



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

**THE MOUNTAINS AROUND
JERUSALEM**

Part 1

T. Austin-Sparks

Volume 149

**THE MOUNTAIN OF THE HEAVENLY NATURE
OF THE KINGDOM**

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up into the mountain: and when He had sat down His disciples came unto Him” (Matt. 5:1).

“And straightway He constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before Him unto the other side, till He should send the multitudes away. And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, He was there alone” (Matt. 14:22-23).

For some time past there has been one thing pressing more and more strongly upon my consciousness and being forced up to recognition, and it is what we have often called “*spiritual ascendancy*”. It seems to me that that is the issue for the church, and being the issue for the church, it is the issue for every child of God, every member of Christ. The end of the church’s history on this earth is ascension, and it will not just be mechanical or automatic. It will be the climax of a spiritual history, which is this having learned to ascend in a spiritual way, of having come to know what real ascendancy means while here.

This as a necessity, has, of course, been felt and recognized by the Lord’s people fairly generally, and, although many have not really perceived the inner nature of it, they have felt the need of it, and so this very sense has been put into phrases, into language, which often has become a slogan. For instance, ‘the victorious life’ is almost a slogan. It has been the name given to certain kinds of Christian activity, work, teaching and movements. Others have used the word ‘overcomer’, have spoken about overcoming, and it has become the name or label for certain teaching and certain movements. And so we have these various ways of trying to put into a concrete expression something recognized and felt to be necessary, but not fully understood, and therefore often limited in its

application and meaning. It has been limited rather to present, temporal, earthly things, rather than being seen as a great spiritual principle with a very much greater content than just getting the better of your temper and overcoming difficulties in your make-up and being a little more kind, generous and happy, for that is very largely the way in which the victorious life is thought of. There is something infinitely greater in the principle than most have recognized.

We shall therefore be occupied for a little while with this matter, and we have come to Matthew's Gospel which is very much marked by these heavenly features, things which indicate, symbolize and represent that heavenly position, that above position, for the church.

One of those features in this Gospel is the frequent occurrence of the word 'mountain', the number of times in which we find a mountain brought into view. Another feature is the activity and ministry of angels. These are suggestions, at least, of something from above, something off the earth, something which in principle is ascendancy, a link with heaven. A mountain top is a link with heaven, in type, in figure. An angel visitant and ministry is a link with heaven. That is the thought which will lead us to the spiritual truth so vital and necessary for the children of God.

The strength of the mountains

You know this matter of what we term 'spiritual ascendancy', getting above, getting on top, breaking the power of earthly gravitation, mastering this down-pressure to bring us lower and lower and finally under. We are all conscious of this spiritual force that is focused upon Christians more than upon any others, to get them down, to get them to take a lower level or to accept a lower level, and then when they do that, that is not the end — still further down they go. Once you have started the downgrade, there is no end to it; once you have let go a little bit, you let go some more. The end will be overwhelming, submergence, thoroughly down. We are all conscious of that tremendous force of down-pressure and down-drag to keep us from maintaining a high level of spiritual ascendancy, mastery and spiritual dominion, of being on top of the enemy and things. That position really known, reached, and maintained, is a tremendous factor in the matter of fortification, of strength, and that, of course, is why the enemy always seeks to force the people of God down. You remember the words in Psalm 125:1: "They that trust in the Lord are as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides for ever. As the mountains are round about

Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from this time forth and for evermore.” Mountains? And the Lord like the mountains? What is that? It is fortification, it is strength, it is protection. And what is the point of fortification if there is nothing against which to be fortified?

