



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

VOCATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Part 1

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THE CALL TO FELLOWSHIP

“A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary” (Jer. 17:12).

We shall have much to say about those words as we go on. For the time being, I want to add alongside of them two other passages:

“I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer. 1:5^b).

“Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations” ... “unto the uttermost part of the earth”. A very brief contemplation of each of those passages will reveal that they have many things in common, and among them some things of very great, indeed of the greatest, importance.

The one inclusive thing which they have in common, as lies right on the surface, is that here is a ministry, God-appointed and heaven-governed unto all the nations. That was Jeremiah’s calling, or shall we say, the calling of the prophet; that was the church’s calling and ordination — the ministry of the church. There are, alongside that inclusive fact, or contained in it, these other features. Each of these, both in the case of the prophet and of the church, was linked with that past eternal intention of God. The present, in each case, was seen to be bound up with something which had always been in God’s intention. The complete statement of Jeremiah 1:5 is a tremendously suggestive, significant statement, that before Jeremiah ever had a being in this world, the Lord knew him, called him, formed him, and appointed him. His very being was linked with something before time. That is perfectly true of the church, as we so well know. The present, in the prophetic ministry, in the church’s vocation,

thrown back into those eternal thoughts of God, that one eternal intention.

In the second place, in each case, God is seen acting again, because a called vessel had failed Him. How true that was in the case of the prophetic, or the prophet's ministry! The vessel which God had called, with which He had taken such infinite pains, had failed Him in this intention of His. We know how true that was in the time of the great crisis out of which the church was born: one called vessel and nation had completely failed. The Lord was reacting, in the case of Jeremiah, in the case of the church, in the way of recovering a vessel, or constituting a vessel in relation to the failure that had been and was.

In the third place each of these, Jeremiah representatively as a prophetic ministry, and the church, was an embodiment of God's sovereign ways of working in relation to His intention. It is fascinating and tremendously instructive and helpful to study God's sovereign ways with Jeremiah as His servant, and how those ways with him set forth God's principles of service at all times. It is on this wise that God works. If we want to know what true service to God is, we have to look into the life of Jeremiah and others, and not only by what they say, but to see God's handling of them, God's dealing with them, God's relationship to them. And there we learn the way and the laws of the service of God. I am making these statements, which have to be explained as we go on. This is the foundation.

The ministry of the prophets

What was true of the ministry of the prophets, represented so largely by Jeremiah (whom I consider the greatest of the prophets) was true and is true of the church. The church is the embodiment of God's principles of service; its very history shows how God works. A prophet "unto the nations"; a ministry "unto the uttermost parts of the earth", is constituted on certain, very clearly defined laws. God is the One who makes those laws, and applies them, and keeps the history of every chosen vessel to those laws. Here with Jeremiah, as with the church, we have the spiritual history of a chosen vessel. If you were to look into it, you would see that this is true to type; the history of every chosen vessel is more or less the repetition of these vessels of old. The vessel embodies something that is spiritual history with God. It is not just objective. What I am trying to say is that the vessel is not just picked up and used and spoken through, but a history is wrought in that vessel; its very constitution is a spiritual experience out of which its ministry comes. That is a very important thing

ever to remember. No vessel chosen of God which is in His hands, will be allowed for long to get outside of the realm of reality, and often it is terrible reality. God is *doing* something before He is *saying* something, and all the saying comes out of His doing.

Fellowship with God

Now the focal point of all this is *fellowship with God*. That is a deep, and inexhaustible matter. A very great deal of weakness, confusion and failure is traceable to one basic defect: it is failure to recognise the real nature of God's call to any life, to any instrument. The real nature of God's call to you, to me, either individually or collectively, is a call into fellowship with Himself. We have other ideas about what it is to be a Christian, to come to the Lord, however we may put it, but the fundamental factor of any call of God upon any life, any instrument, any vessel is this, upon which everything else is based where He is concerned — fellowship with Himself. The Bible contains a great many things, but it could be truly said that the whole Bible is gathered into one thing. From the creation of man, right the way through to the end, the one thing that governs everything in the Bible is God seeking to have man and His creation on the basis of fellowship with Himself. What a lot is gathered into that; how many aspects there are of that; but that is the one thing: the Bible is all about that. And if Christianity is the spiritual sum of the Bible, as undoubtedly it is, then Christianity rests upon this one thing — fellowship with God. We are called (and this is the statement of Scripture) into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). And the Son has made it unmistakeably clear that the relationship between Himself and His Father, which was a relationship of perfect fellowship, is the relationship that He desires to exist between His own, Himself and the Father — “they in us”; “I”; “as I and the Father ... so they ...” (John 17). That is the sum and the centre of true Christianity — fellowship with God. Perhaps it is necessary to step back to what was said immediately before that. A great deal of confusion, weakness and failure is due to our not recognising that that is what it is all about. Why are we Christians? Why do we belong to the Lord? What does it all mean? What is it all about? The answer (you can apply it to every detail and you will find it fits) is *fellowship with God*. That is what He is working towards, and through that He does all His work.

