



the
Golden
Candlestick

**THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS
OF HIS POWER**

Part 2

T. Austin-Sparks

Volume 193

POWER WORKING THROUGH SUFFERING

We are continuing within the compass of that great phrase of the apostle Paul's, "the exceeding greatness of His power". I ask you now to come to the book of Daniel, and take up one phrase which occurs three times. "At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth, and I am come to tell thee; for thou art greatly beloved (margin, literal Hebrew, 'thou art of the precious things')" (Dan. 9:23). "And he said unto me, O Daniel, thou man greatly beloved" (Dan. 10:11). "O man greatly beloved" (Dan. 10:19).

A man greatly beloved

There is nothing, I am quite sure, that we would covet more than that that title might rest upon us, that the Lord might be able so to address us — 'Thou art among the precious things, greatly beloved'. But perhaps we feel that we could never attain to that, mainly because we lack those fine qualities which characterise the man addressed in those words, and Daniel was certainly a man of fine qualities, of unmistakably high character. There are many things about him truly commendable, but if you consider this whole matter, with Daniel and his three companions at the centre of the situation, I think you will come to the conclusion, and rightly so, that the divine approbation was not because of any natural qualities in them. While truly the Lord did take account of certain features about them, they were spiritual features in the main, and not natural features.

But more than that, this wonderful way of addressing Daniel went far beyond what the man was himself, even spiritually. It had to do mainly and pre-eminently with the purpose that he was serving. It had to do with the position in which he stood where the Lord's interests were concerned. He was precious to the Lord because of the very precious thing with which he was related and in which he was serving the Lord. A flash of light upon that comes from the end of this whole matter. The issue of Daniel's life, as we have seen, was the return from captivity of a remnant. The last thing said about that remnant in the Old Testament is this — "Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even mine own possession, in the day that I make" (Mal. 3:16,17). Another version says, "They shall be my peculiar treasure", My peculiar treasure among the precious things, or the most precious things, and this preciousness of Daniel, this belovedness of Daniel,

therefore, had more to do with the particular interests of the Lord being served by him than with himself and his own personal merits. We do not, of course, make light of the grandeur of the man before God and his spiritual qualities, but the words of the Lord to him — “Thou art greatly beloved”, “O man greatly beloved” — went beyond the man to his ministry, his ministry to the Lord. That rather widens the scope, does it not, and seems at least to suggest that there is a chance for us.

You may think a great deal of these four men, and you will not be able to think too much of them, but with all that they represent, we must note that what they had was God-given, and the Lord gave to Daniel wisdom above all others, and the Lord gave to the three wisdom and discretion. It was all derived from the Lord, whatever it was in their own personal lives and abilities. But when it comes to serving the Lord in the thing that is at any given time nearest to His own heart, then surely the door is open to us, to all. All that needs to be done is to seek to know and to discover what is nearest to the Lord’s heart at any given time. Of all the things that the Lord might desire, what is it that is nearest to His heart, what is the thing which pertains unto this particular time most precious to the Lord? We may spread our service to the Lord over a very wide area and embrace a very great many activities, but there is always something that gets much nearer to the heart of God than the general; there is always the particular. I trust we shall see a little of what that is before we finish. Indeed, I think we ought to have seen it already. The exceeding greatness of His power does relate to a particular object, not only to the church as being brought into existence, but as to its being in the position that God has eternally chosen it to occupy, and in the condition in which He desires to have it. Let us leave that for a moment and work towards it from another standpoint.

A suffering instrument

The book of Daniel is most generally regarded as a book of history and prophecy. I suppose for most people you have only got to mention the book of Daniel, and at once their minds conjure up pictures of a great image and world empires represented, and then a lot of very ugly and horrible-looking beasts, and the times of the Gentiles, and so on. The whole thing immediately resolves itself into one of the major documents on historical prophecy. Well, that may all be right; not many people agree as to how it is right, but it may be right. Indeed, it is a book of prophecy. But the truth is that this book can be studied, known, and become even fascinating along the line of prophecy and history without it having the slightest spiritual effect upon those who make it their business to know what it contains. What is not recognised is this, that there has never yet been a fulfilment of prophecy without a suffering instrument, and there never will be. Prophecy does not just happen, even though it has got to happen, it must happen. There has to be a bridge between the prophecy and its fulfilment, which bridge takes the strain and bears the load unto fulfilment. There has to be

a mediator which stands in the gap and suffers for the fulfilment of the Word of God. In a word, there has to be a suffering servant somewhere connected with the Word of God. "I John ... was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 1:9). The book of the Revelation is another book that is included in the great prophetic books of the Bible and is studied so often from the standpoint of prophecy being fulfilled or to be fulfilled, and this point is overlooked every time, that this fulfilment seems to be bearing down upon an instrument, a vessel, a servant, with a tremendous weight of suffering and conflict. That servant is really fulfilling the prophecy, in effect. That is the greatest truth about the book of Daniel. But for Daniel and his companions, the thing would not have happened. It would not have happened willy-nilly. We have read, "O man greatly beloved", "thou art greatly beloved."

Look at the context. "At the beginning of thy supplications", it came back on that, the answer was given, but there has been set up a terrific conflict in the unseen, of which Daniel knew nothing apart from registering some terrific impact upon his spirit which almost crushed him. The waters almost went over his head. There was something going on because he was standing in the gap — to the fulfilment of what? — the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah. It says so quite definitely (2 Chron. 36:22). There has to be an instrument which enters into the sufferings of Christ for His Body's sake which is the church. That is the principle of it. This whole thing has to be forced, so to speak, through the very heart of one who is in sympathy with the purpose of God and is suffering with God for that purpose. That may not always be an individual. While it is true that Daniel seems to have borne the major weight of this, it was a nucleus, a group, a company. It was collective and corporate, and it may be a company that is the vessel that just goes through it for the purpose of God, and if God should find such a people on this earth, that people and everyone comprising that people is peculiarly and particularly precious to the Lord, much beloved.

