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Golden
Candlestick

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Part 1

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THE VOCATION OF THE CHURCH

Reading: John 13.

It is necessary for us to look closely into several things that will help us to look into the divine meaning and the content of this chapter, and of the chapter following. These two chapters constitute one definite section of the Gospel.

Let us underline a few things in this chapter. First of all, let us note the references to the imminent departure of the Lord out of this world: verse 1, "... his hour was come that He should depart out of this world ..."; verse 3, "... knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He ... goeth unto God"; verse 33, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you"; verse 36, "Simon Peter saith unto Him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go ...".

If you glance back to chapter 12 at verse 35, you will remember that He had said something quite similar: "Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light among you ...".

The second thing to see is the impossibility of following Him now, and the reference to an "afterward": verse 7, "Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know afterward"; verse 36, "Whither I go ... thou shalt follow Me afterward."

The third thing to notice is that with which the chapter opens, the feet washing. Keep that in mind as a definite feature of this chapter; the washing of the feet by the Lord, and then the command that they should do the same to one another.

Then another thing to note is the new commandment, and the testimony to the world that is bound up with it: verses 34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Then in three verses we should note another thing: that is, partnership

with Christ and service: verse 8, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me” — I regard those last three words as governing the whole of this section: “part with Me” —; verses 13-14, “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master...”; verse 16, “The servant is not greater than his lord...”.

With those things noted, let us come to the general message of this chapter. It marks a step forward from chapter 12 as to the church.

The church

Let us again define the church. According to John 12 it is the company of those who are in a living fellowship with the Lord Jesus through His death and resurrection. That is the church, and, so far as that is concerned, this chapter carries us a step forward. In chapter 12 it is resurrection union with the Lord Jesus. In chapters 13 and 14 what is introduced is ascension union with the Lord Jesus. That is why we have noted those four verses in chapter 13 and one in chapter 12 with reference to His imminent departure. That is a governing thing here. It is very much in view.

Chapter 14 is very much taken up with the Lord’s going, the Father’s house (“I go to prepare a place”), and all that follows in the chapter bears upon the Lord’s going to the Father, leaving this world. It is the Lord’s going into heaven that is very much in view, and is governing everything here.

This is all set forth to show that the church, the fellowship of believers with Christ, through death and resurrection, is a heavenly thing; and inasmuch as service also comes up in this section, the service of the church has to do with Christ in heaven. The Lord is saying, in other words, that there is a new place for Him and for you, and that new place is outside of this world, it is in heaven. He says, I am going to heaven, I am going to the Father, I am going out of the world, and you spiritually are going out with Me, you in a spiritual way are going to be united with Me in a new place. So that everything for you henceforth — because I am in that place as your Head, your Lord, your Master — is going to be heavenly, out from heaven.

If you go back to chapter 12 and verse 31, you will recall these words: “... now is the judgement of this world ...”. This world, then, lies under judgement. I am going out of the world, out of the sphere of judgement, out of the realm of condemnation, I am going out to the Father, and you, My church, will be spiritually joined with Me, taken outside of the realm of judgement, out of the world.

If there is one thing that is true about the church, one thing that is made clear in the subsequent revelation of the New Testament, where the doctrine

of these things is developed, it is that the church is outside of the realm of judgement and condemnation. The Lord's people have been translated out of the power of darkness, the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. He is there, and we are represented as being in Him in the heavenlies, and in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation. "The whole world lieth in the wicked one", and the whole world, therefore, lieth under judgement. But we are not of this world, we are in Christ, taken out. The church is a heavenly thing, having escaped the judgement of the world.

Now that is made incumbent upon the Lord's people. It is impossible to be in the good pleasure of God unless we are spiritually in that position, outside of the world. He that is a friend of the world (that is, he that has heart relationship in any way with the world) is at enmity with God. So that we cannot know the good pleasure of God unless we are spiritually right out of that which is called the world. To put that another way, we must know heaven now as our home, our native air, our resting place, our source of all supplies, in order to enjoy the good pleasure of the Lord, and when we do know heaven in that way we know the good pleasure of the Father.

