



the
**Golden
Candlestick**

FEATURES OF ZION

Part 1

T. Austin-Sparks

Volume 133

THE STABILITY OF CHRIST

“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King ... Walk about Zion, and go round about her; number the towers thereof; mark ye well her bulwarks; consider her palaces: that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death” (Ps. 48:1,2,12-14).

“He looked for the city which has the foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

“For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

“His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob” (Ps. 87:1-2).

The words of the twelfth verse of Psalm 48 suggest a contemplation of Zion as a whole. *“Walk about Zion, and go round about her.”* It is not possible to piece together all that is in the Scriptures about Jerusalem and Zion without being carried out and on to the Lord Jesus and to His church. It would be of very little value to us in our spiritual lives, in all our conflicts and our sufferings and our perplexities and in all that goes to make up the walk with God, to have in the Bible a lot of things said about some city in some part of the world which has had a great history and a lot of attention drawn to itself as being the centre and object of many a quarrel and dispute and conflict, a city in which the nation to which it belonged had a great deal of pleasure and delight and about which its psalmists composed psalms, praises and other adulation. It would be very little help to us to just have that as something recorded and handed on as a book. The Bible is not like that. Neither is the Bible intended just to be a book from which we draw lessons. That is certain things happened long ago and you draw lessons more or less from them, you make them examples. It is very much more than that. Everything that is here in the Scriptures is something which is timeless and which is therefore at hand to be of value in a spiritual way in any moment. In a word, it is all gathered into the Lord Jesus, and then is brought to us in the Holy Spirit to be made of practical present value in our spiritual experiences and, great as is the amount about Jerusalem and Zion, it is all about the Lord Jesus. As I have said, it is impossible to sit down and gather together all these things under these names, if

you have any spiritual illumination at all, if you are in any way being taught by the Spirit of God, and not to be transported to the Lord Jesus and find these things belong to us in a very real inward way. So that the contemplation of Zion in the Spirit will become a contemplation of Christ. Just as Jerusalem is a comprehensive symbol in many numerous particulars, a symbol of divine meanings, so Christ is the reality of all those meanings brought into a vital organic relationship with believers. We see Christ speaking in this many-sided symbolism, speaking right into our lives, going right down to the very depths of us with challenge, comfort, assurance and all the things that we need. For anyone who knows the Psalms alone knows how many things are said in connection with Jerusalem and Zion for the comfort and help of the Lord's people.

We have often noted that the book of the Psalms compasses the whole range of human need, and has ever been that to which the people of God in their hours of need have turned. What a history there is of turning to the Psalms and finding in the Psalms something to meet almost any need of which we can be conscious. It is as though those who wrote the Psalms were caused to pass through all the experiences of which men are capable and to cry out for and find God in those experiences. Yes, it is like that, and if so much of it is gathered up into connection with Jerusalem and with Zion, then it is all pointing towards and summed up in the Lord Jesus. It simply means that He is the answer to the sum of all our need. He speaks to us as Zion spoke to Israel of old and to those Psalmists who passed through those many experiences.

The Foundations of Zion

Now the other passages which we have read refer to one phase of this whole matter of Jerusalem and Zion — that is, her foundations. The passage in Hebrews 11 referring to Abraham said that he looked for *the* city which has *the* foundations. Then the apostle Paul says the only foundation is Jesus Christ, there is no other foundation. Then the Psalmist says, "*His foundation is in the holy mountains.*" God's foundation is in the holy mountains. You remember the word of the Lord to Abraham was that he was to go to a distant mountain, the land of Moriah, and offer Isaac for a burnt offering there. And, reaching the summit of Mount Moriah and looking across the intervening space of time, the next appearance of Moriah is in David's day. You remember the story of David's failure over the numbering of Israel, the devastation throughout the land, and eventually the threshing-floor in Mount Moriah, and there the offering to the Lord and the ravage of death stayed, the sacrifice, and the temple secured, the place of the house of the Lord, and you reach another phase, another point, in the foundations of the house of God. And the next time,

without mentioning the name Moriah or any earthly mountain, looking from that point with David on over another long period of time, you come to what Abraham looked for — the city which has the foundations. You come to Christ and you come to the heavenly Jerusalem and see what God has been moving towards all the way, and you find that Abraham's experience was foundational and David's experience was foundational. And if you gather up the meanings of the offering of Isaac, as of receiving him back as from the dead, the meaning of that great mercy of God to David on Mount Moriah, you find exactly what spiritual foundations are. To those we shall come presently, but here it is foundations which are in view, Zion's foundations.

