The Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him" - a record was kept.

The Lord's Book of Remembrance

Now in Nehemiah 11:4-24 you have the names, the record, of those who were a freewill offering. The Lord kept a record, the Lord composed a "book of remembrance," the Lord entered the names of these, and concerning them He says they are "a peculiar treasure," something He specially treasures. The Lord is looking for some who will be to Him "a kind of firstfruits," a kind who will be in the vanguard, following Him "whithersoever he goeth". He does look for a nucleus who will mean the satisfaction of His heart in the first place and in the essential way. As He looks out on a great multitude - and He has a great multitude who are His in the earth today - it cannot be said that all who bear His Name, all who are the Lord's, are utterly following and wholly going on, or meaning to do so. No, it is not so. But He looks for this tithe of His people, this tenth part representation answering to His own heart desire. They to Him are peculiarly precious. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure". That is the final issue of this matter of the whole testimony: who will voluntarily go all the way with the Lord, no matter what it costs?

A Freewill Offering

Now it was a freewill offering, this tithe. Each one of the tenth made it voluntarily. They submitted themselves voluntarily to this casting of lots. You might object that if a lot was cast they had no option, they had to accept it whether they liked it or not, but the point is that they willingly committed themselves to that method. That was a willing, a freewill, offering unto the Lord. No compulsion here, no law here, no legality here - it was just willingness. Are you prepared, out of your own heart, to make a response and say, without any bribery, without any fear of the consequences if you do not: 'Yes, I am going all the way with the Lord, I am going to see that the Lord gets all that He wants so far as I am concerned'? That may mean a lot, that may involve a lot. But the Lord does not ask you to do it. He just waits for it - a freewill offering, a peculiar treasure to Him because it is freewill.

But what did it mean, this living at Jerusalem - this living at the very heart of the testimony, in other words? For since the wall represents the testimony, people coming into residence within the wall in Jerusalem really represented a spiritual movement - that there are those who are prepared to live right at the heart of the testimony. It was necessary, and it always is necessary, to the Lord that some do that - come right into the heart of it, to be there in the place of responsibility concerning it. There is a need that the testimony should be taken up with a sense of responsibility for its maintenance, that it shall be kept whole, that it shall be guarded, that it shall be served, that it shall be ministered to. If you look at the details concerning those who came within, you see their various ministries. I cannot take up the detail now, but you will see the various ministries which were represented by those who came into Jerusalem. They came in to fulfil a ministry, a spiritual ministry, on the inside, and take responsibility there. It was a need the testimony required.

A Great Cost

But there was a great cost attached to it. Not everybody was prepared for that, not at all. There were many who were ready for it, who accepted the method of

choice to live inside, who were not called upon to do so, but there were those who, in the sovereign overruling of God, found themselves called upon to do so. The lot fell out in their direction. God sovereignly saw to it that that was how things went for them, and it represented a real cost. It was very much nicer to live outside Jerusalem than inside. These men came into the city, on that day when the lot was to be cast, ready to accept the result as the will of God for them.

And then the lot was cast, and it fell to them to come and live in the city. I can imagine some of those men going back to their suburban dwellings, wondering what the reaction was going to be at home about this; saying to their wives: 'My dear, we have to go and live in the city, we have to move into Jerusalem - the lot has fallen to us.' Well, of course, the right kind of wife would say this: 'My dear, it was a matter of prayer, was it not? We prayed about it, that if it was to come our way the Lord would overrule, that if He wanted us He would let the lot fall on us. It was before the Lord; it is all right, the Lord wants it. Of course, it means giving up our nice little country house and our nice garden. It means losing that circle of friends we have out here. But still the Lord has laid it on us and we do not do it with any murmuring. But there are the children - perhaps that is the hardest part of all, the children. They have to lose so much - this free life out here, this life with all these others out here in the larger scale. They are involved in this.' And then they would turn to the children, and say: 'Listen, children: we have got to go and live in the city. We shall have to leave the country, and the garden, and all these others out here, and go to Jerusalem for the Lord, because the Lord wants it.' They would be very happy parents to whom the children said: 'Yes, we realize that your devotion to the Lord is costing you something, it is meaning a lot for you; and if we are involved in it, well, of course it means a lot to us - but we are with you in this.'

I do not think that is all imagination. I am quite sure that it was a costly thing to move into Jerusalem - and it always is costly to live at the heart of the testimony. Those who do so must forego many things that other people may have. You lose the large circle of friends when you go right to the heart of the Lord's interests. There are many people who do not understand your doing that; they call you foolish, you lose their confidence. They cannot believe that the way you are taking is right, and they would argue, 'Surely that is not the Lord's will for you'. Yes, you lose many friends, and you may lose many other things; you may involve your children too - they may lose much if you are going wholly with the Lord.