Away back in Old Testament times, when the people came into the land, the remarkable thing is that they occupied the higher places more than the lower. You will find that their towns, cities and villages are almost all of them upon some high place, the reason being that their enemies, who had chariots and horses, had their strength on the level, in the plain, but they could do nothing with chariots and horses against mountains, and therefore the safety, security and fortification of the Lord’s people was by being on high places. That is a parable. If the enemy can get you on to his level he has beaten you. So he must pull you down, he must get you down, he must get you to accept something less than God’s full place and mind for you, and then he will undo you. That is what he has done with the church, speaking of the church now in very general terms. He has pulled it down to this world level; he has reduced it to the level of things here, and he has absolutely disintegrated it, broken it up and divided it and robbed it of its power. The church which is revealed to us in the New Testament is always on high ground. That is what we are going to see. In Ephesians, it is “in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus”. It is a great power to be on high ground, it is a great defensive, protective factor; the enemy can do little with you if you keep up there and refuse to come down. Nehemiah found that to be so, when they said, Come down and let us confer; and he said, “I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down” (Neh. 6:3). It is a principle operating.

Now here you are in Matthew on the mountains round about Jerusalem. What you find here is that every one of these mountains reveals some great factor in the church’s state of impregnability. We are simply going to take the main principles out of some of these mountains.

We come to Matthew chapter five. As you have looked at it, your eye has passed on from verse 1, and you need to let your eye run right through to the end of chapter seven, because it is chapters five, six and seven which contain what happened on this mountain.

The “exceeding high mountain” of temptation

And may I remind you that this is not the first mountain mentioned in Matthew. There was an exceeding high mountain to which the devil took

the Lord in vision and showed Him all the countries of this world and their glory, and said, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9). My point is this, the devil reached his highest point in that mountain of temptation, and the Lord beat him there. It was on a mountain that the devil, fully extended, was defeated by the Lord. The Lord, so to speak, takes up the whole of this question of ascendancy over all the power of the enemy, this place where the enemy’s power is taken from him, and begins to apply it; and in the Holy Spirit there are always principles. This is not fanciful interpretation, it is not imagining something. You always have to ask the question, ‘Why is it all written?’ Is it just a pretty story, an incident? No! The Holy Spirit has, may I say, a ‘mentality’, and the Holy Spirit’s mentality is always conscious of great spiritual principles which fill the universe and apply to everything, and whenever the Holy Spirit takes up anything, He sees through the thing to the principle behind it. If the Holy Spirit has inspired this Gospel and inspired a man to mention various mountains, He sees behind the figure to the principles. And so the Holy Spirit has all the time a second interpretation in mind which is the true, the ultimate, and He is bringing that in representation. He will bring it out without representation presently through the apostles in the letters. It will be direct, it will be just pure spiritual truth; He will not have symbols in those letters, it will be direct teaching. He will not say then that the church is a city on a mountain; He will say that the church is in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. That is what He means all the way along. So the Lord is here taking up this matter of Satan’s defeat as on a high place, and then proceeds to apply that and to tell us what are the secrets of that ascendancy, dominion, authority and power.

Then we come to these chapters, and does it not strike you as also containing something significant that, when you come to the end of this section, at the end of chapter seven, the talk on this first mountain, you have a man who has built his house upon a rock, and the storms came and the winds blew and the house stood, for it was built upon a rock. It may only be suggestive, but it does seem to me to be rather remarkable that that is what the Lord is after — strength, stability, something that cannot be shaken. You will find that this is the idea of the mountain, “... as mount Zion, which cannot be moved” (Ps. 125:1). Spiritual ascendancy is only another way of saying a rock which withstands the storm.

The heavenly and spiritual nature of the kingdom

It is almost too well-known to suffer repetition, that this Gospel as written by Matthew is the Gospel of the King and the kingdom. That is the particular emphasis of Matthew, Christ as King. Then if that is true and that kingdom is not of this world, it is a heavenly and a spiritual kingdom in this dispensation. And that Kingship is not now political or temporal on this earth, but spiritual. Then when He ascends the mountain, you have the principle of spiritual Kingship and the spiritual kingdom, of spiritual command, of spiritual government, of spiritual elevation. In this Gospel Matthew speaks of Jerusalem as “the holy city” (Matt. 4:5) and “the city of the great King” (Matt. 5:35), but as you proceed, you perceive that the earthly Jerusalem is in the way of rejection. Steadily, deliberately, the movement is towards the setting aside of the earthly Jerusalem, and as that movement proceeds and the Lord Jesus reaches the outermost bound of that kingdom there at Caesarea Philippi, (the furthest point of that earthly Jerusalem’s influence in the earthly kingdom), at that point the Lord Jesus brings the church in. It is the first time in the New Testament, as far as the order is here, that the church is mentioned, and it comes fully in: “Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). There we have our mountain, our rock, our Zion which cannot be removed, which will withstand the tempests, the raging storms of adversity which are coming upon it, as it proves later.

