



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

**GOD'S NEW THING**

**Part 1**

**T. Austin-Sparks**

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*Volume 184*

## THE INITIAL NEW THING

*Reading: Acts 1:6-9.*

In this message we are aiming at simplicity in the presentation and to be pre-eminently practical. There will be nothing which in itself will be new, and nothing that will be very profound, but I trust that its impact and challenge will be new and that it will come to us in very truth as the Word of the Lord for this time.

### **The need of a new thing**

There is a growing sense and conviction that a new thing on the Lord's part is a pressing necessity. There is a feeling that we have gone so far and have come to a place where it is at least difficult to go further without some fresh movement from the Lord's side. I think most of the Lord's true people are sensing something like that, and it is put into this phrase — 'a new thing'. But we must be careful as to what we mean when we use a phrase like that. What do we mean by a new thing on the Lord's part? We must be careful because we must realise that the Lord has not been experimenting and, as the result of His experiments, finding things to fail and discarding them and then trying something else. That is not the case. The Lord has never experimented. Experimentation on His part would imply at once limitation of knowledge, that He did not know how things would work out, and that He was just trying it out to see. When the Lord started, He started with what was absolutely successful. There is no question there. The Lord's first way and first means were absolutely successful. It is Christianity that has deviated from *the* effective, successful way of the Lord. So that what will be a new thing with the Lord's people will just be a return to the original. Perhaps it sounds like a charge, almost an accusation, to say that to return to the original would be quite a new thing. Nevertheless, to a very large extent that is true, and the necessity for that return proves the validity of the original. You will have to come back to it because it is the only way.

So then, the beginning of God's work in this dispensation and the nature of that work throughout this dispensation is summed up and found in germ and essence in these three verses which we have read, Acts 1:6-9. But of course what is needed is an adequate recognition and apprehension of what is included in this statement and of how it is to be fulfilled. There has been an all-too-superficial grasping of this statement. It has been taken up with and run off with: "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." It is only a part of the statement and I repeat that it is very necessary to have an adequate recognition and apprehension of what is in the whole statement before the thing can be effective. Very largely, Christianity has been based upon this eighth verse; at any rate, upon a part of it. The whole idea of the worldwide mission of Christianity takes its rise from this word here, superficially grasped, it is true, but nevertheless from this — "... my witnesses ... unto the uttermost part of the earth." But who will say that Christianity has been anything like as effective as at the beginning? It has not maintained or preserved its original character and force, and that for this reason, that it has been so superficially grasped.

### **The negative side**

Well now, let us approach the whole statement. First of all, there is a negative and a positive side to it. "They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath appointed by his own authority." That is the negative side. "It is not..." is the negative aspect of the statement, and it is of as vital consequence as the positive, as the other side. The 'not' relates to their question and dismisses a whole misconception concerning this dispensation. This is not the kingdom age in the sense in which they asked their question. The fundamental mistake throughout has been the constant endeavour to give to this present age and dispensation an imprint which God never meant it to bear. As you look at Christianity today — the word 'Christendom' might be better — you see it is stamped throughout by this misconception and the endeavour to carry the misconception into operation. God never did intend that in this dispensation His Kingdom, the kingdom of God, should be a temporal system on this earth with the church in the position of power here to rule in social, political or material things. That is the kingdom of God for

the next dispensation, not this. You can see gathered up into that numerous things. The temptation is always there, the tendency is always there. It finds its way in where people do not intend it to come in, but it is a part of this whole make-up of the self-life of even Christians to see something here on this earth as a monument and as a demonstration, a proof and evidence, an order of things which is the kingdom of God. It is found right at the very heart of evangelical enterprise; it is a spirit which works through all Christian activity. It is the constant peril of everything that is truly spiritual to be resolved into something here with a name, a title, a reputation, a recognition, an acceptance and a proof in the realm of the senses. It becomes something here of this world and in this world. I say it is the peril within the innermost circle of what is spiritual and it works out to that outer, wider circle of the Christianisation of the world and of society and of politics, and the reconstruction of a new world upon Christian principles; and it is all nonsense. God never intended that to be in this dispensation. That, I say, belongs to the next age, not to this. "Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" That is dismissed as being a misconception of God's thought for this particular dispensation, and that misconception in its application and in its spirit, in its constant tendency, without intention has done more to delay the Lord's return than anything else. The fruit of that misconception in Christianity is the greatest menace to the Lord's purpose in this age that this world has seen.

