



*the*  
**Golden**  
**Candlestick**

**LIFE IN THE UNSEARCHABLE  
RICHES OF CHRIST**

**Part 3**

**T. Austin-Sparks**

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*Volume 183*

## THE RICHES OF CHRIST IN THE WISDOM AND REVELATION OF GOD

*Prayer:*

*Lord, we ask that Thy Spirit would refresh us and revive us, and carry us on towards the goal which was in Thy thought and heart in bringing us here, and do give to this hour something of really vital importance to Thyself in us, and then through us; in the Name of the Lord Jesus we ask this, Amen.*

We are going to resume where we broke off in this matter of the riches of wisdom and knowledge as in the all-comprehensive unsearchable riches of Christ. Before I continue may I just say this: that what I feel and believe the Lord is really seeking to do with us at a time like this is to bring us into understanding of what a true Holy Spirit Christian life is. The apostle Paul said: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." It is this spiritual wisdom that we are concerned with at this time — the riches of wisdom.

You will remember that we reminded ourselves that the chief connection of wisdom in the Word of God is the building of the habitation, the house of God. In Solomon, representatively and typically, the summit of the Old Testament is found in the building of the house. As David said: "Solomon my son is young and tender and the house that is to be built for the Lord must be exceeding magnificent." That was the masterpiece of wisdom, and so it is in the New Testament. The masterpiece, not of time, but of eternity; not of earth, but of heaven. The masterpiece is the building of God's spiritual house, and we are seeking to see something, if it be but a little, of what that house really is and the wisdom which builds it.

I need hardly remind you that it has been the thought of God from the beginning, before He set His hand to creation, to have a place here where He Himself could dwell. To dwell among men was the governing thing in His speaking to Moses concerning the tabernacle: "Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." And all this was pointing towards the day when He would be present in the person of His Son, and in the corporate expression of His Son, the Church. Emmanuel — God with us. That is the climax of everything, for when we reach the end of the Bible, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them." That

is the last thing, so that the building of this house for God is the governing object of the dispensation.

Stephen saw, more than any other apostle had seen, what his great successor, Paul, came into fully. Stephen said: "Solomon built Him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands; as saith the prophet, The heaven is My throne." And yet it is His desire and pleasure to dwell with man.

That is always the first test of whether anything is a true representation or expression of the house of God. Strip the idea and the language of the house of God of everything else and come down to this: Is God there? Is that where you really meet God? Can you say that every time you touch that, you touch God? My, that is testing, is it not? Testing for you and for me because, you know, the Word says: "We are a temple of the living God", and the quotation is in this context, for God said: "I will dwell in them." "Ye are a temple of God ... If any man destroys the temple of God, him shall God destroy." It is a very consequential thing and it raises this issue for us personally. When people meet us, come into touch with us, or when we pass people through this life, is it possible for them to say: 'When you met that man, that woman, you touched God, you met God. There is something of God about that person.' I think we could have nothing more challenging than that. What is the influence and impact of our having passed through this world and this life? What registration do we make, and what will abide with those who knew us and had anything to do with us? Will it be possible for them to say: 'Well, you know, that man did have something of God about him' (or that woman) 'and we came to sense something of God by having come to know him, or her.' The same must be true of our gathering, be it but a handful of two or three, or larger. The only justification for our existing and talking about ourselves as the house of God, the only right we have for meeting together, is that anybody who comes near meets God! They should be able to say: 'We have met the Lord today. We have been in the presence of the Lord today. The Lord has been there.' It is a wonderful thing when it is possible to say that. It does challenge us, and it will do a lot of things with us once we get hold of that conception of the house of God.

## **The presence of Christ**

I would like to remind you of that wonderful sermon by Dr. A.J. Gordon, 'How Christ came to Church'. Have you read it? It has so often challenged

me and, I think that it would challenge all preachers who read it. Let me give you the body of it.

“It was Saturday night, when wearied from the work of preparing Sunday’s sermon, that I fell asleep and the dream came. I was in the pulpit before a full congregation, just ready to begin my sermon, when a stranger entered and passed slowly up the left aisle of the church looking first to the one side and then to the other as though silently asking with his eyes that someone would give him a seat. He had proceeded nearly halfway up the aisle when a gentleman stepped out and offered him a place in his pew, which was quietly accepted. Excepting the face and features of the stranger everything in the scene is distinctly remembered — the number of the pew, the Christian man who offered its hospitality, the exact seat which was occupied. Only the countenance of the visitor could never be recalled. That his face wore a peculiarly serious look, as of one who had known some great sorrow, is clearly impressed on my mind. His bearing too was exceedingly humble, his dress poor and plain, and from the beginning to the end of the service he gave the most respectful attention to the preacher. Immediately as I began my sermon my attention became riveted on this hearer. If I would avert my eyes from him for a moment they would instinctively return to him, so that he held my attention rather than I held his till the discourse was ended.

