



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

**GOD'S INSTRUMENT
OF DELIVERANCE
IN A TIME OF DEATH**

Part 1

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THE TIME AND THE INSTRUMENT

“Then Mordecai bade them return answer unto Esther, ‘Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father’s house will perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ ” (Esther 4:13-14).

The message could very well be gathered into two words in that last sentence of verse 14 — “thou”, “this”. “Such a time as *this*”. “*Thou* art come to the kingdom”. The last clause is a very significant one — “such a time as this”. It represents what God does at given and particular times and what He needs and how He works. We might very well take that clause and set it down at different points in history. We could do that in both the Old Testament and the New and find how it fits in with its connected features and elements, going back many years in time and history and noting “such a time as this”. We move on — “such a time as this”, and yet again — “such a time as this”. And we shall eventually arrive at our own time and find that the features are very similar, the situation is very much like these others into which this fragment so aptly fits with its own particular associations. God had a peculiar method, a peculiar vessel with a peculiar object. It was apt, fitting, necessary, vital, just at this and that particular time. You could not always fit this particular word into the situation. There have been times when it would not be apt, that is, things were not in that condition which made this a fitting means and method of God. What is here, therefore, does represent something for a particular time and the thing which should strengthen us and help us is this, that such times having recurred not infrequently through the course of the ages, God has always come into that time in exactly the same way; that is in principle. He has come into that time in the same way, with different vessels, but always with the same object and the same governing principle: “Such a time as this”.

“Thou”. The ‘thou’ can apply to this one and that one and another one, always representing God’s instrument of reaction to a situation which has constantly recurred in the history of His dealings with men. What is the nature of “such a time as this”, and then what is the nature of the means sovereignly chosen and appointed by God to meet that situation?

“Such a time as this”

I think the first thing that we can say about these times is that they have always been and are always times when there is a particular and peculiar uprising of the forces of evil in terms of spiritual death. That has not always been. There have been the great days of power and aggression and glory among the Lord’s people, but there have constantly recurred times when the Lord’s testimony seemed almost to be lost, and the forces of evil, working by spiritual death, seemed to be wellnigh triumphant.

You can see how true that was in the day of Esther. The Lord’s people had spiritually fallen very low, had gone far out of the way of His thought, had become enslaved by the world powers, were in a position remote from that which was the Lord’s choice for them, and in a condition very much other than He would have had — captivity and exile. And being there the enemy determined his final stroke and having got them so far, he wanted to complete the work and wipe them out altogether. He wanted to bring them wholly and utterly and finally under his weapon of death. It was a day when the hatred for what is of God, the hatred for that seed of God in the earth, the hatred for what that meant, implied, and represented as being here in the kingdom of this world; when that hatred was making itself known and felt, manifest in a very intense and a very utter form. The issue here is undoubtedly one of finality. You are going to die or you are going to live, and whichever you do, you are going to do it thoroughly this time. It is forced up to that.

And I have no doubt that some of you are feeling that that is very apt, at any rate, that we are individually sometimes brought pretty near to that position; it is one thing or the other now, no shadows about it, it is black or white, it is life or death this time. We are facing the final, the ultimate, and not one of us is prepared to accept anything less than something utter in this situation. The situation is such that it is now one thing or the other. We are not prepared to just go on in a state of far greater defeat and bondage. We know that we cannot accept anything less than victory, than liberty, than life. We are right up against a situation so that we must have a knowledge of the mighty deliverance of the Lord and we can accept nothing less or else we are finished. Is that not how you feel about it? One of the results of the Lord’s sovereign dealings with His people is really to bring them there. In a certain sense, it is not a bad position in which to be, (yet very bad for those who are experiencing it), but from the Lord’s standpoint, He is striking for a position in which there are no half measures, where it is one thing or the other, where there is no mixture, no compromise and no uncertainty. The issue is perfectly clear. He forces up to that position, He allows things to precipitate that crisis. “Such a time as this”.

That is how it was in Esther's day, that is how it was in all the other similar days in Scriptural history and since, and if I am not mistaken, that is how it is today. I think that more and more of the Lord's people are steadily progressing towards situations like that where they are no longer able to accept a position which is only in some measure satisfactory, in some measure victory, in some measure knowing the Lord, but where they have got to know as they have never known. What has been will not, cannot, support them for the future; there has got to be something more. I think there is a steady movement in that direction. It may be comparatively small, but we are coming to a day like that. There has got to be a new knowing of the Lord because it is a question now of no less significance than life and death.