If you ask concerning things here or abroad, What is the great obstruction to the real spiritual purpose of God, it will be told you without hesitation — the organised church, Christianity in its earthly form, its system. It is delaying the Lord's return, it has held up His coming. The Lord here is not giving any dates at all. He is carrying it out into the realm of things spiritual and the Lord does not say anything about whether it is now or then, but what He says, in effect, is this: The matter of the times and the seasons appointed by God in His authority is a matter of the Holy Spirit. It is not a matter of dates and times at all; it is a matter of how far the Holy Spirit can do His work. When the kingdom comes back to Israel, it will be on the consummation of the work of the Spirit, not necessarily any period of time, but primarily a matter of the Holy Spirit's free course to accomplish the divine purpose. This whole question of dispensations is to be taken up in the Holy Spirit; but it has been taken up in the flesh, and so, the Spirit being frustrated, the Lord's return has been delayed. It can be said that the Lord would have come back long ago if things had gone on as they were at the beginning. It answers a lot of your questions about why the apostles

expected the Lord to come. They were in the flood of the Spirit and that was making the Lord's return very possible at any time, but when they began to see things changing in Christianity, falling out of the realm of the Spirit into the realm of things temporal, they began to realise that the Lord was not coming, because He could not come so soon. You notice a change even in the apostles on that matter. That is very important, and that bears upon this new thing which is old. If we want the Lord to come we have to get back to the original to bring Him. The Lord's coming is primarily a spiritual matter. I do not mean He is not coming in person. It is a spiritual matter in this sense, that the Holy Spirit is *the* custodian of this dispensation, and it is only when the Holy Spirit's work is done that the Lord can come. Therefore He must have a new place to do the old thing and bring the Lord back.

### **The positive side**

Now the other side. "But..."; the positive side. "... But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses ...". The 'but' relates to that side, and here you see it has three features: 1) The power of the Holy Spirit, 2) The world witness and witnesses, 3) The ascension of Christ. It is a comprehensive statement.

I have already said that you take out the heart of this thing — "Ye shall be my witnesses" — and run off with that. Come back, put that in relation to what has gone before and what follows. What has gone before is the dismissing of a whole false conception of what this witness is unto and what this witnessing is for. Then hold it again in relation to what is going to be said. "And when He had said these things", what did He do? Did He say: 'Let us go into the upper room and have a conference about this and draw up a programme?' No — "As they were looking, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." He was received up into heaven and disappeared into glory. That is as vital a part of this whole matter of the world witness as anything else that is here. It carries with it the force of the whole character of this dispensation, that the Lord is *not* out to save the nations in this dispensation; He is out to take out of the nations and link with His Son in heaven in a heavenly way a people for His Name. That is the character of this dispensation. That is not new, not profound, but it is related to this whole matter. Again the misconception of saving the nations has led to all manner of activities which are not in the line of the Lord's purpose at all. His purpose is to take out of the nations a people and make of them a heavenly people by reason of their union with His Son in heaven — in the world not

of it, is the old phrase — a heavenly people. “When He had said this, as they were looking, He was received up.” The witnessing and the witnesses are related to that heavenly nature of things in the purpose of God in this dispensation. Someone has said that the headquarters of Christianity in this dispensation is in heaven and everything has got to come from there and go to there, be constantly in touch with Him as there, drawing all its resources from Him there, taking its character from Him there. It is “the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven” (1 Pet. 1:12), but always gravitating back again in every life where He has a place.

Much more could be said about these three things: the power of the Holy Spirit, the worldwide witnesses and witness, and the ascension of Christ.

### **Worldwide witnesses**

For a little while we are going to fix upon the second, the worldwide witnesses: “Ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

First of all, let us be reminded that the word or title, ‘witnesses’ — carries with it something much more than a verbal statement of truth or of facts. The power of the Holy Spirit is not necessary to state historical facts; it is not even necessary to verbally state truths. ‘Witnesses’ involves the people themselves in the truths which they state. It is the same word as ‘martyr’. Martyr is only another English word for the same original word as ‘witness’. We often think of the witness rather in the light of the thing said, but here it is the person bound up with the thing said, and they are both one. Or, to put it in another way, the believer and Christ are always regarded in the New Testament as being one, so that where believers are, Christ is by implication and ought to be in spiritual reality. A witness therefore is not one who goes out to declare either facts or truths as such, but who goes out on the principle of representation of those things, which means identification with them, that the thing said is already there in the person of the one who says it. We are not here to maintain and propagate a system of Christian teaching more or less, less or more; we are here as Christ. The world thrust Him out; He has come back again and He is not out. He has come back in mighty power. That is what it is to be a witness that the presence of witnesses is the presence of Christ in this world. *Everything then begins with a testimony resultant from a revelation of Christ in each individual concerned; witness means that.*

