

The Spiritual Ordinances of the Heavens

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"Canst thou bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season? Or canst thou guide the Bear with her train? Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens? Canst thou establish the dominion thereof in the earth?" (Job 38:31-33).

"Thus saith the Lord, who giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirreth up the sea, so that the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts in his name: If these ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever" (Jer. 31:35-36).

"Thus saith the Lord: If my covenant of day and night stand not, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob" (Jer. 33:25-26)

"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches" (Rev. 1:20).

"The stars of the heaven fell unto the earth" (Rev. 6:13).

"And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for a third part of it, and the night in like manner" (Rev. 8:12)

These are various fragments, and there are many more like them, about the heavenly bodies with a view to indicating that which is signified by them, that these heavenly bodies are symbols of spiritual things. They are only, after all, the embodiment and representation of those thoughts of God which relate to and govern the life of His people here on the earth. The word in Job 38:33 contains the inclusive idea — *"Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens?"* Canst thou assign its influence upon the earth? In the natural world we know as scientific fact that it is the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon, the stars, which have such a tremendous influence upon this earth as to really make this earth possible, and not only to make it possible as a habitable place, but to make possible the realisation of all its potentialities and its content. If the sun were to go into continuous eclipse, if the heavenly bodies were to cease to act and react upon this earth, this earth would very soon be impossible of habitation, and nothing would come from it at all in the nature of fruitfulness.

Now that in the natural is intended by God to be a symbol of spiritual things. That is, that what is in heaven governs what is here, and it is only as what is here is in line with, and making its response to, what is in heaven that life is at all possible and there can be any meaning at all in life. There is no justification for life, no fruitfulness in life, nothing that gives life its meaning at all unless it is governed from heaven, unless heaven influences it. Well, that is perfectly clear as to a parable in the natural creation of what God has established in the spiritual world, the spiritual ordinances of the heavens.

We want just to look into that a little as simply as possible. One might, of course, gather all that up into one phrase, one declaration of our Lord Jesus — *"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore ..."* (Matt. 28:18,19). It is the authority of the Lord Jesus in heaven that makes possible a new creation and all the

fruitfulness of a new creation here on the earth, but for the moment I am not going to follow that particular passage, though we have it in our minds.

The Centre of the Ordinances of Heaven

Now, the centre of these ordinances of the heavens, and greatest one, is, as we know, the sun, and the sun is a figure of the Lord Jesus, the supreme, heavenly centre of life, power, of everything in the way of virtue and potentiality and dynamic and possibility. It is all centred in Him. All effectiveness here is only drawn from Him and by reason of Him.

God's Desire to Reveal Himself

Now the principle that we have just enunciated is this, that God has created this universe in its material form to be a great, comprehensive, many-sided expression of His mind, His thoughts, His ideas; that everything that has come from His hand embodies a thought of His. It is not just something made, self-contained, an end in itself. It contains something, it has in it a meaning and a value. In type, in principle, it has something of God to say, to imply, to indicate. Therefore we are led back to this primary or primal truth, that God has, from eternity, desired to reveal Himself, to express Himself, to make Himself known, and that, of course implies that it is His desire to bring people into an intelligent knowledge of Himself.

But that is only the first step, it is not only for His self-revelation, and it is not only that people should know Him, but that there should be, by that revelation and by that knowledge, a living manifestation of Himself in those who know; a reflection of Him, that, seeing them, something of Him is seen. That is His desire, that all things should reveal Him, should be an expression of Him. With that desire before Him, He made all things to be in some way or another an interpretation of His own mind and the embodiment of something about Himself. That, undoubtedly, is the whole setting, the whole background, of the creation.

God's Self-Revelation on the Basis of Life

Having said that, as we pick up our Bibles with a view to seeing this desire of God being put into execution and operation, this desire of self-manifestation, self-revelation, we find that this self-revelation of God has always been by means of life, and that means by means of living persons. God gets His desire satisfied as a living Person revealing Himself to living persons; the correspondence of life on the basis of life.

The Coming in of Death

It was just there that the great adversary saw the point at which he thought he could frustrate God's end. He just cut in at the point of life. The point of life is faith and obedience, and where faith and obedience are destroyed, death at once takes place and life is suspended; *spiritual* death, *spiritual* life. So we find that from that time and from that point the creation as a whole is in death. "Death", says the apostle "passed unto all" (Rom. 5:12), and in that realm where life is not but death is, God is not able to realise His purpose of self-revelation, self-expression, and, in a sense, self-reproduction. I am not speaking about the reproduction of Deity, but reproduction of divine nature in living persons.

