



the
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VOCATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Part 2

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A WORLDWIDE TESTIMONY AND IMPACT

“Now the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Before I formed thee I knew thee; and before thou camest forth I sanctified thee. I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child, for to whomsoever I shall send thee, thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth. See, I have set thee this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:4-10).

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

Fellowship unto vocation

Now, we are concentrating upon the heart of things. Forgive some reiteration with a view to focusing everything. The heart of the Bible, the heart of Christianity, of the Christian life and all God’s dealings and ways with us, His people, is *fellowship with Himself unto a vocation*. Fellowship with God vocationally — not fellowship as something in itself, or an end in itself, but fellowship unto a vocation in time and in eternity. If you would keep that in mind continually it would explain everything, because that is the explanation of the Bible from beginning to end, and of all that there is from man’s creation and the creation of the world, to the glorious consummation of fellowship, that glorious and wonderful final end: “and His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face” (Rev. 22:3-4). That is vocation in fellowship, if it means

anything at all. And you know that that stands at the end of the Bible as the ages of the ages take the place of time.

Jeremiah, one of the prophets

I want to be very careful. I am not concerned about preaching. I want to make sure that what is said is, from my side, explained carefully. And I want you to come into this with me, and make it your business to try to understand and grasp what is being presented.

We have taken these verses from the beginning of Jeremiah's great ministry, great in every sense, stretching over some forty-five years, or thereabouts — so full and so meaningful. And we have seen how it began; how the Lord lay His hand on him; how the Lord spoke to him, and what the Lord said to him, and what his great commission was. If you follow through this lengthy book, you find all that working out from chapter to chapter, to the end; that beginning, with all its terms, is being worked out.

Jeremiah is a representative prophet. You may have your preferences among the prophets, and if I think that Jeremiah is the greatest of the prophets you might not agree because you like Isaiah or someone else better. Well, that does not matter. Jeremiah is a prophet to the nations through the nation, and is representative of the prophetic function and ministry. Now, what I want you to grasp is this: it does not matter one little bit who the prophets were; it does not matter that there were prophets who bore the name: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea and all the rest. You can dismiss the names, and, if you like, in a sense dismiss the men as men. But you must keep in mind and lay hold of this, that these men were a divine and heavenly function among the people of God and in this world, and you have got to get hold of the function, that is, the thing that God was doing through them. That is not confined to the Old Testament prophets, the prophets of Israel. There are prophets in the New Testament church; the church of the New Testament takes up the function. We are not given all the names of the prophets in the New Testament church, but we are told that they are there: "And He gave some, apostles, and some, prophets ..." (Eph. 4:11). This ascended Lord gave gifts to the church. Inasmuch as He has not marked them out by name in the New Testament church. I suppose Paul was one, and some of the others known to us by name fulfilled that particular ministry. But inasmuch as He has not given us the names of the prophets in the New Testament dispensation, that does not matter; that only bears out what I say. It is the

function that matters, not the name or the person. The function goes a long way back before Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Abraham was a prophet and was called a prophet. The function was related to this one, essential thing, that being the whole matter of fellowship with God in vocation. Now you can take that to your Bible, and the Bible will prove that that is right: fellowship with God — real relationship with God in oneness of heart unto vocation.

The prophets and the prophetic ministry were related in their ministry, their work, not to themselves in this matter, but to the people, that God meant to have the race in that position — a people in this earth, in that relationship, fulfilling that vocation. They were the prophets of Israel, but the whole point of their life was that Israel as a nation, as a people, should be in that relationship with God in fellowship unto a worldwide vocation. That is why God chose Israel and put them at the centre of the nations, in order that in this particular and peculiar relationship with Himself in fellowship, they might fulfill a divine vocation among the nations, and to the nations, that by response to God's overtures, all men might come into that relationship. It was open to the whole world to come into that relationship with God.

Do not make any mistake about it, for our way of speaking often betrays a faultiness in our conception. We so often hear people in prayer, and other ways, speaking of the 'redeemed' in the earth; and the mentality is that the 'redeemed' is synonymous with the 'saved', but it is not. Every child of Adam has been redeemed; every child of Adam has been redeemed by the cross of the Lord Jesus. There is not a man, woman or child on this earth that has not been redeemed. The great tragedy is that so few know that they are redeemed, and that so many who are redeemed will not accept their redemption. Judgment will rest upon that refusal to have something so costly, which is theirs by right. Well, that is by the way.

