



the
Golden
Candlestick

SAMUEL

Part 1

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CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGINNING OF A LIFE THAT WILL COME TO FULL-GROWTH

Reading: 1 Sam. 1:1-20.

Samuel is a very good type and illustration of the matter of spiritual growth, and in him we can quite easily trace the principles of spiritual increase which we find everywhere in the Word of God. This is not just taking an Old Testament illustration. We must remember that the Holy Spirit, who directed the writing of all the Scriptures, had present in His mind those eternal principles of God which are the same in all ages, at all times, because they are timeless and eternal. The same Spirit who directed the writing of the New Testament directed the writing of these Old Testament Scriptures on the same principles, so that we can easily find in the life of Samuel and in the life of any other great servant of God the things which come out in a spiritual way in the later parts of the Bible.

We shall be as brief as possible and not seek to exhaust the content of this very gracious and very full representation of God's mind. We do know that Samuel came to be an old man, occupying a very large place in the interests of God. Just to glance at the later years of Samuel's life is to see a shock of corn come to ripeness and fulness and of very great value to the Lord. He has become the anointer of kings, the pray-er for Israel, so much so that in other parts of the Old Testament Samuel is singled out by the Lord Himself, saying, "Though ... Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people" (Jer. 15:1), meaning that if anybody stood well with God and could prevail with God, it was Samuel. That little glance helps us as we come right back to the beginning.

Inward travail

Look now into the second chapter of this first book of Samuel, and the first thing about Samuel having been given to the Lord is that he is an

expression of two things. Firstly, he is the expression or embodiment of considerable soul travail, soul anguish and suffering. He came into being as born of much sorrow, travail, or, as Hannah put it, bitterness of soul. Let Samuel, then, represent spiritual growth, spiritual enlargement, spiritual fulness, and at once we realise that such is not easily brought about. It does not just happen. It is the fruit of some work in the soul which sometimes makes the soul full of anguish and bitterness. When God is after something that is represented by Samuel, that is, sonship, the man-child, the full expression of His thought, it is not just mechanical; it does not just happen. There is a good deal of secret, bitter, soul anguish lying behind it. Do not forget that. Perhaps you have no need to be reminded, but it may explain a lot.

Utter unselfishness

The second thing is that Samuel was the embodiment of such a selflessness in the interests of the Lord. Hannah had been through much pain and suffering, anguish and travail because of the provocation and reproach of Peninnah, who was no doubt telling her day by day that the Lord was not with her, the Lord was evidently against her, that she was overlooked of the Lord. She was probably told that her situation, rather than betokening the Lord's pleasure and favour and any kind of special intention of the Lord where she was concerned, just proved the contrary, that the Lord had no special interest there. After all that, we might well have thought that Hannah would have clung to Samuel and held him and never let him out of her sight; that very strong possessiveness would have marked her. But on the contrary, she gave him to the Lord; she took him to the house of the Lord and left him there. She proved that, costly as the way was, it was not, after all, for herself that she was seeking this blessing, it was for the Lord; utter unselfishness.

Now, if we are selfish, it will be very clearly marked by our having no concern for the Lord's interests and for the interests of the Lord's people, which are the same thing. Selfishness and self-centredness and self-interest will keep us from any kind of active and costly concern for the interests of the people of God. If we lack that kind of concern for the Lord's interests and the interests of the Lord's people, the interests of souls, the interest for the house of God; if we lack that kind of sacrificial and active concern, it is because we are wrapped up in ourselves and our own interests, that we are self-centred and utterly selfish. The unselfish-

ness of the Lord was seen in that He forgot Himself and let go everything for the Father's interests. If we are not right out for the Lord's interests, right out for the sake of the people of God (and that must not be just a mental picture of service, it may be something very near to us, those with whom we are most closely in touch every day), if we are not actively concerned for their spiritual welfare, however much it costs us, that betrays a selfishness of the grossest kind. Unselfishness is seen in this costly self-sacrifice for the Lord's interests in His people. Samuel embodied that, and because he embodied that he became who he was, and therefore he is a great example of spiritual growth.

Let it be recognised that our spiritual growth comes not by turning in on ourselves and being occupied with ourselves and our own misfortunes and our own troubles, but it is in travail, a travail which is outward for the Lord's interests — suffering, yes, not because of our disappointment, our set-back, because we are not getting what we want, and what our hearts are set upon, but it is, after all, the Lord in the Lord's people and the Lord's house. We will never grow by being occupied with ourselves. Real spiritual growth comes along the line of outward objective exercise and travail for the people of God, whether those people of God be saved or unsaved. It is that the Lord should have what His heart desires in a people. Israel was in a very needy state at this time, and this travail undoubtedly was sovereign travail. It was not just ordinary natural travail. It was something that God was doing, it was all going to be God's doing, God's miracle, to get Samuel. But the point is that Samuel, as we shall see, grew and grew to the whole dimensions of a great spiritual need in the Lord's people. He became the personal embodiment of this travail, this suffering, this selflessness, which was not drawing and holding to itself, but was turned out. Hannah, as soon as she possibly could, weaned this child to take him and leave him at the house of God for God's purposes. You see, then, unselfishness of that kind is a way of spiritual growth and spiritual enlargement.

