



*the  
Golden  
Candlestick*

**GOD'S NEW THING**

**Part 2**

**SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS**

**SPIRITUAL DEATH AND  
HIS RISEN LIFE**

**T. Austin-Sparks**

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*Volume 185*

# GOD'S NEW THING

(CONTINUED)

## CHAPTER THREE

### BY THE SPIRIT

*Reading: Acts 1:6-9; Eph 1:16-17; 4:13.*

*“Ye shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.”*

*“A spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”.*

*“... unto the full knowledge of Christ”.*

The object in bringing these Scriptures together is simply for this purpose, that they represent the beginning and the end, the initiation and the consummation, the first and the final and full work in this dispensation. Acts 1:8 in its fulfilment is the beginning of the new dispensation order. Ephesians 4:13 is the consummation, the end, the fulness of the dispensation purpose, the fulness of Christ. “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.” “... we attain unto the fulness of Christ”. The point is this, that, from beginning to end it is the Holy Spirit who is the power and the energy and the custodian of this great purpose of God in this dispensation. The advent of the Holy Spirit was the breaking in of God to project the purpose of the dispensation and to pursue it to its final consummation. That is, God the Holy Spirit took the whole matter in hand, assumed charge and responsibility for it. As we glimpsed in our previous meditation, the purpose of this particular dispensation is an immense one. It is beyond us. It is quite impossible for any of us to explain many of the precise statements that are made in this letter to the Ephesians. I ask you to read it carefully again sentence by sentence, and see if you can explain some of those sentences. No, it is far beyond us. We may have thought much about it, we may have heard much about it, we may have read it many times. We might even be able to recite it and anticipate the next clause as it is being read to us and know exactly what is coming next, yet the whole thing lies like an ocean, a vast realm of things about which we know nothing — and yet — and I am not exaggerating, this is not just rhetoric,

words, it is true — all that is there is so far beyond our comprehension. It is stated to be God's thought and intention in this particular age or dispensation in which we live, that is, that He has committed Himself in this age to secure that vessel in which all that shall be a realised reality. Oh, that we might have an overwhelming sight of this vast thing, that our Christ should really be to us so infinitely greater than ever we have imagined Him to be. Well, that thing in all its range is what the Holy Spirit came to project, to carry through and to consummate, and yet we find the church as a whole, speaking quite generally, in a state of poverty, smallness, weakness, and very largely, blindness about this whole matter. What we have been occupied with in the previous two meditations is the need for God to do a new thing, and so now we gather it all up into this: the need for a new expression of the Holy Spirit's activity in relation to the purpose of God.

Many are praying and hoping for revival, but again we must be very careful as to what we mean. I suppose if we were asked to express what we mean, we should say something about a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit as at the beginning, as at Pentecost, in which many souls would be saved. Well, that is all right in itself as far as it goes. There is nothing wrong with that, but the Holy Spirit did not come to stay there. The Holy Spirit came not only to initiate, but to consummate, not only to make a beginning but to develop unto final fulness, and when we think of a work of the Holy Spirit, we must take the whole range of that work and see that it is just as important that there shall be an expression of Christly fulness at the end as there was at the beginning of Christly initiation or of conversion. Do you not think that it may very well be that because the people of God have failed to see that it is as much the work of the Holy Spirit to make Christ full as it is to bring a soul to Him, that the church is where it is after all these generations? We have stopped short with the Holy Spirit's work, we have confined Him to a first stage in His activity. What would you think if in the first creation where it says that the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the deep and the Holy Spirit, as the instrument of the Godhead, had just brought light upon that chaos, lifted that cosmos out of the chaos and brought it into a position where everything was possible and then left it there? Well, it is just like that, you see. In the new creation, to bring souls out of darkness, spiritual chaos into light, and to put them, as it were, with their feet upon the road to the immense intention and purpose of God and then leave them is unthinkable. It is quite as important that He should go on from that point and see the thing right through until all that God intended is reached.

Now this is said with a view to bringing it home to us, how important

it is that *we* should recognise the need, place, work and purpose of the Holy Spirit to constantly press on towards final fulness, the great purpose of God. Of course, there is the other wise. What hope and assurance and strength it gives to us to know that the Holy Spirit has come for that very purpose.

Then look at it from this other standpoint: the very nature and character of this dispensation is that it is a spiritual one so far as God's work is concerned. In chapter one we sought to point out that that comprehensive statement in Acts 1:6-9 holds a discrimination. The Apostles asked Him — “Dost thou *at this time* restore the kingdom to Israel?” He dismissed that and indicated that this is not the time for the kingdom of God in its earthly sense to be set up. That belongs to the next age which the Father hath appointed in His own authority. This age is a spiritual one. Confusion, arrest, limitation, and the keeping back of the Lord's coming is the result of that misconception about this age. This age, so far as the Lord is concerned, is an essentially spiritual age in the purpose which He is pursuing. By saying ‘spiritual’, I mean that it is the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about a new spiritual condition, spiritual order and spiritual economy, in the people taken out of the nations for His Name.

So we begin with God and there is no material contact with God in this dispensation. The Lord has established it as the governing law. “God is spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). You notice the immediate context is this — “... neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem ... the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth ... God is spirit” (verses 21-24). It is the new hour on the clock of ages. The only touch with God now in this dispensation is one in spirit. Not in this mountain nor at Jerusalem or in any other earthly place. It is spiritual.

Having said these things “a cloud received Him (Christ) out of their sight”. How do you know Christ? What kind of contact can you have with Christ in this dispensation? You cannot know Christ after the flesh now. He is out of sight. We are absolutely dependent upon the Holy Spirit for any kind of living knowledge of Christ; our very relationship with Christ is a spiritual one. In ourselves we are not children of God, in the family of God, nor do we have any relatedness to Him until we are born of the Spirit, and the precise statement is that that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). Your body and my body is not a child of God; your soul and my soul is not a child of God. The relatedness is deeper and more inward, in our spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are therefore, so far as the Lord is concerned, so far as all divine things are concerned, a spirit having a soul and having a

body, but the deepest fact about our very being is that we are spiritual beings when we are born again.