Seeking heavenly things

Another thing arises out of that; it is that, just in the measure in which our life is in heaven, and we are fulfilling the Word of the Lord in Colossians 3:1,2: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth ..." (KJV). Just in the measure in which our life is a heavenly life, and we are living in heavenly union with Christ and drawing all our resources from Him, there shall we understand heavenly things. To put that another way, voluntary contact, fellowship, life in this world in a spiritual sense is a deadening thing to spiritual knowledge and spiritual understanding. It means that our powers of spiritual perception and apprehension of the things of Christ are deadened, spoiled, arrested, paralysed by the things of this world. If we have our life in this world (we are not speaking physically, and by reason of the obligations to move among men; we mean that inner life in this world); or a heart relationship with this world, then we shall move in its darkness. That is why the Lord says that union with Him is light, and unless we go out with Him we shall be left to walk in darkness: "Walk in the light while ye have the light ...". He is not saying to His disciples that they are going to be left without the light; they are going to be able to walk all the time in the light in a dark world, because of their heavenly union with Him. But if we are left here in this world without that union, then

it is darkness. Any touch with this world in a spiritual way is a paralyzing of our spiritual faculties. If we want understanding in heavenly things, then we must have a heavenly life, and our understanding of the things of the Lord depends entirely upon the measure in which we are living in heavenly union with the Lord Himself.

The place of testing

There is yet another thing. It is our place which is always the ground of our testing; that is, we are tested by the place in which we live. That is illustrated for us in the case of Israel. They had been used to a certain kind of life in Egypt. It may have been a hard life, there may have been difficulties about it, but there were some things about it which were not so difficult. They did know where their food was coming from; their life was one of sense. It was fairly certain and fairly regular, and there was not very much to test them in the matter of faith. They knew pretty well what sort of a life they would be called upon to live, and it was a routine which was fairly fixed, and there was not much uncertainty about it; therefore there was not much test of faith. But when they came out into the wilderness, then they found themselves tested very much by the place in which they were. How often the test was too much for them, and they harked back to Egypt. Out here we are never sure of anything, we never know where our next meal is coming from; everything out here is uncertain, it seems to be so indefinite, we cannot see, we cannot do anything. Nothing that we can do will secure for us what we need. We are simply out here, and we are dependent upon God! Ah, yes, it depends on how you say that, what that means. You can say it in a tone which implies that it is a terrible thing, or you can say, Well, I have the surest and most certain of all sources — I have God. But the flesh does not look at things like that. The natural man thinks it is an awful thing to be dependent upon God and not upon his own effort, knowledge, wisdom, strength and understanding. To the natural man it is an awful position to be in a place where your own understanding, ability, strength and you yourself altogether are perfectly useless and altogether dependent upon Someone outside of yourself.

We are brought out of the world into heavenly union with the Lord, and there everything is out from Him, not out from ourselves, not out from the world. It is a life of utter dependence, but what a test it is! You find you can do nothing. There is nothing in yourself with which to cope with this situation. The disciples simply clung to the Lord as long as they could, to hold Him within the realm of their senses, for they felt that if He went back to the Father the bottom would fall out of their world.

The real testimony of the church is just in that direction, the absolute reality of Christ as in heaven, manifested by the church's life. You take it up at the beginning with the Acts, and right on, and the testimony of the church is the testimony that Jesus, though in heaven, is more real, wonderful and glorious than ever we knew Him to be, or ever He was to us when He was here in the days of His flesh! The church was given this testimony on that very ground. Take the case of the apostles, and then the case of the great apostle Paul, and you see that the whole testimony of the church as represented by them is the testimony to the wonderful reality of the ascended Christ, the risen Lord. It was all secured. The Lord was seeking to make clear to His disciples that it was expedient for them that He went away, for they were going to make discoveries of Him when He was gone which they had never been able to make before.

What a change there was between John 13 and Acts 9. In John 12 the Lord Jesus is in humiliation, rejected, set at naught. Acts 9 reveals a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, with all the power and authority in His hands, so that Saul of Tarsus met far more than his match in the ascended Christ, and the whole system of Judaism as gathered up in its intensest form in that one man met more than its match in the ascended Christ. What no other thing in this universe could have done in changing such a man as Saul of Tarsus from the position which he had held into a devoted servant of the despised Jesus was accomplished by a revelation of Jesus as in heaven. That was the thing that startled and broke him, that was the thing that accomplished this miracle. "I am Jesus." We can never imagine the impact that that announcement made upon Saul of Tarsus. Saul had thought of Jesus of Nazareth as some imposter, false teacher, blasphemer of God, and who had died under the curse of God, for "cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree." Jesus of Nazareth was, to Saul of Tarsus, the most miserable object of contempt and hatred. Now, hear the announcement, out of such transcendent glory that cannot be borne, that is intolerable and blinding — "I am Jesus"!