God's Intervention in the World of Spiritual Death

That leads us, of course, in this very simple way, to the intervention of God in the world of spiritual death in terms of life. "I came that they may have life" (John 10:10). "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). "The free gift of God is eternal life

in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). "*The life was manifested*" says John (I John 1:2). By this coming of the Life in the living Person, in personal form, life is transmitted, imparted to living persons on the basis of faith and obedience, and the earliest, simplest form of faith and obedience which brings life in is found in those words of the apostle: "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*" (Rom. 10:9). "Believe" is faith; "confess" is obedience. The two things must always go together, and we must realise that that life is still in suspense until those two things have been brought together. The real life does not function and operate and manifest itself in us until we have gone beyond believing in our hearts, until we have confessed with our mouths. Some of us, including myself, know quite well that for a long time there was a believing in the heart, but everything was in suspense until the day of public confession, standing out and making a declaration before men of that faith, and the life was released and manifested from that moment. Faith and obedience result in life.

And then what is a crisis becomes a process, faith growing all the way along, obedience growing all the way along, and so life increasing. Immediately we suspend faith, faith becomes checked, life becomes suspended as to its activity. Immediately obedience is withheld, the life comes under arrest again. These are twin laws of life — faith and obedience.

But it is a matter of God realising His eternal desire of revealing Himself, expressing Himself and that in terms of life. So then, in order to see God, to know God, this life must be possessed. If God is only going to reveal Himself in terms of life, as a living Person to living persons, they must be *living* persons; that is, they must have the life. That is the beginning of God's purpose being realised. It is along the line and on the basis of life, possessing divine life. There is no knowing of the Lord, seeing of the Lord, either initially or progressively except in terms of that life which is within. We never really know the Lord by reading or studying or hearing addresses and sermons or by any objective course at all. That may go on for a whole lifetime, and we still do not know the Lord. The basis of God revealing Himself to us is that we possess divine life as a gift from God, and every fresh bit of knowledge of God or of the revealing of Himself to us will be on the same ground so that that life is uninterrupted, unhindered, unarrested, that life is growing, that life is increasing. Thus, how great is the need to possess the life, if we are to know.

God's Reproduction of Himself as to His Nature

But then, it is not only the revelation of God. It is, as we have dared to put it, the reproduction of Himself as to His nature. It is only in terms of life. It can never be by imitation. You can never reproduce anything of God by imitation. You may have a synthetic tree, a tree that you have built up and wired together, and it may be so carefully and cleverly done that it is difficult to detect the difference between that man-made tree imitating the real thing, and the real thing itself. But you do not have to wait too long before it becomes perfectly manifest which is the real thing and which is the imitation. There is a good deal of imitation of divine things, a good deal of trying to duplicate what is of God, but it just does not carry with it the inward dynamic, impact, witness or truth, because it has not got the life. It can only be by the life itself, or, shall I put it this way, by the organism possessing that particular kind of life, the life which belongs to that organism, and if the organism is God reproduced as to His nature, it must be the very life of God Himself there present for that reproduction. It is very important to discriminate between the constituting of something, even on Biblical grounds, according to Scriptural terms, but it is made, and then maintaining it from year to year and from generation to generation, from century to century, something just being carried on which is a framework, a system. It is just so possible to have that, to try to repeat something that was originally of God, and yet it is not the thing that is satisfying God, meeting God's need, answering to His thought and really it is not alive. The only way in which God

has ordained, by the ordinances of the heavens which cannot be set aside, to express Himself, to reproduce Himself, is by means of His own life being within.

You see, it is not the reproduction of *things* at all. It is the reproduction of the Lord. You cannot make the Lord, you cannot manufacture God. He expresses Himself as the Living One. That is foundational to the purpose of God in our lives. Hence the Lord Jesus says, "I came that they may have life". "In Him was life". "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Four Expressions of Life

These ordinances of the heavens, how do they work in their influence upon this earth? Well, in so many ways there is a reflection here of the heavenly order, and among many other things we have the government of the heavenly bodies expressed in terms of life in the seasons of the year: spring and summer and autumn and winter. These are governed by the ordinances of the heavens, and these are four expressions of life.