Then everything is by the same law and the same line. All our growth as children of God is just a matter of the increase of what is spiritual in us. Spiritual growth is not measured by the increase of our knowledge of Christianity, Christian things and Bible truth. It is not the measure of time since we were converted. No, some people were converted thirty years ago, and they are just as small in stature today as they were then. They are no bigger; they have not grown one little bit in spiritual stature. It is all a matter of spiritual growth, spiritual measure, and therefore the great object in view, the fulness of Christ, means that enlargement of what is spiritual in us and in the church until Christ fills all things. It is all Christ, it is the fulness of Christ in this enlargement of what is spiritual. You know quite well that is going on all the time — or it ought to be going on all the time — that is, we are getting a new kind of knowledge. We get our own knowledge of divine things knocked all over the place until we come to the position where we are ready to confess that we do not know anything at all; we do not even know where we are. All natural knowledge, wisdom and understanding gets hit on the head and knocked to fragments. We have got to have another kind of knowledge which is not human knowledge or wisdom at all; and another kind of strength. Our own natural strength, whether it be soul strength in the realm of mind, brain, will or even physical strength, may get knocked all over the place. If we bring it into the realm of things divine, we are just broken down, and the Lord brings us to the place where, if the Lord does not fulfil the purpose for which we are His and have been saved, then it will never be fulfilled, we have not strength to get on with it. It is just all the Lord or it is nothing. Believe me, that is where the church will come, or its representative company will come, to satisfy the Lord. At the end, it will be a hopeless, helpless thing so far as the life of nature is concerned, but it will be the miracle of God. When we get through at last and come out into the glory, we shall without any hesitation say, Well, it was the Lord that did this! Many times we despaired; if it had not been for the Lord, we would never be here. But that is a law, it has to be. Everything is a matter of spiritual measure.

But that makes everything possible, because this means a new capacity. I do not know what your capacity is naturally. There are varying degrees of natural capacity, but here the Holy Spirit, in constituting us upon this spiritual basis, brings in a new kind of capacity, a capacity for things which lie altogether outside of the possibility of men at their best by nature. That is the hope that comes with the Holy Spirit, a new capacity. “That ... God

... 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.” Do you know anything about that? You see, that is wonderful language, but look at us, what poor, weak, helpless things we are. We do not know the exceeding greatness of His power. We have to have spiritual knowledge by the Holy Spirit as to what that is. That certainly means that God is doing something so terrific that it calls for the exceeding greatness of His power and that He is doing it. At last, when we fully see the way by which we have come, the forces which have stood in the way to obstruct and hinder, all the factors which had to be taken into account and dealt with in order to get the church through to glory, we shall see that it called for the exceeding greatness of His power to get that church there. Sometimes we just have a slight sense of what that means; the overwhelming greatness of spiritual opposition, the sense of the impossibility of going on and getting through. Sometimes it seems that there is an impenetrable obstruction. The Scriptures are right in their symbolism: bars of iron and gates of brass seeking to circumvent the great purpose of God. The fact is that if we get through, being such as we are, it will be a matter of the exceeding greatness of His power, and what the apostle is praying for is not that we might feel it, but that we might know it, that is that we might know that that exceeding greatness of His power *is* to usward, it is operating in our direction unto this final fulness of Christ. It is at work for us. We do not realise it, but we know it has got to be.

You see what comes into view. For this dispensation the Holy Spirit has come committing Himself to one particular object, and that object is Christ. He has come not to do things, but one thing. He has brought in Himself all that Christ is in fulness and finality and is operating with a view to make all that Christ is in that fulness and finality real in a Body. He begins, as we have seen, with spiritual new birth and from that point onwards His whole purpose is bent upon realising Christ in fulness in a corporate Body and in each member of that body as fully as He will be allowed to do.

What I do really want to say to you in all this is that the Holy Spirit does make all the difference. He brings in a prospect, He makes possible its realisation, He gives the faculties necessary to the realisation of God’s purpose. Oh, we see so many of the Lord’s children who always have a cloud hanging over their countenances and over their lives, always full of uncertainties, always marked by question, always giving out an impression

of despair. That ought not to be and that need not be. What such Christians need is a real knowledge that the Holy Spirit dwells within and is unhindered, or, in other words, has their complete consent and cooperation. You see, He plants right at the centre of our being all this tremendous possibility and that which is necessary for its realisation. He gives progressively, maybe line upon line, precept upon precept, but nevertheless He gives, or He has come to give, an increasing *personal* knowledge of the Lord Jesus. There is nothing static about the Holy Spirit, nothing fixed at all; He is going on. If you will let Him, He will bring this whole matter right inside of you. It is not a matter, it is Christ. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). You have the greatest Teacher in this universe dwelling within you. If the Holy Spirit is there, you have the greatest power in this universe dwelling within you, you have the greatest possibilities in this universe dwelling within you. But remember, it is not for power, it is not for capacity in itself, it is not for prospects for ourselves; it is definitely and solely to bring Christ into fulness. Therefore all that is not of Christ must find the Holy Spirit against it, setting it aside, dealing with it to make room for Christ.

### **The Holy Spirit's instrument**

Now, that brings me to this. The Holy Spirit has a very mighty and effective instrument, a proved instrument. The Holy Spirit's one instrument for all His purpose is the cross of the Lord Jesus, and the cross of the Lord Jesus was never intended just to be destructive. It is a wrong apprehension of the cross if we dwell wholly upon its destructive aspect. The Holy Spirit uses the cross in order to clear away all obstructions and make room for Christ. He has a constructive object. But He does use the cross; the Spirit will lead us to the cross. The Spirit will take hold of the cross and apply the cross. The cross was, in its objective work, complete, comprehensive, once and for all. There is nothing more for the cross to do in itself. Christ is not now a crucified Christ, but all the comprehensive work of that cross has yet to be made effective in the church and that is a progressive thing. For every bit of spiritual measure within, room has to be made, and that means an application of the cross in some direction, to some matter. Oh, the cross is a living thing in the hands of the Holy Spirit, not something of centuries ago. It is as living today as ever it was when the Holy Spirit gets hold of it. We know quite well that there are things which have got to go, which have got to be shed. He is doing that all the time, but with the positive object of making Christ full.