The church has its testimony in the value of that, and its ministry is all to do with what the Lord Jesus is, not in a historic sense but in His heavenly, glorified, exalted Person. It is the Son of Man at God's right hand that gives the ministry to the church, what it means that God has got a Man in the glory. That is the church's ministry.

You see how this links with that which we said at the beginning. God's eternal purpose is to display Himself in the universe through a creation, the centre of which creation is man, and the centre of which corporate man is the Man Christ Jesus. Power over the world and power over Satan is only — but is surely — on the ground of heavenly union with Christ.

You notice, then, that so much comes in with the word “hereafter”, of verse 36. When Christ is in heaven, then they will understand, and when Christ is in heaven then they will be able to follow. What the Lord meant when He said to Peter, “... thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow Me hereafter”, was not, You cannot follow Me now, but when you die you will go to heaven with Me. What He meant was this: Peter, you are in the flesh, and your flesh is a very self-confident flesh. You say you will go with Me even unto death. You do not know how impossible it is for your flesh to take you through. The flesh cannot go right through. But when you are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit, when the Holy Spirit has come and you are a spiritual man, and not a fleshly or carnal man; then you will be able to follow through, you will be able to go through the cross, you will be able to die for Me, but not now. That “afterwards” depends upon Christ being in heaven; just how far we understand and how far we can go depends on heavenly union with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So you see that all the Epistles are directed towards bringing heavenly fulness into the saints, and the saints into the heavenly fulness. That is the ministry, that is the service of John 13. It is to bring the Lord’s people into His heavenly fulness, and to bring His heavenly fulness into them.

Now we are getting near to feet washing. What a lot of misunderstanding there has been about this. You have got to see things from the heavenlies. If you begin to view things from the earthlies you go astray all the time. What is the meaning of this? Why wash the feet? Well, they had been in contact with the earth, and their contact with the earth had defiled them. Now then, get rid of all that which is of the earth, keep free of the earthly, of the world in a spiritual and a moral way. The Lord says, I am going out of the world. You have to come out of the world with Me in a spiritual way, and yet you have to remain here. Your life will be here, although you will not be of the world. As you move in this world you will become touched by it, but remember you are a heavenly people and you have got to maintain your heavenly relationship. Now then, your ministry to one another is to help one another to keep clean from the world in order to help one another to abide in the heavenly life. That is feet washing. It is a mutual engagement to help one another to keep clean so far as this world is concerned. The Lord Jesus in His great act said, in effect, I make you a people, a company, clean from this world, a heavenly people, but you have to remain in the world in testimony. You will be in touch with the world, and from time to time it will lay its hand upon you, and there will be defilement, but do not remain there, do not allow it to remain upon you. In your fellowship together seek to help one another to keep free, to elevate one another from the world, to keep the world out. And if you see a

brother, a sister, who has been touched by something of the world, seek to minister in a loving, humble way to that one, to get them free of that touch, that condemnation.

This is what He means later on by the new commandment, that you “love one another even as I have loved you.” How have I loved you? I have loved you to take you out of the realm of condemnation and judgement. I have loved you so that My very life has been laid down for you, to get you out to be a heavenly people. Now you, in that same love must minister to one another to maintain that heavenly position, that heavenly life. It is a ministry of love. It is not official. It is a ministry of love towards one another to help in the heavenly way (verse 35).

