



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

VOCATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Part 3

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CHOSEN IN CHRIST BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

In bringing these passages together I believe that they themselves constitute a vision of divine purpose and thought. The main thought is found in the prophecies of Jeremiah:

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

“Of the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom” (Heb. 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” (Psa. 2:8).

“Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses ... unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee ... I knew thee, and before thou comest 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 this day set thee 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” (Jer. 1:4-10).

“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, 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. 1:4^a,9,10).

The inward application of our calling

Now, we are going to move from the wider circumference to the more inward application. What is before us by the Lord's appointing, is the great and wonderful truth and reality that the call which has come to us and to the people of God contains a very great purpose. It would not be surprising if a failure to apprehend the great purpose of God through salvation results in a number of disappointing conditions. Because as we shall see as we go on, the real fulness of the meaning of Christ to the believer lies right there in the purpose for which He has brought us into fellowship with Himself. It does not lie in salvation (and this is not, of course, minimising, or undervaluing salvation in its initial and elementary phases; only potentially and intentionally). Perhaps you know only too well that you can be saved and stay there for the rest of your life rejoicing in the fact of what that means, but knowing painfully little of the great inheritance that is in Christ. The ignorance resulting in such limitation in life is due to this, not to ignorance of the way of salvation, but to ignorance as to the purpose of salvation; the purpose now, as well as in the ages to come. So that the emphasis at this time is upon that *for* which we are saved, *unto* which we have been called in Christ Jesus. And although it will be said again and again, let us say it here and now, that purpose is not only to have, and not only to be, but it is to fulfil a vocation. All the having and all the being is unto a great service to the Lord. We spent the previous chapter on that, and now we must go on and get to the inside of this matter, as the Lord will help us.

You probably have been aware that so much of what we read in other places is very much, if not altogether, of a piece with what we read in Jeremiah. There you have the throne on high from the beginning — a glorious throne — “Thy Throne, O God, is for ever and ever”, and of the Son He said it; the throne, as something related to the nations, to the uttermost part of the earth. Jeremiah was told that he was appointed a prophet not only to the nation, but to the nations; and the fulfilment of his tremendous ministry and vocation, which was tremendous in range and in cost, was only possible with that throne in view as his place of refuge, appeal and resource.

The Father is heard saying to the Lord Jesus: “Thou art My Son. this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psa. 2:7-8). That Son later declared, to a nucleus of the church, with the

whole church in view: “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me unto the uttermost part of the earth.” In other words, you are related to the Father’s intention to give Me the nations for My inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for My possession. That is your business, your commission, your vocation. “Having made known unto us the mystery, the secret of His will, to re-gather all things into Christ” (Eph. 1:9-10). He has made that known to us. Why? Because He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world. In piecing it all together, it makes one picture, and comes right up to this; the purpose for which we have been brought into fellowship with God’s Son. It is a *vocational fellowship* with God’s Son.

When we come to this matter we must allow Jeremiah in his experience, in his function, to interpret for us, because whether it is Old Testament or New, it is all one purpose and one way of God. Jeremiah can help us a lot as a focal point of all that we have been saying. As we take up these verses right at the beginning of his life and work, we are witnesses of the Presence of God acting sovereignly in relation to His purpose. It is tremendous how this book of Jeremiah discloses the sovereign activities of God. It is God acting in His own right, on His own initiative; God Himself, the originator and projector of everything; it is God taking things in hand personally, and bringing them out of His own counsels, the counsel of His own will. And this book of Jeremiah is full of the fact, and then of the features, of this sovereign movement and action of God in relation to purpose.

The language may sound technical and even theological. If you can get through the language, the very word ‘sovereignty’ is a word that has been taken up and made the basis of tremendous controversy. Making our way through the words and the phrases to the truth that lies behind, we have an unshakeable rock of confidence. Many times in the Scriptures the Lord is called the Rock. The Psalmist used that as a favourite title for the Lord. We all need something rock-like upon which to stand and to rest and Jeremiah needed a rock under his feet as well. I don’t know if you are familiar with the prophecies of Jeremiah. Perhaps you think that they are not particularly interesting or inspiring, perhaps a bit depressing, but, those of you who are, know this that, if ever a man needed a rock under his feet, Jeremiah did. Oh, the forces that he encountered, that broke upon him. Jeremiah would not have survived at all, let alone at last triumphed with his ministry, but for a rock under his feet. And that which was of the nature of a rock was found in one word repeated many times — underline it in your Bible — “I ...”, “I ...”, “I ...”; “Before thou camest forth I

