



the
**Golden
Candlestick**

THE CROSS AND HIGHER GROUND

Part 1

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THE CROSS, THE GATEWAY TO HIGHER LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

“He said unto Moses, ‘Come up unto the Lord’ ” (Ex. 24:1-18).

“And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Come up to Me into the mount’ ” (verse 12).

I believe the Lord desires to say and is saying to many of His children, *“Come up to Me into the mount.”* And when you come to look into it, it is very clear that the Lord’s fullest thought for His people is that they may occupy high places; that they may in a right sense be an exalted people. All the movements of God are in that direction.

The man of whom it is said, in the midst of many others who knew the Lord, that he walked with God, terminated his career here by going up to the Lord. The end of Israel’s wilderness journey was going up to possess. Elijah finished his course with an upward movement to the Lord. Israel’s later history, when in right relationship with the Lord, was governed by those great seasons of going up to the Lord at Jerusalem, and we have a series of songs called ‘Songs of Ascent’ or psalms of ‘going up’. The Lord Jesus did not finish His course on the cross or in the grave, but going up; and the church, His body, is destined to follow in that way, to go up. All these movements represent God’s highest thought for His own. To fail of this means to have failed of God’s fullest purpose. The Lord is an exalted Lord, He is represented as being “high and above all” and He desires His people to exalt Him above all, and it is a remarkable thing that when you do exalt the Lord you always go up yourself. The Lord desires us to have high thoughts about Himself. If we have low thoughts about the Lord we live a low life; if we have high thoughts about the Lord we always go up ourselves. This contains this simple and yet very rich truth, that the Lord desires His people to be in fellowship with Himself in high places, an exalted place, in true spiritual elevation. If the end of the church’s course is to be marked by the church’s going up, then I think we may rightly conclude that towards the end, the Lord’s great emphasis will rest upon spiritual and moral ascendancy in His people. He will be calling us on to higher ground, for, as we believe, the chronology of things is bound up with the spirituality of things. The dates of God synchronize with the conditions of His people. There will be no translation of the church, only on the ground of the church’s preparedness for translation; and the fixed time for going up is fixed by God to tally with a state into which the church has come. There will be no mere mechanical and automatic translation of the church. It will be entirely

related to the church's condition and, therefore, there must be a spiritual side as well as what we might call a chronological side, and the going up literally must be bound up with our going up spiritually and morally.

I am quite sure, the Lord is seeking to get His people onto higher ground: the higher ground of faith; the higher ground of love; the higher ground of fellowship; the higher ground of spiritual vision and revelation; the higher ground of spiritual power, authority; the higher ground of moral ascendancy. It is significant to note that the Scriptures contain mountains which represent all these things. That will be the realm of these meditations. In this chapter we do not go any further than the first step. We survey first of all, in brief, this fact (for it is a fact), that the Lord is calling to higher ground; and then we take into consideration the first and the all-inclusive thing relative to higher ground. But the effect of this must be not just more information, more teaching, more knowledge, but it must have a moral effect in us, in our relationships, in the matter of fellowship. We will have to have a reaction from everything that is low, small, mean. We shall see that we must take higher ground in the matter of our relationships. The present level is too low, it is not high enough, it is not according to the Lord's thought. In the matter of love for one another there must spring up in us the feeling, that the way in which we regard one another is too low. We must take the attitude that it is too low, we must come up higher in this matter. And so on all matters of our life in relation to the Lord there has got to be some elevation, and we must see that it is related to the ultimate purpose of God. This is not some little homily for daily life, that you must try and be more loving and show a greater consideration, and so on. It is related to the great end which God has in view.

The cross — God's essential method

But I want here to point out how striking and impressive it is that in the Word of God all increase and advancement of the Lord's people is connected with elevation. In fact, we may say that all connected with the positive side of the testimony is brought in by an eminence. When the Lord is going to do something on the positive side of adding to and increasing His people, or advancing them spiritually, it is almost invariably connected with some high place. That is impressive. This 24th chapter of Exodus is one great outstanding example of that. That in its greater ranges will be before us if the Lord continues to lead this way. We make the observation now in order that we might be arrested by this. I emphasise the word 'positive' because there is a negative side, and that is the cross side. We are speaking about the cross and higher ground. There is that wilderness level where the cross operates in order

to make possible the higher ground. The wilderness is not God's positive ground, that is the negative side; that we must be crucified is not God's end but God's essential method. The setting aside of man by nature is what we might call the negative side, the positive side is to bring up that which is of God on to a level of God's purpose and God's power.