No alliance with Satan's kingdom

There are two sides to the story of Daniel and his friends. There is what we will call the negative side, although it was anything but negative if we think of negative as neutral or passive, but for our purpose we call it the negative, and the positive, or on the one side, the refraining. You notice how the book begins. Daniel and his friends purpose in their hearts that they would not defile themselves with the king's meat, and they besought the chief of the king's eunuchs that they might not be made to partake of the dainties of the king's table and be given very simple fare. Would to God there were more men like the chief of the eunuchs. He said to them, 'You know you are going to bring my head into peril if I accede to your wish. My very life is at stake over this matter with the king. I am running a tremendous risk in taking sides with you in this matter.' However, he did. There are a lot of people who walk in the middle of the road,

who compromise, who sit on the fence, whatever simile you like to use, who are afraid of the consequences of taking sides with that which represents God's fullest purpose. They are looking after their own reputation, thinking of how it is going to affect them. But this man, at any rate, came down on the right side, and it would be good if there were more who would run the risk of losing their heads to be on the side of God's fullest purpose.

Now, they purposed, and carried out their purpose, of refusing the king's meat, refraining from eating of his delicacies. That looks like the negative side. Of course, it was very important. The principle was, 'lest they should be defiled'. The things themselves were not wrong. The wine is not a wrong thing, it is of God's creating, and the other food was not wrong, but you see it was in a kingdom of idolatry. It was the food of the power and authority of idolatry. Animals to eat were never wrong until they were offered to idols, and then they were. They changed their realm altogether. But it was here that Daniel and his friends drew the line lest they should be defiled. This is a very important thing, a very important principle if we are going to serve the highest interests is, as we have tried to emphasize that there shall not be a single point at which there is an alliance with the thing that is not of God, but of Satan's setting up. That is the principle. It is not negative by any means. But for our purpose we call it negative: the refraining, the refusing, the withdrawing.

Heavenly support

There is the positive, the other side, that is, heavenly support. When you take this course, whatever it may mean, and for us today it means a great deal more than what we eat and drink literally and physically. That belongs to that other kingdom with all its glamour, gold, attraction, advancement and reputations to be made, and all the gratification of the soul which can come from this great Babylon. To be with God in His essential supreme purpose opens the door for something very positive, heaven's own support. There was some mystic, hidden power at work in the lives of these men. It is not good enough to say that if a few more people would follow their example and live on a more simple diet, they would be more healthy. That is not good enough. Of course, that has been said about this. 'If only you would adopt a vegetarian diet, live on more simple things and avoid all these luxuries and so on, you would be a much more healthy person.' That is not good enough. There was a hidden power at work from heaven governing this whole thing, that they were not only, because of their refraining from these things, better in flesh and countenance at the end of the time than all the others who were indulging and than they would have been if they had indulged. There is something here of a secret which speaks of a great principle, that heaven will look after those with exceeding power, power that exceeds the power of nature and earthly resources and worldly advantages. Heaven comes in to look after them, that they need not be thin and wasted and miserable and wretched, simply because they are Christians — less happy, less

satisfied, than the people of the world are with their world. It is not necessary to be like that, but such Christians can be flourishing, feeding upon the heavenly resources, and be far better off and know it, than those in the world. Heaven places itself on the side of those who place themselves wholly on the side of God's supreme interest. The sustenance and the continuance of these men is nothing less than miraculous — and I do not only refer to their original resolution about eating and drinking, I mean the whole way through their testimony, their sustenance. They went through the fire seven times heated, through the den of lions, through all the threats and difficulties, the sufferings, trials and adversities and all that had to be overcome, and they came out at the end as they did. It is perfectly marvellous. You have only got to pick up Daniel 1:21 and you see, “And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.”

What does that mean? He went through three reigns into a fourth: the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, into the reign of Cyrus, in spite of hell's determination to make a quick end of him and his companions. Heaven was supporting and looking after them and they were sustained and continued in life and health. This is history.

But this can be translated, and, thank God, is translated into spiritual experience. An instrument for God's fullest purpose, having a people like that means that they are involved in something which is even greater than these physical afflictions of Daniel and his companions. Spiritual trials are always greater than physical trials. Soul agony is always more than physical agony. If our souls are in peace, and our spirits are in strength, how much more we can bear the physical. Well, I think some of you know what I am talking about, what we become involved in if we are related to the Lord for His fullest thoughts and purposes concerning His Son. Oh yes, fires are heated to the seventh degree, there are lions, yes, lions. Paul knew all about it. “I fought with beasts at Ephesus” (1 Cor. 15:32). We do not know exactly what he meant by that so far as the lions were concerned, whether they were literal lions in the Ephesian arena, or whether it was metaphorical. We do know that he had a terrible fight for Asia in which he despaired of life. Yes, lions, and these sufferings. That is the positive side, that, although that is terribly and awfully true, there is this support, may I use the word mystic support, when, if the enemy and the power of Satan and all his emissaries, and the world, and grievous to include, many Christians and the Christian system could have had their way, we would have been finished long ago, for they have not stopped at anything to bring it about. It is true. You are up against something enormous when you stand right into God's fullest purpose, and yet in spite of everything Daniel continued. Heaven is secretly supporting so that you go on, and your going on is nothing less than a miracle. Sometimes the going on seems to be impossible, but you go on. Survival is a wonderful testimony.

That is really what I find to be the valuable thing about the book of Daniel. I am not so interested in the restoration of the Roman Empire. Whether we shall be here to see that or not if it is going to be, while that is of secondary

importance, the thing that touches us here is that being with God for all His will and meeting all the opposition that can be thrown against us, God supports us every day. That is the thing that matters, and we survive, but more than survive. You are supported. Is it not wonderful, the divine support?

It is real, the marvellous support of God to carry on what is precious to Himself. He does it. It is not because of any capabilities of the instruments employed. It is heaven. It is the only explanation and answer. What are we, after all? When the truth is known, we are where we said Moses and Jeremiah were in the previous message. 'Lord, you have got hold of the wrong instrument.' There is nothing here to justify our being in the position that we are in, and yet God will not let us go. He supports. That is the positive message.

In order to be "beloved of God" did not, and does not, mean exemption from suffering. That is the question that often arises. "O man greatly beloved". How do you know it? There is nothing on the outside to prove it. Daniel is thrown into the den of lions, with all that encircling hatred and animosity, and yet he is still, there as he is thrown in, a "man greatly beloved". The three in the fiery furnace as they are thrown in, as they are bound to be thrown in, the point of the tremendous threat, and all that that meant, and yet they are still, 'Men greatly beloved'. You see the point. To be precious to the Lord, to be greatly beloved of the Lord, because we are serving the Lord in something very near to His heart does not mean that the Lord preserves us from suffering. We might naturally think that that would follow and therefore He will give us a good time, He will protect us, He will safeguard, He will never allow us to suffer in this way or in that. It seems such a contradiction. Loved, greatly beloved, and yet greatly suffering. Well, it depends entirely upon whether the sufferings are related to the purpose of God.