(a) Spring

In the spring, life is demonstrating its presence, life is asserting itself, life is beginning to show that it has very distinct, clear-cut ideas. Presently those strong, those powerful forces in life, with their very distinct ideas, will be manifested in specific forms; they will take quite definite shape. It is an expression of life governed from heaven.

I think you can see what the illustration points to. This heavenly life which we receive in Jesus Christ come down from heaven under the government of our sovereign Lord in heaven must manifest itself, must express itself, must assert itself, and must show it has very distinct manners and ideas. It is going to take quite definite lines, forms and shapes, and you have not to do anything about it. All you have to do is to let it have its way and not violate it, and you will see. What I mean is this, that if this life is God in expression, if God is truly in us, is it thinkable that no one should know about it? It is true that, if, in spring, you go into the wood among the trees, you can listen and literally hear life. You can hear the cracking. It is almost uncanny, ghostly, the cracking that is going on. Life is audible. Then, as you watch, you can almost see things happening, and you can see that a certain form is being taken, a certain shape is being given, certain distinct ideas are being expressed. If God really is in us, can it be possible that no one will know anything about it? Is not the very first thing about a truly born-again, regenerated child of God that people begin to know about it, that life becomes audible? Ah, but it is not all noise. If that is true, and you are watching, you will see a certain character, certain distinct, divine features being formed, taking shape. It is spontaneous. It is not that they have to be in a strait-jacket of a legal system of *Thou shalt* and *Thou shalt not*. No. It is life spontaneously taking shape. The mark of a true Christian is not that they go to church and do all sorts of things which they are expected to do, but they are expressing God in quite definite and distinct ways, showing the nature of God more and more. It is the very essence of life to do that. That is elementary, but challenging, and we have to start from the beginning.

In the passage in Jeremiah, the Lord is saying in effect, My ordinances of the heavens are unalterable, unchangeable, immovable, they are established. In Psa. 89:37, the Psalmist says, "It shall be established ... as the faithful witness in the sky"; something fixed, trustworthy, and these are ordinances of the heavens which cannot be altered. It is perfectly true, it is established, that if life from heaven gets into us, this is how it will show itself. It will show itself, and it will show itself in distinct ways. It will spontaneously

make us change our manners, alter our conduct, do things which naturally we would not do. It will be God showing His character, His nature, in us in terms of life.

(b) Summer

Summer follows; again it is only life advancing to full expression. There in the summer you have that life coming out and showing itself in fulness. Here you have the full expression of what was inherent there in the spring. An horticulturist wanted to show the real potentialities and possibilities of the bulbs that he was selling, so he divided his shop window into two and on one side he just put the bulbs in their undeveloped, apparently very uninteresting form; on the other side of the window he put the bulbs fully grown with all the beautiful flowers, and he said, This is what is in that! It is summer; you see the full expression of that life which is in us.

My only point in this particular application is this, that all the fulness of God to which we are called, for which we are chosen, to come to the fulness of God is implicit in the very life that He gives us at new birth. Spiritual full growth, maturity, is not some other thing that we come to later on, higher teaching, deeper teaching, or something like that. It is just life expressing itself in fulness. I do not know why it is, I suppose the reasons are numerous, why so many people are professing Christians and they remain in the bulb state. Why is it? There is something wrong about that. Well, I could say a lot of things as the reasons why that may be, but there is the fact. It is unnatural to remain in the bulb or the seed state always, even if the life is there. There is something wrong, abnormal. The very natural thing ought to be growing and growing and going on. Perhaps there is not enough sun, enough fresh air of the spiritual kind, perhaps not enough spiritual food, not enough walking in the light. There may be something worse than that such as disobedience, unbelief, the violation of one or more of these laws of heaven. My point is this that, if the life is in us, without straining, but walking according to that life, being obedient, we should grow up into Him in all things, we should be becoming fully-grown Christians, expressing the Lord in ever greater fulness. It is the law of His life. Summer follows spring quite naturally without terrific upheavals; it just happens. So full spiritual life ought spontaneously to follow in the way of receiving and possessing the life.