knew thee; *I* formed thee; *I* have made thee a prophet to the nations; *I* have put my word in thy mouth, *I* appointed Thee. *I* equipped thee. *I* put My word in thy mouth — *I ...*”. If Jeremiah had started this business he would not have got very far. If someone else had put him into it, he would have had good reason to have had a controversy with them, and to retire very early in life. But for forty-five years of unceasing and ever-growing antagonism, hostility and sufferings that few men have known or surpassed, he went through. I believe it was because underneath him and behind him, was this fact which remained: I did not put myself into this; I did not take this work on; this was not my idea for my life; I really had nothing to do with it; indeed, if I could have escaped it I would have, but I came under a divine compulsion. I am where I am, I am what I am, doing what I am doing, because God said, I knew thee, formed thee, appointed thee, sent thee — God!! Divine sovereignty in action! You say, that is quite obvious for Jeremiah; we accept it for him, but does the letter to the Ephesians only apply to Jeremiah, to the apostle Paul, or to some special servants of the Lord, or is it the message to the whole church? If it is the message to the church as it surely is, it begins with this. *He* chose us in Him before the foundation of the world!

I wonder how you define or explain your conversion? How do you put it when you refer to your coming to know the Lord? ‘I was saved on such and such a date.’ ‘I came to know the Lord at such and such a time.’ ‘I was born again.’ Oh, we have many ways of putting it. Do you know that the truly adequate way to explain it is this: Right back from eternity past, before this world was, a hand reached out to my lifetime and took hold of me and in so doing, brought me right into something that was in the mind of God before the world was created. That is the meaning of our salvation. It was not just something that happened some day in our lifetime. There is concentrated into every true new birth from above all the meaning and intention of God’s great purpose concerning His Son, that He shall give to His Son the nations for His inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. That is part of the meaning of our being Christians, our being the Lord’s. If all who are born again, or saved, could only get something of that into their hearts or into their understanding early on at the beginning, do you not think that their spiritual progress would be much more rapid and their measure as Christians would be much greater? There it is — saved, and saved so long ago, yet today, not much more than when it happened. It is because of an insufficient apprehension of the greatness of the purpose bound up with salvation. We have

been reached out to from eternity, to be brought into that fellowship with God's Son for the ultimate possession of the nations and the re-gathering of all things into Him.

We must always keep in view the relative factor in this. All that cannot be gathered into any one individual, or any number of individuals as separate individuals and entities. We are a part of a great whole: it is the church that is the elect, the chosen vessel for that purpose. But having said that, we can go on.

Coming into line with God's purpose

There are a number of things that accompany that, to which we have no right, to which we can make no claim, only as we get right into line with God's purpose concerning His Son in fulness, and stay there. Look again at Jeremiah as instancing this. When God gets hold of a people, a vessel, an instrument, in line with this purpose of His heart, this counsel of His will, this secret (translated as 'mystery') among the nations, He commits Himself. That is the next thing: God acts, and getting a response to His sovereign action, He commits Himself to that vessel, to that instrument. Jeremiah is a wonderful example of an instrument, or a vessel, to which God committed Himself. Go away and read through again and see how many times it looked as if Jeremiah was finished by the designs, cruelty, hostility and wickedness of men; finished by the awful weariness of his own hard way; finished by the drooping of his own soul: 'I said, I will no more speak' — finished! Go through and you find again and again, for reasons within himself and outside of himself, it looks as though Jeremiah is finished. At last you reach that terrible time when the vehement wrath and fury against him has taken him and dropped him down into a deep, dark muddy pit, in which he sinks up to his arms, to be left to starve and die. Finished! Who can survive all this? But he survived! He came up out of the pit, and went on for quite a long time with his work. And even when his prophecies were being fulfilled and they came and destroyed Jerusalem, and carried away all who had opposed, the very king who was doing it all marked out Jeremiah to be set free! God, in committing Himself to this vessel, saw to it that he continued as long as He wanted him to continue. Let all the forces, men and devils, and all the human weaknesses and readiness to give up, declare that it is impossible to go on, still there is continuance until God says: I have finished! That is what it means. Oh, it is a tremendous thing to be right in line with God's

purpose! God will commit Himself to that, and there will be continuance until God finishes that story. That is the sovereign continuance of God. Well, there are many other examples like this in the Bible.