The Importance of Foundations

Foundations are exceedingly important things. Sooner or later, everything, as to its real value, will be determined by the foundations. There is a sense in which we are never finished here with foundations. Of course, there is another sense in which the foundations are laid once and for all, and we are not supposed to go back and lay the foundations again and again. But there is another sense in which we are never finished with foundations, though they may be laid. We are always being dealt with on the basis of our foundations. God is dealing with us in the light of our foundations or His foundations. Sometimes a great building will completely collapse, and when investigation is made, it is found that the trouble was in the foundations. Sometimes a building will become a very distorted thing. Only a few days ago I saw in Scotland a building. It was straight when it was put up, but now one wing was at this angle, another wing was at that angle. The windows would not close, no door would fit, everything was askew, and of course there is no difficulty in explaining: the foundations have given way, they simply have not stood up to things. That building was exposed to a large extent of open country. Across that country, down from the mountains beyond, came the winds, and they discovered the foundations, and there is the building all over the place. These things are true of many lives. Some collapse entirely, some become distorted, twisted, all topsy-turvy, confused, all angles, and it is just foundation trouble. Some reveal terrible inconsistencies in the superstructure, raising great questions as to the thoroughness of the work which underlies. It is all a matter of foundations so often. We can become very top-heavy with our superstructure truth. We can have all the truth of the church, the Body of Christ, and all these heavenly things which in themselves are perfectly true, and we may have them all as a matter of teaching; and something happens in the day of adversity and we go to pieces, we just do not stand up, we are found out, we collapse. We are

all having to make confessions along that line. We break down. There is some weakness somewhere in the matter of foundations.

Well, what is the meaning? What must we do? We must contemplate Christ afresh, firstly in relation to foundations. If He is the foundation, if Zion takes its character from Him, and if Zion is all that these Scriptures says Zion is — *“Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God”* (Ps. 87:3); *“The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob”* (Ps. 87:2); *“Beautiful in prospect is Zion, the joy of the whole earth”* (Ps. 48:2) — so you can go on — if those things are true and such a Zion takes its character from its foundation, then in order to have such things as being true of us, of the church, we must look at the foundation, that is, we must look again and yet again at Christ.

The Stability of Christ the Foundation

One thing here which of course immediately rises in connection with what I have been saying which is perhaps the first, the supreme characteristic of Christ as foundation and of every right foundation, and that is stability. That is what a foundation is supposed to be — stable, to have stability. Oh, how steady He was; how quiet, how confident, how assured, how unmoved, how imperturbable was the Lord when He was here. Nothing moved Him, nothing shook Him, nothing made Him waver. He quietly, steadily, in composure, faced every onrush of adverse forces from earth and from hell. Indeed, He was a rock. With the fast-gathering storm, the nature of which He knew perfectly, about to break upon them all, the most terrible storm in history, forces of hell working through every earthly means, right on the edge of it He said, *“Let not your heart be troubled”* (John 14:1). He knew the trouble that was coming to Him and to them. *“Let not your heart be troubled.”* Yes, that is the Lord Jesus. Stability!

The Secret of Christ’s Stability

But what was the secret? It was not just human composure, the strength of a great soul, of a great will. There was a secret. His life was deeply rooted in His Father in heaven. That was a favourite phrase of His — ‘Father in heaven’. His whole life was deeply rooted, or, to keep to our metaphor, founded and grounded in His Father in heaven. A heart relationship is implied by *“the Father”*, *“My Father”*.

Now that heart relationship with His Father was not a thing which just existed in His case in a way in which it does not exist in our case. I mean, it

was something that was put to the test and tried in every way. Satan did his utmost to interfere with that heart relationship with the Father. *“If thou art the Son ...”* (Matt. 4:3). Everything was focusing upon that heart relationship with the Father. There is the insinuation that this One in need, in weakness, is not being cared for by the Father. *“If thou art the Son ...”*. The last terrible ordeal was focused upon the same point. *“The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?”* (John 18:11). Oh, what a cup! What a bitter cup! But He said *‘The cup — not that God has imposed upon Me, not that I must be resigned to it — which the Father has given me’*. My Father gives Me the most bitter cup that ever man has been called upon to drink — My Father gives it. You see the point. It is a terrible cup, but it is handed by *the Father*. That speaks of a heart relationship, does it not?

