



the
**Golden
Candlestick**

THE CROSS AND HIGHER GROUND

Part 4

THE ORDINANCES OF HEAVEN

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THE HIGHER GROUND IN RELATION TO THE LORD'S COMING

Reading: 1 Thes. 4:17; 2 Peter 3:11,12; 1 John 3:3.

We have been occupied with the cross and higher ground and from the beginning we have seen the movements of God with His people in an upward direction spiritually and morally, which are to culminate in a literal, upward movement to join the Lord in the air and in glory.

Now for a little while we shall be covering things which have been said in relation to that final movement of the Lord's people from these passages, specifically in Thessalonians, in the clause "shall be caught up". That is the Lord's side of this thing. We have been dealing very much with our side of it. Going up, upward exercise, the Lord calling us to higher spiritual position; this is the Lord's act, but it is the Lord's culminating act. It is, as it were, the Lord's counterpart of that in which we have been spiritually engaged and exercised. It is as though we had been spiritually moving upwards until we reached a certain place and then the Lord suddenly finished the movement and took hold and gave a literal expression to what had been spiritual and we are caught up to His side.

The condition for being caught up

We cannot too often point out the fact that there will be no catching up on the Lord's part unless there is a going up on our part. The translation of the Lord's people to glory is not going to be in spite of a bad state, in spite of a low condition, and that it does not matter how we go on here so long as we are saved, but it will be upon the ground that we have been going up all the time. Now that is a thing that we must have written deeply in our hearts. The weight of the New Testament is brought to bear upon that truth. There is a tremendous urgency in the New Testament. We ought to read it through with that one thought in our mind and then we would be tremendously impressed with the atmosphere of urgency in the matter of pressing on, going on, holding on, keeping on, maintaining, enduring unto the end, and we ought to bring in all those words "if", "if", "if", relative to holding fast, enduring, and so on; very

weighty little words. We cannot rule out the whole realm of what is provisional in the New Testament and make light of it. We cannot dismiss from the New Testament that imperative element that is there in the matter of a pressing forward, a seeking to attain. It is there and it means something, and it just means this, that we are seeing and have been seeing so often that the Lord's consummating of an end waits for an upward movement on our part towards a certain position. The church must reach a certain position before the Lord can come in on His side. There are two sides to translation; now these simple fragments of the Word that we have just read introduce us to that. "Seeing then ... what manner of persons ought ye to be ...", and then, "He that hath this hope in himself purifies himself." That is only saying in other words, we take higher moral ground and higher spiritual ground in relation to the Lord's coming.

Hastening the coming of the Lord

That brings me back to all that we have been saying about upward movements, or taking higher ground in various directions and respects, that it is all in the light of the Lord's coming, and if the coming of the Lord is really in our view, if we have this hope, if we look for the coming of the Lord, if the coming of the Lord means anything to us, if really the cry came from our hearts, "Come, even so, come Lord, come", then it puts us under a moral obligation to hasten the coming of the Lord, and to hasten the coming of the Lord by preparation. The Lord can only come to a prepared people, and that people cannot be for ever with the Lord until they are prepared for the presence of the Lord. Now then, let us gather up the things that we have been saying in the main points in relation to the Lord's coming.

We saw in Exodus 24 that what is in God's view and governing all His activities with His people is the glory of His Son, Jesus Christ. Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of the children of Israel went up into the mountain and saw the God of Israel, and under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, as it were the very heaven for blueness, for transparency, for clearness. And we saw that the sapphire stone is representative of the Lord Jesus in universal glory, and that it is upon that that God's feet rest; it is upon that there are all the movements of God. That regulates everything that God is doing and God is saying. He has planted His feet firmly upon the glory of His Son Jesus Christ and He does not move from that position, and everything that He now commands and now does is because of that which is the place of His feet, the glory of the Lord Jesus. The building of the tabernacle, all the instructions for it, came out of that; and those that went

up into the mountain saw that and became a representative company in testimony to that, so that that heavenly blue of the sapphire came out into the tabernacle and became the chief colour of the tabernacle, from the robe of the high priest to the fringes of the garment of every man, woman and child throughout all the generations of Israel. That blue was there, it was the glory of the Lord Jesus which they had seen under the feet of God, and that glory of the Lord Jesus was to mark everything throughout the whole of that people's life. They were gathered in a typical way in relation to the glory of the Lord Jesus with which God Himself was so closely connected. That is where we begin and that is where we end. Everything is gathered into that.