The church has been brought right in to take the place of that earthly Jerusalem. A heavenly thing has come to supplant the earthly, but the heavenly thing takes over the principles which are illustrated, represented, and symbolized in the earthly. And if that principle that we have enunciated of stability, power to resist, to overcome, to have dominion, was inherent in the earthly representation, with the representation’s rejection and setting aside, the principle is lifted right up and made the very principle of the church, “and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”.

But it has got to be on high ground for that to be true. It has to be, so to speak, in the mountain, a position essential to power. Power is not found down on level ground; power is found by reason of position.

A transfer from the outward to an inward spiritual disposition

Then you come to recognise that in this transference from the earthly Jerusalem (the temple) to the heavenly and the spiritual (the church), there is another change indicated. Everything is transferred from the outward to the inward. Now that is summed up in these chapters.

The first section is in chapter five — on the mountain. The King is there; His disciples come to Him; those who are to be taught the meaning and nature of Kingship and the kingdom, who are to come into the spiritual meaning of that, come to Him and He begins to enunciate the spiritual laws and principles of His Kingship and kingdom, and you find that they are an extraordinary lot of regulations by the standard of this world. The very first one reverses the whole conception of power. When people begin to build a kingdom in this world, see how they begin. They will start by looking for the people who are obviously, manifestly and conspicuously great among men, capable, efficient, strong, aggressive. But this King says concerning those who are to govern in His kingdom, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” I just want to lift out this principle again. It is something inward and not outward, something of character, of nature, of disposition; it is a kind of person inwardly, and that kind of person is altogether different from the person that this world seeks for its kingdom. But He is saying, power is with these, authority is with these, dominion is with these. Do you want to know what ascendancy over the enemy, the great devil and his whole kingdom, is? The secret is “poor in spirit”. The Devil can do nothing with that. He can do anything with anybody whom he can get down on to his own level, that is, being something in himself. “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God”, said the Devil, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13-14). Get on to the ‘I’ level, and it may be a very big ‘I’, but it is a very low level; it is an earthly thing, it is a devilish thing. And the Devil cannot even stand up; he is a serpent, grovelling in the dust.

That is how the Lord looks at pride. “The haughty (the proud) He knows from afar” (Ps. 138:6). “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Pro. 16:5). Power over the enemy is the reverse of the enemy’s disposition, taking his own ground from him, or having it taken from us. The inclusive ground of the enemy’s dominion is always pride, which has so many forms of expression. It is there as a root of all sin; and this kingdom, this dominion over the whole power of the enemy is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” That is where the Lord beat the enemy

finally on that exceeding high mountain. The enemy said, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9); an appeal to the Lord Jesus to be something, to have something, to be great in the eyes of men. In effect the Lord says, ‘It does not interest Me, that does not touch Me, you cannot get Me on that line, I have no ambitions in that direction. My whole interest is in spiritual matters, not things temporal.’ “The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). He was poor in spirit in that sense, and the enemy was defeated. I do not know what the actual truth and reality of that temptation in the wilderness was, whether it was a literal mountain, whether the thing happened literally or whether it happened in the soul of the Master. We know what it means.

You imagine things, you can have suggestions and presentations of prospects and possibilities made to you; you do not need to have it all brought about literally; it can all take place in the chambers of imagery by suggestions. If it was like that with the Lord, it was rather a principle that was at work, and He was dealing with the spiritual principle. It was the spiritual principle of dominion, which is not, ‘have and hold and get for yourself’; it is, ‘lose everything for yourself if only God gets what He is after’; “the poor in spirit”. It is the reversing from the outward to the inward, and it was on this very ground that these disciples had to fight out their one inclusive battle.

