



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

**THE DEEP THINGS
OF THE SPIRIT**

Part 1

T. Austin-Sparks

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THE PLACE OF CHRIST

“Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

And alongside of that one or two other fragments of Scripture well-known to us:

“Canst thou by searching find out God?” (Job 11:7).

You will notice that there is a marginal reference which puts it this way:

“Canst thou find out the deep things of God?”

“The Spirit searches ... the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10).

“The unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8).

Oh, the depth of the riches, how unsearchable! And then we ought to read from John’s Gospel chapter 16, the Lord saying to His disciples when the Spirit is come He would take the things that are His, and show them.

I think it might be profitable if we just took a moment or two to look at two or three words outstanding in this portion of the first Corinthian letter, chapter 2. You notice the three words: prepared, searched, deep things. “Things God prepared for them that love him”, things which God made ready for them that love Him. The question of course immediately arises — When did God prepare, or make ready, those things? The word is used in different connections, and they throw light upon this question. You remember there was a request made of the Lord when He was here by a mother concerning her two sons that when He came into His Kingdom, they might sit one on the right hand and one on the left hand, and His answer was that that was for those for whom it was prepared (Matt. 20:23). He could not do that, it was for

those for whom it was prepared, already made ready, by God. The blessing of the Lord on a certain man or upon certain ones takes this form: “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). And one more, Ephesians 2:10, “... good works which God afore prepared that we should walk in them”. Presently we shall touch more definitely upon when that took place, but it is quite clear from these passages that there was a long anticipation of something which goes right back to the foundation of the world, or literally the words are, the laying down of the world, the mapping out of the world. It was then that this was prepared, the things which God prepared right back there for them that love Him.

Then this word ‘searches’, the Spirit searches all things, and the word does not mean to find out, to discover. It just means ranging the deep things of God. The Spirit’s movement is deep, far and wide, ranging the whole realm of the things of God, exploring.

And then deep things. This very same word was the word which the Lord used to His disciples – “Launch out into the deep” (Luke 5:4, KJV), and Paul used it about his experiences among which he said, “A night and a day ... in the deep” (2 Cor. 11:25). Now, anybody who knows anything about the sea will get some idea of the meaning of this word that is employed here: the deep things of God.

Revelation not explanation

So we are led into a very great realm when we come into the realm of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the things of the Spirit, and we are going to ask this question: What are these deep things of the Spirit? And we can only hope to think of some of them, perhaps only one at the moment. What are these deep things which have been revealed though never explained? We must not confuse those two things. It is possible, to reveal or uncover, bring something into view, without explaining it, and we are not given the explanation to the deepest things of God. We are still left with very great questions about them as you will clearly see as we go on in this series of messages, but nevertheless they have been uncovered, they have been brought to light as immense realities and brought to light for our good.

Christ God’s appointed Heir of all things

One of the deep things of the Spirit which have been brought to light, and I think the first, is the place of Christ in the divine scheme of things, a very deep thing indeed, far beyond our fathoming. But nevertheless it is

clearly before us in the Word, going right back again, Hebrews 1:2, speaking of the Son, “Whom he appointed heir of all things”. That is His place in the divine scheme — heir of all things. He was appointed that when? Well, before all things were created, because immediately it goes on to say, through Whom all things were created, the worlds were made. He was appointed heir of all things. You remember His parable in which He quite clearly intimated this thing. The wicked husbandmen who, having stoned the servants, espied the coming of the Son and said, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance” (Matt. 21:38), incidentally touching upon the deep things of Satan. It is an uncovering of Satan’s deep work to rob Christ of His inheritance, and that explains the cross, from the side of the enemy, the murder of the Heir with the securing of His inheritance in view. But keeping to the Lord’s own word — the Heir of all things. So Jesus, the Son of God, is revealed by the Spirit to be God’s appointed Heir. Psalm 2:8, undoubtedly Messianic and prophetic – “Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” So His inheritance is the nations and the uttermost parts of the earth, divinely appointed, ordained, and it cannot be set aside. It is heaven and earth, for He said on His resurrection: “All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). The Heir possessing all authority in every realm. So Paul prays that believers through the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of revelation might be able to see Christ’s inheritance in the saints, (Eph. 3:18). Here are some of the “all things”: the nations, the uttermost parts of the earth, the heaven and earth, and within the church His inheritance. That is a statement of fact. It is a deep thing revealed by the Spirit.

But the point does arise here, God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit. These things then, have a very real meaning for believers. This will take us away from a superficial Christianity. If we can really grasp the meaning of this first thing for ourselves, as believers, it is going to have a very salutary effect upon us.

