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Golden
Candlestick*

THE WAYS OF GOD

Part 2

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THE WAY OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

Reading: Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11.

We see in these passages of Scripture the beginning of discipleship so far as the Lord was concerned. The first time that the word is used and mention is made of the Lord having disciples was at Cana in Galilee at the end of the turning of the water into wine. From then onwards, at different places in the country and at different times, the word 'disciple' is used of them, and we see in these passages the calling of such, and therefore the beginning of discipleship. 'Disciples' simply means 'learners', those who are to learn, and that by association with the Teacher.

Now in the records of the calling of the disciples, or in their relationship with the Lord, there seems to be a gap at one point. Simon, Andrew and John went after the Lord and were completely captivated by Him, and it becomes quite clear that, while they were disciples of John the Baptist, they transferred their discipleship at a certain point to the Lord. But the gap was between the initial calling and the point at which they made the full and final break. In between they went back to their fishing as we read in Luke.

It is quite clear that Simon knew the Lord before this incident and had a kind of relationship with Him which meant a certain degree or a certain kind of obedience. There was an understanding between them; there was a relationship already existing; but they had not finally left their boats and nets and their work as fishermen. In a sense they were already disciples up to a point. They had gone so far; there was an understanding between them and the Lord. There was a relationship, but the relationship had not yet arrived at the point where everything else was abandoned for Him. That came, as we shall see, later and on certain grounds.

The point for the moment is this gap, and during the gap this incident occurred which we have just read in Luke, referred to as the 'miraculous

draught of fishes'. That is placed between an initial relationship and understanding which just goes so far, and the full break and entire abandonment of all for the Lord, and therefore this incident has peculiar significance, coming into that gap. You see, they are in a way disciples, but that discipleship was not intended to remain in that realm and on that basis indefinitely. They were called to *learn* in order that they might *do*; "He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth" (Mark 3:14). "That they might be with Him" — that is the discipleship; "and that He might send them forth" — that is the apostleship. They may be two different things, or two halves of one thing, and in between, at some point, in some way, in between the discipleship and the apostleship (that is, in between the relationship with the Lord for instruction, for discipline, and the effective service) certain things have to take place. It is not always a time matter at all; it is just how quickly we learn. The two things may be going on more or less at the same time — that we are disciples and apostles at the same time, for these men were that at a certain point. But something has to come in to carry us from the point where we are only in an indefinite way the Lord's disciples, and the full way which leads to the realisation of the full purpose for which we have been called of the Lord, the object for which He has called us into fellowship with Himself.

The value of a practical background

There are two things to say about that. One is, firstly, the great importance and value of a practical background. These men were trained fishermen. It seems it was a kind of limited liability company, and Simon was the managing director. The two families are mentioned working together, and they were partners with Simon. How very much their natural training and background is drawn upon in their lives. It is very impressive, if you just read Mark's Gospel alone, to see how much the sea and fish, and fishing, are mentioned. "He walked by the sea" is constantly reiterated in Mark. These men had that practical, temporal background which was going to be of tremendous value, and the Lord Himself drew upon it. They knew something about the sea and what you might expect on the sea; they knew something about fish and what you might expect where fish were concerned and how to go to work in catching them; they knew something about nets. All that was going to stand them in great stead in the other realm where the sea is the world; the fish, the multitudes of

men in the world; the sea and the fish together — the whole mass of humanity, and the ways of God in taking men alive. It is interesting to follow Peter through from the day of Pentecost onwards, and see that higher spiritual wisdom at work in his life in relation to men. In the same way we can look at the church and the Spirit's wisdom in the world, taking hold of men.