Prophetic ministry to the nations

The function issuing from this fellowship is to let the nations know what God has done for them by the cross of His Son and to bring the nations into that relationship with God, which will mean that the nations serve Him. This is what is meant by the prophetic ministry. Do not think of the prophets, or prophetic ministry, as bound up with a certain cult, a certain class of people. We speak in Old Testament terms of 'priests' and

‘prophets’ and ‘kings’ and a lot has to be done in our mentality regarding this! The church of Jesus Christ is called into the great prophetic ministry through fellowship with Him. It is a prophet nation to the nations. If you are in it, you are in that. You can call yourself a prophet if you like (better not!), but it is true if your function, your vocation is far beyond yourself and yourselves; it is to the uttermost part of the earth in some way. This is the meaning of what is in the Old Testament. The ministry and work of the prophets is a ministry which does not end with them, is not confined to them and while there is a need of this particular function, it will go right on to the end.

Now you see that, while this was true, and it was so patently true of those called prophets in the Old Testament, this was the real nature, the essence, of the call of disciples. The very disciples of the New Testament, of Christ, became disciples on this basis, “And He chose twelve, that they might be with Him ...” — that is fellowship, “and that He might send them forth” — that is vocation. These two always go together. Discipleship rests on that. Now you might be unprepared to call yourself by any of the other names, but I am sure you would be prepared to call yourself a ‘disciple’ if you belong to the Lord. That is the relationship with Him — a disciple. Whatever that means, a follower, a taught one, one under instruction — it is just that basic, initial relationship to Him. Now, note again, that discipleship, the very first phase of the Christian life, rests upon fellowship unto vocation. Discipleship was that and is that.

Apostleship. Again we put a ring round a certain class, and call them ‘the apostles’. Well, of course, in a sense that is right, but in another sense it is wrong. Every one of us is a ‘sent one’. If you have not got that consciousness that you are a ‘sent one’ then there is something defective about your Christian life. You may only be ‘sent’ on a very short errand, within a very short geographical limit, but you are then sent by God, and ‘apostle’ simply means that: ‘sent one’. The whole content of apostleship is fellowship unto vocation. When you leave the individual aspect and move to the collective, do remember, while the book of the Acts includes all the individuals, it is concerned with the church, firstly the church universal, the whole church; and the church has its very existence upon this one exclusive and inclusive basis. The church is the apostolic church in this sense; the whole object of the church (and it has none other) is to have a people in fellowship with the Lord to a worldwide vocation. Well, that is obvious in the book of the Acts — you see fellowship unto vocation — that is the explanation of the church. And when you break up

the church (in a right way!) into churches, what is the divine idea and mind about churches? Here and there planted by heaven, throughout Asia, throughout Europe, anywhere, here, there or there, wherever you come from, what is the divine idea of a company, smaller or larger, in any particular location? It is the same — fellowship with God unto a *world* vocation. The churches exist for that.

The ministries, divinely given from heaven, relate to that one thing; is it a ministry of instruction in the companies, unto the persons? The ministry of instruction is intended to result in this double thing — fellowship with the Lord being right and clear and true and full, unto vocation. Any other function in the church or the churches has this same object in view all the time. The Holy Spirit's presence and activities are all on this basis. All discipline, chastening, correction, empowering, everything that the Holy Spirit will do directly or through instrumentalities, has this one thing in view — the right relationship with the Lord. Can you dispute that? The right relationship with the Lord, with the object of making those, so rightly related, His vehicles and His instruments to a wider circle than themselves. "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers ..." (Eph. 4:11). What for? The rest of the statement is: "... for the making complete of the saints unto the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12). Unfortunately the punctuation has spoiled that statement, but it is a whole. The perfecting, or making complete of the saints unto the work of the ministry. It is the saints who are to fulfil the ministry. It is the church that is the anointed vessel of ministry. If you come into the church you come into that which is divinely chosen from all eternity — "before I formed thee I knew thee" — chosen from eternity; called in time; endowed from heaven; you come into that church, and you come into a place where these two things are implicit from heaven's standpoint. If you fail there, you fail in the very meaning of your Christian life and of your church relatedness. Fellowship with the Lord, that is what ought to be in our individual Christian life, and in our life together as companies of the Lord's people, but not stopping there — unto vocation, and *world* vocation.

