

THE WORK OF GOD AT THE END-TIME

by

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End-Time Principles Set Forth in Simeon.

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Chapter One

THE PECULIAR CONDITIONS OF AN END-TIME

Reading: Luke 2:25-38; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 8:13; 9:26.

We are being led at this time to take note of the fact that we are at an end-time, and that God does a peculiar work at such a time. Things become very strange and very difficult at an end-time; everything seems to be thrown into a state of disturbance, upheaval, intense pressure and conflict. The great conflicting forces in this universe register very terribly and intensely upon that which is of God and upon those who are of account to Him, so that there often arises the sense that this is an actual end, and a question as to what more is possible. Inwardly we feel that the way is becoming exceedingly hedged up: 'frustration' is the word which seems to prevail, and outwardly everything is in a state of serious and great question as to the future. Indeed, it becomes more persistently the experience of the true people of God that they could give up and abandon everything. The ways in which this works out are numerous, but the whole effect is to paralyse and put out of commission that which is of God and bring it to a complete standstill. It is this, then, that will govern our consideration at this time - that we are in an end-time and that in end-times the work of God takes a particular form and is of a peculiar nature. It obviously becomes supremely important and necessary for the Lord's people to know the time in which they live, what the portents are, and what it is that God would do at such a time.

I suggest to you that that constitutes a real reason for getting together in serious and solemn conference, for it is not something that we can take just as a part of a sequence of meditations. Our consideration of it may be supremely crucial and in a peculiar way related to a time in the history of this world, and of God's work in this world, which is of tremendous importance and will not be repeated.

Now, this matter of the end-time and God's work therein is brought very fully and clearly into view by Simeon and Anna. There is no doubt that they represent firstly an end-time - an end-time dispensationally and an end-time with regard to their own age, for they were both advanced in years. And then they also represent God's service at such a time. Simeon used the word of himself - "*Now lettest thou thy servant (bondservant, the word is) depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace.*" "*Thy servant.*" Anna was found continuing in the temple in fastings and supplications day and night, not leaving it, a prophetess thus occupied in the house of God; and if that is not a picture of service, what is?

Fullness of Ripe Age Carried on in Freshness of New Life

I am, in the first place, going to take up the age factor. Let me say at once that, although I am going to talk about old age, my message is mainly to young people. If that sounds hardly kind and fair to others, let me put it in this way: age is not a matter of years at all. You may be young in years and yet be far beyond your years, or you may be old in years and far behind your years. This is a spiritual matter. This age factor, as represented by Simeon and Anna, corresponds to the word in Hebrews 8, "*He hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away*"; and again, to the words in 1 Corinthians 10, "*upon whom the ends of the ages are come.*" That makes us very old, does it not?

Well now, what have we as the picture before us? We have an aged man with a babe in his arms, at once bringing an end and a beginning together, an end handed on to a beginning, a beginning taking up all the fullness represented by

the old. It is the old passing over into and giving place to the new. If we get the Divine idea, the spiritual thought, about this - an aged man with a babe in his arms - we at once see that from the Divine standpoint that is the Divine principle. Age is not diminution, contraction, declension, depreciation. That is not God's mind about old age. There is a passage in Isaiah which says, "*The child shall die a hundred years old*" (Isaiah 65:20). There is a state, a condition, a realm in which a child shall die one hundred years old. It means there is a principle here - that there is a realm in which age has the child present, has the babe there in its arms. At one hundred years old the child has not gone, it is still the child. The Divine thought about old age is rather that of fullness, fullness unto the enrichment of what is yet to be, and which is about to come in; to provide a heritage; not to pass out and take everything with it and for that to be the end, but to have something very full and rich to be taken up and carried on and expressed in newness, freshness, youthfulness; all the values of a long history brought out in new ways. That is what is here.

You know the instances in the Bible of infancy linked with old age. How much is made of this spiritual principle in relation to Abraham and Isaac! When Abraham was old, Isaac was born. The fact is taken up to express this - that when there is a great accumulation of history and spiritual knowledge, God will reproduce that, He will give it form again and yet again. "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*" (Genesis 21:12). Or again, Jacob and Benjamin, the child of his old age; and what a lot Benjamin represents spiritually. Then we have the case of Eli, who was very old, and the child Samuel. It is not only a beautiful picture, but it is a very significant one, that child alongside of the aged Eli. God started there again, right in the presence of something that was in itself about to pass out, but taking up all its spiritual values to reproduce them and bring out all their intrinsic worth. Here again are the aged Simeon and Anna, - by certain computations we arrive at the conclusion that Anna was 106 years old at this point - these two with a babe. It is not an end with God; it is something very much more than that.

All Former Spiritual Values Now Centred in Christ

So the inclusive thing represented by Simeon and Anna is fullness by fulfilment. Firstly, it was the completing of a phase, the gathering up of all past spiritual values, as represented in these two, into a new and wholly spiritual order, the order of Christ.

Simeon so clearly speaks of that transition mentioned in the first chapter of the letter to the Hebrews: "*God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son.*" It is a transition from the fragmentary, the partial, the occasional, the diverse, to the complete, to the inclusiveness of the unified, and to the final. That is the transition here represented. The bringing in of the Babe, the Christ, holding Him in his arms, was in figure, simply the gathering up of all that had been of God in the past, and centring it in Christ, and seeing how He takes it up and is the fulfilment of it and transcends it.

See Simeon, then, as to the past. Something was happening now with the coming in of this Babe, the coming in of the Christ. It is not without a certain significance that Matthew's Gospel has been put out of chronological order and put into the first place in our New Testament. In that Gospel, again and again Matthew uses this phrase, "*that the scriptures might be fulfilled,*" or, "*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet.*" It is characteristic of Matthew's Gospel. It pointed backward to all the Scriptures which were looking toward this Christ in Whom they were to find their fulfilment, their realisation, their finality and their transcendence. All the hopes, all the expectations, all the promises, all the

foreshadowings and all the forecastings, were gathered into the hands of Simeon that day as he held that Babe. The Hope Of Israel was in his hands. What a long hope, what a chequered hope! Even through all their failure when black and dark despair seemed sometimes to have settled down upon them and they cried that their way was hidden from the Lord and their judgment passed away from their God, still they cherished a hope. Through all their failure, through all their sufferings, they still held to the hope that there was something yet to be. Through all the judgments which were poured upon them from heaven for their sins, they still clung to the promises and believed that they would one day see the salvation of the Lord. Oh, here it is all in the hands of Simeon! All that past is here present in those arms. That Little One answers to it all. The Hope of Israel!

This expectation and hope has reached its consummation in these very two who, with others, were looking for the consolation of Israel, the redemption of Jerusalem. They were looking; and what a day it was of little prospect, of seeming hopelessness! and yet there were those who were still hoping, still believing, still clinging. And there that day stood Simeon, holding in his arms the fulfilment of all the hopes and expectations and promises - holding the complete embodiment of the full thought of God. Simeon held all that in his hands, and by his words and attitude and spirit you can see him projecting that into the future, holding it forth. *"This child is set for..."* - the whole future is going to be affected by Him. It was a tremendous moment.

All Types and Systems Transcended by Christ in Person

Ah, but note, it carried with it a stripping of all framework of earthly systems. It was no longer that which encased Christ, it was Christ Himself. All the encasements of Christ were finished at that moment. What a moment it was! The encasing in types and figures, symbols and prophecies and the whole system of Judaism, that whole framework was shattered and stripped off that day, and the manifest reality of all that had been inherent and intrinsic in the past was in Simeon's hands, to be handed on to the future. It was a crisis, a turning of the dispensations. It was a passing from all that was merely of earthly systems in relation to Christ, to the Christ Himself: and that is no small thing, and that is the mark of the end-time.