But in this matter of the Holy Spirit making the cross real, the Lord does demand a basic and historic crisis in our experience, something from which He can work, something upon which He can build. The trouble with so many is that we have to say they have never really had a Waterloo battle on this matter of the flesh, the self-life, the old creation, their own nature, whatever you may call it, as to their life in the flesh in this world. They have never had a major crisis and until that major crisis has really taken place, the Holy Spirit has not what is necessary to build upon, to work with. That major crisis means that we have come to the place sometime, somehow, where we know that a certain realm is forbidden. Not everything is cleared up but there is a certain street and we dare not go down that street. If we go down that street, that is death. We know it, we have been down there, that is forbidden. Is there in your history that which you know quite well means, 'Ah yes, I got burnt there, and I know what it means to touch that again!' And that something was big enough to register in your life that a whole realm of things is closed to you. That is death, that is deadlock. You go down there and you will wander there in an awful wilderness and desert until you get out of it again and you will learn that is a realm which is forbidden. Do you know what I mean in your heart? There has got to be something like that in our experience where a real issue is brought about on this thing and the Holy Spirit works on that and new questions arise, new forms of the temptation arise, new aspects of the whole business come up. We move on that and we discover that it is akin to the realm we have been taught we must not touch. That is death, that is a death touch, it is included in that. The Holy Spirit works this thing out in that way on many things and we know, as we knew that crisis time or experience, we know this belongs to that, and then it is just a matter of whether we are ready for the Holy Spirit to have His way, whether we are going on and there is going to be an increase of Christ. The increase of Christ is a matter of our being willing to say what the Holy Spirit says about things, to agree with Him, not in mind but in heart. When He says. No! — we should say, 'Alright, no!' Sometimes it will be a struggle, a real conflict and battle, but a new measure of Christ is hanging upon that conflict and it is a wonderfully living education, it is something that is very real. The true life in the Spirit, the true life of a Christian, is no mere theory or abstract thing. It is very real, we are experiencing it every day. We know what we may do because the Holy Spirit is agreeing with it; what we may not do, because He does not agree. This is the way unto the consummation of the Spirit's purpose, the fulness of Christ.

Now I must close, but I want to bring it all up here as the thing about

which we have to have exercise as the outcome of this day, a new thing. Let us pray very earnestly that the Lord will do a new thing, but, as we do so, let us recognise that the Lord's new thing is this: completing that for which the Holy Spirit came in the sense of bringing a far greater fulness of Christ into His body so that, the age purpose being consummated, the Lord may come. Oh, He cannot come until a spiritual thing has been done. It is not a matter of dates and times. No, it is a spiritual matter. The Lord must accomplish the purpose of the age before He can come. What is the purpose of the age? — to have expressed in a company here on the earth that greater fulness of Christ, that which answers to His whole design in this dispensation, His fulness. "Till we all attain unto the fulness of Christ". That is the object. There is much, of course, bound up with it, but let us pray that the Lord will do this new thing, to get a people on this earth who give the Holy Spirit a free way and are set upon this object.

*Concluded.*

# SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS

*Reading: Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:3-8.*

We shall now consider the matter of spiritual foundations and stand back and view it in a more comprehensive way.

In this passage which we have read from Peter's letter we have this great truth brought to us by means of a simile, the simile of a building and edifice constituted by a large number of living stones being brought together in relation to one main and important prominent stone called the corner stone. We are told that that corner stone was chosen by God and placed by God and was very precious to God. "I lay", that is the Lord speaking: "I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious." That is, eternally chosen; precious, that is the value of that One in the eyes of God. And then there is seen a process of bringing into relation to that chief Corner Stone, other living stones, and so the habitation of God is built. If you are having difficulty with the phrase, that is, if any of you are of a technical mind and you are having difficulty with the phrase "corner stone", let us explain. When men begin to build in the ordinary way they do not start with a corner stone, they lay a foundation. But if you were building a pyramid you would, everything is built from a corner in a pyramid. That may give you some interesting study as to what the church really is. You have a pyramid, and when you have a pyramid you finish with one stone which is the topstone; and you find in another part of the Bible the Lord Jesus referred to as the Topstone. He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the corner and topstone. Everything from the beginning to the end is in relation to Christ, and that is what we now have spiritually before us. Just that little parenthesis to get over the builder's technical difficulty of the corner stone.

Now here is the metaphor that the apostle is using as to the nature of God's intention, purpose, and object. It is thus presented to us in the figure of a building. If we get away from the figure, the metaphor, to the real spiritual meaning we shall come to see that in the eternal intention and will of God, two things have been dominant and all-inclusive, and these two things are the two things which represent God's intention in the history of this world

and also explain all the dealings of God with man. It will also bring into view what the nature of things will be. You and I ought to be interested in what was intended from the beginning and what will be at last. Surely every man and woman having a being and taking an interest in the world and in history, in life, ought to be interested and concerned with what was intended from the beginning and what will be in the end. Well, it is all embraced in the spiritual meaning of these two things represented in this metaphorical representation of the building, the Corner Stone, and living stones in relation thereto.