Yes, tested in that relationship, along every line, and passing it on to His own. *“Your heavenly Father knows ...”* (Matt. 6:32). *“My Father ... your Father”* (John 20:17). The Father in heaven; the place where He was rooted, where His foundations were, that place was altogether outside of this world. It needed to be. Only so could there be stability. If His foundations had been in this world, well, there would be no stability, no security here. His foundations were outside of this world. Oh, thank God that there is a place of security outside of our world. The apostle uses another simile when he speaks of the place of the anchorage of the soul, sure and steadfast, within the veil (Heb. 6:19). It is the same thing; an anchorage, yes; a place of foundation, yes; a place of rooting outside. Christ had His foundation outside of this scene and all that belongs to it. Paul puts that into a phrase — *“Your life is hid with Christ in God”* (Col. 3:3), outside of this scene. Hidden, yes, foundations are always hidden, but oh, how important they are!

Christ’s Stability must be ours by the Spirit

If the Lord Jesus is the foundation, how is He the foundation? If that is true as to His foundation, and that has got to be true of us — how? We have been so superficial. We have said, Yes, *“other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”*, and that means His Deity, His Godhead; that means that He accomplished a great atoning work on His cross, He rose from the dead, He ascended to heaven, He is there at the right hand of the Majesty on high, He is coming again, and these things comprise the foundation. That is all true, do not misunderstand me, I am not taking anything from that, but I want to say we can believe all that and be terribly shaken and completely collapse. We can believe it as a matter of doctrine and as a matter of facts, and yet somewhere, somehow, there is a gap between our perfectly

orthodox doctrine, our sound doctrine and the stability of our lives, the straightness of our lives, the consistency of our lives. Somewhere there is weakness, and yet we have all that. Jesus Christ as the foundation is not so only as a matter of doctrine or in any objective way. The Holy Spirit has come to enter into us as the Spirit of Christ. Paul speaks of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and by the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ he would be able to do certain things (Phil. 1:19). What did he mean, and what is that? It just means that what has been wrought and ratified in the Lord Jesus and perfected in Him through testing, through suffering, through trial perfected, is now, by the Holy Spirit, made true in us. We shall take our character from Him by the Spirit, and we too shall become, if not all at once, yet quite definitely in a progressive way more assured in our hearts, more steady, more confident, more unmoved. Our early storms are child's play, but even then to a child a little adverse wind is a terrible hurricane, it is awful. As we go on with the Lord, we find that we come up against blasts, cyclones, of spiritual adversity, trial and assault which no child could stand up to, and we find that we are shaken by this new test, this new trial, this new form in which the Lord is allowing us to be assailed. Oh, blessed be God, the story is that we are not carried away; it is marvellous how we survive and come through. Why? — because of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

What is the Spirit of Jesus Christ? Firstly, the Spirit of steadfastness. It is not our steadfastness, God knows. If it were left to us, we should have been carried away long ago, we would not be here. We are learning, yes, by our own failure often, by our own breakdown, our own weakness under trial and assault, we are learning Christ, we are discovering Christ, we are coming to the place more and more where we worship and say, 'Well, I never thought I would weather that one, it did not look as though I was going to get through that one, it looked very much as though that one was going to be the end of me, but I am coming through.' It is in that way that He is our foundation. I know foundation truth is His Deity and His atonement, that is the foundation for our faith, but somehow He Himself has got to come in and be my hope of glory, or else there is no hope at all. He has to be my hope of glory inside, be a sure foundation in my spirit, an unshakeable foundation, and, for those who have gone any distance with the Lord through the years, it is possible for them to say very humbly, 'Yes, I used to be caught along that line, I cannot be caught along that line now. There was a time when that would have shaken me terribly; thank God, I have got beyond that. I have not got beyond the point of being shaken, but not on that point, in that way.' We see that He has gradually brought us on in the matter of His own stability. Rock-likeness — is not that exactly what He meant when He said to Peter, "*Upon this rock I will build my church*" and

“*Thou art Peter (a piece of rock)*” (Matt. 16:18)? This was a prophecy concerning a weak man, that he would take his character from his Lord and become a part of Christ in that sense, that, by the Holy Spirit, what was true of Christ would be true of him.

