



the
Golden
Candlestick

THE GOINGS OF GOD
THE GOVERNING CONCEPTS
OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

Part 1

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THE PURPOSE OF THE AGES

“They have seen thy goings, O God, even the goings of my God, my King, into the sanctuary” (Psa. 68:24).

“Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is a great god like unto God?” (Psa. 77:13).

“They turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward ... And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went ... they turned not when they went ... And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went; thither was the spirit to go: and the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels ... And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters” (Ezek. 1:9,12,17, 19, 20, 21,24).

“The goings of God”; this little phrase in Psalm 68 is, of course, of narrower connection than that in which we are going to use it at present.

There is undoubtedly a wider application than that in which it is set here. You will recognise that this psalm is very closely connected with the book of Numbers in which the people were ordered for progress and warfare, and in the tenth chapter of that book you have the very words with which it commences, and the goings of God referred to are there quite evidently goings in the midst of His people in the testimony. The word would be perhaps more correctly translated, “the processions of God”.

But, as I have said, we are using the phrase in a larger connection just now, reaching out back to the before times eternal and on through the ages to the consummation in the ages of the ages, and all this might very well be gathered up under the fourfold sovereignty of God: sovereign purpose, sovereign government, sovereign grace, sovereign providence. I am not going to speak of it particularly along those lines, although those things will be inherent in what is said.

My own feeling is that the Lord would lead us to view once again those governing concepts of His great divine revelation. God has given us a very great revelation from eternity to eternity, and that great revelation, that great unveiling, which He has given us runs quite clearly and distinctly along certain clearly defined lines, and it is something of those lines which I think the Lord is leading us to look at again at this time.

The purpose fixed

The first of them is this, which reaches right back before the world was — the purpose of the ages. That is a definite clause of Scripture. It occurs in Eph. 3:11, translated “the eternal purpose”, but the margin puts it more accurately — ‘the purpose of the ages’. There are some things which are for faith a very solid rock, and faith needs solid rock to rest upon. Many people seem to think that faith is something which suspends you in mid-air and dangles you between heaven and earth, so there is nothing very solid under your feet. But God has never called us to such a faith. It is a vague, false, wrong idea of faith that you go out on nothing. While that may be true so far as material things are concerned, it is not true where God is concerned. The things about which we are now speaking are things which are solid rock upon which to rest the feet of faith.

And this is a part of that rock — the purpose of the ages — that it is something fixed, that this world is not just meandering on, wandering and drifting, things just taking their course without meaning, without reason, without object. You can view things like that if you like, but if you do, you will find indeed the world has slipped from under your feet; there is nothing to rest upon; life has no meaning. And immediately you recognise that the very first thing that divine revelation gives us is this fact: (when you come with the whole revelation in the Scriptures in your hands and begin to piece it together in its right order) something very certainly fixed, and that is, a purpose for the ages.

The fact of the purpose

It is a mighty fact; not a purpose that is limited to something even within the universe, not just a purpose that is isolated to a certain number of people in God’s world or universe, but the fact of a purpose lying behind and governing all. This is a solid rock upon which to stand when everything seems positively to contradict that fact; things seem just to happen, things seem to be in chaos, things so often seem to be without design, and to be just

running riot without control, in an awful state of confusion and lawlessness. You look in vain naturally for any design or plan in it all, but the first thing about divine revelation is this, that the fact of a purpose of the ages is set forth and declared, is made known and established.

The purpose all-inclusive in its range and detail

Then, alongside of that there comes this further aspect of the revelation, that it is all-inclusive. This purpose of the ages is all-inclusive. That is, it comprehends all things in range and in detail, that this universe is being governed by God in relation to a set purpose, and if the veil were drawn away so that we could see the ways of God, the workings of God, as we shall do in fulness eventually, and as we may do by glimpses here and there, we should see that God is making all things bend to the realisation of a purpose. He really is governing all things in connection with that end which He has set and fixed as an unshakeable and immovable rock of eternal intention. It is going to be; that is what God determined, and all things shall come within the compass of that sovereign determination. Eventually it will be found that nothing has really worked against that purpose, but worked towards it. If it were possible to take the alternative view that some things can work against the purpose of God positively and finally, we have to admit a defeated God. So as to the range of things, all things shall come within the compass of the divine government, a government in relation to His purpose.

As to details, that also is shown to be true. For those who are the called according to His purpose, God works in all things good (Rom. 8:28). The things are not good, and they do not all proceed from God. Many of them, probably the majority of them, proceed from an altogether different quarter, they come from the devil; but God takes hold of them and makes them work according to His purpose. Sooner or later we shall be compelled to arrive at that for our salvation from despair or from a fatalistic attitude, from utter confusion and bewilderment. We shall be compelled to come back and say that, even in the details God knew what He was doing and God had held that. Sovereign purpose was at work. But, of course, you can only discern that dimly when you know what the purpose is.

The nature of the purpose

You have to have some knowledge of the nature of the purpose before you can believe or understand in a little way that God is governing all things in relation thereto. I am not saying that you can at once go and apply this

and see how it just does solve every riddle, that you will immediately find that, by using this key, all the doors open up and you have an explanation, but I am saying this, that for those who are in the light of the purpose, this key will open many doors, solve many riddles, answer many questions and clear up many perplexities.

What is the nature of the purpose? Well, again, the revelation is very clear, and, in this matter, very full. The nature of that purpose of the ages is the divine glory in terms of Sonship in His Son, comprehending a whole family of sons. Perhaps that is a little too involved. Divine glory — that is the end and the issue of all things as to range and detail. If you cannot get any further than this in the matter, you can at least get this far and say, Well, the stage is well set for the Lord to get a lot of glory. The very problems, the strangeness, the abnormality of the experiences of the children of God come within that divine sovereignty of purpose, to create or produce a situation in which God will get a lot of glory. Is He not working on this principle all the time, that by the issues of all things, He is magnified, He is glorified? Not until you get out on the other side do you recognise how much and how wonderfully the Lord has wrought, but He is governing all things in relation to His purpose which is His own eternal glory in Christ Jesus and all who are in Christ Jesus.

Hannah's song after the birth of Samuel is an example of what we are saying. The whole thing is there gathered up into a small cameo or example. The situation of Hannah's life was an exceedingly difficult one as you know. She was one of two wives, and the other wife, Peninnah, just went on the ordinary normal way. There were no particular perplexities and difficulties in her life. She had a family, and was perfectly satisfied along the ordinary natural line. But Hannah's was not by any means an ordinary natural line. Then the Lord intervened, and after His intervention and its issue, she sang that song, and if you read it, you will naturally say, 'Why, this woman is suffering from hysteria, she is saying wild things! Really, the situation does not justify the things that she is saying.' That is how it looks naturally. She talks about the barren having borne seven, but she has only got one little boy. Her enemies are brought to shame. Then she goes on with so much about the divine sovereignty bringing down those who were exalted, bringing them low, and picking up those that were abased; the divine activities, sovereign activities in life. The Lord "bringeth low, He also lifteth up"; He "killeth, and maketh alive"; and on she goes like that. But what does it all amount to? It is a complete reversal of the whole situation, and it amounts to this, that when you get to the other side where you are able to recognise God as having been in the whole, not just in the deliverance, not just in the intervention but

in all that lay before that, all the unnaturalness of life, the abnormality of experience, all that which was so altogether other than ordinary people have, and see that God was in that, then you recognise that in the activities of God there is something very much extra to the natural, and it comes out to this, that God created a most difficult, unnatural, abnormal situation in order to lift things onto a very much higher level than the natural. Here is Peninnah: it is all natural and she has gloated over it, but Hannah is rejoicing not in being brought just to her level, but, because things were so contrary to nature, so altogether impossible in that realm. She is on a very much higher level and she can see that her one little boy is worth seven of the others. That is what she says in effect. "Hath borne seven". She is saying, Why, this boy is worth seven of all the others! Why? Because he represents the sovereignty of God over a situation which was utterly impossible unless God intervened, and that very situation created the occasion for God to get sevenfold glory.

Of course, there is a lot more to it than that, but it is the issue that so often in the life of those who are called according to purpose, things are anything but normal and ordinary and natural. We have experiences and situations which all go wrong according to natural regulations and laws. Is it not true? How much we should avoid and escape if we were of the world. How much more normal and ordinary life would be in attaining our ends, avoiding difficulties and perplexities, but because we are called according to *the* purpose, there is a divine designing that things go wrong from our standpoint. They are not normal, and oh, how our natural hearts long for a more normal existence! Are you not all the time craving for that? If only things would be more normal! Everything we touch seems to get difficult. Other people can do it and it goes through. Immediately we touch anything, well, expect trouble! We are denied many things that could be got in ordinary ways, and we have many difficulties which would never have come to us but for the calling according to His purpose. That purpose is His glory, and the outcome of it all is that there is a transcending of situations and conditions which are thoroughly extraordinary, by which He is glorified. In the end God has got a great deal more along that line than He would have got if our lives had run in normal channels.

But then that is on the surface. Get inside of that. Why this course of things? Not just to cause us to burst with some spontaneous word of praise and to keep us in a realm of excited exclamations of how wonderful the Lord is; it is for something deeper than that. All that He permits is working in two directions. Firstly in ourselves; it is working in us something. It is working patience, experience, it is doing a great moral thing in us, making a great difference. In a word, being under the divine control and not just being the

vicissitudes of life with which all people have to reckon, but being under the divine control, the tribulation and the suffering is working Christ-likeness and therein is God glorified in the moral reconstituting of His universe from the centre, and remember the elect is the very core of God's universe. It is there that He is concentrating His transforming activities.

But there is that other direction. In the great realm of spiritual intelligences which are averse to God, God is, by means of the experiences of the church, getting immense glory. We do not know anything about that, only by information; but here it is in revelation. It is shown.

I am speaking about what has come out in the revelation of God: the great fact of purpose and the nature of that purpose. There is something going on that is revealed here in us in another realm whereby God is glorified through our experiences.