## **The need for adjustableness in response to revelation**

That revelation, of course, is capable of immense enlargement, and that fact demands that we shall remain very free and adjustable. If we become fixed in the revelation of Christ which we have and put a fence up representing the boundary of our apprehension of Christ, then that is our doom. We must keep very free right to the end, because every new enlargement of the revelation of Christ will call for a fresh adjustment and we have got to be free to adjust. Peter got an enlarged revelation of Christ just before he went to Caesarea (Acts 10), and, as you know, at that moment he was perilously near cutting short the great dispensation purpose of God. When he saw the sheet let down from heaven with all manner of creeping things and reptiles, he had a controversy with the Lord. When the Lord said, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat", he said, "Not so, Lord." He had put up his fence. The whole dispensation purpose of God was in jeopardy for Peter by reason of that fence. Had Peter not been adjustable, he would have lost immensely himself and would have narrowed the goings of God at that time. It is just an illustration. Oh, the revelation of Christ is capable of endless, inexhaustible expansion. Presently it will come to the point where, with Paul, we may see the Godhead in the counsels of eternity past laying the great plan of ages, all of which was to issue in the summing up of all things in Christ. Who has comprehended the purpose which He purposed in Christ? It is immense, and it calls for constant adjustment and adjustableness. But it all begins — it may be in a limited way, a comparatively simple way — but nevertheless it begins in a positive way with a testimony born of a revelation to each individual. And that revelation is concerning the significance of Jesus. Jesus becomes seen in the light of the Godhead, in the light of eternity, in the light of the universe. Of course, we are suffering terribly by our Christian history and tradition. It was a much simpler matter for people in those days. It was a terrific thing for them in those days to see Jesus of Nazareth in the light of heaven; even for the most religious person, steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures, suddenly to have it broken upon them from heaven that Jesus of Nazareth was Son of God, universal Lord. It well might drive even a man like Saul of Tarsus into the desert for three years and leave a scar upon him to the end of his life. It is like that.

You say, 'Surely we are not going to have or to expect something like that?' Whether we have it in that degree of force and power or not, the fact is that this dispensation is marked by this thing throughout, that everyone who comes into fellowship with God does so on this ground and on this wise

that they personally have a revelation of Jesus Christ to their own hearts which makes them a captive, which is an apprehending from heaven, and which makes Him the supreme reality in God's universe. Nothing less than that will make Christianity effective. It is a revelation of God's Son in the heart of each individual which creates the testimony because it has already created the witness. Everything begins with a testimony resultant from such a personal revelation of Christ. Do not get mentalities about revelations and visions. You know what I mean. You know quite well whether it is true in your case that the Lord has done something in you, whether in an act at one time or by a deep working process, which has had this result, that you can say, 'Jesus is all the world to me, the supreme object in God's universe for me.' You can put it like that or in other words. You can say, 'I could not go on without Him; what would life be if Christ were taken out of it?' Put it how you like, but the fact is that He has become absolutely essential and indispensable. That is what happened at the beginning, and am I wrong in saying that it may be that a new thing which is the old thing is becoming very necessary for many Christians? Well, right at the very beginning, initially, it is the breaking upon the heart of something of the significance of Jesus, with an impact upon our consciences. If this thing does not touch our conscience, it has not gone far enough. At the beginning, the breaking upon hearts of Who Jesus of Nazareth was involved the whole question of their having put Him to death and that is a matter of conscience; of their being involved in the responsibility for His rejection.

The sin question arises, not, first of all, in relation to ourselves — and that is the weakness of evangelicalism today. The gospel that is preached today so largely centres upon the individual. You are a sinner and you need salvation. Then it resolves itself into: I am a sinner and I am miserable because of it; let me be saved, I do not want to be miserable. But, in the Word of God, sin is against heaven and in His sight. It is a matter of my relation to God's Son. "He ... will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me" (John 16:8-9). Sin is focussed upon God's Son. Christ is right in His theology when He puts into the prodigal's mouth the words: "Father, I have sinned ...", not against myself, society, my earthly family, but "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight" (Luke 15:21). That is where sin registers itself. The revelation of Jesus Christ to the heart touches the conscience because it has to do with the place of God's Son, sent into this world to deal with the sin question. That is where the testimony begins, that is where the witnesses begin, with something like that.

I do not want to exaggerate, I do not want to make difficulties for you by saying that this thing should be more than is necessary as an initial thing, but I do want to say that in some way every one of us who is a Christian should have, at some period in our life if not at some hour, come very forcibly up against this fact that God has done something in us in relation to His Son which has made Christ supreme for us in the whole universe, and absolutely indispensable. And this is something that has that effect and has become a conscience matter with us; more than that, of course, it has put us under a great debt and under a tremendous sense of obligation.

### **Witness spontaneous, not official**

That leads us to this, that such a revelation to the heart, such a work of God in our lives, becomes expulsive; and it is here that the great divide to which we have referred begins to operate between the spontaneous and the organised. The organising of Christianity into official bodies has very largely put things in a false position. Let me put it like this. Young people, everybody, if you were accepted by an official body as an accredited representative with a title such as missionary, Christian worker, minister, whatever you like, and were sent by them with their backing to any place on this earth, and it was known where you went that you were sent and backed by this recognised and accredited organisation to be their representative there and to do the work, would you be more of a witness than you are without any of that? Then the whole thing is false! All that has put things on a false basis, and that is not what God is looking for in this dispensation at all. At the beginning, His missionaries, His witnesses, were such because they were that before they went anywhere, before anybody took any notice of them. They did not get a title, much less a uniform or special clothing; they did not get a society behind them with a reputation. They got nothing whatever. They were just there where they were, and they were witnesses. The thing that had happened in them was expulsive, and they needed no machinery to bring it out. That is a challenge. What is the Lord waiting for? He is not waiting for you to join a missionary society, to be sent out at all by anything like that. He is waiting for you to be a witness just where you are. If the Lord is going to have His full thought where you are concerned, nothing will happen until you are that where you are. He did not say, You shall be fully accredited ministers or missionaries or Christian workers, and I will give you a badge and a uniform, and I will let people know where you are going. He said, "Ye shall be my witnesses." May that not be, strange as it