So you see the meaning of this ministry so far as the prophets were concerned. They spoke sometimes like thunder, sometimes with broken hearts and a sob. Why? Because they knew what *I* am trying to make *you* know. They knew that if this relationship with the Lord, this real fellowship with the Lord, resulting in this real, worldwide vocation of representing Him to the nations broke down, the very meaning of their existence

was gone, and there was nothing for God to do but to put them aside. When God did set aside any vessel or nation that He had brought in for that purpose, and sent it away into captivity and exile, it was for this reason only: you have failed in the thing for which you were brought into being, to represent Me in the nations, to express Me to the nations. And you have failed of your vocation because you have lost your fellowship. That sums up the prophets, does it not? Their cry, their appeals, their warnings, their thunderings and their broken hearts. And you can see at once, if you know Jeremiah, that he is representative of this particular ministry and how true that was, how he cried, speaking for God: “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of water, and have hewn out cisterns” (Jer. 2:13) — broken cisterns, man-made contrivances in the place of the living God. That was Jeremiah’s cry, or one of his cries. I am afraid of bringing in too much detail from this long book, but I could take example after example to show that it comes back to this: the people are out of touch with God, and therefore out of touch, as a nation and as far as a testimony is concerned.

A world testimony

Now, let us come right home in all faithfulness, to ourselves, in the place where we are, or any other place where you may be with the Lord’s people. If ever the Lord raises up or plants an instrument, a vessel, in any place, He does it on this basis alone: on the one side, to bring into the closest and fullest and deepest fellowship with Himself that is possible; and on the other side, not themselves in view, but the *world* in view. A world testimony is always God’s thought in any selective choice and appointment of His. And listen, essential to the very life of such a people is a dominant sense and consciousness of being in a world ministry. If you forget everything else, hold that, and carry it forward for all time to come. You must individually and as companies of the Lord’s people, wherever you are, if you are to conform to the divine mind in your existence, you must have this dominant consciousness that you stand related to a great world ministry, it is over that that the battle will rage. The enemy may use anything that will weaken or dispose of, spoil, break that up, paralyze that, end that! Every time God has moved in a prophetic way, I mean on this principle of recovering or securing something according to His mind in fulness, the movement has had a far horizon; it has had something far beyond itself in view. In the days of its livingness, its primal freshness, how it

spontaneously moved out to the world, and became a world force. No organization, no hewn-out cisterns were necessary; no plans, no programs to do things in the world, but there the thing happened. It happened without effort, propaganda, advertising or publicity — it happened! And the world was touched. Can we not go through those movements? Yes, we can mention so many of them; there they are in history — things that God did from heaven. And the result was a wonderful fellowship with Himself in life. Look at the wonderful movement through the Moravian brethren. It is so clear that they had a beautiful, wonderful fellowship with God. Their motto, and everything about them spoke of that. What a fellowship with God! And how the world was touched then! Yes, a world testimony, and a world impact; quite spontaneous; a repetition of what we have in the book of the Acts. And so we could put our finger upon one thing after another and see this. And then the tragedy is that they turned in on themselves. Each one turned in on itself, became something in itself, drew a circle round itself, constituted a hard and fast system of teaching to which one must conform, with regulations that one must observe. The result was disintegration, divisions, confusion, and creeping paralysis! Is that not true to history? You see the reverse. Because that was the state of things in Israel in the days of the prophets and their ministries. It was because that was the situation that was growing in the churches of the New Testament that we have the messages at the beginning of the book of the Revelation to the seven churches in Asia. They are lampstands! Jesus Himself said that no man lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel; a lamp is a testimony for all to see, for the illumination of all within its range: it is something which does not to live unto itself.

This has always been the peril, always been the battleground, to maintain this twofold position: living in unclouded, unshadowed fellowship with the Lord; and a testimony to the world. Yes, beginning, if you like, locally, but ever and always far beyond, having that in view. And it can be put to the test. It is true. So it works.

Chastening and discipline

If the Lord has to chasten, discipline, and sift all such activities and ministries, painful as it may be to those concerned, keep this still in view — recovery of fellowship with Himself unto essential vocation. Now then, have you met that challenge this very moment? Ask your own heart. Do you have, in your very constitution as a Christian, a sense that you do

not live unto yourself, and that you cannot live unto yourself, but that you are bound up with a great divine purpose, reaching out and on, drawing out your life? If that is not true, you come into the category of “she that lives to herself is dead (gives herself to pleasure, ASV) while she lives” (1 Tim. 5:6). Is that not true? Our life depends upon this, that we are in union with God with a purpose, with a vocation. And this is no small thing. It draws us out to the uttermost part; the ends of the earth are our concern. If the Lord wants us to go, well, we are ready to go. But whether He calls us to the end of the earth or not, our hearts reach there with Him for all His interests. This is not sentimental; it is something that is part of our being. Is that true of you? Have you just settled down, nicely settled down into your nest, whatever that nest is? Well, remember the words about the Lord stirring up the nest, and casting out! That is not a very pleasant experience. It will have to be if we settle down in our nest, if we put a limit which God does not put upon our calling, our vocation.