Higher ground: Christ in glory

And so we see that all that is related to the positive side of the Lord's people and of the Lord's testimony is bound up with some high ground. But before we go on with that we want to see what is all inclusive, that in which all else is bound up in this matter, and that is, to see God's pavement, that upon which His feet rest, so to speak, the highway of God in relation to His people. Come to Exodus 24:9-10 and you have it: God's pavement, that which was under His feet, as it were, a sapphire stone, the very heaven for clearness. We see that as the thing upon which the feet of God rest; that, so to speak, in which the Lord walks up and down, the basis and the foundation of all that follows, and you know what follows. "*As it were a sapphire stone*". I do not propose to turn to all the passages in Scripture where the sapphire stone is mentioned. You can do that when you desire to make a little study of the Word. All I desire to do now is to point out what this means. The sapphire stone has a great place in Scripture. You will find it in relation to creation, in relation to grace, in relation to government, and you will find it in relation to glory, both heavenly and earthly glory. And here it is in Exodus 24, beneath the feet of God. In Ezekiel 1:26 and 10:1 you have it seen as above the crystal-like expanse of the firmament. In Lamentations 4 you see princes of Zion spoken of as sapphire stones. In the Song of Songs, chapter 5, the beloved is spoken of as a sapphire stone; and then in Isaiah 4, the metropolis of the earth is seen to have its foundations laid with sapphire stones. And then in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 the second foundation is a sapphire.

What is the sapphire? I think if you look into the Scripture you will find that the sapphire stone undoubtedly represents Christ in universal glory. "*As the very heaven for clearness*". You know the sapphire is the stone of heavenly blue, transparent blue, as the very heavens for clearness. Do you notice what is happening here? "Under His feet as it were a sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness", for transparency. Immediately following this chapter are the instructions for the tabernacle. That tabernacle is to be a representation of the Lord Jesus through and through, from centre to circumference; it is Christ presented. The high priest is the central figure, he wears an ephod of heavenly blue; and every man, woman and child throughout

all their generations is commanded to have a bit of that same blue upon the fringe of their garments. The predominating element throughout this whole thing which is to be a revelation, unveiling, representation of the Lord Jesus is the heavenly blue. It is something that has come down out of the mount. It is a reflection here on earth of that which was under God's feet, the feet of the God of Israel. Earth and heaven are united in that blue; heaven and earth are joined, to reveal the Lord Jesus in universal glory. That is the nature of everything in the Word of God. That is where you arrive in the revelation of the eternal purpose and thought of God, heaven and earth united in the revelation of the glory of Christ. That is well-known, that is perfectly clear, but do not let us make a commonplace of it. Familiar as we may be with the truth of it, it is no small thing that when God reaches His end, this whole universe, heaven and earth, will be united in the display of the glory of His Son, Jesus Christ. God has fixed that, and God will reach His end. But for the moment the thing that is before us is this, that everything is related to that in the activities of God. God has that in His view all the time and all that He is going to say and do and require is bound up with that, the universal glory of His Son Jesus Christ. So that before ever a hand is put to work to realise that representation in type, before ever there can be a movement in the practical realm of accomplishment, there has to be a vision and a revelation of Jesus Christ in glory.

If in a special way the apostle Paul was given the ministry concerning that revelation of Jesus Christ in the mystery of His body, before he can utter a word in that connection he must have a revelation of Jesus Christ in glory. That is basic to all the purpose of God, and we can neither do anything, nor endure anything until we have that, until we see God's end and that upon which God's eye is resting. Why had Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel to ascend the mount and see the God of Israel and that which was under His feet? In order surely that there might be an adequate representation of what was according to God's mind. This was a solemn responsibility that was being conferred upon these men. They were being brought to see what was under God's feet in order that they might be charged with the responsibility of having everything constructed and maintained in accordance with that.

Seventy of the elders; that is a representative number of the people of God. In the New Testament seventy is representation of the whole church. Seventy is a combination of ten and seven. Ten is the number of responsibility and seven of spiritual perfection, and the responsibility that was being conferred upon these men was for the spiritual perfection of God's thought in relation to the Lord Jesus. They had to have God's perfect thought about the Lord Jesus and see to it that everything was constructed according to those thoughts. God's thought from eternity is the universal glory of His Son. The Lord must have

some people to come into His thoughts about His Son in order to take responsibility in relation to others, and so He says to them in effect, “Come up into the mount; your coming up is related to a great many more. Your coming up is that you might receive a revelation which will put you in a place of great responsibility, but also of great privilege unto a ministry which has no lesser object and end than the universal glory of the Lord Jesus. Come up into the mount.”

