

The Life of the Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Chapter 1 – Wholly Following the Lord

Reading: Num. 32:11-12; Joshua 14:8-9,14; Num. 27:18,20.

"... because thou hast wholly followed the Lord" (Josh. 14:9).

It will be recognized at once that this is not connected with the beginnings of the life of a child of God, but marks a crisis on the way. It was at a certain point and because of certain things that this was said of Joshua long after they had come out of Egypt, that is, with some considerable spiritual history lying behind. There had been sufficient time in which the people should be tested and that the real state of heart should be revealed. Really this wholly following of the Lord was connected with that well-advanced point, in Israel's life when they came to the end of the first wilderness journey and the land lay before. It was at the dividing point between the wilderness and the land when the spies were sent over and the majority report was unfavourable and discouraging, and this very small minority report of two men was one of faith and assurance. It was then that it was said of Joshua and Caleb that they wholly followed the Lord their God, and that is full of very great significance.

We have read the passage in which the Lord makes it perfectly clear that the great mass of His people were not after this kind and would therefore not go in and possess the inheritance. They had not wholly followed the Lord. Out of the whole host a very few are found of whom it can be said that they wholly followed the Lord, and when you examine the situation with a view to discovering the difference between Joshua and Caleb and all the rest of the Lord's people, you do not find that it was because some were the Lord's people and the rest were not. They were all the Lord's people. And you do not find that it was that some had regard for salvation and valued it and the rest were careless about it, indifferent to it, or had light regard for it. No, I think it can be said of all Israel that they had a very real interest in the matter of salvation. They were all the Lord's people and they were all interested in redemption and they were all in the good of salvation, but there was one thing which made for the great difference between the few and the many. That one thing was that the many were interested in a personal and selfish way in the things of the Lord, that is, they were concerned about the things of the Lord in a way that brought their own interests into view. It was interest in divine things which had a self-ward aspect, how the things of the Lord would mean their own present advantage, gain and enrichment here on this earth, for this present life, in this present world. The majority judged of the value of things and responded in their following of the Lord according to that result. They were interested in the things of the Lord, but the things of the Lord for them had got to mean that present and earthly advantages were to run alongside of their devotion to the Lord, that the return was to be here and now.

Joshua and Caleb, on the other hand, were not living for the Lord for themselves and their own interests, nor for the here and the now. They were living for the there and the then, but more than that. They were not at all concerned with what their following of the Lord would mean to them in the here and the now. The concern which filled their hearts was that the Lord Himself should have that upon which His heart was set, that the Lord should reach His end and have what He desired in and through and by His people, and that is what is meant by wholly following the Lord. It might well have been said of the majority of Israel that they were almost entirely, if not wholly, following their own interests in relation to the Lord, while these few were following the Lord's interests for the Lord's sake. That was the main difference, and that is what is meant by wholly following the Lord.

If you and I could really see the implications and applications of that difference, we should be delivered from a great deal of our trouble and complications, for our Christian life becomes complicated according to the degree in which we have vested interests in relation to the Lord. Yes, it is always an element of self-interest which complicates the Christian life, and immediately we can get clear of all such interests, even in a spiritual way, the complications begin to fall away and we get out into a clear place. Let me say again, we are not raising at all the question of whether we are the Lord's people or not, or whether there is a kind of devotion to the Lord and His things, but we are raising the question of the nature of that devotion to the Lord which determines at once the degree. The nature of devotion to the Lord determines whether it is wholly following the Lord or not. If the nature of our following of the Lord is mixed up with personal self-interest and satisfaction and gratification, then it becomes complicated, and our following of the Lord is an imperfect thing. The complications of the Christian life very often arise in the nature of having, even as Israel had from time to time, a kind of secret displeasure with the Lord, a secret heart-offendedness with the Lord, an inner grudge against the Lord, and the presence of any such thing at once complicates our lives. While that is there, we are never going to make progress; we are at a standstill. Let any offendedness get into our hearts with the Lord, any sense of a grudge, being upset with the Lord, that the Lord is not fair, the Lord is not coming up to our standard, the Lord is not doing as we feel He ought to do, let anything like that come in and the whole life is complicated and brought under arrest and there is no progress.

That is how it was with Israel. You remember two things are said, one about Israel summarizing their history, and one about Joshua and Caleb which summarizes their history. About Israel it is written, "*He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul*" (Psa. 106:15). That is history. That says this — they wanted certain things and they insisted on having them and they would not take 'No' from the Lord. They took the attitude, Lord, if you do not give us this, then we will not go on, we are not going all the way; You have got to do it; our following of You depends upon your giving us what we want! They took that stubborn attitude that, unless the Lord gratified their wish, they were not going on, and it created an impasse and a deadlock between them and the Lord. The Lord never forces anybody, and there is a point to which it is possible to come where we take that attitude, and the Lord says, All right, have it, but you must take the consequences! He gave them their request because they would not take 'No' for an answer, but He sent leanness into their souls.

There may be things upon which our hearts are set and we are not prepared to take a No from the Lord. Oh yes, we may have feigned a surrender or yieldedness and given up, but deep down we are holding on. We are making ourselves objects for pity because the Lord does not give this, the Lord does not respond in this or that way, the Lord is not giving that upon which our hearts are set. We have got it there, we are holding it, although we say to the Lord that we want His will, we want to wholly follow Him, we want to be utterly for Him. We think we mean it, but deep down we are holding on, there is a reservation. I will wholly follow the Lord, but I expect the Lord to give me that, to do this for me! There comes a time when the Lord sees He cannot get past that, and it may be that fatal thing that the Lord says — Have it!

He clears the way, we have it; we have Dead Sea fruit, leanness in our souls, desolation. We have lost the Lord's best and life has become terribly complicated because of that.

What is meant by wholly following the Lord

Now on the other hand, the words which Joshua and Caleb uttered seem to me to indicate another kind of history altogether. When they came back from the land, you remember the majority of the spies brought up their evil report, but Joshua and Caleb said, "*If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land*" (Num. 14:8). You

know that in the letter to the Hebrews, the whole question of the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God is brought up in connection with Joshua bringing the people over into the land. The land was intended to be a type of the rest that remains for the people of God, and when Joshua said that, he was already in the rest of the land. He was in rest. His attitude was this, his state of heart was this, If the Lord wants us to have this, it is all right, we need not worry, strain, strive, fight, or be concerned about it; if the Lord wants it, it is all right, we will come in and possess. If the Lord delight in us, we do not need to worry about anything — giants, difficulties, walled cities; if the Lord wants it, we will have it; all we have to do is to go on wholly with the Lord, trust Him, and it is all right! Joshua was in the rest of the land in his heart already because he had no personal thing to which he was clinging which complicated his relationship with the Lord, but his heart was on what the Lord wanted and he was in this position — If the Lord wants us to have that, if the Lord wants me to have that or wants to bring me into that, I trust Him, it will be all right, I need not scheme, devise or worry, I need not be anxious, I will just go on with the Lord and He will bring it to pass. If the Lord does not want it, then I do not want it! Joshua was in that position and was at heart rest. It was not just passivity, it was the rest of faith, and you have no rest of faith until the self-element is put out. It is that which complicates our spiritual heart rest all the time. That is simply wholly following the Lord and that discriminated Joshua and Caleb and all the rest. It was the nature of things.

Now, that has a very wide and comprehensive application. I beg of you to come with me into the place of self-examination, for I doubt whether any of us have not at some time or other in some way or another, been guilty, been found in this place where our lives have just got all so complicated, tangled and under arrest, because we have wanted something. We have wanted it in relation to the Lord, but we wanted it. The Lord was not giving it to us then and we were getting upset with the Lord. It was something not manifestly evil, but the very fact that we were so wrapped up in this thing showed that we had interests in it. We had not got to the place where if the Lord delights in it, if the Lord wants it, it is all right, it will come to pass; if the Lord does not, then God forbid that it should ever come our way, if it is cutting off the right hand, the plucking out of the very eye, nevertheless it is far better to do that than to have something the Lord does not want.

The complication of personal interest in the things of the Lord

That, even in the personal connection, is of very wide application, but it goes far beyond that. I believe that this goes right to the heart of the whole question of the difference between a great mass of Christians today and a few among them. We are in danger of getting into a terribly complicated position over the Christian world. We look out on the great mass of Christians, true Christians, who are the Lord's people, and then we come up against this matter of something more, however you may put it, and it looks as though this 'something more' line of things is raising questions about them and their work and all that they are doing for the Lord. And then there is the question of dividing up between those who are going for the something more and those who are not and making a breach and a rift, and we begin to look at this whole thing and it becomes terribly complicated. We have got to get disentangled over this matter. We have got to get out of that complication and look at the thing quite squarely.

There is this one thing that is complicating this matter. It is that so many of the Lord's people are having a very lively interest in salvation, in evangelism, in a certain following of the Lord. They are very interested in things as of the Lord, but those things are down here and now on the earth in this present time and they are concerned about the success of those things, the prosperity of those things. It may be a movement, a mission, an organization, a society, something like that, and they are so tied up with that thing that everything is complicated immediately that thing is touched or affected. Oh, they have

not seen it like this, but it amounts to this — it does not matter if the Lord could have something more by wiping that thing out of existence or putting it aside. They are not going to have it put out; they are so bound up with the thing that the thing has become an obstruction to perhaps something more of the Lord.