God, before time was, had in His heart and in His mind the thought, desire, intention and purpose to have at the centre of this universe something which in every detail of its constitution would express Himself, would reveal Himself, and be the image spiritually and morally of Himself. We are told by the apostle that the Lord Jesus was the express image of the Father's Person, and so the Father determined that everything should be modelled in this central representation according to His Son, as the image of Himself. That is, that this world, the centre of the universe, should be a representation of Himself in His Son. And so the Scriptures tell us that when He commenced His creative work, it was through, and by, and unto His Son that the creation was carried out. And then when those creative activities were progressing, at a certain stage He said: "Let us make men in our image", and so He did. Now here comes in a very interesting question or proposition. If there had never come in by sin — by complicity with the Enemy of God, by disobedience — a process of degeneration, what would the successive generations of man have been like? They would have remained undoubtedly, according to the original type and each successive generation would have been in the image of the first, the head of the race. The image would have been retained right through, the likeness would have been maintained continually. But there came in that which instantly represented a drop, and then commenced a down grade movement, and in that fall, and in that degeneration of course the original image was lost. God's intention in that race was not realized; a whole race and a whole world maintaining His image. Eventually He sent His Son into that world. We know that that Son of God voluntarily took upon Him all the results, the effect of that movement downward. Voluntarily He entered into that thing to its very depths. The sin, the misery, the wretchedness, the ugliness of it all: "His visage was so marred more than any man"; and so deep did He enter into it that even His Father had to turn away His face, one last moment of agony, that awful thing which He was representing voluntarily, had to be forsaken once and for all, and in that

turning away, though it may have been but for a moment, of His face on the part of the Father, from the Son, in that hour when He was made sin for us, He who knew no sin. God's verdict was revealed for that race. It is for ever abandoned; it is for ever given up; it has failed irreparably, failed of its intention, and it is carried away in a Representative Person into the eternal wilderness of desolation and forsakenness.

But there was another side. God raised Him from the dead. But He did not raise that One who was made sin, from the dead. That is, it was not the Son there in His representative capacity now as made sin and made a curse that is raised. He is raised without any of that. He is raised in the perfection of His own divine humanity without a trace of the old thing which He had taken on Him. And when He is raised He is presented not to the whole world but to a little company, as God's eternal Model, God's eternal Representative on the divine side, presented to them, to their faith. When faith has been exercised towards Him and they recognize Him as they never recognized Him before, and appropriate Him and accept Him and make Him Lord in their life and come into vital, living resurrection union with Him, the work has commenced again in the earth. And He is taken and established in the glory, and the Holy Spirit is sent, the Spirit of that One in the glory, to carry on the work of reproducing Him here. Slowly the work goes on, a hidden work, largely a secret work, a work, which even those in whom it is being done are largely unable to discern. I mean that you and I who are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, in whom the work of God is going on, even we are not able to see all that is going on of what God is doing in us. From time to time we are able to see just a little of what has been done. After a while we realize, well, there are some big changes that have been made in us; we are not what we once were. But God hides His work very largely even in those in whom He is doing it. We do not see our own spiritual progress, but He knows. What is happening? Christ is being reproduced. To use the words of the apostle Paul, there is a conformity to the image of His Son going on. You see it is getting back to the original intention. "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son ...". This work is going on behind much obscuring scaffolding; the day will come when the scaffolding will be taken down and the spiritual edifice will be manifested in perfection. This building is all in living relationship to Christ, living stones linked with Him the Living Stone, the Chief Corner Stone. Now the apostle Peter here says that there are two alternatives presented to men, presented to faith.

You see faith in the Lord Jesus, that is faith in all the work which He

has done as well as faith in Him for what He is as God's Son — the work which He did in His cross in bringing under judgment in His own Person all that sin, all that evil, all that unlikeness to God, in order that God might begin again, in order that God might have that which He originally set His heart upon, faith in that. And then faith in the meaning of Christ Risen as the firstborn among many brethren. That is the beginning again of a new race, with an inward likeness to God initially, to be developed. Faith in the Lord Jesus as to His work, and as to His Person is that which links us to Him, the Chief Corner Stone, and makes us living stones, and thereby brings about the basis, the foundation of that progressive work of God which ultimately is to be revealed as, shall I say a collective, a corporate, a universal Christ, the image of God. The end of all this work of God spiritually and morally in the lives of His own is going to be that in all things, and everywhere Christ is seen and Christ will be seen. I am never tired of dwelling upon that. Beloved, in the glory you and I are not going to be somebodies. Christ is going to be the One, the altogether and only One throughout the universe and throughout eternity. We shall not be pointed at and have it said of us what a great and glorious being we are. The whole testimony will be to Christ. How marvellously Christ shines in that one; how fully you can see Christ there. It is going to be Christ filling all things. That is the end, that is what God has started. That is the explanation of creation. That is the explanation of God's dealings with us. That is the answer to any question as to what will ultimately be.

Now I see that Christ presented to faith brings with it two alternatives as the apostle here says. "For you therefore that believe is the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:7). What preciousness? The preciousness of Christ to the Father. "Elect, precious". That is the word about Him. Precious to God; and then you, as living stones, brought into living relationship to Him through faith, partakers with Him of that preciousness to the Father, become precious to the Father. What is the nature, the essence of that preciousness? What is it that makes it precious to God? The realization and fulfilment of all that God said is here, to have a universe Christ-centric, conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. If you had some object which engrossed your whole heart and mind and for which you had given all your best, lavishly, and for which you had suffered long, and waited, and at last you had that, how precious it would be to you. That object is the precious thing to you, and all the preciousness of God is vested in His Son. His Son is precious to Him in this sense; that His Son is the means, the instrument, the vehicle, the channel, the vessel by which God gets all He has ever set His heart upon.