Rock-like — oh, how much in these Psalms there is about the rock. “*Thou art my rock.*” How often David used that word of his Lord. You see the foundation. Well, I said earlier, there is a sense in which we never get away from foundations. That is, God is always dealing with us on the matter of foundations to get us more and more settled, grounded, assured, confident. There is no end to that here. All the fresh shakings are to bring that about, all the fresh adversities are dealing with the matter of foundations. We never get away from them. We, in other words, never get away from testings and trials of faith, and is not faith the very foundation of everything? Dr. Campbell Morgan published a little book on Job. Coming to the last chapters of the book of Job, those chapters in which the Lord takes up matters with Job and leads him out — “*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?*” (Job 38:4), ‘What do you know about this and that?’ He was led right out into the immense magnitude of God. And Dr. Morgan says God never touched upon Job’s problem, He never tried to solve Job’s problem for him or to answer Job’s questions. How God dealt with Job’s problems was to make Job sure of Himself, the Lord. And Dr. Morgan says that when Job came to the place where he was assured of God, his problem no longer existed, it had gone. Is that not it? The Lord does not answer our questions and explain our experiences and solve our problems directly. He is working to bring us to a place where we are *so sure of Him* that the problems are undercut. “*His foundation is in the holy mountains.*” The Lord loves the gates of Zion. That is where the heart of the Lord is.

Now note: Abraham was called the friend of God. How was he the friend of God? How did he become that which God loves more than all the dwellings of Jacob, where the heart of God was? Simply because, through testing and through trial, he imbibed the Spirit of His Son, Jesus Christ. Was not that the scene on Moriah? — the Spirit of Jesus Christ laying down His life, His soul. Yes, it was Christ in Abraham, through testing and trial, that made Abraham the friend of God and made it possible for God to say, My friend, My delight, My beloved. “*More than all the dwellings of Jacob*”, these earthly things.

UNITY IN THE TRIUMPHANT LIFE OF CHRIST

Reading: Ps. 48:12-14; Heb. 11:10; 1 Cor. 3:11; Ps. 87:1-6.

In our contemplation of Zion or of Christ, our first occupation is with foundations, and we were speaking about spiritual stability as wrought out in Christ while here on earth, under every kind of adversity, and then perfected, and brought to us in the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, to make us in that particular respect like Himself — steady, unmovable, reliable, quiet, confident, assured — a work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

This is an additional word on foundations in that connection of stability. It is obvious that we shall never get very far if we are unstable. Until the Lord has got us to the place where we are, to some real degree, grounded and settled, fixed and steady, He will not be able to put upon us the responsibility of His house. His house is not a material structure to be built upon material foundations. It is a spiritual thing. It is spiritual responsibility, spiritual ministry, spiritual life, spiritual fellowship, all that is represented in the House of God, and it cannot be placed upon our uncertainty, our uncertain souls, our wavering, our unreliable selfhood. It can only be placed upon what is of Christ in us in the sense of stability.

How important for carrying responsibility with and for the Lord is this matter of coming to the full assurance of faith, this confidence in God!

A Family Constituted by a Life Triumphant Over Death

Now we pass on to another aspect of the foundations, for the foundations themselves are manifold, although one. You know from the Revelation how manifold the foundations are: all manner of precious stones in the foundation, and the next thing that we shall consider for a little while in relation to foundations is that the foundation is a matter of a family constituted by life, and that life as the life which has conquered death. That is a rather vague statement, I know, but we can quickly explain. As we indicated in the last chapter that Abraham, who was looking for the city which has the foundations, had to go to Mount Moriah and there offer Isaac and receive him as from the dead, and God had said "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*" (Gen. 21:12). So it is quite clear that the family had to be out from a triumph over death, a life which had overcome death, which had vanquished death, and wherever you come to Scripture bearing upon the heavenly family, the divine family, you will find

that death and resurrection are always in the near neighbourhood, very closely in touch. There has to be that which really is the mighty vanquishing of death in order to bring in this heavenly family so that it is constituted on that ground. And it is a family, every member of which, in the first place, possesses the life which has overcome death, and is learning to live by that life, and is called upon to prove right through the whole course of this earthly sojourn where death remains, to prove right on to the end the power of that life in terms of overcoming death.

It is something into which we are called as our experience, as the ground to be proved and to be established. It is foundational that you and I not only possess that life in Christ, but continually prove its worth, prove its power, know it as the power of His resurrection. That is in the very foundation of things. If Abraham is the father of all them that believe, if he is the father of a spiritual and heavenly seed, then he is the foundation in principle. And if it was in Isaac that his seed should be called, it is quite clear that it was on Mount Moriah that in principle the family was secured, secured by death being set aside and life triumphing. The same thing happened on Moriah so many years afterwards in the case of David. He had brought death upon the land; death stalked through the land, cutting down on the right hand and on the left many thousands through David's folly and sin. At length in the threshing floor of Ornan, Mount Moriah, the sacrifice was offered, the sword was sheathed, death was stayed, life triumphed, and it became the foundation of the house of God, the temple in which the supreme characteristic is life triumphant over death.