Yes, the great battle of their lives had to be fought out on this very ground. They were ambitious men; they were men who wanted to get possession and position. “Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what then shall we have?” (Matt. 19:27). And they quarrelled with one another on the way as to who should be greatest in the kingdom. They were ambitious: “Grant that ... one may sit on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in the kingdom” (Matt. 20:21 paraphrase). This is the world’s idea of success. The Lord is saying, No, that is not the secret of real power and authority; it is just the reverse of that, the power to let go. That is being poor in spirit — the power to let go for the Lord’s sake, to let go even your rights. We know how fiercely the battle sometimes rages on that very point of our ability to let go to the Lord. The whole thing rages like a storm while we hold on. Immediately we let go to the Lord and say, ‘Well, Lord, I just hand it right over to you, I take my hands off, You take charge’, something happens; there is relief; there is ascendancy; there is a new position obtained, and it is one of power.

Even in relation to the interests of the Lord, *we* come into it. We are

so devoted to the ‘interest’ of the Lord that we get a grip on the interests of the Lord, and is it not true that so often we only believe things to be the Lord’s will because we want them to be? We want them so much to be the Lord’s will that they must be the Lord’s will.

He is on the mountain and He is saying in the first place, that the secret of the church’s power (that means the power of every individual believer) is that of an inward ascendancy over the spirit, the disposition, and the mentality of this world, of this old creation, and it is a new kind of outlook, a new kind of mind, a new kind of temper and disposition. It is a change from the outward to the inward.

The Lordship of Christ

We pass to the next section of these chapters.

“Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matt. 5:17).

“Verily I say unto you” (5:26); “I say unto you” (5:20,28,32,34,39,44; 6:2,5,16,25,29).

And do you notice what that is set over against? Moses said — but I say. Yes, Moses said certain things, but I say unto you. It is tremendous. Think of those to whom He was speaking: all the immediate world in which He was moving, holding the law, and its giver, Moses, as its last word, the final authority, in all the things of God. If there was any question they asked, What did Moses say? He closes the whole argument. And here one comes along and says, “Moses said” — yes, “but I say unto you”, “I say unto you”. There is constant repetition: “But I say”; and, “Verily, truly, I say.”

Now note, He is not contradicting Moses; that would not do. It is not that He is contradicting Moses, but He is transcending Moses, He is taking things on to a higher level — you can see the context — from the outward to the inward. If a man murders his brother, well, Moses said what should be done to him; but I say unto you that if you are angry with your brother, you are a murderer. This is something not in the act that you do outwardly; it is the nature from which it comes, which is very much higher ground. It is not what you do, it is your disposition. Many a murderer has never killed anybody, but he is a murderer all the same, according to this standard. You say, “That is terrible ground, who can take that ground?” That is not the point just for the moment. The point here is this, that the King is on the mountain, and He has gathered to Him the men who are to

be instructed in what that Kingship means, what real ascendancy is. What is it? The full and final and utter sovereignty of the Lord Jesus. “I say unto you”. You may have thought that Moses was the last word; I am the last word; there comes with Me a kingdom that never came with Moses; there came with Moses a kingdom and a system of laws and regulations which were but temporal. There has come with Me a kingdom and a system of spiritual laws and principles which is spiritual and eternal, and therefore infinitely greater than that of Moses. *I* — this is the only One in God’s universe who has the right to use that personal pronoun, but He used it in the right connection, He used it in relation to the divine mind, the divine thought. Satan used it out of that relationship.

All I am going to say about that is this, that spiritual power, authority and ascendancy is gathered up into this, that the Lord Jesus has the place of complete and perfect sovereignty in and over our lives to govern them, so that our minds are made completely subject to His. Our ideas, our thoughts, even in His work and His interests, should be subjected to Him, so that it is not how, where and when *we* think things should be done, but that *He* should become complete Master in His own house.