Well, perhaps that is enough. Here were these disciples, in their fellowship with the Lord, being trained and disciplined, instructed. And it was not all words where the Master and they were concerned; they had some bad times, painful experiences, heading right up to the inclusive painfulness of the cross. It was all to prepare for a new Holy Spirit fellowship with the Lord unto their world vocation; to be with Him that He might send them forth. Much more could be said, but I do feel that this is the word of the Lord. And it comes right to this one thing: You and I, every one of us, must be mastered and governed by a great sense of divine vocation in our existence. This vocation demands for its fulfilment a fellowship with the Lord that is close and pure; for it can never truly be fulfilled unless it is so. That is why the Lord is disciplining us, putting us through it so continually, having such short terms with us on wrongs, evils, questionable things; not letting us get away with it or run off. No, He is holding us to it, and working deeply and thoroughly, and perhaps drastically. His object is vocation. If you do not like the word ‘vocation’ (it may sound too technical), it is testimony. It is spiritual ministry, which is not going on to a platform here and there and everywhere with a Bible, but a life that knows the Lord; a life that is in fellowship with God. You can leave the preaching side or the Bible teaching side as some particular and peculiar function; you need not worry about that. Jeremiah got to the place where he said, I will never preach again; I am not going to do any more of this talking. The preaching took charge of him; he did not take charge of the preaching; it came out of the fire burning in his bones; it has

to be like that. But that fire only burns when you are in real touch with the Lord; that is where the fire burns. Will you be patient and ask for grace to receive this? And do remember that most of our enemies, if not all of them — and there are many of them — have this one object as their target: our fellowship with the Lord resulting in our testimony to the Lord. If the enemy can undermine that by any means at all, he is going to do it. And oh, how many are His means! The Lord help us to receive the word and to yield to it, and go on with this, which might be new commissioning. Wherever you go, go with: I am not here just for here, just to live in this small realm; I am not here with myself and my immediate circumstances as my horizon; I am here as a part of something far bigger. I am a member of a church which was brought into being, a church universal brought into being for a world testimony to the Lord. I affect that. I affect that consciously and mostly unconsciously. My spiritual life means something to other people of the Lord. You do not know how many of your dark days and bad times are because some brother or sister or brethren and sisters somewhere, are going through it, and you are involved in it. Now that is New Testament teaching: “If one member suffers, all the members suffer” (1 Cor. 12:26). How often there has come to us a sense of some brother or sister, or some of the children of God having a bad time; it has overcome our spirit, and we just had to pray for them. And when we learned the truth, it was just at that time that they needed our prayer, and the burden was laid on us. In this great spiritual system, time and geography have no place; we meet in our Head, Christ Jesus. Now that is another big matter, but it comes in here. We belong by our very relationship to Christ, to something that is far-reaching.

TO REUNITE ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

Instead of reading one passage of Scripture, we are going to bring together a number of short passages. First of all, we take the passage from Jeremiah which has been like a banner over these messages, under which we have been gathering everything else:

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

“... but of the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (Heb. 1:8,9).

“Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psa. 2:8), and you notice in the context that this relates to the Son.

“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).

Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession ... ye shall be witnesses, My witnesses, unto the uttermost part of the earth. “... as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4^a). “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in Him, I say” (Eph 1:9,10).

He chose us ... in Him ... before the foundation of the world ... He made known unto us the secret of His will ... to sum up all things in Christ. “Now the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed

thee ... I knew thee, and before thou camest forth ... I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer. 1:4,5). Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance ... I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations ... Ye shall be my witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth ... (and so on).

Seeing things in perspective

I wonder if you have noticed something very obvious in the Bible, that most of the great things were connected with mountains. You only have to say that, and your memory will take a flight through the Bible, and light upon many a mountain, in which some great thing took place which was indeed a point in which heaven and earth met. The value of a mountain is that it gives perspective, a command of the whole situation; it brings all details and particular things into a right relationship, so that everything can be seen, not just as something in itself, but as a part of the whole. And there you get a sense of proportion and balance. And, by way of parenthesis, do you not think that is just what the value of such gatherings as these, which we call conference times, should be? We all feel the need to have our sense of proportion or priority maintained and preserved. We are right up against things too closely; the details press upon us. The immediate situations take possession of us; those things right before our eyes, and in our experiences tend to become everything, and exclude so much. Situations get on top of us, just because we are so close to them, upsetting the perspective and creating a good deal of confusion.