And when we come into living relationship by faith to the Lord Jesus, that purpose of God is expended to us in Christ and we come into the preciousness. "For you therefore that believe is the preciousness." That is why God has gone to such lengths for our salvation. God has given His best, has poured Himself out: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself ..."; God suffered in Calvary's cross. We are told: "... the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood". It is God who has suffered through the ages. Abraham, in sacrificing his only and well beloved son is only a feint type of what God Himself has done: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son ...". Why "so loved"? Because it was the centre and the sphere of all that upon which His heart was set. God has gone to all that length of suffering and sorrow and agony because His heart is bound up with this world in a great eternal purpose. Therein is the preciousness. And when He can have any one further living stone which will contribute toward that whole purpose, a vessel for the universal display and showing forth of Himself, His glory, spiritually and morally, then He has something which to Him is very precious; and you will find the Word of God throughout speaks a great deal about the preciousness of the saints to God. How dear they are: "... for he that touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zech. 2:8). "Yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (Ps. 105:15). He has hurled empires to their doom because they have raised their hand against His Son. Egypt went to disaster and ruin because it stretched out a hand against His people. Babylon, the glory of the ancient world was hurled from the high place to the depths because it dared to put a hand upon His people. Rome persecuted and martyred and butchered the early saints, and Rome is no more. What has been, ever will be. His saints are precious to Him because it is in His saints that His whole design and purpose of the ages is to be realized. The preciousness to God of one child of His through faith in the Lord Jesus. That is one alternative.

There is the other. "... but for such as disbelieve ...". This stone which was intended to be the means by which they are brought into that preciousness to God, by which they were to be brought into that place of glory, the manifestation of God universally, this very Stone chosen of God for their honour, for their glory, the very thing which was meant for their salvation becomes their undoing. "For such as disbelieve, the stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner; and, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence" (1 Peter 2:7,8). Two emphases again. A 'stone of stumbling' is a stone in the way over which people trip. A rock of

offence, that is a piece of jutting rock upon which striking themselves, they cut themselves to pieces. That is the other side of the history. The Lord Jesus has come for man's salvation and not condemnation, but if they disbelieve that which is meant for their salvation becomes the means of their undoing. The issue of Christ having come into this world leaves no one in a no-man's land. It is either: "For you therefore that believe is the preciousness", or if you disbelieve the very thing itself will be for your undoing. No! God never designed hell for man, and God never wills that men should go to hell. That was never in God's thought. Hell, we are told, was created for the devil and his angels. The Lord sets up a warning against hell and everything that He can do to stop men in that way He has done, and all along the way He is warning men and calling men. He is saying, in effect: 'I never wanted, never do want that you should share the devil's doom.' And He would call, entreat, urge, and by every means He would save men, but if man will go on refusing His warning, ignoring His entreaty, well there is only one end. God has done His best and is doing His best. "But for such as disbelieve ... a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence". You see the alternatives. You see the side of the glory. You see the side of the shame.

The issue for us is an issue of faith in the Lord Jesus. Now just one word before closing by way of underlining one word. He is called a Living Stone, and then those linked with Him are living stones. That for me determines the entire nature of relationship to Christ, that determines the basis, the foundation of that life which is eventually to issue in the manifestation of God's glory, God's image. The word *living*. The Word of God does not argue at all on this matter. It simply takes for granted one thing, that apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ no one is in this sense alive, everyone is dead. "And you ... when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins ..." — dead. So far as this kind of union with the Lord is concerned, no one has it by nature; they have not that life. If you could read the exact text of the original language here, you would at once be settled upon that. The word *living*, here, is the word always used in connection with God. There are four words in the Greek, translated into the English word 'life', or 'living'. Three of them relate to the ordinary human life as we know it, the life which every person and animal has by nature. But there is a fourth word which always relates to divine life, the life of God, and that is the word used here, *living*. That is, those who have God's life, and no one has that life only in organic union with the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit through the apostle is very precise: "Living stones". If He had only been content with a metaphor He would have said: 'A lot of stones all together bringing about an edifice.'

Living stones; that is the feature of every part of this building, that it has divine life; not ordinary human life but divine life. Christ alone had that life and has it and we only have it as we are in Christ by faith. The Lord Jesus came to bring the gift of this life to mankind. “I am come that they might have life” is the word in the Gospel of John chapter 10 verse 10, “and that they might have it more abundantly.” “The gift of God is eternal life”, the same word again. “He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life” (1 John 5:12).

Now all you who are so familiar with this, well-seasoned and mature saints, have got to be patient while I emphasise and stress these things. Remember some of us want to have foundations attended to and that is what the Lord is concerned with. The foundation of God’s eternal purpose is living union with Christ by faith. That is the foundation, the union which is a oneness with Him in divine life. Everything is built upon that, everything comes out of that. All our spiritual growth is the result of our having spiritual life, divine life. All our becoming conformed to His image is the outworking of that life in order just as in nature a certain kind of life produces a certain kind of likeness, so here in divine things, this peculiar, specific, exclusive life of God produces the likeness of God. And for the acceleration of spiritual growth, for the speeding up of spiritual progress, for the development of Christ-likeness, the one need is an accession of divine life by the Holy Spirit. Everything issues from the basic thing, that is, having His life in us and the fact that we only have that by being joined to Him. His picture of the vine and the branches is basic to this truth. The vine and the branches make one organism and the fruit is borne because the life of the vine is the one life passing through all the branches; and it is that oneness, likeness of life which is basic to everything in the eternal purpose of God. That life which was of Adam meant that the divine likeness was lost; that life received by faith in Jesus brings back the divine likeness inwardly and it will develop.

I asked at the beginning a question which may have sounded to you something like a speculation, as to what the result would have been if that degenerating course had not come in the race. Here you have Christ who is the Original — God’s original in resurrection. We are born of the Holy Spirit and receive the divine life which is in Christ. That produces Christ-likeness and that likeness goes on with every fresh generation that is born of Christ. When really born from above, born anew, born of the Holy Spirit, whichever term you prefer from the Scriptures, it all means the same thing, that we receive the life of God which is in Christ and every fresh one that is born of that life comes into the image of Christ, receives that element which means