When the Lord Jesus comes He comes to be glorified in His saints. He comes that they may be glorified with His glory, and the coming of the Lord and the being caught up, to meet the Lord in the air is the manifestation of the breaking forth of the glory of the Lord in His saints. Then shall His glory be seen in them, then shall they be glorified with His glory. He is glorified in His saints. And we pointed out that the glorifying of the saints is not the sudden mystical enrobing with rays of light, of a kind of phosphorous glory round them. That is not the glorifying of the saints, and that is not the glory of the Lord Jesus. It is something that comes out from the inside, it is something which has been wrought into them, and it is the moral beauty and the moral excellence of the Lord Jesus that is His glory. It is what He is in His nature, in His character. It is wonderfully blessed and glorious to contemplate that there is something going on in us if the Lord is having His way. And if we are moving spiritually upward with the Lord, there is something going on right at the centre of our being which in the moment when that which is mortal and of corruption falls from us, will at once blaze out through a body of glory. It is only this mortality and body of corruption that is hiding what is going on. All we need is that the films of mortality and corruption should fall from us and that we should have a body suitable to us, of Christ in us, and that will blaze out as a moral glory. That is what happened with the Lord Jesus.

This matter of the appearing of the Lord and our being caught up to Him represents a moral state, that position where the work of grace is done in us, and where there has been a marvellous conformity within to the image of God's Son. That is glory which is His moral excellence and perfection made to shine out from us because it has been wrought in us. Now then, hastening the day of God, purifying ourselves even as He is pure, being the manner of persons that we ought to be because of that, means that we are by the Holy Spirit's energies being conformed to the moral likeness of the Lord Jesus. I do feel the Lord wants to stress that word "moral" amongst us. We have entered the abstract realms, something that we have called spiritual, and we have divorced the spiritual from the moral. You can be so "spiritual" that you neglect your moral

obligations, and that is a denial and contradiction. The glory of the Lord Jesus will be spiritual but it will be moral glory, it will be character in the highest sense of character, and the grace of God working in the heart of every child of God ought to be forming character in them. They ought to be the finest characters that this world knows. Yes, there ought to be moral strength and moral ascendancy and moral purity, righteousness and equity, reliability, trustworthiness; they ought to be people you can count on. They ought to be the best type of people you can meet, those in whom the grace of God is at work. Conformity to the image of God's Son does not set aside these moral values of character, but the greatest force for making character is the grace of God, the Spirit of God, and we must not differ between spiritual and moral. It is the moral perfection of the Lord Jesus that has to be planted in us, to which we have to be conformed, and that is related to the coming of the Lord Jesus. That is why we are seeing we must take higher ground in His Name, and that has to be concrete and not abstract. The Lord would have us holier people, more upright people, more righteous people. That is not conformity to the image of Deity, it is conformity to the image of a perfect Man in Christ, a glorified humanity, a soul that has been purged, cleansed, redeemed, elevated.

Now we have not come down to a lower level when we say these things. They are very important things and this is purifying ourselves in the light of the Day of God; it is taking higher ground. Well, that is the meaning of God's will for the glory of His Son. The meaning of the universal glory of Christ as represented by the sapphire stone is that throughout the whole universe in the new heaven and earth, the moral splendour of the Lord Jesus will be revealed, and all that is immoral and non-moral in this universe that makes it what it is, has to be swept out. And this universe has to be filled with a positive moral excellence, the Person of the Lord Jesus as Man, and at the same time being very God Himself. The coming of the Lord requires that sort of thing. We must recognise how very practical the spiritual life ought to be and why all these moral exhortations — “putting away all filthiness, all lying, all evil speaking, all malice, and all such things, speaking every man truth with his neighbour”. That is not a low-down level of ordinary ethics, that is related to the work of grace in our hearts.

Learning the lesson of faith

We must not stay with the first thing any longer, we go on to the second. After seeing that first, primary, all-inclusive thing about the glory of the Lord Jesus, we went into the Gospel by Matthew 14:22-36 where the Lord Jesus constrained or compelled His disciples to get into the boat and go before Him to

the other side while He sent the multitudes away. He went up into a mountain to pray and when evening had come He was there alone. The ship was now many furlongs from the land and distressed, for the wind was contrary. In the fourth watch of the night Jesus came to them walking upon the waters; and out of that incident we linked Hebrews 7:25. We saw that the Lord was training His disciples in the light of a coming day when He Himself would be in the Mount making intercession for them and the church would be down here in the storm. He would be there, and they would be here, and in view of that coming day they would have to learn the lesson of faith by which to get through to the other side. In the midst of the conflict, the opposition, the raging of the enemy, the only thing that would get them through would be a mighty faith in Him as up there interceding for them.