Well, such a situation has arisen from time to time, and the Lord has, at all such times, moved in His own way, by His own means, to meet that situation. But let us be quite clear about this: it is a time, not when new conditions are created, or brought about, but when what has been there all the time becomes more manifest and more felt. That is, the abiding, the age-long *hatred* of Satan for that which is begotten of God because of the significance of what is begotten of God. It is of immense significance, more to Satan than perhaps to any other, that there is something begotten of God. We might dwell much upon that, and I would beg of you to think much about it — begotten of God, a divine seed in this universe. That is of immense, immeasurable consequence and of ultimate consequence to Satan and his kingdom. His final doom and utter overthrow is bound up with that divine seed as surely as Haman's was in the case of the Jews. From time to time that seed becomes aware of that hatred. That hatred will fill the very atmosphere; the spirit of death will be breathed everywhere and you will be environed by this sense of an evil, inimical antagonism of a spiritual kind which has precipitated this situation. You have got to know the power of life triumphing over death in some way which you have never known before. God, the God of life, has to come in as you have never known Him coming in because of this outbreak of the forces of evil and death, this manifestation of naked malice and hatred from hell against that divine seed. That is the nature of this little phrase, "such a time as this".

Maybe some of you are having a thoroughly good time, all is going well. If so, then my word is not for you — carry on with your good time; I would not have you come under any cloud. But maybe some of you know (in your experience) what I am talking about. You know that this is such a time when the force of hatred from the enemy is being sensed very intensely, very acutely. The power of death to quench and finally quench seems to have come out with determination, and sometimes there is a very narrow, very thin point, between the going under and a deliverance from the Lord. Those two things are not very far apart, you seem to be getting very near to the edge. "Such a time as this".

Well, let us recognize these things and perhaps they will help us, that there is, as there has always been from the beginning, this deep and awful malice and hatred against that which is begotten of God and against anything that can produce that begetting of God.

We are begotten by the Word of God, and that hatred is against the Word of God. That the very Word of God should be given is a matter of conflict, something withstood and challenged. It is a begetting thing. Whatever has in it the possibility of bringing into being something begotten of God, whatever there is that has already been begotten of God is the object, the focal point of this continuous and awful hatred of the enemy. And the more potent or the more calculated to effect spiritual life, the more that hatred will be sensed and known. If we are really going to count at all in this matter of the survival of what is of God here, we are going to be the objects of that hatred all the more. I mean that if you are content with an easygoing, superficial kind of Christian life, you will not be bothered very much by this wrath of the enemy, this fury of the oppressor, this hatred of the dragon. If you are going on, if you have set God's ultimate as your goal, then you are going to know "such a time as this", the uprising of the forces of death and evil to finally quench, if possible, to put right out and bring to an end if that can be. That is the first thing about "such a time as this".

The nature of God's instrument to meet the situation

That in itself sets forth immediately the method and means of God's reaction. Esther is such a clear and simple illustration of God's method. There are two things about Esther which gather up everything else in this movement of God at such a time. One is, chosen of God in relation to the throne; and the other, the spiritual power of that relationship is throne life.

You see, Esther does so beautifully show forth the sovereignty of God in this. There is nothing of merit or claim but just the sovereignty of God in grace. If it had been known, now speaking in the purely natural realm, who and what Esther was, she would not have stood the slightest chance of coming to that throne. You notice she had to keep hidden what her relationships were. She did not tell that she was a Jewess but kept it hidden. If it had been known, her chances of ever coming to that throne would have gone at once, but the sovereignty of God is working, triumphing over natural handicaps, making nothing of disadvantages here, altogether setting aside things which would have thwarted and hindered one triumphing. The strategy of God is seen in the fact that here is a realm in which the plans of evil against that which is begotten of God are being formulated and are intended to be executed, yet right in the very heart of things God puts an instrument by which He is going to destroy those

plans. That is sovereignty, and it is all of His divine choice. “Ye did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16); “chosen in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Chosen in grace; for what? Not just to be saved, not just to know the blessings of the Lord in a saved life, but chosen in relation to the throne. That is the goal, that is the object.

But that throne is not to be visualized mentally as something material in an objective way. This throne is dominion; this government, this power, this regality, is a spiritual power. It is the power of life, the life which issues from that throne and it is a life which is mightier than all the other forces known in this universe. Your Bible begins with it and your Bible ends with it, and in between the beginning and the end this is the one issue. It is this life, this mighty life, this tremendous life, this greatest force in God’s universe, His own life. When we think of reigning, we must think of reigning in life, not reigning in some throne of a material order, but reigning in life, the *mighty* dominion of a power, an energy, an ascendancy of influence coming right out from God Himself. It is that life which is begotten of God that makes hell tremble and afraid and wrathful, but which is the key to the whole situation and which is the strategy of God. Now, Esther stands for that, those two things, the throne and what that throne represents — a life, a mighty divine life, a throne life.