ultimately perfect conformity to His image. And so throughout all eternity what will be shown is generations, and generations and generations after the image of Christ. All generations will reveal Christ throughout eternity. It is a marvellous thing, is it not, it does not matter where you move with the gospel of Christ in this world, whether it be in what may be called the dark heathen races who have no light, knowledge, training, or civilization, in any language or nation, and the gospel of the grace of God is preached and faith in the Lord Jesus is exercised through the hearing of that word and through the exercise of that faith divine life is imparted. It does not matter where it is, the lowest of the low, or highest of the high, there comes about a similar likeness, one likeness. We have seen it. I have seen a man stand round an open air meeting the very picture of debauchery, whose features were horrible — the consequence of sin, standing there with hardly a decent rag on him, marred and wretched; and I have come to know that that man's home was like himself, his children half naked, his home divested of all comfort and furniture, in order that he might indulge his lusts. His poor wife a mere bag of bones, toiling for those children because of his sin. I have seen that man hear the gospel (a case in my own experience) at that open air meeting, and open his eyes as the grace of God and the saving power of God was presented, and become concerned, interested, and being spoken to afterwards exercising simple faith in the Lord Jesus, without very much intelligence or understanding, with a dulled mind and a spoiled life, nevertheless reaching out from his darkness and receiving Christ as his Saviour. Within a week that man had become conscious of the filthy state in which he was and had done everything in order to change his own condition and home. A week after he turned up at the meeting wearing a nice clean scarf, and within a month he came wearing a collar and tie. And his home was changed and furniture was coming in, and his wife knew something of relief, and his children wondered whether the millennium had started. Yes, that is true. That is the incoming of divine life, which starts conformity to the image of Christ and changes things. And this universe is going to be changed altogether by that. The day is coming when that very life will have transformed everything, and everywhere it shall be Christ. That is God's end.

But that is not going to be through a long series of ages through a kind of flow absorption until everyone has received the gospel. No, no! There is a crisis coming. This is a day of grace. This is the day of the gospel. It will not always be so. Christ is presented to faith with that object in view now. We settle our destiny by whether we believe or disbelieve, and God has fixed a day when He will judge the world by Jesus Christ and the day of grace will

have ended, and all will stand before Him. And the question will be: “What did you do with My Son, believe or disbelieve?” To those who believe He will say: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you ...”, and to those who disbelieve: “Depart, from me ...”. A great divide will come. This is the time for believing or disbelieving, putting ourselves on one side or the other, accepting one of these two alternatives. “For you therefore that believe is the preciousness: but for such as disbelieve ... a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.”

The means of undoing and overthrowing. It has been so always with individuals; it has been so with nations. The nations are today in this very crisis, in this very balance. If the truth were known, the state of the nations today is the issue of how they have answered, to God’s challenge in His Son the Lord Jesus. If we had time we could very well prove that.

But leaving the national and international aside, for the moment, this is an individual question. Beloved fellow children of God, let me urge this upon you, the basis of everything for us is that the life of the Lord is vibrant in us, and what the Lord desires, needs, and must have is that every one of these stones should be a living stone. Are you a living stone in the House of God? Are you alive with the life of God? Is the manifestation of His life there? That life will produce Christ-likeness. Well, both believers and unbelievers must answer to the Lord as the outcome of this word. If it sounds severe, challenging, do not think it is meant to be harsh. It is only by reason of the seriousness of the matter, the eternity which hangs upon it that we press and urge and seem to be so emphatic. There are such great issues in the balance as to whether we believe or disbelieve, as to whether we are alive with the life of God, or whether we are where the Word of God puts us by nature, dead in trespasses and sins. The Lord accomplish the purpose of His Word.

# SPIRITUAL DEATH AND HIS RISEN LIFE

*Reading: Numbers 17:1-13.*

The Scriptures throughout reveal an abiding and deep-seated antagonism between God and this world, and that antagonism passes into every instrument which is brought into living fellowship with God, and it becomes the expression of God's antagonism, and also the means by which the antagonism in the world is dragged out into the light. So that all who are in spiritual fellowship with God know that from God's side there can be no reconciliation with the world in that spiritual sense of the word in which we are using it, and they also know that there is towards them, as towards God, this strong, deep, relentless spiritual antagonism on the part of the world. It is also true that in the true nature of fallen man there is that element which has an affinity with the world, and which causes man to spontaneously gravitate world-ward.

The Word of God reveals the existence of a great system of spiritual intelligence which has as its business the maintaining and stimulating of that antagonism, and all its might is bent upon keeping that affinity between fallen man and this world. So that that whole system of spiritual intelligences is all the time seeking to keep man world-bound spiritually, and to bring about some kind of involving again, even of the Lord's people and the church, in this world, spiritually. The whole history of the church's gravitation world-ward in numerous ways is just the history of the success of those spiritual intelligences to again entangle the people of God in the toils of the world spiritually.

Now we come to the next thing in this connection, spiritual death, which is the law governing that relationship of man with the world. Spiritual death is the many-sided and master-hold of those spiritual forces. The very essence of the working of the Lord Jesus by His cross was to destroy that affinity and break the power of that law of death, and to introduce, on the ground of separation from the world, the law of life, a counter law to the law of gravitation towards the world, the realm of spiritual death. So for a brief time we shall be occupied with the law of life in Christ, that which comes by the

resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Just how to lift out enough for a little while is my problem. The Lord will no doubt help.

We may find our helpfulness by reverting to the portion of the word from which we were reading in Numbers 17, the account of the taking of the twelve rods of the twelve tribes of Israel, and then of the sequence in the budding of Aaron's rod. You will notice, if you have the Word open, that this seventeenth chapter has its setting in a scene of death. The chapter before gives the account of the rebellion of Korah and his company, the disputing of the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the calling into question of God's appointment. You must ever remember that Moses and Aaron are one, that in principle they are not two men, they are the two halves of one. Moses is that side which represents government, administration; Aaron is that side which represents priesthood, mediation. Two sides of one ministry, which are clearly seen in the antitype of Moses and Aaron, the Lord Jesus Himself; King and Priest, Ruler and Priest, Administrator and Mediator. Korah with his company rose up and questioned the divine appointment and its absoluteness. You know the issue. The Lord took up that matter. Moses did not take up that matter; Moses did not turn a hand for his own vindication, he fell on his face before the Lord, and his meekness is brought out at that point as never before. But the Lord stepped in and called for Korah and his company to be brought to the door of the tent of the congregation. The issue was that the earth opened and swallowed up the company of Korah, and if you look you will see it was a very large company. Death engulfed all who were touched and tainted with that thing. Chapter 17 is set in that background of terrible death. Korah and his company have touched something which was death, and which worked out in death. There has been a contact in spirit between them and that realm which is death, and spiritual death always precedes the literal carrying out of it, just as spiritual life in resurrection precedes the resurrection literally. There will be no resurrection unto life for anyone who has not already been resurrected spiritually. And when eventually the judgement of death has its literal consummation, it will simply be the fulfilment of what has already been taking place in spiritual death; and in principle Korah had already touched a realm which implied and involved death, and the literal judgement was but the consummation of that.