Let me put it this way. It is not until we get to the place where we say, What does it matter whether this thing in which I am interested is wiped out of existence if only the Lord can get a larger place and a fuller measure? It does not matter at all! Not until we get there are complicating elements eliminated from the spiritual life. It is interest in and devotion to some thing — it may be for the Lord, but it is a thing which terribly complicates the whole situation. And if you look at Israel's history, it was just that, that deep-seated thing which grew and strengthened and eventually issued in their being entirely set aside for the dispensation. What was the thing that the rulers of Israel said at last? It was this: when Christ was presented, when the gospel was preached, when it was evident to all who were unprejudiced that the seal of God was upon His Son Jesus Christ, they were so fixed they put it like this — If we allow this, the Romans will come and take away our nation and our place (John 11:48). Oh, is that it? I see, your nation and your place are more than Jesus Christ, more than the gospel of salvation, more than the kingdom of heaven. If only Israel had been in the condition to have said, What does it matter whether our nation and our place goes, so long as God gets His end? What a different issue!

You see the point. It is possible for the children of God to jeopardize their whole spiritual future by some personal interest in a religious way, our nation and our place. Not one of those men that came out of Egypt shall enter into the land, save Joshua and Caleb, because they have not wholly followed the Lord! They were interested in some *thing*, not in the Lord.

This has a wide application and until we have got clear on this, we have not got clear of complications. The great need today is for the Lord's people as a whole to come to this position — It does not matter about our organizations, our denominations, our missions, our institutions, our movements! It does not matter a little bit about them if the Lord could get more without them; if the Lord could, by setting them aside, get a greater gain to Himself, then we hold them lightly, our hearts are upon the Lord, not upon things, and we hold things very lightly indeed as we view the Lord's interest. If only the Lord's people could get there — and I am quite sure they would all say 'Amen' to that as a matter of proposition, but when it comes to the test, you find all the time this is what is rising up — Ah, this is touching our work, our people, our something! — and there is a flare-up. The question is not raised at all — Is the Lord getting something? Can this after all mean something more for the Lord? Does this mean spiritual enrichment? If so, well then, our cherished things must go! Until that position is taken, I see no way for the Lord. But you will find that the Lord has a Joshua and a Caleb company in the midst of the vast multitude, that little minority which is not pre-eminently concerned about things, but about the Lord, and with them the Lord has His future, has His end. It is with them that that upon which the Lord's heart is set is bound up.

It is following the Lord, not our own desires even in relation to the Lord, not our own interests even in the Lord's work, not those things upon which our hearts are set in the things of the Lord; it is the Lord Himself.

But it represents a crisis, very often somewhere well on the road. When we start the Christian life, if it is a clear-cut start, we feel that we are in the position of wholly following the Lord, nothing held back. It may be very true at that point, but it is so possible and so easy for these hearts of ours on the road to become bound up with some vision, some ambitions, some things for ourselves in the Christian life, and then a new crisis arises and here is a position well on the journey where a new crisis arose and the

issue was, Am I wholly following the Lord after all? How much of my own satisfaction, gratification and pleasure is in my Christian life? How much is it the Lord or what I want from the Lord, what the Lord ought to do for me, what the Lord can do for me — or the Lord Himself?

Now, that is very utter, but then this is the question — wholly following the Lord, and I have said this because I realize that we can and we do complicate the Christian life so much. It becomes a very complicated thing unless we keep this issue perfectly clear — is it the Lord or is it things? If it is things, if it is what we want, what our hearts are set upon, what the Lord ought or can do for us and give us, it will not be long before there are complications and under the testing we shall be grieved with the Lord, and then comes an arrest.

May the Lord just teach us what this means for us. It is but a word which calls to our hearts to give the Lord a great opportunity. Joshua introduces an entirely new realm and new way of things, and this is how the introduction is made, this is how things are brought in — on the basis of the heart and its purity towards the Lord.

Chapter 2 – Possessing the Inheritance

Reading: Num. 27:18,20; 32:11-12; Joshua 14:8,9,14.

In our previous meditation, we were noticing that this matter of wholly following the Lord arose at a somewhat advanced point in the history of Israel, after all those years in the wilderness when they came at last to what should have been the end of that phase, the passing over the Jordan into the land. It was this question of wholly following the Lord which arose and determined the issue, whether it was on, up and into possession, or whether it was to fall short, to miss and forfeit and to remain where they were on the level of life as it had been for so long. We pointed out that among other things, one of the main features which distinguished between these two was that the great majority of the Lord's people had personal interests bound up with their relationship to the Lord. They were influenced and affected by how their following of the Lord touched their lives here and now. If to be the Lord's people meant that they could still be successful as the world would regard them as successful and get those advantages which would mark them out as being of account among men, then they would follow the Lord. But if following the Lord should carry with it all that which would look like an utter absence of worldly prosperity, success and status, and a living entirely in a realm of believing God and little more during a time at any rate of severe testing and probation, then they were not prepared to wholly follow the Lord.

On the other hand, Joshua and his partner, Caleb, were just the opposite. They followed the Lord wholly, it is said, but the nature of their following was one which was so completely cut off from personal interests; it was the Lord Himself, and what the Lord wanted, what the Lord delighted in. They were governed by the delight of the Lord. That delivered them from many complications in their lives.

The Spirit of life overcoming death

We can take another step forward in this matter by noticing that Joshua does bring in a new realm and a new basis. With Joshua an entirely new sphere is introduced. With him it is transition from the wilderness and what that represents as a realm and basis and nature of life, to the land and what that represents as an altogether other realm and basis of life and what is the difference? What is the realm and basis brought in by Joshua? It is no other than the life of the Spirit. It is very interesting that that is the first thing said about Joshua in the book of Numbers where Joshua is taken. "*Take ... Joshua ... in whom is the spirit*". Joshua therefore does bring in that realm and basis of life which is the life of the Spirit and with Joshua the one matter which will always be in view will be spiritual degree, spiritual measure. When Joshua is on the line of his true significance, we shall always be facing something of a spiritual order. Of course, the passage of the Jordan is undoubtedly something spiritual. We will not stay with that, you can think about it — Jordan at its season overflowing all its banks, then a cleaving of a passage through the floods of Jordan and the passing over dry-shod — a resisting of that which represents the flood-tide of death, an overcoming of the full force of the power of death and a going right through Who will ever make that passage only in the mighty power of the Spirit of God?

Here we are on the ground of Ephesians so much. "*That ye may know ... the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all*" (Eph. 1:18-21). We are passing here through the mighty power of death into the heavens to be blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. That is what is brought in with Joshua, and the very first thing is the mighty power of the Spirit of life conquering the full force of death in order to secure a people on a heavenly basis, of a heavenly nature. Therefore

they must, by the greatest thing in their history, know this life of the Spirit in terms of life more powerful than death, as an inward experience. For Jordan is inward while the Red Sea was outward. That is spiritual experience.

Of course, in our conversion we know the mighty power of Christ's triumph over death for us in the sense of triumph, of the judgment of our sin for us, but in the Jordan here, the end of the wilderness, we are coming into something more of the spiritual experience, of the power of Christ's victory over death as an inward thing, and many of you know quite well in your own hearts and experiences what I am talking about. We do know the tremendous need for knowing the power of His resurrection as something far beyond that initial stage of our salvation, our conversion. We have discovered a power of death now not only in the realm of that sin in which we are born, from which we are saved by faith. We have discovered the power of death in our own natures, deep down in our own being the ground of death, and there where death works in us, we need to know the power of His resurrection life triumphing in us over the death that works in us, and that is Jordan. I have no intention of staying with Jordan. I indicate that with Joshua it is the introduction of the life in the Spirit.

The inheritance possessed by spiritual men

Over Jordan you come to Jericho, and the most superficial glance at the conquest of Jericho convinces us without any doubt or question whatsoever that we are in a spiritual realm. This is the possession, the conquest, of a spiritual kingdom in which is our inheritance — "*all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ*" — and that has got to be possessed.

How is it going to be possessed? Spiritual blessings are possessed by spiritual people and the measure of our possession and the possessing of our inheritance is the measure of our spirituality.

Come to Jericho. Nothing like that was ever known before in the history of God's people. There are seven nations in the land in occupation, nations greater than Israel in possession of the inheritance. They have got to be dispossessed and the Lord's people have to possess. For six days there is a single circuit of Jericho. Just round once in the day and back to their tents. That was a strange kind of conquest, not much in that to display human natural ability, progress, power, reputation, potentiality. Just round once, and that is a conquest of a nation registered. That nation is circumcised and cut off. Round once, one nation put out; the next day the same thing, that is nation number 2; the third day, that is nation number 3; six days, that is nation number 6. On the seventh day, round seven times. The whole seven nations are potentially cast out, cut off, for seven is *spiritual* completeness. The thing is done by a faith encompassing. It is a spiritual thing, so spiritual it almost looks ridiculous. Joshua comes in with that and that is really the whole conquest in essence. It is all done like that at the beginning, completed in principle, it is the life of the Spirit, spiritual conquest.