He is enunciating the principle which became evident with the coming of the Holy Spirit. What was the secret of the church’s ascendancy in those first days? What was the secret of the power of those who represented the kingdom of the heavens? Well, it was their subjection to the absolute Lordship of Christ. Look at Peter in relation to the house of Cornelius, the little bit of battle that was fought out in relation to the mastery, the Lordship, of Christ, but when that Lordship was established, even over Peter’s traditional acceptances and mentality, what power came in in the house of God! Why, heaven came down, heaven was manifested there in mighty power! Peter, in reporting the thing over against the questionings of his own brethren, said, “Who was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). I was perfectly helpless in this matter; heaven took it out of my hands. Just as had happened at Pentecost, heaven took it out of our hands; we were swept off our feet, so it happened there. It is the Lordship of Christ.

In the life of Paul it was like that. Paul set out on his way, committing that way to the Lord and trusting the Lord about his way, and he reached a certain point and he thought to go in a certain direction and preach there, but he was forbidden of the Holy Spirit. Then he thought in another direction: this would be the place to go to, this is a needy area, surely it would be the right thing to make Christ known there, but the Spirit of

Jesus suffered him not (Acts 16:7). Now, supposing he had leaned to his own understanding and pursued the course of his own judgment, he would have gone into Asia and Bithynia, and there would have been no result. Perhaps he would have got into trouble; that is usually what happens when you pursue a self-chosen, self-directed way. But at that point, the Lord showed him another direction. Perhaps he had never thought of that. That certainly was not in his present mental program, but he was adjustable to the Lord, the Lordship of Christ was established, and so he went there, and you have the churches in Macedonia, and glorious churches they were — Thessalonica and Philippi and others. But here was Christ's Lordship governing through the Holy Spirit. And you find that right through the Acts.

I venture to say that not one of us, leaning to our own understanding, would have taken Philip's course from Samaria to the desert, but he was subject to Christ, and who will say that that was not the most fruitful thing? It is the working out of this principle, "I say unto you". You have to transfer your seat of authority from that which up until now has been the greatest to something that is greater than anything you have known. You say, "Of course we are there; we do regard Christ as greater than Moses; for us there is no trouble about that."

But the application of that principle is not as simple as that. Listen to that last statement of mine again, that last clause: transfer from what has hitherto been the greatest thing in your knowledge to something now revealed to demand that transference. Even in Christianity that principle has to be applied. Are there not many people who have been born and brought up in a certain Christian way and that is the best and greatest they have ever known? They think that is the last word, and if they hold to it and take the attitude that there cannot be anything better than this, they have closed the door to something that may be much better. Many are there, tied up to what they hold to as the very best thing that ever was or could be, and so the Lord is excluded. The Lord may constantly be breaking in and saying, "I have not reached the end; I have not exhausted all revelation; I have yet much more to make known than has ever been known by the greatest and fullest person. Are you ready to adjust? Am I Lord?" And on that question of His Lordship, power, dominion, authority and influence hang.

Adjustableness is such a tremendous thing in the matter of knowing the Lord in greater fullness. So-and-so says, but I say. Oh, we have been brought up to believe this! Yes, but *I* say ... Sometimes it just works like

that. The Lord is hitting right up against some fixed position of ours, some kind of finality, some rigidity because we believe that that is the end of all truth. He comes right up against it and applies this matter of His sovereignty in new things over our judgments and conceptions, even our spiritual ones. Are we open for anything more that the Lord may have, or are we fixed? Upon that depends this whole matter of power and spiritual government. I could give you many living examples of how that works out, but there is your law of the kingdom — adjustableness to Christ. “Moses said”, and we are fixed on Moses. That was just the little point between Peter starting out for Caesarea and that great work of God. Moses said that no unclean creature was to be eaten. The unclean and clean are catalogued in Leviticus 11; you have a catalogue of unclean creatures which are forbidden, and here they all are in this sheet, and the Lord from heaven says, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat” (Acts 10:13). What about Moses? “But I say unto you ...”. You say, surely that is a contradiction of Moses? Not at all. If you saw more deeply into the meaning of that discrimination, you would see that after all the unclean beasts only represented principles, just as the clean ones did, and the actuality is secondary. It is only symbolism, after all; it is the thing implied that matters. Do we *at any point* have another authority but the present exercise of the authority of Christ — the *present* exercise, for that authority of Christ comes in at points and stages, and tomorrow it may mean something more than it means today, and it is the everyday progress of the authority of Christ? I mean by that that tomorrow some new ascendancies may be necessary that have not been before; it is His word that must govern in all things. “But I say unto you”.