These passages that we have read are themselves mountain peaks, and together they constitute one great and glorious mountain, which could deliver us from this obsession of the oppressive and the immediate, with what we ourselves are going through. And so we have to leave our spiritual insulation and isolation, and climb to some vantage point of the heavenlies. That message took its great place in our New Testament at a time when the near view could have brought complete despair. The immediate happenings in Christianity, among believers, in the churches, could have produced in the apostle a hopelessness that would have cast him deep down in the valley of despair. He climbed to the height. You and I, and the church ever since and to the end of the age, owe a vast debt to that man's climb up the mountain in spirit from his prison cell. It was from there that he repeatedly used that very word, that 'mountain' word, "the heavenlies ... in Christ Jesus".

We need to get up there again. May the Lord give us mountain energy today, to rise up as on wings, to see anew what we are called unto, and what we are called into. That is the saving vision, that is the redeeming view, what we are really called into and unto; what we are involved with if we are really in full fellowship with God. What is all the conflict and pressure, discipline and suffering about? Is there some one thing that can and does answer all such enquiries and cries? For I am quite sure that you sometimes ask those very questions. We must climb the mountain to find the answer.

We are all familiar with a line of a well-known and greatly loved hymn by George Matheson, 'O Love that will not let me go'. After his death, when the poem was found, and the thought was to publish it, those who found it and were about to publish it, came upon one line in it that perplexed them; they could not quite grasp or understand it; it seemed mysterious and abstract and so they decided to change it. We have in our version the line: 'I trace the rainbow through the rain', but George Matheson had written: 'I climb the rainbow through the rain.'

That is quite a difference: 'trace' — well, that is all right; that is an artistic contemplation, a poetic way of speaking, but when George Matheson wrote that poem, he was in the grip of a tremendous spiritual conflict. For him everything in life was rocking, and there was a perfect deluge on his soul. He did not sit back in poetic contemplation, and say 'I trace the rainbow through the rain'; he girded himself, and said, 'I *climb* the rainbow through the rain'!

We have to take hold of things and discover what lies behind them, to find out what it all means. What is the explanation? And there is one. And it does lie right at the heart of what I have just said that we are called into and unto explains it all. These difficulties, trials, adversities, sufferings and conflicts are very real; for the saints they are sometimes terrible. And if that is true, the explanation must be one that is at least commensurate with them. The answer must at least be adequate to all this. Think of all the suffering of the saints. Yes, we suffer, but is it comparable to what some of the Lord's people are going through, while we are sitting here in comparative comfort? What justifies all this? What is an adequate answer? And we are driven and forced to seek that answer. Again I say, the only sufficient answer is found in remembering that unto which we are called.

Three cycles to reunite all things in Christ

In order to get that end we are going to consider three cycles. The Scriptures which we have read, which are only a selection among many others which are similar, bring these things into view.

1) All things

The first we will consider is all that which is comprehended by the repeated clause, “all things”; you cannot get outside of that; that comprehends everything. “All things” were created by God for His Son, whom we now know as Jesus Christ. That is the beginning of everything. They were created for Him, through Him, unto Him. He, we are distinctly told, was appointed Heir of all things. That is where we begin. All things, these Scriptures reveal, were integrated in Him, consistent in Him, held together as one whole not only by His power, but by His Person. There was a wonderful, beautiful, harmonious unity in the creation, all centred in God’s Son, held by Him. While He was there everything was harmonious and in accord. While He was in His place there was a beautiful oneness running through everything. Of the great harmony of creation, He was the keynote, and everything came back to Him, and moved from Him; and the explanation of the music was God’s Son. “All things” were integrated, and consisted in Him. “All things” were disrupted by putting Him out of His place, or refusing to recognize Him in that place. That is, of course, the great story of heaven’s disruption; that to which the great apostle refers when he says: “The angels which kept not their first estate ...” (What a lot there is in that!) “... are reserved in chains unto everlasting destruction.” Well, I am not dwelling at length upon any one of these things. But there was discord in heaven to begin with, and it had to be cast out, and there came into this world that disputing of the creation rights and place of the Son of God. For that reason everything here was disrupted and became disconnected. The first picture of creation is a beautiful one, but that changed, and we see all things now with an element working like an evil leaven, a power which is all the time breaking up, never ending in its breaking up work, leaving nothing whole or complete. It is a terrible story all through the ages, of this evil thing working, so that the last bit of harmony is spoiled. It is an evil spirit which is not going to allow anything to remain integrated in Christ. Does that not explain a lot, that where Christ is given more of His place, the enemy is the more concerned to break up, to divide? It is a sad history, is it not? Will anything survive

this? Will anything escape this? And the most beautiful thing will be the object of the most vehement attempt to break up, disrupt and disconnect.