It is the double principle of the overcomer everywhere throughout the Bible. Wherever you come upon “such a time as this”, you find always it is that — the throne and life. Joseph is just that, the throne and life. With David it is that, the throne and life. Paul, passing out of the historical now into the heavenly and spiritual, is just that, the throne and life. Revelation 2 and 3, all heading right up to that, the ultimate, the throne and life. The final chapters of Revelation, it is the throne and life; the throne, and out from the throne a river of life. The throne and life, two things. Regard them as two principles, two sides of a mighty energy of a mighty fact; that is the dominion of divine life, and that is God’s means and method of coming into “such a time as this” whenever “such a time” arises. “Thou and this”.

Well, are you satisfied that we are in “such a time as this”? As you think about it and as your experience teaches you, you feel we are in a time very much like that. Spiritually our time is very much like Esther’s time, very much like Joseph’s time, very much like David’s time in the first years of his life. We are very much in that position; or perhaps we are better able to see it in the first chapters of the Revelation or Revelation chapter 12 now. Are you satisfied it is like that? In other words, have you any reason to believe by looking both outwardly and into your own spiritual experience that this is a time when, on the one hand, the hatred of the enemy for what is of God is being manifested with a new intensity and on the other hand, the issue for us is very acutely and in a certain final sense one of life or death? Do you feel it is like that?

If so, then what about the other side? Thou — “for such a time as this”. What about God’s coming into “such a time as this”? What will He do? How will He do it? What does He require for this? The first thing, as we have tried to point out, is this recognition of the object of His sovereign choice, that we have been chosen; His people have been chosen by Him in grace to be His means of meeting that situation. What I want to stress in that particularly is this, that overcomers are not some particular favourites of God. They are not some elect among the elect, some spiritual aristocracy singled out. They are just among the ordinary people of God, if the people of God can be called ordinary. If we can settle that in our own hearts, it is going to save us a lot of trouble. The disciples fell to the idea at one time that, because they had given up all, they should stand in the special favour of the Lord and get something special. The fact is that those who have let go most and suffered most and been most utter for God, have not experienced particular favours from the Lord. It has rather been the other way. They have been called upon to walk with the Lord in the dark as few others have ever had to do.

These hearts of ours, this human nature of ours, is always on the bargaining line with God. If we are utter for God, then God is going to show us particular favours — and it does not happen. It seems rather the other way. We want to be special favourites of the Lord because we have been particularly good to the Lord; that is what it amounts to. No, there are no special favourites of the Lord in that sense. We just have to get rid of that thought. I will say something more about that in another connection later. If there are going to be any special rewards, they will come afterwards; the Lord will be debtor to no man. He will see to all that afterwards. But for the present, the overcomers are just people among His people. They may be going on with Him more than others, but it is as much of grace with them as it is with anyone else. You must realize that.

The grace of God in the instrument

What is the history of those who have been most useful to the Lord, who have served the Lord in a peculiar way spiritually in spiritual things? It is just the history of His peculiar grace. How is that shown? In this way, that the Lord does not do what the biographers do. If you go to the library and get the biography of anybody who has been peculiarly used by God, you will usually, with some very rare exceptions, find a volume which extols their excellencies, says much about their strong points, what good people they were, what great people they were, how outstanding was this and that and another characteristic on the fine side. The biographer relegates to a very back place, if ever is given a mention at all, the imperfections, faults, failings, weaknesses, and certainly the

sins of such. God never does that. Take up the biographies that God has written. Oh, there are great and glorious things said about these men and women, but they are always a marvellous revelation of the grace of God.

Where will you begin? Take Abraham; has God covered the faults and weaknesses of Abraham? Oh, there are some dark, some heartbreaking things in the life of Abraham. Why did God have that incident with Hagar and Ishmael put down to be kept alive for centuries, thousands of years? Why record the two occasions on which Abraham deliberately told a lie to get himself out of difficulties?

What about David? Are there not some dark patches in the story of David? Why was not God kind enough to cover all these over, seeing what this man suffered, endured, and how utter he was for God; why mention them? The kindly biographer of today would not mention those things, or would not make much of them. God writes them all in their dark colours.

Moses? — yes, grand things said about Moses, but Moses' weaknesses and failures are there and anybody can read them and see them and there is no mistaking them.