This is the explanation of that symbol of the burning bush that was not consumed in the life of Moses. The Lord knew what He was doing when He made that the medium of his call and commission of Moses. If ever a man found in himself, and in those about him, reason to give it all up, and say, I just cannot go on any longer, it was Moses. Indeed, he did cry out sometimes, O Lord, I cannot bear this people! But until God buried him, until God fixed the day for his going, he went through all the weariness, and all the trouble because God was in the bush and had committed Himself until His work was done.

I am saying to you that if you come right into line with God's purpose, and are wholly committed to God's purpose concerning His Son, and stay there, you will go through. You may experience all that Jeremiah did, if not literally, then spiritually, but you will go through. It is a wonderful story of the continuance of a vessel to which God has committed Himself. Get out of line with God's full purpose on to some subsidiary line, some bypass, some other track, some alternative, and this will not be true. Here is God's sovereignty, then, seen in Jeremiah, in the matter of his continuance, and in the matter of many particular deliverances. Again and again God stepped right in at the critical moment, and cut short the course that was threatening the life of this man. And then, when all was done, there was the final vindication of Jeremiah. Much has been made of (and it is a gloomy side, the side that none of us like to contemplate) the fact that Jeremiah was called to a ministry that was never going to succeed, that of calling the people of God back to Him; it was destined to failure. They never did come back. In a sense it looked as though he was giving his whole life to a lost cause. Oh, well, for the time being that is how it appears. But don't forget, the return of the remnant from the judgment in captivity was definitely put on record, written in the Chronicles of the history of Israel, written most probably by a man who was in it, Ezra the scribe. It was put right at the beginning of the Chronicles of Israel, that "the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus" (2 Chron. 36:22). Cyrus, pagan king, great, good, noble, but ignorant of God (for Isaiah says: "I have surnamed thee though thou hast not know me"), one day felt himself strangely moved to think about these Hebrews that were under his dominion. He began to look into their history and case in order to not just let this thing

drag on, but to see if something should be done about it. And this came on him. He could not get away from it; perhaps it became almost an obsession. Day and night this matter was disturbing his rest, engaging his attention, and causing him to look into it. "The spirit of God ..." was doing what? He was taking up the ministry of Jeremiah, and making Cyrus fulfil it; vindicating Jeremiah. If you want to know what lies behind that remnant coming back and rebuilding the House and the wall, and all those final activities of recovery, the answer is Jeremiah! Is this not sovereignty? Jeremiah was not on the scene here on earth to see it — maybe he was watching it all from heaven! Whether he was or not, he will know all about it, that his labour was not in vain in the Lord! God was committed to him, and there was an ultimate vindication of Jeremiah.

Well, there may be a good deal of adversity, a lot of time taken, much suffering and cost, but a vessel that is right in line with God's purpose concerning His Son will stand vindicated at last. God Almighty has committed Himself to that, and will see to it. Is that not a rock to stand upon, the sovereignty of God?

What is the essential basis of this whole position? It is just this: fellowship with God in a purpose much larger than just a personal ministry, or a personal bit of work for God. It is to see everything in the light of the whole, and to be committed, as Jeremiah was, without consideration of what is personal, to what God wants, to what is nearest to the heart of God. It is fellowship with God in that which He has projected and is pursuing, and is set upon realising, fellowship with God! Oh, our silly Christian interests, how foolish and paltry so many of them are! People strutting about, calling themselves by important names, and playing at churches and chapels! It is all so silly! We must get some conception of the greatness of what God is after. Our bit is only at most, a fragment. Get right into the whole thing; firstly, fellowship with the purpose of God, and then fellowship with the burden and suffering of God.

These sufferings of Jeremiah seemed to be very personal, very much because of himself. But no, they were the sufferings of God. It was like that with the prophets, was it not? They had been baptised into the passion of God concerning His great purpose in the nation. And oh, how they were baptized into that passion! So many of their experiences, the happenings in their lives, were just sovereignly brought about. Call them tragedies, if you like, brought about in order to be vivid illustrations of what God Himself was suffering.