We see everything in chaos and confusion because He, the unifying, integrating Centre of all things, is not in His rightful place. That is the answer, the explanation: because He is not in His rightful place. That may be a terrible indictment in some places but we have got to face it quite honestly and frankly. That is the first cycle.

2) The Son Himself undertakes the great work of recovery

The second cycle which the Scriptures before us present is, firstly, the Son Himself, the Heir and Centre of “all things”, undertakes the work of recovery. Viewing the chaos from heaven He voluntarily stripped Himself of heavenly glory and undertook to come down into it, and recover that which had been lost. He undertakes the great work of recovery. That word ‘recovery’ is a favourite word with us; the ‘recovery’ of this and that, which was God’s mind, and thought. The first one who engaged in that work and ministry was God’s Son Himself and He has committed Himself to that work of recovery. Having undertaken it, He comes down and enters into this kingdom of disruption. He comes right into this chaos and disorder Himself and by His very Presence shows what a disrupted and discordant scene this is. There is only one Person in the whole picture, who, in Himself, is integrated, harmonious, balanced, and whole. It is one of the impressive things about the Lord Jesus that He Himself moved in this scene, so harmoniously in His own Person. It is not an easy thing in this world, as you know, but He did it. On the other hand, how His Presence annoyed and roused these chaotic forces, so that there grew, through that brief period of His earthly sojourn, an atmosphere of conflict, hatred and discord, until at last it broke out in an awful storm, tearing the very creation, the very atmosphere, and no one had any control or mastery; the very elements are disrupted. This evil thing is all focussed upon Him. He has entered into it, to witness against it, in the first place; to be an offset to it in His own Person and Presence and to speak the words that are in the strongest contrast to man’s condition. What are His words? “I will give you *rest*”; “You shall find *rest* unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29). “*Peace* I leave with you, My *peace* I give unto you” (John 14:27). How such words clash with the conditions! He is here, right in the midst of it, testifying against it, manifesting what it ought to be, and intensifying the condition that really is, to show how evil it is. You never know how wrong or evil a thing is until you see what is absolutely right

and good manifest in the heart of it. He became, by His Presence, the example, the witness and personal testimony of what was intended against the evil forces.

What is that word on His lips? “Blessed ... (Happy) are the peacemakers ...” (Matt. 5:9), and so on; in deed, all His works testifying against this wrong state, and mending it. Having been here long enough to be a witness in the midst of it, He then took it all on Himself. He took on Himself the evil and the consequences of the evil that had come in. He verily drew it on to Himself. He sought not to ward it off, sought not to argue Himself out of it, though He knew what it meant. The marvel of His silence when such as He could have made a case for Himself! He, who again and again, had sent wise men, scribes and Pharisees, with all their trickery and subtlety and all their attempted snares to ensnare Him, sent them away like dogs with their tails between their legs, without a word! Look at Him! Alright, “Let him who is without sin first cast a stone” (John 8:7). And they went out one by one from the least to the greatest! “Master, is it right to give tribute to Caesar, to pay tribute to Caesar?” (Mark 12:14). You can see the trap that they have laid for Him. “Show Me a coin. Whose inscription is this? Caesar’s? Render unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar” (Mark 12:15-17). Now then, your whole honesty, conscientiousness and integrity is at stake! “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.” They are completely defeated, and had to confess that no man spoke like this Man. The Man who can do that sort of thing with the rulers, could, in the day of His ordeal and trial, have put them all out of court. But the marvel, “He opened not His mouth”! Not a word! “As a sheep before its shearers is dumb, He opened not His mouth” (Isa. 53:7). He is not putting it off; He is not holding it at bay; He is letting it come on; He is even drawing it on! And so He “became sin”, says the Word, “that He might destroy sin”. He is drawing it on to its own destruction. He became ‘broken’; “This is my body broken ...”. He became broken in order that He might unite. This is the great testimony of the Lord’s table: one loaf, one Body, through brokenness. He became defeated in order that He might triumph. He became dead in order that He might destroy death for ever. He emptied Himself and became empty in order that He might be filled with “all things”. That is the second cycle. Now we come to the third.