To myself I said constantly: ‘Who can that stranger be?’ and then I mentally resolved to find out by going to him and making his acquaintance as soon as the service should be over. But after the benediction had been given the departing congregation fled into the aisles and before I could reach him the visitor had left the church. The gentleman with whom he had sat remained behind, however; and approaching him with great eagerness I asked: ‘Can you tell me who that stranger was who sat in your pew this morning?’ In the most matter-of-course way he replied: ‘Why, do you not know that man? It was Jesus of Nazareth.’ With a sense of the keenest disappointment I said: ‘My dear sir, why did you let Him go without introducing me to Him? I was so desirous to speak with Him.’ And with the same nonchalant air the gentleman replied: ‘Oh, do not be troubled. *He has been here today, and no doubt He will come again.*’

And now came an indescribable rush of emotion. As when a strong current is suddenly checked, the stream rolls back upon itself and is choked in its own foam, so the intense curiosity which had been going out towards the mysterious hearer now returned upon the preacher. The Lord Himself “whose I am and whom I serve” had been listening to me today. What was

I saying? Was I preaching on some popular theme in order to catch the ear of the public? Well, thank God it was of Himself I was speaking. However imperfectly done, it was Christ and Him crucified whom I was holding up this morning. But in what spirit did I preach? Was it ‘Christ crucified preached in a crucified style’, or did the preacher magnify himself while exalting Christ? So anxious and painful did these questionings become that I was about to ask the brother with whom He had sat if the Lord had said anything to him concerning the sermon, but a sense of propriety and self-respect at once checked the suggestion. Then immediately other questions began with equal vehemence to crowd into the mind. ‘What did He think of our sanctuary, its gothic arches, its stained windows, its costly and powerful organ? How was He impressed with the music and the order of the worship?’ It did not seem at the moment as though I could ever again care or have the smallest curiosity as to what men might say of preaching, worship, or church, if I could only know that He had not been displeased, that He would not withhold His feet from coming again because He had been grieved at what He might have seen or heard.

We speak of ‘a momentous occasion’. This, though in sleep, was recognised as such by the dreamer — a lifetime, almost an eternity of interest crowded into a single solemn moment. One present for an hour who could tell me all I have so longed to know; who could point out to me the imperfections of my service; who could reveal to me my real self, to whom, perhaps I am most a stranger; who could correct the errors in our worship to which long usage and accepted tradition may have rendered us insensible. While I had been preaching for a half-hour He had been here and listening who could have told me all this and infinitely more. And my eyes had been holden that I knew Him not; and now He had gone. “Yet a little while I am with you and then I go unto Him that sent Me.”

One thought, however, lingered in my mind with something of comfort and more of awe. ‘He has been here today, and no doubt He will come again’; and mentally repeating these words as one regretfully meditating on a vanished vision, ‘I awoke, and it was a dream.’ No, it was not a dream. It was a vision of the deepest reality, a miniature of an actual ministry, verifying the statement often repeated that sometimes we are most awake towards God when we are asleep towards the world.”

Much of the detail of that dream may not be relevant to your position, but there certainly are challenging features for us all. There is the general and particular fact that the Lord Jesus, the glorified Jesus of Nazareth, has said most definitely that, “Where two or three are gathered in My name,

there I am.” So that *whenever* or *wherever* there is a gathering into His name, be it greater or smaller, He is *there*, He is *present*! If we really took this seriously what effect would it have upon our manner, our behaviour, *our* presence? It might be painful and embarrassing to detail what is so common in conversations, noise, talkativeness, appearance, distractions, etc., in many of our congregations, both before and after the ‘service’! Might we not go away more quietly, rather than dissipating the atmosphere and message, if we had remembered that He was actually there?

Then, let us take this other intimation. It is not any one, or all of the other things that make what is commonly called ‘the Church’. Not building, form, ritual, congregation, music, and so on; but it is *His presence*! It is His presence where everything is gathered *into* His name, which means *what He is!*

Well, that He might dwell amongst us. That is the idea, that He should be found where we are and people should say: ‘You know, I was with a certain little company at such and such a place today, and I met God.’ You cannot be frivolous and careless if that is true.

### **In spirit and in truth**

This is what is meant by this that God is seeking to build by the Holy Spirit today. Then we went on to say that the house of God is the embodiment of the truth. In its nature it is truth. He said to the woman: “Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem” — neither ... nor ... but in spirit and in truth. It is not a geographical location; it is not necessarily here or there. Neither ... nor ... but, and the great *but* comes right down on “In spirit and in truth”. That is the house of God.

We were pointing out that the Lord Jesus came as the very temple of God Himself with the intention to extend His own person, to gather into Himself a corporate organic relatedness of born-again believers, in order that He might in Himself, and, therefore, in them undo the historic lie: “Hath God said?” ‘God knows. Thou shalt know? Yes, you shall have a wisdom independently of God, and if you have it, well, that will be the realisation of *yourself* and of everything.’ There is a lie right at the inception of human life, and you know as well as I do that that lie is working out to destruction. We stand almost holding our breath at what is going to happen next in this world because of this lie that man has sufficient wisdom to fulfil and realise his own destiny: this satanic lie of humanism and all such philosophies. The embodiment of the truth is the house of God; you and I individually and

together to embody the truth because Jesus says: “I am the truth.” Man is living in a deception. He is a deceived creature. His heart is deceived. This lie needs a lot of breaking. It has too many aspects for us to comprehend or even mention, but it is anything that is not real, is not true, and anything that is pretence or make-believe.

I got myself into a lot of trouble once when I said ‘make-up’ for ‘make-believe’. That is what it is — something that you are not, something put on to give an impression that is not true. It is not you. Jezebel started that, you know. I was shocked last week when the economical problems of England were being dealt with in Parliament and it was announced what were the exports of Britain, and, amongst them, so many million false eyelashes. This is one of the great exports. My, what have we come to! And all for make-believe! Well, forgive me, I am not dealing with those things *as such*, but there is so much in the system which is unreal, untrue, make-believe, artificial, pretence, and what other words can I command to say the same thing? In Christianity in its organised form there is so much that is pretence: pretending to be something, putting on something, make-believe, and it is not true. It is hollow. We have a very religious manner during an hour or two of service, you see, but it is not true outside. Really, it is no more true than in those realms where it is most pronounced.