Love is self-emptying. He laid aside His garment, He took a towel and girded Himself, He poured water into the basin, He came forth to wash His disciples feet. That is the self-emptying of God’s Son. As we know, it is the type of Philippians 2: “... found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself ... taking the form of a bondservant ... becoming obedient unto death, the death of the cross.” It is just the opposite of that satanic pride which seeks mastery, lordship. Pride will never wash another’s feet, it will not come forth to serve others. Pride seeks all the time to be served. The Lord Jesus says, If you and I are really going to be true ministers of heavenly things, if we ourselves are going to come into the knowledge of that, and are going to be used by the Lord, we have got to be without pride, we have to be characterized by love, and that love is to show itself in this way, that we are constantly seeking to help one another to escape the toils and touches and contaminations of this evil world, and to enable one another to live the heavenly life, the life of heavenly union with the Lord. It is elevation all the time, uplift. It is so easy to do just the opposite, to remind one another of the things which belong to the old creation about us, and that brings us down to earth. It is not very helpful. You will not lift me very high if you are constantly reminding me of the old creation things that are still about me. I shall not help you to get very high if I keep pointing out the old faults that are still clinging to you. Let us minister to one another unto lifting up, unto heavenliness of life. There is nothing more elevating than that we should constantly remind one another that it is not what we are but what He is that matters, what He is in glory for us. That is an uplifting thing at once, as Horatius Bonar puts it in his hymn:

“Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art.”

That is heavenliness; that is heavenly ministry, to keep Christ in view and to minister Christ. That is true love, and that is the love of Christ to us.

Now we can see a little more of what the Lord's thought is for His people, and the way in which He is going to reach His end; for you and I and all the Lord's people will only reach that great end, where God is manifested in this universe through a new creation, as we are out from this world, a heavenly people, living a heavenly life upon heavenly resources, where there is no condemnation, no judgement or power of this world, but where we are in the kingdom of the Son of God's love. That is the way to the glory.

Notice that the Lord Jesus connects those two things; that He is about to depart, and now is the Son of Man glorified. The glory is bound up with deliverance from this evil world and with heavenly life.

GOD'S COMPREHENSIVE PURPOSE MANIFESTED IN ABIDING

Reading: John 15.

There are really three chapters which form this section, and contain the special truth relative to the whole purpose of God — chapters 14, 15 and 16. They cannot really be separated or divided, because they are one piece, but chapter 15 is the heart of things, reaching back into chapter 14 and on into chapter 16.

We are now coming to the fullest phase of the development of the revelation, and we are touching the things which are the strongest things, and those which represent a completeness, a wholeness. Therefore it is necessary, and it will be helpful for us to just review the whole ground in order to see how this part both fits into it and very largely gathers it up.

We have been thinking of God's eternal purpose in Christ His Son, and we have seen that that purpose is an expression, a manifestation, a revelation of Himself in a creation, and that that intention and purpose in the eternal counsels was to be realised and fulfilled man-wise. That is, by man as the central instrument and vehicle. The sum of all that which is meant by "man" in the racial sense is His Son, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it would be again valuable if we referred to some of those Scriptures which speak of the eternal counsels of God, and show us what was in these counsels. The Letter to the Ephesians is the main channel of that revelation: Ephesians 1:4-6: "... He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved One."; verses 11-12: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will; that we should be to the praise of his glory ..."; Ephesians 2:7:

“That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness towards us through Christ Jesus”; verse 10: “... we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”; Ephesians 3:9-11: “... to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

That contains several other things, but the first thing that we note is that it represents counsels of God before times eternal. It sets before us the fact that God in eternal counsels determined certain things; planned, arranged and secured certain things. Those counsels are summed up in the one phrase: “the eternal purpose”.

Then the other two things which are seen in those passages and in others are firstly, that that eternal purpose and those eternal counsels are bound up with His Son, the Lord Jesus, and are all in Him. The second thing is that Christ as God’s Son is set forth as a comprehensive and inclusive Son, and a great company now known to us by the title of the church which is His body was in those eternal counsels and foreknowledge chosen in Christ.

Therefore you have this order. God’s eternal counsels, and the purpose of the ages, summed up in His Son, Jesus Christ, realised in and manifested through the church. All that is summed up in one word, and that word is “Son”. It is a very comprehensive word. The beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews is explicit: “God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets ... hath at the end of these days spoken to us in son (the margin says ‘a son’, but the Greek has nothing corresponding to ‘his’ or ‘a’, and the literal translation of the Greek would be just this: “hath spoken unto us son-wise.” Of course, we know from what immediately follows that that relates to the Lord Jesus in the first place, “whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds (or the ages).” That term “son-wise”, as the Letter very quickly goes on to show, is an inclusive term as well as a personal one, and that Son is seen to be brought into corporate relationship with other sons, or others who are called to be sons, who are to be brought to glory.