My point is this, that training and values here in this world in a temporal way are not wasted. There is a sovereignty behind the way in which the Lord deals with us in our lives here. In some cases there may be a very full and complete training along a certain line. In other cases, the way of the Lord's sovereign dealings with us may be different. Some He has led this way and some that. Some have been led for some reason (perhaps they do not know why) to take up this line of work or that, and they become efficient or trained in that. Others find that their background is different from their current task, but when looked at from the Lord's standpoint, the way the Lord has dealt with us is not meaningless or without value. There are some, of course, who would say, If only I had been trained in this or that! If only I had this in my hands! Well now, the time may come, if it has not already come, when even such people will be able to say, Well, that has provided a very real ground for knowing the Lord and for knowing people and being able to enter into the lives of others; it has not been wrong, a mistake or a misfortune. Sometimes it is something quite definite and concrete, as with these men who were expert in their trade. I do not know what Matthew might think about it. He had to sit at a desk receiving tribute money as a servant of an invading, occupying nation. Perhaps he reflected on that with a good deal of questioning. The Lord sovereignly has a place for our background, and we must not take the attitude of discarding it as something that does not count for anything. It will find a place just as with these men it had a very definite place. It will find a place if we trust the Lord and not just clean the slate of everything of the past as if there had been no sovereignty of God in it at all. That is a very important thing to remember, and, whether you are able to recognise it now or not, the time will come when you will not be sorry that your former life was as it was. You will see that, under the hand of the Lord, it really has been a ground upon which He has been able to work, and out of which He has been able to get peculiar values. That is one thing here. The Lord took up these men, and transferred their past history to a higher realm and made use of it there — with a higher wisdom of course and an entirely new understanding of things.

Capitulation to the Lordship of Christ

The other thing that is quite clear here is this crisis in the life of Peter. If he is managing director, if he is the head of the firm, of course he is a representative one. He is, in the light of the big place that he is going to occupy in the future, the leader in the church at the beginning. It was through him, after recovery, that the scattered brethren were related and gathered. It was by the leadership which was given to him by the Holy Spirit that the first big movements of the church were made. We cannot get away from the fact that in a spiritual sense afterwards, he is still the managing director, so to speak; he is still the man who influences the situation and influences the other lives and is the centre of the church. When he was put in prison, the whole church made prayer for him; he is the key to the situation. Well, in the light of the influence that he will exert, the position he will hold, he has to be dealt with in a representative way.

Now just think of the managing director, the head of this firm of fishermen, having toiled all night and having caught nothing, being told in broad daylight by someone who is not a fisherman at all, whom he has not yet recognised as the Son of God but only as the prophet, the Messiah (a carpenter, more used to agriculture than seafaring, who naturally has no knowledge and no authority in this realm of Peter's, in which Peter is an expert) to let down the nets. Now, here is an interesting thing. He objects, has his reservations — “We toiled all night, and took nothing; but at thy word I will let down the nets.” He has used the word, ‘Master’. That is a peculiar word, it is not the usual word for Teacher or Rabbi. It is a very rare word which means simply *Superintendent*, and that, I say, is significant, that Peter should have got that far and said, Well, I am boss in this firm, but you are my boss. I give way to you because I recognise you as head of this whole business! But when he had taken the draught of fishes, he said, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O *Lord*.” The word here is ‘*Kurios*’, meaning absolute Lordship. He is the *Lord* Jesus Christ. This is another realm altogether, not in the temporal but in the universal, the transition from superintendent to absolute Lordship. Now, that transition indicates the movement from discipleship to apostleship. “Thou shalt take men alive.” The Lord has so governed this whole matter as to bring Simon, this one who knew all about it and could do it all, and who had the position, to a place where he has discovered his own helplessness and futility. Then he discovers, in his own utter futility that

the Lord can just very simply do what no expert would ever imagine could be done. You do not go out fishing in broad daylight, especially in those parts of the world. If you have toiled all night and taken nothing, you conclude that there is nothing doing, so you clean up your nets, hang them up to dry, and when things are more favourable, you will try again. But in the most unfavourable, naturally speaking, the most hopeless situation, here is the tremendous reverse from heaven.

The fact is — we have got to face it — that sooner or later everyone who is going to be used of God will, under the divine sovereignty, come to a full recognition of their own utter futility. In the hour of that recognition, of course, the enemy will pounce. When we are feeling worthless and helpless, he will say, you are no good, you had better give it all up and quit! But let us recognise that such times of manifested worthlessness, when we feel and know that we in ourselves are a failure, are absolutely necessary to having greater usefulness to the Lord. The Lord will not have any natural experts in His service. There are no natural specialists in the service of God, no experts, no people who know how to do it and are capable of doing it. The Lord has no place for them or for those who think they can. Simon is a representative one; he stands at the head of all discipleship and says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” How utterly futile! The Lord, of course, did not depart from him; He went on with the work of training.