I remember once, during the first World War, I was in Malta, and I went to the festival of Corpus Christi in the cathedral. They had been marching around the town with the seven expressions of the cross; huge representations of the cross in life-sized figures. They were marching all around all the morning and sweating under the load, and then they all came into the cathedral for the festival of Corpus Christi. I was there, sitting on a chair. Then the priest, the bishop, came and elevated the host, and they all went on the ground, and because I did not, they turned and looked at me as though something was going to happen to me. They said: ‘Kneel down, sir, kneel down!’ But I did not kneel down. I sat where I was, and when it was all over we went outside, and we were not outside five minutes before these people were all fighting one another in the most awful scene of quarrels and feuds; and not one hour after all this religion! That is an extreme thing, but see how hollow and unreal religion can be. If it is in a more modified form it can be what we believe to be very devout, but it is in the soul. It is all in the artistic and aesthetic temperament.

Do you know that there are several things in the Bible which are said to be an abomination to God? If you look into your New Testament, in the Gospels, you will see that the thing which was most abominable to the Lord

Jesus was hypocrisy. Oh, He could bear with a lot of things in sinners, but bring Him in touch with hypocrisy and He is angry to His depth. The most vehement words of denunciation, the most awful things that came through His lips, were against, “Ye hypocrites!” Why? Because He had come as the very embodiment of truth, reality, utter transparency, without a shadow or vapour of what is suspicious, doubtful, or questionable. So His whole being revolted against the lie, and, strangely enough, in religion.

No, the house of God is that, and you and I must be that. God help us to be clear, transparent, without guile, deception, falsehood, pretence, make-believe, and with nothing that is not the genuine thing. I started by saying that we are here to know what true Christianity is according to the Spirit, and that is it — “in spirit and in truth”. That is, it is not ritualistic, it is not sacramental, it is not any of these things which people think make up the church. It is in pure, clear spirit and truth.

## **Spiritual wisdom**

Well, that is spiritual wisdom. Spiritual wisdom is something so contrary to worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom cannot fathom this; it cannot get a hold on this; its wisdom is altogether a different type of wisdom from spiritual wisdom. If I may illustrate:

Many years ago I knew an old wit, one of those people of whom there are not too many. We could do with a lot more of them! We call them eccentrics; they are something different, somewhat — if we may say so — peculiar. This one I knew was a man like that. He had a wooden leg before the days of artificial limbs, and he stumped along on it and you could hear him a way off. He lived in a country town and one evening he went into the market place. There was a great crowd, and in the midst was an infidel jeering at God, making fun of the idea of such a being as God, making the people laugh with his jokes about the idea of God, and so he went on. My friend listened until he was finished, and then he went up to the infidel to talk to him. ‘Sir, I wish you would come along and see me tomorrow morning and we will have a chat.’ ‘Oh, yes, I will come.’ So the next morning the infidel went along and found my friend sitting in his garden under a big oak tree. The infidel in his ridiculing God the night before had said: ‘Well, look, here is an idea. This will show you how silly God is, if there is one. Here is a mighty oak-tree, a massive thing, hundreds of years old, and the only fruit that God can put on that majestic tree is a little acorn, and here is something almost like a weed creeping on the ground, and God puts great big water



melons on that.’ ‘Now’, he said, ‘if there were such a person as God, don’t you think he would put the wonderful big fruit on the oak tree and the little acorn on the creeping weed?’ My friend knew what he was doing when he invited him to come. He was sitting under his oak tree and they began to talk. It was at the time when the acorns were beginning to fall, and an acorn fell right on the top of the infidel’s head, and he said ‘Ouch!’ My friend said: ‘Get down on your knees and thank God Almighty that that was not a water melon!’ Well, I am not wanting to make you laugh, but sometimes we get home our point with a story. The wisdom of this world, you see, and the wisdom of God are so different. Spiritual wisdom is so different from natural wisdom. They are as remote from one another as the heaven is from the earth.

The Lord is seeking to teach us spiritual wisdom and understanding, for only with that can His house be built. It is going to be the embodiment of truth and the embodiment of His wisdom in a mystery. When Paul was making his great comparison between the wisdom of this world and spiritual wisdom, in his letter to the Corinthians, he said: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them. They are foolishness to him. He that is spiritual judgeth all things, but he himself is judged of no man.” He is an enigma to this world. He is unfathomable to this world. Of course, you know that, do you not? If you are the Lord’s, you know that the world cannot understand you a bit. It is like that. It is a hidden wisdom. “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery”, said Paul. That is the wisdom we need to know for building up one another and for building the house of God.

## **Livingness**

The next thing is that the house of God is the expression of the livingness of God. Livingness is an essential and primary feature of the house of God. It is the house of the living God, the house of the Spirit of the living God, the house of the Spirit who is the Spirit of life. The hallmark of what is of God is livingness. It is a test again; a test of you, of me, of our meetings, of our local companies. What is the effect of contact with us? What is the effect on people coming among us? Are they *at least* able to say: ‘Well, I did not understand all that was said. I could not grasp all they were talking about, or the preacher was talking about, but the thing that I found there was life! Something answered to a deep desire and need in me. Life! Those people have got the secret of life.’ Life as and over against, and opposed to,

mere formality. Formality, the blight of crystallisation. Do you see what I mean? God does something, moves in life, notice is taken of it, but it is not long before men take hold of that and crystallise it into something static. ‘This how it is to be done; this is what you are to believe’, and before long the compass is boxed. The whole thing has been crystallised, and set, and fixed. The dead hand has come upon the things of God. That is the history of Christianity. Again and again when God moves, man takes hold of it and systematizes it and says: ‘This is it!’, and immediately the Holy Spirit’s liberty is quenched. The Holy Spirit’s prerogative to do as He will, and make innovations if He wants to, is not allowed.