Was Paul infallible? We have a way of thinking that if a life is in the hands of the Holy Spirit, it will be an infallible life, that if a man is filled with the Holy Spirit, he will never make a mistake. Do not think that. God has reserved infallibility to one and only one, and that is His Son, and He will never allow another to come into the place of being infallible.

Whether David, Abraham, Moses or Paul, or any other, save that One, it is the story of infinite grace using men in a peculiar way, but letting you know that it is God, and it is God in grace and in mercy. These men are weak, fallible, imperfect men with faults who are capable of making terrible mistakes and slipping up here and there in terrible ways. It is simply God in grace. There may be a secret (this is not a brief for moral weakness, it is not to excuse our faults), but here in these facts the story of the overcomers is not the story of some moral elite. No, it is the story of the grace of God, perhaps more than in any other realm. Let us take heart from that. We are not going to be overcomers because we are such wonderful people. It is going to be because of His wonderful grace. And the overcomers who will serve the Lord in this more particular sense will be kept in a place where they are the people upon whose lips this word 'Grace' rests more than upon any other lips.

You look at the letter to the Ephesians, and you know what sublime heights you have reached of divine purpose and calling. Oh, you know what a vast revelation you have in Ephesians. But have you noticed that in Ephesians grace is mentioned more than anywhere else? Go back to those chapters and underline the word grace, and see what you get. That is not a great wonderful realm and level of life to which some wonderful people are called; it is the

grace of God that makes possible the highest.

Well, Esther comes to the Kingdom for “such a time as this”. But it is the sovereign grace of God, and you and I who need the grace of God so much, are qualified to be of such vital account to the Lord in a time like this. I have said that in case any might think, ‘Oh, that calling to the throne and to be of such value to the Lord is for some, not for me; better people than I, people of greater capacity and merit than I have. Why, my very existence depends every moment upon the mercy and grace of God!’ Ah, you are the one, the very one. That is the background of the overcomer. “Thou!”

That is what is meant by this — “*Thou* art come ...”. There is a sense in which Esther had a skeleton in the cupboard. That door had to be kept closed. We may have a skeleton in the cupboard, such as some handicap, disadvantage, something which would disqualify if it prevailed, but God in mercy and grace keeps the door closed upon our disqualifications and looks upon other qualifications that are in His sight.

The life of God in the instrument

Through grace, then, she was brought into fellowship with the throne and that throne was the throne of grace but also the throne of Life, a mighty life. What the Lord will do in “such a time as this”, what He seeks to do, is to find a people, a vessel, in the midst of His people, the majority of whom are in spiritual declension and far removed from what He would have and where He would have them in such a time, an instrument knowing Him in the power of His mighty life in a spiritual way in the very presence of death; let me emphasize: to know that life in a *spiritual* way. It is there that we have to know it first. In a spiritual way it can be known right in the very presence of death, right in the very activity of death and right in the very triumph of death in other connections. That is the marvel. Have you not known in your experience — I may be perhaps going deeper than some have gone — have you not known times when it did seem like that, you could easily conclude that death has actually triumphed in a certain realm, but your spirit has not been involved in that triumph? A strange kind of contradiction! Here it looks as though the enemy has gained the day, but in your spirit there is that which will not allow you to believe that, to accept that, which stands against that; and it is not that you are simply pugnacious, strong-willed and minded, you are not going to have that. It is deeper down than that. Your reason is bewildered; death in every other realm, but in your spirit you are held; you cannot capitulate, you cannot accept it. Right at the centre of your being there is the holding in life while everything else says it is death. Well, that is what I mean by life being of a spiritual kind, something to be known right in us, right at the centre of our

being which is a contradiction to every other argument and appearance. God needs an instrument like that, knowing right in the very centre of their being the power of His life when everything argues that death triumphs, the enemy is on the throne, but you cannot accept it. If you went out in the realm of your reason, you would have to accept it and capitulate, but while you keep in touch with God, you cannot. You have no argument, no explanation. If you begin to have an altercation and a controversy with God, you begin inwardly to lose it. But while you take the position, 'I do not understand it, I cannot explain it, I am utterly defeated in the realm of reason and understanding, but the Lord knows what He is doing, the Lord is going to bring something out of this for His glory' — you have peace, inward rest and life. Believe me, that is going to count against the enemy tremendously. It is going to count for the Lord.