The calling of believers

Firstly, then, the calling of believers. The calling of believers is said to be in accordance with His eternal purpose. What is that? The eternal purpose is Christ inheriting all things, so that our calling, our being called, our hearing the call, is a first work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christ coming into His inheritance according to something laid down with the foundation of the world. That makes conversion something very much bigger than just being saved, doesn’t it? It is not just a matter of becoming a Christian. There

is this immense background to our being called. The Holy Spirit, shall we say, has got to work in relation to the appointed Heir of all things, and you and I coming under the hand of the Holy Spirit are a part of that inheritance, and our very calling in grace is according to that purpose, and our calling therefore is something tremendous. It is only our calling. The beginning of our Christian life is not something merely incidental. It is fundamental to the whole scheme of things in relation to the Lord Jesus.

The believer's consciousness

Then after the call and the response, the consciousness of the believer. You can verify this out of your own experience, but I think it is true to the experience of most, if not all, who respond to the Spirit's influence and call, that, having done that, there comes into being, there settles down within, a sense of being owned, belonging, possessed. Shall we put it this way: I know now where I belong, this is really where I belong; I felt that I did not belong to anything or anybody before, and I ought to, but now I know I belong and to Whom I belong. It is a sense of possession, being taken into possession. It is a matter of ownership. That is why there springs from the lips of those who have responded to the Spirit immediately the word 'Father'. Paul says to the Galatians that His Spirit has been put into our hearts and thereby we cry 'Abba, Father', and what does 'Father' mean if it does not mean belonging. And again 'Lord': the first ejaculation of Paul after his apprehending was 'Lord'. We love that word, but we did not always love the idea of being 'lorded over'. It is foreign to human nature to be lorded over. There is a revolt in the whole human race against being lorded over by anything or anybody, but the Christian's delight is to use that word 'Lord', and to be lorded over by Him. Master — that is music to the Christian, that word, Master as applied to the Lord Jesus. How the natural man hates the idea of Master, but here is the consciousness that comes in. We are not compelled or forced; it is spontaneous. The Spirit has brought us home, brought us to our rightful possession or possessiveness. This is how it ought to be. Well, you see, that was all arranged long before we had a being. We belong to Somebody, we are Somebody's inheritance, that is where we belong.

The believer's confidence

Ah, yes, and this leads surely to the believer's confidence. There is a tremendous value for us in the place of Christ in God's scheme of things. If really in the before times eternal we were made a heritage, we were included

in the inheritance of the Son, and the Spirit calls, do you think there is going to be any difficulty in our acceptance. It is altogether out of keeping with this whole scheme of things to have any question at all as to whether we will be accepted. If you had an inheritance, and that inheritance was brought within your reach, do you think there would be any argument as to whether it could be accepted? None of all. And so this very great, deep, blessed truth of Christ's inheritance in the saints gives us a ground of confidence as to our acceptance, no question about it. We belong to Him — why have any question as to whether we will be accepted? Of course, He has done everything to make our acceptance a blessed reality and dispose of anything in the way. Acceptance, assurance, what a ground of assurance! This whole question of assurance among believers which is so often challenged by the devil and every demon that he has, the shaking of confidence, the shaking of assurance bringing doubts. Why? There is no ground for it at all. It is not contingent upon our worthiness or anything about us except that we believe it. Long before this terribly complicated make-up of ours had any acceptance the whole thing was planned. We were given to the Lord Jesus, we belong to Him. What a ground of assurance then. It stands rooted in eternity, it stands rooted in the divine counsels. If you have heard the Spirit's call, that is not just something belonging to this moment or to this life. That is something which ranges all the ages and goes right back to the beginning. What a ground of assurance. He will keep surely that which belongs to Him. "I am persuaded that He is able to keep" (2 Tim. 1:12, KJV). Is the Lord Jesus able to keep what is put into His hands and what really belongs to Him from eternity past? What a ground of assurance for keeping! We need have no worry about tomorrow, about the future. He is able to keep. Oh, those mighty words of the apostle: "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:35). And then a catalogue of everything conceivable that might be thought to have the power of separating, and then the whole thing swallowed up: 'I am persuaded none of these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.' Why? Simply because we belong to Him.

The church's message

That gives us our message. There is the believer's life as to what lies behind the call, as to what accompanies the call, for assurance, for confidence for the future. What about the church's message? You see, the church's message is called a declaration. The word most characteristic of the function of the church and of the messenger of Christ is that he is a herald. It is a

herald's business to make a declaration or a proclamation, an announcement. What is the message — and, mark you, this means far more than may appear on the surface. It is a declaration that all things belong to the Lord Jesus, every unsaved man and woman belongs by right to the Lord Jesus. This world in every spot by right belongs to the Lord Jesus. Put your foot down there and say. 'This place belongs to Christ by right.' The Holy Spirit, mark you, takes account of that and stands on that. Oh, yes, He has got them, they belong to Him.