The great question for you, for me, for the Lord’s people is this: the question of higher ground, and higher ground means advantage, vantage ground over the enemy and all his work and his power. If that ground is to be obtained, these two things which come out here in connection with the first mountain must be realized — things in our own hearts. First, a spiritual disposition found in those laws of the kingdom: the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and so on — a disposition; persecuted for righteousness’ sake — there is no virtue in being persecuted; anybody can be persecuted for anything, but for righteousness’ sake is different. For example, you do not turn round and say, ‘I will get even with you one day.’ It is a disposition: “Who ... when He suffered, threatened not”, it says of the Lord (1 Peter 2:23). That is the secret of

power and ascendancy. And then the preparedness to let the Lord have the upper hand in all arguments, to let the Lord have the last word in all matters, to adjust to anything that the Lord brings in a new light. Yes, openness to Him and complete subjection to His full authority. That is the way of going on in power. It is proved in this book, as we have seen, and it always is so. May the Lord bring us on to that mountain.

**THE MOUNTAIN OF HIS HEAVENLY PRESENCE
IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM**

Reading: Matthew 14:13-33.

In our previous meditation, we were in Matthew chapters five to seven, and what really is before us for our apprehension is the meaning of the kingdom of heaven with the church as the embodiment of it. In these mountains we have foreshadowings of that kingdom which was then coming and has now come. You remember that on the occasion when the Lord was about to take His disciples up into the mount of Transfiguration, He said, “There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matt. 16:28), and undoubtedly that was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The Son of man came in His kingdom then, fulfilling His own words “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36); so that here we have the kingdom coming, the kingdom imminent, and here are foreshadowings of the nature of that kingdom and of the vessel, the church, which embodies it.

The first and inclusive thing about that kingdom is that it is a heavenly kingdom, and so the great things foreshadowed as to that kingdom are disclosed on mountains in Matthew’s Gospel; six mountains comprehended, meaning, of course figuratively, that these belong to heaven; they are of a heavenly character. And when these things become true in the church, it will be a heavenly church, and then it will be a church in a place of ascendancy, dominion, authority, government and power.

The real government of the world is spiritual

Now we pass over to Matthew 14:13-33. “He went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when evening was come, He was there alone”

(v. 23). And He was there alone in more senses than one. He was physically alone, and He was alone in His soul. If you look in John 6:15-21, the corresponding record, you will have the explanation of His act here. The words used in the translation are quite weak. Our word in Matthew is, "He constrained the disciples to enter into the boat." The word really is very much stronger than that. It is really only equalled by our word 'forced', 'compelled'. He compelled them; He forced them to get into the boat and go before Him. John 6:15 explains that the multitude would "take Him by force, to make Him king". This would have been a precipitate political movement which would have wrecked everything, pulled things down on to an altogether lower level of this world and would have destroyed the prospects of this heavenly kingdom. It would have been a very subtle and clever move of the enemy to come and take Him and make Him king by force, and the disciples were evidently caught in it. We know that that was their idea, vision and ambition right up to the end, even after His resurrection. "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Their vision was earthly and political and it is not exaggerating or misunderstanding them or wrongly judging them to say that when this thing suddenly came up in a mass movement, they were involved, they were caught, so He sent them away first of all. He could deal with the multitudes better without them present. He sent them away to another place, until He had sent the multitudes away. It is so often when those who are associated with the Lord get wrong views of His intentions, false conceptions of His work and His purpose; so often they are the ones that complicate the whole thing and make difficulties for the Lord. The only thing to do is to get them out of the way, and so He got them out of the way and dealt with the multitude Himself. He had to quiet the multitude, He had somehow to stop this sudden, precipitate drive, and you can believe that that was no easy thing. So He forced them, He compelled the disciples to go.

The real government of this world is spiritual, not temporal; that is the upshot of it. They would come and make Him king by force, and try in that way to set up a temporal kingdom with Him as its head, but the real government of this world is spiritual. He had to refuse and repudiate the other, and disentangle His disciples, who were the nucleus of the spiritual and heavenly kingdom, from that. What follows is an acted-out parable of the kingdom in this specific connection.