So that the closer, the fuller the fellowship, the greater and the better

the service that God calls true service. You can see, by only a superficial knowledge of the life of the prophets, who indeed were the great servants of God, that God did take infinite pains to see that these men were not just mechanical contrivances to serve some end of His, but they were men whose lives were brought into the deepest fellowship with God, and out of that all their service came. That explains the New Testament. We should not have ninety per cent of the New Testament if that were not true! At least ninety per cent of the New Testament bears down upon this one thing: God seeking fellowship on the part of His church with Himself, and that includes the individual believer. Well, that is what the Bible is about, and that is what the New Testament, in particular, is about.

But further, it is a fellowship call in relation to *vocation*. It is not, only in a secondary way, a call to salvation; it is a call to salvation, but that is by the way, shall we say. We make everything of salvation in our interpretations of Christianity. Salvation is essential; nothing can be apart from it. But God's call, while through salvation essentially, is not ultimately the call to salvation; it is to *vocation*. It is a call "according to (His) purpose" (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9). And the vocation is only possible by fellowship. It is a *fellowship vocation* — a vocation springing out of fellowship with God.

Perhaps I must pause to say this: perhaps you, from time to time, or even now, could argue over what I have said. Many there are who are doing a lot of good work for God; indeed there is a tremendous amount of what is called Christian work or service, and it is possible to be carried away with the service, with the work. But if those concerned are really in the hands of the Lord, if their lives have really been surrendered to the Lord and are under the government of the Holy Spirit, you will find that God is very careful about things in the life of which He does not approve; and they do not get away with it. If there is something there that the Lord does not agree with, you come up against it; it is possible for your whole life to be held up; you have a bad time. The Lord is working *in* you to will and to do for His good pleasure that which is well-pleasing in His sight. He is working *in*; you are not just doing a lot of things; you are a sphere in which God is at work doing things, and being very painstaking, careful and meticulous; and this involves a considerable amount of exercise, and sometimes pain and suffering in our relationship with the Lord, because of this one thing. Vocation, real vocation, real service, springs out of a fellowship of life and character with God. There is no real fellowship with God except on the basis of character, is there? Our characters are all

contrary to God, persistently, habitually, there is no fellowship with God; it breaks down at once. That is why, if something goes wrong with us, everything is brought to a standstill until we have got to the Lord to get it right. Well, that is simple life and experience.

Let us trace our steps again: the basis of everything is fellowship. The fellowship with God is a vocational fellowship: it has a purpose in view, a work to be done, a service to be fulfilled. Thirdly, that vocation relates to the nations. Everyone called of God into fellowship with God is called into a vocation, and that vocation is *a nation's vocation*. The horizon of your life, when you are brought into fellowship with God's Son, can never be small, little, limited or only local. It immediately reaches out; you become aware of the greatness of the range of everything into which you have come. You become a part of this thing which God has had in mind from eternity — *a world for Himself*. That is what we are born into in our new birth — the nations. If you are a part of the church, and you are that if you are born of the Spirit, baptised in one Spirit into one Body, that is what we are born into. The first thing that the Lord Jesus said about the church which was about to be born was, "... the uttermost parts of the earth". That is your vocation; that is your setting, your calling, your horizon. Now do not misunderstand me, I am not saying that every one of you has got to go to the uttermost parts of the earth, but I say that is your setting; you are to have no less a range of responsibility than that; no less a sense of committal than that. It is the nations which are the vocation of the church, and therefore of every member of it.