Is not that the principle? Have I gone too deep? I hope not, I do not want to be mysterious for anybody, but is that not exactly what has happened in the overcomer every time? The situation to all appearances was lost, but they did not accept it inwardly, they stood inwardly against that, and in the long run they were proved right. Hebrews chapter 11 is just that story, things outwardly all going contrary and seeming to be the triumph of evil and the triumph of death, but "these all died in faith." They did not die in controversy with the Lord, they did not die in capitulation to the situation, they did not die in a state of utter bewilderment and despair; they died in faith. They *died* in faith. It is not our mental strength. It is something spiritual deep down in our being. It is that that makes the overcomer and it is that that God is seeking to get hold of in "such a time as this". I know how difficult a situation that presents, but — "thou" and "this". We cannot get away from that, we are being hedged up to it. "Thou" is that kind of thing for a situation which is like "this".

We must ask the Lord to make clear to us what it is He is really after.

THE OVERCOMER IN A TIME OF DEATH

Reading: 1 Sam. 8:4-10,21-22; 17:38-39,49.

In our previous meditation we were allowing a little phrase in Esther chapter 4 to guide our thoughts — “Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” “Such a time as this”. We were seeing that that last clause can be taken and fitted in at various points in the history of the things of God in this world with its attendant and connected features and elements, that is, the features and elements of a specific time, such a time as that in which Esther is brought into view. Again and again such a time has arisen and in principle God has moved on the same lines, by the same means, to meet the conditions of those particular times.

The battle with worldliness

Here is another such time, and the principles are all very much the same only changing in outward form of expression. We may be helped again to note how the Lord moves in such times, realizing how much our own time is a time like Esther’s time, David’s time, and the specific times of others.

You notice the situation when David was about to be brought on to the scene. It was a time when the Lord’s people, that divine seed in the earth, had become very greatly conformed to this world, when worldliness had overtaken them. We are very superficial in our mental interpretation of that word or term, worldliness. We usually limit it to something like going to theatres and playing cards and doing things like that. It is very much more subtle than that. So subtle is it, that even a David gets perilously near being caught by it. It is found expressed in this request — “Make us a king like unto the nations.” That is what Paul would call being conformed to this world or this age — like unto, conformed to, the nations. Bluntly and plainly it amounts to this — doing things as other people do them, having your life on the same level and basis as other people, the people of this world. It means arranging your affairs, organizing matters and running things as they do among men, accepting and adopting the recognized way, method and means; not being different, singular, peculiar, extraordinary, not being too heavenly. And sometimes the subtlety of it is in an appeal to be practical (and we have always to be very careful that we

are practical in our Christianity), but that being practical does not mean that we lose the heavenliness of our Christian life. For many, being practical means just to come right down to earth and do things as other people do, and that may be worldliness. It may be the abandonment of a position because that position is a very difficult one and worldliness can just be compromising because of the difficulty of the situation.

That is exactly what happened in Samuel's time. The difficulty for Israel from the day when God took them out of Egypt, as He Himself indicates here, unto the day of Samuel's old age and afterwards was to have an invisible King, with whom the relationship was entirely spiritual, out of sight, in heaven. They would argue that this was not practical. What they asked for was to have things down here with their feet solidly on the earth, something that you could see and handle, a basis of life capable of being apprehended by the senses. Anything above or beyond that is too difficult. Heavenliness is too difficult, spirituality is too difficult, invisibility is too difficult. "Like unto the nations" meant the contrary to the spirit and the heavenly, and the easier way for the flesh, and we cannot stand in judgment upon those people.

We are in this all the time. Our battle may not be with the temptation to go to a bridge party or to the cinema or a theatre or something like that, but I venture to say there is no one who has no battle with worldliness in the subtle form of wanting to have life on a more tangible, practical, more rational basis; and what the whisperings of the flesh are! That is the battle with worldliness in its essence.

Israel succumbed; their spiritual life weakened, so much that they could not stand up to that high demand and requirement to have the Lord unseen, intangible, in heaven, as King alone. It was too hard, too high, too difficult to go on with the Lord alone when He was out of sight, out of physical touch, on a purely spiritual basis of relationship which meant sheer, pure faith. Let us come down to something more obvious! And that is what is in this request — "like unto the nations", conformed to this image. The Lord makes it perfectly clear that that is spiritual declension. He knows their hearts, and while registering His own attitude towards it in causing Samuel to let it be known without any doubt or mistake how contrary to the Lord's mind it was, the Lord knew that their hearts were set. The only way in which they could learn otherwise was to allow the outworking of that which they demanded. So often that is the way. We will not have it the Lord's way so the Lord has to let us have it our way, and in the long run we wish we had had His way.

"Make us a king like unto the nations." So that king was given, and he himself was the embodiment of the spiritual state of their hearts, the embodiment of the vision of their own worldliness. He was something big, imposing, impressive, head and shoulders above all in Israel, something that the

flesh could really take account of and glory in. That is being conformed to this age. That is what conformity to this age means, having something that you can look at with satisfaction, pleasure, and gratification, something you can take account of and call it big, a success, something that makes an impression, something that you can write about. That was Saul.