Now we pass into this part of the story where the big question is for the Lord's people — there being a realm of death, and we seeing how possible it is for us to become involved in that, to touch that, and the awful consequences — How can we live? Who can live? You see that is what comes up at the end of chapter 17, but it is the issue of chapter 16. At the end of chapter

17 you have: “And the children of Israel spoke unto Moses, saying, Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. Every one that cometh near, that cometh near unto the tabernacle of the Lord, dies; shall we perish all of us?” Question followed question. Death is working, death; a realm which can be touched spiritually. How can we live? Can we live at all? The content of chapter 17 is the answer. Aaron’s rod that budded. I think it almost impossible to fail to see in that rod the type of the Lord Jesus. All those rods, even Aaron’s rod, when brought to the tabernacle were dead. Aaron’s rod was among the rest, apparently like them, in death. Judgement has taken place, sin has been judged and dealt with, and death through sin reigns universally. That is sin, as you have it at the end of Good Friday, as we call it. Even the Lord Jesus, who has voluntarily entered into the universal judgement of sin, taken His place amongst sinful men, and has received the judgement of God upon the sin of the world, looks, at the end of that day, as though He is like all the rest — dead. Laid up through the night, the dark night. But then we hear Paul’s ringing shout: “God raised Him from the dead”, and what we call ‘Easter Day’ is Aaron’s rod that budded; it is Christ in resurrection. These rods, or at least Aaron’s rod, was an almond rod, the stick of an almond tree. In Hebrews the word “almond” simply means “awakening”, and it is given that name because it is the first of the trees of spring to break the slumber of winter. The first blossoms of spring are the blossoms of the almond tree, and the almond gets its name in Hebrew simply from the fact that it breaks the slumber of winter first. It is the first to show the new life. A very poor type of Christ, the Firstfruits of them that are asleep, awakened, breaking the slumber of death.

There is something more than that. The miracle of this particular rod was that simultaneously it had buds, blossoms and fruit, ripe fruit. You have never found that on an almond tree in spring. You have seen the bud and then later the flower, and later the fruit, but here you have them all at once. Christ in resurrection is initially the break with death, and at the same time the full fruit of resurrection, and there is present all the beauty of that in the flower. It is a matchless picture of resurrection. Christ does not rise progressively in a bud, and later on the flower, and later on the fruit; it is all there in a moment; and that is why we can live, for in Him is the fulness of resurrection life. Do they ask, How can we live? Who can live? The answer is here — Christ lives, all is possible. Even in the presence of death and judgement, in a world where death rages, to touch which, spiritually, means death, it is possible to live in the triumph of His resurrection. I take the simple and the superficial lesson of this almond rod and of the resurrection.

There is much more, but we will ravish our hearts with the first beauty of this thing. You and I know quite well that death is all around us in this world in a spiritual way. We know by painful experience that it is all too possible and all too easy for us to touch that realm and to feel that cold touch of spiritual death upon our hearts by reason of in some way out of a thousand ways just getting a contact. It may be conversation. It is so easy to touch death by not watching your conversation. How often, after a holy time with the Lord, frivolity has come in in your conversation, and you know in your spirit that you have come into a realm of death. It may be by something said about a child of God; you have come down to earth levels in your relationships or your criticisms. I could never, if I tried, touch all the ways in which it happens, but I mention these simply to give point to the truth. There are innumerable ways in which the spirit of one who has been touched by the Lord with His life can be involved in that spiritual realm of death. This is a reality to us. That new law which He has put within us, which gravitates towards the Lord, makes us revolt and recoil from even compulsory dealings with many things in this world. Sometimes we have to go back into the world because of the conventions of this world, because of certain duties which have to be performed, sometimes to ungodly relatives or associations, but we want to get away as soon as we can; we recoil. That to us is death spiritually.

Now we live in that realm, in that world. How can we live triumphantly in a world where death is, and not perish in it? And there is something more than that. How can you and I, as the Lord's people, seeking to live a heavenly life in this deadly world live, not only in the presence of men and women and things which are dead, but in the presence of all the spirits of death which are with increasing intensity coming upon the children of God to register death upon them, and seeking to make them accept death, and to put up a real conflict spiritually with something. The only word which expresses it is death; that which is active, malicious, wanting to crush the life out of you and bring you down and under. How can we live in that? We need a very full victory. That rod declared the fulness of the victory, going right on to the end — ripe fruit. It covers the whole field of resurrection life. Christ risen answers the question, How can we live? Because He lives we live. He, risen, is our life, even in the midst of death.

I know how very simple and elementary that statement is, but it is not too elementary for me. That does not set the standard, of course, but for me that is a message, and because it is a message to me I give it to you. Beloved, we cannot live as children of God in this world except in the power of the

risen life of the Lord Jesus. We *can* live, even in the midst of the full force of spiritual death, if we know Christ in risen life, fellowship with Him in His resurrection. We can live, and it is what we have got to learn to do. We have to learn from day to day how literally in our hearts to lay hold of the Lord as our life, to make it possible for us to go triumphantly through this world, this living tomb, this realm of death.