may sound, a new thing? I am not so sure that there are not very real signs that the Lord is pressing into that. The days of the official or professional missionaries in many countries are numbered. In many countries the future holds only a place for living witnesses, not for official missionaries; but for people who are going to live with the expulsive power of a personal life with Christ.

You say that you are praying for the Lord to show you something, for the Lord to do something, for the Lord to give you a way. Well, may not this be it? I know it is not a thing we would jump at; it is not just the thing we are expecting and looking for. There is something much more glamorous than that in our idea and thought of going into the Lord's work. No, just there; "Ye shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem." I know there is a dispensational connection with that, but there is also a spiritual connection. In Jerusalem, the headquarters of religious tradition, the seat of religious prejudice, the place where the likelihood of acceptance was least, and the place where the disciples had failed and most likely their failure was known and would be thrown up at them. They all forsook Him and fled; one denied Him with oaths and curses. Do you not think that had got out? Rumour has a strange way of getting out, and facts too. They had failed, and, whether it was public property or not, they knew it. They had failed in Jerusalem, they had broken down in Jerusalem. "My witnesses in Jerusalem", and your testimony recovered in the place where you had failed, your testimony established just where you had broken down. That is difficult, but that is the Lord's way. "Beginning at Jerusalem". It is so much easier if only all that could be cut out and written off and we could go out and start afresh in another sphere where we are not known. That is easy. But where we are known and especially known as failures, that is more difficult.

"Ye shall be my witnesses." Yes, but when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, not in your own strength. That is our assurance, our comfort; not left to ourselves to reconstruct the testimony out of the ruins of the past. There is the Holy Spirit for this. We have to recognize where it is to be and under what conditions, and the Holy Spirit is sufficient for that. That is very practical, very elementary. It is getting back to the original.

Have you got these thoughts? — a personal revelation of Christ which has really gained our hearts to the extent that we live under a deep sense of indebtedness and obligation which produces the expulsiveness that we must let it out, others must know, He cannot be hid. And that is not to be something within the framework of an organisation to help it out. It is to be spontaneous, it is to be upon the perfectly natural basis (if I may use that

word in connection with the spiritual) that we are people who have something we cannot keep in. We do not need any society to help us out with it at all; it is going out. That is simple. “Witnesses unto Me”, and that it starts here, right where we are now, our Jerusalem, or where our Jerusalem was, in so far as we can get back and rectify our testimony in the place where it broke down or failed or there was none, and then the sovereignty of the Lord comes in and deals with everything else. You need not worry as to where or how. The sovereignty of the Lord took that in hand, took hold of that matter in Jerusalem, and in His own sovereign way, in a way that looked like destruction and the end of everything, He scattered them abroad, they went to Judea and Samaria, then to the uttermost parts of the earth. They that were scattered abroad because of the persecution that arose with the death of Stephen, went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:1-4). The sovereignty of the Lord saw to the rest. What we have to see to is that we are witnesses, that is all, and the Lord will dispose of His witnesses and put us in the way sovereignly.

Although this is no new ground, I do feel it does represent something of tremendous recovery and account to the Lord. Oh, Lord, get every one of us there! If we are only where we are in the good of this, something is going to happen, and if our fuller teaching, our larger truth has in any way had the effect of curtailing our power of witness in the world, something is wrong with it. No, the true effect of a true revelation is that we can no more contain it all ourselves; the world must have it, the ends of the earth must know it. This is something which cannot be kept hid. It will burst if it does not go out. Do not let us get the great living things of the Spirit into watertight compartments and kill them. I remember sitting in a dining-car of a train with the late John MacNeil. We began to talk about different great leaders in evangelical Christianity, and we lighted upon a certain one, a great well-known Bible teacher, who wrote a book on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and in that book he said that when the Holy Spirit came upon the church at the beginning it produced an ecstasy. Old John turned to me in his own way and said, Do you know Dr. ... who wrote that book? Could you ever imagine him getting into an ecstasy? Why, the grapes of Eshcol would have become raisins in his hands! Do not let us turn the grapes of Eshcol into raisins. You can have great vistas of truth and it all become negative or inoperative. If it is really living, it has got to be fruit for the world. “The leaves of the tree for the health of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). It has got to come out. There is something wrong with it if it does not have that effect.