Here is an interesting thing, tremendously impressive. We were much further on in history in our previous meditation with Esther, but we were dealing and are dealing with the same fact all the time. What was Saul's downfall? At what point did Saul and this line of things come to their tragic disasters? It was with Amalek. The word of the Lord to Saul was, "Smite Amalek and utterly destroy him" (1 Sam. 15:3), and Saul compromised. The Lord said through Samuel, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams ... Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king"; the kingdom is taken from you, you have lost your crown! He came down over Amalek.

Do you know that Haman, the Agagite, was of Amalek? Agag is only another name. Where has this come from? It is a thousand years of history. Where did it arise? Why, it is the fleshly, natural side of Abraham. Abraham had a spiritual seed and a natural seed. The natural seed worked out through Esau, Edom, Amalek; the spiritual through Isaac. Out of one source, the flesh and the spirit; from one father, the flesh and the spirit. That fleshly, natural, earthly line withstood the spiritual for a thousand years, headed right up to Esther, and we never hear of it after Esther. Esther finished the history of Amalek. That is what the overcomer is going to do — finish the history of the prince of this world. Now I leave that, but is it not interesting that here Israel with Saul chooses the line of the flesh, the earthly. Israel chooses Esau, Edom, Amalek, Agag, and loses the throne, loses the crown.

The antagonism of the world to the Anointed One

And just then David, the one who is anointed and has been paying the price of the anointing, is brought in quietly, steadily, to occupy the throne. But the two things in spirit and in principle are found in antagonism from the beginning. It is most interesting to note the different forms in which that antagonism showed itself.

Firstly, subtly, and apparently kindly and solicitously, there is Saul's armour, a kind of protective provision, a feigned assumed concern for David's well-being. How subtle is the working of the Evil One through the flesh! "Save Thyself, this shall never come to Thee!" (Matt. 16:22). It is the voice of Saul, it is the voice of the world, it is the voice of the flesh. A very long history, and not hesitating to attack the very Son of God Himself. This shall never come to

Thee, save Thyself! Put on this armour! Take the way that other men take! Do it as the world does it! The other way, this spiritual way, this heavenly way is too risky, uncertain, and precarious!

David was nearly caught. He put it on, but David was a spiritual man in heart and when he got into that position he knew inwardly that he was in a wrong position. A spiritual person will know inwardly when the Spirit of God does not agree with any proposed course or method, and it is such people who are the overcomers. The tragedy of the church is that it has not got spiritual perception and discernment as to exactly what the Spirit of God agrees with. The church has become so insensitive to the Spirit of God that it can be worldly and believe it is spiritual. It can go on the way of the world and be conformed to this age and still claim to be spiritual and not know that the Spirit of God is not in agreement in that. That is the tragedy of today, and if there are those who in spiritual sensitiveness know that the Spirit of God does not agree with this and that and they act accordingly, woe betide them! They will be hunted in the wilderness as David was for years, and their lives will be pursued by the murderer. That is the history of the overcomer.

Now in this situation of conformity to this age, lost spiritual sensitiveness, the quest for the way in which other people do things, God reacts and brings in, as almost from nowhere a David. David is God's reactionary instrument against this trend, and with the bringing in of David, the hidden antagonism, hatred, malice, murder, begins to come to light. It is not very long after this before javelins are being flung about by Saul. For what reason? This is perfectly irrational from any ordinary standpoint, but perfectly rational when you understand the spiritual things involved. There are other forces and intelligences which recognise the significance of David. That anointing portends the throne. There may be a long way to go, there may be a suffering way to be taken, it may be very costly, it may seem as though it is never going to materialize, but there are spiritual intelligences who know enough to know that that anointing is as good as though the thing were done.

The significance of the anointing

I would urge you to contemplate the tremendous significance of the anointing. Paul says that God has chosen us and anointed us in Christ (2 Cor. 1:21); that is the Spirit. John says, "The anointing which you have received abideth in you" (1 John 2:27). Oh, thank God for that! "The anointing ... abideth in you", and if you look carefully you will see that anointing relates to vocation and destiny. The anointing is something which points us to a divine purpose and it abides, and the upshot of anointing is that God has predestined for something and the Spirit is the security of the predestined purpose. By the

Spirit you come there. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech. 4:6). The Spirit is the guarantee, the Spirit is the power, the Spirit is the energy, the Spirit is the assurance; the anointing is the basis upon which God will realize His end. It will not be because of our persistence, our ability, not because we are so good, not because of our high level of life, but because of the anointing. Oh, a tremendous thing, the anointing!