There are sufferings which are the corrective sufferings for our misdemeanours. They are also out of love, related to the Lord's honour and interests, but there are those sufferings which have nothing to do whatever with ourselves. Mark that. There are points where you have to come back to the Lord and say, 'Lord, if I am suffering from sin, why did Christ suffer for my sin? Why did Christ suffer for my sins if I have got to suffer for them?' You can only cut the ground from under the devil's accusing work by that line. And the Lord will say to you, Well, you see, there are two realms of suffering. One is that you have been misbehaving and you have known it and you have persisted although you have known it, and you have had to be corrected. That is My love and faithfulness to you. It is one kind of suffering. But remember there is another whole realm of suffering which has nothing to do with your sin. It is because of your relatedness to My interests, and Satan knows all about it and he afflicts. I could deliver by preventing, but I choose to show the exceeding greatness of My power by keeping, supporting, and bringing you out of all that Satan can do triumphantly at last. "The exceeding greatness of His power". It works through suffering.

POWER BY REVELATION

“The exceeding greatness of His power” (Eph. 1:19).

We began these considerations by underlining the word ‘exceeding’, and showing that it is not only a matter of degree, but it is a matter of comparison. It is great, but it is a greatness which exceeds. The power and the expression of that power to which the apostle here refers is different. That is borne out by the immediate context. The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward, the believers, to us-ward, and that again, has the context of the whole letter which stands related to the pre-eminent, supreme purpose of God in this universe, that is, that in this particular dispensation, the supreme object of God’s eternal interest has been brought into being and is in view, and it is concerning that that he used this word ‘us-ward’. He does not just mean himself and a few other fellow-workers, nor does he mean himself and the believers of his own time alone. This letter, as you know, is wholly taken up with and focused upon that elect Body, the church, and so it is in that connection that he uses this word ‘us-ward’. He meant church-ward, the Body-of-Christ-ward, and the exceeding greatness of His power, the power in expression beyond, any other time or in any other realm is related to that. And this statement is not built upon an isolated fragment, because there is so much more in this very letter itself to support that. There is much more in the whole context of this fragment, this sentence, or part sentence, that bears out the fact that all that the apostle is saying has to do with this particular object, the church, which he calls the elect, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. So it is something comparative, and compared with it, there never has been such an expression of divine power.

A comparison and contrast

Having made that emphasis and observation at the commencement, we have since been looking at some examples of divine power in expression from which we have been able to derive some understanding of the working of that power and the principles of its working, and in the previous chapter we have been looking into the book of Daniel. There we see divine power most evidently in operation, but the realm of Daniel — I mean the book now, not only the man — is after all the earthly and the Messianic, that is Israel’s earthly hope in person and possession. The book does at points leap beyond that, but it is mainly and essentially connected with an earthly history and an earthly people. It has to do with the earthly side of God’s kingdom. It is God’s kingdom, but

it is the earthly side of God's kingdom. It is what we call historical. This book is just full of history, but it is the history of the kingdoms of this world and the relationship with that nation Israel. If in that earthly and more temporal realm there is such a wonderful display of divine power, how much more in this other realm of which Paul is writing, for he is dealing with another and a higher realm and object than this earth and an earthly people or nation.

We ignore for the moment the school of interpretation which rejects all such theories and teachings about the future of the Jews, and claims that all such prophecies about Israel's future are now to be spiritualized and carried over into the church, not arguing whether it is true or not. But supposing that there is to be a resurrection of the Jewish nation, for resurrection it would certainly be, at most and at best it would only be on an earthly level. That is the horizon of that prophetic interpretation which gives Israel as a nation still a future. I am not saying whether you should accept that or not. We will not bother about it, it does not matter. But we are saying that, given such a resurrection is to take place, it will never be beyond the earth level.

What Paul is talking about here is something which goes far beyond the earth level. You notice the whole context is the church in the heavenlies. It is the church's eternal calling, vocation, destiny, position, as in the heavenlies and as operating from the heavenlies to the getting right back behind the whole book of Daniel, right back behind the kings and the dominions and the empires to the whole spiritual government and influence of this world. That is an infinitely greater thing than ever Israel as a nation at their very best is ever destined to know. Here is something so much higher, so much greater, and it is in that comparative sense that the apostle used this word, "the exceeding greatness of His power which is to us-ward believers". The word 'believers' defines the church, does it not, as a whole? "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" — not only raising Him from the dead. That may be true of Israel, it may be true of many others, but "He ... 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, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under His feet." This is something very great. Therefore the power by which this is accomplished is exceeding great power. That is the realm into which you and I, through the grace of God, have been called. That is our calling, that is our destiny, that is God's purpose concerning us in this dispensation, and therefore that power is to us-ward because we belong to the dispensation to which this power relates, and in which this purpose is the object.

The secret of Daniel's power

Let us analyse this matter by illustration again from Daniel. That is the first thing, the comparison and the contrast. But what was the secret

of Daniel's power and that of his friends? Daniel's power was by way of revelation of times and seasons, of events and things in history. That very largely sums up the book which goes by his name. You notice every time that Daniel came into a place, a position of influence and power and the increase of God's power and ascendancy, it was by way of a revelation. There is something that the wisdom of this world cannot deal with, solve, or explain and no one, not even the wise men of Babylon, can explain. The wisdom of the world is exhausted and defeated. And then the thing is revealed to Daniel, and it is revealed to his three friends, and more than once this happens, this kind of thing, by revelation. It is perceived that in him and in his friends there is a spirit, as it is put, an excellent spirit, the spirit of the gods, able to explain, to interpret. That is the pagan way of explaining it because it does not understand, but this is exactly what happened, and so their influence and power in that realm was by way of revelation, but the revelation related, as I have said, to times and seasons.

We know the prophetic program of the book of Daniel, what would happen during coming centuries. One empire succeeded another, the pageant of empires and a number of other events in the earth, with here and there a glimpse, a breakthrough, of something extra, but dimly, far-off perceived, and imperfectly disclosed. That was power by revelation because, being revelation from God, it carried with it power. Every revelation that comes from God, no matter what the realm is in which it is intended to operate, or to which it applies, carries with it power, enough to overthrow a Babylonian Empire, or a Medo-Persian Empire, or a Greco-Macedonian Empire (as was the case) and a Roman Empire; power by revelation to deal with these mighty systems of this earth. Yes, they are great things, and it is great power at work, and that power is functioning and operating by way of revelation. It is a tremendous thing really to get a revelation from God. If God reveals something, something is going to happen, something bound up with it that all the empires of this world cannot frustrate. Revelation from God can hurl the mightiest edifice to dust and ashes, as was the case here. Well, that is power.