I was interested to notice that this last clause in Psalm 48 — *"This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death"* — is not a correct translation. The correct translation is: *"He will guide us across the gulf of death."* Now *"Walk about Zion"*, and the last thing is: *"He will guide us across the gulf of death"*, not even unto death but over death, across death, the other side of death.

When we come to think of this in the light of the Lord Jesus, of course, again it is quite patent that it was in the hour of His resurrection that He said, *"I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God"* (John 20:17). What He had said on that wise before — their Father and His Father — only became, in its full spiritual meaning and value true in His resurrection. They were begotten again *"unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Pet. 1:3). It is a family embodying this great reality of triumphant life, and it is concerning that that the apostle used those words which are very familiar to us in 2 Corinthians 2:15 — *"We are a sweet savour of Christ unto God"* and, leaving out the other details, we come to this: *"a savour from life unto life"*. *"We are a sweet savour of Christ unto God"*; that

is, we are bringing to God that which is of Christ which is precious and acceptable to Him, something in which He delights. It is Christ, and what is it? A savour of life unto life in others, that we are bringing the message and the power of this life triumphant over death to others. That is a sweet savour of Christ unto God. It is a family in the power of life.

God Builds on the Family

As to foundations, what is it God builds upon? What only can He build upon? The answer is quite definitely: God can only build upon life, and He can only build a family upon life. One of the very precious things, I think, of the Word of God, the divine truth, is just this, that God's foundation in spiritual essence is the family. We think of building by and on quite a lot of things, and it is here that so much confusion is brought about. We think of building in terms of truth, of doctrine, of knowledge, of light; we are all the time making those the criteria, and very often these things destroy the family spirit by misapprehension. We divide the Lord's people when we make truth and light a matter of relationship, of fellowship. Even unconsciously, almost unconsciously, springs up something divisive: superiority, difference in measure and apprehension. There comes about a phraseology: they have not seen! They have not got revelation! And the way in which it is said implies they belong to one category, and we to another. It is so subtle, and we are making the measure of our light the measure of our fellowship. The result? Well, quite without intention, the effect is division, is distance, is difference.

How can you and I and all the Lord's people make a good beginning in hope? Now, you can rule out a whole host of things and say, it cannot be that. We cannot make a good beginning with any hope if it has to be the same measure of light, everybody having the same apprehension of truth, the same interpretation. That cannot get us anywhere. But I venture to say that if we take this attitude and hold fast to it — We belong to one family, we are members of one family, we have one life, one Christ, within all of us — if we would hold to that, we would get a long way. You may not agree with me on quite a lot of things, (I expect you do not) but is that going to cause you to go away, wash your hands of me and have nothing to do with me? Then you are making things such as teaching, doctrine or interpretation the basis of relationship and fellowship. If you say, 'Well, I do not see eye to eye on certain matters, quite a number of matters, but we belong to one family, there is one foundational thing about us, we are members of the same family', that gives us a good starting point, and will at least form a foundation for seeing just how far we can go together. Get the foundation right, see what the foundation is, and it is not that,

that and that, but it is this: we share one life, we are members of one family, and in any family worth the name there is at least an effort made to get on together because they are a family. That is very elementary. It is hardly worth mentioning, but I see that it is just there that the test of the power of this life comes in. That is what I am getting at. We say we share one life. Yes, but what kind of a life is it? Is it abstract, just something that we have got in common, we call it eternal life? We have never defined it any more than: That it is going to outlast this life and carry us on through eternity.

But there is something in the life that you and I share that has proved more than a match for all the disruptive forces of this universe. They were concentrated at the cross of the Lord Jesus, they were out to destroy, to disintegrate, to divide, to scatter. In His resurrection, that life proved more than a match for all those disruptive forces, and on the day of Pentecost, you see what that life did. They were all scattered in the night of his betrayal. On the day of Pentecost, they were together and it says of those who were saved that they continued steadfastly in fellowship. Something has happened. The disruptive, disintegrating forces of death and spiritual forces have been met. A beautiful family in fellowship has been born in His resurrection, and there is that in this life which is not just passive, abstract life; it has in it the power of unifying and overcoming disruption. It is the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Oh, how easy it would have been for a complete breakup of that band before His cross! How easy it would have been for them to have been alienated from Him and from one another, for the whole circle and group to have split up, divided and gone! How easy it would have been for Him to have just given them up as a hopeless proposition, wash His hands of them, saying, I can make nothing of these men, I can never bring them into any kind of oneness. There were all the makings of a situation like that, but *“having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end”* (John 13:1). He did not let them go. He did not give them up. He did not wash His hands of them. He did not say, They are impossible! He did not say, I have no room for So-and-so, he is such an impossible person! He did not allow disintegration to come in. He held them together to Himself by His love to the end.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ has come to work that same thing in you and in me so that we do not so easily let one another go because of our faults and imperfections and all that kind of thing which would alienate us, separate us, divide us. We are not so ready to let other people go because they do not see as we see. We are not so ready to let the Lord's people go because they have not got revelation. You see what I mean. No, the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the Spirit of the family, and the family is not just composed of those who see alike, who gather in a certain place and are occupied with a certain interpretation. No! The