The young man, Hosea, married a young and beautiful woman. They

set up a home; they lived together happily and in blessed fellowship. He went about his work, and she kept the home. But after a time she tired of that life, and tired of him for some reason. Perhaps she got tired of his ministry; she did not like the kind of ministry. It was not very popular; it did not bring many friends; indeed, it alienated quite a lot of people. Well, for some reason, or reasons, she tired of him, and in so doing, became opened to other approaches to which she succumbed. Other lovers came her way, and she yielded and left the home and left Hosea. How long she was away we do not know, but long enough to have her whole life wrecked and ruined, leaving this broken-hearted man behind, alone. One day he went out, sad, heavy at heart; perhaps for some business. He took with him a bag with some meal in it. As he went through the city he had to pass the place where slaves were bought and sold, and a sale of slaves was going on. He heard the noise and the bidding and the asking, and when he looked up, he saw someone being offered for sale — a woman! There was something about her that made him look again, and as he looked, he saw that it was his former wife — emaciated almost beyond recognition, in shame and degradation! Was it revulsion that welled up in his soul? No, the old love came up and overcame everything. And he asked, What price are you asking for her? They said, Thirty pieces of silver! As he looked in his wallet, and only had fifteen, he gave them the fifteen and said: Here is the fifteen, and here is fifteen worth of meal; will that do to make up the thirty pieces of silver? They said, Alright, we will accept that! He took her home and restored her to her old place of respect and love, and cherished her once again.

Why must that come into a prophet's life? Sovereignty of God! You say, cruel, hard, bitter! But you see, a vessel committed to the purpose of God has to enter into the very heart feelings of God, because it has to become the very embodiment of his message. And the message of the prophet is this: "Israel, whom I betrothed unto Me! I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me!" (Jer. 2:2). Israel, betrothed to the Lord, married to the Lord, His Spouse, had forsaken Him, had gone after other lovers, and been wrecked and ruined; and was found in the market for the price of a harlot! And God comes out to Israel like that with a new embrace, to bring that Israel back, and to love as before; to restore and honour as before; to pass over the transgression in great forgiveness as though it had never been. That is the grace of God, and the messenger had to embody that message in his own experience.

Now, that is a very vivid example, but it is sufficient to carry this point. Ours is not a work and a ministry which is something objective; we are not just tape-recorders to reproduce something mechanically; the thing has to be wrought into us, and come right out of the brokenness of our own souls. We have to share the passion of God's heart. That is Jeremiah! Are you going to turn your back on that, and say, No, that is not for me? But, dear friends, if only we could get a glimpse, I feel, of what that grace will result in — in glory! It will more than compensate for all the cost.

I have only got halfway through my message, because it is so full, this matter of being in vocational fellowship with God.

This last emphasis is on the constituting of a vessel. Jeremiah might well have complained along one line as perhaps you have. I have personally complained along this line: I was never made for this; my whole constitution and make-up is such that, well, another kind is necessary for this job, this work. Have you ever said that? Well, I have quarrelled with the Lord many times on that and said, Lord, you have the wrong man; it is another type of man You need for this job; I am out of my place. I could do a lot of things very much better, naturally, than I can do this job. Lord, you have made a mistake. Jeremiah might well have said that, not only about his constitution, but about much in his early history. We pointed out that he was a member of a priesthood that had been entirely set aside; his ancestor, Abiathar, the high priest, had been caught in that movement of complicity with the conspiracy of Adonijah to take the throne from Solomon. And when Solomon was established on the throne, he banished Abiathar the high priest to Anathoth which was miles and miles from Jerusalem. It was a priesthood banished, under a ban, which had never been restored. Jeremiah belonged to that ancestry, and to that banished order. He might have quarrelled with God over the fact that the advantages of birth, ancestry, heredity, and so on, were all against him. Now, if you really wanted the right kind of man, Lord, you ought to have called somebody who had better standing! And yet, in the sovereignty of God, this was the man that was chosen. The Word says definitely, "I formed thee"; oh, the mystery of God's ways! It becomes quite clear, as you go on through his life, that, difficult as it was for him naturally, he is the man. God can write in this man His own heart. God can come through this man as He might not be able to come through many others. The point is, the man was constituted not as he thought he ought to be, but as God chose that he should be; and being constituted by God he fulfilled his ministry because God was behind it, God was in it. If you and I are really in line

with God and in the hands of God, though everything is to be against us in ourselves, the thing is done sovereignly, the thing is done spontaneously. Let me put it this way: If you or I were to assume a position, to take it on ourselves, and to do it out from ourselves, by our own make-up, and our own natural equipment; if we get into a position that God has not put us into, the whole thing becomes artificial and unreal. It is evident to all that God is not in it, God did not do it and it did not come from God. Rather it is the man himself; he has taken that position; he is trying to do that and the Lord is not supporting him. It is patent to everybody. When we are in that for which God has called and constituted us in all the mystery of it, the thing is in a right sense quite natural; it just does go on; just does happen; you do not have to 'put on' anything, make-believe anything; you do not have to adopt a special kind of voice or dress or anything else. It just spontaneously flows perfectly naturally. You are, in a right sense, yourself, and not aping someone else. God made you for that; He knew what He was doing; just get on with it with Him.