A vocation unto the nations

If this book of the Acts sees Christianity precipitated by heaven into this world, it takes its rise from Acts 1:8: "Ye shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me, in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Three things are presented there: "Ye ..." — a called company. That word "called" becomes very specific and very inclusive as you go on through the New Testament. But there it is: it is a company called into being by heaven. It is an endowed company; an endowment is given to that company — "Ye shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you." It is a company with a vocation — "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me unto the uttermost parts of the earth"; called, endowed, commissioned, or entrusted with this worldwide vocation. And you go on into this book of

Acts (so-called), and you see that heaven which initiated and constituted this, takes infinite pains all the way along to prevent this thing from settling down and becoming merely localised. This is as big as heaven, and heaven is going to accept nothing smaller than itself. The principle is going to be applied all the way along; heaven is going to keep the nations in view until the end. So you see the persons who lead the church — and I use that word, that language, carefully — and the church fulfilled its vocation because of heaven-given inspirers and leaders. But notice how heaven had taken pains to undercut in the persons concerned anything less than its own dimensions. Very much has been said about Stephen. Do you know why Stephen was martyred? There is only one explanation and it is that he charged Israel and Israel's leaders, of having failed God in the great vocation unto the nations. They had drawn in and settled down in an exclusiveness, pride and conceit, thinking that they were the people and the only people; they had it all. They called the Gentiles 'dogs' and the nations, well, what were the nations? *They* were the people! And it was because Stephen struck at the very heart of that localization and exclusiveness that he was martyred. Read again what he said.

Let us consider Paul. The only explanation of Paul is that God had cast him in the mould of the universal, the worldwide, and took those pains which resulted in the greatest miracle in the apostolic church, that a rabid, bigoted, Pharisee of the Pharisees, should become the "apostle of the Gentiles", of the nations. His whole background, training, everything, like Jeremiah's, was ordered, arranged by God, even before his birth, and at his birth, and through his childhood, to constitute him this man who would become God's vessel in relation to that worldwide purpose concerning Jesus Christ. You see the Holy Spirit working with the persons on those lines (Gal. 1:15).

You see Him working with the geographical places. Jerusalem was tending to become the localized centre of everything, to dominate, govern, hold everything to itself; and heaven moved in and said, 'This is not my idea!' With one scattering blow all that had to yield to heaven. They went everywhere, to fulfil the great design, unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And you notice how, by the Holy Spirit, the apostles were so strategic in this very matter of the centres that they chose, out from which whole areas, large areas, could be touched. Heaven was working on that principle through the Acts. This is a world vocation.

Now you see how clear these things are in the case of Jeremiah. That statement of Jeremiah which we have quoted has a tremendous amount of

history behind it. Jeremiah was a priest by birth; he was of the line of Abiathar. You remember it was Abiathar who was guilty of complicity with Adonijah in seeking to take the throne from Solomon, God's chosen successor to David. The result was that Solomon sent Abiathar, the high priest, away to his own home in Anathoth; banished for life and put right out of the high priesthood. Come down the years and arrive at Jeremiah; he is in his home in Anathoth; he is there, serving in this limited way in a prescribed priesthood. There he is, in a little place, some forty odd miles from Jerusalem, carrying on some kind of priestly work in a little locality, not even in Jerusalem. And then it says: "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah ..." (Jer. 1:4), and said (and I like to put it into my own words): 'Look here, I have got something bigger than this for you!' "I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). 'Out of this; this is not My thought for any servant of Mine — some little hole-in-a-corner-thing, that is not accepted or recognised!' And if you wonder if that is true, we make a great deal, for our own comfort, of the words of Jeremiah when he answered the Lord: "I am a child, I cannot speak." A good many of us have made a lot of that for our own consolation. When Jeremiah spoke those words, I believe that he did not mean what we mean by 'a child', or, the word does not mean that in the Hebrew; it means, 'I am one who is not yet recognised by men'; 'I have not yet got standing or status'; 'I have not been accepted.' Perhaps that is more comforting still! But the Lord said, 'Say not, I am one without status, or recognition, or acceptance; thou shalt go to all to whom I send thee!' "I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations"!

In line with heaven

Here is God's thought coming out again, you see; all the nations are in view with God and He is moving sovereignly. We have much to say about His sovereign movements in this connection. He is moving sovereignly in relation to the nations, maybe firstly through His own people; but it is the nations that are in view with Him. Here in the Old Testament, and there in the New, in the Acts, it is heaven that is on the move. Heaven has got things in hand; all this is heaven on the go! If we get in line with heaven, we shall come spontaneously into these three things. (Lay hold of this if you forget much else).

1. We shall come into line with a heavenly calling, in other words, a heavenly vocation. Get into line with heaven, and we almost

automatically come into line with a heavenly calling, a heavenly vocation.