Having accomplished all that in His cross, He received the great approbation, the seal of heaven from His Father: “Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee”, (referring to His resurrection). But what a

scattering has taken place! “All ye shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad” (Matt. 26:31). In resurrection He begins to gather these broken, scattered fragments together, and the Son brings in His sons and fellow-heirs. We need to read again in Hebrews 1: “Of the Son He saith ...”, then it continues about His brethren, “I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb. 2:13), and “bringing many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10).

3) The Son brings in His sons as His fellow-heirs

In the third cycle, the Son brings in His sons as His fellow-heirs; and it is in Romans 8 that the phrase occurs, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ”. These sons are a family matter; we call that family the ‘church’; the New Testament calls it the church. But in this third cycle, this comes clearly in view in the passages referred to. This family, this church, this body was eternally known by God, foreknown and chosen by God in the Son before the foundation of the world. That is very wonderful — chosen in Him. “Whom He appointed heir of all things”; He also chose and appointed the heirs with Him of all things. “Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world and hath made known unto us the secret of His will (in so doing) ... to gather together all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:4,9,10). This church was foreknown, eternally chosen, elected to this one great, all-comprehending, all-inclusive purpose. The point on which you and I must be very clear and certain is this matter of election, predestination, and so on. This does not relate to salvation only insofar as salvation is the beginning; this election, if the letter to the Ephesians means anything, relates to the *purpose* of God concerning His Son. We come to it through the cross, through being born from above; but that is neither the object nor the end. That for which you and I are born from above, chosen in Christ, and in time, called into the fellowship of God’s Son, is this purpose of God concerning His Son, to gather up into Him “all things”, to (and this is the word in the original) *reunite* “all things” in Christ. The church was seen by God through the ages, through all the disruption, through all the cost, the consequences, the cross and its agony. The church has been seen before it all, and through it all, as the vehicle, the vessel, the instrument of the Son, to bring back that original pristine harmony and unity centred in the Son of God.

The heavenly vocation of the church related to suffering

The church is called for that; that is the heavenly vocation, the purpose. Perhaps this is too big for a little people like you and me to grasp and to believe, but we are a part of a great thing. It is not all in us, thank God. We do not have to take the full burden and responsibility of this individually. But we are related to something that is elected of God, called of God, for no lesser thing than this! What a lot this explains! What an answer this is to all our suffering and our discipline! If only we could see it, yet we don't! It is not present with us in our hours of anguish as it was with the apostle, who perhaps knew more of the sufferings and sorrows than any other man of his time. Because he climbed the mountain, because he was seeing from the heavenlies, he could say: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ... while we look not at the things that are seen ..." (2 Cor. 4:17). He means these things right on top of us, these close-up things of present experience, seen from the mountain-top. "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, transient, passing, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). You need to get on a high mountain to view it like that, to get that balance in life. That answers a lot of enquiries and questions; if that were true, if that is true, if that could really come to us, and we knew it! Oh, to be delivered from our familiarity with the Bible so that this teaching might break upon us with its own real impact! My brother, my sister, you are called of God in relation to a vocation in which He fore-determined that you should have a part. It is no less a thing than this, that, in union with His Son, you should answer this challenge as to His Son's place, and right this wrong that His Son has suffered, and be with Him at last in the righting, in the adjustment, in the recovery; to be sons in glory. If that is true, it is a great gospel! No wonder the apostle felt it necessary, in the midst of saying these things, to fall on his knees, and say: "I pray the Father of glory, that He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened that you may know ..." (Eph. 1:16-18). It is a prayer that we ought to pray continually, because only so shall we be saved in the hour, in the day of travail and suffering. This church is the sovereign act of God; it is God's act, it is God's thing. Before ever it existed in time God has acted with the church in view. We are brought into something that we never thought of, thought out, planned, intended, meant or under-

stood. We are brought into something that is God's own thought, and God's own act. "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