There is the anointing on David and the devil fears that anointing. All the powers of evil know what that anointing portends and points to, and thus begins the history of violent, murderous assaults and antagonisms. The very instrument of the devil is very often acting contrary to his better sense of judgment. See those violent reactions in Saul where he decides never to do it again, calls David back, but does it again. The thing is never rooted out of his heart. Why? He is not a spiritually-minded man; he is governed by other concerns and interests; his life is not rooted in God, it is rooted in himself, and what a difference that makes! Any life which, after all, is rooted in itself is going to be a life like Saul’s. On the one hand, many things fair and fine and good; on the other hand, a strange contradiction, full of reactions, inconsistencies. “Is this thy voice, my son David?” — the crooning of a mother, yet his heart murderously intending to destroy David if only he gets the chance. He is not his own master. That is a life rooted in himself, giving Satan all the ground he wants to play with, making it a life full of contradictions. A life rooted in God is different.

Into this situation God brings David as His reactionary instrument and then the violent conflict begins and it is the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, between heaven and earth, between God and the devil. It is being fought out in their representatives here: in Satan’s representative on the one hand, in Satan’s instrument, a worldly people of God. Satan has far greater advantages through a worldly church and worldly Christians than he has through the out-and-out worldling. I am up against that every day. What am I finding? I am touching the world, going out to those ships, touching men, and as far as possible getting contacts. What comes back? The one thing, nine times out of ten, is this: we have no room for the churches, we have no room for the parsons, they are only concerned about their own interests! There is a lot in that. It is a worldly Christianity that is a greater hindrance to the Lord than anything else. Oh, a great strategic thing it is to the devil, which means that God’s strategy is in the opposite: a David, an Esther, a spiritual people, having no compromise.

David represents that which at heart (with many outward weaknesses, faults and imperfections all calling for the grace of God, as we were seeing in our previous meditation) is set upon God, at heart without compromise, at heart knowing the Lord. And what were the features of David that made him such an instrument of God and made it possible for the Lord to secure the throne, the

dominion, the triumph of life through him here on this earth?

The overcomer one who has proved God

The first thing was that David was a man who had proved God in the secret of his own life. You know what he said when he came to Saul; the giant was there. Well, he simply testified as to how the Lord had come into his experience in difficult times, how he had proved the Lord with the lion and the bear. “The Lord who delivered me ... will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:37). The Lord who delivered! Can you hear over the ages another man saying, “Who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver: on whom we have set our hope that he will also still deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10)? — proving God as the God of deliverances. Our God is a God of deliverances. And that is the overcomer’s testimony.

But to have a testimony like that and to have proved God like that, you have got to be in positions where only God can deliver you, and so we can say about the overcomer that the overcomer is a man, a woman, a people, who have been in tight corners and proved the Lord. That is simple language, but that is what it amounts to — in positions where none but the Lord could deliver, but they proved the Lord. “I have not proved them. And David put them off him” (1 Sam. 17:39). But he could have said, I have proved the Lord! and he did in effect say that. I have proved the Lord and I put Him on! An overcomer is one, then, who has proved the Lord, who does not speak out of a book, who does not prepare his testimony but in whom it has been wrought. The knowledge of God has been wrought in deep experience and he speaks out of a conflict and a contesting with the lion and the bear. Like his Master, he has been in the wilderness with the wild beasts and has proved the deliverance of the Lord.

Someone preached a sermon once on words which were trimmed down — “And he was alone with the wild beasts and the angels.” Of course, the complete statement is, “And he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him” (Mark 1:13). The preacher trimmed it down and said, “He was with the wild beasts and the angels.” But there is something in it. We are not allowed to do that sort of thing, but there is something in it. Alone with the wild beasts and knowing the Lord; alone with the forces of destruction and death, and the Lord. It is out of that kind of thing that the overcomer comes, God’s instrument for meeting a situation like this, for recovering the heavenly, for bringing in life where death is so mightily at work. David had proved the Lord.

We need not make many words of it. That is where you and I are at this time. Many of us are being put where it is simply a matter of proving the Lord as our deliverer; we are shut up, there is no other way, no explanation to be

given, no one else can help us, explain or save us. We are shut up to the Lord; we are going to prove the Lord as the deliverer, as the God of resurrection. And so God shapes and frames His vessels for meeting a need which exists among His people.