The secret of the church's power

But do you see what Paul is saying here in immediate connection with the exceeding greatness of His power? — “That (He) may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”. There is something bound up with a revelation of Jesus Christ which transcends all other revelations, and has in it power exceeding all other expressions of power. A real Holy Spirit revelation of Jesus Christ is the most momentous thing that can happen in this world and to any life — a revelation of Jesus Christ, a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

There was nothing in all the world that could accomplish a thing like

the emancipation of Paul but a revelation of Jesus Christ. Saul of Tarsus was steeped, embedded, rooted in the tradition of his fathers, in all the history of the Old Testament and of his people Israel. He was a personal embodiment of all those oracles and of all that tradition and of all that faith and hope, the hope of Israel. He was so convinced to the very last thread of his fabric that Jewry was right, there was nothing more and nothing beyond. For such a man in almost an instant of time to be emancipated from that so that it becomes to him *nothing* in comparison with what he now sees can be only through revelation. You could imprison that man, you could flog him, you could heap upon him all the ignominies and sufferings that can be, bring every force and power to bear upon him to make him recant Judaism, but a man like this will not be moved one hair's breadth by anything and everything that you can do to him. But it took only a revelation of Jesus Christ, and it was done. While he never lost his love for his brethren after the flesh, nor his travail for them, he was out of that realm, and strangely enough not only out, but he was sponsoring the very thing for which all Jewry had the most contempt — the Gentiles and their salvation. See what he had to meet from the Jewish leaders because he was standing for the entrance of Gentiles into the kingdom of God. That was where he was. What a tremendous thing a revelation of Jesus Christ was and is.

Therefore we are in something very much greater, are we not? Daniel at most could only faintly prevision the Messiah. The Holy Spirit in this dispensation has the full Christ for our present revelation. I want to underline very strongly that word 'revelation', but safeguard it. When I am speaking about revelation of Jesus Christ, do not for one moment think that I am suggesting something extra to the revelation which we have in the Word of God. I do not mean something extra-Scriptural, but at the same time I say that to have it here in the book is not everything, and to have the revelation of Jesus Christ only in printed form does not accomplish this thing of which we are speaking. The Spirit of God has got to take this revelation which is in print in book form, and open the eyes of our hearts that we may see, that we may have knowledge of Him, not as one in the most sacred of books, the most authentic of books, but passing from the written in the book to the revelation in our hearts. When that happens, that is an end of all argument, and that is a mighty thing beyond anything else.

Although many of you have heard things like this before, and so often do suffer the new emphasis, for what is needed by Christian people, perhaps more than anything else, is not a better knowledge of the text of the Scriptures, the content of the Bible as a book, but a revelation of Jesus Christ in their hearts. It would be altogether impossible to directly handle the difficult situations which concern the Lord today, and His purpose, along that direct line of attack, saying, 'You are all wrong, you have missed the point, everything is topsy-turvy. This is where you are wrong, and this ought not to be, and this ought to be', and all that whole realm of argument, accusation and condemnation. You never get anywhere like that. It is utterly futile and fruitless to attack

this present situation in that way. It makes no difference, and if you could get people to change their attitudes, positions and acceptances, it might after all only resolve itself in another system of truth, teaching and practice. They do it because you overpower their reason and they therefore think that this is the more proper and correct way, but that is not very profitable.

But here is a great situation, impossible of handling along any of these lines. Indeed, if you try, it will break you, it will crush you, for there are people who are as completely and utterly abandoned to their system of things as ever Paul was to Judaism. You have a very bad time if you tackle their pet things. But let there break in a revelation of Jesus Christ, and the thing is done. They are out of that prison, and what is more, they see that it was a prison, and they never before would have believed it was a prison, but they are out. A revelation of Jesus Christ is necessary.

Exceeding power which puts people into a position of real spiritual power is by revelation of Jesus Christ — true, through the Scriptures and not apart from them — but the revelation of Jesus Christ in their own hearts. We know quite well that Paul based the whole of his life upon that very thing. “It was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal his Son in me” (Gal. 1:15-16), and that revelation, he says, was comparable to what took place in the divine decree in creation. “God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness ... shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). A divine order, and the thing is done. “He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). The thing has happened, that is all. A revelation of Jesus Christ is not something in the mind; it is a happening in the life. And when it has happened, well, it has just happened, and that is all there is to it. Something has happened. And what is needed among the Lord’s people today more than anything is that mighty happening by a new revelation of Jesus Christ. That is the working of His power, and it is the secret of power. I trust that before we close, we shall have come to see something of the meaning of the working of that power where we are concerned.

Inward revelation

Now again just to underline something already said, but to bring it into stronger relief. Daniel’s activities and revelations were by sovereign acts to him. The revelations that he had were things that came from the outside objectively to him. He got his revelations by dreams. Whether a dream is objective or subjective, I am not going to argue, for we understand that it was something that happened to him. It came objectively by dreams and by angel visitants. These were sovereign acts, acts to Daniel. This present dispensation is the dispensation of nothing less than the Holy Spirit of God within believers and the church. Not things objective, but revealed within, “God has shined into our hearts.” It is the revelation of Jesus Christ within. We are not moving now on dreams, even though they might be God-given, nor on angel whisperings and

speakings, though they might be the angels of the Lord. In this dispensation we are Holy Spirit indwelt. That is the essential nature of the dispensation and of the church. There is a transcendent, an infinite superiority in the very character of this dispensation over all other dispensations. This is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and this is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit not speaking to, but *revealed within*. Moses wrote on tables of stone, the Holy Spirit writes on tables which are hearts of flesh, says Paul. The new covenant is inward, that is the difference.

Well, that is no new light for you, but this marks something very much in advance upon and superior to all former dispensations, and therefore it marks power beyond anything that ever was before. We know by our very New Testament itself and what it contains that that is true. There is a power at work by revelation of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in people that is unmatched anywhere else.