2. When we get into line with heaven, we spontaneously get into line with a heavenly endowment for the vocation. “Ye shall receive power.”
3. And when we get into line with heaven, we get into line with God’s ultimate object, a people out of the nations, and then the nations for His possession.

In line with heaven — a call according to purpose in line with heaven — an endowment, heaven taking responsibility. Are we not grateful for that? What a lot of history that explains for the Lord’s servants, for the church, for us. It is this, that having come to the place of the most utter abandonment to God, to Christ, to be here on this earth only for Him, He has taken responsibility for all that is required. Jeremiah may have some terrible experiences, some terrible times; it may look sometimes as though it is the end, and an awful end, but you know quite well that God saw him through, took responsibility, and that his ministry was successful, although it seemed to be a failure. You have just got to follow through in the Chronicles of Israel, and how did the Chronicles begin? “... that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, and made a decree ...” (2 Chron. 36:22). Jeremiah comes into his own, for God has taken responsibility for seeing that this heaven-given mandate does not fail. Come into that when we come into line with heaven, and we can never be on narrow, confined, exclusive lines. Heaven’s view is the nations, or the ‘uttermost parts of the earth’. Heaven acts sovereignly for that, as we have said.

Let it be understood that we do not *make* Christianity; we initiate or project nothing; heaven does all this. We shall see, perhaps, as we go on, more of this heavenly initiative. But what I am trying to emphasize is this, that if we get into line with heaven, the rest follows. Oh, how necessary it is not to get out of line with heaven. We can fail to come into line with heaven; we can also turn aside from heaven’s line. But if we come into line with heaven, everything else follows; it is spontaneous, it happens. You do not have to organize, plan or scheme, or try to make something happen or have elaborate plans and programs of Christian activity. It just happens if you are in line with heavens. It is spontaneous, heaven does it. We are but channels or vessels; we are not the source, or the originator.

Heaven goes on, heaven is going on. If we step aside, heaven is going

on; if we rebel, heaven is going on. Heaven's attitude is always that — I am going on. Are you coming or are you going to be left behind? It is just like that. Our life, our service, depends entirely upon where we are, not in the first place upon what we are, but where we are; not on what we try to do or make, but where we are. Are we in the place where heaven can go on with us and through us? You know quite well that this is the full revelation that has been given to us in one short book of the Bible. It is just that. Everything in that letter to the Ephesians is so full, so strong, so rich, so spontaneous — “in the heavenlies”, “in Christ”, that being the vast range of the divine purpose and counsels.

Well, for the present we must break off, but here the primary point is this: Christians, believers, children of God, people of God, are the result of a divine act in relation to a superlative purpose in the heart of God — “Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you.” We all have to come there even at the beginning. We may be told that we may decide for Christ, we may choose the Lord, and we may think that we do it, but we know quite well that nothing really happens until we come to the place where, if God does not do something, it is all nonsense, empty, all in vain. Sooner or later, that is where we all have to come; it must be, from beginning to end, all of God. Our existence and our service is the result of a divine act; that divine act relates to this great vocation in the heart of God which has to do with nothing less than *all the nations*. As we shall see in the first place, it is “taking out of the nations a people”, but it does not stop there. In the last place it is: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.”

It is really necessary to go on from that point, but for now that will be enough. I can only hope that with all this you catch a glimpse of something. We have so often said that it is no little thing to belong to the Lord, to be in relation to the Lord. It is no lesser thing than to be an integral part of this which was conceived in the heart of God before He made the world, in relation to that world, concerning His Son. You and I have, by divine act, been called according to that. We shall find the greatness of the Lord, the greatness of His resources, not brought down to the little measure of our personal horizon, but as we are lifted clear of all that into the full range of God's purpose concerning His Son. There we shall make discoveries of how great the Lord is in His resources, and in His ability to get us through. If you want proof of that there is one very good source and kind of proof with which perhaps some of you are not a little familiar, that the more you are in fellowship with God's ultimate, full

purpose, the more intense, bitter and relentless will be the activities of hostile forces. That is perfectly clear, but it is a compliment! Perhaps we do not like that kind of compliment, but it is a compliment to anything when the devil hates it and seeks to destroy it. So, what counts most for God, or could potentially count most for God will be the target of most of the enemy's activities, and that is a significant thing.

We need our initial verse, do we not? "A glorious throne from the beginning ... our sanctuary".