See what we come to. Christ Himself emerges from the framework of things, from all the scaffolding of past ages, from all the figurative and typological and symbolical, and transcends the things by His own Person. There is all the difference between Himself and His things. Right up to that time, God's people had been occupied with the things concerning the Christ: now they were to be occupied with the Christ Himself. It was a tremendous moment. This is what will be at an end-time. That is the point. An end-time is transition from a lot that has had to do with Christ to Christ Himself, transition from frameworks to the essential and the intrinsic, transition from all the works and the things related to Christ to that which is known of Him personally. All the other is going to be stripped off, and we are in the day when that stripping off has seriously commenced. The issue is going to be - may I put it this way? - how much we have actually in our hands of the very Christ Himself, how much we are occupied with the things concerning Him, the encasement of Christ.

This work of transition is going to be done, for this is an end-time movement. I see it here so clearly, the pre-figuring of the prophesying of that other end-time which we have in the book of the Revelation, when the man child is brought forth, and the ultimate things are in view. At such a time everything will be tested and challenged by the forces that will be let loose from hell. There started, with the bringing in of this first man child, the Lord Jesus, a loosing of Satanic and hellish

forces which has gone on and on, right through this dispensation. Herod heard, and loosed his sword, occasioning a terrible massacre, in an endeavour to compass the death of this One; and from that time onward hell was out (and has continued to be out) not against a system but against a living Person. So here we see the man child presented and the tremendous reactions that are immediately provoked.

Pass right on to Revelation 12, and there you see a corporate company called the man child. (It is corporate because the language is *"and they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb."*) This is the corporate counterpart of the individual, of the personal. When that corporate expression of the man child is presented in the book of the Revelation, what have you? - a most violent release of evil forces for the destruction of everything that speaks of Christ.

God's End-Time Work - Everything Essentially Spiritual

Well now, what is the service of God at an end-time? As far as we have gone, surely we are able to see one or two things. The particular work of God at an end-time is, to begin with, the constituting of a new and spiritually inclusive dispensation, a new age of an essentially and wholly spiritual kind. In Hebrews 12:27 we have, *"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain."* That word 'removing' really means the transferring or the transposing on to another and different basis. The fact that that comes at the end of the letter to the Hebrews is significant, for that letter is just full of that earthly system of Judaism with all its forms, its ritual, its make-up and constitution. All that is earthly, even in relation to God, is going to be removed, and everything is going to be transferred to another basis - a spiritual, a heavenly basis; and when things begin to happen on the ground of an end-time, that is the character of what is taking place. The earthly is now going to be forced to give way to the heavenly, the temporal to the spiritual, the outward to the inward. Then it will be proved just how much we have that can be transferred, for there are many things that are not going to be transferred. *"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 15:50). That signifies and implies that there is a whole order of creation which is not going to constitute that eternal order; it is to pass away. Everything is going to be transferred to another basis, and this kind of thing intensifies at an end-time. Do you see that?

Let me put that more simply. What God will see to, by sheer force of conditions, is that anything that is only temporal will go and that which is spiritual alone will remain. There must therefore be intensifying processes to bring out the spiritual. Is not that where we are? I do not know what your experience is, but touching one and another here and there I find there is some real understanding of this. We never knew such spiritual conflict, pressure and difficulty as we are knowing now; things seem to be getting beyond measure. May this not be the explanation? The Lord seems to be concentrating upon bringing out spiritual values, making spiritual men and women, and if I am not mistaken (and I claim no gift of prophecy, in the foretelling sense), we are going to see, and are already seeing, the removal of so much, the external things, upon which Christians have been relying as though these things constituted their Christian life. We are going to be forced back to the place where the one question that faces us is, After all, what have I got of the Lord Himself? Not, What can I do, where can I go? but, What have I got? I believe that is a very present and appropriate question in many parts of the world just now, and it will be increasingly so as everything outward is brought to an end. Now is the test - What have I got in my hands?

God's End-Time Work Inclusive of All Former Values

Yes, the constituting of a new and spiritual dispensation. But I also used the word inclusive - that is, the heritage of all the values that God has ever given. This is, mark you, a dispensation principle. Spiritual history returns upon itself, it goes back to the last point of fullness. Perhaps you do not grasp what I mean by that. If there has come about a decline, whether in our own spiritual life or in the life of the Church, sooner or later we shall be forced back to the point where we left the full measure of God. Cannot you see that happening? We see it in various connections today. Take the matter of literature. There is an increasing demand for the old works. Publishers are finding a great demand for something of years ago, and it is coming into the market. The shelves have been full of cheap, superficial Christian stuff with gaudy wrappers and all that, and times have come when people are aware that this is not meeting the need, and the demand for something more is arising. The call is for some of the books which former generations had. That is happening. History is returning upon itself. There has been decline, loss, superficiality, frivolity, cheapness, in Christianity, and the Church is going to perish for want of solid food unless it is provided. Thus the cry is, 'Let us get back to what there was before.' That is happening in many ways. It is a dispensation principle. If God has really given anything, that will never be lost. Time will vindicate it. Sooner or later we shall have to come back to it. We shall be thrown back for our very lives on what God has given. This is where the new takes up the old.

It is a sorry and a superficial day, and one which will not stand up to things, when you think you can dispense with experience. If young people suppose they can think lightly of those who have gone through the fires and grown grey-headed in the service of God, in learning to know the Lord, and that such can be set aside as back numbers, that is a sorry day for the future. With all that is needed of the new generation, do not let us think they can produce all the past in their own lifetime. God will throw them back upon what has gone before. Do not count the past servants of God as back numbers. They are very much up to date. Simeon was very much up to date when he brought all the wealth, fullness, richness of the past in his hands, and, so to speak, transferred it to the new, to the Babe, Who took it all up, and Who later confessed that He did take it all up. *"Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil"* (Matthew 5:17). There are always, sooner or later, reactions from cheapness and superficiality, and that usually under duress and compulsion and a sense of being unable to go on without something fuller.

Infancy in the arms of age. Yes, and infancy depends upon those arms. I think I am not going too far in saying that here, in the holding of the infant Christ in these arms, there is this signification, that for the fulfilment of His life and ministry the Christ depended very much upon the past, upon all that God had done before. The only Bible He had was the Old Testament. How He lived on it! When He said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,"* He was talking about the only Bible He had, the Word of God, the Old Testament. You see how the Old Testament is used in the New. It is but another aspect of this. One of the richest studies and most profitable lines of inquiry is to mark where the Old Testament is found in the New and why it is found there, the use made of it. Yes, it is a tremendous fact that which is new depends upon that which has gone before.

The Abiding Value of Every Working of God

We come to a close for the present by noting this. We must live and we must work with our eye upon the after value of our lives. Thank God that can be. Life

would be an enigma and intolerable if all that we have learned through suffering and discipline passed out with us and there was nothing more for it. No, it is not like that at all. There is an after value, and we ought to live, I say, and work, with our eye upon that heritage which we are to give beyond our own time. On the principle that God vindicates everything that He Himself has done and given, and makes it necessary, then He is making necessary for His new dispensation what He is doing in you and in me now. That new dispensation is going to be constituted on the basis of what He is doing in his saints now. That is a New Testament principle. What He is doing in the Church now is to be the good of the coming ages. What He is doing in us, it is not presumption to say, is going to be the very life of some beyond our time. So we should not think of this life as something to be got through, to be lived through to ourselves, something in itself. It is something that is to be found again to the glory of God in that which is to be - the passing on of that which has been of God, which can never die but is conserved by Him forever, and will be necessary. I wonder if that is a new thought to you? What the Lord is doing in you by way of increasing the measure of Christ in you is going to be necessary long after you have gone. It is a principle, a law, that anything that God does is forever and will be necessary.