Let me take another example — Job. Here is a man about whom God can say some very wonderful and glorious things as to his personal character and conduct. He is a man with whom God has no controversy over his moral and religious life. God is able to testify of Job that there is not another like him in all the earth. He is a man of great possessions. One day there is a terrible, tropical storm; the result is that all his crops catch fire and they are burnt up; he has lost them all. The next day another storm occurs, and all his cattle are destroyed. His sons are involved; a raid is made and his possessions are carried off; things happening as they might happen in the natural world. Thunderstorms of intensity are not extraordinary things; and I suppose raids are not extraordinary things in those regions, they might happen any day, and that is all that Job knew about it. Things went on like that until he physically became involved. His body was stricken, but in the natural realm there is nothing very extraordinary about it. The only extraordinary thing about it was that it all came at once, one thing on top of another and that is all that Job knew about it. There was this series of calamities, starting on the circumference of his life and possessions and finishing with his own physical person, then, of course, they made inroads upon his soul and his relationship with God.

Job did not have the key to the situation while he was going through it. It was an unnatural and unusual thing for all this to happen to one man at one time, but the things themselves could be easily explained; there is nothing unnatural about them. But when the whole story is written, you have a door opened in heaven, and you have it explained from another standpoint altogether. Job did not know that Satan had appeared among the sons of God in the presence of God, and had been challenged about Job, and was given a certain liberty to touch Job's possessions and then his body. He knew nothing

about the unseen conflict. He knew nothing about the fact that God, by reason of this man's experiences, was cutting the ground completely from under the devil's feet, to leave him without a leg to stand on. And can you find the point in the book of Job where Satan disappears from the scene? You cannot, but you know that he is gone. There is a point where he is neither among the sons of men or the sons of God; he is out of court. And God was morally working out that spiritual drama of completely robbing of Satan of all his arguments, leaving him without any ground to stand upon. God was doing that in the life of a man, and the man knew nothing about that while he was going through it.

We are told distinctly by the word of God that something like that is happening. "... that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10), and in other realms something is happening by which God is being glorified by the abnormal, the unnatural, the extraordinary experiences of saints, which, while they are unnatural and abnormal when viewed in the light of other peoples' experiences, in themselves might happen to anybody. But the fact is they would not happen to other people like that who are not immediately related to God's eternal purpose. The purpose produces conditions and situations which make for the glory of God in the whole universe. It is not easy for us to accept that and to feel comforted by it, but there it is. We are called according to purpose. Something more than ordinary is bound up with our lives and with the details of our lives.

The hope of glory

You know there is one word which sums it all up: "The hope of glory". "Who called you unto his eternal glory" (1 Pet. 5:10); that glorious hope, that hope of glory. "The creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope" (Rom. 8:20). Hope governs all these things in the life of those who are called according to His purpose. There is a mighty hope bound up with it all and it is the hope of the glory of God. This, of course, is where the thing touches us, that God is not just working out things for His own personal and isolated glory through our sufferings. That is not the kind of God that He is. He has called *us* unto His eternal glory; the hope of glory is ours. The glory which is coming to God is going to be shared by us.

Now this is, as I said, a rock upon which to rest our feet. The purpose of God in the ages and through the ages is something fixed. The goings of God are in relation to that purpose. We have indicated something of the goings of God and they are all related to a fixed object which cannot be denied Him,

in which He cannot suffer loss, which He will realise. It is fixed for eternity. There is a covenant bound up with it, and, while the terms of the covenant to Israel were very far-reaching: 'If My covenant of day and night can be altered and if the sun and the moon can cease from shining, then My covenant will break down' (that is putting things on a fairly permanent basis). But the covenant with us goes beyond that. There is no need of a sun when God reaches His consummation. It says so. There is no need of sun or moon, there is no night there (Rev. 21:23,25). God based His earthly covenant upon the sun and moon, day and night, and they are fairly sound propositions; but He goes beyond that, beyond time, ages, summer and winter, sun, moon and stars. God bases His covenant upon His own eternity, before time was, before the sun, moon and stars were, before the seasons were, before the earth was; upon His purpose from eternity to eternity, and that is very solid for faith. Oh, that something of the strength of that might come into our hearts: the goings of God from eternity to eternity in relation to a purpose to which He has committed Himself and concerning which, in His sovereignty, He is governing all things.

If we could see, and when we do see, we shall see that things on the greater scale and things more particular were not just chance, not just the course of history, not just the events of time, not just the wanderings on of the world. God was governing all in relation to His Son, and sometimes we do see a little of how that is. I am not saying that they are always sympathetic sovereign governments. They have to be the other way in some matters, but who, with any perception at all, will not say that the happenings of the past few years and the very situation produced in these days by those happenings, are not under sovereign hands in relation to His purpose? You cannot get away from it. You know quite well that it is true that when God is brought into the situation and recognised and referred to, even things outside of the specific purpose, things outside the church, change. It is the old message of the prophets. Situations are because God is left out, and we have seen it again and again how even in that world, where God is not the Lord and Saviour in the sense in which He is to us, nevertheless, He responds marvellously in interventions to a recognition and acknowledging of Himself. There is sovereignty which extends over all, and what is it all for? Just to draw into line with His purpose, to give His Son His rightful place, that God in all things shall be glorified through Jesus Christ. That is the Scripture.

Well, for us the sovereignty works in that and more direct ways of God's glory and God's purpose, and if you are at this time passing through darkness and shadows and it does not look as though there is very much glory coming along your way of life and you do not see how this is coming out

to the praise of His glory, well, take it as an established fact that, it is, it must, God's word says so. The revelation is, in the first place, of a purpose which governs everything, and particularly the lives of those who are called according thereto; the goings of God are there. *God is going on*, and He is going on in relation to the purpose of the ages.

THE UNDEVIATING GOINGS

Reading: Psalm 68:24; Ezek. 1:9,12,17,19,20,21,24.

We are occupied with a comprehensive outline of the divine unveiling. God has given us in the Scriptures a revelation of His mind from eternity to eternity, working itself out through the ages, and in our previous meditation we were thinking about that phrase in Eph. 3:11 (margin) — “the purpose of the ages”.

Now, to begin with, we will say a little about the goings of God in relation to the purpose, and when we come to consider the goings of God, we find ourselves in the presence of that which is absolutely undeviating as to its direction and its object. Those fragments in the first chapter of Ezekiel’s prophecies stress that factor very much. These wheels go straight forward; they do not turn as they go. It is a going. You are tremendously impressed, as you read that chapter, with a going. There is something going, going, going. It is tremendous, this going.

It is undeviating, so far as the object is concerned. As to the goal, there is no deflecting, there is no turning. It is all the time pressing towards the goal, on towards the mark.

Perpetual in mind

So far as the goings are concerned, these goings are perpetual in mind. I know that in the chapter there is a point at which it looks as though there is a stop. “When they stood, they let down their wings.” It is just a point much less than the goings. The goings are referred to continuously, but there is an intimation that there is a pause at times. But what I want to indicate is this, that, though there may be a pause for a reason at times (and we shall touch upon that in a moment) — in the mind of God His goings are unceasing. There really is no pause in the divine goings in relation to that purpose. That is, God does not rest, God does not stop, God does not allow Himself to be held up, there is nothing that can stay Him. There may be many things in the way to obstruct and oppose, but God does not skirt around them. He will go

through them. God is going on. There is never a time in the history of this world when God has ceased to be active in relation to His object, when He has stopped. In His mind, He is going on. However it may be here for specific objects, nevertheless, God has not given up, and God has not come up against something that holds Him up, and God has not taken a rest and said, 'It does not matter just now, we will give it a rest, we will suspend operations for a time.' No, He is going on all the time.

I do not know how that impresses you, but it is a very important thing. We started our previous meditation by pointing out what a rock it is for our feet, to know, to be assured, that God is working to a purpose and, in His sovereignty, governing everything in relation to a purpose and we are called according to that purpose. It is a tremendous strength to know that that is why things are not just drifting willy-nilly. There is nothing like that of indefiniteness in our relationship with God. There is something quite clearly defined, outlined and fixed in the eternal counsels of God, and, as Paul says, "who worketh all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). "The *counsel* of His will". The will, if you look at the context, is immediately connected with the eternal purpose. Surrounding that fragment, this idea, this conception, and this statement as to eternal purpose is mentioned several times, then His will, and then, He "worketh all things after the counsel of His will". Not the councils of His will. The councils took place before times eternal, but now His will is dictating His course, counselling Him. His will counsels that this and that shall be done, this course shall be followed, that this is necessary. His will counsels it, and He works according to the counsel of His will, counselled by His will, by His purpose. It is tremendously strong, very rich. Here is God with a fixed purpose which is His eternal will, and that will dictates all God's activities in relation to all things. He works all things by the dictation of His will or His intention or His purpose. What a strength that is once it becomes a part of us — not of our philosophy of life or of Christianity, not just our theory, but when it really becomes a part of our constitution. This is a thing which to us is like a surely gripping anchor. God is working all things in relation to a definite purpose, and the immediate and most direct application of that fact is to them that love Him. Well, He is getting on with it. The goings of God are in that connection and that direction, and therefore in the mind of God His goings are perpetual, unceasing.

Periodic in meaning

But then there is that which looks like a contradiction of that. They are periodic in meaning. You do not understand that till I explain what I mean.

From time to time God's goings become applied to new situations, new demands, new conditions, and you find that at certain times God is moving His going in one way or another. He varies at times His goings, and you find in the history of the ages periods marked off in which the goings of God took this form or that form. They pause for this particular occasion. At the moment, they are found dwelling upon this particular object, in relation to this particular situation, what we have before called divine reactions. That is, God reacting to a situation which has arisen, and those reactions of God are clearly seen as time-marks in the ages when there is a deviation on the part of His people from the straight course of the divine goings. Those goings, in a sense, stay to come upon that situation with a mighty reaction.

You see it in the history of the church; the church from time to time has deviated on various matters, left the main thoroughfare of those goings of God, and certain particular weaknesses have come in, certain marked losses have taken place, and God has reacted to that situation at that particular time. God has stayed, to use human language, to recover that — and so we find specific movements of God at specific times because of specific digressions, and it is as though the wings were let down. And always remember that when God goes He is lifted up from the earth; God's goings are never merely earthbound, they are related to heaven. An earth-touch, as we have often said, is a deadly thing. You get the church touching the earth and you see its arrest. It is related to the earth, but it is something between. Psalm 68 brings that very fact in. The goings of God in Psalm 68 are marked at one point from Sinai to Zion, and if you look closely, you will see that that is not just an earthly movement as in Israel. You will see there is a spiritual side. It is from what is earthly to the heavenly. Sinai is always earthly, the Jerusalem which is below. In Galatians, Paul links with Sinai, the Jerusalem which is above, which is Zion. It is an upward movement from Sinai to Zion. God is moving from the earthly to the heavenly.