Satan's system a soul system

Now, note, the system of Satan and this world is a soul system. I hope you have really recognised what that means. The soul system is a tremendously strong system. We know that in ourselves, the awful times we have with our own souls, our own soul life. That is the system of Satan and this world, the soul system. You see it in Babylon in the days of Daniel and his companions. Oh, how this thing was worked up and played upon, and what tremendous power was exercised by it. Take only one feature — the time when the king set up the great image and called for universal worship of that image. By what means did he proceed to it? — By music. The enemy used emotions to be played upon, to be worked up, the whole thing to be swayed towards this image for worship, by music. Music always affects the senses, but music alone never touches the conscience. I am not saying you cannot sing in the Spirit, and that music cannot be used for spiritual purposes. I am not saying that, but I am saying that Satan's system is a soul system, and therefore that which affects and influences the soul and its senses most is the thing which he employs. That is his line of action. This whole thing is not touching conscience at all. I am not saying that God will not touch conscience through words put to music, but music alone never touches conscience. It only works on senses. That is a great factor in this whole soul kingdom of this world and of Satan's set-up. How much we can say about that, and what a lot Satan has done. I believe that there are few more, if as much, deceptive things to put you in a false position more quickly and more utterly than music. It can make you believe anything or do anything. Why do we have military bands? To make men do anything. Withdraw the band, withdraw the music, and you find the whole thing has gone. I mean that tremendous strength is withdrawn and the whole thing has been artificial. All your good feelings go, all those wonderful emotions

disappear, die down, all that you are going to do under that tremendous impulse of the band, of the music, is all a myth, an exploded, burst bubble. What a false realm it is! You can decide to do anything under that emotion, and then you come away from the hot atmosphere of your choruses, of your singing, of your music in which you have been converted, and you wonder in a few days where your conversion is, and if you cannot keep that up, that atmosphere and that kind of occupation, your Christian life begins to fade out. What a deception! What a lie!

You see, here is the working of the lie in Babylon. It is the principle of the whole system of Satan and this world kingdom, and music is a part of it; that is, it is a soul system.

We are in Christ. We are not in a soul system at all. Everything here in this dispensation so far as the church is concerned is not soul, but spirit. I do not mean that soul is annihilated, that feelings are ruled out and forbidden, but I mean that spirit takes ascendancy and command. It is a thing that you and I need to understand very much more than we do. I do not feel that we can really say too much about this matter for our present time, especially concerning the false positions into which people are being put because of this drawing upon soul emotions, the destroying of real spiritual life and testimony, because some Christians will sink down into their own souls and live in their own feelings. You can, as I said earlier, produce almost anything by your soul. You can so dwell upon a thing in your soulish mind that you can produce the very symptoms of anything, and the thing itself not be there. If you like to dwell upon some disease and think you have got it, and then let the idea get hold of you, you can produce the very symptoms of that disease. Medical people will bear me out, and the disease is not there at all, and yet you are feeling that you have got cancer, you have got something. You have been dwelling upon this, your soul has become occupied with it, and now you are getting pains and all sorts of things, and you are certain that is what is the matter with you, and if you will only go and have the thing explored, there is nothing there at all, it is a lie. We have heard of one person, who so concentrated mind and soul upon the death agonies of the Lord Jesus that blood actually began to come out of the veins of that person. You may not believe that sort of thing, but it is true. Get into that realm, and there is no end to it, but it is all so false, such a lie. But what a power it is, what a strength there is in it. You cannot argue people out of it. Even if you produce the evidence by X-ray or something like that, they still do not believe it. What a strength there is in this soul life of ours!

Now a spiritual person is one who has been delivered from that realm, and delivered from that power, and that is the exceeding greatness of His power, and it is for you, dear friend, if you are in the grip of your own miserable, deceiving, lying soul. What a power this is, and it is very true. The apostle has a corresponding phrase: — “strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man” (Eph. 3:16).

Another comparison and contrast

I am coming to one other comparison and contrast as I close. Here in Babylon in this great dream of the king interpreted by Daniel, we have this world system, which is Satan's system represented in a composite person. Take the two words not only together, but separately. Composite person. You see, it is the figure of one man. But that one man is made up of empires and kingdoms which spread over literally hundreds and into thousands of years, all bits and pieces put together to make up this one man. But how significant is it that Antichrist is a composite person. What tremendous power there is in Antichrist, in this composite build-up of systems under one personal control, one inward personality drawing together to himself all these parts, and working through them all, the kingdoms of this world. All the kingdoms of this world are one kingdom under Satan's power. They are a composite person. That is how it is in the world; that is how it is in Satan's kingdom.

When you come to this letter to the Ephesians, what have we got? No composite person, but one Person in one organic Body, not bits put together. Oh, let us get rid of this worldly and divisive conception of the church, that it is made up of all sorts of things. The church is made up of Methodists and Baptists and Congregationalists and Jews and Gentiles and Americans and British and Chinese and Indians. That is a lie, is it not? That is composite. It has a lot of power, and it is very useful to the devil, and there is a lot of His power working through that kind of thing. Get up against it and see. You do not meet the Lord. You meet something that is not wholesome, not good. You are up against a terrific power when you touch that composite thing. But how much superior and greater is this Body, the organism, not something put together of all kinds of bits and pieces, but something of organic growth out of Christ, and the picture, the revelation of that church is that it is going to overthrow all this other. This is the stone cut out without hands that smashes the composite. This is it. This is organic. Oh, what power, superior power, there is in organic oneness with Christ! That is only saying in other words, what tremendous power is bound up with the church because it is an organism, the very Body of Christ Himself. And so that is going to emerge when all other systems collapse and dissolve. Yes, it is going to emerge triumphant. Do not again talk or sing about Jews and Gentiles being in the church. There will not be a Jew or a Gentile in the church. There will not be a Britisher or an Indian or an African or a Chinese, or any other nationality, in the church. Do not make any mistake about it. It is a wrong interpretation of "out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9, AV). It does not say 'made up of every tribe, tongue, people and nation', but "out of". If at the beginning He made of one blood every nation (Acts 17:26, AV), He has now in the end made one nation from one Blood, His own Blood. There are no nations in the church. It is one nation, and that is the strength of it, that is the thing that Satan fears.

Well, I will not say more, but you surely glimpse something of the

exceeding nature of the dispensation in which we live, and therefore of the power which works in this time, and, thank God, it does work. We see something of this in the earth where all these other things of this world system have disappeared, and we can meet together forgetful of every kind of artificial distinction and division, whether it be national or any other. It just does not come in, it does not affect, it does not influence, it does not matter. We have found another ground of strength, another ground of life. That other ground is the one new man in Christ.