We will leave it there for the time being and ask the Lord to exercise us quite strongly about this matter of the intrinsic value of the knowledge of Himself for the time that is to be, through this transition upon which we have now so seriously entered.

Chapter Two

THE IMPORTANCE OF VISION

Reading: Luke 2:25-38.

We were noting in our earlier meditation that Simeon embodies all that relates to an end-time, and that in an end-time a peculiar set of conditions arises. On the one side, there is a sense of disintegration with regard to what has been, and on the other hand a sense of something pending, a new situation and a new set of conditions coming, with certain very definite and serious issues arising in the meantime. Firstly, it may be asked, how much of all that has been is going to survive and be carried on into the new situation? - for a great stripping is taking place, a great sifting of the spiritual as over against the temporal, even in relation to the things of God. Or (to come to the figure here of Simeon taking in his arms the child Jesus) how much of the Lord have we really got in hand in a time of transition and of break-up and of pending new conditions? On the other hand, how much of all that is associated with the Lord is after all of that external order and system which is purely earthly and transitory, temporal, the framework, the mould of things? These are very important questions and issues, and they are all forced in at a time when things are about to change. Then very grave strain and pressure and conflict comes into the atmosphere. It is as though something is about to be brought forth which stirs the enemy to his utmost resistance, oppression and frustration, so much so that at such a time the whole fabric of the spiritual life is under strain and test, and it would be much easier to give up or take some line of less resistance. These are things which belong to an end-time, and we were noting that there is no doubt that we are in such a time today. That is the significance of this very hour. Things are going to change radically, one order is going to pass and another to come in. But amidst this sifting ordeal today, there can be, and should be, that which answers to the case of Simeon, who was the embodiment firstly of all the spiritual values that had been, and then of the break-up of all that was not spiritual and permanent, being but a framework of things in the past dispensation; and further, the embodiment of the principles and intrinsic values of what was coming. That is very briefly and broadly what occupied us in our previous meditation.

Simeon Had Vision

But now we are going to note one dominant factor about Simeon as representing this end-time, transition period. This dominant factor, which is also a dominant necessity, is contained in the one word 'vision.' Although Simeon and Anna were so old, they had vision; which meant that, although they were at an end of one phase and naturally might just have closed down, and so an end have come to everything, they had instead a new beginning in their hands, something more ahead than ever had been before. That matter of vision is of tremendous, of superlative, importance, for, as we are going to see more fully, these two people embody the whole principle of service to God at a most critical time in the development of His interests. Service will only be of a transient character and very limited in its value and range if there is no vision: it will be something that is being done for itself and largely as an end in itself, and that is not adequate. Service must have a far greater range of significance than that of just doing a thing, something done for the time, with the one concerned seeing nothing beyond the thing with which he is immediately occupied. That means limitation, transience, poverty in service. Vision always carries forward beyond the present, and adds in something, so that what is being done contains more than itself in time and in value.

The Effect of Vision

(1) Life

See how vision was really the vital thing in Simeon's case, what manifold effects it had upon himself. Here is an old man who, according to all natural laws, is at the end of his life and may die any day. People would be saying about him, 'We should never be surprised to hear old Simeon had gone;' and yet vision kept him alive. He could not die, because he had a God-given vision. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. *"Mine eyes have SEEN!"* Here is a man with eyes in his old age, a man who is seeing; and there is a power in that seeing which casts him forward, and puts death back, making it a servant rather than a lord. He can say to death, 'You must wait my time, the Lord's time.' Vision kept him alive, and transcended all the ordinary course and laws, making him the master of them all, giving him ascendancy.

Whatever it may have meant in his case as to his natural life, his length of days on the earth, that has to be transferred to the spiritual realm. Of course, there is a direction in which it still holds good physically. If God has given a vision and bound up the realisation of it, even in some measure, with the life of a chosen vessel, that man or that woman, that vessel, is immortal until the work is done. That one can cry with the Psalmist - *"I shall not die, but live"* (Psalm 118:17). But you have to be possessed of a vision of God's intention so much that your life is bound up with it. Well, his vision kept Simeon alive. There is a tremendously vitalizing effect about true vision.

(2) A Link With God's Purpose

There is a very great deal more in what I have said than perhaps you have recognized, and a great deal more to be said about it. To be a link with God's purpose by receiving from the Lord a vision of what that purpose is is a tremendously emancipating thing. It is one thing just to go on from day to day and week to week and year to year in a kind of piecemeal way: we go to the meeting today and to the conference next weekend, and that is repeated again and again, and so the whole rota of Christian activity and occupation is just something in itself. It is quite another thing to be caught up in the grip and the throb of a mighty, dominating vision corporately, so that the very atmosphere seems to proclaim there is something more than just the occasion - there is something big, something far-reaching in this - and you are brought into it by the Holy Spirit. You come in, as did Simeon, in the Spirit. You find you have not just joined something, linked yourself on with some thing which goes along as on wheels which are square, bumping over and bumping over, but you are in a course, like the wheels of Ezekiel's vision, full of life, going straight forward - tremendous vision! - to One in the Throne. There is a great deal of difference. You may be able to mark in your own minds the difference between these things - on the one hand the thing that is just something in itself, that is just going on, being kept going perhaps by its own momentum or drive, or by other interests brought in, something very much an end in itself, and it does not matter very much whether you go or come. On the other hand there is that which is so different - a coming right into line with the great purpose of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, seeing what God is after as far beyond the present attainment.

In the case of Simeon, it made him a living link with God's purpose. Here was the old, the passing dispensation, but in it were spiritual investments of God. Here was the new dispensation, introduced by the coming of Christ. Simeon stood as a link joining those two, and he was a very living link indeed. We are coming to the

time when a great many changes are going to take place in the set system of Christendom, and when the spiritual will alone be of account, and when it will be of vital consequence that God should have a people who are a link with His fuller purpose. He has always required such. If we were inclined to do so, we could go back to the Bible and mark transition periods again and again, and see just what God put in at the point of transition as His link between the two, and as His bridge from the one to the other. But there is the fact. If we have any reason to believe that such a change is imminent, when it will not be possible to carry on on the old lines and to go on organizing things with all the old machinery, and when the people of God are going to be forced by world conditions on to a spiritual ground where their concern will be just the Lord Himself, if we have any reason to feel that has commenced, then this must follow - that there should be something that becomes for God a ministry which links on with His fuller purpose, which stands vitally related to Him in His greater intentions, which brings in the Lord in fullness. Simeon did that, and so became himself the sign of a dispensational movement, a living link with God's fuller purpose.

(3) A Walk With God

Another effect that vision had upon Simeon was that it kept him walking with God, it gave him spiritual incentive, it made a spiritual man of him. I am sure you will agree that we very much need spiritual incentive. It is a question which is always very present. What is everything for? What is it all about? What is the good of it all? We can very often lose heart. Cannot you lose heart in the work of God as you look out on the spiritual condition of things? If you have any vision of what God wants, your heart can sink as you see how things are in comparison. It is a poor kind of spiritual vision that can be satisfied with things as they are now. But, in the presence of this heartbreaking state, together with all the wearing out, frustration, resistance, hardness of the way, and the many difficulties and problems which come upon the people of God, we do need incentive, and that is only saying in another way that we do need vision. *"Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint"* (disintegrate) (Proverbs 29:18). Without vision they go to pieces, there is no doubt about that. But, you see, Simeon had vision and therefore in a day when things generally were most disappointing and unsatisfactory, when that which was really of the Lord was very small indeed, in that day by his vision he was a man throbbing with incentive. It kept him walking with God. We need something to keep us walking with God. It is so easy to let go and to drift. The prayer life is so difficult to maintain in strength. You have to fight for your prayer life: you lose it if you do not; and so with everything else in this walk with God. Everything is against it - the drag and the drain and the pressure. Unless we have vision, we shall not be walking with God. To walk with God for His own sake, out of pure love for Himself is, I suppose, the highest level at which we can aim, and we certainly need something to promote such love and maintain it. A man once said to me, 'It is the ministry that keeps me going as a Christian.' That is terrible; but what he meant was that he had to have incentive, something to hold him to the Lord. It is in that sense that I say this. Because Simeon had vision, this perception that the Lord had committed Himself to something great and that he himself was bound up with it, he lived near to the Lord and found his strength for a close walk with his God. It made him a spiritual man. He *"came in the Spirit into the temple;"* he was evidently living in and walking by the Spirit, and that describes a spiritual man. How important, then, vision is.