(c) Autumn

Autumn again is only that same life yielding itself, giving itself up, giving itself up for others; giving itself up for the satisfaction, the good, primarily of the Lord Himself. *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"* (John 15:8). The autumn is life yielding, life supplying, life ministering, life laying itself down. It is God in Christ laying His life down, giving His life, being fruitful, making possible the increase of life in others.

(d) Winter

What shall we say about winter? Yes, winter is just as much an activity of life as any other season. We think of winter as death. Do not ever think of winter as death. Not at all! It is all wrong. Why have the leaves fallen? Oh, in our poetic similes we talk of autumn as the falling leaves into the grave, and death and winter. Not at all, in God's realm. Why have the leaves fallen? Because there is a new life already come in which has pushed them off. There is a new formation already taking place which thrusts them off. Outwardly it looks like death, but the life is working secretly that the production next autumn shall be more than it was last autumn, that there shall be greater fruit next autumn than this, and so room must be made, the lesser must give place to the greater, and winter is the time for that. Oh yes, it looks like death, desolation.

Do you sometimes know that strange change from what looked like perhaps even spring to winter; from something that was spring, summer or autumn in your spiritual life, and suddenly everything goes, it all seems to fade, and you feel a terrible unreality about

everything? You wonder if it was ever real at all, it has all just gone now. That is how it appears, that is how it seems. Do not make any mistake, do not be deceived by appearances. If you knew the truth of nature, you would know that winter was anything but a time of death; it is a time of tremendous value, of re-forming, a time of tremendous new intention and meaning. It is all there in winter, and this stripping, this desolation of appearance is, after all, life active to secure greater dimensions in future than have ever been in the past. The tree has got just as far as it can for the time being. Those leaves will not grow any larger now, but next year the tree will be bigger, and everything on it will be more. There is no death in the realm of divine things. Through what seems like death, really life has gained ground, is increasing. We all have bad times. We have had strong times, we have sensed the Lord, things have been really good. Then what comes over us? What is it that happens? Everything seems to come under a cloud and be suspended as though it is death now. Now, if you are a true child of God, if really you are born anew and do possess divine life, that is a phase which will be repeated again and again, but, mark you, that phase of seeming death and desolation is a time in which more ground is being gained for God, and the next time you come up, you will go further than you have ever been before. There will be something more than ever there was before.

Many years ago, I had a little book given to me. In it there was a little poem. I cannot quote it now, but I remember its terms. It was about someone who mourned that spring was forced to go, and having been so enjoying the springtime and coming to the end of spring the last lines were these: 'I mourned that spring was forced to go, and while I mourned, lo, it was summer!' And then enjoying summer and coming to the end of summer. 'I mourned that summer had to go and lo, it was autumn!' And so with autumn: the beautiful colours, everything was glorious, and autumn goes, and 'I mourned that autumn had to go, and lo, it was winter!' and then all the glories and beauties of winter.

Well, you see, there is something always ahead for the child of God, and, even if we are having a bad time, let us remember, according to the ordinances of the heavens, winter is a living thing. It may be hidden, it may not be all out in the open clearly seen and demonstrated, but it is life all the same. Something is happening, and something mighty is happening, for with the Lord it is all life. There is no death, it is all life. We are not talking about nature now, not the earthly creation which still lies under a curse. We are talking about the new creation in Christ where the curse has been destroyed and there it is all life, and life according to fixed heavenly laws, showing itself in these various ways symbolised by the seasons. It is all a matter of life.

What does this all amount to? There is a heavenly government. "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." You see the government of the heavens for our commission here. Thank God we are commissioned here by One Who has charge of heaven and earth, and all is under His government. In each of the Gospels, when you come to the end, the commission, you will find some different aspect of the rule of the heavens, finishing up with that very blessed one in John: "*As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you*" (John 20:21). "*Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them*" (John 20:23). Do you see the link? On one occasion, there was a poor, helpless man brought to the Lord; and He said, "*Thy sins are forgiven thee.*" The onlookers said, "*Who is this that speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?*" But this is God, and "*That ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (he said unto him that was palsied), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thy house*" (Luke 5:18-26). The rule of the heavens in forgiving sins. "*Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them.*" Authority from heaven to proclaim forgiveness of sins. The heavens do rule. Thank God that the heavens do rule in remitting sins, in telling men on heavenly authority, that their sins may be forgiven.

All that is in the ordinances of the heavens. May the Lord give us instruction.