Recovery of the full testimony of Jesus

Surely these are days in which there is a very great need to come into the fulness of God’s thought concerning the Lord Jesus. These are days when God’s glory in Christ needs to be known, a recovery of the full testimony of Jesus. Unto that the Lord must take some, at least, and bring them into a special fellowship with Himself in His thought. That is a place of elevation. Oh, but do you notice what had to happen before ever that could be? “*And Moses built an altar under the mount*” (Ex. 24:4). That is sacrifice. There was no ascending the mount until the altar had been built, sacrifice offered and the blood shed. In other words, there is no coming up into those higher altitudes of divine revelation, divine apprehension, divine vocation and ministry except on the ground of the cross doing its work to set nature and man aside, because man by nature cannot come into God’s thought. “*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God neither can he know them*” (1 Cor. 2:14). He has to be set aside, the cross has to cut in there and put man by nature out of this thing before he can come into the fulness of God’s mind and God’s purpose. “*And Moses built an altar under the mount.*”

The cross is always the gateway to higher levels of spiritual life. It is always the way to the tablelands of God, and it is not a thing so far as we are concerned, done once and for all, only in the matter of our justification and our acceptance. On the objective side it is finished once and for all, but on the subjective side there is to be a daily dying, a bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. But that is the way up. We sometimes think of it as the way down, this pulling down, destroying, crucifying. When shall we get to the end of this business? If we knew it we are going up all the time, it is the way up. The Lord Jesus came down. He existed in the form of God but He counted it not something to be held onto, to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, being found in fashion as a man. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death — and the apostle does not stop there — that is enough to become obedient unto death. But there was nothing that the world would applaud about that death; it was not one of those deaths that men would take account of and

say it was a noble death. It was a most shameful, degrading death — the death of deaths. Wherefore God has highly exalted Him. We have nothing to give up like that but the principle works: the cross is applied to the pulling down of the life of nature. It does not like being set aside. How many of you like to be thought nothing of? How many of you take pleasure in people just treating you as nothing? The flesh is not made that way. The cross is applied to set man by nature aside, and as that cross is applied there is a spiritual coming up all the time. This is ascendancy, coming up into a new place, and many people never reach very high ground because they never go down very low. They do not know much of the fulness of the Lord because they know so little of the emptying. A new application of the cross is, in the divine thought and intention, to bring us onto higher ground, and if the church is to finally reach its highest ground, just prior to that it will know the deepest application of the cross. What is true for the church is true for the individual member. The altar always leads to the mountain in the intention and determined purpose of God. It is not the exaltation of ourselves; it is the exaltation of Christ in us, and in that we find our fullest satisfaction. We shall ever feel less and less, but if it is a right state, which is produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the cross, in God's sight there is a wonderful increase, a wonderful gain. We shall see later, and I hardly dare mention it because of anticipating it here, there is a mountain in Matthew to which the Lord brings His own and says, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Do you see the connection?

Everything according to Christ

But now let us come back and close upon this preliminary note. What is the Lord after in that cross, with you, with me? What is it that He has in mind? Just this: everything according to Christ, heavenly blue. That is, the glory of Jesus Christ in His people individually, in His church collectively and in this universe at large eventually; everything revealing the glory of Jesus Christ. Do you see that that is the movement of the church? When the church is perfect in glory it will be the very vehicle of the going forth into the universe of the glory of Christ. That is our destiny as members of Christ. It is to that we have been called and chosen before the foundation of the world, that we should be unto the praise of His glory and that this whole universe should reflect His glory through a Christ-impregnated church. The blue everywhere. That is the end. God is working towards that end now. His dealings with us are towards that end. Why these difficult experiences, this discipline, this chastisement, why these sufferings? All to the glory. All to bring about the crystal clearness, the absolute transparency, the purity of the heavenly nature of the Lord Jesus in us.

The Lord is just doing that thing in us by the cross, which is clearing the film of this natural life, removing the thickness and the denseness of this corruption and pollution, getting a pure transparent state which is the absolute purity and clearness of the nature of Christ in us. It is a moral thing. This conformity to the image of His Son is a moral thing — I use that word in its highest sense — something that is being wrought into the very moral fibre of our being, the nature of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has taken that in hand. Do not think of being glorified as sometime reaching that position where suddenly there will be upon us a cloak of light and we shall be glorified. The glory comes by what we are, shines through from within, not from without. The Mount of Transfiguration is not that suddenly the Lord Jesus was given a robing of light, it was the shining out of His Person. And glory is the result of the moral process in us, of the Holy Spirit's work through the cross. It will be what we have been made by grace. It will be His glory not ours because it is all of grace, because He made it possible and He carried it through.