It is at times as though God says, 'We must stay a moment. My people have got out of the direct way of My goings, we must deal with this; they have lost something, they have lost the glorious hope, that blessed hope; they have lost the anticipation of the coming again of the Lord Jesus.' There was a time when the church lost that, and losing that, well, how can the Lord go on? And so He had to pause to put that right, and there was a mighty reaction of God. You find a period marked when the Lord was everywhere making His servants speak about the coming again. It was a time note of God. They lost the glorious revelation of the church which is His Body, it came down to be an earthly institution. The Lord paused and reacted to that and brought back the great revelation of the church, the Body. So you can see it in various

connections. Yes, even in evangelism; the Wesleys were a mighty movement of God to pause, to recover something which had been lost. The goings of God are like that — periodic in meaning, while perpetual in mind. He is always of a mind to go on, in His mind He is going on, but at times He has to pause, and, while that is a statement of truth, of something interesting, it is something that we must be very much alive to. God has not reached the end yet, ‘the Lord has yet more light and truth’ and a great deal more ‘to break forth from His Word’, and we must not box the compass of revelation and think we have it all. God is yet going on, however much He may have given, however much we may have received. It may be that you feel that you have as much as you can cope with, yet God is going on. There is a lot more yet. There will be a new crisis leading to something further in the goings of God. Let us always seek to be so much under the government of the sovereignty of God that we shall be found in the timings of God, at the points of God, in the particular emphasis of God for this time, and today perhaps the most outstanding tragedy of the whole church is this, that men do not know what to say to the times.

There is no message for the times, there is no voice anywhere today in the church speaking to the time. It has no distinctive message for today. It has its general message, quite right and true, but it does not say with a prophetic voice what God would say to this hour. The church is somewhere a long way behind the goings of God. If the church were abreast of the goings of God, it would have a message for every hour, for every new stage. Today in this terrible situation in the world, the church would have something to say to it, to the nation and the nations and to its own. May it not be that the Lord even now is pausing to recover? Is there not a sense in the heart of so many of the servants of God that God must do some new thing, God must speak anew somehow, God must come in in an altogether new way? Yes, that sense is true, is right, but then the trouble is that the church does not get down before God to get from Him what He wants to say, and may it not be so true that all too few have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches? God speaks and acts periodically to meet specific situations and needs. If we do not hear, there is going to be a great deal of loss. Whereas the mass of His people have no ear, are not ready to hear the immediate present-hour speaking of the Spirit the Lord would speak right inside the mass and find him that hath an ear and him and him, and make them the nucleus of His reaction to the present situation. The reaction must rise from within the company of the Lord’s people. Ah yes, and there is a remnant of the remnant in Malachi, the whole remnant that came back has now deviated again and it is of the remnant that the Lord has to say, “Ye are cursed with a curse” (Mal. 3:9).

It is a terrible thing to think that it was a remnant who got to that condition in Malachi. Then the remnant has a remnant within the remnant. “They that feared the Lord spake one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name” (Mal. 3:16). They were the instrument of the divine reaction to the more general situation.

And so it often happens that the Lord has to pause until He has a nucleus. He may work on the main circumference and nothing happens, no ear to hear; He may come more inward, still there is not that sensitiveness necessary, but He finds some. The challenge comes at this particular period, point, in the goings of God when He would say something so needed by His people. Are we giving Him an ear, are we alive to God? His goings are bound up with those who are going with Him. He is not going on alone, He is not going on without what is necessary to Him, and all the way through He has moved to get someone to go with Him, or some nucleus to go with Him; an Abraham to go with Him in His eternal goings; a nation, Israel, and then out of a nation — Psalm 68 provides it all. If I were to stay with Psalm 68 alone, I would get all I am saying to you, “There is little Benjamin” (v. 27) — an elect out of the elect. The whole nation is brought down to little Benjamin and some of Judah marked out as distinct from all the rest in the goings of God. It is like that. It is not that these, the few, are more elect than anyone else, but that they are of the elect thought, the elect mind, they are approximating to the thought of the election, they have embodied the purpose of election. It is not just election in itself, and so they represent what all the elect ought to be. No, but God tarries to get a company to really go on with Him and He makes that company the example of His purpose, the example to all others of His purpose. That is what I mean by the periodic movement of God as to meaning to meet specific demand for a new situation.

Then again, in this Ezekiel chapter, I seem to be contradicted when it is noted that there are wheels within wheels, and when they turned these turned. Here you have a turn without a deviation. We have taken hold of that phrase — “a wheel within a wheel” — and made it to mean something that is inside something else; something is presented to you, but there is something that is not presented to you — it is something inside, it is wheels within wheels. But that is not what is meant in Ezekiel. There is a wheel and inside that wheel another at right angles to it, so that in these goings it has not to swing round, change its course; it can just come that way. It is straightforward without a curve all the time. God in His eternal goings does not go on an uneven course, and He does not have to curve round for some purpose. Whichever way He goes, it is straightforward. Of course, Ezekiel’s

prophecies are themselves an illustration of that. The goings of God were straightforward with Israel, but then Israel failed Him. It is a terrible picture here of Israel's delinquency, failure, apostasy, so there is Chaldea up there to the North. Suppose God's goings with Israel are from West to East and that is the way He would go with Israel, but Israel does not go on with Him, so He has to commit Israel into the hands of the Chaldeans there in the North, so the wheels can turn this way and get His purpose through Chaldea to bring Israel again right into the land. It is not deviation; it is straightforward in object all the time. The object is always in one direction.

Particular in application

The goings of God are particular in application. That is, His goings will be governed by the situation which arises. His object will still be in view, but He will make this particular application of His goings as the situation arises. I think I can help you to grasp that because we have an example here in our very present method or way of speaking. There are times when it is important that, in His eternal goings, the Lord should be placing great and repeated emphasis upon objective truth, upon the subjective side of things. Where the Lord has to deal with the inner life of His people, the need for the application of great truths like the cross to the natural life arises. He is seeking to bring that home, the necessity for the meaning of the cross in the setting aside of the life of nature, in the ruling out of the self-life and dealing perhaps, with sins in the life, or the tendencies and the strains within the Lord's people, and the Lord sets His emphasis upon the subjective side of things. You can have too much of that and it can become infinitely dangerous turning yourself in upon yourself all the time with this awful introspection which leads to neurosis and nervous breakdowns, the false application of truth. Then there comes a time when God sees that that is becoming dangerous and so He takes up the opposite line and for a time He is laying stress upon the objective to restore the balance or to preserve the balance. His purpose is to bring us first of all from the earthly into the heavenly, and then to deliver us from the over-emphasis upon the personal and the subjective into the great reality, and universal and heavenly, the objective.

The Lord is specific in His goings from time to time. In the application of His goings He is particular at different times. If we are walking with the Lord, if we are in the life of the Spirit (Ezek. 1), we will know when the Lord says, 'Enough of that emphasis, enough of your occupation with that. You are getting into dangerous realms; you will do yourself a lot of harm even with the truth, if you force it.' Truth can do you harm if you become obsessed with

a particular emphasis. If you are always taken up with your wretched self which has to be crucified, it will do you harm. If we are walking in the Spirit, we shall know. The Lord will say, 'That is enough, come out into something bigger beyond yourself'; and so we are saved by the next particular emphasis and application of the goings of God.

It is very important to know and recognise that. Oh, listen, you can never really have an adequate motive for dealing with the personal life and the sins in the personal life if you are dealing with them as things in themselves. If you are just occupied with the thing because it is something wrong, you have not an adequate motive for dealing with it. If you come back to all these things from the standpoint of tremendous and glorious purpose, you will see God has called us to something very great. He has given us a great revelation, a great vision of a great purpose, and that is what is in view. Then surely the emphasis upon the things that have to be cleared up has something behind it which is far more saving than if you just had to deal with these things in themselves, as things by themselves. What is the real motive? Suppose the Lord had given you a great ministry in relation to His vast purposes of grace, do you not feel that the safeguarding of that ministry and all that it means to so many others would be a far stronger motive for dealing with wrong things in your life than if you did not have that and you were only left with your wrong things? You only get an adequate motive for dealing with wrong things when you see how they are related to something very much greater.

And so His applications are particular. He, so to speak, goes *there* in His goings to the one end, and He goes *there*, but it is all with the one end in view; the wheels can just take Him straightforward. It is an impossible thing really to explain and define what is being said here, that God is always going straight forward, but He has so constituted His goings that even if He has to go this way or that which looks like being off the main road, it is not that God has to make circuits. I say that because God has anticipated everything; He is never taken unawares.

Whatever God has to pause for or seem to turn aside for, His goings are always straightforward. That is, He has always one object in view, and if He pauses or turns aside, it is to bring back. That is the earthly aspect of it, but the heavenly is that it is always straight on.

But remember that these periodic meanings and these particular applications have to do with things which arise — specific interests, either in the history of the church as it deviates from the main road or in the emphasis within the church as to the truth for the hour, the need for the moment. His goings include all that, they cover all that, they are all in the goings of God. There is always the persistence of God towards His object. His goings are

undeviating in their ultimate direction and object. He is always going in His mind — never tarrying, never being arrested, yet at certain given times giving meaning to His goings of a particular character, dealing with situations which arise with a particular emphasis to meet that situation.

This is not all objective; we can discern this in our own spiritual history. What is true of the whole must be true of the individual. How do we look at our spiritual history? Surely like this. We came at some time into a sense that there was a purpose for which we had been called. We were not just called to be Christians, but there is something there, some real purpose in it. We may never have been able to define that purpose, but we have a sense of purpose. Now we live for something, now there is a meaning in life. Something in our hearts has gripped us as an objective for which we have a being at all. Then from that time, if we have walked with the Lord, we have noticed how the Lord has brought us into touch with this which has just met our need up to that point, or into touch with this which disillusioned us and made us very conscious of something needed to meet that inner sense, for the Lord works in all sorts of ways. Sometimes we have been led from this to that just to make us heartily sick of the whole thing and to bring us back and say, 'Lord, that does not meet my need and I must know from you exactly how that need is to be met, how the purpose that you have planted in my heart is to be reached. You bring me into touch with that which will meet and minister to that central essential thing of my calling.' So the Lord does move in so many ways. We come as far as that period. We feel we have all the Lord could ever give anybody. The Lord could not show us any more than this, it is so wonderful. Then the whole thing comes to a point where — No, this is not all, and that ceases to be all that it has been; that is, it ceases to fill the whole of our need, our need has grown. Is that the story of your bookshelves? Years ago in your Christian life you bought and read certain books, and you thought they were wonderful. Go to your bookshelf and look at them now and you find there is nothing to bite on, nothing there. God has gone on, and gone on in you. Oh, if there were the goings *with* God as well as the goings *of* God we should always be moving, moving ever into greater fulnesses. Oh, never come to the place where you feel you know it all, you have reached all. Ask the Lord to save you from that at any cost, to keep you in His goings. So many who have been so greatly used of God have just become settled, stagnant, fixed; they have their limits. Oh, God does not want that. May He keep us ever alive to Him in the goings so that it is ever greater fulnesses of Himself, for the end is the fulness of Christ.