It raises tremendous issues. If you declare and make known the fact that men and women belong to the Lord Jesus by every right of creation, and redemption as His inheritance, then if they refuse they are held as guilty of rebellion against the rightful owner. It precipitates a very positive clear-cut issue. If you are a sinner, an unsaved person, who does not recognize the absolute ownership of the Lord Jesus, and you are not, in the presence of this declaration, ceding Him His right, you are guilty of rebellion against God's appointed Heir. It raises a tremendous issue, and it goes beyond that. If you belong to the Lord Jesus by right of God's giving and appointing, and you do not give Him yourself, you are robbing Jesus Christ of His rights. It is a very positive issue. You see, you are in the category of a robber of God. That is very serious. So this is the proclamation. There is the good side, the Gospel side, of this. It is a grand thing, on the grounds which we have set forth, to know that I really belong to the Lord Jesus and, recognising and acknowledging that, there is no question as to whether He will accept what belongs to Him, as to whether He will keep what belongs to Him, or as to the destiny of what belongs to Him. All I have to do is to believe and cede to Him His rights. You see, this is the work of the messenger, the herald, the proclaimer. The Holy Spirit is here said to be committed to this. If we make the right proclamation or take the right position in relation to Christ's place in God's scheme of things, the Holy Spirit comes in on that. Very often the Holy Spirit cannot come in and precipitate issues because we are not clear-cut enough as to what this whole thing is about, and it is about nothing less than Christ's heirship of all things. Get that in, and the Holy Spirit will come with tremendous conviction. We make the issue so much less and usually what the individual is going to get as the benefit of coming to the Lord Jesus, instead of primarily the rights of the Lord Jesus Himself, proclaiming Him as Lord, and the Holy Spirit will set His seal to that. The Holy Spirit always does that. In the unsaved or in the saved when we cede anything to Him as Lord and let Him take His place as Lord on any point, the Holy Spirit bears witness. That is always His ground.

So the Spirit is committed to calling according to purpose, and sealing

those who respond, or conforming them to the image of God's Son, and of guiding them into all the truth related to God's purpose. That is Christ's place. It is a deep thing of God, it is a big thing, it is an immense thing, but this has been revealed, among many other things, to us by the Spirit. May the Lord strengthen us by His Word.

THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

“It is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:9,10).

“And he spoke to them many things in parables” (Matthew 13:3).

“He that hath ears, let him hear. And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? And he answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: for this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not” (vv. 9-17).

“All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world” (vv. 34-35).

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (vv. 44-46).

“Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea” (v. 51).

These parables are said by the Lord to be mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, things which are heaven's secrets, and only known and understood by those who have the heavenly gift of understanding.

A work of discrimination

You will have noted probably that in this chapter, Matthew 13, the great chapter of teaching, there is a divide between the multitude and the disciples, marked by a distinct movement, the Lord Jesus speaking His parables to the multitude, and then sending the multitude away and being alone with His disciples, showing a difference, a divide. The chapter is particularly and peculiarly marked by an act of discrimination between the multitude and the disciples, and you must remember that the multitude was Israel, not the pagan world in general. Twice over the prophet Isaiah is quoted in connection with this ministry. There are in this chapter people who had all the ministry of the prophets, and had that ministry available in written form, religious people with all at their disposal that God had given. On the other hand there are these disciples in their relationship with the Lord Jesus, and these are put into two very distinct categories, those who, with all, see not, understand not, to whom the mysteries are still mysteries, and those, on the other hand, who are being given an opening into the secrets of heaven. This discrimination is something which has to be noted because it is carried forward in the New Testament. It does not only relate to Israel and the church as represented by the disciples. It is something carried right forward, and is to be found in Paul's letters. It is here so clearly in the Corinthian letter. That is largely what the beginning of this first letter is about, the difference between people who have got Christian truth, and those also who, having it, have something more, insight into it. This is a very searching chapter, this second chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians where Christians are concerned. Let us remember that these were Christians, they were in the church, and yet these things were written to them.

And then we know how this very thing is carried over into the book of the Revelation, right to the end. The first three chapters of the book of the Revelation containing the messages to the churches are largely based upon this very thing. It is a work of discrimination, every message concluding with: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says." That is singling out some in the churches who have had all the apostolic ministry, and yet at length there is a difference in the churches between those who have spiritual understanding and perception, the ear to hear what the Spirit is saying, and those in the churches who have no such capacity.

A judicial factor

And notice in that connection there is a judicial factor. We must note these things before we can get to the positive message. There is a judicial factor, both here in Matthew 13 and in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord is passing judgment. To Israel Isaiah, here quoted, is passing a judicial verdict on the people. They have had the truth, they have had the ministry, they have had the oracles of God; they are held responsible, and not having the spiritual perception — by reason of their own reaction, of course, to it — they are passed under judgment and terrible judgment. I think it is Henry Drummond who, in that very famous book of his, ‘Natural Law in the Spiritual World’, cites the case of a little crab who always chooses to live in the dark caves. Originally it had a wonderful eye, but now it is found only to have an eye-socket. Because it chose to live in the dark, it lost the faculty of sight, and gradually the organ was destroyed by its own choice, and that is exactly applicable here. Having the truth as they had, and not taking a right attitude towards it and being exercised about it and being open to it and its implicates, means that the very faculty of the new birth not being used deteriorates and at last brings its own judgment of complete disability to understand. Now that is the judgment passed in the churches in the book of the Revelation. It is a very serious thing, this matter of spiritual knowledge, the things of the Spirit, what the Spirit says.

Preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit

As to the disciples here, while I believe they in all good faith meant what they said, they did not speak the whole truth. When the Lord challenged them: “Have ye understood all these things?”, they said, “Yes”. Well, they meant that, I believe, but subsequent behaviour and history before the day of Pentecost made it perfectly clear that they had not really grasped it and entered into it. The point is this, that the Lord was stocking the ground unto the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He was putting into the ground of their hearts that which would be the basis of the Holy Spirit’s operation when He came. We remember, don’t we, the references to recollection afterward: ‘Then they remembered His words’ (John 2:22, etc.). We find in Peter, for instance, years afterwards the signs that now he understands what the Lord meant when He was here. It is perfectly clear that theirs was an imperfect apprehension, but that the Lord was preparing and stocking the ground of their hearts against the day of the Spirit’s coming. We call them ‘disciples’, and that is how the word is translated here. You know, that is not the exact

translation of the word. We have a better English word, but it would not sound very suitable if it were put into the New Testament, but actually and literally the word which we have as ‘disciples’ means ‘apprentices’. That is a better word to explain exactly what they were. They were apprentices. Now you know what an apprentice is, one who is being trained and prepared unto a coming day, a day of efficiency and responsibility. They were in that position while they were with the Lord, being prepared, trained, for a coming day, and that day was the day of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One Who brings to life in us everything that is of God, and if it is not brought to life in us, what a sorry state there is. Look at these men who had it so far as the words were concerned, in them before Pentecost, and what a sorry state of things. They had it all in them as words, as teaching, and they thought they knew it, and said, ‘Yes, we have understood’, and yet look at them! But after the coming of the Spirit that which was in them sprang into life. You see how we can have a lot, a great deal, but until the Holy Spirit has really lighted upon it, it is not only valueless but may put us into an altogether false position full of contradictions. Hence the importance of the Spirit, and that is the focal point of the whole message.

And this is the true life of the church. That interim period of discipleship or apprenticeship was not the true life of the church. The condition in Corinth was not the true life of the church. All that both the Lord said, and the apostle said, was to get them to their true life, their true position, and the true position is that of spiritual understanding, spiritual knowledge, where the truth is alive and dynamic, a power in the life. That is the true life of the church. It is not something extra to salvation. It is the true life to have it.

The church the hidden treasure

Now with that background, let us come to these two parables which we selected, two parables of three which the Lord gave to His disciples alone, that which is called the parable of the hidden treasure, and the parable of the pearl of great price. We need to get perfectly clear about this, perhaps to correct misapprehensions and get adjusted as to really what these parables mean. We have a very lovely hymn and we shall go on singing it, but it leads us altogether wrong in interpretation if we apply it to the parable of the pearl:

“I’ve found the pearl of greatest price,
My heart doth sing for joy.”

Well, let us go on singing and let us go on appreciating, but do not give that as the interpretation to the pearl mentioned in this parable because it is not true. Yes, Jesus is the pearl of greatest price, but you cannot buy Him, and you have not got any means worthy of Him. You may go and sell all that you have. Do you think that is of sufficient value to secure the Lord Jesus or His salvation or anything that He can give? No, Jesus is not for sale, salvation is not for sale, redemption is not for sale, and if they were, show me where the wealth is that is commensurate with Him and His salvation. So let us get clear on that matter. Neither the treasure nor the pearl are things that any man can purchase or merit by works. He cannot be bought, and salvation cannot be bought. We have not the means if it were to be purchased.

The man in both cases is the Lord Himself. He was the sower in the earlier parable of the sower, and said to be so: the sower, the Son of man. He is the One who sows good seed in His field. Turning now from the world to believers, sowing believers in the world, and the enemy putting counterfeit believers alongside. It is the same Man sowing the saints in the earth, and here the Man who finds the treasure and the merchant Man who finds the pearl are still the same Man, the Lord Jesus in every case.