This universe is to be full of the moral excellency of the Lord Jesus, seen everywhere. What a universe it will be! That represents higher ground for us. It emphasizes and stresses the call, "Come up to Me in the mount." First of all to see what is in view. When you see that you have an adequate motive for enduring the sufferings of the cross, you have an object in view in the light of which you regard everything that the Lord does with you and to you. That is the end. We need that. We have often said that Paul got through that terrific life of his because he kept the Lord whom he had seen on the Damascus Road always before him, and in almost his last words he has got that vision still there, "That I may know Him", 'Him whom I saw years ago on the Damascus Road; He is still my goal, my object, my glory; "that I may be conformed to Him", that is the only thing.' It was that that carried him through.

Oh, that the Father would show us the Lord Jesus as His goal for us, that He is operating all the time in relation to that end. He is going to have everything constructed with that end in view, according to that. And the tabernacle, while it represents Christ in Person also represents Christ corporate: the Body which has many members, and the members being many are one Body, so also is the Christ. The Christ personal will be revealed in the Christ corporate in the ages to come and they must be one, therefore, in moral nature as they will be one in glory, having been, from a certain standpoint along a certain line, one in the cross. There is a work of the cross in which we do not share, done for us and apart from us, but there is a work of the cross in which we do have a place and it is given to us in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for Him, in His behalf. "*Filling up that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ*" (Col. 1:24). It is unto that glory, that end of God.

Now may the Lord bring us up into the mount to see the glory towards which He is working, that in which He walks up and down. All the ways of God are connected with the ultimate glory of the Lord Jesus; His feet stand upon that and He does not move off of that pavement. God's movements are in relation to the Lord Jesus, to the glory of the Lord Jesus. That is the sapphire stone to be revealed throughout the universe. Creation is governed by that, grace is governed by that, government is governed by that. Ezekiel is government, "*And above the firmament a throne and as it were a sapphire stone*", the glory of "*one like unto a man*". Government is in relation to the glory of the Lord Jesus, and the glory is His glory. That is glory: the manifestation of Him in His moral perfections in a people whom He has brought to glory, the achievement of this One bringing many sons to glory. That will be glory for Him and that will be glory for us.

The Lord lead us on to higher ground with a vision of the end He has in view, for that embodies all that the Lord has to say in these days. It is related to that. So may we get our vision adjusted at the outset and see God's end.

**POSSESSING THE HIGHER GROUND
BY SPIRITUAL EXERCISE**

Reading: Matt. 14:22-33; Heb. 7:25; 13:20-21.

Now we are going on from that point, but may I just again say a word or two of a general character before we come to the more specific in the next aspect or phase. It is that we might recognise the necessity for an upward movement on the part of the Lord's people at the end time. It is clear to us all that the course of the church here on earth since the first days has been a downward course. Before we close the New Testament we have a fall from the very highest position of which the New Testament speaks. That position is the Ephesian position, the heavenlies in Christ and we close the New Testament with a word to the Ephesians, "*Consider from whence thou art fallen.*" The direction of the church here on earth has all the way through been a downward direction. That is, its gravitation has been towards the earth, becoming something of the earth, and something in and of this world. Its attachment has been to things here; its life has become a life in relation to things here; it has become something set up on the earth, and in every way spiritually, doctrinally, and very largely morally, its way has been downward. This is not just a natural course of things. You and I know only too well that which we experience in the corporate body is out from our individual experience; that the whole direction of things is to force us down, to press us down, to rob us of that morale and moral ascendancy and spiritual superiority to the world and to the forces of evil.

The need for higher ground

There is an awful downward pull always at work and you and I know it almost every moment of our lives. Rising, ascendancy is a matter that calls for a constant exercise, vigilance, diligence and if for one moment we yield our spiritual diligence we go down. If for one moment we are caught off our guard like David on the housetop, a mighty man of war but in a moment taken off his guard, it always results in a downward direction. We know that; the whole course of things is to pull us down. And that downward pressure and force has very largely succeeded through the centuries since early New Testament times. The Lord again reacts to that tendency and at the end He would seek in a new way to recover the ground which they held at the beginning.

And again, are we not conscious of the need for higher ground in ourselves? Are we not all longing for higher ground? Well, if you are not, I am. I am conscious of the need of a lifting up onto higher ground spiritually, and using the word in its broad, wide sense, morally; to have a greater spiritual morale and to know more of what ascendancy is, superiority spiritually. Oh yes, that is a need that we are all feeling: to come into a new position with the Lord in some higher realm of spiritual life. And that need is very widespread and widely felt, and so the Lord would seek to bring a company up there on behalf of the rest, and that is what He is doing, I believe, and He would say to us in these days, “*Come up to Me in the mount*”, in other words, “Take higher ground, let your exercises be to possess a position that is above your present position.” You know mountains represent exercise. (If you do not know that, come and live where I am living now, and you will discover that mountains represent exercise and you do not get over them with one bound, you get over one mount and then you find another, and you can go on like that indefinitely, and it represents exercise). And what is true in the realm of nature is true spiritually, that you have got to possess the upper land by spiritual exercise. We shall see that as we go on. But the Lord is saying, “Let your exercise be to possess higher ground. Come up to Me in the mount.”