Now all that is according to the truth: all that can have the Word of God throughout brought to its support. You probably realise that more or less. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus has got to become a daily reality. It is not something that happened so many years ago. We do not celebrate something that happened centuries ago, we celebrate something that is real now in experience. I cannot sing a hymn about something that happened so many centuries ago. I can only enter into this thing if it is a reality to me now. I want the value of it to my own heart now, and then I can sing. This matter of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus has got to become an increasing reality to us in our life, to live in triumph in the midst of death.

It is so real and true to experience; very often it is wrapped up so carefully and so cleverly by the enemy that the whole tendency and peril is to put things down to the account of something else, to the fault of people, the accidents of life, the mere converging of circumstances, to blame somebody or to blame something. And so it is wrapped up to really divert us from the source of it, so that, being occupied with something which is not the original occasion, but merely a means of it, we shall not get right to the source and be able to tackle it there. If your spiritual death comes about in measure through some means seen or known, and you become occupied with the means, the channel, the instrument, the person or the thing, you have no power to deal with the matter at its fountain-head. You simply get up against people and things, and blame them and feel sorry about them. But if you recognise that that is only the wrapping of the enemy, and see that the issue is a question of life and death, and you get right to the source of it, and say, Now, although so-and-so may have been unwatchful, unwise, and in measure responsible, I see that the enemy is behind that, and the effect of this thing is intended to be that I am spiritually put out of action, brought down into death, then you are on the way to being able to master the whole situation. And how often when we get behind the thing or the person, and deal with the thing in its spiritual realm, the other thing of itself clears up, and you find that that is taken out of the enemy's hands. It is important for us to recognise the ultimate matter, and that is the one of spiritual conflict between the prince of this world and our spirits, to bring us again into the bondage of spiritual death.

That is not all, but I must close. I want to remind you that it is not only a matter of living. Chapter 18 carries this thing further. It carries it into ministry. The answer of the end of chapter 17 works two ways. It works, on the one hand, towards living in the presence of death and being delivered from death; but then it works in the other way in the matter of spiritual service. It is a glorious thing to notice that it is not only a matter of being able to maintain yourself in life, or being maintained in life, but a ministry in resurrection comes into view. Chapter 18 brings the whole matter of spiritual ministry in resurrection in a new way before the Lord's people. Aaron, his sons, and the Levites, on the ground of this great miracle of resurrection come into a spiritual ministry. It is not necessary for me to remind you that the Levites are, in representation, all the people of God. They represent all the people of God, in consecration, in separation unto the Lord and their ministry is the ministry of all the Lord's people, and all the Lord's people have their ministry in the Levites. In the New Testament you do not divide the Body literally. Here it is a principle, a type, an illustration of a spiritual reality. In the New Testament it is Christ and His own. If you want the proof of that, read your Letter to the Hebrews again, and you will find, in the very first chapters of that Letter the Lord Jesus, who comes in as the greater than Aaron, speaks again and again of His own as being brethren, children: "I and the children ..."; "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren ..."; "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus ...". And there Christ is seen as "a Son over God's house, whose house are we". It is a priestly family that comes in with the New Testament. The letter to the Hebrews makes it perfectly clear that that is all on resurrection ground. He, through death, has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil and delivered all those who all their lives were in bondage through fear of death. On the ground of resurrection this priestly family comes in with Him as its Head. That is Numbers 18 quite clearly. And so spiritual ministry comes in, not for a class, but for all the Lord's people. If there is any difference between the sons of Aaron and the Levites it is only a measure spiritually, and not a class. It is approximation to maturity, as represented by the sons of Aaron, but the ministry of the House of God is spread over all the Lord's people. Every one of you (take this to heart) stands now, in the New Testament day, in the position of the priests and the Levites of Numbers 18. That is a privilege and also a responsibility.

Now, of course, your mental difficulties will be as to the nature of ministry, and you will perhaps be asking questions. You may ask, Have I got

to preach, have I got to be on the platform, taking meetings? No, it does not mean anything of the kind. It does mean that you have a ministry spiritually, by your very relationship to the living Lord. Oh, that we could get delivered from this mechanical idea of ministry. The Lord has taken tremendous pains with some of us in this matter. Ministry is not someone getting Bible messages ready, Bible readings and subjects, and getting up and giving them at meetings. That is not the ministry. The Lord has shown to us that it is impossible to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the Word of God, in truth, unless we have the fruit of Christ's resurrection in us. You have got to come, not only to the initial experience of the bud, being raised together with Christ; you have got to come to the place where the beauty of Christ in the flower is there, and then the fruit of Christ is there in ripeness. I would not come to you to minister at any time simply because there is in the Bible a good deal of interesting matter that I have seen, and I would like you to know it. My cry to God is, Forbid me to speak to this people unless you give me a word in my own heart that is meaning something to me. Ministry flows out of living union with the Lord Jesus, and if ministry is not that it is not the ministry of God. If you take on ministry in a mechanical, organised way, it will kill you sooner or later. This ministry is only possible in the power and fruit of His resurrection.

Are you knowing the fruit of His resurrection in your own heart, in your own life, so that He is really causing you to partake of the fruit of His resurrection — ripe almonds? It may be in a simple way, but you are knowing that beauty, that unction, that fellowship with the Lord in your own heart. If you are, you need not worry about ministry; that will show itself. The Lord will find ways for you. I have no doubt whatever but that when the Lord gets a child of His into a place where they are really in their own hearts enjoying the fruit of the risen Lord, the Lord will make contacts with that life which will be fruitful, and that will be ministry. He knows where there is someone who is just longing for a taste of the fruit of His risen life, and He will make the contacts. That does not exempt us from being ready, anxious to be used as the Lord will, on stretch to be of service to Him, but all eagerness to minister will be in vain if we are not in resurrection with the Lord Jesus. But, being given that, ministry follows, it comes out of that.

Numbers 18 comes out of Numbers 17. The ministry of the House of God is spontaneous when there is union with Christ in risen life; the fruit is there at once.