If we look again at Colossians chapter 1 we have a very full presentation of this: verses 12-19: “Giving thanks unto the *Father*, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the *inheritance* (these are family terms) of the saints in light ... who hath ... translated us into the kingdom of the *Son* of his love; in whom we have our redemption ... by Him were all things created ... thrones ... dominions ... principalities ... powers ... in Him all things

hold together ... It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.”.

There are the eternal counsels especially related to the Son, and then our place is seen in the Son as related to and bound up with those eternal counsels; that is, the place of the church.

So that the word, the idea, the thought which governs everything, from the formation and projection of those counsels unto the ultimate realisation of them, is that of sonship, and we have seen and know quite well that sonship is the full thought of God in the matter of relationship to Himself, not the initial thought connected with the word ‘child’. A child is one thing, but the thought in fulness is that of “son”, and that is the end to which the eternal counsels are moving. It is with that always in view that every activity of God takes place: creation, redemption, all things — and no one knows how to tabulate that; it is quite impossible for us to comprehend what that means — after the counsel of His own will He is working. So that everything that is going on is governed by this one end of God, to produce sonship in this universe in all that it means to Him, “that we should be unto the praise of His glory”; that is the end. So that if we look on we see that the end of all things is a universe which is filled with praise unto His glory.

The great activities of God in sovereignty in the universe, in nature, in the creation, even in the fallen creation, according to Romans 8, and all those minute activities of God in our own lives who are the called according to His purpose, are held by Him in relation to sonship. If that really gripped our hearts and kept a grip upon them, our attitude towards everything would be one of enquiry as to how this could issue in sonship, how this could result in that growth and development which means a full expression of God’s thought. We ought to settle it, to lay it down as a standing, abiding, unalterable fact, that from God’s standpoint everything is being controlled with that end in view where we are concerned, where the church is concerned, to produce sonship in all that that means. It is a comprehensive thought. At the end of these times no longer in divers portions, in divers manners, no longer in the fathers, but all now gathered up and comprehended in One, Son-wise.

Now have we seen anew the purpose of God, the end towards which He is working? Have we got that clearly before us (and, oh, what a universe of fulness it is!)? Right through from the beginning God moved on the principle of sonship. If we have that in view we are able to come back and understand John’s Gospel. Indeed, we are able to understand all the scriptures, but as this gospel is particularly brought to us at this time it yields up the great secrets of sonship, and shows us how and by what means God moves to that end, the laws and the principles which govern sonship. John’s whole object in writing this Gospel, as He says at the end, is to prove the Sonship of Jesus Christ.

Now if we are included in sonship, then the principles which governed His life govern ours, and so the gospel is not just a revelation of Jesus Christ but it is a revelation of things for us in Christ, that we also may come to that for which we were foreordained unto adoption as sons.

Summary of John's gospel

Chapter 1 of John's gospel is the inclusive and comprehensive presentation of the Son from eternity, and the great statement which affects us and affects God's purpose so immediately is that statement: "In Him was life and the life was the light of men." It is a statement which presents a unique fact; in *Him* was life, in no other. Then it presents a related truth: "the life was the light of men." He is related to men as the Light.

Chapter 2 brings before us the principles of fulness. We refer to the marriage of Cana in Galilee. This brings before us the principles of fulness, for the end of that parabolic sign was fulness everywhere; fulness of life, fulness of joy, fulness of blessing, fulness of glory. The best wine kept to the last, and He showed forth His glory. It is just the end reached, and if you study the details of what took place there you have the principles which issue in fulness.

Now God always brings His whole subject into view early, at the beginning, and then He begins to break up and apply it afterwards. So that in chapter 1 you have the comprehensive presentation in Christ; in chapter 2 you have the comprehensive statement of principles of fulness in Christ.

We can break it up into fragments. In chapter 3 with Nicodemus it is a matter of a new creation essential, with a new life not possessed by the natural man, if God's end is to be reached. There cannot be the first step taken towards the realisation of these eternal counsels until there is a new creation in Christ, which creation is characterised by a new life; not that which is born of the flesh, the will of the flesh, or of blood, the will of man; but that which is born of the Spirit, a new creation with divine life.