Pressing on unto completeness

Now we have begun with Exodus 24. We want to look right on from that eminence, from that elevation, look right on through ages, through generations and see a still higher one of which this is only a type, a shadow, and that one which we shall see as we stand on mount Sinai is the letter to the Hebrews. The letter to the Hebrews is a beloved mountain. It is that which is only typified and foreshadowed by this mountain in Exodus 24, and you know quite well that the letter to the Hebrews takes up Exodus 24 and speaks to us about the “pattern of things in the heavens which was shown in the mount”, but here it says, “Now we come to the heavenly things themselves.” We have been led from one point which is only typical, illustrative, to a higher which is the real, which is that typified, and from this one we see that higher one; and when we come to the letter to the Hebrews we hear with a new meaning the word of the Lord, “*Come up to Me in the mount.*” That is what sums up the whole of this Hebrew letter. It is the call of the Lord to these Hebrew Christians, these Hebrew believers, to come up from Mount Sinai to the heavenlies. To come up to the mount. Oh, but that going up does mean exercise. If there is one letter which represents exercise it is this letter. How the apostle constantly repeats the phrase “*Let us*”; “*Let us fear lest a promise having been left us of entering in any of you should*

seem to come short of it"; *"Let us leave the first principles and press on unto completeness."* The urge is upwards all the time and it represents real exercise. We will see something of the nature of that exercise before we are through.

Faith

But I want us to get into this thing through the gateway of Matthew 14:22-36. Perhaps you have not seen any connection between this incident on the lake and the letter to the Hebrews, but there is a very close connection. Matthew 14:22 onwards is an event in the lives of the Lord's people, His disciples, which is but an illustration in history of exactly what you have spiritually in the letter to the Hebrews. In both places you have Christ above, *"And when He had sent the multitudes away He went up into a mountain to pray there alone."* In the letter to the Hebrews the opening is, *"We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour."* And then in chapter 7:25, *"Seeing He ever lives to make intercession"*. He is in the mountain alone in prayer in both instances; in both instances it is Christ on high, Christ above fulfilling an intercessory ministry, a priestly ministry of prayer. On the other hand, in both cases the church is down here. It is down here in Matthew 14. The church and that which represents it, is down here. In the letter to the Hebrews the church is down here. Christ on high, the church down here. In both cases you have a storm raging. That is obvious in Matthew 14, but read the Hebrew letter and you will find there is a storm raging. These Hebrew believers have taken up a position and all hell has come out to get them to relinquish the position; they had begun to let go, to go back, and they are meeting the cost of this thing. You notice how much of this letter is given up to try and get them to endure, to go on, go through and pay the price. There is a storm raging. In both cases the main issue is that of faith. Matthew 14: *"You of little faith"*. It is a question not only of Peter as representing the others, but the faith of the church. It is the faith question.

When you come to Hebrews the issue is faith; all the way through it is that. The letter is gathered up in Chapter 11, and the saints from Abel onwards are gathered in array and brought by their faith right up to this time in which the Hebrew believers were living. The apostle tells those believers that they are the complement of all that preceded them. The Old Testament believers could not be made perfect without them and so their faith added unto the faith of all the saints makes for one mighty victorious faith. It is the faith question right through to the end. The faith of the ancients was that by which they got through to the end and that alone by which they got through to the end; not the end of their lives but to the end of God's age. They got through to the end of the dispensation. And Enoch got right through to translation by faith (v.5), and this

principle of faith is linked with the final issue of the people of God unto rapture. It is a faith question in both cases.

A new apprehension of Christ

And finally, in both instances, the one thing which governs all the rest is a new apprehension of Jesus Christ, an entering more fully into a knowledge of Him by which they are brought onto the higher ground of spiritual ascendancy and authority. That is the thing that governs. Now that you have the element of these two things, of course you will want to sit down and think a good deal more about them.