family is much larger than that. Anything in the nature of exclusivism is a violation of the family spirit, the family nature, of the Holy Spirit Himself. Where would any of us be if the Lord had treated *us* according to what we are in ourselves, according to the measure of our apprehension of His thoughts and His will, our likeness to Christ? What we owe to His infinite forbearance and longsuffering as with very wayward children, very slow-to-learn children — yes, and very sinning children! What we owe to His longsuffering and forbearance! Do not let us make external things the basis of fellowship. The family is something altogether different from that. Do not let us make ‘things’ at all the foundation of relatedness. Let us recognize that it is Christ Who is the foundation and Christ in terms of love and life which have met the full force of hatred and of death *and conquered*. That life is in you and in me to prove its power and its value in the realm of all those works of evil along the line of division and death. The foundation is life, Christ as life, Christ as victorious over the work of death. You know that in nature, where death has taken place, disintegration will soon follow. Where life is, there is still hope — the basis of it holding together.

THE INDESTRUCTIBILITY OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

“For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3).

We have had an immense amount of teaching on the greater magnitudes of divine counsels and purposes carrying us from eternity to eternity, and we are acquainted, at least acquainted, with very much in that realm that has to do with those purposes of God, but I have been greatly troubled because there is a very great deal that does not seem to come into line with that. Indeed, it seems to be inconsistent with it or a contradiction to it, even amongst those of us who are so closely in touch with it; and that, under test, given circumstances, assaults of the enemy, deep trials, onrushes of other forces, there is breakdown. There is a good deal that is not honouring to the Lord, very much otherwise, even where the teaching has been received for a long, long time and ought to be known. And this is not said just about others. We are all aware that a good deal of what we know of spiritual information has still to be inwrought, and we are far from being able to say that we are the living embodiment of all that. We find many weaknesses, we find a great deal that needs to be built up in ourselves. And in this realisation and having to do with so much, all this which falls so far short of what the Lord has given and is so contrary to it in so many cases and directions, my exercise of heart has been: What is wrong? Is it not after all a matter of foundations? Have we become so taken up with the superstructure of the divine purpose and truth and revelation that, as we said earlier, we have got a bit top-heavy, and there is something not quite right between the relationship of the superstructure and the foundation? That is my exercise, and that is what I feel to be the Lord’s intention, for this message. So far as I am concerned, that is my burden.

So we came to speak about our foundation, a fresh contemplation of Christ. We approached this through the symbolism, typology and metaphors of Jerusalem and Zion, but I have a feeling, a very bad feeling, that the metaphors and the symbolism obscure the immediate practical value, and I want to get away from the framework right to the very heart of things and just say exactly what it is we feel the Lord is after. It is here in Christ Himself, the foundation other than which no man can lay, and if that foundation be destroyed, made of none effect, violated, what do the righteous do? Put in that form of question as to prospect, it is a cry of hopelessness. You can do nothing, nothing is possible.

With all that you say and all that you teach, all that you give, it is all in vain, it is useless, if the foundations are in any way destroyed. You notice that the margin gives another tense to that which puts it rather in the past: What have the righteous accomplished after all that you have done? After all that you *have* done, what does it amount to if the foundations are destroyed? It is all in vain.

So again it is very important that we should be quite sure that everything is really on the foundation and what that foundation really means, and this can be understood by looking at some of the meanings of foundations.