Now, what is our spiritual condition? Do not let us think that intensity of personal occupation with spiritual things, which locks us up in ourselves is a mark of spiritual growth, or that we are going to grow that way. Real heart concern for the *Lord's* enlargement in His people and those round about us, immediately next to us, His interests in this life that is nearest to me every day, and those lives around and beyond, will bring me out into enlargement and be the way of my spiritual increase. If I am just turned in all the time on my problem, my difficulty, my disappoint-

ment, my need, my failure, it may become just the expression of selfishness. The fact is that we come into an awful morass, into a quagmire, along that line, and the Lord does not get us out. If we are waiting for the Lord to get us out, we will wait a very long time. The Lord says: 'You do something about this, you take action about this; I am not going in until you have resolved and taken hold of this situation, and then I will help.' But the Lord has no interest in selfish people; the Lord does nothing with people turned in on themselves. He leaves them there until the time comes when they either fade right out or say, 'This cannot go on any longer. I am getting nowhere, something has got to happen!' And then the Lord does come to our help.

This is a word at the beginning of Samuel's life. The beginning of that which ends in full-growth is the expression of these two things: real inner travail and utter unselfishness.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LORD HIMSELF

“And the child Samuel grew on, and increased in favour both with the Lord, and also with men ... And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli ... And (Eli) said, What is the thing that the Lord hath spoken unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me ... And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:26; 3:1,17,19-21).

Discerning the voice of the Lord

The first event we actually read about Samuel was that of the Lord speaking to him in the night, or the Lord calling him in the night, and that incident is of quite definite importance and has quite a definite meaning. The Lord could have spoken to Eli and made Eli teach Samuel; that is, the Lord could have taken another course than the one which He took on that night. He had a very special purpose, it would seem, in adopting the method that He did, in holding the matter to Samuel, and holding Samuel to Himself, and it seems to me that the object was that Samuel, from the beginning, should learn to know the Lord’s voice. It was a day in which there was no voice of the Lord among men, there was no prophet speaking for the Lord. Eli certainly was not in a condition to speak for the Lord. In a day when the Lord purposed to react to the existing poor spiritual condition, a condition marked, as the Word says, by, “no open vision” (1 Sam. 3:1 AV), nothing that was clearly of the Lord, at that time He took pains to teach the instrument that He was going to use to recognise His voice. There may have been voices, but not the definite and clear voice of the Lord. It was a time of confusion in every way and

indistinctness, indefiniteness. Eli was fast going blind, signifying the state of Israel without anything clear in relation to the Lord, and in that day the Lord took pains to teach Samuel to discern His voice. He, so to speak, sought to produce in Samuel a faculty of spiritual discernment, and so He called and He called again, and refused to go round any other way than this direct, personal way, and hold it to Samuel so that Samuel came to know when the Lord was speaking. He could, from that time, discern that this was of the Lord.

This is a very important matter in spiritual growth, that there should be in us a faculty of spiritual discernment, and it is there by new birth. Our spiritual faculties are renewed, quickened, in new birth, but there are few, even of the Lord's people, who have exercised those faculties. As we have it in Hebrews 5:13 — “those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil”. Therefore people are still largely uncertain and indefinite as to the Lord's purpose. I am not now speaking about details of everyday life, but I am speaking about the purpose of God, and it is true that there are comparatively few who are clear as to the purpose of God, because their spiritual senses are not exercised to discern.

If Samuel is a representation of true, genuine, simple, spiritual growth, this is one thing which explains his growth, that he had learned to know the voice of the Lord in a time of confusion and indefiniteness. We shall only learn by dwelling in the secret place. It requires that we have a life with the Lord behind the scenes, and carry out with us into life in general that mark of living before the Lord, having our lives before the Lord, and not, in the first place, before men. It means that what we are outwardly and in public is not all that we are; there is something more than that behind us. And it is in that personal life with the Lord, that quiet and persistent touch with the Lord in the secret place, that we learn to discern what is the voice of the Lord as distinct from other voices, and that there does develop in us that faculty for knowing that this is of the Lord. How we come to it does not matter at the moment, but we do come to it, where somehow, strangely perhaps, inexplicably, we know when the Lord is saying something and when it is not the Lord that is saying it; and that is essential to spiritual growth.

There is a place for fellowship in the matter of the things of the Lord, for counsel, for advice. There is a place where we can get the advantage and value of the spiritual experience of others, but there must be, behind all that, the faculty that is growing for discerning and for corroborating what others say. There are people who live wholly upon asking other

people for advice and counsel to tell them what to do. Their whole life is a matter of running about asking other people what they are to do. There is a place for spiritual counsel where there is the experience that will provide it, but that must not be the whole life. We must have that personal touch with the Lord where we have had a beginning in knowing the Lord for ourselves, and where that faculty of discerning His voice is growing. You will find as you go on that people who are without spiritual discernment are people of small spiritual measure. Discernment is a characteristic of spiritual enlargement.