Chapter 4 shows us the next step, that that life, when it is planted within the centre of the being of a believer, answers all that deep enquiry of the heart as to purpose. The woman of Samaria is marked in every way by longing, desire, need. (Thirst is a characteristic word in connection with man in his relationship with God). Here is one who is the very personification of conscious need, longing and wanting to know real life, what is the meaning of life, what is the meaning of everything — though perhaps not expressing it in such technical terms. There is a consciousness of some thing which ought to be which is not. There is inside a deep knowledge that we were made for something, and we cannot find it; that this kind of life is a mockery, this kind of life is simply all the time a seeking to find satisfaction and never finding

it. The very desire to be satisfied, the very sense of need itself is surely a witness to the fact that we were made for something. There is a destiny for which we were created, and we are groping for it, and yet we never seem to find it or reach it. If we finish our life here on this earth like that then life will have mocked us. That is the state represented by the woman, and then the Lord Jesus, speaking of the water that He gives, the life of the Spirit of God dwelling within, shows that there is an answer to all that, and that that divine life dwelling within is the solution to the problem, the key to the whole situation. When you have got that life you have got your destiny in essence, you have found that for which your whole being craves as the explanation of your very being. It is a wonderful thing to recognise that. I trust that is not too abstract.

You ask, Why have I a being? I am conscious of longings, desires, reachings out, and if they are not fully and finally satisfied then life has mocked me, I have missed something that I am conscious I ought to have had to explain my being. Now when the Lord plants eternal life within there is an answer to the whole situation, and that very life itself says, This is what you were made for; this is what you were created for, for God. So in the very receiving of eternal life we have in essence all the purpose of God for which we were created, and all the answer to those eternal counsels which marked us out unto the adoption of sons. "Because we are sons God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." That is the Spirit of life in Christ linking us with God and God's purpose in our creation.

Chapter 5 and chapter 6 lead us on to see that union with Christ is the full basis and way of eternal purpose. We shall not stay with this in detail, but those two chapters make very clear the facts of divine union. Chapter 5 emphasises Christ's union with the Father, and how it worked, His dependence upon the Father, His drawing everything from the Father, His doing everything, speaking everything as out from the Father, with nothing out from Himself. Then He carries that over to us, to show that as He lived by the Father so we have to live by Him. Chapter 6 shows that form of union with Christ which is feeding upon Him: "I am the bread". He lived by the Father; we have to live by Him. But chapter 6 also emphasises that union with Him is through death and resurrection, because it is broken bread. It is His body, His flesh, and His blood. These cannot be taken until they are released. The body broken, the blood shed, and we are partaking in a spiritual way. Therefore union with Christ is the full basis and way of the divine purpose; that is, nothing is apart from Christ. God does not give us eternal life as some *thing*. We have it only in the Son.

Chapter 7 leads us to the heavenliness of union with Christ. The Feast of Tabernacles, governing that section, sets forth how the people of God are called out to live in booths and maintain that testimony throughout the whole course on earth. Theirs is not an earthly life of abiding places here, but they have to keep a testimony all the time to the fact that they do not belong to this world; they live in booths; they are a heavenly people. It is a great principle of the purpose of God that we should recognise that we are a heavenly people and have to live a heavenly life.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with another great principle and law of the eternal purpose; it is this, that revelation as to Christ is a supreme factor in the eternal purpose.

In chapter 8 you have much said about the Lord as to light. In chapter 9 you have the man born blind. The two things go together, and the issue of that was the full knowledge of God's Son; of course, in a typical way. The man came eventually to see who Jesus was, and that was the outworking of the light. It is what Paul means in Ephesians by a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him; not just the initial knowledge of Christ, but the full knowledge of Him. Revelation of Jesus Christ is a law of the eternal purpose; that is, we move on towards God's end of sonship by the full revelation of God's Son in us. It is a progressive thing, and spiritual growth unto fulness, unto perfection, unto sonship is by a progressive and ever-growing and ever-fresh knowledge of Jesus Christ by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 10 gathers this all up into a corporate company and introduces the fact that this is not a matter of so many separate units. The realisation of God's eternal purpose requires the church, and is intended to be expressed in and through the church. So that the church being introduced, or the corporate company in union with Christ, in chapter 10, we are led into chapters 11 and 12 to see the church as a resurrection company.