That is where we come to in the secret place, and we see that the issue for the church in this dispensation in the matter of getting right through all the storm and the raging of the adversary against the church to swamp it, is the issue of a mighty faith in the Lord Jesus. We notice how deliberate He was in that. And straight away He compelled them, and they went out under His compulsion, and when they found themselves in the conflict, in the trouble, it was because it was all according to plan. The Lord has Himself precipitated the church into the conflict of this age, He Himself holding on up there in prayer in order to bring out of the church that triumphant faith over all the work of the enemy by which it shall get through to the other side. In the illustration in Matthew it broke down because He had to say, "O ye of little faith", but the question in view is the matter of faith which goes through and gets to the other side, a faith in the Son of God, and that is where we are now. Do we believe that all this conflict is an accident, or because things have gone wrong? Well, if you study it close enough, the closer you get the more you feel there is a plan about it, a divine purpose in it; it all has a meaning. The Lord does not deliver you out of conflict however much you cry to be delivered, but He teaches you how to go through in the power of a growing faith, and the church in the end is going to triumph by this faith in the Son of God. It is unto the coming of the Lord. What the Lord is doing is to develop in the midst of conflict in the church a faith that will overcome and break through and reach the Lord. It is ascendancy, it is a coming up principle, it is a faith rising over the storm and believing in Him when He is out of sight. He is not unmoved. He knows all about it and He ever lives to make intercession. He is praying there, and we ought to make more of the intercessory work of the Lord Jesus than we do and believe that this will prevail for us. It is a great thing to think that the Son of God is praying for you and for me. It is a blessed thing to think of people praying for us, but *He* is praying for us! That is the basis of faith. He is praying the prayer of faith and we can take advantage of that by faith. Now you see,

relative to the coming of the Lord this is ascendancy of faith and it has got to be maintained in the storm and has to become a feature of the Lord's people.

Fellowship

And then we went on with the third phase of this higher ground in relation to fellowship. And this also is just as much a matter of relationship to the coming of the Lord as anything else. How important it is to recognise that our fellowship is connected with the Lord's coming. It is in this matter we have to take higher ground. We stop merely for one word about this. "So shall we be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, so shall we be for ever with the Lord", and if there is one thing which that consummation will represent it will be the finality of oneness among the Lord's people; a blessed prospect, a glorious hope. In His appearing and our being caught up together to be with Him the last remnant of all the divisive, schismatic, disintegrating natural man, carnal man, will be left behind. We saw that all divisions come out of "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos", and it is "I", and that all our lack of fellowship is because of natural elements which predominate and which we allow to predominate. But with the coming of the Lord the last vestige of that will fall away and there will be a perfection of oneness without a carnal element ever to interfere with that oneness. The Lord keeps this in view all the time, that we have got to hasten and prepare for that, and we have, spiritually and morally, to take now that ground which shall be ours literally then. And in relation to the Lord's coming we have to take higher ground in the matter of fellowship, mutual love, and mutual forbearance, striving, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of perfectness, completeness. It is a matter which has to do with the Lord's coming. We are moving into that day and it is imperative that we do move into it. We have just pointed out that in that city only one street exists and that street is of pure gold. There are no back streets and side streets for us to live in, we have all got to live on the same street, and that street is of pure gold (which is the divine nature). Here that divine nature has got to be wrought into us, which brings about the oneness of fellowship of that city. The city of God is the full, ripe product of a moral and spiritual process in our hearts. That gold is just typical of the divine nature wrought into us and seeing the street is made of that means we all live together in fellowship of the likeness of the Lord, and even now we have to move towards that. The more we come into the Lord's likeness here the more we shall love one another, which I am afraid if it is reflected upon in the other direction becomes rather a challenge when we think that all our systems speak little of divine likeness. Where are we? Higher ground must be taken in this. The Lord lift us up on to higher ground in this matter in view of His coming. He that has this hope gets

right. And what is getting right? It is conformity to the image of His Son, giving diligence to the matter, applying our hearts, hastening, purifying ourselves even as He is pure. The perfect fellowship of heaven demands the perfect oneness in the likeness of the Lord.