But listen - "They shall be... a peculiar treasure". To be a peculiar treasure to the Lord surely balances the account - nay, outweighs that. If you are going on with the Lord, it means that there are many things that you would like to have, many things quite legitimate and right, many things about which there is nothing wrong, but which, because of your utterness for the Lord, you will have to let go. And if you involve others in the suffering and cost of it all, that is a very bitter draught from the cup. There is nothing to indicate that these people who were chosen to move into Jerusalem did not have a bit of a struggle about it, that it did not cost them something, but the fact is that in their willingness to go on with the Lord they triumphed over all.

I think it is a wonderful thing that in the arrangement of the books of the Bible there is such a big gap between Nehemiah and Malachi, and that Malachi comes right at the end with: "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure". It is costly in many ways to live at the heart of the testimony. Again I say, you may be deprived of many things - good things; you may lose a lot of friends; you may lose a larger life of opportunity. Oh, how

many have stopped, saying: 'How many doors will be closed to me if I go that way! How much wide influence I shall forfeit! I shall narrow my scope if I go that way.' And many have refused on those grounds, thinking that it was a legitimate argument to hold on to a larger scope and larger influence against the whole mind of the Lord - a wrong way of estimating values, because values are not bigness; they are intrinsic and essential.

The Intrinsic Value of the Peculiar Treasure

And so the value that the Lord has here, as you see quite clearly, is in just a very few, comparatively. It is a "day of small things"; it is a comparatively small company about which the Lord says, 'My peculiar treasure'. The value is intrinsic. It is there that the Lord finds what His heart desires, and that which, I believe, leads us to the far greater thing. It is not that the Lord's thought ends there in smallness because the Old Testament ends with this day of small things, this little company fearing the Lord: but that is the link between the end of the old dispensation and the beginning of the new - the coming of the Lord Jesus and all that followed. For, in the four hundred years between the Testaments, there was still that little company holding to the Lord's full thought. When you open the New Testament, and begin the record as given by Luke, there you find that link - the little representative handful. Here is Anna, here is Simeon - here in Jerusalem is a company who wait for the promise, for the Messiah, looking for that day. They are linked with those who "feared the Lord". Ah, but this is something that, though outwardly small, has become so intrinsically great, making a way for the Lord to come.

No, it does not end there, but the challenge lies there. How mistaken we are when we measure things by their bigness, by their numbers. That is the way the world does it. And that is where the world has come into the Church - measuring things by numbers, size, extent, what you can see, how you can appraise from natural standpoints. 'Oh, that must be something for God! Look what a big thing it is!' Not necessarily. It has often been that the greatest thing of God has been very small in the eyes of man.

We return for a moment, in closing, to the long list of names in Nehemiah 11. I expect when you have read the book of Nehemiah you have skipped this - those names, those terrible, unpronounceable names! You have said, 'Oh, let us get on to something more interesting than this!' And yet perhaps this is one of the most interesting things in the whole book. The Lord has taken note of each individual who offered himself in this way, and has marked him down by name and put him in the book; and he is not only here in this book, the Bible, and there mentioned by name for all successive generations to recognize, to identify, but he is in the other book in Heaven for all eternity. That is no small thing: to have your name down not only in the Lamb's Book of Life as one born from above, a citizen of Heaven, but in the Lord's "book of remembrance" as one who has 'followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth', as one of a tabulated company, yes, out of all the saved, all the redeemed - this kind of firstfruits unto God.

Need we say more? What is the appeal of these messages? That is the point at which we arrive. I trust it means comfort to you. We want all the comfort that we can get, but we know something of the cost. How many times recently have people said to me, 'When are you going to retire? So-and-so has retired and so-and-so is retiring' - yes, ministers of the Gospel. There is no discharge in this warfare, no day for retiring, brothers and sisters. I am sorry for you! You are not going to be pensioned off down here and spend the rest of your life vegetating. You have to go on to the last breath, with battle and cost to the end. There is a cost bound up with the full purpose of God, and in many ways we know it.

But oh, the answer! The Lord is taking note; He is putting it down, and He is saying: 'That tithe, that freewill offering people, shall be My peculiar treasure in that day that I do make'. I do not know how that is going to work out, what it is going to mean. Of course, it is a picture statement: that in a great house there is something, amongst all the possessions and all the ornaments, something that is peculiarly precious to the owner, and whenever his friends come he is always showing them that. 'Have you seen this? This is most valuable. I hold it more dear than anything else I have got; indeed it is more to me than all the rest put together - a peculiar treasure.'

That is behind this. How it is going to work out I do not know, but that is what it means. Those who go this way, those who will pay this price, those who will accept these consequences, those who will be after this kind - a freewill offering to the Lord for everything that He desires and His heart is set upon - will be in His House like that. He will be drawing attention to them and saying, 'Look here, have you seen these? These are peculiarly precious to Me. They followed the Lamb whithersoever He went.'

The Lord make us like that.