A GLORIOUS THRONE

“A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary” (Jer. 17:12).

“I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5^b).

“But ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“A prophet unto the nations”, “... witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth ...” and, “A glorious place set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.”

We have already covered a considerable amount of ground in laying down a foundation for these meditations. The sum and the substance of it all is that the call of God is a call into fellowship with Himself in a great purpose which has been in His heart from the foundation of the world. That is the meaning of being the Lord’s people: it is a fellowship call and a vocation call. It is therefore something very much more than a call to be saved. That is only the door into the fellowship, and into the vocation.

Now, without any backward look, we are going to go on with that. And once more, we outline, and here I want to mention six parts of that whole matter of *fellowship with God in vocation*. And, of course, what I am saying, although without quoting Scripture, is fully based upon and supported by what the Word of God teaches.

1. The world was made for and given to the Son as possession and inheritance

This world was made for, and given by God to His Son, as His possession and inheritance. That lies behind everything in history and in the Bible; it lies behind human life; it lies behind everything that the Bible

contains. God designed this world and created it for His Son, and gave it to Him as His inheritance.

2. The world was stolen from God's Son

Something that runs through the Bible, and breaks out from the prophets again and again is that God has been robbed. God has had His rights taken from Him, God's rights are vested in His Son, and that taking from God relates to the place of God and His Son in this world. It is not difficult to see that, on the one side, the big issue all along is just that: God does not have His place or His rights; they have been taken from Him. If we could comprehend the whole meaning of one big Bible word, and understand it, we should see that it just comes back to this thing — that word 'righteousness'. The whole of the content of the word 'righteousness' relates to what is right where God is concerned; and righteousness and unrighteousness bear down upon this one issue: God having His place, and being ceded His rights, His rights in character, in creation and in government. Well, they are big things, and cover a lot of ground. But the point is that this world has been stolen from God's Son by man's consent. The simple fact is that it is in wrongful hands; it is in hands to which it does not belong. God has written that truth deep and large in history.

I wonder if you yourself have ever wondered about one matter. You remember, in a vision, God came to Abraham, to make a covenant with him, and said: Thy seed, thy seed shall be sojourners in a foreign land four hundred years. Before they were in existence, they were destined to the Egyptian captivity and bondage, or, it was foreshown that they would be. I have often asked myself when reading the story of Joseph going into Egypt, then bringing his brethren there, and then bringing his aged father, and the seemingly happy time for the present that was theirs, why it was necessary for that to become a prison for them for those four hundred years, and as we know, an awful prison. We know how they cried and groaned by reason of that bondage and their taskmasters. Why? Well, we know that Joseph's brethren were not a very good kind of fellows, a poor lot, perhaps; they did not treat him very well, but four hundred years! If it was because of them, what they were that they should not have been, this was pretty heavy punishment! Why must this long and terrible period be written in history? Well, we may not understand the whole thing, but I do suggest this: God has written deep and large on the page of history, that this world is in the hands of a power to which it does not belong. While

they were there during that period in Pharaoh's hands, they did not belong to Pharaoh, they did not belong to Egypt. God's words were: "... My people ... let My people go ... let My son go ..." (Ex. 4:23; 5:1). In effect, 'They do not belong to you; you have no right over them; they belong to Me.' Now perhaps we could find a better and fuller reason for Israel later going into the seventy years' captivity in Babylon, for, we might say, they deserve that; you have only to read these prophecies of Jeremiah; nevertheless, there is another aspect to it. That people remained God's people in Babylon; they did not belong to Nebuchadnezzar; they did not belong to Babylon; they were God's people in wrongful and false government and control. God has written this in history, that there is that which is God's which is under a false, wrongful government. It is not where it ought to be, not in His hands; it has been stolen from God. Truly, as Pharaoh stole Israel, and Israel's rights, properties and liberties, as truly as Nebuchadnezzar stole the wealth of the temple and of the city and the people, and carried it away, so, in a full, deeper and spiritual way which is much worse than the temporal, this world which belongs to God has been stolen from Him. He is not in possession of it. It has been stolen; God has been robbed. God's Son has been robbed of His inheritance.