The foundation of all training, all discipleship unto usefulness is exactly that. The foundation is your coming to know that it is no use, you have not got it; however much you may think you can, you just cannot do it. It does not matter how much training you have had; you cannot do it. It does not matter what the past has been. You may be the head of an important firm — it does not count here. You have touched another realm in which things are different. You cannot get away with it here; it is the Lord in this realm. It is another superior realm, altogether greater, but one which has to produce in us one thing.

It says, “he was amazed”, and so were the others. No one who is conceited is ever amazed. No one who thinks they can do it and know all about it is ever amazed. If you come to the place where the whole situation is utterly impossible, proved to be impossible, and you know that it is not in you, and then the Lord does something, you are amazed. You can do nothing but go down on your knees and worship.

That is the double side of discipleship and training for usefulness — and let us lay it to heart. When Moses thought he could do it and he went

out and took the thing in hand and started to throw his weight about, that was an end of his usefulness to the Lord for forty years. When he came to the place where he said, I cannot — although mighty in word and learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians — yet, I cannot! — that is the time the Lord began, and gave him the illustration of the bush filled with fire and not consumed. There is something supernatural about this and not natural at all, in the service of God. This is the way of our calling: to constantly be reminded that we have not got it, we cannot do it; but on the other hand, that the Lord can, and the Lord is doing it. So, while we have no faith in ourselves, we have faith in the Lord over against ourselves. This is the way of true discipleship.

THE WAY OF SPIRITUAL INCREASE

Reading: Gal. 4:21-31; John 3:6; Rev. 12:1-11,13,15,17.

In Galatians 4 we have Abraham and his two wives, Sarah and Hagar, and the two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham, such as he was, with all that he was, was a man of faith, a man to whom an initial revelation had been given, a man who at the beginning had been separated from the world unto God. The apostle says here that at a point in his life where he was undergoing a very severe test of faith, God broke his life into two. God created a fork in his life and from Abraham there came two courses. The apostle says that those two courses were the flesh and the Spirit, or the carnal and the spiritual (not the regenerate and the unregenerate) but both taking their course from Abraham, a man separated unto God, a man in the way of faith.

The apostle takes hold of this and uses it in a double way. First of all, he shows its application to Israel and the church. Israel after the flesh at the time at which Paul wrote corresponded to Ishmael, the child of the flesh, the ordinary natural course, having had its origin in Abraham. It was a good origin, nevertheless, out from what initially and originally was truly according to God, but by deviation there came in something wholly other than the Lord's mind. While still being, in a sense, the Lord's, it fell far short of His original intention, being altogether different from His thought for His own. In time it became a veritable menace to His thought. That is, Israel after the flesh, as Israel came to be, a carnal seed. The church is, over against that, speaking generally, the heavenly seed, the spiritual, that which is according to God's mind.

But then the thing is pressed further, and it is shown that that second thing, the church, has a fork. There is a point at which it divides, and even in the church, that which had such a wonderful origin, that which at its inception was so wholly according to God as was Abraham, now at a

certain point in its history also divides and in the church there are the carnal and the spiritual. This is found right through the whole history of things related to God. It did not begin with Abraham. We find it beginning with Cain and Abel, the first children of Adam, and it is found everywhere and persists right down through the ages, and as with Isaac and Ishmael, so with the church. There is always an irreconcilable conflict between the carnal and the spiritual. God never says anything in the direction of reconciling or bringing about an understanding and a cooperation between the two. God is utter and final in His attitude toward flesh and Spirit, the carnal and the spiritual. He says that these two things are as far apart as the heavens are above the earth. His thoughts are much higher than the carnal thoughts of Israel. There is the range of the heavens and the earth between the two, and they never can be reconciled. “As ... he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, so also it is now” (Gal. 4:29). And it is not only true between Jew and Christian, it is true in the church between the carnal and the spiritual, and the Lord’s conclusion about this matter is, not ‘Reconcile’, but, ‘Expel!’ “Wherefore cast out ...”.