The church in the heavenlies

We go on now to mention the previous two chapters and we come into the letter to the Ephesians. It is not easy to gather all that up in one application. But we do see when we come into Ephesians we come on to the high ground of the heavenlies in Christ. To gather it all up as far as possible in one word it represents this: that the church, the body of Christ is something which has been cut off entirely from this earth by the cross of the Lord Jesus in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That high ground of the heavenlies is that in which there is a ministry of good food, a ministry of universal value, a ministry of eternal purpose, a ministry of triumph over all the power of the enemy; that is all there. That relates to that wonderful word at the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians in connection with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, a word so familiar and yet we have not valued the full power of it yet, “the exceeding greatness of His power according to that working of His which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead ...”. You see the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the taking of Him out, up to the throne and it represented the absolute release and emancipation of Jesus Christ from all limitations of the old creation. When you find Him on resurrection ground not one of the old limitations remain. Geographical limitations no longer prevail. He can go anywhere in a moment of time. He covers all space without any time being lost; He can pass through a bolted door. Nothing at all of the old creation limitations exist on resurrection ground. He is cut off from that realm, brought out into the limitlessness of resurrection life. There is a principle there which has to be established in the church, that it is something cut off from the old creation and united with Christ in the heavenlies where it is no longer bound by the old limitations. That is the meaning of the power of His resurrection, and that is set over against all other earthly conceptions and ideas of the church and the Christian life. We are now a resurrection people and have been cut off from this earth, from every kind of bondage and limitation, and brought out into the emancipation of the heavenlies, the universal where we are no longer bound by the ties of this nature, and that has to become a mighty, practical thing in our experience. I am talking about a position which we occupy in relation to the Lord Jesus where we are on the high ground of what is possible to Him because of His resurrection. There is nothing impossible to the Lord on resurrection ground.

There is no limitation by which He is governed and we have to come into all the possibility and limitlessness of Christ in resurrection. The coming of the Lord Jesus will be but the ground of that. When we come into the full meaning of His resurrection, spirit, soul and body, we shall be as He was in resurrection. With those spiritual bodies we shall not be hindered by any material barrier, time and space will no longer have any place. We will be free in the universe literally, but for that we have to move spiritually now; the Lord can do things now. He can take a Philip out in a desert and in a moment of time plant him at Azotus. The Lord can do these things literally now though we have not had any experiences of them, but that is the sort of thing that will be in resurrection bodies, where all the old creation limitations have ceased. We have to come spiritually into a place where there are no hindrances, barriers, limitations, because Christ has triumphed over them all. We have to learn how to apply that principle. Here is a thing that represents a limitation. How are we to transcend this limitation to the Lord's interest? Only in the power of His resurrection. It is a practical working. I know what the enemy is trying to hinder. In these bodies of infirmity we are limited in the Lord's interest sometimes; the Lord's interests are limited because of them. How are we to transcend the limitations of these infirmities and accomplish things which are impossible to the natural man? In the power of His resurrection it can be done. The weakest, most infirm naturally can by the energy of the resurrection accomplish more than the most healthy man by nature. It is the testimony of Paul who represents the truth entrusted to him to preach. There is nothing impossible to those who believe and who take their position on resurrection ground, regarding what is in the will of God for them. If the Lord wants something done, nature and natural conditions may shout it is impossible, but in the power of His resurrection it is possible. We have to learn how to apply the law of resurrection and live by that life which is triumphant over the old creation. We must not surrender to our natural conditions; we must not say "I feel so bad I cannot" but, "I feel so bad, but I can through Christ do all things." We must not say, "I am too tired tonight to go to the meeting" but, "I can in the power of resurrection" and come home from that meeting feeling as fresh as if we had just got up in the morning. The power of His resurrection leaves out the conditions of our old creation, and we must not surrender to them. The Lord would teach us how to live on that ground.

Do you know anything about it? Would to God we all knew more about it. This is the testimony of the Lord Jesus. What kind of a testimony are we in this matter? All points on to that day when these spiritual principles will be consummated in the body of Christ, and that body will be a universal body without the ties of geography or time. I have only indicated the thing. So this meditation of Ephesians is intended finally to bring us out into the heavenlies spiritually now, where limitations cease because the power of His resurrection

has come in. You will not get resurrection power to do anything that is not in the will of God. But if the Lord requires anything, He has provided the means to it whether you feel three parts or nine-tenths dead or not, it can be done in the power of His resurrection. That is what resurrection means.

The grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you — and that is higher ground. When Paul went to Corinth he said, “When I came unto you, brethren, I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified;” that is his first word. When he closed he said, “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect ... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.” That is the gathering up into a couple of lines everything that has come out of that first word, “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”. What has come out of it? The grace of the Lord Jesus. Over against what does that stand? “I”. “I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual ... ye walk as men.” The grace of the Lord Jesus is altogether the opposite of that. What grace of the Lord Jesus? It is Philippians 2: “Though He existed in the form of God, He counted it not something to be held on to on an equality with God but emptied Himself ...” unto the most shameful death of all, where no one will look at it, honour it and say it was a heroic death; everyone will turn their faces away in horror. This is the grace of the Lord Jesus. Emptied of all the “I”, every bit of personal interest, every bit of pride, emptied right down to that death. “Let this mind be in you.” That is the grace of the Lord Jesus, and that is set over against “I”. Higher ground, and the love of God. That is set over against all that lust on the part of the Corinthians for display gifts. You notice how the apostle enumerates the gifts with a grieving heart rather than with pleasure as far as they are concerned. He is not speaking happily of the gifts because he sees these are being used for the display, for making something of themselves and he goes on to 1 Corinthians 13:1. He says in effect, “the gifts are alright brethren, they are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, true, but unless there is love it only makes the one who has them official and it does not profit very much.” Knowledge, that was one of the things they lusted after — “I determined to know nothing ...”, and the love of God is higher ground even than gifts.