3. The world is a lost world

This world, therefore, is, in the deepest sense, a lost world. Of course, lost, firstly, to its rightful Owner; lost to the purpose for which it was created; lost to its own rightful state of peace, joy and satisfaction. It is lost to its essential unity and integration; that needs no arguing. It is lost to its glory. All in it, by nature, are lost; the nations are lost. Now, the Lord Jesus made it His business to lay great emphasis upon that fact, by every means: by parable and declaration, by work and Person, He sought to make this quite clear to all, that the inheritance is lost. Yes, and that it had been stolen. Remember the parable of the vineyard, and the wicked husbandman, who said: 'This is the heir to whom the inheritance belongs. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.' Oh, what a profound meaning the Lord Jesus had in speaking that parable. We know all His other parables about lost things. We have dwelt mainly upon one side of them. There is another side, you know. Take the one best known, of the so-called 'prodigal'. Well, we have gone round that 'prodigal', looking at him from every standpoint, until perhaps you think that there is nothing more to be said. But have you ever thought that he did not belong

to the man to whom he had hired himself out; and he did not belong to that world to which he had gone; and he did not belong to the circumstances and condition in which he found himself? There is something in him all the time, rising up in revolt, and saying: I don't belong here; this is not what I was made for. My whole being cries out and says: I am in a false position; I am in a wrong position; I am not where I ought to be; I should not be in this. If the coin or the sheep, those lost things, could speak, they would have said: I am not where I ought to be; I am somewhere else; it is not what I was intended for. So, when the Lord Jesus sums it all up and says: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), He is touching the ultimate things, not man's salvation in that elementary sense, but man's salvation in its profoundest, uttermost, sense: the recovery of that which has been lost to God's Son — His inheritance. This world was made for and given by God to His Son; it was stolen from Him by a power that has no real right over it; it is therefore a lost world.

4. God's Son came to secure the lost inheritance

God's Son came into this world with the supreme object of recovering the inheritance to Himself, of retrieving the loss, and securing the lost inheritance to Himself, as its rightful Owner. That, again, is perhaps the simple gospel, but let us get behind everything and see what it is that lies there at the root of His coming: leaving everything; being divested of everything in heaven, and coming here, even to the death of the cross. The thing that lies right at the heart of all that is the recovery of His inheritance.

Now let me solemnly and reverently touch a point which goes deeper than anything else in this matter. When the Lord Jesus, on the cross, cried, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" (Matt. 27:46), He went out into the place of the lost; the place where the scapegoat was loosed and driven to the wilderness, away from man and God. He took the place of a lost world, and a lost humanity. He lost everything in that moment. It is the desolation of His soul. For that moment He lost God, lost heaven, lost everything! It is a terrible phrase, and I hesitate to use it — He was like a 'lost soul' in that moment! "He poured out His soul unto death." What is death but the loss of everything? If it is death all is gone. And He went out there to bring back in His own Person the lost inheritance of man. He touched the very depth, the bottom of our loss, and God's loss, and His

own loss. The wonder of the resurrection is essential to the whole circle. For this world was lost.

5. Christ triumphed over the powers of darkness in His cross

But that was not all. There is an extra factor in it all. Out there in that darkness and desolation, that wilderness of forsakenness, things were by no means passive. Out there He went to meet the one that had robbed Him and God of everything, whom He Himself called the 'Prince of this world'. He met the usurper, the robber, the stealer, and in awful conflict, in that darkness, He wrestled His great wrestle with the powers of darkness. So terrible was it that the Psalmist well describes them: "They compassed me about like bees" (Psa. 118:12), referring to these hosts of wicked spirits, of which Paul speaks. Out there He met that whole kingdom and hierarchy in full force. "He plunged in His imperial strength to depths of darkness down; He brought His trophy up at length, the proud usurper's crown." He wrested the inheritance from the false prince; He fought this whole battle out in that dark moment on the cross. Oh, what a lot can be crowded into a few moments! It can be an eternity! So it was with Him. The cross was a far bigger thing than a crucifixion; it is cosmic, it compasses the whole range of heaven and earth. In that moment He fought it through, and did spiritual combat with the prince of this world and his hosts, and He triumphed by His cross. He stripped off, says Paul, "the principalities and the powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross" (Col. 2:15).