POWER WORKING THROUGH GRACE

The phrase which has been governing our leading, our consideration, is that in a prayer of the apostle Paul which we have in his letter to the Ephesians, “the exceeding greatness of His power” (Eph. 1:19).

We began by reminding ourselves that at this point in the life of the apostle, that is, when he was reaching the end of his journey here, all the full stored-up greatness of his apprehension of Christ, the revelation which had come to him of his Lord Jesus, was seeking to burst the vessel and break forth, and it came out in a whole number of superlatives, the words which represent the very extremes of human language. Among them there is this one — “the exceeding greatness of His power”. There are others in this letter, and if I am not mistaken, the others are Paul’s own conception of how that exceeding great power works towards us, and so he uses superlatives of the same kind, and sometimes the very same superlative in relation to two other words: grace and love. Love, “the breadth and length and height and depth”, the knowledge-surpassing love. Grace — the riches, the exceeding riches, of His grace, the unsearchable riches of His grace. As you read what comes from this man’s pen, not only here but at other times elsewhere, you are led to this conclusion, that while Paul has such a conception of the magnitude of the power of God, he sees that that is mediated to the church and for the church in terms of grace and love, and I feel that is a good note upon which to conclude. So in this chapter we shall be contemplating what that means, but only contemplating, by no means exhausting.

Christ above all by the working of God’s power

Let us return to this basic fragment — “the exceeding greatness of His power”. There are three things connected with that phrase. Firstly, where it put Christ. And so it says, “according to that working of the strength of His might”. Can you find any more words to add to that? — The working, and remember that the Greek word is ‘*energio*’; it is a very strong word. It is not the passive working, it is a mighty working, it is divine energy, that working, that energy, of “the strength of His might which He wrought — or again, energised — in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”. It tells us where this exceeding greatness of divine power put Christ.

The second thing is where it puts believers, and the statement is here

a corresponding statement, that it puts believers in exactly the same place. "Having made us to sit together with him in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 2:6). Exceeding great power is said to put us where it has put him.

The third thing is what it really means, now in this life, for us to have been put there in Christ; to really understand the first, where it has put Him, is to understand the other two. What it means that we have been placed there.

The apparent contradiction of circumstances

Well, let us look into it. Again we must bring together two fragments and this question, what does the combination of these two fragments mean? "The exceeding greatness of His power" in setting Him "far above all". Now is that true, that the Lord Jesus has been put now at this very time far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named? How can you prove it? There is no other way of proving it except by experience. But is it true? Turn your eyes upon that scene in Jerusalem on the day when the vehement ferocity of the Jewish leaders was let loose and vented upon those who bore the Name of the Lord Jesus, and bore down upon that splendid young man Stephen. There seems to be no rein whatever put upon their fury, their malice, but, dragging him out, they take the stones, hurl them until they have broken his body and he is there maimed, bleeding, dying. Is Jesus far above all rule and authority? Presently James will be taken and martyred. Is Jesus far above all rule and authority? Or later, Paul's own life, and that unspeakable wickedness of Nero spreading itself over thousands of believers in the Lord Jesus, covering them with tar and setting them alight as living torches in the light of which they carry out their sports, hurling them to wild beasts, sewn up in the skins of animals that wild beasts should tear them to shreds, and so on and on. Is Jesus far above all rule and authority? And so we could go on right down the years and the history of His followers and servants to our own day. We think of our dear brother who may still be alive, perhaps, in the torture house of the Communists in China, and many like that in China, Russia, Siberia, and other parts of the world, tortured daily because of Him. Unspeakable hatred and wickedness is being expressed towards those dear to the Lord Jesus. Is He far above all rule and authority? Is it true?

God's purpose in allowing the circumstances

Where is the answer? The answer is not sufficient as a written thing in this sacred book, the Bible. The answer must be found somewhere in practical forms and terms. In another of Paul's letters, that to the Romans, he uses a phrase. It is set in a very comprehensive paragraph at the end of Romans 8. The whole paragraph is this: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (v. 35-37). This is a man who is not talking theoretically about some possible things that might happen in imagination. This is a man who knew these things actually and literally in his own life, every one of them. “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities (far above all principalities), nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers (far above all powers), nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 38-39). Within that comprehensive statement there is just one little clause. We, in all these things, are “more than conquerors”, and if you could discern it, right at the heart of that little fragment lies the answer to the question, Is He far above all rule and authority, with all this going on? What is it to be more than conqueror? Surely it is enough to be conqueror. Does it only mean degree, that you not only conquer, but you overwhelm? No, that is not the answer.

I remember some many years ago I tried to illustrate that very clause in this way, and I think I can illustrate it now with something more up to date in the same connection. Quite recently a man in South Africa died who had become very greatly beloved by this country and many others, highly respected, and regarded as a great leader and a worthy man. His name was Smuts. There was a time when, as he was then known, General Smuts was the sworn enemy of this country, and some of us well remember the days of the Boer war, and how Smuts figured in it with his colleague, General Botha. Well, what ravages they wrought, how they nearly brought this proud country to its knees, but then this country won the Boer War. It was a sorry win, but it was a win. They were conquered, but that was not the end. These men were still suffering, smarting in spirit, still enemies, but this country went to work so wisely, so generously, so understandingly in the clearing up of the situation that gradually those men were won right over onto the side of this country. And instead of remaining just conquered, they added their full weight and strength to the benefit of this country. The enemy was not only a conquered enemy, but all his power was brought in the favour of the former foe, in the favour of the conqueror, and that is being more than conqueror. If you cannot only quench and subdue your enemy, but also take hold of your enemy and make him serve your ends, that is being more than conqueror, and that is the story here.

We are more than conquerors. How? Why? The very things that have been against us are being used, by divine grace and love, to bring about the things against which they were set. They are fulfilling the very purpose which they set out to frustrate. “I would have you know” said the apostle, “that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12), and they were pretty hard things. You see, there is the coming in of this exceeding great power through the grace of God, which

robs the enemy of His power to do harm, and makes his work do good. That is something transcendent; that is something exceeding great.