Notice some things in Matthew 14. You have nothing in the Gospels but what is fully developed in the Epistles. The Gospels are the seed-plot of the Epistles and all that is in the Gospels is taken up and led out in fuller revelation in the Epistles. So we must never regard these incidents and events recorded in the Gospels as just bits of a story, just incidents thrown together to make up a story or a life of Christ. We must always recognise that what is in the Gospels is put there as a seed for a fuller revelation. Whatever happened there is nothing by itself, it never stands alone, it points on to something, the explanation of which you will find in the Epistles. We should not try to read something into the events of the Gospels or try to get something out of them, for you can be fanciful with things and put in a lot. But there is a true principle that the Holy Spirit has hidden in the sayings and deeds of the Gospels, something which He is going to develop later on, and we look for that. Here is one instance of that principle. So we find a great deal of truth wrapped up in this portion of the Gospels, and in a very real way the whole letter to the Hebrews is summed up in this portion of Matthew.

The Lord's deliberate direction

I am not going to attempt to deal with the whole of the letter to the Hebrews here, but I do want you to see one or two things which are of great importance to us in this matter of coming to higher ground. You see that the section begins with, "*And straight away*". The Holy Spirit does not use words just for the sake of using them. He has an object. So when He says, "and straight away" it means that there is deliberateness about this. It is not as if the Lord Jesus said, "Well now, we have fed these 5,000 people, what shall we do next? There are several things we might do, we might do this or that; what is the best thing to do?" And then by thinking it over, "We will do so and so; you get into the boat and I will send these people away." There is nothing haphazard in this, there is nothing casual about it. It is deliberate. He knows

what He is going to do. He has this whole thing in His mind beforehand; it is not some sudden idea of a moment. This thing has been with Him and He has decided it, and so He is businesslike about it: “*And straight away*”. It is as though He said, “Now that is done, we will go on with the next thing.” The word “constrained” can be translated compelled. He brought them under His constraint, under His compulsion; they were not left to do the thing which suggested itself to their own mind, and they were not left with any option; they were put under constraint to do this thing. He exercised an influence over them which left them with only one course to take, “He constrained the disciples to enter into the boat”, etc.

I say that in order that we might see that when they got out onto the lake and the storm arose, and they found themselves in difficulties and in troubles, it was all His deliberate direction. It was not that things were going wrong; it was all according to plan. Now you may not be able to accept that, but get through to the end of the story and you will find it easier to accept. He has brought them into this situation. It is under His influence that they are there, under His considered direction. He has not made a mistake; He has not dropped into a trap by being casual. No, He has done this thing deliberately and they are there because they are under His influence. In verse 24 the margin says they were “*many furlongs distant from the land*”, and again, believing that the Holy Spirit uses words wisely, it is important to recognise that there is something in saying that, in being so descriptive of what their position was. They were many furlongs from the land. They were completely cut off and separated from all that natural stability upon which men rest for their security and they were well out of every kind of natural resource. The Lord had put them there. This is what the cross does with you. It cuts out from under your feet all that speaks of the earth.

The church in the heavenlies

We have been speaking about the church becoming earthbound. In the letter to the Hebrews we are called into the heavenlies, the church off the earth, our feet well off, if you like suspended in mid-air; all the ground of confidence, all the ground of human resource taken away, all that organization and system of the church upon which men rely to maintain the church’s work and life and testimony, the cross cuts it all away. And when the cross does that work and you come absolutely under the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, He sees to it that you are well out. You have no confidence in the flesh, and you have no resource in yourself, or in man; you are many furlongs from the land. Here land is that which speaks of the earth. You remember that the church has become earthbound, trying to maintain its testimony as something here in this world, using this world, setting up something that this world can take note of, getting

the patronage of this world, and that is all contrary to God's thought. God never intended that the church ultimately should be something set up here on the earth, that the men of the world could take note of, or that believers could take account of as being something important here. The outer representations of this thing ceased when Christ went to glory. Ecclesiastical architecture and all sorts of things passed when the New Testament came in. The Lord Jesus made that clear in the days of His flesh and all the meaning of it is now gathered up in His Person. "*Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father ... but in Spirit and in truth*"; and that is something like an invidious comparison. This is not the true, this is only the type.