6. The Victor Prince calls us into vocation and conflict of recovering the inheritance

As the Victor Prince, He returned from the fight brought back by the power of God and coming back, He calls His fellow-heirs to the vocation of possessing the inheritance with Him, of taking the inheritance which He has secured in Himself. He calls the fellow-heirs, and you know that is a Scriptural word: "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ". He calls them to this great vocation and conflict of the inheritance. That is the meaning of the Christian life, of being a Christian. "Called into the fellowship with His Son" (1 Cor. 1:9); called as 'fellow-heirs' with Him to share the inheritance with Him, but called into the vocation of taking the inheritance and fighting its battle. And it is unto all the nations, to the

uttermost part of the earth. The vocation of every Christian, and that includes you individually, and me, is to have our feet down on some patch on this earth in the name of the Lord Jesus. That other one, with all his powers, will try to move you, to shift you, to drive you out, to make it impossible for you to stay. But that Name is sufficient; that Name is enough. He has won, not in our victory, but in His.

The methods of those evil forces are too many to count and enumerate and mention, but I put my finger upon a very favourite one, which, no doubt, is a very live issue with you and with me as the ‘accuser of the brethren’. If he cannot get us broken on the matter of Christ’s redemptive work for our ultimate salvation, he will seek to cripple and paralyze us on the ground of our unworthiness to be the Lord’s at all, or to be the Lord’s servant. It is the Lord’s servants who know most about the work of the accuser, because it is the vocation that he is after. And this is an issue that is alive to the end. You may think that you have got past the letter to the Romans, and into the letter to the Ephesians. But if you will allow the testimony of one who is not a novice and a beginner in these things, it is that I need the letter to the Romans more today than ever in all my Christian experience. It explains the great truth of justification by faith, or to put it in another way, the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ. That is not only a salvation truth; it is a battle truth. “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper”, says the prophetic word. And “every tongue that rises against thee in judgement thou shalt condemn; this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord” (Isa. 54:17). Men forge their weapons against the people of God, and they succeed. Men raise their tongues of accusation against the people of God, and they succeed! Apply it to the forces of evil behind everything, and it is true because, “their righteousness is *of Me*, says the Lord”; that cuts the ground from every accusation and blunts every weapon of the accuser. “Their righteousness ...” — the opposition of the enemy is on the line to make you surrender to the idea of your non-acceptance by the Lord, your rejection by the Lord, your being set aside by the Lord because of what you are. It is a terrible battle, that! But “their righteousness is of Me” is the letter to the Romans, and we need it in the battle; we need it to begin, and we need it at the end.

We are in this battle; we are called into it, for the inheritance. The inheritance is not salvation. We do nothing to earn salvation. The inheritance is far more than that. He calls us into this vocation of taking His rights for Him. Wherever you are, in your home, in your business, in

your place of spiritual service, in any part of this world, as in fellowship with Jesus Christ you are in fellowship with this great vocation, to hold that place for Him, in His Name; and not to move until the Lord says, Move. The Lord does move us, and tells us to move sometimes; but we must have the Lord's word for it before we do it, or the enemy will make a great mess of us.

6.1 An inherent conflict

Now there are three things in this sixth point. The rightful and victorious Prince of this world calls us as fellow-heirs into the vocation and conflict of recovering the inheritance. That means that in the very call into fellowship with God's Son there is inherent conflict. We never realise that conflict until we take sides with Jesus Christ. It is then that it awakens and you find yourself almost immediately in some atmosphere which is charged with antagonism, without speaking or doing anything. You do not have to get up and preach; it is there! You are aware of it. The more you go on with the Lord the more this very atmosphere of antagonism grows upon you. It is not a very comforting gospel but you know it is true; and the more you count for the inheritance, and the more anything counts for the inheritance, the more violent the conflict.

I had a long letter during this week from a dear aged sister (Mary McDonough), whose name is known to many of you, and whose writings perhaps to more. She is the writer of 'God's Plan of Redemption' and has meant much for the Lord and for the inheritance through a long life. She is now lying in a nursing home after a very bad accident, from which it is doubtful that she will recover, very much alone. In her letter she said: "I am the target of the assaults of the evil powers in a way in which I have never known in my life. Pray for me; ask your friends to pray for me." Here is one who has meant much to the Lord in the matter of the inheritance. You would say, Well, it is time that she had the waters of quietness, that the Lord gave her a calm evening. No, this is no isolated case. Everywhere, those who really represent some value for the Lord Jesus are experiencing that sort of thing; the pressure is intense. Think of what is happening in some places. God only knows what that dear servant of His in China, Watchman Nee, now in his seventh year of tortured imprisonment, knows of the awful conflict. He does not know, unfortunately, of the tremendous values of his ministry. How he has kept us going here with his ministry, with demands that can hardly be met through that book or those books of his! I wish he knew. But we know! If you saw the

correspondence about that book, heard the reports about it, the tremendous things that it is doing in many parts of the world, then you would understand that there is something in this suffering of his, and this conflict. It is not for nought. If you do not count much for the Lord you will not know much about that, and there are many Christians who are turning Christianity into a picnic, a good time. That is the idea of Christianity in many circles. If you want to know the intrinsic, ultimate value and what the prince of this world thinks about it — he may be very pleased with a lot of it! But remember that the call into fellowship with God's Son in this great vocation of the inheritance has in it *inherently* the element of conflict.