Hearing the word of the Lord for the time

Having come to the point where it was perceived that the Lord was speaking and that this was the Lord's voice, then it was possible for the Lord to give Samuel the word for the present time. "I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that hears it shall tingle" (1 Sam. 3:11). The Lord was going to do something, and He gave Samuel the word for the time. And you will agree, I am sure, that the great need even of our time is for the appropriate word of the Lord, the word concerning what the Lord would do and what the Lord would have.

It is an important thing to know what the purpose of God is, and anyone who really apprehends that purpose in their own heart is someone above the average and in a place of spiritual largeness beyond most people. It is not something we have taken up, but by our secret walk with the Lord we know what it is the Lord is after, what He is aiming at, what He would have among His people, what He would do. If we have that, we have spiritual stature. So, having the faculty exercised, the Lord was able to give Samuel the word for the present time.

You notice, firstly, the voice; that is, knowing and being able to distinguish the voice of the Lord; then the word of the Lord, the purpose of God. You will never get the purpose until you know the voice. You may get it mechanically, but it will not be of much spiritual value. Eli said, "What is the thing that the Lord hath spoken unto thee?" (3:17). Cut that down from a question into a statement: 'The Lord hath spoken to thee.' It is a tremendous thing for us to be able to say, 'The Lord has spoken to me.' I think we must beware of those people who are so sure of the Lord's mind on all subjects, and are always telling us the Lord has spoken to them. But on the real purposes of God in relation to His people, in relation to the time, we should be in the good of the Lord having

spoken to us. We know what the Lord is after because He has spoken to us in our hearts.

Knowing the Lord Himself

So firstly, the voice, then the word. Then something more than that, the Lord Himself appeared unto Samuel in Shiloh. The voice, the word, the Lord Himself. Samuel came to have a personal knowledge of the Lord, a personal relationship with the Lord. Yes, the word is included in that. “The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord” (v.21). Yes, the word is included, the voice is included, but underline ‘Himself’ now. The Lord appeared *Himself*. It is the Lord Himself who is the real heart of the matter. That sounds very simple as a matter of statement, but it does represent something of primary, supreme consequence, that we are learning to know the Lord Himself.

This is the test of whether it is the voice of the Lord that we are hearing, and whether it is the purpose of the Lord that we think we know. It is possible, and of course it becomes actual in the case of many, that they somehow or other become possessed of a knowledge of the purpose of God. For instance, there is a conference on the eternal purpose, and after the conference you know what the purpose is, and you can say, I know now. You can talk about the eternal purpose; you have all the terms and all the ideas, but when you come up against the many Christians and leaders of Christians who may not have seen that and not be interested in it and are getting on with all sorts of other things for the Lord, and seeming to be blessed, then the whole question arises, I wonder if this really is so important after all? If it is a teaching, a doctrine, an interpretation of truth, we say, These people seem to be getting on all right without it, they really do not seem to miss very much by not having this idea. You are tested by trial and adversity, and if the thing is a theory, a doctrine, a teaching, it will have no value to you. It will not mean anything to you in the day of adversity. Samuel had to go through things. Oh, what a time was that in which he lived! What things he was going to experience! He might well, later on, question that voice. Did I have a dream, a nightmare? Was I under some strain that night that caused me to imagine and hear things? It is strange how, under tremendous pressure, you can raise questions about things which at a certain time were most real to you. You look back and say, At that time the thing was tremendously real, but I wonder if it was all right? Things have changed!

That is where knowing the Lord is the primary thing. Samuel was saved in the day of trial, of adversity, of conflict and seeming contradiction, because it was a personal matter between him and the Lord. It was not things at all; it was the Lord Himself. I beg of you to make sure that your position is not one founded upon anything less than that you know the Lord Himself personally. You do not just 'know' Him by teaching, by words; you know the Lord Himself. The Lord appeared Himself unto Samuel, and that is the one thing that will ensure that we go on.

This has to do with real spiritual strength and measure. We have learned to know the voice of the Lord, when it is the Lord speaking; we have come to know what the Lord's purpose is concerning Israel His people; and we have come to a knowledge of the Lord Himself which is a personal thing, and not just purposes as such, not teachings as such, not visions as such; but the Lord Himself.

THAT TO WHICH THE LORD COMMITS HIMSELF

Reading: 1 Sam. 3:19-21; 4:1-11.

This portion of 1 Samuel 3 verse 19 and onwards brings into clear view something which is vitally related to the whole matter of spiritual growth. In the last section of chapter 3 we read: “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.” This indicates *where* the Lord commits Himself and to *what* the Lord commits Himself. Spiritual growth is entirely a matter of the Lord giving Himself. If the Lord is not with us we shall not grow, and if the Lord does not *continually* give Himself to us, we shall not grow. Spiritual enlargement is all a matter of the Lord continually allying and associating Himself, and here we find the Lord giving Himself, committing Himself.