I wonder if that helps you, because there is a lot of unnecessary trouble to ourselves and to other people by our getting into something for which the Lord has neither called us nor fitted us. He calls us not according to our ideas of fitness, but His own. When Moses argued with him by saying, 'I cannot speak; I am not eloquent', the Lord said, 'Who made man's tongue? Did you make your tongue, or did I?' and when Jeremiah said: 'I am a child; I cannot speak', He said, 'Say not, I am a child; Thou shalt go to all to whom I send thee; say all that I tell you to say.'

The point is, if we are with God, God takes the responsibility to see us through. I request you to go to this book again, to see if you can mark these evidences of God sovereignly at work. There are many of them, but particularly note the tremendous values and resources that are available when we really are wholly in line with God's purpose. Oh, the resources! It is a hopelessly inexhaustible realm! We will leave it there for the time being.

STAND! SEE! ASK!

I am going to repeat the fragment of Scripture which has stood over these messages, not to dwell particularly upon it, but to have it there as standing over all that we have to say:

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

And now for this present time, will you turn back to Jeremiah 6:16:

“Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, wherein is the good way, and walk therein.”

Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, wherein is the good way, and walk therein.

The crossroads

At this point in the ministry of the prophet, he is commanded to tell the people that they have come to the crossroads; that the position and the condition in which they were at the time represented for them a crossroads: roads were crossing and dividing. From this time, their choice of road was going to seal for them their future and determine their destiny. At some point, which is not easy to trace or fix, in their history a deceitful current had entered the stream of their life. It may have been very small at first, as these things usually are almost imperceptible and unrecognisable; the significance of which is not measured. It had been so with these people, small, and yet as it went on, it gathered momentum, until the time of these prophecies; it had taken control, and was carrying almost everything in its course. The Lord knew about it, knew the trend of things, knew the implications, knew what it pointed to, and saw that the people must be called upon to stop and face this whole situation. And this is the

word with which He challenged them: “Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, wherein is the good way, and walk therein.”

The effect of this something, this foreign element which had crept in, was to bring about an almost total loss of a central, controlling, integrating authority. That, by the way, is the point of this all-governing word in Jeremiah 17 — a throne on high — the central, uniting government. That was what was needed, because, as I have just said, it was just that which had gone, resulting in complete confusion. If there is no single voice of authority, no one centre of government, no one uniting vision and purpose, the result is confusion; no one knows what is right and what is wrong, whether things are right or wrong. That is how things were then and that produced unrest. This appeal, then, in Jeremiah 6:16 was: “Walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” Unrest, weariness with the whole business; a sense of futility, not getting anywhere; and then the breaking up, divisions, schisms, and conflicts were all for one reason. It would appear that a large number, if not the mass of people, accepted the way that things were going and abandoned themselves to it. Some others were confused and bewildered by it all; some were fearful and distressed. The Lord knew all about it, and came in with this word: a crisis has been reached; you are at a crossroads; you have got to stop and consider.

The first thing, as you notice is this: Stand in the ways and see. Stand! Stop! Pause! Reflect! Take in the situation! Break this spell! Stand at the crossroads and see, look, take account, take note, for this is a critical time. That brings us right back to the whole of our message because the one uniting, coordinating thing in the life of any people of God, or any individual child of God, the one all-integrating thing is a clear apprehension and strong grasp of why we are God’s people. Why has the Lord called us to Himself? Why do we exist as people of God? We have been trying to show that it is not just to be His people and to be different from other people in the world, not just to be a saved people who are on our way to heaven. He has called us, He has chosen us, He has brought us to Himself for a great purpose, and that purpose is to be instrumental in *our* time. We can leave past and future times to those who belong to them, but we must realise that measure that belongs to our time in the purpose of God which is to bring all things into His Son Jesus Christ. His purpose is to ‘gather up’, as the word is, “to reunite all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10), to bring back that which is His by eternal appointment of the Father. Anything other than that, anything less than that, will undoubtedly result in the conditions that we find here in this book of prophecies. Firstly, arrested spiritual