The power of God's grace over against sin

And so it is with one great enemy. Is it not wonderful that the apostle uses this very word in that connection? "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Rom. 5:20). Oh, sin, then — that dark, sinister, evil, destructive thing — has been taken hold of to bring out the greatness of God's grace. It has not left everything desolate and barren. It has been taken hold of by God as the very ground and occasion for showing how great His grace is. Sin abounded, and, oh, yes, that is a tremendous thing, but grace did exceedingly abound. This exceeding great power coming through grace has brought us to that place, has it not? Is it not something very great to discover the grace of God, the love of God? Oh yes, it is a very great thing to find out the heart of God, and we have found it out by the way in which He has handled sin. Oh, you and I have yet to come into a really adequate apprehension of the grace of God in relation to sin and our sinfulness. You see, here it is in this letter to the Ephesians. Before the apostle gets to this word about the exceeding greatness of His power, he says, "which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (v.6). The old version says, "made us accepted". The word 'accepted' is 'freely bestowed'. Accepted, is that not grace? Accepted in the Beloved. There is the heart and wonder of the gospel of the grace of God. We can all believe and understand that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is beloved of God. That does not want much straining after; there is not much difficulty about that. He certainly is God's well-beloved Son. He stands before His Father without the suggestion or hint of a doubt or a reservation. His acceptance by the Father is full and utter. There is no shadow between them. They are one in a oneness so utter that there is nothing like it anywhere, and do you see what this says — that that belovedness of the Lord Jesus to the Father is transferred to you and to me. We inherit it in Christ; it is ours. Exactly the same position held by Him with the Father is given to us. Oh, how can that be? That defeats all our attempts at understanding and explaining. Freely bestowed, accepted in the beloved One, so that what He is to the Father we are in Him. What the Father is to Him, He is to us in Him.

Something has happened. There has been some power at work somewhere to bring that about, seeing what we are by nature and in ourselves, and you tell me that, knowing myself as I do, that is true at this very moment. Then I have misread the Bible if it is not. "Hath made us", is not going to make us, but hath made us. It is already done. He has done something over this question of sin in you and in me. He has done something about it, with all the power that was required to do it. He has exercised that power; it was done in the cross. Oh, wonderful gospel, true beyond our power really to grasp, almost beyond our power to believe. Power working through grace, and it is just grace, and that is all there is about it. Marvellous grace, unspeakable grace, that what

the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is to His Father, I am, you are, in Him. That is something about which to go and tell the world, that is the good news, the gospel, of the grace of God.

You have got something to get over to take your place on that, because you are always bringing this self of yours as it is, this sinful self, and there is nothing to say that He has annihilated our sinful selves. I am prepared to believe, if you tell me that there are certain sins that you were once in bondage to from which you are now free, and they no longer go on. But if you tell me that you are no longer capable of doing anything wrong and sinning, I cannot believe you and that is not what is said. If Paul can say, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18), and we cannot differentiate between trespasses and sins; if it says, "having forgiven us all our trespasses" (Col. 2:13), it also says, "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself [consider your own selves], lest you also fall into the same trespass" (Gal. 6:1). That does not look as though the trespassing man, or the man capable of trespassing, sinning, has been annihilated, but being what we are, still capable of sinning, still with a sinful nature, still righteousness unperfected, because Paul almost says with his last breath, "that I may be ... found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, ... but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:8,9). That is an aspiration right to the end. Righteousness still unperfected, yet this fact that in Christ Jesus we are to the Father as He is. There is power at work in that, and it requires, of course, the whole explanation of His cross to make that clear, but I am stating facts.

Now, you can analyse it, and you can get nearer to it in this way. In order to understand what has happened, you must recognise and remember the effect of sin, the result of sin. What was the result of sin? In the first place it separated from God. In the next place it brought condemnation upon man. In the next place it brought death. Well, I will ask you two questions. You are a child of God; you know it, you have been born again. Firstly, Are you sinless, are you incapable of sinning? Do you still have a sinful nature? If you are honest, you will say, Yes, and you well know it. While you are saying, Yes, are you united with God? Have you come to know that you are no longer separated from God, that something has happened by which union has been made between you and God? Is that not your greatest treasure? These two things are true at the same time. Therefore something must have happened as to the effect of sin, and that is exactly what Christ did. He took the effect of sin for you and me in separation from God, and bore all that effect in His own consciousness on the cross and drained it to the last dregs for you and for me in the cup which He drank — separation from God. There is no more separation for you and for me who are by faith in Jesus Christ. The question of our sinful nature continuing is quite another thing altogether, and you will not get anywhere with that until you have settled this, what He has done for you in dealing with the result of sin in the first instance, bringing you to the place from which sin drove you

out, union and fellowship with God. Oh, wonder of wonders, that we, still sinful creatures in our own natures, are enjoying fellowship with God. How is it? Well, just for that reason, that this exceeding great power working through grace dealt with that first consequence of sin, and in the same way it dealt with the second. It dealt with the matter of condemnation, and the phrase is almost worn threadbare now: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

That is so in the third matter of death. We come to that in a moment. But you see basically in a matter of relationship, this tremendous thing called sin which brings separation, condemnation and death and has been overcome by the exceeding greatness of His power working through grace, and has brought about our acceptance in the Beloved on the same terms that He enjoys with His Father, wonderful! But we just know a little bit about it in experience. That is more than conquerors, is it not? Of course, we would all be very glad if Adam had never sinned, and we had never inherited a sinful nature, and were quite sinless. I do not want to open up a very difficult discussion, but I really believe that it must be like this, that in the end God will be so wholly vindicated along the line of grace, that we shall no longer have any question as to why He allowed sin, and why He created man, knowing what would happen. The end will be God's absolute vindication. There will be no question as to whether He ought, after all, to have created man and allowed sin to come in. God will be vindicated, but He is going to be vindicated by His grace, and there will be more worship and adoration through eternity to God because of grace, than there would have been if grace had never been necessary. That is more than conquerors.

The power of God's grace over against the world in us

Think of the world. Is He far above all rule and authority? Are we really where He is in this matter, far above all in Him, where the world is concerned? Well, the answer is no theory, no beautiful ideal just to contemplate. It is something in practical experience. But what a tremendous power this world is, what a force, how much the world is to its own, is it not? The world is everything, and it is a tremendous thing to the people of it. Think of all the fear, almost terror, that people feel when they contemplate having the world against them, not being in its favour; its opinion, judgment and attitude all against them. It strikes a note of terror; it has such a power. What we were speaking about earlier, this world system in the realm of the soul, the soul life, the standards of this world, the motives and judgments of this world do govern our souls so much. Well, how can we illustrate that? There is a simple little thing which we have often used which really does give us the clue to understanding. It is what Paul said in his letter to the Galatians in his last reference to the cross, the last of several references to the cross, in that letter. He said, "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath

been crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14). And what did he mean? Well, the immediate context shows.