## PROGRESSIVE NEW THINGS

*“... making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe” (Eph. 1:16-19).*

*“... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).*

Just link the passages together — “The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”; “till we all attain unto ... the knowledge of the Son of God”.

There are two or three things here of which we must take careful note. First of all, the word ‘knowledge’ here is, in itself, an indication of what the apostle means. It is not the ordinary simple word. It is ‘epignosis’, full knowledge. “Till we all attain unto the full knowledge.” There was an initial knowledge which had a tremendous effect, as we have seen in our previous meditation. Here it is a further knowledge or an ultimate knowledge, the full knowledge of Him.

Another thing is this, that it is by the Holy Spirit that this knowledge is made progressive and final. In Acts 1 we saw that the Holy Spirit coming upon them produced this revelation of Christ in their hearts. They saw the significance of Jesus of Nazareth as set in the great divine interpretation. That had a tremendous repercussion in the world; it was initial. Now here, at a point much further on where believers such as those who formed the church at Ephesus have had a remarkable initial experience, the revelation of the Lord Jesus had a great effect in their lives to the point of rendering all their costly and precious things of no account; they piled up their libraries of

valuable books which amounted to a considerable price and set them ablaze, so that they went up in smoke. That was consequent upon seeing Jesus, but although they have had a very real spiritual experience and a very powerful revelation of Him in their hearts, here, some time and distance on they are being told by the apostle that the same Holy Spirit who had done that, could do something which was still far transcendent of all that had been, bringing into the realm of superlatives, of the divine eternal counsels. The Spirit of wisdom and revelation *in the full knowledge of Him*. And if the first would have a tremendous effect not only in them but in the world, would not this other have at least an equal effect? The revelation of Jesus Christ is not intended just to be something of opinion, something that we know in terms of Christian technique. Divine revelation is usually in its outworking revolutionary, and if there is no revolution following what we call 'revelation', then there is something wrong with the revelation, or between the revelation and us, for true divine revelation must have a tremendous effect in the life. Take the example of the apostle himself who wrote this letter. We know what a tremendous thing that unveiling was in his own case when he, on the way to Damascus saw who Jesus of Nazareth really was, how utterly blinding and paralysing it was, and revolutionary, effecting what nothing else in all this world would have brought about. To emancipate an utter, abandoned fanatic from that to which he is committed fanatically by any kind of argument, persuasion or even force is a most impossible thing. Here is this Saul of Tarsus, and he is blind, abandoned to the Jewish position, to his traditions, his history, his inheritance, that whole system of things, committed with all his being to vindicate it. What are you going to do with a man like that by argument, persuasion or force? Nothing at all! He saw who Jesus of Nazareth was and that did it; it was done. That revelation effected something that nothing else would ever have brought about. But even that man, with all the greatness of the revelation and its effect in his life, himself came to realise, not once nor twice, that there was a revelation of Jesus Christ which far exceeded and transcended anything that had been, and he lived his life in the grip of this consciousness, that Christ was infinitely greater than ever he had conceived, that he was but on the fringe of a vast realm, on the shores of a mighty ocean. To his last hours he would press on that he might know Him. And Paul bound up the full and final knowledge of Christ with the complete emancipation, not only of himself, but of the creation. When Christ is manifested, when Christ is known in fulness, then all chains will fall off by the transformation of everything. It is a matter of the effect of knowing in this kind of way, by the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 8.)

## **Revelation by the Holy Spirit**

May I pause here for this parenthesis? There is all the difference between knowing these things by studying the Bible, and knowing these things, although in the Bible, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. I am not talking to you about the content of the Bible as something in itself, all of which you can get as to the letter, phrasing, doctrines and system by studying this Book as you study any other book. I am talking about the Holy Spirit coming through and making living what is here so that all that we have seen in any other way is as though we had not seen it. That is the second new thing that is necessary. It is not a new apprehension of the teaching of the Bible in its verbal statements of truth. It is that the Lord's people should have a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, an act of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of their hearts that they may know, in order to come to the full knowledge of the Son of God. That is simple, and as a statement may not sound very much, but are there not many of us here who feel that we really want to know, to know in a new way what we have known for a long time? We know it. There he is, he is talking about Ephesians again; we know it! We know all these verses, it is the thing we have been brought up in, we are steeped in it. But what is the effect in the world? What is the impact of it? It is not just a knowledge of the truth, but the coming in of Jesus Christ. If the Lord Jesus comes in after His resurrection, if He comes in as the risen One, something must happen. Things cannot be just as they were.