(4) A Strong Prayer Life

Again, vision made Simeon a man of prayer. It made Anna a woman of prayer, one who continued in fastings and supplications day and night. It was vision that

did it. We must have a motive to maintain our prayer life, otherwise it becomes mechanical, something done, something that is an obligation, something that we are afraid not to do. Prayer is maintained in strength by vision.

(5) Accountability

And altogether Simeon was an accountable factor because of vision. How needed it is for everyone of the Lord's people to be an accountable factor. We speak of 'live wires,' really life points that count in the midst of all that is dark and drab and heavy and murky, or all that could turn us in on ourselves and keep us circling round with questions. We need to be factors that count in the things of God, and that is only produced by vision. Well, what will make us positive in function and in influence? for that is what we need to be. What will save us from drift and diversion and from snares? What will take mere nominalism and ordinariness and tentativeness and contentedness out of us? What will make us choose the best and not be satisfied with the good and argue that there is no harm in it? What will deliver us from all that sort of thing? Nothing but vision. The possession of true vision will save us. You will never be merely nominal if you have Divinely-given vision, you will be vital.

It is that which explains Paul, for if ever there was a vital man, an accountable man, a man of destiny, it was Paul; and do you remember that Paul always places himself alongside of all saints and never for a moment regards himself as above them in any way. He is always speaking about 'we, we, we', meaning himself and the other believers. What made him the vital, accountable man he was, able to say, "*I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision*" (Acts 26:19)? He had vision.

The Need for Exercise in Relation to Vision

Well, you say, we agree, we do not dispute anything you have said, but we have not got vision; what about it? The point is we have to get before the Lord on this matter and ask Him to put us into His vision and His vision into us; otherwise we shall be mere passengers to be carried along, mere parasites living upon the life of others, and contributing nothing. We must really bring this to a practical issue with the Lord, and that is the whole point at this moment in what I am saying. No one can give you vision but the Lord. But to see God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, to be able to say with Simeon, "*Mine eyes have seen,*" makes a life of vital account. It was for that the Apostle prayed for others, 'that the eyes of their heart might be enlightened.' Well, when all has been said, it is something that calls us to exercise, for this is not something merely personal. This is something that touches the service of God in a critical time in the history of this world and of the people of God, in a movement of dispensations with great issues pending. Presently, mark you, there are going to be many of the Lord's own children and servants wondering where they are. They are going to have to leave their fields of service, and have all their work taken away, and they will be standing saying, 'What is the meaning of this? what does the future hold? where are we?' Ah, but that is not all. I have only used that by way of trying to focus the thing that is on my heart. We are moving quickly into a big change in the whole complexion of organized Christianity, and in such a time there has to be something that steadies things, that holds things for God, that understands the situation like Daniel and his friends in whom was the Spirit of wisdom. They knew the heavenly meaning of what was taking place and could interpret the happenings, save the situation and touch the ages.

You see what I mean. There must be something, and it is a very critical business. We must be in possession, and under the mastery, of this heavenly vision, the

purpose of God. We must see the nature and meaning of what is happening, of the trend of things, the issues that are involved, and we must be found in co-operation with God in these movements of His from heaven, able to serve Him now.

If that seems altogether abstract and remote, let me bring it all to this: it is wholly a matter of a living and adequate measure of Christ. Come back to Simeon and Anna. All, probably, that onlookers saw was a little baby being brought to the temple for the common customs, as thousands and thousands of babies had been brought over the years. But these two saw in that child vast ranges - "*Thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*" Look at what is centred in that child. But you would not see it if you had not revelation. If you were not taught of the Spirit, you would not see the significance of Christ. These are truths which you can be told and believe, but has God revealed them in your heart? The time is coming when that will be the ground of testing; not doctrine, teaching, reading the Bible, but what you have in hand. For centuries men had been coming to the temple with their hands full of offerings of many kinds, meal offerings and other forms of offering: they were not allowed to appear with empty hands. But did they grasp the real significance of what was in their hands? Was it to them merely an offering of meal, a lamb, a ram, a goat, whatever the offering was - some thing? Was that the beginning and the end? Did they see? We know now that all that was a symbol of something very much more. We know it as teaching. We have had lectures on the tabernacle and its offerings and sacrifices. We know all about it technically, but what have we in hand? What will it be when the great shaking comes when we can no longer have meetings or the fellowship of believers, and perhaps have to endure what many out in other lands are under today? What have we got in hand? What has been revealed by the Holy Ghost? It is not merely a question of that in which we have been brought up and taught in meetings and conferences, but of what has really been revealed in us of Christ, of which we can say, "*Mine eyes have seen.*" No one can take away from me what I have seen; nothing can destroy that; I have seen, and it has become a part of my very being. That is the crucial point in a day like this. We must be able to recognize the changing directions of things, and we must be able to move with God.

It was said of Simeon that "*the Holy Spirit was upon him,*" and we live in a dispensation which is much more one of the Spirit than that. The Spirit is in us; not merely visiting and not only coming upon us, but abiding within. But because Simeon and Anna were in the Spirit, they knew the great significance of that moment. When the child Jesus was brought in, something happened within them which, to put it in a phrase, meant, 'This is that!' That is the ministry, that which you have in yourself by the Holy Spirit's working, enabling you to say, 'This is that, this is it!' It becomes something tremendously real, living, consequential. This is that! To be able thus by the Spirit to interpret God's meaning constitutes a ministry. We have yet to speak of how Simeon and Anna are the embodiment of the service principle, but we have got very near to what service to God really means. To begin with, it means vision.

If this in any way really touches your hearts, if you are in any measure able to perceive that this surely is the direction of things, may I ask that you will earnestly go to the Lord and be deeply exercised in prayer that you may have His vision? Seek that it may be in you, so that you will be able to serve the situation when a great deal is collapsing. Even if it could be said that we are not yet in the emergency of a change of a dispensation, surely the situation as it is today requires all I have said. But the real incentive is the knowledge that the day is far

spent, the night cometh when no man can work. May the Lord find us as children of the day and not of the night.

Chapter Three

THE NATURE OF SERVICE AND THE MARKS OF THE SERVANT

Reading: Luke 2:25-35.

"The end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7).

I think it unnecessary to stress the fact that not only by reason of time, but also by the clear evidence of world developments, the above words from Peter's letter are obviously very much nearer fulfilment than when they were written. We have only to contemplate some actual, present possibilities, which could develop any day and issue in a very full fulfilment of the end of all things. In a word, there is no doubt that *"the end of all things is at hand,"* that the turn of the dispensation is near. The great transition from what has obtained during this dispensation to what will obtain in the next is approaching rapidly. If that is true, if we are impressed with that, we should look to the Word of God to see if it has anything to say to us as to what the Lord will do at such a time; and we are not left without very clear information as to the nature of things at an end-time and as to what God brings forward as His supreme work at such a time. Here, in the end-time represented by Simeon and Anna and a company in Jerusalem, we have been seeing something of those abiding spiritual features of such a time.