The church is in the sea. The sea in the Bible represents mankind, the nations: restless, often in tumult; and the spirit of mankind, the spirit of the

world, the spirit of the nations is running counter to the church. The church is going through a difficult time. That is where the church is, and the sea at this time has worked itself up into a tempest.

The Lord in complete ascendancy

There are two pictures of Jesus: there (on the mountain) and here (on the sea). On the mountain He has been getting back into His native air. You know what it is to be caught in something of this drive and push and rush of man to get something done by his own energy, effort and determination, and you know so often that your spirit revolts against it. You say, No, that is not a movement of the Spirit; that is man trying to do something. There is a lot of tremendous hot-air activity in relation to the Lord to bring His kingdom about, and spiritual people saying, This is not it; that is man. The Lord Jesus was there, and in effect His action said, Let me get back to My own native air, let me get out of this, let me get control of this situation from heaven. He is alone, but He is there in prayer taking possession of this tumult. He is in ascendancy; no one else is; but He is in the place of mastery over all these forces in this world. The next that is said of Him is that He is on top of those restless forces, in complete command of them. They have no power over Him, He is walking on the waves. There on the mountain and here on the sea in control, the two places are one; in complete ascendancy over all those raging forces seeking to engulf His church.

Then to Peter, the representative of the church at that time, He says, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). The representative one is to be brought, through faith, into union with that ascendancy. He, so to speak, is bringing the church into that ascendancy of the Lord through faith.

The church with the Lord in His ascendancy

Well, those are the features of the whole situation, the acted parable. What is really being enacted here is another foreshadowing of the post-ascension days, Jesus there at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, all things put in subjection under His feet, absolute Lordship committed to Him, the King of the spiritual kingdom which is not of this world, but lies behind and really governs. It is not long before you see this being fulfilled in the church in the tumult of the nations. On one occasion in the midst of

that tumult they quoted the second Psalm to the Lord. “O Lord ... who by the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say, Why did the Gentiles rage?” (Acts 4:24,25). Here is the raging sea of men, and they are in it. Yes, they are precipitated into it; Herod, Nero and all the rest. But He is not only there, He is here, not to do the thing apart from them, but to bring them into the good of His own position. So you find that in the tempest, when the church exercised faith and bore testimony to the absolute Lordship of Christ, what happened? Well, they were not engulfed, they were not overwhelmed, they went on their way. Sometimes there was a great calm: “So the church ... had peace ... and ... was multiplied” (Acts 9:31). “Saul ... breathing threatening and slaughter” (Acts 9:1); you can hear the wind and the waves, you can feel the tempest raging when Saul is acting against the church, but they exercised faith in their exalted Lord, and He is found to be in their midst. Saul is on the way to Damascus; Saul sees Him and hears Him saying, “Why do you persecute Me?” ‘I am there, Saul; where My people are, there I am as well as up here!’ Through their faith, this mighty storm is brought under His ascendancy and Lordship. They have come into the good of it, and the storm breaks. So the church had peace and was multiplied. The point is that the church came into the good of the mountain top, into the position of ascendancy, through faith.

This mountain foreshadows the coming days of the church, when the church is precipitated into the tempests in the nations. We are there now, there is no doubt about it. But what about it? We may not at this time be suffering directly great persecutions from men, but I leave you to decide which is worse — to suffer direct, open persecution at the hands of men, or to know the awful raging of the powers of darkness against your soul. We know something about that, this awful conflict, these atmospherics, this pressure, this terrible determination of the evil forces to overwhelm us if they can, to bring us under; we know it continually; we are in the way of the kingdom.