The preciousness of the treasure to the Lord

But when we come to these two parables, we are met with a little difficulty until we think and pray much about it. Many interpretations are given, some of them quite commonly held. I am not going to dispute, but I am afraid I cannot accept many of the common interpretations of these two parables. However, I leave it to you with the Word to see whether there is truth in what we are going to say about them. I think we can get the key to the matter by lifting out the dominant and all-governing idea, and that is undoubtedly the preciousness to the Lord of what is mentioned in the treasure and the pearl. Here we have something very precious to the Lord, and until we have got that, we have not got the key. If He is the man in both instances, then His heart is set upon something that is very precious to Him, and in both of these things He finds it. In both cases He puts the value of what He finds before everything else that He has. Well, we have got a lot of later light upon that, such as Philippians chapter 2 and Ephesians chapter 5 which shed a lot of light on this, that which is transcendently precious to the Lord which has led Him to leave all, sell all, if you like, sell all that He had in glory in order to become possessed of this that is typified or represented here.

The treasure buried in the world

So, getting the word ‘preciousness’ in our hands, we have got the key to these parables. I do not think there is any real ground for doubting and questioning that the treasure is the church. The Lord has said earlier that the field is the world. A treasure is buried in the world. He buys the world, He has redeemed the whole world by His blood, He has paid the price for the whole world’s redemption. The whole world will not become His peculiar treasure. He knows that quite well. He knows well enough that all the world will not acknowledge what He has done for it in redeeming it, paying the price for its redemption, but nevertheless He has done that. Not one man, not one soul in eternity will be able to say that He did not pay the price for them, for him, for her. He did. We have to leave the larger issue with Him, but He does know that within that world, hidden, buried in that world, is that which He will have. He has got His elect in the world. “Elect, precious” (1 Pet. 2:6), says Peter. Oh, but listen to this parable, precious elect, precious. The elect is buried in this world and the Lord has His heart set upon that, His church.

Now within that word ‘buried’ lies all the Gospel about the Son of man having come to seek and to save that which was lost. All that has to do with the lost possession, the lost inheritance. And all that has to do with the seeking and the saving at so great a cost is there in that very first suggestion. It is buried in the world.

The treasure found

Then it is found. A lot of help may be derived from recognizing a very common fact in those days. You know Palestine had been occupied by many nations in its history, many wars had taken place, and many an invading army had had to quit just as quickly as it could. The various nations and armies very often left behind very much as they went away and buried it, hoping that they would come back one day and find it again. It was quite a common thing in Palestine, this being known, for men to be digging about all over the place for treasure, searching to find some of this buried treasure. A great deal was discovered in that way, and we are still discovering buried treasure of bygone days. So it is from a very common and well-known phenomenon that the Lord Jesus is illustrating. Here are men all over the country perhaps digging for treasure. Now here is a man looking for treasure, and He has *found* the treasure. The Lord Jesus puts Himself in that position. He is a treasure-hunter Himself, or He was, in the world, and He has found a treasure of great price.

The treasure hidden

Then what does He do? He hides it — and I want to draw a difference between a buried treasure and a hidden treasure. He hides it deliberately. I ask you, is it true that the true church is a hidden thing in this world? There is no doubt about it, the mystery of the church, the mystery of the Body of Christ is that it is something hidden. Man is always trying to bring it out into display and popularize it, make it something that belongs to this world, to be recognized. But you cannot alter the fact that, by a deliberate act, Jesus has hidden His church. Don't you try to expose yourself to this world. Now that, you see, also leads us into another large realm of things, but we have got to get on. The most precious thing to the Lord, which is the church — “Christ loved the church and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25) — has, as a part of its preciousness, the fact that it is hidden. The parable does not go on beyond that point. He purchased the field in order to get it. It is quite true that He has got it, but the principle of the hiddenness remains for the time being. We know the day is coming when the church will be manifested. That belongs to the future. At present it is hidden. The treasure then is the church.

The pearl of fellowship in Christ's sufferings

Now we go to the second parable. What is the pearl? Now, I feel very strongly that these two parables are not two different things, but two aspects of the same thing. The Lord, who knew all and knew the deep things of the Spirit, knew this, and so He gave these together as a kind of pair, isolated, as parts of each other, two sides to one thing. The pearl is not another object from the church. The treasure and the pearl are not two distinct objects. The pearl, as I see it in the light of much Scripture, is another mystery. It is the mystery and value of suffering. Now if you gather in your New Testament and some of the Old as well, you find that it is one thing for the Lord to have either Israel or the church, to have it as a whole, His own. Yes, He has bought it, it is His own. It is another thing to have in the church that answer to His sufferings, that real response in life to the cost of the possession. You see how much Paul has to say about this, answering to the sufferings of Christ, sharing His sufferings, filling up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1:24). You have got the churches in Revelation. They are the Lord's, these are not professors of faith only. They are the churches, they are the Lord's, but look to see how little there is in them that answers to Him in a full way, a suffering way, and we know that the pearl is the embodiment of suffering. Its very existence speaks of its suffering, its anguish. The great