We come to the book of the Revelation and we remember that that book was not written upon a chronological principle and basis, it is written in spiritual order. The last thing said in the Revelation in the message to the churches is: “Because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold ... I will spew thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16). I take that to mean, ‘You are Christians and yet not Christians; you are not utterly outside. If you were, there would be a chance of evangelizing you and getting you saved, but because you are inside and have come to this established position with your carnal mind and life, you are in a hopeless position so far as My purpose is concerned. I cannot evangelize you; I cannot do anything with you but spew you out.’ “Cast out the bondwoman and her son”; “I will spew you out.” I am not so sure (though I am not going to be dogmatic about it) that that does not get to the heart of Revelation 12. There is a man-child company (obviously plural) which is caught up to God and to His throne to rule the nations with a rod of iron. That word had already been said to one of the churches, to that very church to which we have referred — Laodicea; “He that overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me in My *throne*.” That is the issue of the spiritual over the carnal. That man-child company was caught up to God and His throne. Then the end of the story is that the dragon went away to make war with the rest of the woman’s seed.

You have the two seeds in the church, not the regenerate and the unregenerate, but within the church itself. They are the seed of this woman, they are her children who are the rest of her seed. Why have they not been caught up? Why are they not with the Lord in His throne? Why are they there in the wilderness for this period? May it not very well be that they represent the carnal among the Lord's people, who were not spiritual enough to be caught up? Leaving all matters of times out, it is the principle of this thing that we must recognize — how God sets His heart, thoughts and purpose upon the spiritual among His people, and how the time must come when that legalistic, unspiritual, carnal 'Christian' order of things which exists and which is predominant as to its opportunities and its earthly power, will be spewed out of God's mouth. Is it not becoming apparent that Christianity in its organized, systematized, earthly sense, is losing its place with God? God is setting it aside and looking for something within that great mass that answers more to His thought — a *spiritual* company.

If that is true, that is the point of His word to us, and especially the point of His speaking to Christians today, to indicate that His thought is bound up with Isaac and not with Ishmael. He is committed to Ishmael inasmuch as Ishmael has come on to the ground of grace. I mean that if anybody is a Christian, however carnal, if they have accepted Christ as Saviour, then God is bound up with that one and with that people as with Ishmael, but He has not bound up His full purpose up with that people. His full thought is with the Isaac company, the children of the Spirit, the children who have as the very basis of their life an impossibility were it not for God. It was impossible that Isaac should be, but for God; and that is the basis of the very course and history of the Isaac seed, that it is initially and continuously a matter of God, or it is nothing. It is God coming in at the beginning and God coming in all the time in the miracle of resurrection. But for God, there could be no existence, no going on; it is God who is the very life and existence of that people. That is the Isaac seed. We are of Isaac, says the apostle.

Well, we apply this to ourselves. God has all His interests and purpose bound up with the spiritual people, and God will, sooner or later, cast out, spew out that which is unspiritual. It represents a tremendous divide that God has placed between these two which will work out to its final conclusion; they cannot persist together indefinitely.

Now, there is this other thing that I am wanting to get to. It is the increase of that which is spiritual. The apostle here quotes from Isaiah

54:1: “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for more are the children of the desolate than of her that hath the husband.” This is a strange quotation interjected by Paul here, and you need to look at it in its context. It evidently had a double meaning. Isaiah 54 is a wonderful chapter. It begins like that.

“Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not: lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt spread abroad on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth; and the reproach of thy widowhood shalt thou remember no more. For thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name: and the Holy One of Israel is thy Redeemer; the God of the whole earth shall He be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In overflowing wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer ... O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will set thy stones in fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires” (Isa. 54:1-11).