The Stability of Christ

In chapter one we were seeing Christ as the foundation and the great factor of stability. It is quite obvious to us all that if there is not real spiritual stability about us, if we are not people of certainty, of assurance, of spiritual confidence who can be relied upon spiritually, counted upon; if we are people who are of more than one mind, up and down and so on, there is something very much wrong with our foundation, our apprehension of Christ, our relationship with Christ. We saw how stability was wrought in Him to perfection; through all the storms, adversities, trials, sufferings, how sure, how steadfast He was, how unwavering. And then that the Spirit of Jesus Christ has come to work that into us progressively, and, while we will not reach final stability in one bound, it ought to be true that there is a very distinctly marked progressiveness in this matter, that whereas at one time we were easily moved, we are not easily moved about that now. Whereas before we could be shaken by certain things, those things do not shake us any longer. We have got past that. We may still have our shakings by new forces and situations which we have not met before and we are going through new experiences where this rooting, this grounding, has still to take place. Nevertheless, we have moved on, and we are no longer the old flabby things that we once were, knocked about and carried about by all those more elementary forces of adversity.

There is much in the New Testament about steadfastness in Christ, being strong in the Lord, always abounding, unmovable, and unless that is true, we are not going to get through at all. All the building that we are putting up on top of that is going to collapse. We may know all about the eternal purpose, the counsels of God from eternity, the church, its great calling and destiny, and the whole thing will collapse like a pack of cards if underneath we are not rooted, grounded, settled, steadfast, unshakeable; that is, unless we are in oneness and keeping with the foundation, the unshakeable rock, and we are taking the rock-like character from Him Who is the rock foundation.

And, while this is a call and a challenge, let it also be an encouragement,

for we are going to be put through many mysterious inexplicable adversities and sufferings, things that we cannot explain, things that we cannot explain even from God's side. We cannot see God in them, we cannot see why God should allow it, how that can be consistent with God. Oh yes, that is not saying a wrong thing, it is true in the experience of many — the mystery of God's ways, altogether beyond finding out. We are going through things that could shake our very foundation, our faith, cause us to come to a standstill in the grip of an awful question. Now the Lord takes us that way, and the history of stability is the history of a tree which, having been planted, with every successive storm, finds for the moment its roots a bit loosened, things becoming a bit precarious, but its reaction to every such effect of storm is to root down deeper, and the mighty tree which cannot be moved by the greatest gale is simply the history, the sum of many shakings which have sent its roots deeper to lay hold more strongly. That is the way of the Lord with us. Yes, not one of us is beyond being terribly shaken, raising the greatest questions, wondering with the biggest 'Why?' But that is the way of being established. Do not, then, be discouraged if you pass through a time where everything for you is an open question after all. Just remember that that is the time in which the Spirit of Christ has His opportunity for bringing that mighty rock-like stability of Christ into fuller expression as the very foundation of your life.

The Unifying Power of Triumphant Life

Then we went on with the unifying nature of foundations, unifying in the power of a life triumphant over death, and here again I stay for an extra word, because inconsistency with much revelation and much light and truth is found along this line very often. A very great deal of my time is taken up with clearing up messes created in relationships with other Christians by people who have got fuller light. They have got all the light of the Body, all the truth of the Body, the church, the oneness of Christ, and they are making messes everywhere between themselves and other Christians. Rather than it being a unifying thing, it is becoming a divisive thing. The truth is dividing as it should not divide. If we really have apprehended Christ aright, there should be a far greater measure of divine love in our hearts for all saints, not those who accept our particular viewpoint, our particular measure of revelation, what we stand for. It is a most pernicious thing. I am finding everywhere people who say, 'If you have not been to Honor Oak, you do not know anything!' See what effect that has on other people. It is divisive, and it is a wrong apprehension and a wrong application of truth. We stand here solidly for the oneness of all believers, though they have the remotest apprehension of Christ. If they are in

Christ, we are one with them; if they are in Christ, they are one with us. On that we build; on that Christ builds. It is a family relationship that is foundational. The Father, the Son and the children. Do get rightly adjusted to foundations.

Triumphant Survival of That Which is Rightly Related to Christ.

Now one extra word. It is this, the triumphant survival of these foundations or of that which is rightly related to the foundation — Christ. If we go to our type and illustration, Jerusalem, we shall have a very good example and illustration. Oh, what a history that city has of sieges and assaults, of being overrun and destroyed, and yet how persistently it survives! It comes up again and again. How it still remains a world factor, something that all the nations have got to reckon with. Just think of how many times Jerusalem has been overthrown, besieged, destroyed, occupied, possessed. Think of its long history of ups and downs. Today Jerusalem is just as much a factor in world affairs as ever it was. It still comes up. Now I am not going into the realm of prophecy. I am not coming down on to the earth level. Far too much is made of that. God has set this here only to point us to something else, and the history of Jerusalem is God's way of saying that His church, founded upon Christ, will survive, triumphantly survive, and even after all its conflicts, all its assaults, all its sieges, and all its seeming devastations, it will come up again and again, and at last will be there as the supreme factor to be reckoned with in this universe.