And what is it to which the Lord gives Himself that makes for this kind of growth? Well, you have to go back to the beginning and say that it is to sonship. In a word, God was going on with what was of Christ. The word ‘sonship’, of course, sums that up, but it is very important that we realise and make this discrimination that God is not going on with a man or with any *man* or with any *thing*; He is only going on with what is of Christ. That is why I read on into chapter 4. The ark brings in what is of Christ. The ark, as you know, is a type of Christ, and that is brought right to the fore. Samuel and the ark in principle are one. Samuel’s birth as the miracle of God (sonship brought out of death by resurrection) is in principle Christ. The ark is Christ in type, and God is committing Himself to, and going on with, what is of Christ.

You notice two things about Samuel and about Israel. Firstly, God is not going on with Israel as Israel; and there will come a time when Samuel grows old, and spiritual weakness will come in, and it will be said, “Samuel was old ... and his sons walked not in his ways” (1 Sam. 8:1,3). It is a repetition of Eli and his sons again; a picture of spiritual decline. And then, when that happens, even in the case of such a one as Samuel, it

is found that something is lost and the Lord is not going on with that, and things go from bad to worse. The Lord does not go on even with Samuel as Samuel the man. He is going on with Samuel as Samuel really expresses Christ, and is the embodiment of sonship, of Christ. Israel has an association with the ark and they think that, because they bring the ark in, God is going on with that. They discover He is not. There is a purely superstitious association with the ark. With them, it is a charm, a magic thing, that they think will produce some miraculous results, irrespective of their spiritual condition, but it does not happen. God is not going on with that. He will go on with no one and nothing but Christ. If Christ is truly there, God is going on with that. God is not going on with Christianity. He is not going on with anybody because they are professing Christians, because they have joined a Christian church, because they bear the name of a Christian. God is not going on with them on that ground. There may be a good deal of superstition about that, quite hidden and undetected. The idea is that if you are a Christian and belong to a Christian church, well, it is all right; but we find that God is not going on with Christianity as such; He is not going on with Christian churches, so-called, as such; He is not going on with anything that is merely of that external order of things when the people themselves concerned do not correspond to His own thought and represent Christ. God is looking everywhere for what is of Christ, and He allies Himself to that. God is not going on with anything that is other than, or extra to, Christ; even a kind of association with Christ, like Israel's association with the ark, which is not a living one, which is not marked by the very character of Christ. As Christians we do lots of things, we think, for the Lord, but find the Lord is not going on with them. We get a whole tremendous structure of Christian activity and work and Christian things, but find the Lord is not committing Himself at all. It is some *thing*; it is, if you like, Christianity in some form or another, but it may not be Christ.

It was the most devastating thing to Israel to see that when they brought the ark in, that it was captured by the Philistines. We see, as the story goes on, that God was with the ark, but He was not with Israel. God had committed Himself to the ark, and its capture by the Philistines was only His sovereign way of showing He was with the ark, not with the people. He will smite Israel for a wrong relationship to the ark. He will smite the Philistines because of their being out of harmony with what the ark represents.

The point is, that when it says that all Israel knew that Samuel was

established to be a prophet of the Lord, when from Dan to Beer-sheba they took account of this and they had to say, God is with this man when he speaks; God upholds him and stands by him; you meet God when you meet this man. When God made people take note of Samuel, drew their attention to Samuel, it was because of what was of Christ there — sonship. Later in his life it seems that the glory is departing even from Samuel and his house, but that is how all types and figures are. All that is in the Old Testament is imperfect and at last fails. If it was not so, there was no need for Christ to come at all; but that is another matter.

What we must understand is that the Lord is committing Himself to His Son, to Sonship, and it is just the measure of Christ in us and among us that draws out God and finds out how much God is with us. Samuel's growing was real spiritual growing in the knowledge of the Lord. It was, in New Testament thought, the increase of Christ, the increase of spiritual Christ-like stature, and that was the thing that they had to take account of. The Lord made them take account of that. So the whole matter of spiritual influence, spiritual position, spiritual recognition, is not a matter of the realisation of ambitions at all, or of our becoming something important in the religious world. From God's standpoint, if you have a measure of Christ, He is going to make people take account of that; He is going to bring people to that. If you have an extra measure of Christ, He will bring people to that, He will go on with that, stand by that, and the people who need the Lord will be directed to where the Lord is; in proportion to their need, so the Lord will direct them to where that need can be met. The Lord will stand by Christ. He will not stand by you, He will not stand by me. We may work very hard and be active Christian workers and all that sort of thing, but the Lord is not going on with us, and He is not going on with our work and our system of things. He is only going on with Christ, and the next section in 1 Samuel is a wonderful revelation concerning that with which God goes on, and that with which He does not go on. Although it may be something of tradition, even Israel with all the great tradition, God is not going on even with Israel. The whole Bible shows that God does not go on with Israel just as Israel. He is looking for His Christ, and goes on with Him. God goes on with no one and nothing in itself. He has committed Himself to His Son, and when He finds Him, He says, 'This is where I am; take note of this.' So all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that where Samuel was, Christ was; here is where God is — with His Son. It is the Spirit of Sonship and the Spirit of His Son that God is looking for in order to commit Himself.