That is quoted right here at this point where the apostle is speaking about the carnal and the spiritual. Evidently that had a double meaning, for in Isaiah 54 we have come to that part, that half, of the prophecies which looked beyond the captivity to the restoration of Israel. That is the meaning here.

Israel, the Lord’s bride, was cast off for her sins, and, being forsaken by Him, went into captivity. The remnant returned and is regarded as the whole, spoken of as the whole, not as a part only; spoken to as though the remnant were all Israel, the bride. The Lord speaks, not to the whole, but to the representative of the whole, the little remnant, the wife who was cast off and who was saying, Where are all my children gone? Look back to Isaiah 49:21, and you see that is made more precise: “Then shalt thou say in thy heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering to and fro? And

who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?" To this remnant that came back the Lord is saying, You have lost all your children, but I am giving you a new family and a great family. "Thy seed shall possess the nations." He promises a great expanse in restoration, in resurrection from the dead, a great expanse and increase. In the first place, that evidently was to apply to Israel literally. Cast off for a small moment, forsaken, suffering overflowing wrath, yet gathered again. Historically that applied to Israel.

But Paul, using that in connection with the church, gives it a second meaning and makes it perfectly clear that it had a double application, and it applies here. There is a little company of the spiritual, and if you stand truly for God you will lose. (It cannot be otherwise; it is inevitable.) You will lose a great multitude of merely carnal Christians; you will lose their fellowship. They will be cut off; God will have to set them aside. The true ones will be but a small remnant, and they will feel that they are shorn and bereft, brought down to something very small, and they wonder whether it is worth it, but the Lord comes in at that point.

This not only works out in the general dispensational application, but it works out in our lives individually and as companies of the Lord's people. We lose the sympathy, the fellowship, of the great mass of those who are merely carnal Christians, and sometimes we are tempted to wonder what is the real profit and value of being true to the Lord, when there are so few who are that. The Lord says in that connection that He is going to realise through the spiritual a great spiritual purpose. There is going to be an expanding family of the spiritual. He is not going to leave it like that. "Thy Maker is thy husband." The Lord is going to get a spiritual company, an ever-growing company of those who are according to His mind. The Lord believes in increase, in fulness. The Lord is not in the end going to have a little insignificant thing as the result of all His labours and His sufferings. The Lord is going to have a great company who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The end is not going to be just a little thing; it is going to be a mighty thing. Here His word says that, while there may necessarily have to be reduction, He is only reducing in order to increase, He is only removing that which does not answer to His thought and cutting it off and setting it aside really to make way for something more according to His mind. That is a principle that the Lord is always putting into operation: getting rid of the thing which stands in the way of the truly spiritual in order to increase the spiritual. There is quite a lot of stuff that really does not serve the highest

ends of the Lord. It is going on in us. Sometimes we feel we are reduced to nothing, and all that is left is a mere germ of spiritual life. The Lord is making room for the expansion of that germ in us. Sometimes it is outward, the Lord has to cut off. As John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). The Lord has cut off that which is not going His way in order to make room for something that is. This extends right from the inward life of the individual through the smaller companies to the whole church. The day comes when God comes right down as to the whole thing and spews the mass out of His mouth, but it is only to make room for increase. These words of Isaiah 54 have a double application, not only to Israel, but to the church. "I will lay thy foundations with sapphires." "Thy seed shall possess the nations." The Lord makes room for spiritual increase by getting rid of the carnal that is in the way wherever it is and whatever it is. That is what the apostle is saying here in Galatians. It must go, and he could only see with the Galatians that, if they were returning to a carnal basis, it was the way of being set aside. You are fallen from grace, you are separated from Christ, you will have to be set aside. So his appeal is to go on on the basis of that which is spiritual and wholly according to God's mind, for that is the way of real increase.

THE WAY OF THE GLORY

“These things spoke Jesus; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee ... I glorified Thee on the earth ... And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was” (John 17:1,4,5).

“But this spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

“But when Jesus heard it, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby” (John 11:4)

“These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him” (John 12:16).

“And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abides by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:23,24).

“When therefore he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; and God shall glorify Him in Himself, and straightway shall He glorify Him” (John 13:31,32).

“Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:31,32).

“He shall glorify Me: for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you” (John 16:14).

You will have noted the common word in all these passages which

are only a selection from others containing the same word. This word forms a pathway right through the gospel by John. It is the pathway of the glory. You will have noticed, even in this selection of passages which we have quoted, how the Lord Jesus places *everything* on the ground of His being glorified. For Him, from beginning to end, this was the ground of everything. We should be impressed with that, without any exposition of it or enlargement upon it. The fact is overwhelmingly shown and declared and verified in this book, that for the Lord Jesus everything rests upon the ground of His being glorified. The phrase which He used a number of times, and seemed to be governed by very much in His life, was, 'the hour'. "Mine hour" (John 2:4); "The hour is come" (John 12:23); "His hour was not yet come" (John 8:20). There was an hour which governed His whole life. There was an all-governing time in everything; and that hour, that particular time, was in His mind, coming up again and again as He went along. He called it 'the hour', the hour of His being glorified. It was as though He were bringing out of the future something that governed the present situation, whatever it might be, from time to time.

When you ask what is the glory of the Lord Jesus, what does the glorifying of the Lord Jesus mean, the answer throughout the Bible is this: the glory of God is always the expression of His complete satisfaction. When God is perfectly satisfied, then the glory of God always breaks out. You can trace that through the Old and New Testament. The Lord Jesus was living in the light of a time which He called 'the hour', when the Father's full satisfaction would be realised. He was living in the light of the Father being fully satisfied and the glory of God's satisfaction and bringing that into every detail of His life.

But you notice that He was governed again and again by this 'hour' business, whatever it was. Begin in John 2 at the marriage in Cana of Galilee — "this beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (John 2:11). But notice what led up to that: the feast, the failure of the wine, and His mother, anxious and concerned, turning to Him and saying, "They have no wine" (John 2:3). Jesus turned to her and said, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4). But then He acted. After that pause, waiting for something, saying in effect: 'I can do nothing of Myself. I can only do what I do as the Father enables Me, gives Me His sanction to do, and when it comes from the Father it will be quite alright. The Father will be glorified. I am not here to glorify Myself by what I do; I am here to glorify the Father.' In His heart He was saying: 'Father, will it glorify You if I do

this thing?’ And He got the answer back — ‘Alright’, and “manifested His glory”. His hour, that great future hour of the Father’s satisfaction, was brought forward. And that is not imagination and strained interpretation, because you have actual occasions when He said, “Father, glorify Thy name. There came therefore a voice out of heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again” (John 12:28). He was living, you see, in close touch with the Father.

On another occasion, when the feast of tabernacles was at hand, His brethren after the flesh said: “Depart hence, and go into Judea” (John 7:3), implying that everybody was going up to Jerusalem to the feast. He said: “Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; because My time is not yet fulfilled” (John 7:8). In effect He was saying, ‘I am not just governed by what everybody else does. I am not governed by common acceptance, popular opinion, the fashionable thing to do. I must have it from the Father that this going up is in some way going to be to the Father’s satisfaction. You go up.’ “But when His brethren were gone up unto the feast, then went He also up” (John 7:10). Strange behaviour, wasn’t it? But what was going on inside? It was this all the time: ‘Father, are You going to get something out of this? Is this going to be Your pleasure? I cannot do it on any other ground than that it glorifies You. If You are not going to find satisfaction in this, well, let them have all the feasts they like. I will not be there. Let them do what they have always been doing, but I will not be in it. Unless there is something for the glory and the satisfaction and the pleasure of the Father, it is not Mine hour.’ He evidently got the witness from the Father at that moment: ‘It is alright. I have got something in this.’ And He went up. And, you see, God did have something in His going up.

He was putting everything on the ground of glory, the glory of God in Jesus Christ; the glory of Christ. That is something to govern a life, isn’t it? ‘Does this really minister to the glory of Christ, my going here, or not going? What I do, or what I do not do. Whether I act, or refrain from acting. How much is this going to minister to His glory?’ That is the governing thing, a touch with heaven. ‘Can I do this? Will I be doing it for my own glory, my own pleasure, my own satisfaction, or does His glory require it? Will it minister to His glory?’ That was the basis of the life of the Lord Jesus. He called that ‘His hour’. He was governed by the hour of the Father’s satisfaction, and that was His glory. “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me” (John 4:34). That is only another way of saying, ‘My glory is His pleasure.’