THE WAYS, VARYING NOT IN COURSE, BUT IN METHOD

Reading: Psalm 68:24.

We come now to speak of the ways of God's going. God is going, but we are able to trace something of those goings of the ways of God. We shall see them in a fourfold connection. Here the methods are varying. The methods of His goings vary very largely because of what comes in which might not have come in had things kept wholly in His way. But because things have deviated from the one clear direct way of God and God has anticipated those deviations and already provided against them, His ways have to be in some respects different from what He would have had them, different from His original intention.

Creation

But, of course, in the first of these ways that does not apply. When we come to speak of the creation, that is so far as the ages of this world are concerned, that is the first chosen and direct step in the goings of God. Let us keep the object, the ultimate goal, clearly in view all the way along in connection with everything that has been said so that nothing becomes something in itself. Keep Christ in ultimate universal fulness clearly before your eyes all the time, all things summed up in Him, all things declaring His pre-eminence. Keep that in view, and then move by the ways of God on to that great goal, and His first way is the creation.

We are familiar with such passages as John 1:3 "All things were made through Him (the Lord Jesus); and without Him was not anything made that hath been made." "The world was made through Him" (John 1:10). "In Him were all things created . . . all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and he is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:16-17). "Through whom He made the ages" (Heb. 1:2). "Thou, Lord, (this is a reference to Christ) in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth,

and the heavens are the works of thy hands” (Heb. 1:10). “... for Whom are all things, and through Whom are all things” (Heb. 2:10).

We can see by those passages alone that the creation was right in direct line with God’s ultimate intention concerning His Son. You see, the whole created universe was to be God’s gift to His Son as an inheritance. That word ‘inheritance’ and ‘heritage’ is very important, significant and interesting if you will take it up. But that gift of a created universe as an inheritance for His Son was intended to be a *comprehensive embodiment of the divine thoughts*, a means of expressing something spiritual which is according to the very heart and nature of God. The creation in the intention of God *exists for the interests of God’s Son*, and according to that comprehensive mind of God, everything in the created universe was intended to be a testimony of God to His Son, and it will be like that in the end — God’s testimony to the excellencies of His Son borne by the whole universe and borne by every fragment of the universe.

Now that opens up a tremendous field which has simply enraptured my heart as I have contemplated it — a field, of course, which we shall never cover, but as an indication, the whole created universe is a comprehensive embodiment of signs. That is, everything signifies something more than itself, carries with it a meaning which does not lie just on the surface, and that meaning is a divine spiritual thought of tremendous potency.

You begin to move about the universe, then, and you find that the Bible will be an excellent guidebook and handbook. You take what one writer calls ‘the ordinances of the heavens’. “In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth” (Col. 1:16). Now, if all things in heaven and earth were created in the interests of God’s Son, their existence is only justified in so far as they serve those interests. When God’s Son is slain, the sun hides its face and “darkness came over the whole land ... the sun’s light failing” (Luke 23:44-45). The sun was created as a sign, a symbol, of a divine thought concerning the glory of the Son of God. Let that Son be rejected by this world and hung upon a tree and cast out of the very world that He created, and the sun loses the very meaning of its being, and there is darkness.

We find a lot of things like that when we come to the Word. In Matthew 24 — you know it is the chapter concerning those things which would ultimately come upon this earth, upon the creation, the judgments in relation to the rejection of God’s Son and then in relation to His coming into His inheritance, and you read things like this — “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light” (Matt. 24:29); “the moon shall be turned into blood” (Acts 2:20) — strange symbols, strange language. This means

that there is no place for the sun, no need for the moon, no vocation for the moon if the Son of God is rejected. Their existence and their function is at once undercut when that for which they were created is set aside. Matthew 24 has two sides: the Son of God set aside by the world and then the Son of God asserting His rights in the world, and by those two sides you are led to see that those very ordinances of the heavens have their meaning. They do not function; death reigns. The moon is turned into blood: there is death, carnage, destruction, chaos and bloodshed. It is like that when He is finally set aside by the world: “The sun shall be darkened”; “the moon shall be turned into blood.”

When you come to Revelation 12, that so well-known chapter, you have a woman clothed with the sun. What is this? Oh, the sun is there. The sun is the symbol of the absolute supremacy of Him who is on the throne. And now the great red dragon challenges that throne as represented by the woman, the church, and the man-child. The woman clothed with the sun triumphs over all those forces because that sun is symbolic of the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus. Then come those great words: “They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony.” It is the final triumph of the church, and right in the light of the sun, the testimony of the Lord Jesus and His right to reign, the man-child is caught up to the throne. It is all highly symbolical, but you can see that there is the indication that these bodies of the heavens, as well as all these things on the earth, have a significance beyond themselves pointing towards God’s Son.

Come to the end of the Revelation, chapters 21 and 22. Twice over it says that they have no need of the sun; the sun has done its work. I do not know how literally this is to be taken, but the spiritual significance is clear. They have no need of candle, neither light of the sun. The testimony of the natural is finished and that to which it testified has come, for the Lamb is the light thereof. The sun has pointed to the Lamb, and the Lamb is now absolutely and finally triumphant, and so the sun simply walks out. It says, as it were, ‘I have done my work; I have pointed to Him all the time. Now He has come and there is no need for me any more.’ You have to interpret that spiritually, but there is the principle. Everything created by God is pointing towards His Son, His Son’s interests, and when those interests are recognised, then how often He has testified to His good pleasure by the very elements. And how often — and perhaps you can see it more clearly on the opposite side when the interests of His Son have been set aside and rejected, has God shown His displeasure by the elements. I think this may possibly be the key to a good deal. There never was a time when the rights of God’s Son were more universally denied Him than our time, and there never was

a time when the elements were more confused, conflicting, uncertain and treacherous. Is it wrong to interpret it in that way? We are wondering what has gone wrong with the weather, what has gone wrong with things. They are all topsy-turvy; we cannot reckon on anything. Are we getting near the end? Is that it? I do not want to falsely interpret things, but may not this be a ground of prayer even about weather. If He is sovereign Lord and has created all things in the interests of His Son, is there not a basis of prayer that, when the interests of God's Son require it, God can order the very elements? We are not to say when good weather or bad would serve the interests of God's Son most. God is sovereign and knows best and will choose His own way, but may it not be a ground of prayer. I just suggest it as a question; it comes within this compass. Here are the ordinances of the heavens, as the Scriptures call them. As to the sun and moon, the Scriptures say they are the faithful witnesses in the heavens (Psa. 89:36-37). The word witness simply means testifier. They have a testimony and they are faithful witnesses of a testimony, and that testimony is concerning God's Son.

If God is governing those ordinances and those witnesses in the interests of His Son, we may expect two things, that, in the end time, when His Son is most thoroughly rejected, it will be a day of phenomena, a day when extraordinary things will happen. "The stars shall fall from heaven" (Matt. 24:29), meaning, of course, that these things which were there testifying to the Son of God have no longer any need to be there, so today, because the Son is set aside, they fall out of their function. It is going to be like that. The whole of the natural creation is going to be in an upheaval in the end because the interests of God's Son will be set aside. That is one side. But in the next age, the millennial age, we will not complain of having no sun then, we will not have any reason to complain of bad weather. Everything will be ordered by God from the very heavens in relation to His Son, who will then be Lord and King, and this earth is promised to be a very glorious place then, a place worth living in. You will not be contemplating emigration then! Everything is bound up with this one central object. One does not want to be fanciful: God knows this ministry is far too costly to be whittled away in fancifulness. But here are these statements of Scripture; they bear down upon everything. I have only given you mere fragments of the suggestions that are in the Word of God about this whole universe being linked with God's Son as His inheritance and to be the embodiment of those divine thoughts for His Son. You can get on with that business; it will carry you through all the rest of your days. If you can only get your eyes opened, everywhere you will see something signifying God's thought in the creation. It may be marred in its form, but behind it there is an intention.

And there are so many ways in which this comes right up to really helpful and valuable application. We have spoken of the woman clothed with the sun; that is, the glorious end of her triumph. But you know where that woman began. The woman began when the sun went down. When the sun went down, God caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam and out of him He formed a woman. It was in that hour of darkness on the cross when the sun went down that the church was born out of that One, and the church therefore represents the mighty resurrection life and power of Christ, because the Son has come back in full splendour out of the darkness, out of the clouds of the cross. The woman is clothed with the sun. It was out of His dark night of eclipse that the church had her birth, as did Eve in the hour when the sun went down. The church comes right into the good of that resurrection glory of the Son of God, and at last takes her place in heaven where the dragon and his whole hosts are cast out and no place is found for him any more. The woman takes her place there in the glorious triumph of His resurrection life, the sun is back shining in his splendour.

These are divine thoughts behind things. God has simply caused everything that has come from His hand to be impregnated with something more that is of His own spiritual nature, so that the spiritual is the ultimate, the real. Paul says, “We look not at the things which are seen ... but ... the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). That is all we can say at the moment about the creation. It is an indication. It is a full-orbed symbolism, something signified concerning His Son and the goings of God. Do you not think it will be a grand thing when we have a full understanding? I have often said as the result of my own soliloquism that I am scared of that day of full illumination. Here am I fumbling about this Bible, going to and fro in it, and thinking I have a bit of light sometimes and that bit of light makes me wonder. And the day is coming when that book is just going to lie right open into fulness, and I am going to say that all the light I had was darkness in comparison with what there is there. The Bible defeats you all the time. A suggestion comes to you from it that makes you wonder and worship and thrill, and you say, ‘This is an unfathomable ocean!’ But wait till that time when, with full understanding, you see it all, and take it right out in the universe as your guidebook, and go round God’s created universe — every fragment, every flower, tree, every part of your body — and read God’s thoughts into the meaning of the Scriptures. That is going to be the basis of worship throughout all the ages. We see a little bit now of the hidden meanings of God and we worship. The creation was for that purpose, that it might bring us to worship God and the Lamb as it divulges its spiritual secrets and meanings, all pointing to Him.