The overcomer's weapons

David not only had proved the Lord but had proved his weapons. "Girding Saul's sword on his side, he assayed to go, but he said, I have not proved it!" I leap from that statement right to the next. "David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone." I have proved this! This is something I have proved! The point is that it is proved weapons, not official supplies, not traditional means, but spiritually proved weapons. You and I are being taught surely, the means of spiritual effectiveness and spiritual deliverance. We are being taught something of the meaning and value and virtue of the Name, the Blood, the word of our testimony. "They overcame ... because of the blood and the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12:11); proved means.

We need not dwell upon what the stones may represent. We have heard lots of interesting things about those stones. The point is, they are proved means. The Lord really does shut His people up to prove the weapons. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual (mighty through God)" (2 Cor. 10:4). An overcomer is one who has proved his weapons and uses proved weapons.

And then, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts." An overcomer is one who knows the Name, the power of the Name, the virtue of the Name. I am not going to dwell more upon this, but I point it out to you. The Lord must have people of this kind in a time like this. Whether it be David's time or Esther's time or Paul's time or the time of the Apocalypse, He must have a people like this who have proved Him, who have proved weapons, who know the Name.

The path of the overcomer the path of suffering

But to close, remember that the people who know suffering, testing and cost are those who serve the Lord in this way most highly; it is they who know the cost. Oh some of us, when we were younger and beginning, read a lot of things and heard a lot of things said and we got a mentality which has been the ground of a good deal of our sorrow and suffering. And I wonder why it is that men have so misinformed. Is it because they do not know? I wonder if you have any corresponding experience with myself? As a younger man in reading what men have said, I formed this mentality: If you will be utter for God and a

man full of the Holy Spirit, God is going to do tremendous things with you and through you, and God is going to be very utter with you! And all this in the sense that you are going to know, that God is using you, blessing you and that you are going to have a wonderful career; if only you will be out and out for God, you will be a great man in God's hands, a wonderful instrument. A lot of that has been said and written and young Christians can get that idea. The fact is that the more utter you are with God, the more utter your faith has got to be, and very often the more hidden are God's ways with you and the more perplexing are His dealings with you and the greater the measure of suffering you go through. I hope I do not take the heart out of anybody. I am not saying that there is not going to be any blessing, any joy in the Lord, any satisfaction, any glory. I am saying this: what stands to be seen by anybody who has eyes is this, that men like Paul and many others who have so mightily abandoned themselves to God for His fullest and have served the Lord as no others have served Him have been the greatest sufferers. They have had to pay the greatest price and go by the most utter way and know the strangest perplexities and seeming contradictions. Perplexed, cast down, despairing of life, they overcame. And David anointed for the throne, for so high and great a calling and destiny, anointed to save Israel and bring Israel to glory, anointed — chased, hunted like a flea, like a partridge, among the rocks and mountains, pursued for his life, till one day even he said, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. 27:1). I may as well give it up; that is what it amounted to. He despaired of life — a man anointed! The path of the overcomer is a costly one, a suffering one, a perplexing one, but we have to take the long view and see the end.

A little phrase about Job is always very comforting — seeing the end of the Lord (James 5:11); the end. If we take any one phase or any part in itself, if we take suffering as the sum total, if we take this present experience of darkness as everything, we are done for. It is only as we take the long view and see the end of the Lord that we can overcome. Well, David was hunted, chased and pursued, many times in imminent peril, but he came to the throne and saved Israel.

Now, we are in "such a time as this" — that is the point — when the Lord needs a vessel and vessels of this kind, people who will so abandon themselves wholly to the Lord, who fairly and squarely face the cost and say, "If I perish, I perish!" It is not a matter of whether I perish; the point is whether the Lord's people live. If my life goes for theirs, it is all right! So long as the enemy does not triumph; so long as His people are not swallowed up and engulfed; so long as life can be ministered to them; so long as the power of His resurrection can be ministered through me; so long as they are delivered from death, it does not matter about me! "If I perish, I perish!" That is an overcomer. It costs

everything, but the Lord needs that. He has always reacted in that way. Joseph was His overcomer. Joseph had to go a suffering way to the throne in order to minister life. If Paul was an overcomer, then Paul had to go the suffering way to minister life, and we are still getting life because of Paul's suffering! How much do you owe to Paul in the Lord? I owe an enormous amount to Paul. Through Paul the river of life has flowed down these many centuries and oh, how many have been helped through Paul! What a loss it would be if Paul were lifted out of the New Testament. And I think that that is really the heart and core of the very meaning of the phrase "the Body of Christ" in that connection; "joints of supply", "uniting bands" are referred to. What is the purpose of the body if it is not to be the vehicle and vessel of the transmission of life, and that is what the Body is for — to be the sphere and vehicle of transmitting His life. May the Lord give us grace!

to be continued