development, the people having gone so far and then having stopped, and from that time there was no progress spiritually, no enlargement of spiritual life, no increase of spiritual stature, only arrested spiritual progress and growth. This is where they had stopped. Why? Not because they ceased to be the Lord's people, and not for one moment because they ceased to carry out the ordinances, the rituals, forms and ceremonies, and the whole system which had been given to them of their religious tradition and inheritance. They were as active in their temple activities, their sacrifices and ordinances, as ever. No, it was not because the outward forms of their relationship with God had ceased, but it was for this one reason: they had ceased to realise that they were called to be the Lord's people, and that everything that was bound up with that had one object which was to constitute them a people in the world by which the world would be brought to know God; to constitute them an instrument unto the nations. They had become something in themselves. The limits of their horizon were fixed with themselves and all was turned into themselves. They had either forgotten or completely violated the laws of their very existence, that they were raised up to be a people through whom the nations should know God, and should be left with no excuse whatever for ignorance regarding that which would make them understand what kind of God He is, and what He requires. It was the vocation of the people that was intended to govern everything; the vocation of the people under that glorious throne on high from the beginning, integrated with that one all governing throne-purpose and throne-vision. Remember all that we have said, that Jesus on the throne of heaven embodies and represents the purpose of God for all the nations at last; one throne over them all, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. That throne is the symbol of universal rights, authority and government all vested in the Lord Jesus. They had lost the vision of the throne, the vision of their calling and their divine vocation which was the very meaning of their existence. That being so, the purpose having fallen out, everything ceased. And it was on that one issue which included everything that this word came through Jeremiah: Call a halt! We are at the crossroads; we have got to look right into this thing, to the nature of it, and see. Stand still!

Arrested spiritual progress and growth

Now, before we go on; while you will see that this was true as to Israel at that time, you will probably see features of it in our own time as

well. If there should be arrested spiritual progress and growth in any life or in any company of the Lord's people anywhere, or in the church at large (I do not mean numerically, it may mean that as well, but I mean spiritually) so that there is a difference now from what used to be, in the knowledge of the Lord, in the enjoyment of the Lord, in the understanding of the Lord, the meaning of the Lord — if it is like that, stand still and ask, What is the meaning of this? You are at the crossroads. Sooner or later you will have to recognise that. You cannot just go on like this, unless you are going to throw everything away. What does it mean? And while, of course, spiritual arrest may be due to many things, particular things in any one life or any one place, the thing that I am bringing to you at this time, as an inclusive thing is just this: Stand still and ask whether your life, your spiritual life has been brought into something less or something other than God intended and brought you into being for (personally and collectively). Has some deceitful current crept in and taken charge resulting in something other, less than, different from that which was the original vision, that which was revealed to be the supreme purpose of God for the existence of the church, which includes you, individually, as a true Christian?

The way of progress and growth

The way of progress, the way of growth, the way of life is the way of the full purpose of God. The way of limitation is the way of something less or other. It is like that. If there is confusion in your life, so that you do not know what is right and what is wrong, if there is a loss of an all-governing authority that integrates, unites, holds in one steady way, and the result is you are scattered and divided, then stand still, and see, and ask again: Have I somehow, for some reason, by some means, been side-tracked, got off the main way of God's intention, got into something that is less, that is other, that is different and not the whole counsel of God? Stand still and see!

I am sure that you will agree that spiritual progress and spiritual prosperity are bound up with an all-unifying, inspiring, dynamic purpose. Find a person or a people with a purpose like that and it governs their whole life, not only in their meetings, but it reaches out through them to everything, their homes and their businesses. Everything is in the light of the great all-governing object of the place of Jesus Christ in God's intention; fulness of place for Him. Everything will be made to bend to

that, to bow to that, to serve that. Your life will be in confusion, divided, weak and limited, unless you have come to this. My home, all my affairs, my society, my occupations, my everything has got to focus upon this — the serving of God’s end concerning His Son Jesus Christ; that in all things He shall have the pre-eminence! He shall come into His Crown Rights in this world. I may not be able to settle that issue in some distant land; it may not be mine to see that that is so in India, or some other place that is not my country, to which God does not send me; but here I am. Here the issue can be settled, whether it be Honor Oak, or Richmond, or Deal, or Canterbury, or any other place — it may be a limited spot, but it is still a part of the nations, just as much a part of the nations as any country in this world. Do not be romantic or sentimental about China and India, to the loss of that patch upon which God has put you! That locality, that town, that sphere of influence, that place of business, that home is in the nations as much as any other place is. So far as God will help you, it is your business to see that Christ reigns there! The throne is there; everything is gathered to Him. You will make spiritual progress if you live accordingly. You will be a unified person or people if it is like that.