In our previous meditation, we were thinking of the initial thing: Christ coming in His witnesses. Here it is a new coming in of the Lord in this way that what we know. What we have had as a deposit for centuries, what is so familiar to us as the Bible, comes under the action of the Holy Spirit and we realise that now we know what we thought we knew. It is not just this mental kind of knowledge; it is spiritual, it is alive, it is potent, it means something in our enlargement, our emancipation, our release; it means something welling up in us. Oh, I feel that that is the new thing, or a part of the new thing, that is needed today amongst the Lord's people! I get so many letters and very often there occurs a phrase like this — "I teach the Bible", "My business is to teach the Bible", and, "I am very glad to have anything you can send to help me teach the Bible better." That may be alright, but so often for me that represents just business. Will you understand or misunderstand me if I say that our business is not to teach the Bible? Our business is to reveal Jesus Christ.

Step back a bit. Take up the matter of progressiveness in the revelation of Jesus Christ unto fulness. It says in the book of Exodus, chapter 17 verse one: "All the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, by their stages, according to the commandment of the Lord." They journeyed by their stages. The Lord has arranged our spiritual journey in stages, and these stages, if you will look at the illustration in the case of Israel, were on this wise: they came constantly to fresh crises in their history. A crisis arose in which very serious issues were involved, no smaller issue than that of whether they were going any further or not; sometimes whether they were going back or whether the whole purpose of God in bringing them forth was going to be forfeited. That hung upon each successive stage or crisis, and they could not take the next stage until they were free of all that which had bound them hitherto. That amounted to this: there is no more until you have adjusted, until you have got free.

### **The conditions for revelation**

Now let me show you how that worked out, and works out in a very much larger way. There was all the purpose and intention of God, and a very great one, bound up with Abraham. God had it, God knew all about it, but Abraham could not know it until he was in a certain place which meant he was free from all that had been up to that point. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran" (Acts 7:2), and what did He say? Did He say there in Ur of the Chaldees, 'I have chosen you, I will bless you and make you a blessing, in your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed?' Nothing of the kind! All He said was, 'Up and out!' When he had come into the place, in other words, when he had shed all that lay before that place, then the Lord appeared unto him and gave him the revelation of His purpose. There was something which had to be shed, something of which he had to get free. Well, you can see that applied again and again all the way through.

Take Jacob. Not while Jacob was in Padan did Jacob get the light of the house of God. It was when he came into the place where God's sanctuary was to be, when he came to Bethel, and you know that the bringing back of Jacob to Bethel finally and fully did represent some stripping. Jabbok was no small thing in his history. It meant some getting clear of a lot of things in which Jacob had been very interested and with which he had been greatly occupied. But not until he got to a certain position which represented that stripping, bringing down, emptying, cutting off, weakening, smiting of his

strength, not until all that was done could he get the real meaning of Bethel, the house of God.

Go a stage further. When God wanted to reveal to Israel the great eternal thought of His dwelling in the midst of men and having His sanctuary among them, He had to wait until Israel was out of Egypt and in the wilderness. There must be a history, a whole state of things left behind, they must emerge, they must be free, they must be there with the Lord in His place before He can reveal to them the great meaning of God tabernacling with men, having His habitation in the midst. It was a position, a stage, which had much bound up with it.

When you turn to the New Testament, you can see quite clearly that the great revelation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ with all it involves, all that it carries with it, waits upon something. Until men are in a certain position, have reached a certain stage, it has no real meaning or value until death is the most awful reality. The Lord had to allow everything to go into death with the death of the Lord Jesus, and for that death to be a terrible reality. You can only understand that joy that they were slow to capitulate to, afraid almost to allow themselves to accept, the joy of His resurrection, in the light of the dark background of the awfulness that death had meant, His death. What a terrible thing His death had meant to them; it carried everything away with it for them. Not until they were there could they really appreciate the meaning of His resurrection.

That is a spiritual truth. We cannot come into the real understanding, value, joy and power of His resurrection only as it is set over against, not once, twice, but many times, a background of a new experience of death. You have got to come there before you can go on into the greater meanings that God has in things. These are the New Testament basic realities.

## **Sonship**

You begin with the resurrection, but out of resurrection springs one great thing, one great prospect. "God ... begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible" (1 Peter 1:3). But for whom is the inheritance? The inheritance is reserved for sons. Upon resurrection you find in the New Testament there comes into view the prospect of sonship. I am not talking about childship, being born again. I am talking about the greatest thing that God and heaven has ever revealed concerning man: the prospect of sonship. It is an immense thing, this matter of sonship, not just relatedness to Him but all that that

means in its full realisation, and that comes into view through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But something else is required. We have in Romans: "... declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (1:4), in Galatians, (and Galatians is sonship) the liberty of sons, that for which Paul is travailing again. "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ is fully formed in you" (4:19). He goes on with all he has to say about sonship: "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (4:6); the liberty of sons. It is the tremendous prospect of sons.

But what is necessary? Well, the great knowledge of sonship depends entirely upon the place of the Holy Spirit in our lives. I am not now talking about receiving the Holy Spirit. These Galatians had received the Spirit. Paul said to them — "Having begun in the Spirit ..." (3:3). Galatians is this — the difference between proceeding in the flesh and in the Spirit. "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?" It is the place of the Spirit in us that relates to this matter of sonship. He says, "Where the Spirit is Lord, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17), and it is the liberty of Sonship, the untrammelled, unhindered position of the sons of God.