Incarnation

We go on for a little while concerning the incarnation. This is another of God's goings, God's ways in His goings, and whereas the creation is quite original, quite certain, as to being one of God's ways. I do not know about the incarnation. There is a mystery here, the mystery as to what would have happened had Adam not sinned. We know what was intended, that God's Son should have come in and inherited all things. How that would have been reached, we do not know, but we have the fact that God's Son became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we know something of why. Man was the headstone of creation, that creation which was to be an inheritance for His Son. Man was the headstone, the crown of that creation. In Him the inheritance was to find its climax and its most glorious and living expression. Yes, the material creation as glorified will be presented to Him, but it is man glorified that will be the greatest factor in the inheritance of God's Son. And seeing that man was the headstone of that creation to be Christ's inheritance, man must, to begin with, become a partaker of the divine nature. God is going to give to His Son nothing which does not contain His own nature. If it lacked that, it would be a corruptible thing which could suffer death and corruption and again be disintegrated. When God presents His inheritance to the Son ultimately, it will have been placed far beyond the reach or touch of that interfering thing which brings death and corruption, leading to disintegration. It will be a glorious inheritance. In order to be that, it must partake of the divine nature. So Peter lights upon that eternal thought and says: "He hath granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Do not worry about the theology at the moment. We are not talking Deity at all. There is a partaking of divine nature which does not land into the place of Godhead. Here is the statement, "partakers of the divine nature", and the whole creation has got to be a partaker, and particularly man.

Moreover, this crown of creation for His inheritance has to be perfected into the divine likeness. The divine nature is only the basis upon which a process is pursued. There is that placed within the new-born child, that of the divine nature, upon which the Spirit of God will work, by means of which He will go on to conform us to that image so that man eventually will come to a perfected likeness to the divine thoughts which are suitable to the divine Son. We cannot conceive of anything else. It must be like that, and man must therefore, as the issue of becoming a partaker of the divine nature and being perfectly formed into the divine likeness, be crowned with the divine glory. Those are the three things which belong to man's spiritual history, which

begin in new birth, a partaker of the divine nature; a process commenced of conformity to the divine image; and a consummation in view, a crowning with glory.

The divine Son in incarnation came along that path of His relationship to the man that was to be His inheritance, the collective man, and so for the moment He dispensed with His Deity glory, came down on to man's level without glory, and adopted the pathway of man's glory. The divine nature was in Him, but we are told strange things about this very One, things which will bewilder us unless we remember, unless we keep in view that He is now, in the incarnation, taking our place. "Though He was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8); He was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10). This One, Who in His Deity and divine relationship was perfect, is said here to be being made perfect through suffering. The divine nature is being drawn out against all those things which came upon Him to turn Him from the divine path. That commenced in the wilderness under that terrific assault of hell, the devil himself, to turn Him from the path which the divine nature demanded He should walk. If you want the key to it, it is simply a matter of being corrupted, corrupted from the truth. If you do anything at the suggestion of the devil, however right and necessary it may seem, even to save your life when you are starving, if it comes from the devil you may take it there is something in it that is sinister. Even necessity, as pointed out by the devil, must not govern any movements of ours. Oh, the devil can easily say, 'But it is absolutely necessary that you do this; if you don't, your very life will be lost.' It may be the most logical thing because it is necessary. But the Lord Jesus did not accept that argument at all. It has come from the devil; there is something about this that, if it is listened to, will mean deviation from the path of the divine nature which is incorruptible. The divine nature demands this way.

To be continued.

He is in the goings of God. Those goings of God are to issue in the glorifying of humanity. That course of the divine goings is based upon the indwelling divine nature, and the process is the development of that divine nature over against everything that is contrary to it, and the Lord is fighting that battle through to the end. Suggestions, entreaties, appeals, arguments, sufferings, sorrows, treacheries, everything that you can think of to try and turn Him out of that way of the goings of God, and at last He reaches the peak, the Mount of Transfiguration, and the Voice which said at the beginning of that way, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), at the end of that way says, "This is My beloved Son", still undeviating, unfaltering, still I am well-pleased, and He glorifies Him there as representative. And then He comes down to bring you and me into that. That leads to the next point in the ways of God, but the incarnation is just for that, to relate Himself to man, to take man's course through the grace of God, and by the divine nature to be conformed, perfected in some mysterious way in His case, perfected into the divine likeness in order to be crowned with the divine glory. That is our history and He worked out our history in His own Person. Surely this is the heart of the incarnation and the very explanation of those words, He "became flesh, and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14), and when He did, so far from being an isolated incident in the Bethlehem stable, it was the thing most exposed to the whole universe and all the universe was interested and taking knowledge. Angels in a mighty host took account of it, heaven looked on and joined in. Man, wise and unlearned, rich and poor, gathered round in wonder, interested in this, related in a representative way to this. Hell was interested, hell rose up through Herod as it has never risen up against anything that pointed towards this One, whether it be a Moses or any other. The seed royal was ever the object of Satan's hatred, and here He is, and so hell converges for His destruction. I say, He is the centre of the universe in the incarnation. You may follow right through and it is just like that. Heaven is constantly ministering, coming into the situation. Hell is constantly rising up; all men are gathering round; all nature joins in, the sun hides its face and a mighty earthquake takes place. This is no ordinary one; this relates to the whole purpose of God in man. That is all we can say at present about the incarnation.

It reaches right back to the eternal counsels of God in creation, why God created man. You see that incarnation glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration. That explains why God created any man. That is the explanation of the creation. It reaches right back there and it reaches right on to the end. It explains the New Testament between the book of the Acts and the book

of the Revelation. It explains all that is being said there about our spiritual nature and our spiritual course of conformity to the image of God's Son, our going on to full-growth and our sanctification. And then it explains the book of the Revelation. If you take this very thought into the book of the Revelation, it will be the key to that book. Here He is, this One, now risen and triumphant in His heavenly glory, presented in the first chapter with all His excellencies, and then He arraigns the churches before Him and says, in effect, I am not a bit concerned about how much work you are doing for Me, about your standards of right and wrong, about this and that and the other thing which seem to concern you so much. I am concerned about how you stand in the light of God's true purpose — conformity to the image of His Son, that which is to be glorified as the outworking and consummation of an indwelling divine nature.

So He begins with Ephesus. "Thou hast left thy first love". "God is love". Pursue it right through. You touch on very horrible things of which God says, "which thing I hate". There are various degrees and measures and standards, but the one thing is this One presented as the full fruit of God's work and how do you stand in the light of that? The churches have got to measure up to Christ, not to creeds, not to standards of good and bad, but Christ, and Christ glorified. Have you gone on? Is the divine nature working in you? Are you being continually conformed to the divine image? That is the challenge.

When He has dealt with the churches, He moves out to deal with the nations and it is all on the basis of the divine goal and object. And the end in the symbolic form, this corporate man in Christ, is presented as the city. "And he ... showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev 21:10-11). You have your man glorified in a collective way, and I am very impressed as we come to the end there with the way in which two words are used. It says, "And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them"; a little further on it says, "And I saw no temple therein". At a first glance, I wondered, what is this? Is this a contradiction? Then I looked closely and I saw the difference of words in the original. Tabernacle, the general place of God's dwelling; the temple, the inner sanctuary, and the Lamb is the sanctuary and He is in the midst of the tabernacle. The Lamb is the sanctuary and the church is the tabernacle. The New Jerusalem has come down and the voice says, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men"; the church as the general dwelling place and the Lamb as the inner sanctuary. God has reached His end, it is all glory. A glori-

fied church with the glory of God. To put that in the other terms, humanity perfected into Christ, God's end realised. And you know with the change of the symbolism, it is presented to Him as a bride, a wife, a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph. 5:27). Well, that can stand to embody the two points of the incarnation and redemption.

Redemption

If we were to go on further with this third way of God's movements and of His goings — redemption — we would simply say this, then you come to look closely at the whole matter of redemption, it is gathered up into a fragment — “redeemed us to God” (Rev. 5:9 AV). Redemption is so often preached as something unto man, for man. That is very good for us, but when you come to look at it from the standpoint of eternal counsel, God's goings unto His own end, for His own glory, you have to look at it from another standpoint, from heaven's standpoint, and see that redemption is unto God. “The redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph. 1:14). It is unto God, and if you look, you will see that that principle is very closely adhered to by the Holy Spirit throughout; even in the smallest details, things do not err, in a parable like the prodigal, the Lord Jesus does not err in doctrine when He tells a simple story. When He makes that prodigal begin to talk about what he has done, He makes him say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven” (Luke 15:21). In the gospel as it is preached today the emphasis is upon the idea that you have sinned against yourself, come to the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved from the results of your own sin; it is personal. But Christ says it is against heaven, it cuts across God's purpose concerning His Son, it damages the inheritance, it is against heaven. And you follow it to its source, its root, and you find it is that sinister hand always against the throne, the hand of an evil one against heaven “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance” (Matt. 21:38). You see what lies behind — there is a hand against the throne, the inheritance of the Son. Therefore “I have sinned against heaven” and redemption is unto God.

It commences with man where the necessity first commenced; man is to be redeemed. It ends with the whole creation. That is the substance of the latter half of Romans 8. You have been dealing with the redemption of man up to then; now the creation itself is to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, but when shall that be? When the manifestation of the sons of God takes place. The redeemed ones in glory, the securing of that whole glorified manhood in Christ is the signal for the redemption of the whole creation from its corruption unto God to be the inheritance of His Son.

We must point out that redemption is always by blood. Why? Because the blood is the nature and the life. His blood is incorruptible Blood, therefore it is the symbol of an incorruptible, age-abiding life, and redemption is that — unto God back to the nature of God, back to the life of God, and then capable of being glorified and it will be a glorious creation. Everything will be glorious. After all, the whole universe is a moral issue. Satan is a moral issue. That is, you have got to deal with the moral or the immoral elements in this universe and they were dealt with in the cross, and, having the very basis of his strength taken from him, the prince of this world is cast out and has nothing.