The next advance from Jericho is Ai, and Ai by its very reverse is an emphasis upon the very principle. Jericho was such a walk-over, Ai is nothing like Jericho, it is a much smaller proposition, it will not require everybody to go up against Ai; let so many go up, they can do it! — letting in something other than spirituality. They were saying, 'the flesh can do this', they are letting in the natural, and they met a terrible setback at Ai. There are other factors, there is Achan, but it is all of a piece; the natural has come in and they had to get back on to a spiritual level before they took Ai.

Then you know the snare of the Gibeonites who entrapped Joshua. The Gibeonites came with their feigning and their lying and their deception, and the elders of Israel did not go to the Lord and enquire about this thing. They acted on the basis of their own judgment.

The natural level was taken and the spiritual was forsaken. So by defeat again, the very principle of the spiritual is emphasized all the more. God lets us know the truth of His laws both by blessing and by reverse according to our attitude towards those laws. So it was there, and the whole of that history of conquest is a spiritual thing. It is the life of the Spirit. The point is that Joshua brings that in.

The inheritance corporately possessed

Now what I want to say is that Joshua and Caleb had to go through all this and have all this wrought in them and be this before ever it could become history in the people of God, in others. It had to be wrought in them first. They had to be spiritual men in very truth.

Well, their hearts were wholly set upon the Lord; they were bent upon wholly following the Lord. They were in a right condition and position of heart before the Lord. They were in a very real and full sense spiritual men, but how they had to suffer for their spirituality and in their very suffering for their spirituality, they were made capable of bringing the Lord's people and settling them in the inheritance.

You will note, by the way, that it was impossible for Joshua and Caleb to inherit alone. They are a real foreshadowing of that little word in the letter to the Hebrews summarizing all these Old Testament saints. "*That apart from us they should not be made perfect (complete)*" (Heb. 11:40). When all Israel failed because they did not wholly follow the Lord and were turned back to the wilderness to die, Joshua and Caleb had to go back and wait for that generation to burn itself out and for another generation to arise who could possess. They could not inherit alone, they could only inherit corporately in relation to a people, and that is a very testing thing for those who are spiritual. If it were only just a matter of what is individual, the Lord could rapture quite a lot of individuals whose hearts are going on with Him, but He is having to hold many devoted people back, as it were, while He is preparing others, and the presence of the few in the midst of the others is His point of contact with a new company. It is something to think about — the fact that they could not inherit alone, but that the Lord had larger interests bound up with them and they had to suffer for their spirituality on behalf of some others, and that is a test of spirituality. Oh, I have sought to wholly follow the Lord, I have been so utterly devoted to the Lord, I have wanted to go right on with the Lord! Why does not the Lord do this, that and something else where I am concerned? Because He has some other people in view, because you cannot inherit alone.

The principle again arises in the Lord's Word that the Lord has to have a people prepared for Him, and in order to have a people prepared for Him, He must have in the midst of them some disciplined ones, some points of contact. Where does that phrase come? — "*a people prepared for the Lord*". It comes right at the beginning of the gospels. The Old Testament has closed, the long period between the Testaments is now drawing to its close, the new period is opening. The birth of the Lord Jesus has just taken place. In the gap between the old and the new dispensations, there are just a few, Simeon and Anna and a few others, waiting for the consolation of Israel, looking for the Lord's anointed, and then in connection with them a people prepared for the Lord. Evidently beyond them, these few mentioned, the Joshuas and the Calebs at the heart of things, there were people looking expectantly, waiting for the coming of the Lord's anointed, a people prepared.

And what was true at the end of that dispensation will be true at the end of this dispensation — a people prepared for the Lord. There is a whole generation, you may say, a large body who are not in this particular sense wholly following the Lord. They are on the line of the Lord plus things, and you touch their things and you meet a very severe rebuff. But the Lord in the midst of this great generation is seeking to prepare a

people. I am not saying that that generation is going to lose its salvation. I am not concerned with the matter of eternal salvation, but I am concerned with the inheritance, which is another thing.

Fighting for the inheritance

I must stop just to ask you again, What is the upshot of the Word of God, Old Testament and New? What is the primary implication? What is this letter to the Hebrews? What is this third chapter of the letter to the Philippians, what is this letter to the Ephesians, and what is all that is raised with the Word of God with its emphasis about going on, pressing on, all these warnings drawn from Israel's history, perishing in the wilderness, and applied to Christians, not unsaved people? Why bring this up so constantly, this emphasis? Is it a question that you can, after all, be damned for ever if you do not go on? I do not raise that question, but I do see that it is always bound up with something called the inheritance, the on-high calling; not salvation, but the ultimate purpose of salvation, what God has in view for a people saved and brought from childhood in the wilderness to sonship in the land, from spiritual infancy in the carnal Christian life to spiritual maturity in the heavenlies in Christ. That is the discrimination, and it is inheritance, and I say the implication of the Scriptures is that all the way through you have not got to do something to be saved, and you cannot by doing anything add to your salvation as such, but you have got to do something with regard to the inheritance. You have got to go on and you have got to war and war. We are not fighting for our salvation but for our possessions. The Bible is meaningless otherwise. Can you give me another interpretation of the Word of God, both in the Old Testament and the New, that really meets the situation? The New Testament as the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament is saying all the time that the people of God have got to be pre-eminently characterized by a spirit of pressing on.

That can be looked at, as we may look at it again, from another standpoint. The Lord's people are regarded as a militant people, which means that they are a menace to something, and it is not just enemies to our redemption, otherwise it is not a completed and perfected work. Calvary is finished so far as redemption is concerned, and we have it as a gift. Then the enemy is forever finished, there is no longer any enemy! But if the enemy remains and the foe is still in view, that the church is militant spiritually means there is something more than our salvation in view. He is out to frustrate the possession of the inheritance. We have to be at full stretch, therefore. There it is on the face of things all the time, that it is pressing on to something, and that pressing on has to continue right to the end. *"I count not myself yet to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on ..."* (Phil. 3:13). *"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Phil. 3:8). This is the life of the Spirit as brought in by Joshua, and this life of the Spirit is related to that realm in which all the high thoughts and purposes of God concerning a people are found. *"Blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ"*.

Then in Ephesians chapter one, you know how the apostle speaks about our having received the Spirit as an earnest of our inheritance unto the redemption of the purchased possession. We have received the Spirit as an earnest of our inheritance. The inheritance is for spiritual people bound up with their being spiritual.

Now then, unto the redemption, the leading out, the realizing of the purchased possession, come back to Joshua 1. The Lord says, *"I have given it to thee"*. In a sense, it is the purchased possession. God has got it, but it is in enemy occupation, and this purchased possession has got to be — the word is — redeemed, released, liberated, let loose, brought out. Therefore Ephesians which starts with *"blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ"* unto the release of the purchased possession by the

Spirit, ends with our warfare in the heavenlies with principalities and powers. What is that for? That is the releasing of the purchased possession in enemy occupation, unto the redemption of the purchased possession. You can see how all of a piece this is, but this is for people who will and do make this divide between the Lord and an earthly life of things which they must have if they are going to continue faithfully with the Lord; between people who are on that level of things, and people who are on this other level where — *"I count all things but loss for Christ"*. That is the life of the Spirit.

Faith and Patience

I close by reminding you of a thing which must be most clear and obvious to anybody who has any spiritual perception at all. Is not this the thing that the Lord is doing more than anything else today? Look at all the striving and straining after things by the Lord's people, the strain to get some movements going of a Christian character that can be seen — a movement as a movement, a revival, some *thing* going. Tremendous efforts are being made in all directions and have been for some years now. What is going of it all? None of it is going. There are no movements, no great revivals. I am not saying the Lord is not doing anything, but in a public way where are the great demonstrations of divine activity that you can write up, that will bring new periodicals into existence, requiring a new press? There is nothing. And how much the people are being tested by this. I am not saying that the desire for a movement of God is wrong, a concern for the state of things. God forbid! Our concern must be very deep, but what is God doing, and doing by this very denial of this craving, this strain? *He is pressing spiritual people up to almost breaking point of faith and patience.*

Now you are back to Joshua. Joshua and Caleb back there in the wilderness while a whole generation slowly dies, and they are men who have touched the land, seen the land, known the good of the land, men who have wholly followed the Lord, who know the power of the Spirit of the Most High, who have gone right on, and they are back there for a whole generation while another generation is being born and prepared to go on. It is a tremendous testimony to these men and the triumph of their spirituality that at last they go in and possess. Faith and patience has been tested tremendously over that long period of years. It had been tried before through all the years of the wilderness journey, but now they have to go and dwell in that wilderness standing still, not even with the variations of so much journeying as of yore and the breakings in of God from time to time. Now it is just one reign of death, waiting for a whole nation to come to an end, naturally, slowly, to die out. Faith and patience. God is doing that today with a people. There are others who will not let Him do it with them. They will try and force something and do all sorts of things to try and break the monotony of God's seeming inactivity. This is no brief for lack of concern and certainly no seeking that we should not be giving ourselves to what can be done in a living way.