I cannot stay with the glories of sonship. I am indicating this one thing: the progressiveness of the apprehension of Christ is marked by stages, each of which makes a new demand as to what is in the past. Here the bondage of the flesh and the rule of the flesh and everything that means that the flesh has a place in our life to control us is finished and done with, and it is the absolute Lordship of the Spirit. Only so can this greatest of all revelations — sonship — concerning man be realised. It is a crisis.

Going back to Exodus again, you remember it was like that. They came to a certain place and they murmured and they quarrelled with God and they said, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Ex. 17:7). It was not until all the ground of that quarrelling with the Lord had been cut off by that which represented the cross, that you have the springing well and the song of the well, the life of the Spirit, and release to go further. You see the point. The flesh is the ground of all our argument with God; it is our natural life that is the basis of all our quarrelsomeness with the Lord. The flesh is not getting what it wants, what it is after, and so it grumbles and it is displeased and offended with the Lord. It is not until that flesh is laid low that we can go on in the life of the Spirit.

Well, that is the Galatians' position exactly. They had come to a standstill, and they thought that they could perfect their Christian experience by

sinking into the flesh. Paul says, No! “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I . . .” (Gal. 2:20); “Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14). The cross in Galatians is dealing with the flesh to make it possible to go on to the glories of sonship. But it is a crisis. Oh, what a crisis it was for Galatia! What a battle Paul was fighting for Galatia on this very point!

### **The sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus**

But we have not finished yet, there is still more in this full knowledge. There is something which has in it tremendous meaning and value for the Lord and for His people and that is the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus. I am not talking about His Lordship now in a general sense. I am very particular in the words chosen — the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus. God has given Him to be Head; He is the Head of all creation, He is the Head of the Body, the church. Everything of God’s eternal and mighty purpose as leading up to this dispensation, as being the chief characteristic of this dispensation as the greatest of all the dispensations and as issuing from this dispensation is to do with the Headship of Jesus Christ. What God is doing in this dispensation and the pre-eminent factor in this greatest of all dispensations in the counsels of God is the Headship of Jesus Christ. And all those great purposes of His are bound up with that Headship. He is Head.

Now Headship implies and carries with it something else, for you can never think of a head being something by itself. The head implies and carries with it the body and therefore there is a crisis. All that God means for us in the Headship of Jesus Christ demands a revelation of the body of Christ. The Headship is to have all the fulness but that fulness is to be expressed and manifested in the body, “the church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22,23). And who will tell me that a revelation of the body of Christ is not a crisis which demands and carries with it some tremendous stripping off of old ideas? I am not so sure that it will not mean the letting go of the whole Christian tradition since apostolic times. Things are not now in Christianity upon the basis of the body of Christ. It is a tremendous thing with a most revolutionary effect to really see the body of Christ. I am not asking you if you have seen what the letter to the Ephesians contains. I saw that and could talk about it long before I saw the body of Christ. This will emancipate us.

## The unity of the body of Christ

Let me pause for a moment and apply this. You say, Surely we must abandon that now! Look what our Lord prayed before He went to the cross: “That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us” (John 17:21). But where is there anything like that, that resembles that? Is not Christianity itself split and divided into a thousand, perhaps ten thousand, fragments, and very few of the fragments will have anything to do with one another? This is the problem, is it not? You come and you meet together on the ground of the body of Christ. You say, ‘At least we stand for the body of Christ!’ — and you are only making one more body. What are you going to do about it? Abandon it, say it is hopeless? If you do, it means you have never yet had a revelation of the body of Christ. You are looking at the church purely from the earthly standpoint. Get back with Ephesians and see it from the standpoint of past eternity. Come on with Ephesians and see it from the standpoint of the heavenlies. What is it? It is Christ, that is all. Is Christ divided? Is Christ a thousand sects? You see what I mean. A million people and, if you like, a million different particles of what is called the church, but if Christ by His Spirit is in every one of the million individuals or parts, in their essential being, they are one. It is not what they are in the flesh on the earth, in their system, or anything like that. They are as much one as ever Christ is one, and one of the things that we have to adjust is that, to be governed by that. We are not going to be governed by sectarianism, denominationalism; we are going to be governed by Christ. If you belong to Christ, He is in you. You can be what He allows you to be so far as association here on this earth is concerned; we are one. In outworking it may be difficult sometimes. The degree of our apprehension and of the effect of that oneness may impose limitations, but the basic thing is Christ is not divided, Christ is one, there *is* one Body, and that holds good now, it has been brought about by the Holy Spirit. “In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). If we have received the Holy Spirit and are baptized into Christ, there is a basic oneness which is a different thing altogether from these externals, these other things which divide us. The forbidding of the New Testament is to do that which divides the Spirit. Then let us be careful that we do not make truth the dividing thing between the Lord’s people. The measure of truth, the measure of light, is not to divide in spirit, in heart, in our attitudes. That abominable attitude that we have more light, and that other people have not seen, divides us at once; we are looking over our fence at them. However much light the Lord gives, do not

let it ever come in as a barrier in spirit between you and other children of God. To see the body from the heavenlies is to see not first of all what we are in the flesh and on the earth, but to see Christ, to take Christ as the great unifying factor.