It is important, as a part of the whole, to really understand the nature of this church. Again, we need delivering from wellnigh two thousand years of distortion on this matter! What a lot has been put on that word 'church'! What a lot has to be stripped off from it to get to its real meaning! It is a spiritual thing, not a temporal thing, the church. It is comprised at the very beginning of such as have been born of the Spirit, and are indwelt by the Spirit, and the measure of their 'churchmanship' is only the measure of their spirituality, the measure of their spiritual life. In its effect, its outworking, its value, it does not belong to this earth at all: it belongs to heaven. Its roots are in heaven, its life is in heaven, its Lord is in heaven. Its everything is in heaven! All its government is from heaven. When we have said all that, we have to come back to this, and re-emphasizing it we must close for the moment: this church is an essentially vocational thing. I do want you to get hold of that these days. Of course the vocation can never be fulfilled if the conduct is not right, so the apostle says in this very connection, "I beseech you to walk worthily of the calling (the vocation) to which you are called, in all lowliness and meekness ..." (Eph. 4:1-2), and so on. Character must be there, or there can be no vocation, because with God and with heaven, vocation rests upon character, "that we should be holy and without blemish ..." (Eph. 5:27). That is His mind. The Holy Spirit, because of the greatness of the vocation, is very meticulous and particular over details of conduct. You see, you cannot lift this great heavenly vocation out of the affairs of daily life here. You cannot put your 'church' position, and your 'church' doctrine, and your 'church' mentality outside of your accounts, your money matters, your family life, and so we could go on. You cannot do it. All that is a part of the whole — "Walk worthily of the vocation", because this conduct affects your vocation. The Holy Spirit is very particular and sooner or later will bring us all up sharp on this. Look here, you have got a great idea of church teaching and truth about the church, but you are not consistent with it; there is that which is inconsistent with it. Oh, what a challenge this is, that we might almost shudder to face! Let me put my finger upon this one point at once: if what I have been saying as from the Word of God is true, that in Him, the Son, when all things were created and for whom all things were created, there was (and we know not for how long) a beautiful harmony, complete integration and coordination, all moving together as one whole, and then that was all shattered like a

beautiful vase broken to pieces, and this terrible discord was shot through the creation, touching everything, as we know well. God had already determined by His Son and with His Son, that the church should be the vessel and instrument of recovering that, bringing into effect the reuniting of all things in Christ. Where are we over this matter of unity, of oneness, of harmony, or all to the contrary? What are we doing about that? The vocation is that! Oh, the Lord help us not to play into the hands of, and work together with the great adversary of the harmony of God!

We are called to a vocational fellowship with God and with His Son. It is all related to the Son and His appointed place in the counsels of the Father. It is all related to the throne, because it is *in* that throne, and *by* that throne into which He is exalted (that glorious throne, on high from the beginning). It is in that and by that that this is made effective. The absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ in everything and over everything is affected by the state of the church; it is related to the throne. And being related to the Son and to the throne, you see it is related to the nations, the uttermost part of the earth. The message of the gospel to the nations is not only the message of salvation, redeeming love, and redeeming grace, but over and above all that, it is the message of the Crown Rights of God's Son. He is Lord *of all*! We are not called to offer Him as Lord, but to declare that He *is* Lord! But this Lordship, this throne, has its seat and centre in the church; it must be realised in us, in our own hearts.

I wonder if I have failed. Have you really grasped this? However you may feel about it yourselves, you may feel too young, or too inexperienced, or too something or other to be in such a thing, but no, if God has called you in Christ, that calling contains all that I have said for you in relation to the whole. Perhaps in the next chapter we shall be able to get nearer to this, but the object that the Lord is bringing before us at this time is this, we are called with a great calling. That word 'calling' can be rightly changed to 'vocation' — "we are called according to His purpose". And you ask what is that purpose? To save? Oh, infinitely more than to save: to have a body of people saved and glorified at the centre of His coming new creation, what Hebrews 2:5 calls "the inhabited earth to come". It is through this that He will express this perfect harmony and maintain the government of this glorious integration, with Christ in the midst as the coordinating centre. This church, that City — is the metropolis of His creation. Because of that everything will be in peace and rest. We are called to serve Him in that matter.

Let us remind ourselves that this is not going to begin when we get

there; the beginning of this is now. We, in ourselves, have got to be one person, not two or three persons. Do you know what I mean by that? That is “one thing I do” (Phil. 3:13). I am completely one in my whole being, set upon a single object; there is one thing in God’s universe that unites my whole being. My spirit, soul and body are concentrated and focused and united upon this purpose of God concerning His Son; I am not a divided person. We have got to be harmonised in that way by the interests of the Lord Jesus. Corporately it must also be so. Our personal, divided interests must go; our ambitions must go; all secondary considerations must go. We must be one people, for the sake of the Lord Jesus and His rights and we must go out to be His witnesses. And, like it was with Himself, it will be with us. Oh, if there is the right thing there as the example, if it is there, hell will be stirred from beneath — and that is a good sign if it is. It is no compliment to any Christian, or any church in this world, for the world to be able to go on without feeling its Presence, the Presence of Christ; no compliment at all to have an easy time. Well, that is not a pleasant thing to say, and we shall probably have to face that in practical ways. There it is; it was so with Him, and He says to us: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” We have His victory upon which to count. The Lord help us.

To be continued