But let us see what God is really doing, and among a number of things He is doing, this to me is one of the most potent, that He is intensifying spirituality and what is there more spiritual than faith and patience? — the most unattractive things to the flesh. I am quite sure that naturally in the flesh you revolt against the very words, faith and patience. Oh, let us do something, let us have something! Yes, that is the flesh, that is our natural life. Men of spiritual measure are men pre-eminently of faith and patience. Do you know of anything that is more manifestly the order of the day than that? Do you know of anything that is more near to the mark than the perfecting of faith and patience? Is that not your experience? I do not want to say you are all wrong if you are having a life of sight without any need of patience. The Lord bless you, hold it as long as you can. But I think some of us are able to understand the other, the Lord putting us through a gruelling time on the matter of faith and patience. That means He is after spiritual degree

and that points to that which is no less than His great vocation for His church in the heavenlies throughout the ages of the ages.

Now this is not fiction, not just theory. It is very true. I ask you just to allow yourselves to think for a moment. Is there anything like this in my experience? Does it in any way correspond with my history? Allow yourself to think it may be true. There still remains in the human heart a rebellion against that which is so utterly of God, that human heart that says all the time it wants to be practical, not abstract, and so on. We are up against it. We can revolt. If the Lord is going to be faithful and true with us, we may go on a bit, come up against it again, and we shall have to say that there is no getting away from it. The Lord is bent upon something. The Lord knows I want His best, little as I can respond to it, and He is being faithful with me in dealing with me in this way. May the Lord interpret to all who cannot see what He is trying to say and hold us all by His Word.

Chapter 3 – God’s Need of Spiritual People

Reading: John 3:6; Rom. 8:5-6; 1 Cor. 2:13-15; 3:1; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 15:44-46; Num. 27:18.

The thing which we want to repeat, re-emphasize and yet more fully recognize is that the major issues of God’s interests rest with spiritual men and women, and that to have such spiritual men and women is the primary concern of the Lord. It is the Lord’s intention to deposit His fulness in a vessel of His own making. It is, moreover, His intention to fulfil His great designs in creation by means of such a vessel in which the deposit of His own fulness is found. That vessel is called the church, “*the fulness of Him which fills all in all*” (Eph. 1:23). But that fulness is not just going to be deposited mechanically, automatically, sovereignly — that is, out of relation to its condition and its capacity. We were saying in our previous meditation, that in both Old and New Testaments, in type and antitype, it is clear beyond any question that there is a point of discrimination between the Lord’s people in this matter.

We spent most of our time in our previous meditations seeing from the light which Israel’s wilderness history throws upon this matter that there was a point at which the great divide was made represented by Joshua and Caleb, on the one hand, and the whole company of the people on the other, and the Lord at that point said that none of those men which came out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, should enter into the land save Caleb and Joshua. They did not wholly follow the Lord, and these did, and that was after years of relationship to the Lord in all the terms and symbols of redemption. The blood shed and sprinkled, the lamb eaten, the Red Sea crossed and many things marking them out as the Lord’s people, yet at length there came that discrimination among the Lord’s people on this question of wholly following the Lord, and the vessel in which the fulness of the divine intention was to be found and the fulness of the divine purpose was to be fulfilled.

Joshua, we saw, brought in this entirely new realm and basis of things — the life of the Spirit as differing from the natural life, even of the child of God, the child of God, the people of God, living in the main on the basis of their natural life, that is following the Lord in a way and in a measure with all intent and purpose, provided that that following of the Lord was not too costly a thing so far as this world was concerned, provided they could follow the Lord and have some things here as well. But if it meant following the Lord and for a time being stripped of things here, recognition, status, acceptance, realization of ambitions, possessions, even as the children of God, then they were not wholly following the Lord.

With Joshua and Caleb it was otherwise. If the glory of God, the ends of God, so required, if it could not be otherwise by reason of the existing situation but that they should have to wait, deprived of all the advantages, the extras of the Christian life, so to speak, here, and simply wait in utter shornness of all that this world, this life, holds, and wait for a generation, they were ready to do that. Their hearts wholly followed the Lord in that sense, and that is what is meant by spiritual men and spiritual women, a spiritual people — to wholly follow the Lord in that way.

The conflict between the flesh and the Spirit

The Word of God does come down upon this great divide between natural Christians, the carnal, and Christians on the spiritual line, and everywhere the Word makes that tremendous distinction and shows that God’s full ultimate interests are bound up with a company of spiritual men and women after this kind, and it is against them that all the forces of evil are set. That is a thing to remember. We cannot develop it now in any measure at all, but just mention it as we pass on.

It was when the rock was smitten in the wilderness and the waters gushed out and Israel drank — the song of the well, a type of something more than the regenerating Spirit of the early days of the Christian life but now a well within, as it were, the sovereignty of the Spirit in an inward and subjective way, it was then that Joshua came into view. It says — *“Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel”* (Ex. 17:8) — at that point, and when Amalek made the assault, Moses said to Joshua, *“Choose us out men ...”*. That is Joshua’s coming on to the stage. There is nothing about Joshua before then. Things afterwards are very interesting as they throw light upon Joshua, but he comes in then at the moment when, because the Spirit has become an inward reality, has an inward sovereignty, the enemy rises up in a certain form to counter that. The conflict is set between them that are after the flesh and they who are after the Spirit. *“The flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh”* (Gal. 5:17). That is the scene which introduces Joshua and it is from that time onwards that Joshua becomes a militant figure in Israel. The militant side of Joshua’s history begins then.

My point is this, that it is when we become truly spiritual that we begin to meet the full force of the enemy’s antagonism. A new kind of conflict starts with a spiritual condition. Then the sovereignty of the Spirit enters into the life, a new kind of spiritual conflict begins and from that time the conflict intensifies and gets higher and higher in its range, its realm, in the very heavenlies, as typified by the land into which they will move under Joshua’s command presently.

Spirituality, then, is the very occasion of the deepest, most intense form of spiritual conflict. So Ephesians 6 is that our conflict is against spiritual hosts of wickedness. That is the last chapter in the letter. Ephesians 1 is — *“Ye were sealed with the Spirit ... which is an earnest of our inheritance”*. That leads right on at the end — our warfare is with spiritual hosts. That is the outcome of receiving the Spirit.

It is true in the case of the Lord Jesus. The heavens were opened, the Spirit lighted upon Him, then into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. It is always like that. A truly inward spiritual condition precipitates this matter of intense and ever more intense spiritual conflict.

What spirituality is

We have to be very concise in these few moments, but our main point is that what God is really after for His own sake, for His own interests, for the realization of His fullest purposes, is truly spiritual men and women, a spiritual company. Now a spiritual person or a spiritual company can only be such by the deepest discipline, chastening and exercise and experiences. You can be all sorts of things as Christians without being spiritual. It does not require that a man shall be necessarily very spiritual to be a fundamentalist champion. You can be a great fundamentalist leader and champion, standing for the great verities of the faith, the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures and the Bible from cover to cover the Word of God, without being a spiritual man. It is not necessary to be a spiritual man to be that. I knew a man in the United States who was such a terrific fundamentalist that he made so many enemies that he had to keep a loaded revolver in his desk in his vestry. That is a fact. It is an extreme case, but my point is that you need not be a spiritual man to be that. You need not necessarily be a very spiritual man to be a Bible teacher. You can teach the Bible as you teach any other text book and teach it cleverly and make it a very interesting thing and be full of Scripture and ability to handle it without being a spiritual man or woman. It does not require that you should necessarily be a very spiritual person to lead a great evangelistic campaign as such, nor to organize a great missionary society and run a great institution in relation to Christian work. Not necessarily must you be very spiritual for those things. I am not saying spiritual men have never done those things. Really to do

anything like that to the ultimate satisfaction of God requires spirituality. What I am saying is that you can do all these things without really being a spiritual person. A really spiritual person will be concerned about evangelization, about missionary matters, about the Word of God, but to be in all those things and very much engaged in those things does not necessarily mean that you are spiritual.

We can press that further. Look at the letter to the Corinthians. Here are people who have in abundance the manifestation gifts of the Spirit — tongues, healings and all the other gifts are there, and the apostle has to say, "*I could not speak to you as unto spiritual*", and here even in these things which are essentially marks of the Holy Spirit's presence, they are using them carnally. Tongues is a display gift and can be used to bring people into evidence. The very church concerning which we read most of spiritual gifts is the church about which we read most of carnality.

Spirituality is something other and it is just there that our greatest difficulty arises — to really define spirituality. He says, "*He that is spiritual judges (or examines) all things, and he himself is judged of no man*" (1 Cor. 2:15), he is inscrutable. The spiritual man is inscrutable. He can scrutinize, he has power, ability, faculty, for spiritual scrutiny, but he is inscrutable. You cannot really define this, you can only approach a definition, and when you come to Joshua, perhaps you are helped in your approach to this matter of spirituality, for we have seen that Joshua brings us over into another realm, onto another basis. We still have Christ in type as Saviour, Christ as Lord in authority, Christ in person as Son of God and Son of Man; all that is there up to Joshua's time. That is not disposed of or set aside when Joshua comes in, but Joshua goes beyond that. We have Christ as High Priest in Aaron, as we have Christ in authority in Moses, but Joshua takes that up but goes beyond. It is not a mark of real spirituality that we know Christ as Saviour nor that we recognize His authority as Lord, nor yet that we have a knowledge of Him as High Priest in His high priestly capacity and ministry on our behalf. A measure of spirituality is required for all these things, but it does not necessarily mark us out as very spiritual people. All that was there, but Joshua went beyond.