There is a liberty which is licence. I am not talking about that. And there is that abominable thing of trying all the time to have innovations, to do something unique and unusual to make an impression of life. That is not what I am talking about. This matter of livingness means that the Holy Spirit is perfectly free to make His own order, to check us up or unfix things and break through our bounds, limitations, strictures, and do something unusual. That, of course, was the difficulty of the great transition from Judaism to Christianity, and poor James had a bad time over it. Even Peter had a bad time over that. This transition, where the Holy Spirit has taken things in hand and has struck against rigid tradition, and called upon them to do things that they would never have done unless they had surrendered to the Holy Spirit. Oh, this incorrigible tendency to legalism! Legalism is not only the Mosaic law and Judaism; it is a persistent tendency all the way along to reduce things to a form and order which is man-controlled. It is not long before the element of exclusiveness arises, and if you do not do it our way, you are outside.

Oh, the Holy Spirit is much bigger than our conceptions! The Lord Jesus is far greater than our minds; His wisdom far surpasses all that we have ever yet imagined, and that is one of Paul’s superlatives: “Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” ... ‘I never thought of that! I have gone around this problem, and I have approached it from every point of the compass to see how it could be solved, and then the Lord came in with a point that is not on the compass and just solved it. It was outside of my imagination, and the Lord did it so simply.’ A wisdom that is not of this world!

### **The gentleness of the Holy Spirit**

I close by reminding you that this life of the Spirit, this life of His wisdom, is a very sensitive life. Anyone who lives in the Spirit, who knows

anything about life in the Spirit, is really a person who is very sensitive. They are not hard and cold. I believe you know that the Holy Spirit makes gentlemen and ladies of us. Perhaps you do not use those words so much now. You talk about ‘men and women’, but we mean something more than that when we speak of a ‘gentleman’ or a ‘lady’. Yes, there may be certain female persons and you say, ‘that woman’, but you cannot say: ‘You know, she is a lady. Of certain men, male persons, you can say ‘that man’, but you cannot say: ‘He is a gentleman.’ I believe that a mark of the Holy Spirit is courtesy, sensitiveness to what is proper, what is good, what is nice, what is kind, what is thoughtful; not riding roughshod over all sensibilities and hurting people. Sometimes Christians can be so discourteous, so rude, so rough, so insensitive; is that not true? The Holy Spirit is not like that; He is gentle, He is kind, He is thoughtful, He is sensitive.

I remember going some years ago to a garden we have in London where rare plants are collected and cultivated, and the curator took me round. As we were going around he pointed out this and that, and told me about these things, all the camouflage in nature, and so on. We came to a wonderful shrub, standing upright, looking so strong and healthy, and he stopped and said: ‘Will you touch the leaf of that shrub as gently as you can?’ So I stretched out my hand and so gently I touched just the leaf, and the whole thing went down! The whole shrub collapsed to the ground. He looked at me and said: ‘Do you know why? It is a plant of the jungle, and when some wild beast comes through the jungle and just scrapes against it, it collapses, and the wild beast jumps and rushes away.’ This sensitiveness is the salvation of that shrub from the ravages of the wild beast. Then I saw that shrub, after a few minutes, come up again. It came right up as before. A marvellous thing in nature! God’s wisdom in nature. I believe that we should be more like that as we grow older, more sensitive, more of an expression of the Spirit who is easily grieved, for it says: “Grieve not the Spirit.” He is easily entreated, very sensitive.

One of the most difficult lessons that I have found to learn is this gentleness of the Holy Spirit. In seeking guidance from the Lord with all my heart, I have poured my soul out to the Lord for guidance on some matter, and I have expected the Lord almost to send an angel from heaven to open the heavens and speak out, and say in unmistakable terms what I ought to do, and He never does it. But I have noticed the slightest touch of something, this voice of gentle stillness, hardly perceptible. I have noticed it, though not always taken note of it, and afterwards, either for my joy or for my sorrow, I have remembered. ‘If only I had paid heed to that very gentle touch of the

Spirit it would have saved me all this trouble!’ It is so gentle! You know, it is the way of spiritual education to learn how the Spirit quietly governs the life so that we in our own spirit have a registration. We have said something about someone, or to someone, and inside the Spirit very gently rebukes. The growth in the life of a true Christian, the spiritual life, is just this: that you know somewhere quietly inside the Spirit has said: ‘That was not right. That was not true.’