There is much higher ground even than the gift of faith: the love of God. All these things may be right and good but unless the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit they mean very little spiritually. The grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, and that is set over against all the systems and schisms at Corinth: “I am of Paul and I of Apollos, and I am of Christ.” There are divisions among you, says Paul, and against that, the communion of the Holy Spirit. That is higher ground.

The Lord bring us on to higher ground of the grace of the Lord Jesus

which is marked by selflessness and self-emptying. That higher ground is the love of God (which is far more powerful and beneficial to the body of Christ than any amount of official government) and the communion of the Holy Spirit which is the bond of the body. This makes possible the corporate testimony and stands over against all that dishonouring of the Lord which comes by schism. The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all for evermore.

concluded

THE ORDINANCES OF HEAVEN

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-10.

“I have ... appointed the ordinances of heaven” (Jer. 33:25).

Standing back for a moment from any particular portion of the Word of God, and taking into consideration its whole tenor and teaching, there is one thing with which we find ourselves, and that is this, that if we are to have God in fulness, with all that that means, we must have that which God has revealed as His mind. That is a very general statement, but also it is particular. We must provide God with that which He has prescribed as His basis and His means for the expression of Himself in fulness. If we only give God parts of what He has shown to be His requirement, we only have God in that measure. Every increase of the Lord will come along the line of His being given what He has indicated as the thing that He requires. Fulness of divine life, light, glory and riches moves along divinely appointed ways, and we cannot have that fulness in any other way. Paul was instrumental in bringing in a full revelation as to God’s eternal counsels, and in connection with that revelation we find ourselves in the presence of a greater fulness of the Lord than anywhere else. No one will question that, when you come to Paul’s written ministry, you are in the presence of vastness, fulness, depth. The measure of things has been immensely expanded in all directions. There is still plenty of room to move about in where Paul is concerned that we have not yet touched.

But what we must recognise — and this is the point for the moment — is that that fulness has come along certain clearly defined lines in relation to certain specified things, and it could not come otherwise. God’s means are indispensable to God’s ends. Isaiah 6 brings to us remarkably and strikingly the four major factors in divine revelation related to the full committal of Himself on the part of God; they are clearly marked. Two of them are mentioned in verse 1 — “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne ... His train filled the temple.” In verse 5 we have what the first of those means — “My eyes have seen the King.” Put the Throne and the King together, they are one thing. The Throne, the Temple. Verse 6, “having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar”. Then in verse 8, “I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me.” The four major factors of divine revelation are the Throne, the Temple, the Altar and the Ministry, ministry of course of this kind, and they relate inseparably to divine fulness.

Just by way of indicating, before we speak more specifically of these four things, the sovereignty of God operates in relation to one thing, one supreme and ultimate object and end: that is the fulness of Christ, "... according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:9-10). The divine sovereignty operates in many ways, and it would be a fascinating half an hour even to look at the many ways clearly defined along which the sovereignty of God moves, but whatever the ways of that sovereignty, however many and diverse, the goal and object is one, what Paul calls "the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). Divine sovereignty, then, is moving to that end, and now because, in the case of Israel, the divine end is challenged, the state of the people generally makes it impossible for God to move through them towards that end. He acts sovereignly, and this is a sovereign ministry through Isaiah of blinding, deafening and hardening in order to secure that people from among them who will see, hear and understand and embody the Lord's full thought. It is sovereignty operating towards God's end to have a people, and when that wonderful end, the divine fulness in a people, is brought into view, these four things are set forth and laid down as basic and fundamental: the throne, the temple, the altar and the ministry. As we look at them separately, we shall see, I think, how that is.

The Throne

The first, the Throne — and it is always the first; the King. "My eyes have seen the King." "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne." When God is moving in relation to fulness, that is the first thing always. Take the book of the Acts. What is the first thing in relation to spiritual fulness? It is the Lord Jesus exalted, on the Throne. That is their message, that is the beginning of everything. "God highly exalted Him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). "He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:20,21). That is where the church takes its rise. It is from that point that everything begins — the absolute and unquestioned sovereignty of the Lord Jesus where those are concerned who are brought into the eternal counsels, the eternal purpose.