An apprehension of Christ, the embodiment of God's thoughts

What really was it that came in with Joshua? What is it that goes beyond these things which is real spirituality? It is the apprehension of Christ as the embodiment of the thoughts of God. Now that is very difficult, you perhaps cannot grasp that at all, but do you not recognize that Christ is the embodiment of an altogether different and other system of thoughts and ideas from that which is common in this creation, in this world, in the realm known to us by nature, and that when we become subject to the Spirit of God, under His teaching we have to get entirely transformed ideas about everything. Our ideas have to be reconstituted. Is not that the very nature of our schooling as Christians? We are going through a reconstituting of our mentality. We bring over all our natural ideas and judgments to Christianity. We find we do not get very far with that. We have to change our ideas. The Lord's thoughts and ours, even though ours are religious, devout thoughts and very well-meaning thoughts, thoughts of consecration and earnestness, nevertheless there is a difference in their very nature, and we have to get a new mental constitution before we can go on very far with the Lord. Is that not true? It sounds difficult as it is said, but really it is simple in experience.

What is the trouble with us? Why is the Christian life so complicated for so many? Simply because we are all the time trying to interpret God according to our own thoughts, to bring God down to our own judgment and make Him conform to our mentality. We find that it does not work. We cannot get on that way at all and God does not come down there. Something has to happen to turn us inside out and make us altogether new and different, and that is Christ. He is so different, so other. He is the embodiment of divine

thoughts in their very essence. Christ is a new system of ideas, different ideas altogether, and these divine ideas are eternal.

You notice that when you come on to the matter of spirituality in the Scriptures. You are taken out of time into the eternal. What is the most spiritual of the gospels? It is John's gospel. John's gospel is written in terms of spirituality. Take the very first feature of the Christian life — John 3:6 — *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* How that is the keynote of John's gospel. But what is the realm in which that is set? It is the eternal. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (John 1:1). You are taken right out of time there, right out of this creation, right back into the eternal thoughts of God.

What is the most spiritual or one of the most spiritual of the letters of the New Testament? Is it not Ephesians? Yes, *"blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies"*, warfare with spiritual hosts. It is the realm of: *"whom He foreknew, He also did predestinate."* It is outside of time, it takes you back into eternity, and Christ is the embodiment of the eternal thoughts, the transcendent thoughts, and that is just where we find our limitation. We are so time-bound, so earthbound, so constituted according to this present hour and this present world and this present system. It is a most difficult thing for us to get outside of it, to change. But that is exactly what the Spirit of God is doing with us. He is putting us into eternity and changing us from this present order into another. John 3:6 — *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* — that is the beginning. What is the end? 1 Cor. 15:46 — *"afterward that which is spiritual"*. *"There is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body"* (v.44).

Well, the beginning of the thing is that there is a reconstituting inwardly — *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"*, reconstituting as something spiritual. The consummation is that the body is brought into line with that which is done inwardly and a spiritual body follows. Between that there is all the history of spiritual growth, spiritual maturing, understanding, becoming spiritual men and women. *"Ye that are spiritual"* (Gal. 6:1). *"He that is spiritual"* (1 Cor. 2:15). It is something for you to dwell upon and see exactly what it is that the Lord is after and what He is doing with us. He is seeking this because He must have a vessel after this kind for the realization of His purpose. It will serve Him most greatly here even in time. *Spiritual* men and women will serve the Lord most greatly, fulfil His purpose most truly.

This is just where this natural life of ours finds it so difficult to respond because we are so time-bound, so earthbound, there is very little appeal to us, we find little response in us to any suggestion to wait and afterwards the Lord will be justified. We want it now; we must have it now. That is the difference between Israel, Joshua and Caleb. But we have to face this. Do we really believe in a mighty, a tremendous, afterward, that this life at most, at best, at fullest, is a mere drop in the ocean compared with what God has? Do we believe it, believe it so much that this life really sinks into insignificance with all that we miss or all that we may have, in the light of the great calling of God unto the ages of the ages to be fulfilled in this vessel? Is it real or is it visionary and abstract, not practical? Well, there is the test and it is this reconstituting that the Lord is doing in us to make that heavenly, eternal vocation of the ages of the ages a more real thing with us now than all that this world holds. So often the Lord is found just making the precious things of this life as nothing, empty, wearying, so drawing us. He is seeking to reconstitute for that great thing which lies as the very basis and object of our not being just found in time and saved from sin and the world and Satan, but having been foreknown and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, to reconstitute us on an eternal basis. Spirituality is a matter of understanding Christ and apprehending Christ as the embodiment of those eternal thoughts of God. The spiritual man, the spiritual woman, is the one who is really seeing in a growing way the significance of Christ as God's eternal thoughts.

Chapter 4 – The Spirit, the Throne, and Amalek

Reading: Exodus 17:1-16.

You will notice that there is a marginal alternative rendering to that last verse — *“because there is a hand against the throne of the Lord”*; literally, *“a hand is lifted up upon the throne of Jah”*. It is in that more literal translation, that alternative rendering of the verse, that we shall find the ground of our meditation for a little while. “A hand is lifted up upon the throne”, “there is a hand against the throne”.

We have already seen that Joshua introduces in a peculiar way the life of the Spirit, and I think we are familiar with the idea that Amalek represents the strength of the flesh. The Word of the Lord in its accumulative indication and teaching makes it plain that the Lord has a particular object and purpose for a people whom He has foreknown and chosen and foreordained in Christ, a people of all the peoples which have occupied, and will occupy, this earth. That particular people, that elect, has been singled out in the counsels of God for a purpose of peculiar meaning and value, and with them in that purpose of God is bound up His thought of government and dominion. They are to be a people related very specifically and immediately to His throne and by them it is His intention to administer in the ages to come. That is what we understand to be the calling and destiny people called the church. They are in the line of the throne by eternal election.

We are also made perfectly aware that that is not just something which will follow automatically as an item in a programme, but, while it is governed by divine plan and purpose, it is also governed by spiritual condition on their part — two things which so often seem to be contradictory and irreconcilable; nevertheless they are there. Divine intention nevertheless requires a condition.

Now the Old Testament, of course, brings this into view in a typical way and earthly things are made to indicate heavenly; that is, Israel is a type of this heavenly truth; Israel, chosen out from all the other peoples of the earth by divine election, called into a relationship with God to be disciplined and schooled in order to occupy a pre-eminent place among the peoples of the earth in government, setting forth in an earthly way this higher and greater truth that there is a people gathered out of all the nations for His Name to be a heavenly people, not to govern just on the earth but to reign with Him over the earth in a heavenly way in the ages to come. That is the spiritual side of this whole matter.

The Spirit and the throne

Now, the throne, then, is in view. The way of the throne is shown by the Word of God to be solely the way of the Spirit. It is by the Spirit. Everywhere you will find that these two things go together. The Spirit always has the throne in view; the throne can only be reached by the energy and life of the Spirit.

You can see that in many illustrative ways in the Old Testament and in many direct indications and statements in the New. The anointing in the Old Testament was always ultimately related to the throne. You find that that anointing was always intended to work out in some way at the throne, to find its ultimate issue there. The anointing of the Spirit brought the throne into view. Even if prophets were anointed, the anointing has to do with the absolute sovereignty of God, and those very prophets themselves were occupied with the matter of government for God and of God and their ministry in some way directly, affected the throne. Their anointing was for that. The kings were anointed to be

kings. It was by the anointing that they came to the throne. The anointing secured their kingship if it was a true anointing.

You can see that in the case of the most outstanding instance — David who is anointed as a youth and then everything conspires to withstand his progress to the throne; all forces of men and devils combine to see that that throne is never secured unto David, but he comes to the throne in spite of everything, and that which brings him to the throne is the fact of the anointing. You cannot set that aside. That is God committing Himself to this matter, and the anointing is God committing Himself in the matter of bringing ultimately to the place of His intention, the place of dominion.

I wish we fully recognized the significance of the gift of the Holy Spirit, really what the Holy Spirit has in view. We have tried to use the Holy Spirit. Very often we have sought to have the Holy Spirit more fully and powerfully in order that we might come to a place where we have influence and we can use the Holy Spirit in some way and achieve our ends by means of the Holy Spirit. We need to recognize that the very gift of the Holy Spirit by God is pre-eminently and fundamentally with the intention of bringing a people to the throne, to spiritual ascendancy and dominion, and then all that is required is to be utterly submissive to the Spirit, yielded to the Spirit, and the end is as sure as God's throne is; we shall be there, we shall arrive. It would make a lot of difference in our apprehension of what a life in the Spirit means.