THE GLORY OF ISRAEL

Reading: 1 Sam. 4:17-22.

The passage we have just read focuses our attention and holds it for some time and in a very definite way, on the ark. The wife of Phinehas calls the ark the ‘glory’ of Israel. In the incident of the capture of the ark, she says, “The glory has departed from Israel.” If we keep our eyes upon the ark, we shall see the meaning of spiritual life and spiritual progress. It is always, wherever it is found, related to the matter of the full life of the people of God, and of course, in saying that, we are only saying ‘Christ’. If we are going to understand and know the meaning of spiritual progress, we must have our eyes on Him.

The place of the ark

When the ark, the glory, leaves Israel, it betokens the most serious decline of the people of God. That is seen everywhere. When the ark was in its spiritual place — that is, not just occupying a particular position literally, but occupying a place in the life of the people of God so that the ark and the people were spiritually one — progress on the part of the people was always discernible and certain. You remember it earlier in the wilderness. Their progress towards the land, that is, fulness, was always governed by the movements of the ark. Being in spiritual fellowship with what the ark meant — the glory of God — they could go forward; it was always onwards while that relationship was maintained. They came to Jordan, and there again it was the ark that governed the passage of Jordan, and they were in spiritual affinity and oneness with the ark and went through. Again at Jericho it is possessing, it is going up spiritually, into the land, into heavenly fulness. Here the ark was once more governing, and they were in perfect adjustment to it.

Heart union with the glorified Christ

Transferring the type to the antitype, from the Old Testament to the New, let the Lord Jesus then take the place of the ark, the glory of God, and you notice when there is a right relationship to Christ as the glory of God, it means progress and enlargement. What a tremendous example of that we have on the day of Pentecost and in those first days — wonderful progress, wonderful advance, wonderful enlargement, because they are in true heart oneness with the glorified Christ, with the glory.

The glory departs before uncrucified man

It just remains for the moment for us to note what that glory means. We can best understand it by considering first of all the spiritual state of Israel in those days of Samuel, and then the fact that the great menacing force was the Philistines. The Philistines were dominant at that time, and, as you know, the Philistines represent the natural uncrucified man. They were called the “uncircumcised Philistines” (1 Sam. 17:26); that is, the cross had no place where they were concerned, the natural man spreading himself, or the natural life spreading itself over, and interfering with, the things of God. Whenever that is so, the glory is menaced; and when that becomes dominant, the glory departs. It is a simple truth, but clear for our perception. The cross, what Paul in his letter to the Colossians speaks of as “the circumcision of Christ” (Col. 2:11), “having been buried with Him in baptism”, and so on; the cross dealing with the natural man, not just the world (as the Egyptians represented), but the natural man coming into touch with, association with, the things of God as represented by the Philistines, who are always invading the covenant realm and are always seeking to lay their hand upon the ark. It is some encroachment of the natural life into the realm which is wholly God’s prerogative, God’s right, God’s place, and, inasmuch as that is so, the glory departs.

Christ utterly separated from all natural influences

Turning round and looking at it from the other standpoint, from the standpoint of Christ, how completely, utterly, Christ was separated from all natural influences. Take the days of His life here on the earth, and see it illustrated in natural things. His mother would influence Him on natural grounds of consideration, but He repudiates that: “What have I to do with

thee?” (John 2:4). His mother and His brethren stand without, asking for Him. He had probably no time for rest; perhaps this was solicitous for his physical well-being. It may have been that if you look at the circumstances; but He said, “Who is My mother? And who are my brethren? ... Behold, My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:46-50). That is what I have come for — to do the will of My Father; the natural circumstances are set aside, not allowed to interfere. You can trace that in many ways, as you know. Satan will, at the beginning, try to make Him serve Himself on the grounds of natural consideration. “Command that these stones become bread” (Matt. 4:3). From beginning to end, it is all that. “Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe” (Mark 15:32). But He refuses it, and allows the cross to keep the divide between what is of man and what is of God, and in so doing, the glory is preserved and maintained.

The natural life must be brought to the cross

There are all those elements of the natural life which have to be brought to the cross if the glory is to be with us. How many things there are! It is left for us to ask the Lord whether this or that is a natural consideration, or even when we are not aware of it, are unconscious of anything definite, to have this understanding with the Lord, even every morning: ‘Now, Lord, if today unconsciously, inadvertently, without realising what I am doing, I should be letting natural things come in, things of my own mentality, my own will or feelings, anything that comes up that is of the natural life that would veil the glory, speak to me about that.’ The thing that matters is that the glory is present in order that there may be spiritual progress and no hold-up, no arrest.

The main features of glory

The main features of glory are transparency, honesty, truth; nothing whatever that is double, and all personal considerations mean that there are secondary motives, secondary considerations. When you come to the end of the Bible you see the end of God reached in the city, the new Jerusalem. It has the glory of God, it says, and, “her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Rev. 21:11). Everything is transparent, pure, clear; there is nothing about

this that is double. There is no deception, nothing misleading, nothing doubtful. It is right out in the open, perfectly true and honest, and that is the glory in its nature; it is the glory of Christ Who is the truth. You cannot catch Him anywhere with deception or subtlety. He is the truth, and therefore He is the glory.