May I give you another instance. This goes back years. I was with a friend of mine in Ireland, where I went for an annual convention, and he said to me: ‘You know, we had some special visitor recently. We had so-and-so (a well-known servant of the Lord) as the speaker.’ Now I knew that this man’s one message was the Holy Spirit. He never spoke on anything else but the Holy Spirit. My friend said to me: ‘We had so-and-so, and in a conversation between us alone I mentioned your name. I saw his face drop, and he said: ‘Oh, I could never have fellowship with him.’ My friend said: ‘Why? I know him very well. He comes here for our annual convention every year. The Lord is with him and uses him. Why? Tell me why!’ This dear man gave him eleven reasons why he could not have fellowship with me, and they were the most terrible things. My friend said to him: ‘I know that you are altogether wrong, but why not write that in a letter to me and let me send it to him, and he will give you his answer.’ Well, he objected, and it was a long time before he could be persuaded to give the promise, but he gave it and went away, and presently he wrote the letter. Here were all the reasons tabulated, and my friend sent it on. I looked at these things, and I did not know what emotion was going to be uppermost. I could have wept, I could have been angry. Oh, yes, all the emotions sprang up in me, for the whole thing was a tissue of untruths. I wrote back, of course, repudiating categorically, denying the truth of any of these things, but at the end of my letter to my friend I said: ‘After I have said all this, the thing that puzzles me, the thing I cannot understand, is that a dear man of God can go up and down the country speaking of the Holy Spirit, and then he can tabulate so many things that are not true about another brother, and the Holy Spirit never tells him so, nor says: ‘That is not the truth.’ We can say: ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit’, and we may believe all the teaching and truth and doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and be talking about Him all the time, and the Holy Spirit never has a chance to say: ‘Look here, this and that that you are saying, that you are doing, is not the truth. It is false.’ This kind of Christianity is a very practical Christianity. The Holy Spirit is very practical. He does not believe in our doctrines. He only believes in reality.

## Sensitive to the Holy Spirit

Well, although I have not finished, I think I have said enough. You see, the house of God is this: it is where those who belong to it are very sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Life is a sensitive thing and we ought, whenever we by word or deed touch something that is not true, not right, not living, to suffer inwardly, feel it, know it, have a bad time about it until we get it right and get the cleansing of the blood over that, and the Lord's covering pardon. That is the way of spiritual growth. Thank God, there is another side, and it would not do for me to close on the merely negative side. It is very positive, and, you know, it is a lovely thing to have the Lord well-pleased. It is a grand thing, without congratulating yourself and patting yourself on the back and saying: 'What a good boy am I!' The Lord's smile can be upon you and you can feel: 'Yes, the Lord is well-pleased.'

Perhaps the grandest thing that could ever, or will ever, happen to us will be knowing how full of faults, failures and wrongs we have been, and the Lord saying: 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you.' Oh, I think, if ever we fall on our knees in utter adoration, astonished, bewildered adoration, it will be when the Lord says: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' I have often said in years gone by that I wish that the epitaph written over my life could be the Lord's words to Daniel: 'Oh man, greatly beloved!' Don't you want that? What could be better than: 'Oh man, greatly beloved!?' It will be according to how we live the life in the Spirit, and so walk with Him who was meek and lowly in heart.

*Prayer:*

*Lord, we commit all this to Thee. We are going to get up from these seats now, we are going out of this place, and what are we going to be occupied with next? How are we going to spend even these ensuing minutes? We do pray that if the Spirit has been present and speaking, His hand may stay upon us, that we abide under the hand of the Spirit, while in joy and in gladness, blessed fellowship; nevertheless, in the quiet holiness of the presence of the Lord, well pleasing unto Him. May it be so, and accept our worship through our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

## THE RICHES OF CHRIST IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

*Prayer:*

*Lord, Thou hast said: 'Separated from Me ye can do nothing.' We know it, we acknowledge it, and it applies to this very moment and hour; but, Lord, we pray, close up the gap, remove every form and degree of separatedness from Thyself; may there be such a oneness with Thee that Thou art able to bear Thine own fruit through this ministry, and so shall the Father be glorified, for this we ask in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.*

*“Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the princes of the fathers’ houses of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem” (1 Kings 8:1).*

*“And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands towards heaven” (1 Kings 8:22).*

*“And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. And Solomon offered for the sacrifice of peace-offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:62,63).*

*“... according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of His will, 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, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth” (Eph. 1:7-10).*

*“And you, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein aforetime ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest: — but God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised*

*us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:1-6).*

*“... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19).*

*“He might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).*

We have come to the last of these particular messages, and I have to confess to you that it is far from the end of what I wanted to say!

We have been occupied with the greatnesses of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and we have been allowing Solomon to be for us an illustration and interpreter of Him who is the Greater than Solomon; he, Solomon, being but a foreshadowing of Christ, and the foreshadowing is always so much less than the ‘Greater’. We have contemplated aspects of that greatness, the greatness of his wisdom, the greatness of his riches, the greatness of his glory, and the greatness of his honour, and in the midst of this many-sided greatness of Solomon there stand out, most prominently over all, the altar and the house. That is, what we have read just now (and you would do well to read the corresponding record in the Book of the Chronicles) about Solomon gathering all the people, the princes and heads of fathers’ houses, the whole congregation, to Jerusalem for the dedication of the house of God. You were impressed, perhaps startled by the number of the sacrifices. Just unimaginable! You will notice before you go further with that that these two predominant greatnesses of the altar and the house are focused in the person as king. Keep that in mind! It is the person himself, now as king, sitting upon the throne of David, high, lifted up, who gives the significance to the altar and the house. They take their meaning and their character from him in his exalted position, in his glory. That is a statement I trust you will hold on to as we go on.