Incorporation

There remains a little word to be said on the fourth of God's ways: His way in incorporation. Remember that the goal of all the divine goings is to sum up all things in Christ, that eventually all the universe shall be centred in Him, take its character from Him and be His God-given inheritance, a glorified inheritance, a universe filled with divine glory towards which God is moving in many ways, by many means, but surely, steadily moving. His purpose is fixed and unalterable and, getting to the point of the redemption of man, there immediately arises this matter of incorporation into the Man, the risen, ascended and glorified Man.

When we speak about incorporation, it is as well just to pause and think what we mean. It is just making a part of the body corporate, constituting anew a part of something already existing. When in business we speak of incorporating one thing into another, it means that the one thing becomes lost in the other and loses its own separate identity and character and all that belonged to it as something of itself. It is swallowed up and becomes part of something else, and that is incorporating. Here Christ is that into which we, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, become incorporated. We lose our own life in His, we lose our own separateness in Him, we lose everything that constitutes us as something in ourselves in all that He is. That is what incorporation means, and in this case it is not just an external business transaction; it is an inward organic thing. It is even something more than grafting. A great deal has been done in the surgical world about grafting, but even then I do not think the simile is good enough for this, for here there is a planting right into the springs of Christ and a growing up into Him in all things as out from the very root, not putting on something from the outside at all. A lot of people think that to become a Christian you join something, you become a part of something, but that is not it at all. Incorporation is

something very much more inward and organic than that. You are planted right into Christ and in Him as the very root, and you grow out of Christ and grow up in Christ. So that incorporation is just to make us a part of one Body, the body corporate.

Now from what does incarnation take its necessity and its occasion? The occasion for incorporation into Christ is because we are not the direct seed of an unfallen Adam. If Adam had not fallen but had gone on in development, perhaps unto the point of glorification, and we had been the seed of that Adam, the whole point of incorporation would not arise. But we are not. We are the seed of a fallen Adam and we have therefore got to be incorporated into One who is altogether another. We have to be put into another. The last Adam, Christ is so altogether other than the first Adam, the two cannot live together. Any attempt to make them live together is an existence of misery and contention, and we know that in our own very being. Since Christ has come, there is warfare wherever the old Adam gets up. It is a miserable existence until he has really been brought well under. These two are never intended to live together in one body, and so we are led to the very well-known truth that Christ being another, so completely and utterly, must bring us from the one to Himself. We have got to be delivered out of the one and there is no deliverance out of Adam number one, only by death. You just cannot do this thing from the outside. There is no process known to God or man now by which we can be made according to Christ except by beginning all over again, a new creation in Christ Jesus.

Thus it is necessary for us to be taken from one kindred and race and everything that belongs thereto, and made a corporate part of an altogether other and different race of which Christ is the first and the last Adam, but the first of another creation and race. This can only be done by dying and being brought to an altogether new beginning by a life which was never possessed before, a different life. That takes us back to the incarnation and the inheritance and the divine nature.

So it comes about as we know so well from the classic passage on this matter, Romans 6, that incorporation into Christ is first by recognising that His death was our death. Yes, our sins, but also the body of sin. *We died, we were planted in the likeness of His death, together with Him, that "like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:4), raised together with Him by the operation of God.

I am not intending to speak about identification with Christ in death, burial and resurrection as a subject now, but just to point out that this is one of God's ways in which He is going towards His end. It is a part of God's

goings and you will never reach that glorious end and become a part of that glorious Body until you know very truly the meaning of union with Christ in death, and the application of that continuously as a law and a principle, but on the other hand, knowing union with Christ in resurrection, for God help the man or woman who seeks to know union with Christ in resurrection by constantly trying to crucify themselves. It is the wrong way round. You will only put to death the doings of the flesh as you know the power of His resurrection. You have no vantage ground whatever over Adam until you are on resurrection ground in Christ. So the apostle does not leave us half-way in this matter. When he says, "Reckon ye . . . yourselves to be dead unto sin", he also says "but alive unto God" (Rom. 6:11), and if you are constantly trying to work out that reckoning of yourself dead without the vantage ground of reckoning yourself alive unto God in Christ, you will be a very miserable person indeed.

Incorporation into Christ does, then, bring us to a position of power, of advantage over the enemy within.

That is all I am going to say just now on the matter of incorporation. This is a fixed way in the eternal goings of God. There is no getting on, no going on with the Lord, no going on of the Lord with us only as we come to that point of incorporation into Him and being taken down figuratively and representatively by Him, as in Him, into a death which He died once for all, and then being raised in Him to a life which is once for all, that is, for ever. There is no way towards God's end, only that way.

Chapter 4

The Sovereignty and Government: Unchallengeable and Inexorable

We pass now to the next matter in the ways of God: His sovereignty and government. That sovereignty and government are unchallengeable and inexorable.

God's sovereignty and government cannot be challenged. It is a way that God is taking and you cannot challenge Him; you dare not question His sovereign right to take that way. It is unchallengeable? In the end perfectly vindicated as being right. Now, there is quite a lot said about it in the Word of God, but it would take a whole conference to deal with it. Something like that comes up in connection with the potter and the clay. The clay must not challenge the potter — "Why didst thou make me thus?" (Rom. 9:20). God is acting sovereignly, and He must not be challenged.

And His government and sovereignty are inexorable. That is, get in the way and see what happens. It is a terrible thing to get in the way of God! Many have found it an awful thing to get in the way of God. He is going; you, nor I, nor any other combination of forces in this universe can frustrate Him. He will work and none shall hinder, and if any get in the way... You remember Stephenson and his railway engine. It was a poor specimen compared with our model locomotive; you would hardly think it had any power in it at all, but the powerful, scientific critics said to Stephenson, "But supposing a cow got on the line?!" So much the worse for the cow! said Stephenson. Yes, to get in God's way is not to gain anything.

It is good to be in the goings of God; they are sovereign, unchallengeable, inexorable. It may seem often that God is being frustrated and held up; it may seem that we are not getting through, but the story is not complete! If we really knew what God is shearing and ploughing through in His sovereignty, we would see a tremendous thing is happening.

The great inclusive example is Christ Himself in His cross. All the evil, inimical forces in this universe have combined and conspired to compass Him about, to overwhelm Him, to press Him down. The prophetic words of the Psalmist are slightly indicative of it. "They compassed me about like bees" (Psa. 118:12). Paul in the letter to the Colossians tells us what that meant spiritually. "Having put off from Himself the principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). Paul's idea of principalities and powers is very far-reaching.

He goes beyond the heads of the evil hierarchy and finishes with hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:12). Yes, the heavens are full of these evil forces, and when that One hung upon the tree, they said, We have got Him now! Let us crush Him out now! They determined that this was the end of Him. So He knew in His spirit this awful darkness, swamping, overwhelming. “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over Me” (Psa. 42:7). What an experience it must have been in the soul of our Lord, but “I will cut them off” (Psa. 118:12). He stripped off principalities and powers. And Paul says, “He raised Him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named” (Eph. 1:20-21). He sheared clean through. God did a tremendous thing in raising Him from the dead. Exercising the exceeding greatness of His power, He cleft open all the hostility in His universe and made a way for His Son right through. The point is, God’s goings are like that.

It is a good thing to be with God. We may have our discipline, our painful experiences, we may find awful frustration, but the story is not all told yet, and it is marvellous that we have gone on at all. In view of all that we have had to encounter, and in view of all that has determined to bring us to an end, it is marvellous we have gone on. God is doing something which, in the end, will be seen to be very wonderful, and it will be proved that anything or anyone getting in the way of the goings of God and therefore in the way of those who are in the train of His goings will have a poor time. They, indeed, will suffer disaster. It is tremendously important to be with God in what *He* is doing, not what we think He ought to do or what we would like to do for Him, not in our interpretations of what God would do, but in what God is doing.

Now you see, this sovereignty and government is a tremendous thing. We could start from the beginning of the Bible and see it working all through, but the very fact of it is shown in the way in which God so often makes very doubtful instruments serve glorious purposes. Listen to this. “The Most High ... Him that liveth for ever ... his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:34-35). The channel of that inspiration was a very doubtful one — it was Nebuchadnezzar. Now think about it, think about this man who stood right in the way of God’s interests concerning His Son. Nebuchadnezzar was no ally, and yet God forced through the lips of that man perhaps one of the greatest statements about His sovereignty that has ever been expressed in the Bible.

There are a lot of things like that. There have been times when I have paused in reading a certain Scripture which was very sublime, very beautiful, and said, I wonder

if that is inspired? — because of the person who uttered it. But here you are.

Think of Balaam. What is your opinion of Balaam? You have not much respect for Balaam. You know what is said about him. “He loved the hire of wrong-doing” (2 Pet. 2:15) — a contemptible, despicable person, but few more sublime things have ever come to us than those which came through the mouth of Balaam. “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob” (Num. 23:21), and the rest. A very doubtful messenger of divine truth, but the truth is there; it is divine truth all the same. That is the sovereignty of God. He will make His very enemies to tell His praises, His glories, His excellencies and convey to His people for all time His divine treasures. When Balaam said, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob”, he gave expression to the gospel of the grace of God. Sovereign grace preached by Balaam! That is sovereignty. Sovereign grace coming by the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God using an unintending instrument, one really set against God’s interests. And in Nebuchadnezzar again, here comes out the great declaration and testimony to the sovereign control of God in heaven and on earth.

And what about Job’s friends? There are some sublime things in the book of Job; they are grand, but dare I take them as from God? But I see that it is all of a piece with this sovereignty. It was one of Job’s friends, one of his critics, who said, “Lay thou thy treasure in the dust, and the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks; and the Almighty will be thy treasure, and precious silver unto thee” (Job 22:24-25). God uses such a preacher to preach sovereign compensation. It is a great truth. “Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life” (Matt. 19:29). God will see to it and will keep the balances even. His sovereignty holds those balances, and He will be debtor to no man. Sovereign compensation is preached by a friend of Job.