Well, that is God's thought, and it is everywhere written in the Old Testament in the types and in the New Testament it is perfectly clear. The Lord Jesus is anointed; the heavens open, the Spirit descends in dove-like form and settles upon Him. He is anointed with the Spirit. The apostle said later, "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 10:38, KJV). Well, immediately the throne is in view, the dominion over the kingdoms of this world, Satan recognizes the implications of that anointing. Satan knows quite well it is the kingdoms of this world that are now the great issue. It is not long before that matter comes right out into the light.

He takes it by stages. If he can realize his end, that is, defeat the Lord Jesus, on lesser ground by smaller means, he will, and so he takes the matter of making the stones into bread. Then the demonstration by casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and so on. But in the end he comes right out with what he has got up his sleeve, all his cards are on the table, and it is as much as to say, Let us get to this whole issue, what it amounts to — "*the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them*". That is the issue and it is dragged out, and it is the anointing which has precipitated this matter, it is the throne which is in view.

And that is the thing which lies behind all the rest of the New Testament. The Spirit coming brings that throne at once into very clear definition and then it is a question of whether the Spirit is going to be absolute Lord or the flesh is going to have the upper hand.

A Hand Against the throne

Well, with the throne in view for the Spirit, Amalek also comes on the scene at that point. Amalek, speaking of the flesh, the natural life, the self-life, is still there present with the people of God. It is the flesh in the wilderness in Amalek, and this matter of Amalek or the flesh raises the big question. It is raised in this form — If you are going on in the Spirit, if yours is going to be life in and by the Spirit, you are most certainly and positively coming to God's appointed end, to reach that which is meant by the throne. I will not stay to define that. Let us get rid of all mental pictures about literal thrones. Let us remember that we are dealing with something that is essentially spiritual, and I think we know enough, both by reason of our spiritual instruction and enlightenment and by

reason of the history of this world that is now being made so forcefully, what the power of spiritual forces is, that is the power of spiritual nature, the power of spiritual character. We know that ultimately the ascendancy is going to be with that which is pure and that which is holy and that which is true, that the conflict is now between the lie and the truth for the dominion of this world, between the evil and the holy. These forces are at work and it is with these spiritual things that the destiny of this world rests. When we speak of the throne, we are not thinking of any particular material object called a throne. We are thinking of that position and that condition of spiritual life with which God invests the right of government for His coming kingdom. His kingdom must be a kingdom of righteousness, truth, holiness, purity and light, and the government will be vested in those who have become a vessel of light and life and truth in a peculiar way.

Now, if you are going on in the life of the Spirit, you are going to come to that which is meant by the throne, the government, the dominion, ascendancy with God for administering the kingdoms of this world in the coming ages. You are going to come there by a life in the Spirit, but that which is all the time challenging that course and that life is the presence of the flesh, the old nature, the natural life. It is there all the time and it represents a continuous challenge, not just to our spiritual life and our walk with God, not just to our pure condition, as something in itself, but a constant challenge to that end of the walk with God, that throne, that dominion. And every bit of yielding to the natural life means a retarding of the progress towards the throne, interruption of the course towards that dominion, and there it is all the time. And the enemy moves in through the flesh against the throne. Amalek is represented as being a hand against the throne; that is, the flesh is Satan's hand against the throne. Satan's hand is against the throne, but his hand takes the form of the natural life of the child of God. It is against the throne.

God's attitude to Amalek

So we find that God is shown to have no compromise whatsoever with Amalek. His attitude is one of utterest utterness against Amalek. "*The Lord will have war with Amalek for ever.*" The Lord will "*blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.*" That is the Lord's attitude towards the life of nature, not because it is just the life of nature in its human weakness and imperfection, but because it is something against the throne, because it is something which is reaching out to frustrate the very destiny of the saints in the eternal counsels of God. It is quite an impossible thing for me, of course, to comprehend the life of the flesh. We have to learn for ourselves what that is, what the life of nature means. Under the Spirit of God we shall learn what it is, but it is too great a thing, too vast and comprehensive a thing for any man to state that that is the flesh. If we went on and enumerated a few thousand items of the flesh, we would just be found in something unmentioned, caught in some point which had been overlooked. There is no end to this thing. So we leave the definition of the flesh. It is this whole life of nature about which we are learning so much; that is, it is all that which is not of the Spirit.

Now may I pause here to put something in by way of parenthesis. It would be just what the enemy would love to do, to take hold of what I have just been saying about this matter of the flesh life and nature, and frame it into a great means and instrument of introspective occupation. He can achieve the very end we are seeking to frustrate by doing that. I want to lay very special emphasis upon this. Be very, very guarded against an ultra-subjectivity in spiritual things. Even an occupation with the crucifying of your own flesh, the subjective side of the work of the cross, can become an instrument of Satan's paralyzing of the progress of the saints. Be on your guard against that. You may think that that is surely impossible. If you are sufficiently concerned about the crucifixion of your flesh, the putting to death of your own nature, you are surely taking the most direct and immediate way of cutting Satan out. Not at all! Satan, if he cannot come in at the front door will come in the back door, and I have seen many of the Lord's people just tied up in awful paralysis by being unduly occupied with the subjective meaning of the

cross. The way to the throne is the way of the Spirit. Live in the Spirit and the Spirit will teach you what has got to be dealt with. He will make known to you what is flesh and keep you alive to the hindrances and to the enemy. Keep on the positive side, on the life side, of the cross, the side of the Spirit and you will be saved, and do not all the time be digging down into those abysmal depths of your own sinful nature and trying to deal with your own nature. Not at all — that is the way of death and darkness, the way of bondage. While the subjective work of the cross remains a necessary, essential thing, let us remember that we cannot make good the work of the cross by any amount of occupation with it. It is only the Spirit of God that can do that.

Well, let us continue. If Amalek gets a look-in, that is, if we yield to Amalek, if we give place to Amalek, then the throne is suspended so far as our spiritual attainment is concerned. Thus we find the Lord so utterly uncompromising in the matter of Amalek, and this works out wherever Amalek comes up.

Take two or three occasions. Of course, here is Joshua. If he represents the man of the Spirit, you can see what the Spirit's attitude is towards Amalek. Well, Joshua had no compromise with Amalek on that day. He did a thorough work because they are carrying out the mind of the Lord over this life of nature.

But passing on, Amalek comes up again on more than one occasion. What about Saul? Do we realize Saul lost his throne and crown because of compromise over Amalek? The Lord through Samuel commanded the utter destruction and Saul spared, compromised. He lost his throne, the hand was against the throne. Saul is a man who *inwardly* in his heart has some kind of alliance with Amalek. We have seen that in his life again and again. He is not a man of the Spirit. He is a man who is influenced by his own interests, how things affect him, his own judgments. The Lord says one thing; his judgment is better than the Lord's on that and he acts accordingly. The Lord requires something; he thinks the Lord's requirements are a bit too extreme and so he holds back from the utterness of the Lord's requirements. He is not a man of the Spirit at all. He is a man influenced by nature. There are lots of nice things about him. We are not dealing with what is naturally good and naturally legitimate. We are dealing with what the Lord says about things, and a man of the Spirit is a man who is governed by what the Lord says, not by his own judgments on things. Let us be careful.

Come back to Joshua again, the man of the Spirit. You notice what Joshua 1:8 says about this; Joshua is very emphatic: "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth.*" There is a tremendous emphasis upon this book of the law and all around it is this — I will be with thee, I am with thee to deliver thee, be strong and of a good courage, and so on. But right at the heart is this, as though it were a condition — you have got to abide by what the Lord has said and never for a moment yield to your own judgment if your judgment would set aside what the Lord has said. We want to be very careful. Is it written? Is it in the Word of God? Then God forbid that any of us should say it does not mean that or that it is too extreme; the Lord cannot mean that. No, it is there and the throne for us hangs upon whether we subject our own judgment to the judgment of God in all matters. If our judgment comes up, Amalek is in view and the hand is against the throne. Remember that. It is just a word of warning by the way. We have got to be very careful how we deal with the things that the Lord has said, how we bypass some things the Lord has said or put on blinkers where they are concerned. Saul did that and lost the throne and it was Amalek.

Then you notice that when Saul had lost his throne, his crown, his life, David is just in the offing, a true man of the Spirit. You close the first book of Samuel with the terrible story of the death of Saul and Jonathan, and then 2 Samuel 1 sees David coming to the fore and an Amalekite approaching and with what does the Amalekite approach? The Amalekite comes forward with the crown and the bracelet he has taken from the body of

the slain Saul and offers them to David. The flesh comes forward to offer the man of the Spirit the throne, and what does the man of the Spirit say? He says exactly as the Lord Jesus said to Satan — I will have the throne by the anointing, I will not have it at your hands, not at the hands of the flesh. This vile world is no friend to help me on to God; I am not dependent upon any fleshly means to bring me to the throne; I come by the anointing! And David dealt with the Amalekite there and then because his hand was against the throne while offering the very crown. You see how subtle it is. And very often Satan will come along the line of the flesh in such a form as to seem to be facilitating the realisation of the divine purposes, and the snare is this, that there is no such thing as facilitating divine purposes by fleshly means. Many of the Lord's people have been caught there. They have seen that perhaps something for God and of God can be realized if only they compromised in this way or that, or if they accepted a certain suggested offer of advancement, it could get them in the direction that really their hearts are set upon — the throne. But the thing offered, the method suggested, has got something of nature, the flesh or this world in it, and what has really happened has been that that thing which was offered, has brought absolute arrest and complication, and it has been far more difficult to get out of that. It has become a curse.