Chapter 13 takes us beyond that still, and shows the church in heavenly union, heavenly life, and heavenly service. Christ is leaving the world, and while in one sense He is leaving the church behind, He is, in another sense, taking it with Him. That is what we are going to see in a moment, for the feet washing speaks of a constant separation from this world, and all ministry is in the direction of helping the Lord's people to maintain their heavenly position and heavenly life, and not to become entangled with this world.

Chapters 14, 15 and 16

We come then, to chapters 14, 15 and 16. Chapter 14 shows us Christ leaving the world, or in the main the emphasis is on that. Chapter 15 brings

in that which to the natural mind and to these disciples, not yet having received the Spirit, that which is always an enigma, a seeming contradiction. The Lord Jesus says repeatedly, I am leaving the world; I am going to the Father; “yet a little while and ye see Me no more”; “Abide in Me”. The natural man says, How can that be? That is just the difficulty with the disciples. You say You are going; we do not know what you mean by ‘a little while’. That enough is a problem, but then, added to that, You say we are to abide in You, and You are going. You are speaking in a realm that we do not understand. Well, of course, it is not possible for the natural man to understand things like that. You and I understand because we are living in the truth of it, in the reality of it, but *we* can immediately see how this relates to the eternal purpose. Christ has gone; Christ is in heaven, and, being there, *everything* for the church as to the eternal purpose of God is transferred with Him to heaven. It is outside of this world. There is a new place, and there is a Man in that place, and that Man and that place are the source, the fountain-head of everything in relation to divine purpose concerning the church. Christ in heaven is the sphere and the source of everything for the saints in connection with God’s purpose.

He says that if the purpose is to be reached or realised, it is essential that we abide in Him as outside of this world, as in heaven, and abide in Him as the fountain-head of all things.

There is a passage in Ephesians which is the fuller, doctrinal, spiritual setting forth of this: “God raised him ... and gave Him to be head over all things to the church which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” The fountain-head of the church is in heaven, and for all things it is essential to abide in Him.

The question of the disciples, and the question which would be ours if we did not know, would be, How can those here on this earth abide in One who is in heaven, and how can all that fulness which is locked up in Him in heaven be released to those who are here on this earth, in order that God’s end in sonship should be reached? Chapter 16 in the main answers the question, but these three chapters bear upon it. The answer is the Holy Spirit. Abiding in Christ is only another way of saying living in and by the Spirit, having your whole life in, and drawing all your resource by, the Holy Spirit. We know that, and yet it is a matter that has got to be constantly repeated, and we have to be continually reminded of it. Sonship is, after all, a matter of having our life in the Holy Spirit, and having the life of the Holy Spirit in us, and that to the full. When we use the word “sonship” we are only putting into one word all the eternal counsels of God, that which is meant by the purpose of the ages.

Chapter 15

Now you understand John 15 and you can break up that chapter. On the one hand, nothing is possible, said the Lord Jesus, apart from that abiding. A great many things are possible in a certain realm, but not in the realm of God's purpose. You may do quite a lot of things, achieve a lot of things, but they are outside of the realm of the eternal purpose. They do not relate to sonship, they do not issue in sonship, and that is the thing that matters.

But when it comes to the matter of God's end, then the one word which sets heavily upon the whole situation is this, that nothing is possible only in Christ, by abiding in Christ. In other words, nothing is possible apart from life in the Spirit. That excludes everything: "... apart from Me ye can do nothing". On the other hand, the positive side, that everything is possible by abiding in Christ. Let this come to our hearts and bring rest. It says this, that God has planned a great end; God has purposed tremendous things. All that means that tremendous changes have got to take place in you and in me. We have got to be different creatures; we have got to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Everything has got to be Christlike, of Christ.