Among the various designations which the apostle Paul, the apostle of spiritual fulness, took for himself was the designation 'herald'. The word is not so translated in our versions, unfortunately, but wherever you find the word 'preacher' or 'preaching' or 'preached' you have in the original the word 'herald', 'heralding'. Paul actually called himself that in both of his letters to

Timothy, once in each. “I was appointed a herald” (1 Tim. 2:7); “Whereunto I was appointed a herald” (2 Tim. 1:11). Our version is ‘a preacher’, and the original idea of the herald was one who was called upon to make an official proclamation. He might be sent by the king to make a royal proclamation, or by a prince, a magistrate or a military governor, but it was an official proclamation he was called upon to make. Paul used that word in 2 Cor. 4:5: “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord”, “we herald Christ Jesus as Lord”, “we make the proclamation that Christ Jesus is Lord”, and the herald made his proclamation, and he did not ask anybody if they would accept what he announced; he did not make it optional at all. You can do what you like about it, but you have to recognise this fact. What you do is your responsibility. This is God’s fact. “God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

All that is meant by Christ as absolute Lord in the appointment of God, in Headship, the Head of every man, the Head of the creation, and Head over all things to the church — all that which we have not yet ranged and understood, but all that that means of the perfect Headship, sovereign Lordship, of Jesus Christ in all things, in every detail, is the first basic factor to spiritual fulness. In so far as He has His place in us and in our affairs, that will determine our measure of spiritual fulness, or the measure in which God is with us. The measure of God in fulness is the measure in which Christ is Lord. Of course, that is so familiar to you, that you wonder why there is so much emphasis, but there it is.

Now you can understand why it comes here in Isaiah 6, and point is given to it here because this is set over against Uzziah’s presumption. “In the year that king Uzziah died ...”. And you know the story of Uzziah. Uzziah was a great king and brought Israel up to a very high standard, and while he was right, God prospered him until “his heart was lifted up” (2 Chron. 26:16), until pride arose within him, and then he went into the temple of God and approached the altar with incense. The priests appealed to him, pleaded with him, urged him. “It pertains not unto you, Uzziah”; but he proceeded, he asserted himself in his pride, he presumed upon his kingship, and there he was smitten with leprosy and went out white and leprous, and died a leper. “In the year that king Uzziah died”, in the year that that presumptuous kind of kingship was smitten, in the year that that assertive headship of man was stricken, “in the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up ... My eyes have seen the King”, and everything is “Holy, holy, holy”. That could be more literally and properly translated, Exalted, exalted, exalted, is the Lord of hosts. It is the dethronement of every other lordship, every rival lordship, every assertive lordship and headship, everything that presses into the things of God, taking the place of the one Lord.

Dr. Campbell Morgan calls Isaiah the prophet of the theocracy — that is, God is King. He works out his analysis on that principle right through these prophecies. Is Israel failing to give God His place? Then, like Uzziah, Israel must be set aside, and another brought in giving God His place. It means a great deal more than we mean when we say that we make Jesus King and we recognize that He is Lord, and we want Him to be Lord. But most of our troubles come along that line. We have not such absolute confidence in His Lordship, in His wisdom, the sovereignty of His wisdom, the sovereignty of His love. We have not such confidence as to make it impossible for us to have any quarrels, disputes or controversies with the Lord. The Lord is taking a way with us and we do not like it, and we feel very bad about it, and we get ourselves into trouble with the Lord because His sovereign wisdom is choosing a course that is not the one that we would choose, to say the least of it, and while these controversies go on, we say, The Lord does not seem to be interested in us, why should we take His interests to heart? We just give it up, do nothing about it. While there is anything like that, we are at a standstill spiritually; there can be no possible increase of divine fulness, no possible committal of Himself to us in any further measure. It is all hanging upon this question of His Lordship. It is not till we get down before the Lord and say, However it seems and I feel about it, You Lord, must have your way; I must get out of Your way, I must come into line with you. We must really deal with the Lord like that. When that is true and thorough, it will be like the opening of a brass gate. There will be spiritual enlargement and growth on our part, and usefulness to the Lord. This kind of ministry is bound to be the end of it all. When He is Lord, there is a ministry of value to Him, serving His sovereign purpose. It begins with the Throne. “Exalted, exalted, exalted is the Lord of hosts.”