God’s methods and resources

One of the things that the Lord had to say through Jeremiah is this: “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). What a picture in full line with God’s purpose! The river flows, the fountain springs up, life wells over spontaneously yet over against this is the ‘hewing out cisterns’. Oh, the labour; oh the hard work; oh, the weariness — hewing out from solid rock of a cistern, and then filling it up and finding there is a crack in it, and it all seeps and leaks away — “which can hold no water”! Your work, your effort, your organization, what *you* are doing instead of this spontaneous thing that God does. What a contrast! In line with God’s purpose, the river flows! On some other line, mere (what we call) ‘organized’ Christianity, *we* have to do the work, *we* have to find the resources. And is that not just what Christianity is doing? Labouring and toiling, to find the resources to carry on Christian activities which are largely leaky? Oh, what a lot of leaky cisterns there are! And what disappointment — they can *hold* no water! That is the difference. In line with His purpose it is spontaneous. You have honest, conscientious work to do in the right way, but it is the

flow of life, and it comes along this course of the divine purpose concerning the Lord Jesus. As we said in chapter 5, God commits Himself to that. He is with you in it, and carries you along. If it is not like that, stand! There is a crossroads. Stand and see, and at least ask: Are we on some lesser line, some other thing? Are we trying to make something, to constitute or to create something? Trying to form something? Are we doing that or are we in that which God is doing? Then we are not carrying this; this thing is carrying us! It is like that when you have your course set wholly in line with what that throne from of old, from eternity, has meant — everything gathered into the Son of God. Stand! Reflect! Consider! Take it all in!

Next, allow yourself to be made aware of what the alternative is. What is the meaning of it? If you look into this book, and into the history of Israel that brought them to the crossroads, you will find that they had left the heavenly way, and come down on to an earthly way. Their original history was a heavenly one; everything was from heaven; everything was linked with heaven. Everything was meant to be like that. If you had gone through the tribes of Israel, in their thousands, as they were there arranged around the tabernacle in the wilderness, you would have found that there was a certain (may I put it this way) fashion in dress prevailing, for everybody had on the edge of their garment a blue fringe. Blue was the predominant colour in Israel and it was everywhere. And from what did it derive? There was one man right at the centre and heart of the whole nation, the high priest, who had a marvellous blue robe; and everything in Israel corresponded to that, was like a piece of it; it was ‘corporate blue’! Blue is a heavenly colour, and God ordained that from centre to circumference everything was to be heavenly.

In the same way their food came from heaven; they were sustained from heaven. Their guidance in the wilderness came from heaven; their government came from heaven. All their times were appointed by heaven; their law was given from heaven; their water came from heaven. They were, while here in this world, a heavenly people, moving steadily on to a heavenly country — the consummation of their heavenly life here. They had been this kind of people and in the days when it was like that, there was joy and harmony. But they had left their heavenly position, while, perhaps, maintaining the forms. They had come down to earth, to the level of the other peoples. And again and again, that happened in Israel. It happened in the days of Samuel when they said: “Make us a king like unto the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5) and the Lord said unto Samuel, “They have not

rejected thee, they have rejected Me” (1 Sam. 8:7)! The glorious throne on high was rejected and replaced by a throne on the earth. The Lord let them have their throne, and their Saul and their king! But frustration and limitation followed; they came down to earth. The battle is to keep on the heavenly level, and not to be forced down, brought down, tricked down. This deceitful current that came in had that in it, to bring them down onto an earthly level. Many of you may not understand what that means, but many of you do. The battle is there: to be something like the rest; to do things as they do in this world; to be something important down here.