passion of the apostle Paul was that he might be worthy of the sufferings of Christ, that he might be able to make an answer to those sufferings, and that the church might be that. Is not the whole of his ministry bent and focused upon this, not only that Christ should have His church, but that He should have a worthy church. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it”, yes, and got it, but in order “that He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27). That compasses the whole of this ministry. And the Lord Jesus, while He is set upon having His church, oh, He wants something in that church that is a real answer to His sufferings. And there is a mystery about it, this suffering, the mystery of the preciousness to the Lord. His sufferings shared are very precious things to the Lord. When His people really suffer with Him, there is something infinitely precious about that to the Lord. Oh, that we knew and realized that in the day of suffering! Here is something precious above all things to the Lord, the fellowship of His sufferings. To be the Lord’s, yes, but to be the Lord’s in this way, unto an anguish, unto a passion, unto a travail, the pouring out of our lives. As the little organism bleeds to make the pearl, so did He. So He calls us not to share His redemptive work, but to share His sufferings. And this always has an ‘if’ connected with it. “If ... we suffer with Him, we (shall be) also glorified” (Rom. 8:17). If. There are many who belong to the church and are the Lord’s who are not prepared for that, and the Lord knows it quite well, and so He goes farther. He says, ‘The church is very precious to Me, but there is something within the church that I am looking for, an answer to My travail, to My suffering.’ Now, whether that is the final word about the interpretation or not, I know it is the truth, something very precious to the Lord.

A practical application

I did want to say just an extra word, if I might only hint it. If this is the Lord’s estimate of His church and of His suffering saints, if He puts such a price and value upon His church, oh, would it not be only right that we should have a similar regard for His church? If only there were reproduced in our hearts something of this that is in the heart of the Lord as to the value of His church, what a lot of things would go out. Criticisms, unkindness and injuries of every kind to saints, to the church — all that sort of thing — would go. We could not hurt something so precious to us. If it is so precious, we would shield it, we would protect it, we would cherish it, we would do everything to preserve it. The message comes back like that. The things of the Spirit have a very practical application. It is one thing to have a kind of

mental apprehension which makes no difference to us. It is another thing for the Spirit to reveal these things in us, and then we cannot behave contrary to that revelation. It hurts. And is it not true that if you hurt a member of Christ, you are hurt inside? It hurts you, it hurts us, as much as it hurts them. Why? Because the Spirit is grieved, the Spirit is hurt, the Spirit in us. This is a testimony to the value of the church to the Lord. Oh, that we might really prove it in this way, not the theory, not the doctrine that the church is of infinite value to the Lord — but that it might come into us in this way. It is precious to us in the sense that we are hurt if we hurt it or if someone else hurts it. We should not be prepared to listen to things that hurt the children of God because the church is precious to us.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“He shall glorify Me: for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you. All things whatsoever the father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he taketh of mine, and shall declare it unto you” (John 16:14,15).

“But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God ... Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged” (1 Cor. 2:10,14).

The things of the Spirit. In putting those two passages together, one in John’s Gospel, the other in the Corinthian letter, it is quite clear that the one in Corinthians is the fulfilment of the words in John. That is, that what the Lord Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do in declaring or revealing His things, the Holy Spirit really did do through the apostles. And what we have through the apostles is really the Holy Spirit taking the things of Christ and showing them to us. We are occupied at present with these things of the Spirit concerning Christ, and in this chapter I want to take up one other of these major things which came in with Christ, about which He Himself said a great deal and about which the apostles said much, and about which their ministry as a whole is really concerned. I refer to what the Lord Jesus called the Kingdom of God.

Now, those of you who know the Gospels know very well that He said a very great deal about the Kingdom of God. We are told right at the end of the book of the Acts, the end of the long, full life of the apostle Paul, that the last things he was talking about were the things of the kingdom of God, receiving in his hired house where he was a prisoner all who came and speaking to them the things concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:30). This, then, is a major matter in relation to the Lord Jesus about which we need the Holy Spirit’s teaching and interpreting, for really this is the thing that sums up the whole mission and ministry of the Lord Jesus. Everything else may be said to

be gathered into this, and you only have to be reminded of the parables of the Kingdom to realize how very comprehensive this matter of the Kingdom is.

The Jewish idea of the Kingdom

Now we need to prepare our way for the real heart of this message, reminding ourselves of the Jewish background and expectation as to the Kingdom of God. It was not strange language to those to whom He spoke in His time on this earth, this about the Kingdom of God. They had been looking and waiting for the coming of that Kingdom for many centuries. Their prophets had said much about it, and they were in expectation of the coming Messiah to set up this Kingdom of God. They believed that God was the Ruler of this universe. They believed that Israel was the nation in which He would set up His Kingdom on earth, and they were waiting for Him to do it. They were at the very time of the coming of the Lord Jesus, we are told, in expectation of this coming One. Their ideas of the Kingdom were entirely secular, entirely temporal, with all the personal, physical, earthly advantages that that would create for themselves.