With the coming of the Person of Christ you come into the meaning of all that, and that which is but a temporary representation is passed. The church now has nothing to do with this earth, only to bear testimony, that is all. And when you come really by way of the cross you are cut off just as much from your religious order as you are from your old unregenerate worldly order. You are brought out into a spiritual place in the heavenlies in Christ, and the cross does take you out. You realise it is no use trying to cling to the old thing, or look in that direction. You are right out and only the Lord can see you through now, but that is just what the Lord is after; that is the issue of the whole thing. Well, they were many furlongs from land. Being well out they are in a realm where they meet spiritual forces and their conflict is not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness, and hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies; that is what they encounter, that is the nature of the storm. This is made perfectly clear on another occasion when the Lord was asleep in the boat and there was a storm and they awoke Him, and after rebuking their unbelief He turned to what? He turned to something back of the wind and waves and said, "Be muzzled", literally in the Greek it was that. Not "Peace, be still" but "Peace, be muzzled." Exactly the same words as He used on another occasion when He was dealing with the demon possessed. He said to the demons, "Be muzzled." It is the prince of the power of the air that is back of this thing. He is dealing with the spiritual background. That is where they are. On that occasion in Luke 8:23 where the Lord was asleep in the boat, there is this difference. The Word tells us there was a sudden storm, it was like a sudden squall coming down on the lake, something rushing in all of a sudden. Oh yes, the enemy saw Him asleep and thought he had got a chance and rushed in to take advantage of what might only be for a few minutes, to engulf them all. In this case it is not a sudden squall, it is something that lasts, that goes on through the night to the fourth watch. This is something more dispensational, for the church, and what we know more of is the continuous persistence of the enemy right through the age to swamp, to drag down to the bottom. The enemy does not take holidays in this dispensation, he is at it all the

time. It is the age-long conflict that is here typified. That is where they are, out in that realm. That is where you arrive when you get into the heavenlies, when your feet are off the ground and you are under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, under His government. It is true, He Himself brings you there. It is all in the plan that the church should come out there because the church's battle is there, because its final triumph is there.

What is going to happen is that the church is going right through to a place of absolute ascendancy in Him over all the power of the enemy; and to get there experimentally, not doctrinally but actually, you have to be out there. Well, you are not in the conflict by accident, this storm that is raging is not something that says everything has gone wrong. If you are out there under the sovereign control of your Lord, if you have come into this because you have placed yourself absolutely under His direction, because you have accepted the full meaning of the cross (to be cut off from yourself, and from the world, and from everything of nature, gone out with the Lord) and you find that there you meet the full force of the adversary, that is not because things have gone wrong. It is all in the divine plan. If only we recognised that every time.

The intercessory ministry of the Lord Jesus

We are going to come to higher ground. It is a blessed thought that He is praying up there, and that has a relationship to this down here. He knows all about it. "*He ever lives to make intercession.*" He is able to save to completeness (that is the word), to the uttermost, because He ever lives to make intercession. Because He does not die He can carry on this thing right through; He can save to completeness. "*The God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus ... make you perfect*", that is the same word, complete. This is the issue of the letter to the Hebrews. God's issue to this conflict is completeness in Christ, finality. "*... make you complete in every good thing to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight*"; unto what end? "*To whom be the glory*", the glory of the Lord.

Going back to Matthew 14 we see the Lord Jesus praying. Let us make a great deal more of the intercessory ministry of our Lord Jesus in heaven than we have made of it. We shall be surprised when we get to heaven how much we owe to the prayers of the Lord Jesus while we were here in the battle, in the conflict. We thank God for all who pray for us; I never cease to thank God, for there are a great many people who pray for me. I continually seek to stand in the virtue and value of that praying. But there is this which He also is praying and if ever there was the fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man, that prayer is His prayer and it avails much in its working. While we are in the storm He is praying. These things are related. What He secured in the mountain we are

going to be brought into. We are going to get to that higher ground because He is on it and He is going to bring us to it. That is the effect of this chapter. When He came to them in the fourth watch of the night walking on the water, He was in the ascendancy over all the power of the enemy, on top of all the devil's work. He attained His position typically in the mount. We will only attain ascendancy as we are in the mount in prayer. He came to them in virtue of His own spiritual elevation, above things, and then He drew out their hearts to Himself and joined Himself with them in the storm — yes, it was an imperfect, unsatisfactory end so far as they were concerned, but there was this issue: *“they worshipped Him and said, of a truth thou art the Son of God.”* They came into a new apprehension of Him and that was no small gain. The Lord Jesus has these men in His school, training them in the light of a coming day. He knows the day is coming and He will presently say, *“It is expedient for you that I go away”* (John 16:7). That day is coming when He will be in the mount and they will be down here in the storm, and the enemy will assail, and He knows the only thing to bring them through will be faith tested, proved, and tried. He is training faith for that coming day when He will be above and they will be here in the storm, and this thing, the deliberateness and apparent cruelty of it all is training with the end in view.