### **The greatness of the altar**

Now consider the greatness of this altar. I have not read the description of the building of the altar, but if you do so you will see that it was an immense altar. The very thickness of it is said to be a hand’s width. The

description given makes you feel that it must have been an immense altar; and as for the sacrifice, two and twenty thousand oxen, can you picture that? They are coming in a procession reaching almost to the horizon. Here they come, battalion upon battalion of oxen, all winding their way towards that altar, two and twenty thousand of them, and that is only the beginning; following them there are the thousands of sheep. It is almost unthinkable, unimaginable! How many days it will take to sacrifice all that, and rivers of blood will be poured out as they sacrifice day after day, from morning until evening! I have often felt that I would not have liked to have been of the priests and the Levites who had that job. They certainly needed a good many courses of Levites to slay that many! My point is the immensity of this sacrifice, and the meaning of this altar, an altar that could contain all that, to put all that into effect! How great that altar was! And a greater than Solomon is here, a greater altar, a transcendently greater sacrifice is here in the greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus.

You see, this here was, after all, but a historical thing, a thing in time. It is a record and the story of something that happened long ago. It is way back there, and it stays back there. In itself it was in the days of Solomon, and they are past and gone, and all that with it. It was a historical thing in the life of an earthly nation.

But when you pass from Solomon and his altar and sacrifice to the Greater than Solomon, it is there that you find the first point of the superiority, the transcendence of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is super-historical! That is, it outbounds all time and reaches from eternity to eternity. The Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world, and when all the ages pass in procession through the Bible, Old and New Testaments, and we come beyond time, when time is no more and we stand in eternity, the Lamb in the midst of the throne is the object dominating everything. Super-historical! Outranging all times by reason of virtue, a virtue that was never in the two and twenty thousand oxen and thousands of sheep offered by Solomon. You remember the letter to the Hebrews: "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." Read that letter again in the light of this, "He, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever ...". It went further than all those sacrifices did, did more than all that they did, and effected what they never could effect. There was a virtue in His sacrifice.

It is an impressive thing that in the narratives of the New Testament the crucifixion is made to take a subservient place to the death. He died ... He died ... it is the death that is the main thing, not the crucifixion. The crucifixion is the historic aspect; it is just the thing that man did, but within that



outward aspect of His death there was a mighty virtue which was dealing with an immense, unspeakably strong, deep force of evil that has accounted for all these centuries of this world's misery. Behind and deeper down than the crucifixion was a mighty, virtuous death, something that, if you touch it or it touches you, means a registration of something awful, something terrible. You and I, if we are at all spiritually sensitive and we touch certain things, have to draw back. It is what brother Watchman Nee used to call 'the earth-touch'. If you touch that and become voluntarily involved in this world, and you are spiritually alive and sensitive, there is something that stings you. You feel that you have been tainted, pulled out of position, and have got to get away and have a spiritual bath and wash yourself, get before the Lord and take the mighty virtue of the blood to get you back again into your realm as a child of God. Mind you, this is a real evidence that we are born again, and it becomes increasingly like that as we go on. The mark of growth is this deepening sensitiveness to what is life and what is death, and it is the governing and deciding law in guidance. Yes, the law of the spirit of life is the law of guidance. The mind of the spirit is life and peace and that is the guiding law.

In His sacrifice there was a virtue, a power that was never in all the sacrifices of Solomon, it is not the crucifixion. You can wear the crucifix and make a lot of the crucifix and the earthly, physical suffering, but the New Testament puts its finger, not upon that, but upon the mighty power of His death. It is a power that vetoes, a power that prohibits, a power that on the one side says to a whole system and realm: 'No, no! The end!' And to be united with Him in the likeness of His death is to become aware of what is and what is not acceptable to God, because that is the effect of the cross of the Lord Jesus. The Christian life is that!

Yes, it is super-historical. It reaches back to eternity past, it passes through all time, and reaches on to eternity to be, this mighty effectiveness and virtue of the death of the Lord Jesus. The crucifixion was less than forty years old when the epistles were written, and if something like that had happened within the last forty years of our life, we should be talking about it, should we not? Oh, that awful thing that happened, that killing; what happened there on that cross, on that hill; we would be occupied with all that. But these apostles were not occupied with that at all. They are occupied with the inner meaning of the cross and what it means in the spiritual realm. This is something tremendous. It is the spiritual and inner meaning and power of the cross; *that* is the New Testament subject. You have this immense thing, but, of course, it is only a figure and type, and is given to

us in Solomon to show us symbolically, how great, immense and massive the death of Jesus is, the sacrifice of our Lord. I can strive to find words to set this forth, but I know I am defeated when I start, because I know that it takes all the ages of the ages to tell the story. They will be singing the song of the Lamb for ever. We know so little, but all that we can hope for is that the Lord may make an impression upon us.

This cross, about which we talk so much and think we know so much, because we have the language, the phrases such as, ‘Identification with Christ’, ‘Union with Him, in His death, burial, and resurrection’. We think that we know it, when really we have not begun to know the immensity of what Jesus was and did in His cross. Solomon is, after all, but a shadow and yet — think! — two and twenty thousand oxen and thousands of sheep trailing for days towards the altar, being sacrificed, relay after relay! It is a mere shadow of the reality of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is extra-historic, it is extra-terrestrial; we stumble at language, for language defeats us. It is above this earth, above this world, it reaches far beyond what is here. This cross, this death of the Lord Jesus is super-cosmic. It not only takes in all that is here on this earth, but it reaches unto heaven. The heavens were defiled; something happened in heaven before it happened on earth. It began there when the “angels who kept not their first estate” were cast out. The devil who led them lost his place and all the heavens were defiled. A great schism took place in heaven, the beginning of all schisms unto this day. That is where it began, and that is where it came from. It is a much bigger thing than this world.