Well, we know that that did not happen in the way in which they expected. Christ came, the Messiah came, but in their form of expectation the Kingdom of God did not come; they missed it. As they expected, it was never instituted and set up, and because they missed it, a common phrase has come into existence about this Kingdom. It is said now to be ‘the Kingdom in mystery’, and I think what is meant by that phrase, which is not a Bible phrase, by the way, is that it is a suspended Kingdom in its real nature, and it is something abstract and something rather indefinite. The mentality about the Kingdom in this dispensation is like that, that it is a kind of indefinite thing, and that people, many of them, are still waiting for the Kingdom to come, and that gives us our point in this very word.

The true meaning of the Kingdom

We have already said that the whole ministry of the apostles was the ministry of the Holy Spirit interpreting and showing the meaning of the Kingdom of God, and the whole New Testament rests upon a present definite fact, that the Kingdom has come and is here; it is in existence. It may not be the temporal Kingdom that the Jews looked for, it may not be in secular terms, but it is something even more real than that. The Kingdom is come in very truth, but in order to appreciate that, it is necessary for us in the first place to get a better understanding of the word ‘kingdom’, and the translation

which the translators have given to the Hebrew word is not a very happy or fortunate at one. It at once conjures up ideas when you speak of a kingdom. It conjures up the idea of a system and a realm, but the real word does not, in the first place at any rate, mean that at all. The word behind our word 'kingdom' means 'sovereignty', 'rule' or 'reign', and so the Kingdom of God really means the reign of God, the rule of God, the sovereignty of God. It is only a realm or a form of government, an economy, as we call it, in so far as it takes its character from God. The Kingdom of God is only a realm in so far as it is where God's sovereignty is in operation, where God's rule is active. That, of course, is found in the synonym for the Kingdom of God, so often spoken of as the Kingdom of heaven. There is no essential difference between the two forms of expression. It just means, on the one hand, the personal rule of God, and on the other hand, the rule or sovereignty of heaven.

The Kingdom now come

In this particular and peculiar form, the Kingdom of God came in with the exaltation of Jesus Christ to God's right hand. You remember the Lord Jesus said to His disciples one day, "There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). Now, that is a very interesting statement. That is the way Mark puts it — "The kingdom of God come with power". You know that the miracles of the Lord Jesus are really, according to the original language, the powers of the Lord Jesus. Instead of speaking of them as miracles, they should be spoken of as powers. As His parables were an expression of His wisdom, His miracles were an expression of His power. They were powers in certain specific forms, and it is the same word, the same meaning. "The kingdom of God come in power", as a miracle. "Some of them ... shall in no wise taste of death till they see the kingdom of God — as a miracle, as a power", corresponding to His miracles in the days of His flesh.

But what was the supreme miracle or the supreme power? The apostle Paul under the tuition and illumination of the Holy Spirit, makes that perfectly clear in one statement — "the exceeding greatness of his power ... which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:19-21). The supreme power, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus unto His exaltation and the Kingdom came then. "Far above all rule". It says it has happened already, that Jesus, as this

tremendous, superlative miracle of God, is at His right hand far above all rule and authority now. The Kingdom came then. And you will be gathering into that other statements — “For He must reign, till He hath put all his enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). “He must reign” — and that is not future; that is now. “God highly exalted him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). It is something already done. The Kingdom has come, the Kingdom of God is in existence, and Christian history can only be explained in terms of a throne and that throne is the throne of Christ.

It is tremendously impressive that when the church, the people of God, have been in right relatedness to the exalted Christ as supreme Head and Lord, that church has been unconquerable, unquenchable, impregnable. Through everything that men and hell could do to bring it to an end, as they did with its Lord, it has gone on its way and all the hammers have worn themselves out, the anvil remains intact. But the impressive thing is this, that when the church has been out of right relationship with Him as its Lord, as on the throne, as in the dark ages, the church has suffered defeat and humiliation. Which brings us to this point. There is God’s fact, and if only we are adjusted to God’s fact, do what it will, the world and the kingdom of darkness cannot overthrow the church. We shall march on, “terrible as an army with banners” (Song of Songs 6:4).

The Holy Spirit the Custodian of the Kingdom

This whole matter is shown to have been put into the custodianship of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has taken up this whole matter of the Kingdom. His relationship to this matter is made very clear; even in the days when the Lord Jesus was here, a comment upon something that He said by one of the apostolic writers was this: “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). The Spirit given when Jesus is glorified, which means He is exalted to the right hand of God in glory. The Spirit given, the Spirit then came expressly to take up this whole matter of the throne rights, the Kingdom interests, of the Lord Jesus. His whole work is bent upon bringing this sovereignty of Christ into expression, this rule of Christ into realization, this government of Christ into the church and through the church. It is the Spirit’s business to do that and alongside of that to instruct us, to teach us, to show us the meaning of the sovereignty of Christ.