The House of God

The temple, the house of God. That is the place where God has all His rights, where God is ceded His rights. Now, not to take a lot of time in talking about the temple, let us go right over to the spiritual counterpart of this temple in the New Testament. When we come into the book of the Acts, where first of all He is Lord, the Kingship is established, is settled, the next thing is the house of God, the church, the spiritual temple, but you do not find that the temple is that thing in Jerusalem called the temple by the Jews. Neither is it the upper room where the apostles are meeting. What is it? — the people themselves. This is a very mobile temple. It is moving up and down the streets, round and round Jerusalem from house to house. It is the people. I do not know where it was that they brought the proceeds of their sales of properties, goods and chattels, and laid them at the apostles’ feet, but I do know that there judicial min-

istry was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit brought in the judicial element. Ananias and Sapphira met God the Holy Spirit. “You have not lied unto men, but unto God.” That could have happened anywhere in Jerusalem, out of doors or indoors, because the temple was no longer in one place, one building. It was a people, a people constituted by and on the ground of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Where He is Lord, there is His House, the place where He has its rights. So the temple now in this dispensation is a people gathered into the Name of the Lord Jesus, two or three, the minimum, representing the corporate principle. One person cannot represent the temple of God in that full divine sense. Of course, our bodies individually are temples of the Holy Spirit, but that is another meaning from the house of God in the corporate full sense. So there must be the corporate indicated by two or three as a basis, gathered into the Name.

You know the way in which that Name was used at the beginning. “In the name of Jesus”. They were challenged — “In what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:7). “In the name of Jesus Christ”, and God was committing Himself in that Name, and the church was that constituted by the Name which is the Name of the Lord, the King. If the Lord is given this second thing in reality — not a congregation, not just a company of people, a number of people congregating in any given place, but a true corporate entity gathering into the Name of Jesus on the ground of His Lordship — you know spiritual fulness and increase. There you will have riches, life, light, glory and wealth. Outwardly it is a very simple thing. Inwardly it is a very radical thing to be found in organic union with other believers constituted by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, Whose business it is to honour the Name of the Lord Jesus. Ananias and Sapphira met the Holy Spirit as the custodian of the Lordship of Christ, and the Holy Spirit exercised that custodianship in the midst of a company, a people who were constituted by His Lordship, who met upon the ground of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

What is the church? It is that which is organically built upon the Name, to which He gives His name. That opens a lot of Old Testament content, as you know — the place of the Name. But just to return to where we started, we said that if we give God what He has laid down, revealed as requisite to His full thought, He comes in on that in fulness. Give God a true spiritual expression of His Son corporately, the House of God which is only Christ corporate, and you find that more than ordinary life, light and spiritual wealth will be found there among those people.

The cross

Thirdly, the altar. “A live coal ... taken with the tongs from off the altar”. Here is another essential to God. He must have it; He has revealed this as

indispensable. What is the immediate value and significance of the altar as indicated in this chapter, and capable of such wide expansion by the Word of God? Well, the altar, of course, is the Old Testament name for the New Testament cross. But its immediate effect and value is this, that it is that which makes suitable for God's house and God's service. Isaiah saw the Lord. "My eyes have seen the King." He saw the temple, the place where God is ceded all His rights. "Woe is me! for I am undone." I cannot stand here in the presence of this Lord, I cannot enter this temple, I am undone. "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." A touch of the altar made him suitable for the presence of the Lord and for the house of the Lord. It dealt with the condition which set him aside, ruled him out. It made possible his coming into the place of the thrice-exalted Lord, where all God's rights were secured to Him. "This has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away" — by the altar, by the cross, by its touch.

"Your iniquity is taken away." That word 'iniquity' is the word 'perversity'. Uzziah the perverse; Israel, the perverse; Isaiah was involved in the state of perversity in the nation, infected himself by that perversity, and with God perversity goes right to the very root of evil. God does not look upon us as just perverse little children. We may look at a little child and say, a very perverse child, and make excuses, but God never looks at perversity like that. God, in all perversity, sees its whole history. He sees at a glance the history of that right back up there to the next one on the other side of His Throne, that covering cherub, Lucifer, Son of the Morning; perversity entering into him, and heaven, and then later earth being wrecked and ruined by that iniquity. "Till iniquity was found in you" (Ezek. 28:15). God sees the whole history of perversity, traces it back to its source and says, This thing is of the devil, and its meaning is rivalry to the very Throne of God. "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God" (Is. 14:13) — the perversity of Lucifer, his iniquity. That very root of Satan in our natures which shows itself in every kind of rebellion, every bit of perversity, has been dealt with in the cross. You cannot possibly be perverse in the presence of His absolute Lordship. The two things cannot go together. He cannot be King and you be king at the same time. Heaven could not contain two supreme lords, one had to go. And God's house cannot have two lordships, two wills, two minds; there is only one here. The cross deals with the thing that is rivalling God. A rival to God, another will, mind, heart or way — the cross deals with that and brings us into the place where all His rights are secured. It breaks down all perversity. Uzziah's perversity brought on him leprosy, and then death. Isaiah recognised his perversity and submitted: "I am undone." He did not assert himself; he went down in the dust before the Lord and was cleansed and became a living messenger of God.