Travail over departed glory

It was not like that in Israel in the days of Samuel, and, because it was not like that, the glory departed. The woman, the wife of Phinehas, was living in a home where everything was a contradiction of the testimony. Her husband was one of the vilest contradictions to the testimony in Israel in that day, and he was a part of a widespread state of things. The very family, even the old father, Eli, his two sons and all the things going on, were all a positive contradiction to the testimony, the ark. But she, in the midst of that, evidently had some very deep concern about the spiritual state of things, and in her last moments she embodied her own sorrow over the spiritual state in the child that was born. She called him Ichabod, for she said, "The glory is departed from Israel." That is travail over departed glory. But you see the conditions, the associations, when the glory departs. Death takes place; death enters in; tragedy is there.

Spiritual progress, a going on, means that there must be correspondence, there must be harmony between Christ and ourselves, between the glory and our own lives. That is the way. It means that everything that is contrary to the glory, to what the Lord Jesus is in nature, has to be brought to the cross and dealt with, that the way may be kept open for going on. If you keep your eye on the ark, you will learn all the lessons of spiritual advance or spiritual arrest.

THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OVERCOMING THE LAW OF NATURE

Reading: 1 Sam. 6:1-21.

In the previous chapter we were speaking of how the Lord is only associated with what is of Christ. The ark is a type of the Lord Jesus, and it is very clear that God is associating Himself with that. Chapters 5 and 6 of this book show how the Lord abides with what is of Christ, no matter what the conditions may be. The conditions in Israel were spiritually very bad; conditions among the Philistines were very evil; and yet we see that the Lord is jealous for what is of His Son. Even though the conditions all around may be very contrary to His mind, the Lord is still jealous over those thoughts of His which are centred in, and bound up with, the Lord Jesus. All the conditions are contrary to God's thoughts, but here that divine jealousy for what speaks of Christ comes out strongly and clearly, indicating so emphatically that the Lord never abandons what is of His Son; the Lord never gives up His thoughts in Christ.

Now, even when it is a case of the ark getting into wrong hands and into a wrong position, the Lord still very jealously stands by the essentials of Christ. This cart that the Philistines made, as we know from the second book of Samuel and again the sixth chapter, is something that God does not accept as a means by which His interests and His thoughts in Christ are furthered.

The establishment of the testimony

The great stone in 1 Samuel 6 is rather interesting. It is mentioned four times, and on the fourth occasion it says, "which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite" (v.18). Evidently this history was written some time after the happenings recorded, and

“unto this day” would indicate the stability of what the stone represents, and you know in Scripture a stone almost invariably symbolises testimony to something. When they set up a great stone, it was a memorial, a testimony, sometimes a covenant. Here it would suggest that the testimony of the Lord is in the ark, and it is brought to the great stone. That is, it is established; there is something that is established here, a great stone that is established. We know of the great stones in Great Britain, those massive stones of Stonehenge and such places, going back for many centuries. There they stand, unchanged, unmoved. And in the Bible, a great stone speaks of a testimony established. The testimony of Jesus is represented by the ark, and coming to the great stone seems to suggest the establishment of the testimony of Jesus. That is where God is; He is going to do it, He is to have His testimony established, maintained. It is not going to fail; it is going to abide, but He judges everything that is contrary to it.

The cart was a contradiction. When David sought to bring up the ark, he made a new cart. He got the idea from the Philistines, and that cart was the occasion for a very severe judgment of God, as you know, when Uzzah was smitten before the Lord. This was something associated with the Lord’s testimony which was contrary to that testimony, and not acceptable to the Lord. It was a foreign idea, a foreign element.

Inside the ark was the rod of Aaron that budded, and you remember the story of that rod. When God was choosing a high priest over His people, He commanded so many rods to be brought and laid up in the tabernacle, and the rod that lived, budded, bore fruit, was the one whose owner was God’s chosen high priest. It was Aaron’s rod that budded, showing that Aaron was chosen of God for the high priestly ministry. That rod was laid up in the ark, so that in the ark there was the symbol of God’s chosen priestly ministry. The ark embodied that. It is easy to carry that forward to Christ, the ark as a type of Christ. We know that He is God’s chosen and appointed High Priest, “Having therefore a high priest” (Heb. 10:21).

The Lord against every contradiction

When we come to David making a cart for bringing up the ark and God smiting Uzzah, and the whole thing comes under arrest, you find the issue is that the Lord turns David back to His thoughts about advancing His testimony. He said, “None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites” (1 Chron. 15:2), not a cart. It is living priesthood that brings the

testimony on. It is by means of priestly ministry that God's thoughts are advanced and carried forward. This cart is a contradiction. Rather than a living, spiritual, priestly ministry, it is something mechanical, something invented, something made by man. It has come from man's mind. It is *man's* thought of how the interests of God should be carried forward, instead of God's thought. We need not dwell upon the nature of priestly ministry, but let us note that God's thought of carrying His testimony forward to final establishment is by a spiritual people, and not by machines and organisations, contrivances, inventions and ideas of men. Get those things mixed up, and you find that while the Lord remains faithful to His testimony, He is against the foreign ideas.