Our particular point now is the matter of service as represented by Simeon; Simeon and the service of God at an end-time. We shall look at the service and the servant, putting it in that order because it is the service to be fulfilled which explains God's dealings with the servant. You never know why the Lord deals with you in certain ways until you know what He wants to do with you; or, to put that in another way, the Lord's dealings with us are prophetic of what He is going to do through us and by us.

The Service - the Bringing in of Christ in Fullness

Here was Simeon. The service explained the man, for, as we have so far seen, the service to be fulfilled by Simeon was the bringing in of Christ in fullness. Up to that time Christ had been made known in a fragmentary way, by divers portions, in divers ways, here a little and there a little. It had been a progressive development of that which pointed to or symbolized Christ. But now the end of those times had come - of signs and symbols and parts and diversities. Now had arrived the full, the whole, the complete Christ, the Lord Himself; and Simeon was closely related to the bringing in, and the presenting to the future, of Christ, the embodiment of God's fullness. That was the principle of his service, the thing for which God had reserved him and kept him alive; and when there is a service like that to be fulfilled, the bringing in of Christ essentially - not typically, symbolically or partially but essentially and fully - the course of the servant will be no ordinary, easygoing course. The history will not be simple. It will seem to be very complex, very bewildering, very stressful. There will be all the things in existence which would put the instrument out of commission.

The Servant

(1) Prepared Through Pressure

You need only to read the story of the years between the two Testaments to know at what a low level things were when the Lord Jesus came in. There was plenty going on of the religious system, but the real, spiritual, essential value was very small, the state of things very deplorable; and Simeon had lived long years

through that state of things and might well have lost heart. There was plenty, I say, to put him out altogether. You know of the political conditions of his day, which created a well-nigh impossible situation in which to expect the fulfilment of any testimony in glory. The enemy was in the land and the people of God were in poor condition; and much more. The inward spiritual history of this man could have been no easygoing sort of thing, but must have been full of testing and trying, and of much pressure to put him right out. Strange ways with a vessel for fullness! You would think that to be chosen for such a purpose would mean that the history would in some way correspond with fullness, would be marvellous and wonderful, without any difficulty about it at all.

But it is just the contrary. That vessel, chosen and reserved by God to bring in a greater fullness of Christ, is a vessel strangely beset and assailed by all sorts of extraordinary things. It has a complicated course, in which it would never be at all difficult to give up and fade right out and say, 'The situation is hopeless!' The way of this service that has to do with the fullness of Christ is a way of great difficulty and perplexity and anguish, of pressure and stress and seeming complication, and oftentimes of apparent impossibility.

(2) Tested by God's Hidden Working

I want to say here that Simeon was but the individual voice and actor in a corporate end-time ministry. We are told here that Anna, who is a kind of counterpart of Simeon, spoke to all those who looked for the redemption of Jerusalem. There was evidently a company of them in Jerusalem. It may have been, and doubtless was, comparatively small, but there it was. There was a company there, waiting, praying, standing for the fullness of the Lord, and Simeon was but the voice and expression of that corporate vessel. I say that, because we do not want to think too much about the individuals in this matter - considering ourselves as individual Simeons. The Lord raises up a corporate testimony to represent and bring in His greater fullness, and what is true of the individual is true of the company. It goes through strange, unusual ways of testing, of perplexity, of adversity, of strain, and oftentimes its position seems to be an impossible one. Just think yourself into Simeon's position. All these long years he had been standing, praying, waiting, longing, for the coming of the Lord's Christ. Although the Lord Himself had spoken to him and told him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ, you know very well that under certain conditions of pressure you are tempted to question even what the Lord has said to you, and it would not have been difficult now for Simeon, as an old man, to have said, 'I wonder if I am deceived. Am I holding on to an illusion? Nothing seems to be happening, there seems to be no development, I am getting older and older, and even the promises of God do not seem to be fulfilled; what God has said seems to be no nearer realisation.' Under stress you can feel and think like that. I have no doubt Simeon suffered the same assaults on his mind as other people of God have done in their relationship to something precious of the Lord.

Do realize, then, that it is perhaps as a part of a vessel, and not as being individually of great significance, that we may be sharing the strange history of that vessel and the peculiar pressure upon it, because it is chosen of God to bring in a greater fullness of His Son in a time when spiritual need is going to be very great and very intense.

The ways of God in Simeon's days were hidden ways. There was no sign of anything, nothing at all that spoke of a mighty work of God. That is the most testing thing - to be able to live through and live on when it seems that God is doing nothing about the thing you have been hoping for and talking about. The

signs are all hidden, the ways of God are beyond our finding out. That is a very testing thing, but it is in such testings that the Lord prepares His vessel for that particular service.

(3) Reduced Unto Refinement and Effectiveness

Now I have said that this was a very small company, and that is borne out again and again by the Word of God. At critical times, times of transition, that is a feature to be taken account of. At an end-time, that which is to be the vessel of fullness is in itself a very small vessel. There may be the big thing, but that which is really going to serve the full end of God will be reduced unto refinement, as was the case with Gideon's thirty-two thousand, who were reduced to three hundred for that purpose. It was not a big company in the end, not a mob, not a mass movement. It is like that and will be like that at the end. That which is related to God's fuller intention will be a comparatively small thing very much refined, and the Lord takes serious pains to see that it is so.

(4) The Bondservant of a Despot

Now when you come to Simeon in relation to that service, you note, of course, that he speaks of himself as the Lord's servant. There are two words here of considerable significance. "*Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace.*" As we have earlier intimated, the word he used is the one used so often by the Apostle Paul about himself. "*Now lettest thou thy BONDSERVANT...*" "*Paul, the BOND-SLAVE of Jesus Christ.*" Simeon looked upon himself as the Lord's bond-slave. And then, when he said, "*Now lettest thou thy servant depart, LORD,*" he did not use the word that is usually employed for Lord, but the word *despotes*, 'the despot'. 'Now lettest thou thy bond-slave go free, O Despot.' You see what kind of conception he had of himself as a servant, and of the Lord as in the position of complete mastery over him. We so often think of the Lord as the Lord Whom we delight in; we like to call Him Lord, but we do not often think of Him in the sense of a despot. That word for us has an unsavoury element in it. The Lord, the Despot! What I am trying to point out is that, in the usage of this language, Simeon is looking upon himself as the servant of the Lord under absolute mastery. The Lord was his complete master, despot. He was a mastered, a subdued, a subjugated man. For this service of the fullness of Christ, the servant has to be on that basis, a bond-slave, one in complete subjection to the Lord. So much is this the case that here the Greek figure behind the language is that of the slave who has either been inherited or bought, and then branded; he cannot take freedom unless he is either given franchise or bought right out from his bondage by some superior authority. He has no rights whatever. And Simeon is saying, 'Now, Lord, let me go as Thy branded bond-slave; give me my heavenly franchise.'

What a conception of the servant of the Lord! It has to be like that; to serve the Lord in any fullness, we have to come there.

(5) Utter Heart Response to Divine Apprehending

There were two intertwining factors in Simeon's case. There was the sovereign act of God in his apprehending, and there was the heart response of Simeon to that apprehending. These two things work in both ways. God acted sovereignly to apprehend him, and Simeon, on his part, made a full heart response. Yet it also worked the other way. Because Simeon's heart was so set upon the Lord, the Lord laid hold on him. There is the great truth of the Bible that back of all our spiritual history and experience is election, relating, of course, not to salvation but to service. That lies behind and before anything on our part at all. And yet

God looks to see the attitude of our hearts before He will bring that election into realization and express it. The fact does remain that the Lord waits for something on our part, even if only for an attitude, for reality - that we really mean business with Him - before He can bring out clearly that thing which He has foreseen and intended. When our hearts are like Simeon's, wholly and utterly abandoned to the Lord so that he calls the Lord his Despot and himself the Lord's bond-slave, we discover then that the Lord has had us in view for a long time, and His intentions concerning us are brought to light. You see the intertwining of these two things - the sovereignty of God and the abandonment of our hearts. They are like two circles turning in on themselves all the time. Do remember that, because they are very important things.