Apply it again in the case of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness with Satan. Do you think that Christ would have gained the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof in the way in which God intended if He had accepted the bribe of Satan? Of course He would not. The whole end of God would have been defeated and that was what Satan was after.

So the Amalekite came with the crown and the bracelet and the man of the Spirit said, You are an Amalekite and that is enough for me; whatever may be your offer, whatever may be your fair speech, however you may seem to be wanting to advance my interests towards the throne, you are an Amalekite and I know what the Lord has said about Amalek. The Lord has sworn to have war with Amalek forever; I am having no dealings with Amalek on any ground whatever! And he refused the crown and the bracelet at the hand of an Amalekite. The man of the Spirit refuses compromise with the flesh for any purpose whatsoever.

Is this not the very thing that comes up with Mordecai? Haman the Agagite — Agag was only the alternative name of the kings of the Amalekites. Agag and Amalek are the same and Mordecai recognizes Haman as an Agagite, an Amalekite. And although Mordecai is in the place of disadvantage, set at nought and for the time being Haman, is in the place of power and influence, Mordecai is going to have no truck with Haman, no compromise with Haman even to the very end. And did it not prove that Haman was the hand against the throne of God, against the very life of God's people? Was he not plotting the destruction of the Jews, the blotting of them out from the earth? Yes, it is like that. "*The mind of the flesh is death*" (Rom. 8:6). Mordecai is the man of the Spirit and the "*mind of the Spirit is life*" and in the end that triumphed because of no compromise, no acceptance.

Well, the principle is there, so clearly illustrated again and again in many ways leading right up to our Lord Himself; Satan tempting through the flesh to bring Him down on to the ground of nature and to rob Him of the throne.

All this, then, is one strong argument and appeal for a people wholly seeking to walk with God, wholly following the Lord, living a life in and by the Spirit: having no place for nature but always having the sword drawn out against it, against all those appeals and arguments of the natural life, not compromising at all with Amalek, but like Joshua recognizing the Lord's attitude towards that whole realm of things and going right on wholly and utterly with Him in the Spirit.

Well, it is a restatement of truth, and the very statement of truth ought to influence us, ought to affect us, ought to make us aware of the tremendous forces that there are at work in the way of reaching God's end.

But let us finish with the positive note and emphasis again. We have received the Spirit as an earnest of our inheritance, and if you and I have received the Spirit, if the Spirit has become the sovereign Lord in our hearts, then we have the basis of ultimate and continual victory, the very means of growing ascendancy and of final union with our Lord in His throne. The Spirit is in us for that very purpose, and the one thing that you and I have to learn — not an easy lesson, we learn it by many failures, we learn it slowly — that we cannot afford to listen to the dictates of our own natural interests. We must give our ear wholly and continually to what the Spirit is saying, to the whisperings and urgings of the Holy Spirit, the influence of the Spirit in us and over us in an inward way. I am quite sure that you all know in some measure what the sovereignty of the Spirit means in your life in different ways.

What is the meaning of the Holy Spirit being grieved? We know when the Spirit is grieved. What is the meaning of that grieving, that registration of divine disappointment, divine sorrow, divine displeasure. It simply means that the Lord sees that the great end for which He has called us, for which He has given us His Spirit, is standing to be brought under arrest, into suspense. The great end is being put back by this thing over which He is grieving. The Spirit is with us with that great end of the throne always in view and anything that comes between us and that end grieves the Spirit and we know it. That is the meaning of it.

So may we more and more learn to be yielded to the Spirit, understanding the Spirit, and wholly submissive, to the dictates and government of the Spirit of God in us. That is the way of victory and of final reigning with our Lord.

Chapter 5 – The Necessity of New Birth by the Spirit

Reading: John 3:1-3, 5-7.

That statement so very well known to us is at once the despair and the hope of the situation. The Lord Jesus making that statement and Himself being the very embodiment of it is in the one direction making a statement of despair, of complete hopelessness. The situation is an entirely negative one — the repeated “cannot”, “except”. But, in the other direction, it *is* the hope; it does represent a prospect and possibility. That is just the position which obtains in the case of every man and every woman when first confronted with the matter of a living relationship with God. It is a hopeless thing on the one hand, utterly hopeless, but there is a way of possibility. You know how it is when we speak to people who do not know this experience of new birth. How hopeless it is, with what despair we have to meet them when they argue and reason about this whole matter of God and relationship with God, and the religious life.

If you know the real situation and are experienced, you just come very quickly to the position that the Lord Jesus came to; that is, you realize the utter futility of discussing or arguing, of taking up any point with a view to clarifying their position and getting them through along that line. The Lord Jesus recognized the utter hopelessness of that situation and did not for one instant engage in discussion with Nicodemus. Nicodemus wanted to open up the subject of God, the kingdom and the things of God and discuss them as a well-trained religious man could. He wanted to embark upon religious discussion; the Lord Jesus would have none of it at all, not a sentence. He cut the whole thing short and said, “*Ye must be born again*”. There is not one single step that we can take together until we belong to the same kingdom. We will be talking at cross-purposes, we will be talking a different language; we may be using the same words, but will be meaning different things. Our phraseology may sound identical, but the meaning will be altogether different. We shall not be moving together at all because we belong to two different kingdoms, two different realms. You belong to this — it may be a very religious one but it is a kingdom of its own. I belong to that other kingdom, the kingdom of God. The kingdom of man may be a very religious kingdom, a very devout kingdom, full of all sorts of intensive religious activities and observances, but it is still the kingdom of man. The kingdom of God is other. I belong to that from above; you belong to this from below, and we cannot take a single step together in harmony, understanding, oneness or fellowship until we are both of the same constitution. You are born of the flesh; that is, you are born a natural man. I am born of the Spirit, and you must be born in a spiritual way before we can even talk together about things. That is a very hopeless situation viewed from one standpoint.

Recently I was sitting in my boat and I had a man there who was a very red hot Communist and who was pouring out deluges of how he was going to solve the problems of this world, war and all the industrial troubles, going to make a new order and a new world and all the rest of it, and I had to sit and listen and let him go on. At last I said, Well, I have listened to all that you have had to say; I suppose I could argue with you on your level, but this is the sort of thing that men have been saying for a long time. A good many men have said this sort of thing, they are saying it all over the world, and what you say represents a very wide system of opinion and conviction, but the fact remains that the world is in an awful mess and that the thing is not really being touched, and today the manifestation of the human heart is more terrible than ever it has been in the history of the world; you are not really doing very much with all your gospel! He wanted to argue. I said, Well, you see, the point is this, that you can never understand for one moment Jesus Christ and His gospel until you are constituted on the same basis as Jesus Christ.

So the whole thing is quite a hopeless one. You and I cannot do more than argue. We can argue but we will not get anywhere. "*You must be born again*", and if that happens you would see altogether differently, your whole outlook would be changed. You would be so differently constituted that you would at once be changed in your entire conception of things, but until that happens, the situation is quite hopeless and your gospel is not going to get anywhere. It never has, and it never will. Well, of course, he could not see it, but that is just the despair of it all. It is the hopelessness of it. It does not matter in what realm you meet it; it is the same thing. It is Nicodemus in principle again. "*You must be born again.*"

What is the difference? Well, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, after all. It does not matter whether it is the Communist flesh or the Nicodemus flesh, the high Israelite flesh — it is still flesh. It may be most burningly devout in its religious engagements, activities and observances. You may be of the strictest sect of the Pharisees but it is still the flesh. That is a kingdom of its own. What is of the Spirit is spirit, and that is another kingdom, another constitution, another species, another kind of being altogether, and these two do not understand one another.

Well, that is the despair side of it all, and that has an application of degrees. First of all, it is utter. As to the saved and the unsaved or the born again and the not born again, it is utter and universal and all-comprehending. There is not one point in which there is likeness or oneness between a born-again and a not born-again person.

But after we are born again, our moving together with Christ depends entirely upon whether we are moving on the ground of being born again or on the old ground of not being born again. You can, even after you are born again, still move largely on the old ground. You can still allow your own old man to have a place; you can still allow your own will and feelings to have a place. Going on with the Lord depends entirely upon whether you are going on on the basis of that which is born of the flesh or that which is born of the Spirit. So that walking with the Lord is a comparative matter, and real fellowship, real oneness, real progress as a child of God, as we have been saying so much in this conference, is after all a matter of how much we are keeping clear of that old unborn again realm and keeping on the line of that new constitution, that new and altogether different nature. You must be born again because what is born of the flesh is flesh, what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Now Nicodemus was trying to make an impossible transition, the kind of transition that many people have tried to make and it never succeeds — that is, to bring over in a religious way the life of nature into the kingdom of God, and that does not sound so elementary as I have put it. But putting it more simply, it is this, that whereas you may have had interests, zeal, enthusiasm, energy and activity in one realm, you are now simply going to put your enthusiasms and energy and interests into another realm, and they are the same enthusiasms and energies and basic interests, but you are now putting them to the account of Christianity whereas before they were put to the account of self and the world. Now you are giving your own enthusiasms and energies, religious or Christian, and that is an impossible transition. It really is a bypassing of the real issue. No man or woman has ever yet got through to the kingdom of God by means of their own zeal and enthusiasm and interest, by a transference of their interest from one realm to another. That simply glosses over this question "*Ye must be born again.*" It goes round it.