The need of a people in oneness with God's mind

Our whole object in these meditations is to note the nature and basis of spiritual progress. Here the progress of the Lord's interests among His people demands that the Lord's people are in perfect accord with God's thoughts about His Son, and God's thoughts are that there shall be men and women who are spiritual people; not just parts of an organisation, a system, a man-made contrivance for carrying on Christianity. How much there is of that today, to make Christianity 'successful', to get it established by all means imaginable by men! Think of what men will go to in inventing, in making up, in projecting, in organising, all the contrivances of men to get God's interests furthered, the work of God advanced. God is with His Son, and He is only with people in so far as they are in perfect accord with divine thoughts; that is, in so far as they are spiritual people, according to Christ. So here we find that there is trouble everywhere, when the ark of the testimony is being furthered by means other than God's own method of spiritually-minded people whose thoughts are in accordance with God's thoughts about Christ. That comes out very clearly in David's case in the second book. Try to further the Lord's interests by any other means than real spiritual life, which is the expression of Christ, and sooner or later the thing comes to a standstill or it proceeds very slowly. It begins to show signs of arrest and difficulty, and you have to do something more to get it going, and still something more. Any little bit of progress is the result of a tremendous amount of human effort. Whereas the Holy Spirit, when He has the people in accordance with the thought of God, just carries things on wonderfully. The thing goes on in spite of opposition. There were plenty of opposing

elements in the days of the apostles. There were the carnal elements, Philistine elements, but the apostles were in oneness with the mind of God, and so the testimony went on; there was progress. God saw to it that, having people wholly in oneness with His mind about Christ, the testimony proceeded marvellously against all opposition.

The spiritual taking ascendancy over the natural

If you want an illustration of what that means, you have it in these two milk cows. You are familiar, no doubt, with the idea that is bound up with these two milk cows. There they are with their calves. Have you ever tried to take a calf away from its mother? You know quite well that you are working contrary to nature, and when you work contrary to nature, you are up against some very strong forces. They took the calves away from their mothers and tied them up, and then hitched these milk cows to the cart, and turned their heads in exactly the opposite direction from where their calves were, and it says nothing about having to get them to start; they just went on, it says, by the highway “lowing as they went”, meaning that they were naturally longing for those calves, but they were going absolutely contrary to their own instincts and natures. They went on contrary to nature; conscious of the pull of nature, but going against it.

This is a magnificent illustration of this very thing, that God is so concerned for the interests of His Son that He can cause that to happen in us. Let us put ourselves on the level of animals, if you like. On that level naturally, just as natural people, our whole gravitation and instincts would lie in certain directions. We should want that, seek that, go after that, and yet, when it is a matter of the Lord’s interests, the Lord can so work in us that we just go the opposite way to our own natures. When it is a matter of the Lord concerned for the interests of His Son in our lives, the spiritual takes ascendancy over the natural. We find that we have another pull contrary to all our natural instincts. That is a principle of the progress and growth of the life of the Lord in us. It is that something is happening by God’s doing, a power is at work in us that is all the time making us do what naturally we would not do, go the way we naturally would not go, choose what we naturally would not choose, desire what we naturally would not desire. That is a very simple, elementary fact of the new life. We all know that whereas naturally our lives would move in certain directions, after certain interests, because the Lord has purchased us, we find that, while we are conscious of the natural pull, while we are not

altogether oblivious of what we would like, what we would choose if we were to come down onto that level, yet there is a greater law working within us which makes us move contrary to ourselves, like these milk cows. And that is a basis of progress. The Lord, by that means, is going to bring His testimony to its place.

These diviners discerned that that ark belonged to a certain place, and they sent it to its place, and everything proved that that was the place for it. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ works in us to bring the interests of God in our lives to the place where God desires and appoints, to which Christ belongs. Where does Christ belong in our thoughts, in our desires, in our choices — to our own natural thoughts or to the Lord's? That is an issue that arises every day. Where do the interests of the Lord lie? Well, do I have a stronger power at work within me to make sure that the place where the Lord's interests are reached and served most is my place, or is it where I want to be, where I would choose and like? It is the two laws at work. Here the law of the Spirit overcomes the law of nature, and that is the secret of spiritual growth, of progress. It is all a matter of our coming into harmony with God's thoughts in Christ where there is no contradiction, nothing contrary to God's mind, no foreign idea, no Philistine cart principle, but something that is purely of the Spirit, making us spiritual men and women, in harmony with God. That is the way of spiritual growth and spiritual progress.

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS SECURED IN THE PRAYER REALM

Reading: 1 Sam. 7:1-13.