(6) Christ Alone Served

Now life can only be definite and meaningful and unified if it is mastered by one Master. The explanation of the dividedness, the disintegration, the distraction, the lack of cohesion and certainty and meaning, is so often that we have not got a Master. Either we are trying to be our own masters, or we are allowing ourselves to be mastered by all sorts of interests and considerations, and thus are playing into the hands of the forces that are at work to destroy our lives. Our great need is of a Master, a Despot, and to be found in utter subjection to Him; what Paul (the man who knew all about this) called 'being apprehended by Christ Jesus.' That was Paul's conception of his conversion. One day the Lord put His hands on him, said, 'Now, Paul, I have got you; what will you do about it?' and the wholehearted response, never gone back upon, was, "*What shall I do, Lord?*" (Acts 22:10). From that time, Paul called himself the bond-slave of Jesus Christ, and the one thing that concerned him was to be in subjection to Christ, or for Christ to be absolutely Lord. If it is not like that, life will be a confusion, a civil war inside of ourselves. Unless there is one absolute Master, life will be a misfit; we shall have missed the thing for which God made us, until He is our Master.

Take Paul as an example. Paul was making havoc of his own life as well as of the life of many others while he was in rebellion against the Lord, while he was kicking against the goad. That became perfectly clear after the Lord got the mastery. And what was more (and what is always true, of course, where there is this lack of complete subjection to the Lord) Satan was the driving force behind Paul. He thought he was his own master, but he was being driven; he was helpless before the drive of this evil power. More and more that power of evil was fastening on him and driving him on in desperation to all lengths, involving great cost to himself and much suffering to many others. Oh, what a lot then there is behind this term that Paul came afterwards to use of himself - 'the bond-slave of Jesus Christ.' All those wild, tempestuous forces in his own nature, with which we ourselves are so familiar, those forces that fiercely rise up against the Lord and against all that is of the Lord - all that riot of evil forces was brought into subjection to Jesus Christ, and he could speak of himself as His bond-slave.

(7) No Satisfaction Short of the Full Divine Intention

Come back to Simeon. You see, Simeon was a man of great interests. He has been traced by scholars to be the son of Hillel, the great Jewish scholar who founded a school of interpretation of the law. He has also been declared to be the father of the great Gamaliel, at whose feet Paul was brought up. If these facts be true, he must have had a tremendous heritage, a wide field of interest. But, for Simeon, the coming of the hand of the Lord upon him meant that none of that - his scholarly interest, his inheritance, his world, great and full as it was - answered to the deepest thing in him; and it was that same deep thing in him still unanswered, still unsettled, that was his apprehending. We ourselves come to

some extent into this very thing when we find that, however much there may be in life and in this world which interests us and occupies much of our time and attention, somehow or other it is not answering to something in us. We may get as far as we can get in that, in success and so on, and yet somehow even the best and the greatest is still a disappointment: there is something remaining. That is the apprehending hand of God, so that nothing just 'fills the bill,' as we say: there is something which has still to be met, some question still to be answered, some compelling sense of our standing in relationship to something more and higher. That is a mark of God's having a greater purpose in our lives, for He never lets us be satisfied with anything less than the full object for which He has called us. We may think we now have our field, but if that is less than all God's thought we may explore and exploit our field but we shall discover that we have not found all that in our heart of hearts we know to be the answer to our existence, to that sense of destiny, of Divine purpose, which casts an emptiness and dissatisfaction upon all else. It was like that, undoubtedly, with Simeon, and yet that something else had not yet come actually into view. But the day that it came, why, his whole world passed out as nothing. He said, 'Now I have it, now I have arrived!' The day when he held the child Jesus in his arms, he knew he had his answer.

Have you had an experience like that? Do you know something of what that means? - waiting, longing, praying, feeling, and then the Lord brings you into touch with that thing which is peculiarly of Himself, and you say, 'This is what I have been sensing the need of, this is it.'

That is the dealing of the Lord with a servant of His, or an instrument, be it personal or corporate, that is chosen for something more than the ordinary, that is called unto the fuller instead of the partial.

Let us then really face this whole question of the Lord's need of an apprehended vessel to bring in the greater measure of the fullness of Christ, and ponder the strange spiritual history through which such a vessel will go - the unusual dealings of God, and the unusual interest of the powers of evil as they concentrate upon putting that vessel out of action, upon frustrating that purpose. Here it is so clearly represented by this man.

You see, I feel the Lord is wanting to say something to us at this time about the end which is at hand, and of His concern to have a vessel that will serve Him in this fuller way regarding His Christ in a time of coming spiritual need; and of what, therefore, we may expect as to our own experience, our own handling, in view of our having to meet forces so unusual, the awful drive of the enemy. How necessary it is for there to be more than an ordinary abandonment to the Lord - coming to the place where He is Master and Lord in very truth, and where we are utterly subject to Him. Let us make this a very definite matter of prayer. If we can at all discern these signs, both as to the world and the coming phase of things, as well as in our own spiritual experience, let us see that they are of tremendous meaning, and get very much to the Lord that He shall find us a vessel to hand, completely under His mastery.

Chapter Four

A MINISTRY OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST

"And his father and his mother were marvelling at the things which were spoken concerning him; and Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against; yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:33-35).

The Meaning of Christ Must Be Inwrought

In the passage quoted above we have given us something of the meaning of Christ, something of what is involved when Christ comes into our lives with ministry in view. That is the real significance of Simeon's vision and service. Sooner or later, to those who are *"called according to his purpose"* the meaning of Christ will be brought home in a forceful and much fuller way. It may be that we have a deep and very real knowledge brought to us at our conversion; but whether that be so or, on the contrary, we are born again in a simple and comparatively easy way, the time will come when, through deep crises and upheavals in our lives, we shall move up to the fact that Christ, and union with Him, is something infinitely greater than we had ever imagined. It is true that salvation is free and all of grace, but it is not cheap and superficial. If we so regard it we may just fade out, count for little, or be amongst the offended. The eternal counsels of God, comprehending all ages and realms, and centring in a redeemed people, are so full of meaning, so vast in their import, that much deepening work has to be done to bring about a correspondence with them. We have to come to a realisation of what it means to us that we have been called into fellowship with so momentous and so vast a One as God's Son. There are three aspects of *"the fellowship of his sufferings:"* the first, co-operation with Him in His work of delivering souls from a jealous and bitterly hostile enemy; the second, the discipline and purifying which makes for Christ-likeness; the third, the enlarging of capacity, and developing of faculties for apprehending and understanding the greatness of Divine things, particularly the knowledge of Christ. All this is suffering indeed. We cannot attain unto this knowledge along the line of merely being informed; it has to be inwrought. No amount of listening to teaching will bring it about. Often a large amount of long-standing teaching only springs into life when the one possessing it passes into an almost devastating experience of suffering and testing. One world seems to be entirely breaking up and falling away, and a new one is essential to survival. Those who know Christ more fully and really are those who have discovered Him in deep spiritual agony and perplexity. Christ is the door into an immense realm of Divine meaning, and there is nothing casual or haphazard about that way. The whole being becomes involved in this issue if we are really going to represent spiritual measure for others. *"A sword shall pierce through thine own soul."*

John Bunyan, in his great dream allegory, sought to personify characteristics and propensities, and to represent them in life-size form, so that they could be seen in full stature. By his characters he would make us see ourselves, our weaknesses, our perils. As we see them passing before us we smile, we feel ashamed, we are disgusted, and then we find that Bunyan has portrayed ourselves.