Paul, in this letter to the Ephesians, just gives us a glimpse, does he not? “Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness.” It is the virtue of the death of the Lord Jesus which reaches through all ranges and all realms until it reaches the very throne of heaven itself. There the Lamb is the testimony to the universe of what was done at that spot at that moment in time here. How vast a range is the death of the Lord Jesus! Solomon’s sacrifice, great as it was, did not reach beyond the locality. The death of the Lord Jesus outbounds all locality. It is super-terrestrial.

Coming nearer, we read in Ephesians that we have redemption in His blood. Oh, what a lovely thing! ‘Redemption!’ We rejoice in redemption, we sing about it, and it is one of our favourite words and topics — ‘I am redeemed!’ But you will notice that it is a compound word with a prefix — ‘re’-demption. Look again at all the words beginning with that prefix:

reconciliation, restoration, redemption. Something was, and it was lost; something was, and it was forfeited; something was sold into the slave market. Those of you who know your New Testament know so much about it, but this cross, this death, is a redemption, a recovering of all, not only man's condition and man lost, but more than that, a recovery of all that God lost in man of His purpose. It was for the time being lost to Him, and there is a very much larger context to our Gospels. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Right there, where the Lord Jesus is speaking about the lost, and the Son of man coming for the purpose of seeking and saving that which was lost, He comes to this man, this son who is called the 'prodigal'. He is far away, lost to the father, lost to the home and lost to the family. We have to translate that into heavenly things. The Lord knows what He is talking about when He makes this man become alive to his lost condition, and the causes of it, and He makes him say: 'Father!' How does he say it? 'I have been a bad boy; I made a mistake; I did the wrong thing and brought a lot of trouble on myself. All this is because of my fault!?' Did He make him say that? No! 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight.' The Lord Jesus is meticulously careful how He puts things, you know. This loss is *against heaven*. It is heaven that has lost, and sin is robbing heaven of its rights and the Father of His rights. *That* is sin! 'I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight', and that is why there is joy in the presence of the angels in heaven over one sinner that repents, because heaven has got back that which it lost. Heaven has *recovered* what heaven lost, and, more than that, the angels are more concerned for the Father than even for heaven. The Father has got back that which is His right.

Oh, how great a thing redemption is! Not only to man. This universe is full of conflict, full of controversy. In the very atmosphere of this universe there are contentious forces. It is a terrible thing when in our spiritual sensitiveness we get into that realm where the two things are clashing; that which is of the Lord and that which is of heaven, that which we know to be our real realm and life, and then we move into the atmosphere where there is antagonism, hatred and malice. It is a terrible thing to feel the very hostility that is in the atmosphere in this world. Many who have laboured in heathen countries know what I am talking about. I have been to some of them, and I remember my first visit to India. My, I went out where there was idol worship, and where the idol was stuck up in a place with a fence around. The people were furtive, afraid as they passed by, in terror, and it was not just something objective. You felt, as you feel in those heathen temples, something evil and you want to get away. But redemption by the blood of

Christ has translated us out of that kingdom. Jesus said: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” The cross has effected our deliverance, and that is why we sense the evil that is in the world. The death of the Lord Jesus has delivered us from that, and it is a glorious and wonderful thing to be delivered and set free from that!

### **The greatness of the house**

“Solomon, my son, is yet young and tender”, said David, “and the house which he builds is exceeding magnificent.” It is for the Lord, and therefore it must be something very great and very wonderful. I wonder what is your conception of that temple of Solomon’s! You may think that it was very big in itself, but if you were to measure it in the Bible, you would find that it was not so big as you imagined it to be. Its greatness was in its intrinsic wealth, glory and honour; it was the concentration of values.

This house which the Lord is building is the embodiment of the concentrated values of the cross of the Lord Jesus, because all this immense sacrifice was in the dedication of the house. The house takes its spiritual dimensions from the altar. That altar was intrinsically the measure of the sacrifice. So the house is intrinsically the value of the altar. If this house cost all that sacrifice, it must be something intrinsically great. This is a costly house. It represents great cost — “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.”

There is a world which is a field, and in that field is a treasure. As a merchant man, He has espied that treasure, and, having found it, He goes and sells all that He has. You do get the picture of Philippians 2, do you not? His rights in heaven, on equality with God, and He sells it all, divests Himself of it all, counts being equal with God not a prize to be held on to, but empties Himself of heaven, heaven’s glories, heaven’s rights, heaven’s prerogatives, and everything He had as the eternal Son in ages past, to have that treasure, and that treasure is the church “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it that He might present it to Himself a glorious church.” You and I need to recover something beyond the truth of the church, the doctrine of the body of Christ, and recover its infinite preciousness to the Lord. If we did that, not just objectively as some wonderful conception, idea, or teaching, and realised that that man there, that woman there, with all their faults, are part of that so loved by Christ that He gave everything to have it, every part of it, what a difference it would make, would it not? What a difference it would make in our behaviour, and it is meant to do that. If it does not do that with all that we know about the church, we do not know anything. People

talk to me on church doctrine, church truth, church ground — however you may put it — but I have yet to see how much they are embracing all that for which Christ died, and not excluding any, not becoming exclusive, but embracing all who are embraced by that sacrifice of Love. He gave Himself for it. You cannot be narrow, small, legalistic, exclusive, if you have really seen the church, because in seeing the church you have seen Christ. You cannot separate those two. If you see Him, you see the church, and you see the value of the church to Him because of its costliness.