The need of faith

What does the Lord want to teach us? First of all, His kingdom is not of this world. If you get down on to that level of something temporal, tangible, seen and handled, you are off the line. If all these sentient factors weigh with you, then you are on a very low level. That is not the realm. No, the heavenlies is the realm of the church, the kingdom, the govern-

ment, the dominion, the place of authority. Given that that is recognized, then the Lord seeks to teach us the way of union with Himself in His ascendancy, to go through these tempests and not to be overwhelmed by these forces of evil. This is figurative language mainly, but you understand what this means in a spiritual way every day. The enemy is seeking to get you down and get you under, to overwhelm you, and the Lord does not just come along and stop him. He says to you, ‘Come out here with Me to the place of ascendancy, *you* come into My place, on to My ground, *you* exercise faith in Me and by faith you will share My power over those powers of evil. Take your place by faith’ — and it takes a lot of exercise of faith to step out of a boat into the sea and believe that you will not go under, or out of an aeroplane on to clouds and believe that you will not fall down. Faith is tested like that as severely in the spiritual realm as it would be in the natural. It is simply stepping out onto the Lord (where to step out naturally will be disaster) and to believe that there will be no disaster at all. That, of course, applies to many things. This is the thing the Lord is trying to teach us and bring us to, and that is borne out by this acted parable, this foreshadowing of spiritual things.

The Lord’s engineering of circumstances

The Lord Himself deliberately chose these circumstances for them. He compelled them to get into the boat, and He knew from His vantage point on the mountain what was happening down below. He could see it all, and He came to them in the fourth watch, which was the last watch. He knew exactly when He would go to them, when things had got pretty well near the end where they were concerned, and they were at the end of their tether. Scripture does not include things for artistic reasons; every detail has its significance. He deliberately precipitated them into this position and He deliberately waited for His own most advantageous time. When there was no natural strength or ability left and when it seemed that the power was all with these adverse forces, He was going to reveal how utterly Master of the situation He was, and how calmly so. There is no great fanfare, no demonstration; He just walked quietly on the water, and all is tranquil. ‘Come on, you will be the same, it is easy, come on!’ Tranquillity, mastery of forces which have worn these men down completely, brought them to an end. He has waited as He waited deliberately four days before He came to Lazarus, so that everything should be utterly impossible and hopeless from any other quarter but His own. He is always

doing this sort of thing. He has this matter in hand and is seeing to it that there are no resources anywhere else, they are all spent out. The Lord chooses circumstances for us quite deliberately, and lets them run on very often — we think often too long, but He knows what He is doing. He is going to let us know, on one hand, how completely, and therefore tranquilly, Master of the situation He is. Is not that one of the factors that we have so often recognized? The thing was terrific, and then when the Lord came in, it was as though it was nothing, and we asked afterwards, “Was it as bad as we thought it was?” It is so simply cleared up. It was just as bad as ever it was and perhaps a great deal worse, but He is so completely Master that it does not need a demonstration of power from Him to bring this thing under. It is easy. Well, anything ought to be easy for omnipotence, ought it not? He waits in order to teach this, firstly, His own complete mastery in this universe.

But then the disciples are to come into the good of that in an experimental and actual way. They are to know this heavenly ascendancy themselves and, to summarise, we only come into it and make these discoveries when we are forced to, when, if we do not, it is the end of everything. We are like that, and it is as well that the Lord takes us on that ground. He never believes in theoretical ascendancy, He never believes in doctrinal ascendancy, He does not believe in people having all the doctrine and the theory of reigning and dominion. He sees to it that it is very practical, and so He precipitates the situations, and drives us into them in order to make it very practical. Of course, we do know how practical it is. It is very practical because it is very grim, but oh, that we might more quickly learn the lesson and more readily exercise the faith in His supreme ability to deal with this whole situation when it is completely beyond us and we can stand no more. Is it not part of our training, as of these disciples, that we, perhaps far too slowly, but nevertheless, that we should come steadily and surely to the place where we say, ‘I have been in situations like this before where I thought it was the end, but it was not. I proved the Lord then, I will prove Him again now.’ We are constantly redeemed from our despair, our lack of faith, our great tendency to give up because it is all too much, it is impossible. That is the tendency — to say it is beyond us now; this is the end; we cannot go any further. That is unbelief, and He says, “O ye of little faith”; but we should reduce that steadily until, in the presence of storms that have never been before, we also are learning the tranquillity of ascendancy through faith in the Lord.

To be continued.