6.2 Our business to get the token out of the nations

The second thing is that our business, in the first instance, is to get for Christ the token out of the nations. We are not told or taught in the Word of God, that in the first place, the world will be won for Christ. But we are told that the first thing — and notice that that is how it is put — God first looked to take out of the nations a people for His Name, to take out a token from the nations. That is our business. It is your business where you are in your place of work, in the place where your feet are put down to stand there, if by any means there shall be taken a token of the inheritance in view of the Great Day. That is what you are there for. Yes, common language speaks about soul-winning, and so on, but that is what it is. See something bigger than getting people 'saved' and 'brought to Christ'. That is important but there is something behind that. There is this that goes back to a dateless time, called 'the beginning', which was in the heart of God, and reaches through the ages, or to the ages of the ages; one thing to which you and I are called in the first, practical instance — to get the token out of the nations. It is only a token, but it is a token. We are there for that.

6.3 The ultimate possession of the nations

And thirdly, the ultimate possession lies along the line of the possession of the nations: "Ask of Me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for thy possession" (Psa. 2:8). That is to be fully fulfilled and granted eventually. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

I want to come to Jeremiah 17:12. The cost of all this is great, as many of you well know; the conflict is fierce. The demands upon us

sometimes seem to be immense and endless. The interests are so vital that something is absolutely necessary if we are going to get through. We must have an adequate background for getting through. I have not exaggerated, and even if you do not know what I am talking about, believe me, some do! The involvements in this great business are very serious and exacting upon the saints, necessitating some basis and background that is adequate to meet it all, and go through. And what is that? Read Jeremiah again, if you have the patience to read right through this long and terrible book. Hear this man's groans and sighs and cries and troubles. Hear him saying: "Woe is me, my mother, that you gave birth to a man of strife and contention!" (Jer. 15:10). He is called 'the weeping prophet' (I think wrongly so). But he was a man right up against this terrible business. At last they dropped him into a deep, dark, miry pit, up to the breast, and left him to starve and die, had not a kindly Ethiopian, hearing of his plight, gone to the king and begged him to do something. The king gave commandment that they should take ropes and bring up Jeremiah out of the pit. And as Dr. Meyer says about it, there was the extra touch of kindness and understanding with the Ethiopian when he took a lot of old rag and clouts to put round the rope to go under his arms, so there should be no unnecessary chaffing, and they fetched him up! He went through all that — and if you feel that sometimes it is a hard way and an impossible way to get through, you need something, and you need what Jeremiah had. And what was it he had? "A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary."

"A glorious throne" — there is a seat of government in glory. "... set on high ..." — above all this. '... from the beginning' — not yesterday or today, but from the beginning. The throne that has been there from the beginning is an eternal throne, a timeless throne. "... is our sanctuary ...". What picture does that bring to your eyes? Do you see the fugitive? You see the one being pursued by the avenger of blood running for his very life towards the city of refuge, the place of *sanctuary*. The glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our refuge, our sanctuary, our security, our safety, our victory. And when you come to think about it, not only Jeremiah, but Isaiah fulfilled his ministry on the strength of that: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and sitting upon a throne ..." (Isa. 6:1). And Isaiah had to go through things, and it was that that carried him through. Ezekiel — "I was by the river Chebar, and I saw visions of God. The heavens were opened ..." (Ezek. 1:1). And what did he see? Above the firmament a throne, and the likeness

as of a man. Daniel knew something about this conflict and cost: “The heavens do rule ...” (Dan. 4:26). That is the word of Daniel: “The heavens do rule ... thou shalt know that the heavens do rule ...”. And the same secret carried Paul through all his sufferings and troubles — he had seen the Lord Jesus high and lifted up in glory. It is only as we see God raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand far above all rule and authority, principality and power and every name that is named, highly exalted and given the Name that is above every name that we shall get through. But so shall we get through, if we see Him there, know that He is there, and keep our eyes on Him there.

To be continued