But the challenge is: Ask for the old paths. Is there some hint in that, some suggestion, some implication that the trouble, the condition, the state of things was due to the attitude — Oh, we are tired of all this; let us have something new! Let us have something fresh! Let us have a change! You know, one of the prophets puts his fingers on that, and says: ‘... where there are no changes’. The people cannot bear not to have variety, not to have changes, what they call ‘freshness’. There is a peril in this. There is a freshness, a newness about the things of God, about divine things and divine life, that is right. But when it becomes something like this: ‘Oh, we are tired of the old thing; let us have something new.’ There may be something deceitful in that. And so, throwing off restraint, and throwing off that which God brought in and established, they hankered after variety and novelty. Do you notice that course of things today in Christianity? It is always very near, and it becomes very artificial, strained, false and unnatural. Trying to be different may amount to trying to be clever and novel, which is an awful evil. Ask for the old paths! Let us be careful what we mean when we say that we don’t want the past. That is exactly what we do want and need, if the past represents the old paths. If the days of the apostles, of the early church represent the old paths, that is exactly what we do want! Many aspects of newness can be true and right, but this people threw out everything that God had brought in and established as the basis of life, which had been in such fulness, spontaneity and progress. They were tired of it. Stand! See! Ask!

False prophets

One other element in this state of things was that there were false prophets. Jeremiah’s bane were the false prophets. They were the thorns in his side; they were the ones who were making his life a life of contention. But what were the false prophets saying? They were saying: Don’t listen

to Jeremiah! If you do, he will lead you astray and you will lose your place, and you will be found on the unpopular side; you will have the majority against you. Now listen, it is not politic to go the way of Jeremiah. If you want influence, if you want standing, if you want position, don't listen to Jeremiah. In a word, they wanted popularity and Jeremiah was the most unpopular man on the face of the earth at that time. Was Jeremiah right? Did Jeremiah stand for God's way? How did it work out? Pause, stand, see! This is very often the nature of the crossroads. You have to decide whether it is popularity you are after, the way of the majority vote, the way of the crowd or whether it is the way of the cross.

I don't know what is in it, but I do know of a book written by Dr. Wheeler Robinson. I have never seen it, I have never read it, but I only know its title and I know it is referred to by many. It is called *The Cross of Jeremiah*. What a fine title for this whole book! What is the cross of Jeremiah? I do not know what it was in this particular book, but I know what the cross of Jeremiah was. It was the way of the minority, the way that was unpopular. It was the way that was not the way of least resistance; it was the hardest way to take. That is always the way of the cross. The crossroads may be policy or popularity. Is it common acceptance or is it the way of the full purpose of God which may only be taken by a minority? So it works out. And that minority is an unpopular minority, and about them the others say: Don't go that way, don't listen to them, don't follow them! If you do, you will lose. And policy becomes the ruling thing at the crossroads.

Well, I must close. Here is the enquiry at the crossroads as to what really is the nature of this crisis. And then the decision: Ask for the old paths, that old path of the New Testament, which was by way of the cross, the path of the release of the Holy Spirit through an open heaven. And what is there in all the creation that is to be compared with an opened heaven, and a released Holy Spirit? That was the 'old path' of the book of the Acts, was it not? But that was by the way of the cross. It was the way of the exalted Christ upon the throne. As for Jeremiah, it meant suffering, adversity, persecution, pain and cost; so for the church, but oh, the wonder of that cross!

The sovereignty of the cross

I had hoped that I would have been able to include a message on the sovereignty of the cross, as I was fascinated while going through the pages

of the story of the cross, to see that, what from one side, the earthly human side, looks like tragedy and defeat, and the triumph of evil and the enemy, can be seen from another side to be God working out sovereign purpose in a marvellous way. Even to hint at it is to open up a field of tremendous inspiration. *They* said one thing, but Sovereignty came in and took hold of that and turned it in exactly the opposite direction to what they intended. For example, they said, ‘Not Jesus but Barabbas’; and then, being pressed by Pilate, they said: “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). Oh, they never said a more foolish and utterly mad thing! We have no king but Caesar! And they put their true King on the cross. What happened? They got Caesar, and he absolutely wiped out their nation in seventy years, and scattered them over the world, so that they have never had a king through these two thousand years. Alright, there is a throne above that cross, working by that cross. Pilate said, ‘Put up an inscription, and write it in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin’, and there was the whole world on that cross. “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). He did it by His cross; it is the sovereignty of the cross that wins the nations for Jesus Christ. The way of the cross is the way of the throne. It is the way of the opened heaven; it is the way of the released Holy Spirit. But, ask for the old paths, *and walk* therein.

This is your decision. Weigh it all up; look at it; compare the values of the two ways at the crossroads, and having decided let us go the way of the cross, “For though we gain the whole world ...” (Matt. 16:26). We may get everything down here and lose that which God intended, that inheritance in His Son, but it is not worth it. This is the way I am going, the way of the cross. The Lord bring us there at this time.

(Concluded)