The Lord has the end in view

The Lord always takes the long view and He does things which I cannot understand, and which the enemy would interpret to us as being contrary to wisdom and love on His part, things which are exceedingly difficult to understand or appreciate. He does them with a long view, as equipment for a coming day. We have to do things sometimes as parents with a long view. If we took the short view just for a moment we would not do some of the things we do, our hearts would fail us. There are times when parents have to be very firm and deliberate and to seem to the child to be cruel, unkind, and if the child did but know it, it is more painful and costly to the parent than to them. If the parent were only to take the short view the parent would give way, but the parent looks ahead and sees what will happen if this is ignored now, if this thing is unchecked, undisciplined, then it is going to be for the entire impoverishment of that child. The child will lack respect, will suffer in the coming days because of that, his life will be of much less value. So the parent takes the long view and has to do the seemingly unkind thing now. If that is true of us, that is infinitely more true of the Lord who knows the end from the beginning, who knows far more than we do what is ahead; thus the Lord Jesus was deliberate about this thing. He threw them out, as it were, into this conflict, trained them to bring their faith to a place where it laid hold of Him in

recognition of who He is, what He is, in a deeper apprehension of Him, that in a coming day that faith might carry them through. And then they might say, “We have proved that through experiences like this when the enemy rages and everything seems to be threatening our destruction, God gets much out of it for His glory and these times are rich in their fruits and the Lord will not be the loser but the gainer.” That is the faith of the apostle later on. After the Lord went to the glory and was up there praying for them, they got out into the sea. When they broke with Judaism and were well out there because of His sovereignty, in the place which the Hebrew letter speaks of, “*outside the camp*” (another metaphor of being outside the worldly system), the enemy had assailed, the storm broke, but what carried them through? They had known the Lord, had proved the Lord, had come to the place where faith knew that the worst thing that ever the devil could do turns out to the glory of God. Calvary looked as if the devil had triumphed, yet they have come to know a Risen Lord, glorified. What more can the devil do when that is rooted in you, when you know that his last stroke of hatred, animosity, wrath has been met and the issue is Christ in glory.

You see, that is what the Lord is after. The Lord is seeking to bring us onto higher ground and the higher ground for us in this connection is being truly, utterly with the Lord where only the Lord can be our resource, and we know that the raging tempest of enemy adversity, assault and bitterness, is going to work out for the glory of God. That is higher ground and we are bound to come there because He is up there praying. It is a great spiritual gain when any child of God gets to the place where they can say in the face of the blast, “This will be gain not loss; this will be glory not shame; this will be victory not defeat because there is One who has gone through and on the ground of His own triumph He is interceding on our behalf.” That is high ground and we need to come onto that. It represents something more than faith being developed, it represents power over all the power of the enemy. There is a mighty effectiveness about faith. It is a mighty thing; it affects things and reaches the rim of the universe. It touches all the forces of hell. That is not difficult to prove. If you care to go into it further you will find that the whole triumph of Satan in the course of the ages has been based upon unbelief and its resultant activity and disobedience. All Satan’s work is based upon that. That is where he started: unbelief and resultant disobedience. What havoc in the universe was brought about by unbelief!

Dependence upon God

The Lord Jesus came down to a human level to take up the whole question of faith in God, accepted a life of faith in God, a life of absolute dependence

upon the Father, voluntarily decided He would never do anything out of His own judgment, at His own instigation. He never would speak or act except by getting His instructions from the Father. His course might seem obvious, but He would not move until He had gone to the Father about it. He exercised absolute obedience of faith and waited for the instant when the Father would give Him witness that He could do a thing: *“Go up to the feast”*; *“I go not up”*, etc., and He is not deceiving them. No, He is waiting on the Father for the Father’s witness in His spirit that He should go up. Whatever might be the construction that they would put upon His action in seeming to go back upon His word, seeming to be even untruthful, whatever they might say about *“He only wanted to get rid of us”*, He accepted all that and would not move until He had His word from the Father because He had come to break unbelief in man, had come to destroy unbelief in humanity. He went right through to the cross and in the depths of temptation to doubt, the cry wrung out from Him, *“Why hast Thou forsaken Me?”*, His faith almost trembling then. But He broke through in triumph and the next moment, *“Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”* Man has triumphed in the realm of all hell’s assaults to break faith, and He has taken back to the glory a faith which is perfect, and this is the faith of the Son of God. This is the basis of our triumph. This is our union with Him that is going to see us through and as we see that Man in the glory interceding we know He is interceding on the ground of something already accomplished, to be made good in us.

It involves exercise. These Hebrews were finding the climbing out of systems rather difficult, but that is what is involved and it is out there we learn to prove the Lord, out there that faith comes to the place where it also triumphs in Christ over all the power of the enemy. Shall we not say with the hymnwriter J. Oatman, *“Lord, lift me up and let me stand, by faith on heaven’s tableland”*?

(to be continued)