We are seeking to trace the course of spiritual life with a view to discovering the secrets of spiritual progress and growth and enlargement. The book of Samuel opens with a very small degree of spirituality, things being in a very low state among the Lord's people. Samuel is brought in as a personal embodiment and representation of spirituality, that which is according to the Lord. The whole of this book and the second book is a history of spiritual arrest or spiritual growth, and the causes of both; that which lies behind spiritual arrest, smallness and weakness; and that which lies behind spiritual growth, increase and progress. This chapter brings out the secret of Samuel's life as revealing spiritual fulness progressively, and the secret of influence and power, and it is quite clear that it was his prayer life. We shall begin to pass from Samuel; at this point there is an interruption. The ark which is central to everything is now at Kiriath-jearim, and will be there for a long time. We shall not meet it again until the days of David when he comes to the throne, but there are other things which clearly point to this matter of spiritual life, and here, as we are about to leave Samuel and have not much more to say about him, we come to this which seems to be the crown of everything in Samuel's life. He is referred to later in Scripture in this very connection: "Though ... Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people" (Jer. 15:1). This reveals how great an influence Samuel had with God, and what a place prayer had.

So, if Samuel sets before us spiritual growth and spiritual measure, we cannot leave him without taking note of this which was behind it all: his prayer life. Perhaps we could hardly be taught anything fresh about it as a matter of a subject or a theme. It would be like old platitudes to say things about it, and yet it is so necessary for us to realise how much does hang upon this. What was happening here was that the battle of Israel's spiritual life was being fought through in the unseen. These big issues

relating to God's purpose in His people were being handled by Samuel altogether behind the scenes. Spiritual progress was secured in the prayer realm.

Prayer a battle and a battlefield

Prayer is, above all other things, a battle and a battlefield. If the enemy can, he will destroy or cripple our prayer life. There is no point at which the enemy concentrates his forces, his intelligence and his wiles more than at the point of the prayer life of the child of God. Either by open and positive assault, by direct methods and means of interference, or by subterfuge, by trickery, by all kinds of subtle movements of which we are unaware at the time, he seeks to touch the prayer life and put it out; so much hangs upon it. Along physical lines, along circumstantial lines, along spiritual lines, by extraordinary or what might seem to be the ordinary contingencies of life, his focal point, his objective, is the prayer life. Spiritual progress on our own part will be slow and small if our prayer life is small and weak and limited. You cannot fail to see that those whose prayer life is strong and persistent are those who go on.

Then not only as to their own spiritual growth, but as to their influence among others, their service to the Lord's people, their travailing on behalf of others, the spiritual progress of others is traceable so much to the prayer life of the Lord's people. That is a statement of fact which cannot be denied, and if you do not realize how true that is, you are destined to discover it sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

Watching unto prayer

The other thing is that, seeing that the enemy is so concerned about this matter, we have got to be concerned about it, and the apostle, as you know, in speaking of this very matter, says, "with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, and on my behalf ..." (Eph. 6:18,19). These are strong words. In that exhortation he uses the phrase, "and watching thereunto", watching unto prayer, which means that the wiles of which he has spoken earlier in that chapter, "that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil", concentrated upon the prayer life, and they have to be taken note of. Most of the Lord's people have found that the most valuable and the most profitable time for prayer is the

first thing in the day, in the morning before the day begins. That is a very common experience. But that is not always the easiest time, and if it is going to be had, we have to watch unto it. I am only mentioning this by way of illustration; how far you apply it rests with you. But for some people it is not so easy to get up in the morning to have a time with the Lord, but it may be because they do not go to bed when they ought to. They are just carrying on at night unnecessarily so that they are too tired in the morning. To watch unto prayer means that if we are going to have our time in the morning, we had better go to bed. You have to think ahead, and say, 'There is that prayer time, let us be careful we do not get robbed of that'; watching unto prayer. You will not find that it comes easily, that it just happens. You know quite well that prayer is beset by all manner of difficulties, and you never discover that there are other intelligences concerned with this until you make up your mind about it. When you begin to be serious about this thing, then you discover that you are up against things that did not seem to be there at the time.

The enemy, of course, would succeed most fully if he could hide what he is doing, if he could keep under cover and not let you know what he is doing, because to show himself is to betray himself. If he can do it without showing himself, it is easy victory. If you are saying — This is only so and so, I have no time now, things are not suitable — you are taking on the camouflage of the devil. But you make up your mind, and you discover there is something more positive in this than just a circumstance. There is no getting away from it that our spiritual growth and effectiveness is centred in our prayer life, and that that prayer life therefore is the thing that the enemy is most against, and we have to watch unto prayer most carefully.

It was through Samuel's praying that the Philistines were neutralised for so long, that they came no more into the border of Israel, and the people of God had this time of respite. The enemy was dealt with behind the scenes, and God came out through the prayer life of this man. There is this long period when the ark was at Kiriath-jearim until David came to the kingdom. Samuel fills the gap with prayer. The next move of the ark was David bringing it up to its place at Jerusalem. It is the progress of the testimony to its final resting place, to God's satisfaction. I mention that as the setting of everything: the progress of the Lord's testimony concerning His Son towards fulness and the great factor being that of our prayer life.

To be continued