In so far as the Lord has what is meant by the altar, the cross, provided for Him by you and by me, that is only the measure of divine fulness. And if the Lord is going to get greater fulness in us, and if at length the church which is His Body is going to be the fulness of Him that fills all in all, then the cross will be very utterly applied to that church and to every member thereof. If God is going to secure this body — call it remnant if you like — this representative company, for His full expression, there will be the cross applied dealing all the way along with every bit of perversity, resistance, contrariness, everything that is not yielded to the Lord, to make us suitable for that spiritual house which is the fulness of Him.

The Resultant Ministry

Finally, the ministry. *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”* Who? Those who have come under the Lordship, who have met the power of the cross, the altar, who have come into the house of God in this spiritual way, such will fulfil the ministry; such as know that their iniquity is taken away and their sin forgiven. Oh, what a blessed suggestion there is here. You see, the year that Uzziah died was a Jubilee year, and the Jubilee commenced on the evening of the day of atonement. And in the year that king Uzziah died the Lord said to Isaiah: Your sin is atoned for. ‘Atoned’ is the word in the original; ours is an unfortunate translation. Your sin is atoned for — it is a better word than ‘forgiven’. It is atoned for. What is atonement? It is covering. *“Your sin is atoned for.”* On the eve of the day of Atonement, when Uzziah died because his sin was not forgiven, Isaiah lived and came into new ministry because his sin was atoned for. One exalted himself and there was no atonement; one humbled himself and there was atonement. These are they who can fulfil the ministry, who can respond to the divine need. This was not Isaiah’s call to the ministry; that had come some time before and he had fulfilled ministry. This is his new commission. It was as a consequence of these other things to which we have referred that Isaiah was able to say, *“Then said I, Here am I; send me.”* When? *“When I had been made suitable by the cross for a place in the house of God where only God is known as Lord. When that was so, then I said, ‘Here am I; send me’, and He said, ‘Go’.”*

But do not let us take hold of that wrongly in this way, that we are waiting to be made suitable. The cross is an accomplished fact. It was accomplished long ago, and in God’s mind we were crucified with Christ. All we have to do is to step back two thousand years and say, it happened then; not, it is going to happen tomorrow. *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I ... but Christ.”* It is something already done to be stepped into, and when we stand by faith into that position, He can say, Go!

This ministry, this new commission which came to Isaiah was not a pleasant one. It was judicial. "Shut their eyes." The word is really, 'Smear over their eyes.' "Make their ears heavy." "Make the heart of this people fat." Take measures that now, if they want to, they will not be able to; take away their ability. Terrible! "*I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery ... that a hardening in part has befallen Israel, until ...*" (Rom. 11:25). There is an "until" at the end of this chapter. Until what? Well, two things. All that has hindered God has been thoroughly dealt with; the other, "*until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in*", until God has that object of His sovereign purpose from all eternity; then all Israel shall be saved. God has taken out of the nations a people for His Name, that church, which is neither Jew nor Greek, and not a conglomeration of them all, but none of them at all. It is Christ all and in all, Christ corporately expressed; that is the church, the people for His Name. Isaiah's ministry, under the sovereignty of God, was not, after all, so negative as it looked. It was positive in its object, really only to get out of the way the obstruction to make way for His end. Whatever effect the ministry may have, God's purpose is always positive. It is towards that end of His eternal counsels, the fulness of His Son in a people. That is the ministry which lies to your hand and to mine, in many ways, various ways, diverse ways. That is the ministry. That is there, so to speak, suspended, waiting. Listen to that. Believe that. It is true. You are called to the ministry, every one of you. You have to do nothing in an ecclesiastical or official way to be a minister. You need take no title; you need be given no title. You are called to the ministry of bringing a contribution of some kind towards that ultimate fulness of Christ in one of hundreds of ways, called to the one ministry, and it is waiting there. The voice of God is saying, Who? There is only one thing that stands in the way of your response. That is, the Lordship of Jesus Christ established by the cross, making us suitable to have a place in that house of God which serves the rights of God, brings to Him His rights.

"*Then said I ...*". When? It is suspended. God invites us, He is inviting us to the ministry. Who? Here is an invitation to the ministry, but there is a 'then' about it. We cannot respond until all this quarrel with the Lord, these controversies with the Lord, all this perversity, all this recalcitrance, is ended, and He is Lord. The cross has touched perversity, put it away; it is all dealt with by the cross. Then we are able, we are allowed, to say, Here am I, send me; and He will say to you, Yes, go. May the Lord find us in positive value to Himself.