When you come to the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel you find Jerusalem devastated. Jerusalem has been laid waste. It is in that state that you find it in Nehemiah and Ezra. It is laid waste, devastated, and the people of the land are in exile. That is how Jerusalem is, that is how Zion is, that is how Israel is, and always remember that the terms Jerusalem and Zion are very often used of the people, not of the place. The daughter of Zion, the daughter of Jerusalem, is simply Israel. Come to Isaiah and Ezekiel and the city is in full view as though nothing has happened to it, it has not gone. *"He ... set me down upon a very high mountain, whereon was as it were the frame of a city"* (Ezek. 40:2), and Isaiah is speaking so much in his later prophecies about the glorious survival of Jerusalem, of Zion. Oh, they have not let it go, they have not given it up. This thing for them is still intact. Because they knew, they believed, that this was something which God had raised up, God had instituted, God had constituted, and *"whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever"* (Eccl. 3:14). Let happen what may, it will survive, triumphantly survive. Oh, now *"if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"* The foundation for us is the imperishable, eternal stability of the Lord Jesus. Everything does rest upon whether the Lord Jesus is finally going to be vanquished. Is the Lord Jesus,

after all, going out? Is God's purpose going to be defeated? Our answer to that is the answer to our own inner questions.

What is the meaning of the Lord Jesus? He has no meaning apart from us. The very existence of Jesus Christ involves and implies the existence of His church. He cannot exist apart from us. All the meaning of the incarnation, all the meaning of His life here, all the meaning of His cross, all the meaning of His resurrection, ascension and exaltation is His church. He is only vindicated, the meaning can only be understood, in the light of His church. *"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (Matt. 16:18). They shall not! You see, it is the eternal city because it is on an eternal foundation which is outside of time, outside of all that may happen.

We are going to survive if we are truly consistent with our foundation; if we are really rooted in Christ, we are going to survive, we will be found standing with Him at the last. When everything else that has sought to prevent it has gone down and been destroyed, out of the wreck we shall rise and stand with Him.

Sin Weakens Our Confidence in Triumphant Survival

I know what weakens that confidence, and it would be overlooking a very important point if I did not mention it. What weakens our confidence, in survival, coming out alright afterwards or at last, is the sense or the knowledge of our own sin, our own sinfulness and our own failure as Christians. Yes, as Christians we sin. We cannot call it anything else. We sin. If we were to analyse that, we could soon prove it. *"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin"* (Rom. 14:23). If you have the slightest question regarding God at any time, that is sin. It goes right to the root of everything. A little bit of pride, even spiritual pride, is sin. *"Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord"* (Prov. 16:5). *"The haughty He knows from afar"* (Ps. 138:6). I am not going to analyse that question of sin. We sin and we sin in gross ways. We fail, we break down, we make mistakes, we show weakness, and we know in our hearts that the Spirit of God has smitten that thing, we know the Holy Spirit has condemned that in our lives, and we know how failing we are. And that is the thing which undermines our confidence, so often, that we shall not be cast off, we shall not be set aside, the Lord will not have done with us. The enemy encamps upon the ground of our failures to undercut this assurance and to weaken our confidence that we are going to triumph and come out alright.

After all, all I can say to you in a comprehensive way is, go back to Zion, go back to Jerusalem, go back to David. Oh, how terrible! Think of David, a murderer, his hands stained with the blood of a man in order to get his wife,

and other things, right up to that awful thing which culminated on Mount Moriah, the loss of tens of thousands of lives in Israel because of his self-will. Go back to the history of Jerusalem, see what the prophets have to say about Jerusalem, its iniquity, and think upon the mercy of God to David. *“The sure mercies of David”* (Isa. 55:3). What a phrase! The mercy of God, the grace of God, to David, to Jerusalem, to Zion! He has not washed His hands of us, He has not abandoned us, it is going to survive, not because of its goodness, not because we are so good and never fail and sin (this is no excusing of our sin), but by His infinite mercy and grace we are going to survive. We are founded upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ, not upon merit or worthiness or goodness in ourselves. He is the foundation, and He answers to God for every perfection that God requires in us. Let us get down on our foundations. That is the way in which we shall survive triumphantly. It is Christ, the solid rock.

(to be continued)