So, you see, His life was governed by this. But then, you notice from one fragment which we read, this glorifying of the Lord Jesus was the signal for the change of the dispensation by the coming of the Holy Spirit. “This spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). In other words, Jesus is glorified and the Spirit is released. The Spirit comes; the great advent of the Spirit takes place. The dispensation is changed into the dispensation of the Holy Spirit — and how much the Lord Jesus stressed this fact! “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you” (John 16:7). Obviously, He put much more importance upon the Holy Spirit coming than upon His own staying in the flesh.

The signal for the coming of the Spirit, as Pentecost so clearly declares and shows both in the act and in what followed, was Jesus having been glorified. I mean by ‘in the act’, the day of Pentecost was a day full of the glory of the Lord. Everywhere the disciples went, full of this glory, they were preaching, ‘Jesus is glorified! Jesus is on high!’ The glory went out over the earth, but the signal for that was Jesus being glorified.

And this is a very practical thing. Whatever we may desire from the Holy Spirit (and we pray for the Holy Spirit when we want power, light, guidance and we ask for the Holy Spirit for a lot of things for a lot of purposes) remember this: the Holy Spirit will only act in any way at all if the motive is the glorifying of the Lord Jesus. Nothing else! You can pray until you cannot pray any more for the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit genuinely will make no response until your motive is that Jesus may be glorified; not that ‘I may have something, do something, or be something’. No, nothing like that. Jesus being glorified governs the whole matter of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has put it on that ground. So you can be quite sure of this, that once you are adjusted wholly to the glorifying of the Lord Jesus, truly and rightly adjusted, and have given the Holy Spirit the ground that He wants, then He will move spontaneously.

Notice again — and this is the door through which you enter into such a wealth in this gospel — that this matter of the glorifying of the Lord Jesus was the ground of the reversing of situations from the impossible to the possible, or to the actual. There is a sense in which this whole gospel of John is the gospel of impossible situations which are turned into actualities. Have you ever thought of that? It is a whole series of events from beginning to end, of utterly impossible situations on the natural level. We will briefly take a look at them.

The Marriage in Cana of Galilee (John chapter 2)

First, the marriage in Cana of Galilee. The whole event is proceeding and then suddenly, it breaks down, collapses, for they have no wine. Wine is the key to that thing. It is the whole basis of everything, of the joy and the fellowship, and it broke down there. There is shame, disappointment, reproach, and the bottom, as we say, has fallen out of everything. When the wine fails it is a hopeless situation. What are they going to do? They can do nothing. Everything is at an end. I expect those who knew about it were looking at one another in consternation, and were perhaps afraid to let people know because of the disaster that it spelt, the utter spoiling of the whole thing. It was hopeless. And, mark you, Jesus was very careful — and this comes up again and again in the gospel — to see that it was hopeless. “They have no wine ... What have I to do with thee?” ‘I am not here just to redeem broken-down social occasions. I am not here just to make things a little more pleasant for people and save them from their embarrassments. I am here for the purpose of doing what is utterly impossible to men. That is why I have come!’ Life has broken down. Life is full of shame and embarrassment and disappointment and hopelessness. That is where you begin: a hopeless, impossible situation for man by nature. And He has come in to that, and He showed forth His glory by changing this hopeless situation into not only one of hope, but of realisation. That is chapter two.

John chapter 3

What about chapter three? This man Nicodemus is trying to find his way into the kingdom, to find the secret of the kingdom of God, and he has all that ever a man could have: a religion and learning. “Art thou the teacher of Israel?” said Jesus. He had everything of tradition, inheritance, position and prestige, everything that a man could have; and still he was dissatisfied, speaking like a man in despair. He was coming to Jesus by night to try and find a solution to his heart problem, and it was a heart problem with this man. Jesus takes great pains to show how hopeless his situation is. He does not take up this man on his own ground and encourage and comfort him. He throws it straight at him — “Ye must be born anew”; “Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God.” It is hopeless for the best of this world. It is an impossible situation naturally, no matter how much religion you possess.