We contemplate the New Jerusalem and all the composition of the constitution of it — all manner of precious stones, the pearls and the transparent gold. What is all this? A beautiful picture to contemplate? No, it is not. It is a challenge to our hearts. This is the concentrated essence of the preciousness of the Lord Jesus, and the church is that! Oh, yes, this is the church, and we can never set a limit to it, and never get beyond it, but we can get into it. The biggest problem, I think, that many Christians have is connected with the church and what it is. What is this church? It is made so small, so mean, so unworthy of Christ. What we see in Christians who are supposed to be members of the body of Christ! What we see in local companies of believers! Is this the church? Is this the body of Christ? Is this ‘Ephesians’? Is that not our trouble? It is my problem.

You and I *in ourselves* are not the church. We are not the church, and we are not parts of the church. We are excommunicated from the church; we are not in it. Therefore, the church universal or local is not the aggregate of Christian *bodies*. The real church is the measure of Christ in every one of us. Christ is the church, and it is just the measure of Christ that is in us that makes up the church. You cannot join the church; there is no such thing as joining the church. If you are not an organic part of Christ produced by His divine life as different from your own, you are not in the church; but if through the new birth you have become inwardly an organic part of Christ, the church is there. The church is when we meet, not in bodies only, but in spirit. We can meet in bodies as congregations; we can call ourselves ‘the church’, but there is no church. It is when we meet in the Spirit that Christ is present, spontaneously, I may say naturally, present. It just *is*; you do not make it, you do not form it. It may shock you when I say that the apostles never had the idea that they had to get out and form churches. They never conceived that they were called upon by the Lord to go and form churches. What they did was to go and preach Christ, and not only preach Christ, but bring Christ in their own persons, and when people responded to and received Christ into their life, they spontaneously came together. Paul and

the other apostles never said: ‘Now, let us go out and find these people, get them saved, and then collect them together and form them into a church.’ The church was *born*. It was a spontaneous birth and it was the bringing together of Christ in a corporate way, and it was inward. You can do violence to the church immediately you get out of the Spirit. It is only when we ‘abide in Him’ that the church is formed and grows. It is the increase of Christ Himself in us that makes it. Peter is very clear about God’s spiritual house. You will note how he begins his letter as he is going to speak about this spiritual house, and the living stones. He begins by saying: ‘Unto the saints scattered abroad throughout Asia, Bithynia, Cappadocia’, and so on. Now, Peter, you are talking about saints scattered all over the world, and you are going to say ‘one house’? It is saints — everywhere — who are *in Christ* who constitute the one spiritual house. The local is but the representation of the universal, but it is Christ represented, not something in itself.

I will close by reminding you that this more than Solomon’s house — magnificent and wonderful as that was — is eternal, timeless; not only supermundane (above the earth and all that belongs to the earth) but eternal; “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” ... “unto Him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever”. This is a timeless thing, and when we are called by Jesus Christ, that is not the beginning of things, but only stepping into what began long ago, before we had our being. This is an eternal thing.

I do thank God when I look at the history of the church and see the forces against it. There were tremendous forces against it, even in the early days of the apostles and before the last of them had left this earth. Millions of Christians were slaughtered and martyred. Oh, the great persecutions then, and all that has happened to Christians since then in many parts of the world. In the nations, in China and in Germany, and anywhere you like. The gates of Hades, the council of Hades, have really been set against this church! They have stopped at nothing to wipe this thing out. Nations, empires, councils, ideologies have tried to get rid of this, and it grows and it goes on. The martyrs laid down their lives, but He goes on. ‘But the church of Jesus ever will prevail’, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. It is timeless. We may go, we may die in the martyrdoms and persecutions, or whatever has come in time. But He goes on with His church, and we will all be caught up in the end in the great day when He presents us faultless before the presence of His glory, without spot, in exceeding joy.

I will leave it there. It is big enough for you to contemplate. After all, let me say again that all I had ever hoped would be the result of this ministry

was that such an indelible, deep, strong impression would be left that you would never remember it as merely something, a presentation of truth, but with an impression of the greatness of Him unto whom we have been called through the grace of God! Oh, how great our Christ is! How great His cross is! How great His house is! God make this to govern our conduct, our behaviour, our manner of life, our influence upon other people as we meet them. May the Lord give us significance of Himself!

*Prayer:*

*Lord, it came from Thee, we believe; we hand it back to Thee; do what You can with it. Lord, work upon it, keep it alive, watch over it to protect it, and we say through it all, through it all — "Unto Him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever." Amen.*

*Concluded.*

## **A note from the editor**

This issue of The Golden Candlestick is the last part of a series of messages given by T. Austin-Sparks during the Wabanna Christian Conference in 1966. The audio recording of the whole conference with Stephen Kaung, Deverne Fromke and T. Austin-Sparks as main speakers can be found on the Christian Testimony Ministry web site. The messages by T. Austin-Sparks can also be found on [www.austin-sparks.net](http://www.austin-sparks.net).

We did not know the correct sequence of messages, but an original conference schedule made it clear. Most of the messages given by T. Austin-Sparks during this convocation were transcribed already and we used these manuscripts. Messages (chapters) 2 and 4 were transcribed by ourselves.

The audio recordings of these messages were previously made available with the title ‘The Unsearchable Riches of Christ’, but we chose to use the original title, ‘Life in the Unsearchable Riches of Christ’. (Note that there is also a book with the former title published by Emmanuel church which is a different conference.) Obviously the speakers wanted to emphasize the practical application of the theme and put “*Life in*” before “The Unsearchable Riches of Christ” for that reason.