Paul says, ‘These Judaizers are following me around everywhere and seeking to undo the work that I have been doing, by telling you that circumcision avails nothing and uncircumcision avails nothing (circumcision has nothing to do with it; it is a new creation).’ They are following me around and saying, ‘You must be circumcised or you cannot be saved.’ And he says what they are after is to get people converted to their beliefs in order that they may go home and say, ‘We have had so many converts’, “that they may glory in their flesh.” You see the principle. Paul calls that the world principle. Oh, glorying in men, glorying in numbers, glorying in what looks like success and prosperity in your work, glorying in being able to send in a report of so many converts, to be able to say, ‘You see how successful our work is.’ He says that is the world. “I have been crucified” to that, I am no longer one little bit influenced by that kind of thing, what I can show for my work. The thing that matters is that I am faithful to God, faithful to Jesus Christ, and it is not of any account to me at all whether I can report back to Antioch or Jerusalem and say, ‘Look here, we have had three thousand conversions, we have got so many people to follow our teaching.’ That is not it. That is the world, he says. It is the principle, you see. I only take it as an example of this thing, the world, and you know it is not an easy thing to the flesh to have no reports like that to send home, never to be able to write up a report of your work and point out how successful it is, to have something to point to that vindicates you, justifies you, that establishes you and your reputation, never to have anything like that. It goes hard against the flesh.

And here was Paul seeing his converts turned aside everywhere and at last having to say, “All they in Asia be turned from me”, but he is in victory. He is saved from the world spirit, the world motive, which is always a glorifying of the flesh. Is that not the world principle, the world motive? And it works in many other ways. But what a mighty thing it is to be completely delivered from that.

Now, you see, the Lord Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof and the tempter said, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9). The world on the one hand and all its glory; on the other, the cross and all its shame, and He chooses the cross. He has victory over the world, but on the ground of that victory there is a prophetic psalm which runs, “Ask of me”. This is addressed by the Father to the Son: “Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Ps. 2:8), and He is getting it, and the day is in view when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ, and no longer in the hands of the devil. Christ has overcome the world in that sense. But what a mighty thing that is, to have that world rooted out of us so that it no longer matters what the world thinks, what its judgments are, what attitudes it takes towards us, on these

very serious matters of our having nothing much to show for the course we are taking with the Lord, and certainly nothing to write up, but our faithfulness to the Lord is the only thing that remains. That is victory, but it is also mighty grace working, and the power of God over the world in us. Is He not above all?

You could never have taken that position but for some power greater than the world in your life. It does matter to us, let us be quite honest, it does matter to our flesh, our natural life, what the reactions of people are, how they talk about us and think about us, and what they do where we are concerned, and whether they open or close their doors to us, whether we get the advantages that they are able to put in our way or not. All that sort of thing does touch our flesh, if we like to live in that realm, but the grace of God does something that simply lifts us clean out of that so that it no longer matters. But that is a mighty thing, you know, because that flesh is very real, is it not? It is very real, and some of you young people know it, and that because of your relationship to the Lord Jesus and your stand for the Lord Jesus the ‘plums’ do not come your way in this world. You do not get the special privileges and advantages that could be yours; they are withheld. Is that not true? Oh yes, you have to suffer the loss of many things because of your relationship with the Lord Jesus, but how does it affect you? Well, in your own flesh, of course; it hurts. It does not hurt so much that you go right down under and out. The grace of God makes you triumph. Grace triumphs. This is very practical. That is how you know that He is on the throne above all rule, the rule of this world in principle, the rule of sin in effect.

The power of God’s grace over against suffering

And so we could go on with the various other ways in which this great power works, but perhaps we might just close with a word on the sufferings and the sorrows of the Lord’s people. We have read of Paul’s sufferings, and he has other catalogues in his letters of the sufferings which came his way because of Christ, and the sorrows that came to his heart because of Christ, great suffering, heartbreaking sorrows, not a few, great and many. Read his letters again with this one thing in mind to discover what this man had to put up with, what he had to go through, what he had to endure. These words in Romans 8 that we have read are enough in themselves, but, as I say, he has got other catalogues, and there are many indications that this man had no ordinary sufferings and sorrows, but sufferings and sorrows enough to utterly desolate and devastate, to bring to full and final despair. He could have said, ‘He is not on the throne, the devil is on the throne, the world is having it all its own way, my enemies are just being allowed to do as they like, the Lord does not deliver me from suffering and sorrow.’ Looked at from one standpoint, there was enough to make up a case like that, but the marvellous thing, and God only knows how we are involving ourselves when we say this, is that this man not only managed to cope with it all, but he said, “We rejoice (glory, ASV. margin)

in our tribulations” (Rom. 5:3), “that I may know him ... and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). That is not just being conqueror; that is more than conqueror.

Why? Well, he had come to see that this was the very way and the very means employed by the Lord to make him know, firstly, grace, “My grace is sufficient” (2 Cor. 12:9), triumphant grace, and on the other hand, to make these very sufferings, as we have said, work out for spiritual increase in himself and in the church. There was a certain vicariousness about his sufferings. I do not mean in the same sense as Christ’s vicarious and atoning death, but there was a vicariousness about this man’s sufferings. He said, “I ... fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). My sufferings are all being turned to account for the church. These very sufferings are an advantage to the church, a gain to the church. He saw that, and that is being more than conqueror. The point is, and you cannot fail to see it, that this man, with this mountain of suffering and sorrow, knew some power that deprived all these sufferings and sorrows of their power to destroy him. It is a marvellous thing at the end in the prison that he is so triumphant after all, with all that is going on, talking here about being in the heavenlies. There is something there that is not natural. It is no ordinary, human strength of endurance. No, there is a mighty infinite power at work here, the exceeding greatness of His power working through grace, and thus proving that, after all, Jesus is far above all rule, whatever that rule may be — the rule of sin, of the world, of suffering and sorrow, of death. For so many, contemplation of death brings fear and terror, but that is all extricated, like its sting, by the grace of God, by the love of God, by the power of God, and death is no longer the terror that it is to those who know not the grace of God.

Concluded.