That is a big business, and you and I must seek to interpret everything in the light of that. The Spirit has come and He has come as committed to a particular task. He has come as the Custodian of a great and specific divine

purpose, and if the Holy Spirit is doing anything at all in this world with men and women, with you and with me, and in us, let it be understood that His aim is to make Christ absolutely Lord in every detail.

The Kingdom working in secret

It explains all that happens to us. Of course, this Kingdom, this sovereignty, is working very largely in secret. We have said that marks the change in the dispensation. Now, the Kingdom or the rule is something that is so largely hidden because it is now spiritual and not temporal or secular. It is hidden, a secret working. But oh, how wonderful is this working secretly of the Spirit in relation to this rule! It forms a subject by itself, which we shall not pursue now, but let it be understood in general that there is a deep work going on from heaven by the Spirit of God in this whole creation. Sometimes we speak of a person as being a deep person. We pass the remark, ‘Oh, he is a deep one’, or ‘She is a deep one.’ What do we mean? There is something deep down there that is characteristic, but you just cannot always put your finger or your hand on it and define it and say what it is, but it is something very real that explains them. Well, in a very much fuller sense, that is the character of the rule of Christ by the Spirit in this dispensation. There is something very deep going on. God’s plans are very deeply laid. Sometimes you just get a hint of them, just see some little suggestion, token. There is something going on buried deep. God is deeper than all the wit and wisdom of men; God undercuts all the cunning of Satan. He is deeper than the deep things of the very devil himself. He is right down under it all, He has it all measured, all weighed up, all in hand, and when the full story is told, it will be seen that Satan was not having his way at all, but God was under it. It is secretly working, but it is very real.

The Kingdom and patience

Now this large matter for practical help as we close. John, who as you know, is so much occupied with the spiritual aspect of things, in the opening of the book of the Revelation uses a phrase which I think is a clue to so much — “Your brother ... in ... the kingdom and patience ... in Jesus” (Rev. 1:9). The Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, putting the sovereignty and the patience together hand-in-hand. Sovereignty and patience — what does that mean? Well, it may very well mean God and Christ, in their absolute sovereignty, can afford to be very patient and wait a long time. They know they have got the thing in hand, they know how it is going to work out in the end,

and they can be very patient because of sovereignty. It may also mean that patience is the way of sovereignty, that if you have the power in your hand, you are not going to use it for men's instant destruction, but you are going to be patient. You see, men interpret God's patience and longsuffering as God's weakness or indifference, but His patience has to be interpreted in the light of His sovereignty in this way, and He is not going to use His power to force issues instantly. He is going to give us plenty of time. And John was knowing something of that in his exile in Patmos. Why did the Lord not, if He was on the throne, meet this Nero man, meet this terrible persecution from Rome, meet the sufferings of His servant and servants with swift deliverance? It is not God's way; He is not using His sovereignty in that way. He is giving men time, He is being infinitely patient, He is waiting. The rule and the patience go together.

But there is a third aspect to that. Why was John in Patmos? Was it because Rome and the emperor had sent him there into exile? Was it because of the persecution of the Christians in that time? Not a bit. They were mere blind instruments under the throne of Jesus Christ. What was the meaning of it? — and if we get this, we have got the meaning of so much adversity and suffering. You see, virtues are the real power. Power is not official, power is not coming and bludgeoning people into submission and obedience. That is not power, that is not the Kingdom of God. The power of God's rule is the power of virtues, spiritual qualities, and there is a quality about divine patience that is infinite power. Where would you or I be today but for the infinite patience of God? Is it not that that has saved us, preserved us, kept us? Every day we have to worship God for His patience and we say this patience of His is such a mighty thing. What we owe to it! Where should we be without it? John was a fellow in the patience of the sovereignty. Angels are there, as you see in the context. But here is the point, John was really learning the power of the Kingdom of God and of Christ which was found in patience, for after all, the triumphant person is the one who can wait patiently. We know that weakness goes along with impetuosity, always together. Strength is not being passive, but waiting positively, waiting, because that kind of waiting is a mighty faith. It is a faith that God can do and will do. Well —

“The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all.”

He spreads it over a long time, but it is all right. The issue is a very thorough work.

Now, the Kingdom, the rule and patience, being brought together here mean this, that you and I are being trained for rule, for government, along the line of necessitated patience. The impulsive, impetuous person will never reign, will never be put into responsibility of spiritual government. The work of the Spirit in relation to the Kingdom, the rule, is to bring about patience, divine patience, in our hearts. I venture to say that perhaps that is one of the things that we all need more than anything else. You may be a very patient person — I know very well that I am not — but the Lord takes great pains because He sees that it is not only a virtue, it is a power, for ‘virtue’, literally translated as a word, means ‘power’. It is power, it is virtuous, it is efficacious, and patience is that, the rule of the Spirit in our hearts.

(To be continued.)