One of these characters, in which Bunyan has concentrated his genius for humour, sarcasm and irony, is Mr. By-Ends. He tells us that Mr. By-Ends' ancestors gave their name to the town of Fairspeech, that his great-grandfather was a waterman, who always looked one way and rowed the other. Mrs. By-Ends,

his wife, was a very virtuous woman, the daughter of my Lady Feigning, and By-Ends and his wife had two firm religious principles to which they most strictly adhered, and brought up their family accordingly. These established religious principles were (1) never to strive against the wind and the tide, and (2) to walk with Religion when he goes in his silver slippers, and if the sun shines and if the people applaud him. Bunyan says that is a tendency found in human nature to pretend, to feign, to look one way and really be going the other, to make-believe, to choose the line of least resistance, to go the popular way, but to disappear when things are difficult. We all have nothing but contempt for Mr. ByEnds. But that kind of thing can be the peril of us all, more or less. Indeed, it is going to be disastrous unless the Lord deals drastically with it, for it is so utterly incompatible with Christ and with God's eternal purpose as centred in Him.

Let us look again then at the words of Luke and see something of what is involved through Christ being brought in.

Christ Determines Destiny

First of all, Simeon says that this Child - the Christ - is going to determine destiny. He *"is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel."* There are several different translations of these words. Firstly, they may mean that some will fall, never to rise again, as they come up against the Lord Jesus. They will find Him a stumbling-block. It was said in the Scriptures that He would be a stumbling-block to many (Isaiah 8:14). Many would strike their foot against Him and go headlong. How true that has proved to be! Coming up against the Lord Jesus, and not being willing to accept the offence of the Cross, not being willing to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, not being willing to take up the Cross and follow Him, they have gone headlong, and their destiny has been settled by their contact with the Lord Jesus. It is ever so. On that side He is set for the falling of many; that is, He is put there to find out whether we really mean business with God or not; and many coming up to Him and finding Him and His way an offence have turned and gone again, God only knows to what. *"Set for the falling... of many."*

"And the rising of many;" and oh, what a glorious story is bound up with that! Many have come to Him, sensible of something of the cost, recognizing that in which they will be involved if they should link on and go with Him. Nevertheless, they have chosen Him; and what a lifting it has meant for them! Yes, from the dunghill to be set amongst the Princes of His people (1 Samuel 2:8). *"We maketh the rebel a priest and a king."* You and I know just a little of what it means to have been lifted by reason of union with the Lord Jesus. But how much more there is yet to be, for He has given His word that some shall sit with Him in His Throne, even as He overcame and sat down with His Father in His Throne (Revelation 3:21). What a rising! A long and wonderful story could be told of men who have been lifted by the Lord Jesus. The settling of destiny: some will fall, some will rise. Their attitude toward the Christ will determine for ever which it is going to be.

These words may also mean that many will fall and also rise, and in this connection there is a mighty army. I see Peter in that company. Oh, this self-elevated, self-confident, self-assured, boasting Peter! *"Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee"* (Matthew 26:35). There was a man who was up, but up on a false platform, and when he came really into touch with Christ crucified he fell - but, praise God, to rise again. Christ, Who brought him down, brought him up. See the great Saul of Tarsus riding his high-horse to Damascus; and what a high-horse it was! Oh, how self-sufficient and self-important and self-confident was young Saul of Tarsus! He came down off that high-horse into the

dust at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth - the most humiliating thing that could ever have been conceived by him. 'Jesus of Nazareth, that false prophet, that impostor, that blasphemer of God, that one who was hanged on a Cross, bearing what our law declares to be the mark of the curse of God resting upon him!' Think of that man humbled at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth and saying, "What shall I do, Lord?" Has he not come down? Yes, but did he not come up? "This child is set for the falling and the rising of many".

It will always be like that, one thing or the other. We shall go down before Jesus Christ, we shall come up, according to our attitude and response to Him, according to whether we refuse or accept, obey or disobey; He determines it. Coming down from our own natural strength and fullness, in brokenness, humiliation and shame at His feet, confessing Him Lord - a hand will take us and lift us to such wonderful heights of grace.

Christ A Sign Spoken Against

(1) The Challenge of His Presence

Then said Simeon, *"and for a sign which is spoken against"*. What is that? It means that He is set for a provocation by implication. A sign is an implication. It implies something, and the effect of this implication is to provoke. Should you begin to see what Jesus implies, there will be some reaction; and if you are not prepared to accept the implication of Jesus Christ you will be strongly provoked. You will not remain neutral, you will begin to fight. That is where Saul of Tarsus was. Deeper down than all else, he was fighting against the Lord, kicking against the goad. That was the innermost meaning of it. He was provoked by the significance of Jesus, the significance of Christ Himself. In the person of Christ you have a different kind of man, no mere earthly man, but a heavenly Man. Here is a Man embodying in His own person a holy, heavenly standard, the standard of heaven, and men are being measured and weighed by heavenly standards in the presence of the Lord Jesus: not only by what He says, and the judgments that He verbally passes, but by His presence. They are discovering that here is a standard that finds out their smallness, their lack, and their difference. You know that is very true. We have often said that if a true child of God, indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, goes into a business house to work or into some ungodly home, it often happens that, without their saying anything about their being a Christian, a strain begins to be felt, and people begin to be nasty or pass remarks. Something in the very atmosphere has been stirred up and provoked by the presence of Christ in the believer. Without being awkward or difficult (some people are that, of course, and provoke by their foolishness) by even a true, humble, loving child of God something is provoked, and he or she becomes a marked person and known to be different, and that difference is awkward for other people. People begin to feel uncomfortable. If that is true of some simple child of God, how much more true it must have been of the very Son of God Himself. His presence was the standard measure of heaven. Men could not measure up to it, and they felt all wrong and uncomfortable in Its presence. He was a sign. There was a significance about Him, about His very presence, which was spoken against: it provoked.

It is a grand thing to be at home in the presence of Jesus Christ, to know the grace of God which makes it possible to sit down with this holy and righteous and perfect One. But He finds us out. Often that is just what is going on. We are being provoked, upset, annoyed, we know not why; but if we did know, we should realize that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is at work upon us because we are out of harmony with our Lord. In such a case we can take one of two attitudes, either get right, or go from bad to worse and become more and more bitter, even against the Lord. He is a sign spoken against.