And what shall we say of Caiaphas? Well, the least said about him the better, excepting this, that he, being High Priest that year, prophesied that one should die for the people (John 11:51). He did not mean to; he was forced to. Sovereignty was at work to secure atonement for all by One, and Caiaphas was the preacher of it, a doubtful preacher, seeing he is the first preacher of the atonement in the New Testament. But all these are examples of how God is going on His way sovereignly governing, and He is doing it not only in spite of opposition, but by means of it.

We come back to Psalm 68 from which our title — “The Goings of God” — is taken. There is a little fragment in that Psalm which is taken by Paul and quoted in Eph 4:8: ”When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men”; and in the Psalm — “among the rebellious also”. Paul takes hold of that, and he transfers it, and brings it into its right place in the goings of God, the goings of God in the ascension of the Lord Jesus, the raising Him to His own right hand and he sees a mental picture of a thing familiar in campaigns in his time. A victorious general has overwhelmed his enemies, has made them bow, and then his enemies hand over to him a present of men who were leaders of the rebellion, they make him a present of men, “the rebellious also”. And Paul says — and you know that this is not an isolated instance of Paul’s thought about this matter — when He ascended up on high He gave a present of men and the rebellious — and I was also one of those rebellious ones. Saul of Tarsus is among “the rebellious also”, but he is in the captivity which is led captive, and firstly given to the victorious Lord and then given by the victorious Lord to the church. “And he gave some apostles ...” — a glorious picture. But see the sovereignty of God. Here is Saul of Tarsus very much among the rebellious, no one more so than he, and then that sovereignty stoops down from the heavens and catches him on the Damascus road and lays hand on him and arrests him. He leads him captive, and then He gives Him to the church as one of the apostles. Marvellous sovereignty, not only in the act of apprehending, but the sovereignty which turns a once fierce enemy to serve the very ends which he at one time sought to frustrate. No one has served more fully ends which once were the object of his destructive hatred than the apostle Paul. But that is sovereignty.

In smaller, lesser ways, that is true of us. We could go on like that through the Bible. It is very wonderful. We can see it on the other side. Herod gets in God’s way and we know what happens to him. The sovereignty is going on, is unchallengeable, inexorable.

I think I must finish there for the moment. We go back to remind ourselves. God has fixed a goal; He fixed it before times eternal. That goal is that all things shall be summed up in Christ and that He shall fill all things; that God is going sovereignly, inexorably, towards that end. Is that goal the dearest thing to our hearts? Is Christ all and in all really in practical everyday matters, not as a beautiful Christian ideal but in practical matters of everyday life? If you want the sovereignty of God on your side, that is the way to have it. If we really do want God as our ally (that is the wrong way to put it) but if we do want to have God committing Himself to us, the way for that is to have no other object, thought or care but that in all things He, God’s Son, shall have the pre-eminence. God can do wonderful things when He gets us

there. We have our little controversies with the Lord. We sometimes get held up because this thing is making too deep an inroad into this life here. It is not always easy to hand over to the Lord and say, "Have Thine own way, Lord". We do come up against the cost, then our battle takes place, and we win through, and then we find God floods in in a new way and on we go and we find that God is with us. Well, it comes down to very practical, simple details of life. The whole which applies to the vast circle of the universe touches you and me in this issue and that issue, as to whether the Lord Jesus is going to be all, dividing nothing, all and in all. That is the way to find the power of God at work; it is the life which is utter for Christ that finds God utter for it. In the long run it will have proved to have been so, although, as we may see before we have finished, there are often mysteries and hiddennesses in God's ways, but the end is sure. We shall find that, although it did seem sometimes that we were getting through with difficulty, God was doing something tremendous, far bigger than we ever knew. God was overcoming a lot; God was gaining much ground and deep ground; God was consolidating; He was going on. May He find us all one with Himself in His goings.

chapter 5

The Features

1. The Spirit

The first of the features of the goings of God and that which includes a number of things is the agency and activity of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. It is quite clearly seen by a casual glance at the Scriptures that the goings of God are committed to the Holy Spirit. Going back to that as the first of the ways of God in creation, you know that the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep, and it was to the Spirit of God that there was committed the subsequent work of bringing order out of chaos, light into darkness, life into death and everything else to constitute that ordered realm — the cosmos. You follow right the way through the Old Testament, and you find that in all the goings of God the symbols of the Holy Spirit as in charge, are present. It may be a cloud, symbolic of the Holy Spirit governing, controlling, ordering, leading in those goings. It may be the oil, it may be the water, it may be the fire, but there they are as active, energetic, controlling factors. It is the Holy Spirit who has this whole matter of God's movements in hand unto His end. You come to the New Testament. You find that the Spirit is there in the very conception and birth of Him through whom and for whom all things were created. As He proceeds into His public ministry to work out the life and the redemption into which we are to be brought, it is under the agency and government of the Holy Spirit. When He goes to the cross and offers Himself, He offers Himself through the eternal Spirit; the energies of the Spirit are seeing the thing through. Then it is taken up in Christ corporate, the church. He is in charge of things in the book of the Acts, a marvellous, almost a romantic story, of Holy Spirit initiative and government. And you know what a large place the Holy Spirit has in the consummations. "What the Spirit says to the churches" — reiterated seven times at the beginning of the Revelation, and so the whole glorious story finishes — "The Spirit and the bride say, Come" (Rev. 22:17).

It is quite clear by that cursory glance at the whole Bible that the goings of God are in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Thank God for that! We have only to be in the hands of the Holy Spirit and we shall be in the goings of God. Herein again lies the immense importance of Spirit-governed and dominated lives and churches and the church to reach God's end.

(a) Life

But that is inclusive. The Holy Spirit has to be interpreted in several ways. The Spirit, firstly, is the Spirit of life. Whatever is of and in the goings of God will be predominantly characterised by life. That is a test as well as a statement of fact. Whatever is in the goings of God will be pre-eminently characterised by life. We are, of course, thinking of Ezekiel, the goings to which we referred in those seven fragments in the first chapter of his prophecies. The wheels going — forward, the onward movement of God's counsels and purpose. But it says that the Spirit of life was in the wheels; the Spirit of the living ones was in the wheels. Ezekiel begins with life: life in the purposes, life in the counsels, life in the goings. And Ezekiel almost ends with life in fulness, a mighty river, mopping up death as it goes, countering death on its whole course. The characteristic of the Spirit is life, and that life is spontaneous, for life, if it is true life, is always spontaneous. It is life that overcomes all the difficulties, that answers all the questions. There are not many questions to answer, not many real problems to solve, if life is abundant and overflowing. You have no questions if life is just welling up and overflowing. At any rate, you don't bother about them, or they don't bother about you! If a church is in the full stream of life, most of its problems are solved. It is life which is productive, which is fruitful. You never have to appeal for aid of any kind and go to work to raise assistance of any nature where true spiritual life is in fulness. You do not have to mention money or anything else where there is spiritual life; it solves all your problems. Life is God's key to His eternal purpose so that whereas Genesis brings the tree of life into view, Revelation sees that tree right at the centre of the city and the river flowing from beneath the very tree, flowing on and flowing out and bringing life everywhere. It is God's way of solving problems, getting over difficulties and reaching His end. It is spontaneous. You do not have to do anything to produce it; it just happens. When God has His conditions, it is there. Life is a spontaneous thing in the Holy Spirit.

An Energetic Life

Life is a tremendously energetic thing. The Spirit of the Lord is tremendously energetic. No one who is really governed by the Spirit will be indolent. There are no such beings as Holy Spirit filled lazy people. When the Spirit of life is there, you are always abounding in the work of the Lord. You abound when life abounds, for the Spirit of life is so energetic. And that is

not only a statement of truth. You will be able to do ten times more by the energy of divine life than you would do naturally. It is a wonderful story of increased and multiplied activity because of divine life transcending our natural life. Yes, our physical problems can be solved, our temporal problems can be solved, and God has the key. It is just a matter of the Spirit of life. God's goings are like that.

They are above the level of this earth. I pointed out earlier that the wheels of Ezekiel 1, when they go, are lifted up from the earth. They are transcending that deadly earth touch, for the nearer you get to this earth, the slower is your progress; the more you get away from the earth, the more you will get away from the retarding effect of something that lies under the curse. This life knows nothing of the curse, it is incorruptible. It is death-overcoming life, and it is lifted up from the earth, and that is something for personal as well as collective spiritual experience, to be lifted up by this life above those arresting, retarding and limiting influences of the old earth life. The Lord's people should know more about the solving of these problems down here simply by the Spirit of life. How often we use the word 'impossible' because of the circumstances. Well, let us think again. It is marvellous how the impossibility is overcome by divine energy; impossibilities in ourselves and in situations, what the Lord requires beyond ourselves; what the Spirit of life has done and does do and can do! It is tremendously energetic.

We have often pointed out that Joshua is the type of the energies of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is represented by that man with the drawn sword. Joshua capitulates to Him and capitulates everything to Him. He takes his shoes from his feet and bows himself. In effect, he says, I put everything into your hands! Then you see that divine energy at work through Joshua, and what achievements, what goings, they are!

A Holy Life

This Spirit of life is a holy life because it is the *Holy Spirit*. The goings of God are always related to holiness, or holiness related to them. The Spirit of God will not go on when there is unholiness: He cannot. If He does, He will leave us behind; He will not work with anything that is unholy. You know how large a place that has in Ezekiel's prophecies, how, when the house, the final glorious thing, is brought into view, as the embodiment of all the others, of life, the whole law of the house is holiness (Ezek. 43:12). Reaching the end, it is an end in holiness. It is a matter for exercise, for this Spirit of life is a holy life. You cannot get away with it. If there is a controversy with the Lord on something that is not holy, you just stay until that is put right. It is

necessary to say that when you are talking about life, because life does not operate and go on willy-nilly. It does not reach God's end anyhow: it stipulates that its nature must rule, and its nature is holiness.

An Eternal Life

The Spirit of life is an age-abiding or eternal life, and whatever is done by the Spirit of life, though its vessel and its form may pass, that abides for ever. Our outward man may be perishing, we as vessels and instruments of the Lord's purpose unto His end may pass with time, but, while the Spirit of God is operating through us, there is something going up to heaven all the time which will appear again, for "everything God does will remain for ever" (Eccl. 3:14), and the secret of His doing is that it is life, eternal, age-abiding. It is a good thing to be in a work which shall never die, to be in goings which shall never come to an end, which shall expand throughout the ages of the ages. It is good to be in that; with all changes and all transientness, to know that it is not in vain in the Lord. Why? Because Christ is risen, says the apostle, and we are given the victory over death. "Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:57,58), because they are the labours of a life which is age-abiding. Be quite sure that your labours are not yours, but the labours of the Holy Spirit; be quite sure that you are not in goings which you have conceived for God, but in the goings which are God's own goings.