That represents a tremendous transformation. It is a very high standard. It means perfection. Then in our hearts we faint and say, How can it be? It is too much, it is too high, it is beyond us. We are so conscious of the tremendous amount in us that is set against that, the positive strength of evil, and the absolute weakness of the good. How? The answer is this: it will all happen if you abide. That is all. You have not got to do it. You have not got to produce it. You have not got to conform yourself to the image of God's Son. You have not got to create the fruit that is to be borne to God's glory. You have not got to produce this at all. All that you have got to do is to abide in Christ. Live your life in the Spirit, and it will all happen. That is the meaning of John 15. Everything of God's comprehensive purpose is all in the abiding. Surely that ought to bring rest, and that is just Christ becoming our Sabbath, our rest. The Holy Spirit will do everything if we will abide in Him, and as we abide the fruit is borne.

The definition of fruit

Let us be quite clear as to what the fruit is. Do not confuse things. A great many people have the idea that the fruit of John 15 is the work they do for the Lord, and the results of that work. It is not. There may be, in another sense, a fruitfulness of life seen in the winning of souls, and in helping others Christ-ward, but that is not the fruit here. The fruit here is that which realises

God's end. And what is the manifestation of Himself: "Herein is my Father glorified..."; "... that we should be unto the praise of his glory". What is the fruit, then? It is that which expresses God, it is the showing forth of God. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control...". It is the expression of God.

So many people who have that idea, that fruit-bearing according to John 15 is a matter of what we do for the Lord, have gone off and tried to work for the Lord, to be fruitful by doing things. They have failed to see that if you and I abide in Christ, or abide in the Holy Spirit, that sort of thing will not be what we take up. It will become spontaneous. You see souls, and you say, I have got to win those souls; and so you make a beeline for everybody and anybody under a kind of legalistic whip, whereas if you abide in Christ, watchfully and in readiness (and surely to abide in Christ means not to abide in ourselves in these matters, and in our own feelings about things), the Holy Spirit knows where a soul is ready and where a soul is not ready. The timing is known to Him; He Himself times these things. There is a sovereignty at work behind the lives of men of which they are not conscious, and when the Lord does eventually come to a life it is just at the right time.

That Ethiopian Eunuch was just ripe, and the Holy Spirit knew and got hold of Philip and said, Go, join yourself to the chariot; here is a man who is ready, this is the time for that man. The Holy Spirit knew Cornelius and spoke to Peter, Here is a man who is ready; the hour has come. The Holy Spirit knows. We, on the other hand, take up this thing, and try to be fruitful.

No one must think we are discouraging earnest desire for souls. It is a part of the Holy Spirit's work in us that we should have an earnest desire, but if we are going off to take up this matter and say, I must be fruitful and win souls, and simply do it as out from ourselves, there may be a good deal of discouragement and a great many questions arise sooner or later, whereas a *spontaneous* work of the Spirit is always fruitful. It is abiding in Christ for every kind of fruit.

What we want to emphasise is this, that before there can be those practical, concrete expressions of fruitfulness in other lives there has got to be the expression of the Lord in us. Ministry comes out of what we are, and absolutely depends upon what we are, and when our ministry becomes something that is ahead of our walk with God, we have got into a realm of barrenness, unfruitfulness, ineffectiveness, and sooner or later defeat. All ministry must just be in line with our walk with God. Abide in Him, so shall you bear fruit. It is that way. Have your life in the Spirit, and God's end will be reached; that is, an expression of Himself, sonship; and through what He is in us others will be met, for it is not what we can say to others about the Lord, it is what

we can give to others of the Lord. To put it the other way, what the Holy Spirit has of Christ in us to give.

“I am the living bread.” And He put it into the hands of disciples, and said, You give it. He gave Himself to them in type to give to others. That is ministry. It is receiving Christ, and giving Christ, not talking about Him. Unto that ministry we must abide, and as we abide that just happens. The struggle, the strain and the stress goes out of life, and the fret, and the anxiety will depart as to the Lord’s work and as to our own spiritual growth. Rest will come in as we abide. Our business is to abide, to live in and walk by the Spirit. All the rest will spontaneously result, and we can leave it at that.

Let us have that understanding, and be quite clear, and say, Now, Lord, my desire and my intention is just to abide in You. All the rest is Your matter. My spiritual growth is Your matter. My ministry, my service, is Your matter. I abide! It sounds as though it is too simple, and too easy; we want to do something. That is just the trouble, we get into ourselves again.

It is life in the Spirit by which we come to God’s end, and all that is meant by sonship; that is, an expression of Himself, with all its glorious results and primarily being unto the praise of His glory.

To be continued