That very thing can be worked out in other ways. We know in ourselves. Take your own self into a corner and ask yourself, Am I an absolute unity? Am I a perfect oneness in myself? Is there complete agreement in my whole being? In other words, do I never find any kind of conflict and clash in myself between what is of the Lord, what is of the Spirit, and what is me? Do you never have any argument with the Lord at all in your life, never feel any conflict within, never recognise there are two things with you yet? Why, you are full of denominations in yourself! We are all full of sects in our individual selves; we are not an absolute oneness. But there is that in you and in the next child of God and in me and in all the rest which *is* one thing. I know it is wrapped around and cumbered by the other thing, but there is that which is Christ which makes us all an absolute unity. It is the one entity of Christ in the many. If only we could keep on that ground, it would make very great practical differences, although it would not clear up all the problems. It would save us from our watertight, restricted positions which bring us to death and paralysis. Immediately we become exclusive in that way, we are cutting off the stream of divine life.

I was saying that the Headship of Christ with all that it means as His appointment from eternity by God to sum up all things, necessitates a divine revelation of the Body, because the fulness of Christ is Body-wise. It is the body that is the fulness of Him, and you have to see the body like this. Ask the Lord to give you a heavenly revelation of the body of Christ unto the fulness of Him as Head over all things. The statement is so clear. “Gave Him to be head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22). Not *in* the church, — that is quite true — but “head over all things to the church”. “All things” — that is a great phrase of Paul. All things are brought into Christ, and that is to the church, from the Head to the church. All things in the Head to the church which is His Body, the fulness of him that fills all in all.

But coming back to our point; all that is another stage in the revelation of Jesus Christ which has a crisis bound up with it. We cannot take that further step until we get clear to do it. Can you move into the spirit, the heavenly reality, of that oneness of Christ in all His members and make it an applied thing in your attitudes, your relationships, your judgments? Can you do it, are you free to do it? Or will someone have something to say, will the oversight object if you begin to work on that basis, will the ‘church’

interfere? Now we are up against something, we are tied, we are not free, and it is not an easy business. Where we have been brought up they do not believe in that, they do not agree with that, they do not teach that. It is a collision with the whole system that is not the ground of Christ. It is some *thing*. It is a 'church', it is an organisation, it is a mission, it is a movement, it is an institution, some *thing*. We have to be very careful how we violate these boundaries.

### **Being made free unto the fulness in Christ**

Well, I do not know how many of you need a word like this, but I am enunciating a law. The law is this, that the Lord has arranged our course unto that ultimate fulness in Christ in stages and each stage represents a crisis, the nature of which is a leaving behind of something, a shedding of that skin, a getting free of some trapping that is not Christ. It is man-made even though man has made it out of the Bible. Anything that hinders our going on to the fulness of Christ is not of Christ, is not of God; it has to be left. There has to be a crisis. I am not asking you to accept all this as teaching. That is what I am asking you not to do. It is no use presenting anything to anybody until they are desperate about it. What is the good of putting a good meal in front of a man who is not hungry? He will probably push it away. It is an excellent meal; for someone else that meal would be life itself, it would be glory. For that man it does not mean anything at all. It is like that. Not until we come to the place where, unless the Lord gives us some new revelation of Himself, we are finished, it is not safe for Him to give us that revelation. Revelation given on that ground would simply be something of no real value to us. It would be just dead truth. But many of the Lord's people are getting there. Whether they recognise what it means or not, that is not the point. The point is this, that many are heading up to a place where they know the Lord has to do a new thing; they will not be able to go on much longer unless the Lord does a new thing, and the Lord is heading up to a crisis. He is only making it possible for Himself to give revelation with an assurance that it will be effectual.

I have not got to the end of the revelation of Christ, but we must stop here now. You see, Christ is far ahead of us. We know nothing yet. We are called and chosen of God from eternity unto that. And yet with all He cannot either show it to us or bring us into it until we have come to the point where the next measure of it is made safe for revelation by our being ready to let go, to stand clear, out of Ur of the Chaldees, Egypt, Padan, death, the flesh,

out of the earthly conception of heavenly things. These are stages which make possible something more. The Lord must interpret the meaning of His own message to each of us personally. May He find us in exercise of heart about this, and we join with the apostle in his prayer that He would grant us a spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of our hearts being enlightened, till we all attain unto the full knowledge of the Son of God.

*To be continued.*