We have the great example of this in Ezekiel, but the fullest and highest example in Christ Himself. Was He in the goings of God? Was He in the energies of God? Was He in the life of God? Well, we know those were the things which characterised Him. Was that true of the church His Body, Christ corporate? Well, we read again, and we see there is no doubt about it, it is spontaneous there, it is mightily energetic there; yes, it is holy there, as Ananias and Sapphira discovered when this holy life met unholiness with a terrible challenge. There at the beginning something was done which has stayed out the age and is staying it out; it does not perish — we derive so much of our own inspiration from what happened then. Life which came at the beginning is age-abiding.

(b) Intelligence

The second feature of the Spirit is spiritual intelligence. Coming to

Ezekiel again, there you have the wheels and the living ones, and coming to Revelation where those living ones are again brought into view (it is a testimony of life, you see), we are told that they are full of eyes within and without. The Spirit of life is in them full of eyes — it is symbolism, but we can surely see what it symbolises. Where the Spirit of life is, the Holy Spirit, there is not just a dull, blank, unintelligent drifting on. His work is to bring about spiritual intelligence and understanding: He knows all things. So the apostle says in Romans 8, he knows the will of God, the mind of the Spirit; and the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God, they come into that intelligence as to the goings of God. The goings of God are not blind goings; they are all-knowing, all-wise, all-understanding, and the characteristic of those who are moving with God ought to be an increasing understanding of the ways of God, the thoughts of God, and so it will be if we forsake our own ways, the ways of our own thinking, reasoning, willing and desiring, and completely capitulate to the Spirit of God. The result will be increasing spiritual understanding and intelligence in our relationship to God and His ways and goings.

(c) Liberty

Further, a feature of the goings of the Spirit is liberty. The statement is “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17). The context of that bears out what I am saying, without my referring to it, but I do want to make a very special stress upon this, that the Holy Spirit, in order to take us on in the goings of God to ever fuller realization of His objective, demands absolute freedom of movement, and the church has not gone on in the goings of God, because it has put limitations upon God. It has put a harness on God and in effect has told the Holy Spirit that He must run in the church’s harness. You can see this everywhere, and as soon as God moves by His Spirit spontaneously men begin to make committees and draw up rules and regulations for the movement, and it is not long before you have principles and practices, and in the long run there is the death of the whole thing. God is not free to go on beyond that. It is the story of arrest after arrest: putting the harness of our organisation and our crystallised movements upon the Holy Spirit so that He is not free; yes, and our systematized doctrine, which may be true, but it is formed into a system. God is not free to break forth more light and truth from His unfathomable Word because if He did, He would be told, We are bound up with what we have been taught, what we have been brought to believe, and many there be who cannot move beyond that. I am not saying that anything that God will do will contradict earlier truth, but it will move

far ahead of it, and the Holy Spirit must have liberty to take us on. When the Spirit has liberty, things can go on and increase. The Spirit demands that. Here is Peter between Pentecost and Caesarea — two halves of Pentecost, the Spirit moving, and right in between Peter has his little altercation with the Lord about the unclean things he had never eaten. My tradition forbids the Holy Spirit to do what He wants to do and *my interpretation* of the word of God, of Leviticus 11, forbids the Holy Spirit to do this. God has His own interpretation and He must be free to apply it. There may be a lot of undoing to be done before the Spirit can go on, but when Peter got over that traditional difficulty and by the leading of the Spirit arrived at Caesarea, see what happened. As he spoke, the Spirit fell upon all that heard the word. The Spirit is getting on with it. In the book of Acts the Spirit is all the time going on doing marvellous, unexpected or untraditional things. He is breaking down all the standards of human argument and reasoning, and going on, and He does go on wherever He finds freedom. How extraordinary are some of the movements of the Spirit in that book of Acts; how they contradict all men's reasonings. The Spirit spoke to Philip in Samaria, in the midst of that tremendous movement, many turning to the Lord, and told him to leave the whole thing and go to a desert. That is contrary to all common sense, all the best reasoning. But the Spirit had His way with Philip, took him down there. It is like that all the time. The Spirit is simply coming here and saying I am going on; are you coming? Are you going to let me have free course, are you going to put aside all that which you have conceived and going to let Me have My way? The goings of God by His Spirit demand absolute liberty, and if any of you are tied up with a tradition, with a past, with anything fixed, even though it might be of God, and it has brought you to a limit, you know that there is something wrong with that, something wrong with the effect of it. The thing may be true, but the effect of it is never intended to bring you to a limit. It is only intended to bring you to the next thing. A movement by the Spirit of God will never become static and stagnant. It will be on the move all the time. The Spirit demands liberty; He will not be fixed. If He is put into watertight compartments, He will just leave the whole thing and go off somewhere else. That is what life does. At the end of that vision of the river in Ezekiel we read that the miry places were salt; these are the regions which resist the life; they stay out there in desolation. But the river goes on.

2. The Mystery

Secondly, as to the features — the mystery factor about the goings of God. There is a great deal of mystery in the goings of God, so much so that

you often wonder if there are any goings at all. The goings are so much underground, but let them be underground! It is like the swimmer who sees an object far out on the water and he dives and he disappears and everybody waits and waits — it seems like an eternity waiting. Is he lost? Has he gone for ever? What is happening? An awful fear grips the heart. Then he comes up right against the object. Ah, he is there! God is like that so often in His ways. He is after an object in our lives, but He very often goes down beneath the surface and His progress towards that object seems to be entirely obscured. We cannot trace it, but be sure He will reach the object.

Those very cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and elsewhere have that element of mystery in them. There is the eagle feature of the cherubim — heavenly mystery. You see it in Christ, the mystery in Christ. Well, look at Christ on the face of things. What are you going to make of it? You are not surprised that men said, “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matt. 13:55). What is there here that is so extraordinary? Nothing at all — like everybody else. But you know the result of that life of the incarnation, the immense fact, the goal which God has reached. You say, there was something hidden when He moved about this earth. You could not see how God could possibly reach His end. Men could not see God in it at all. The “how” was hidden, but marvellous fulfilment was evident. I can only say this by way of indicating this essential element, feature, of the goings of God, that there is always mystery. We shall not always be able to understand what God is doing, There is much mystery in why He allows this and that. Oh, the “why’s” and the “how’s” which arise upon our lips because of the Lord’s mysterious ways. But mystery is an integral part of the goings of God. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons” (Deut. 29:29). He does veil His things in mystery. Because we do not understand and we cannot trace it, does not mean that nothing is happening. Surely we have enough experience to prove that. To look at the history of the goings of God during the ages — how mysterious were those goings at the time, but how glorious was the consummation, how glorious in the end was the revelation that He had been surely going, moving to an end.

3. The Suffering and Sacrifice

Finally, the goings of God are fraught with suffering and sacrifice. The law of travail was introduced immediately men sinned, but — and this is the most difficult thing of all things for you and me to accept or believe — the law of travail was intended by God to be a beneficent thing, a very good thing. Suffering, sacrifice — you can trace those things in the goings of

God; right down through the ages they are there. When you see those goings gathered up consummately in the Son of His love, you see suffering and sacrifice brought to fulness. The church knows about that. What I am doing is not pointing out the obvious, but just reminding you that it is a part of the goings of God. How did the Lord reach that end in the life of His servant Paul, that end where His servant knew Him in terms of life triumphant over death, life which reverses the natural sentence that it was death. How did he come to that place where all the arguments of nature were proved to be false and unwarranted, where he made discoveries which transcended all such arguments? I am talking about the second letter to the Corinthians. How did he come to that glorious end of knowing God in that wonderful, nature-transcending way? Just through the deepest sufferings. It is the way by which God reaches His end. God was “going” through that suffering. It is a long, comprehensive story of how God’s end is reached along the line of suffering and sacrifice. Let us be careful of our interpretation of these experiences. Do not think that because certain things obtain such as weakness, infirmity, suffering, adversity, trial, sorrow, affliction that there must necessarily be limitation, retarding of progress, and that our attainment must necessarily be held back because of this and that. The story is just the opposite! Right in the setting of deep infirmity and suffering, God does magnificent things and attains magnificent ends. You have to wonder and worship and say, that is of God! Look by what means and ways He obtained that end! You have nothing there that can argue for it in the realm of the natural, but everything that works against it, but God has done it. He goes on, through suffering, through affliction and through sacrifice to reach His end. The story of the goings of God is the story of suffering.

That is why at the end the whole thing is brought to fulness, life in fulness, glory in fulness. The gates are of pearl (Rev. 21:21). It is a story of coming into it all by the way of suffering. The pearl’s history is a history of agony, we might call it, bloody agony. That is the way into all. There is the testimony lying behind those gates, a testimony in fulness, fulness of divine life, fulness of divine glory. It all lies behind the gates of suffering. But they are the ways of God, right in the goings of God.

On that note I think it would be good for us to conclude. We are helped a little by the value of vision. There is tremendous value in having a large enough vision, not being shut up to the little personal circle of our own lives, occupied with our own little problems, having things too near to us so that we do not get any perspective. It is good to have our eyes lifted up to see the great vision of God’s movements, God’s goings unto God’s end. There is a tremendous value for life and service in adequate vision, and there is a

tragic set of conditions because of no vision — all turning in on itself — no vision. I trust that the Lord will have made His word a means of renewing our vision or giving us new vision with all its value.

I trust that we shall not, after all, just see all this in an objective way, but realise the personal applications and considerations of it. All that greatness, that glorious purpose; it touches us right down here, just comes right down to our personal sufferings for Christ's sake. The meaning of your suffering, the content of your suffering is that — the sufferings and the glory which is to follow; suffering and glory linked together in the Word of God. It comes right down there. So may this closing word really help us as we go out and know what it costs, know the price, know what we are involved in in going on with God in His goings, and to realise all these things, this mighty sovereignty at work, this mighty energy operating, and all have been making our sufferings to serve the end, so that in the end that we shall not complain that we suffered and sacrificed. We shall say, It was a right way by which He led us, this is a realisation which could not have been by any other way; we see it now! May the Lord give us that assurance in our hearts.