(2) The Challenge of His Manner of Life

His life and behaviour constituted that significance which was so provocative. You see, He did not conform to their earthly system, even their religious system. He did not fall into line and do the customary thing. He belonged to a heavenly system. Spiritual and heavenly principles were everything to Him and not just outward rites and performances, and He was not going to be drawn into the mere externalities and formalities; He was holding to the inner principles; and the significance of His behaviour provoked those who were concerned for the form of things rather than for the spirit, for the framework rather than for the heart. This people offer lip service: God is seeking heart service. The presence of the Lord Jesus is the repudiation of mere formalities and customs and traditions. He brings in the heavenly standard, the heavenly laws, the heavenly system, and it is not easy for you unless you are on the side of heaven. Follow that out, for that was the sign which was spoken against. They could not get Him to conform to the customary thing, because He was not going to be a party to their falsehood, their hypocrisy, their formality, to their unspiritual condition which lay back of their outward ritual; He was not going to be involved in it, and therefore He was a provocation; and He is always like that. He will find out whether we are governed more by policy than by principle, whether temporal interests concern us more than eternal considerations. He was always bringing a whole series of things like that into the world, and in that sense they just could not bear Him and His way of going on. We have often cited the occasion when He said to His brethren, after being urged by them to go up to the feast, *"Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up unto this feast."* *"But when his brethren were gone up unto the feast, then went he also up, not publicly, but as it were in secret"* (John 7:8-10). It looks a little difficult, does it not? as though He is involved in some duplicity. But what does it mean? It was the feast of tabernacles that was at hand; and what was the feast of tabernacles? It celebrated the consummation of the emancipation from Egypt and the entrance into the kingdom of God, the deliverance from this present evil world and translation into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. That kingdom was embodied in Christ Himself, not in Jerusalem, nor now in any earthly celebrations of historic feasts. He is the kingdom of God, therefore He does not make it a matter of mere occasional celebration in an external way like that. The celebration was empty, false. Their deliverance from this present evil world! Why, they were as much involved with the prince of this world as anybody! Worldly considerations governed them altogether, and the Lord Jesus said, in effect, 'I am publicly having nothing to do with that. I stand for the true essence of this heavenly kingdom, and for absolute separation from this world.' Thus in no way would He allow it to be thought that He was in that. He was apart from it, and if He did go up "not publicly but as it were in secret" it was because He went to try to get people out of the false representation of heavenly things, to bring them to Himself as the embodiment of the heavenly thought of God about the feast of tabernacles.

I have just cited that by way of illustration in order to try to focus what I am saying. He was a provocation because in His own behaviour He signified something of another, a heavenly, order. It is ever so. Where the Lord's children become heavenly and spiritual people in very truth, emancipated even from the established religious system, and are living by heavenly principles, what provocation it arouses, what speaking against! You cannot be a heavenly child of God and not be spoken against. Do not try to escape being spoken against. You signify something, and everything of this world is against that something. We come to that with the next point that arises in connection with Simeon.

(3) The Challenge of His Cross

There was further the significance of His death and of His resurrection as a sign that was spoken against. Yes, His Cross indeed was the signal for much speaking against. Has it not been so all the way through, and is it not so today? How hated is that Cross, when given its true interpretation! It is all right as heroics: yes, men will have the Cross on that basis. But bring in the true meaning of the Cross of Christ - that it is God's No to man and all his heroics, His final and utter No to every man, good and bad, and that when Jesus cried, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Mark 15:34), He was bearing our curse in God's utter No to the fallen race: bring that in, and it is an offence. Say that to anyone who has any feeling of his own importance and dignity and goodness, and who considers there is something of account in himself and he will be very offended. We never accept the Cross of the Lord Jesus until we see how utterly worthless we are, and then the Cross becomes our glory; we side with God and say, 'Thou art right, Lord, in saying No to me.' Have you got there, are you being brought there? You see what God is doing if you are being brought where you recognize you have no claims upon God, no rights before Him, and where you realize your utter wretchedness and unworthiness and unfitness for His presence. You are in agreement with the Cross as heaven's No when you get there. They all had to come there - Peter and John and all the rest. But to be there is to be very near the great Yes of God in the resurrection. The resurrection proclaims that another Man, other than ourselves, passes through into heaven. The door is wide open to this other Man, Who has taken that first man down into judgment and death and has left him there. Heaven is opened to this new Man, this risen Man, and *"if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"* (Romans 6:5). It is God's great Yes to the risen Christ, and we who have been united with Him come into that Yes; we have the open door of heaven. Now, you see, that doctrine is an offence to any self-important, self-sufficient flesh in this world, and it is spoken against. Christ crucified is a sign spoken against; to the Greeks foolishness, to the Jews a stumbling-block; but to us who believe, Christ (yes, crucified) the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

The Fruit of the Fellowship of His Sufferings

And Simeon said to Mary His mother, *"yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."* The significance of Christ - *"a sword shall pierce through thine own soul!"* The sword there is not a little thing. The word used to describe it is the same as that used by the translators of the Old Testament into Greek, the word which was used for Goliath's sword. Here the Greek word signifies the great Thracian sword, an immense thing. 'A great sword shall pierce through thine own soul,' speaking of course of her suffering, her anguish, when she would stand and see this child, then grown to full manhood, stretched upon the Cross. Simeon said, 'That will have the effect or be the means of disclosing the thoughts of many hearts.' What it really amounts to is that the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is the means by which hearts are revealed. It is when we are brought into the fellowship of His sufferings and are suffering together with Him that the thoughts of many hearts come to light, either sympathetically or the reverse. Some hearts, as they see the Lord's people suffering for His sake, will show bitterness, resentment, and be all against the Lord because they do not understand. Oh, how often do parents rise in rebellion and resentment when a young man or woman, in full consecration to the Lord Jesus, accepts the fellowship of His sufferings, and goes out into a life of self-sacrifice - a life in which eternal and heavenly interests take precedence over earthly advancements and privileges, and the things of the Lord are very costly in terms of worldly things. How friends turn against such and call them fools, and all

the rest of it! The hearts of others are beginning to be exposed by their fellowship with their Lord in His sufferings. It is coming out all round; hearts are being laid bare. It is necessary that that sort of thing should happen. You will so often find that the effect of such a thing is to precipitate a crisis in those very hearts sooner or later. Oh, what a story is bound up with this? How often has a man been called upon, because of his devotion to the Lord, to suffer terribly at the hands of his own family - persecuted, subjected to every kind of ignominy, shown no favours. That may have gone on for a long time, increasing all the while, but the one has stood faithfully, yielded no ground, gone on with the Lord quietly, humbly, meekly, lovingly, showing no resentment; and that very exposure of what was in those other hearts has at a later time become the means used by God to break those lives, and to bring them to Himself. That is only one aspect of this matter - the thoughts of many hearts being revealed by the fellowship of His sufferings.

The disclosure comes out also in the other way, thank God. Many hearts are revealed as to what they have of love for the Lord when His children are going through bad times in fellowship with Him. But whichever way it may issue, the principle operates. If we are, like Mary, brought into the sharing of His travail, it has a tremendous effect upon other people. The fact is that it has always been by way of the fellowship of His sufferings that other hearts have been touched. If the Lord takes you into a deep way of suffering with Himself, in sharing something of the cost of the coming of the Kingdom, that in itself is a testimony which touches hearts; whereas we may stand and preach and nothing happens. When something happens to us, when we go into the depths, something begins to happen in other people.

So, servant of the Lord, realize that the Holy Spirit works upon other lives through your suffering with the Lord, and takes you into suffering for this very purpose. Hearts are disclosed. The worldly heart will be uncovered by the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Paul said, *"Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Galatians 6:14). The Cross finds out how much worldliness there is in our hearts and brings it to light. By worldliness we mean, of course, the standards of this world, its ways, its opinions, and so on.

The Cross finds out what is in our hearts as to ourselves - how much selfishness there is about us. You cannot know the Cross in any real way and be a really selfish person. The Cross will expose all selfishness and demand the setting aside of all that is self; self-interest, self-consideration, self-pity and every form of self comes to light by the Cross.

Well, this is the particular ministry of any end-time, which is also always a time of transition.

We have seen that Simeon represented a remnant clinging to a heavenly vision in a time when what was of God had become earth-bound and largely traditional and formal; that he gathered up in himself all the fragmentary, diverse and partial revelations of God's speaking; that he embodied the idea of spiritual maturity, while at the same time he signified that which had waxed old and was nigh unto passing away. But, with all, he linked on with God's new and full manifestation as he held the infant Christ in his arms. Thus he showed by declaration and prophecy the immense issues bound up with Christ, and the course and cost of a ministry of *"the fullness of Christ."* Here we leave the matter for the contemplation of all such as look for *"that blessed hope,"* and, in looking, ask what the Lord would have as the ministry of this present transitional phase which will issue in His appearing.