The resources of the Christian life are different, just as the ideas and thoughts of God are different in essence from ours, and we shall be constantly coming up against that difference, that God thinks differently, although our thinking may be very devout and religious thinking.

Here is Paul the apostle, who, speaking of his earlier life as a devout Pharisee, a very devout Jew, a leader of the Jews, who could say of himself with regard to the righteousness which is in the law that he was found blameless — a terrific thing for any man to say, to stand up to that whole law and say in front of that law, the law of Moses, I am found blameless I — a man who could say that, but nevertheless said “*I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*” (Acts 26:9). What he did, he did out of the profoundest religious conviction and devotion and he did it before God. He was being tremendously conscientious so far as his apprehension of divine requirements was concerned, and yet was ever a man more wrong that he should persecute the way and the Name of Jesus and the followers of Jesus, even unto the death? Was ever a man more wrong, and yet this man is found doing this in a most downright religious devotion, showing that we can be in two different worlds even with our religious passion.

Until a reconstituting of us has taken place, something basic has happened, a new kind of constitution which produces a new consciousness, a new standard, a new concept, an entirely new order of things from within. Until that happens, even our devoutest religion may be in another realm altogether from God. Even while we may think we are serving God, we may be unconsciously violating the very thoughts of God. It is possible.

Now all this is intended to focus upon this one simple thing, that a child of God is not one who has become interested in Christianity and devoted to Christian things, but one whose innermost constitution has been changed; something has happened which has introduced something which was never there before, and that something has made them of a different order. There may be a crust round the old creation, but right at the very centre there is something that is altogether new, that has come out of heaven, that belongs to another kingdom, and that is the deepest reality of their being and they are different in the deepest reality of their being from the old order and the old species of being to which they belong by natural birth. It is a hopeless thing until that has happened but that is the hope.

Once that happens, oh, the changes that take place! They may not be far-reaching, they may not go a long way, but they are very radical. A person who has really been born anew of the Spirit and in their deepest being become spirit because born of the Spirit, will begin at once to say, Now I see what you meant, I could never grasp your meaning, but I see now! It is a new apprehension altogether.

I am quite sure that even the most mature of you need to recognize that this is the basic reality of a life in union with God and it is the thing that has got to grow, increase, as we go on, so that we are being continually reconstituted by the new nature that has been introduced. We are constantly being changed, transformed, passing through this transition all the time, coming to see more and more what we could never see and understand before, coming to be capable in spiritual understanding and in spiritual enactments of what was altogether outside of our realm before. That is the new birth in its outworking. It is something constitutional. Ye must be *born* anew.

It represents the utter and vast difference between God’s kingdom and ours. We talk about the kingdom of God and here it is; the kingdom of God, and its alternative corresponding phrase, the kingdom of heaven. What do you mean by — you cannot see the kingdom of God, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. Well, it is not as so many people have imagined it. It is a realm to which you are going, going to heaven, some place; you will never get to heaven unless you are born again. What do you mean by getting to heaven, entering the kingdom of God? This is a kingdom order of beings.

You know how it works out in the physical. You go up in a machine, and when you get beyond a certain altitude, this human order cannot stand it. It wants another order of

being to endure those higher altitudes. Some artificial means will tide you over for a little while, but if you are going to live there, you will have to be reconstituted. You would have to dispose of the blood system altogether, and have another principle of life. Your very arteries would burst if you stayed there too long, they could not stand it. So you would have to dispose of this whole system of blood circulation and be another kind of creature that lives on the basis of a system without arteries and blood vessels. You would have to be reconstituted for another kingdom. We are not made for that.

And it is just as radical. Here are two people next to each other, touching one another, and those two people may be as different in their kingdom and constitution as the man who is constituted to walk on the earth and the other being who has been reconstituted to live up there in those excessively high altitudes. The difference is as great as that. The kingdoms are two different kingdoms, two different species. One is born again and one is not, and they belong to two realms. You discover that, they both know it. The man who is not born again, he knows this one next to him is some different species. There is a consciousness that there is something different here and something that he cannot get on with, he cannot understand. And the other one who is born again goes back to the office, the home, the worldly situation, and they know they are a different order, belong to another kingdom. They are out of things.

That is elementary, but I do feel it should be said for those who are right at the beginning of things so that we get clear of those entanglements, those false ideas about what it is to be a Christian, and see that it is not just turning over our zeal and our activities to another side of things; we are the same, but we have a new sphere of interest now, a new sphere of activity. It is not just that. It is a new constitution. That is what the Lord Jesus meant by saying to Nicodemus, You must be born anew. This is basic to this whole conference, this law of the tremendous difference that is made by becoming spiritual. *"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* and it is something other.

"God is spirit" (John 4:24). There is no article in the original. So often it is quoted "God is a spirit". It says, *"God is spirit"*. Spiritual things are of one order, and you and I can really not understand God until we are spiritual. We cannot have fellowship with God until we are spiritual, that is, until we belong to God's kingdom. Until you are born of the Spirit, you cannot, enter the kingdom of God because God is Spirit and God's kingdom is spiritual. It does not mean it is theoretical, abstract. It is very real. There is nothing more real to a Christian than spiritual things. They are tremendously real. They are not abstract; they are personal. It is the Spirit of God Himself. The Spirit of God is a very real person and He keeps very short accounts with the children of God.

I am not going to add much more to this. It is an emphasis that I feel in my heart the Lord wants made and wants brought more and more clearly to us, this tremendous difference between what we are by nature in ourselves as born of the flesh, and what we are when this thing has happened called being born anew, born from above. It is a tremendous difference. It is so different that one realm is the realm of utter impossibility where God is concerned and the other realm is the realm of every possibility where God is concerned because we have become partakers of the very divine nature, the spiritual nature of God.

There is a grave divides these two. It will not be long before in John 3, Nicodemus is brought right up against it. He is still arguing on the natural line, he cannot see. The Lord Jesus heads him up to the issue. The issue is death. In effect He says, Nicodemus, you are smitten with an incurable and hopeless, fatal disease, and the only way for you is to die and to have a new life. *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness ..."*. That is an awful thing to say to Nicodemus. What does it mean? Well, man is bitten, he is poisoned, fatally poisoned; his is a hopeless position; by being bitten by this venomous serpent, he is doomed, he is going to die, unless there can be open to him a fountain of

new life, a life which is more powerful than that death and its cause, a life which is more powerful than that venom of the serpent, a life which is altogether free from those elements which work out death and doom. Unless that life can be provided, the situation is hopeless. That is where you are, Nicodemus, religion and all, Israelite and all, master in Israel, ruler of the Jews: that is where you are, as hopeless as that, doomed. But, *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of men be lifted up."* Here is your life which is another life. There is no trace or taint of the serpent's venom in this life from above, nothing there that works out to death and doom and destruction. It is a life in which there is no element of death at all, upon which death has no power, in which death has no place. It is in God's Son from above. It is this new life of the new birth by faith in the Lord Jesus, and as they looked in faith, people in the wilderness did one of two things when that serpent was elevated. They either said, What is the good of looking at that? I do not believe there is any advantage in it, I do not believe in your serpent; I will not look at it! — and they perished. Or they believed when it was said, If you look, there is your hope! Their look was their expression of faith. *"They looked unto him and were lightened"* or saved (Psa. 34:5). Here is your new life in the Lord Jesus. Doom, in your condition, hopelessness and despair, but another life by a new birth, a new constitution, that makes everything possible for a new day, a new prospect. That is the gospel. It is on that basis that every Christian has to live and learn to live, more and more upon a life which is not their own natural life, which is another life, free from all the seeds and taints of death, a life which has a new day, a new prospect, an immortal hope. It is here that immortality is. The Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul. We hear a lot about, it, but the Bible does not teach immortality of the soul. That is a failure to discriminate between continuous endurance and immortality. Immortality is a kind of life, not just an extent of life. You might go on enduring, existing, for ever and ever, but you cannot call that immortality. *"Who only has immortality"* (1 Tim. 6:16). Immortality is glory. It is the nature of God's life, and that is given us in Christ. I am not saying we are going to be made extinct when I say that the Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul. The Bible teaches that we go on, but God forbid we should go on without immortality. Immortality is the glory of God which comes in with the life of God and it is unto that we are called and this life which we receive by faith in the Lord Jesus is immortal life. It is a kind of life in which, rather than seeds of doom and death, are found the seeds of glory, and that is going to be wrought out in every part of our being.

It begins in our spirit. *"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit"*. It finishes up in our body. *"This corruptible must be on incorruption"* (1 Cor. 15:53). *"Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory"* (Phil. 3:21). The basis of it is this new life which is ours by new birth. But let us remember the grave lies between. We have to acknowledge that we are doomed by nature. There is no hope even for religious man by nature. Our only hope is in resurrection union with the Lord Jesus.