But Jesus changed that hopeless situation, not only for Nicodemus, but for many more, and for us. He turned it not only into hope, but into realisation in the kingdom. It was an impossible one, you see. My point is that Jesus was continually making it perfectly clear that, but for Him, the situation was impossible, but with Him there is no such thing as impossibility.

John chapter 4

Was there ever a clearer example of hopelessness than that woman of Sychar? “Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband.” And when she begins to speak you hear her tones of despair: “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw.” It is the cry of a woman who has exhausted life of all its hopes and is still in despair. You know what He did with that! Jesus drew out this hopeless situation, didn’t He? He made her aware of it; He took pains to let her know. It sounds cruel for Him to bring up her past, but He is letting her see how her own state is a hopeless one in order that He might show that He is the hope of the hopeless.

Still in chapter four: “(Jesus) came therefore again unto Cana of Galilee ... And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum ... and (he) besought Him that He would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.” Again it sounds so cruel. To this poor, distraught, heartbroken father, with his whole life wrapped up in that boy who was at the point of death, Jesus says: “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.” Is this unkindness? Is it cruelty, lack of sympathy? No, Jesus is drawing this man out to his extremity and making him recognise and acknowledge that only in Him is there any hope. He says, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” It is the cry almost of despair, as though he had come to the last resort — Jesus. But that is what Jesus wanted! Only Jesus. There is no other hope. And Jesus did not go. He said, “Go thy way; thy son lives.” You know the rest of the story. It is one more of these examples of the impossible.

John chapter 6

Chapter six: “Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?” There was a great multitude of five thousand people. “Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread” — and if you like to look into your Bible and work that out you will find that that represented a year’s

wages for a labouring man in Palestine — “is not sufficient for them”. Two hundred pence was not sufficient to meet this need. Jesus had put the question as a test: ‘How can it be done?’ ‘It can’t be done’, said the disciples, ‘It is hopeless. It is impossible.’ “Make the people sit down”, said Jesus. Well, you know the rest of the story. The situation is quite hopeless, quite impossible, but is turned to real actuality.

John chapter 9

Here we find a man born blind. This is strange language and a strange kind of argument. A lot has been made of this and all sorts of things have been said about it. The disciples asked the Master, “Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be manifest in him.” Well, the man was born blind, and, mark you, the man’s own language about this shows how he realised the hopelessness of his position. When the rulers challenged him about who it was who had given him his sight and said, “This man is a sinner”, the man said, “Why, herein is the marvel ... Since the world began it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.” Since the world began! His idea about it, you see, was this, that this was a hopeless situation without question. “Since the world began it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.” That is pretty hopeless, isn’t it? Yes, Jesus meant it to be like that for the glory. A hopeless situation!

John chapter 11

Chapter eleven brings us to Lazarus. And you know the Lord’s attitude here! They sent to tell Him, “He whom Thou lovest is sick.” He did not dispute that statement about His love; nevertheless He stayed where He was four days. And when at last He came and moved towards the tomb, the sisters said, “Lord, by this time he stinks.” The Lord had deliberately forced it up to that to make the situation as hopeless as anything could be naturally. “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby.”

John chapter 21

Go on to the end, the last chapter. What is it? “They ... entered into

the boat; and that night they took nothing.” A fisherman’s lifelong discernment, knowledge and ability all exhausted! ‘Nothing’ is the verdict upon that. Well, you know the rest: “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find.” An impossible situation was turned to a glorious realisation, for His glory. He put everything on the ground of His glory.

There is a lot of comfort for us in this. Oh, how often do we despair and feel the hopelessness of things! While Jesus lives there is no such thing as impossibility and hopelessness. It does not require a lot to say that, but, oh, sometimes it is the most testing thing that we could believe that a thing is possible after all. But it is. Many of us have enough experience in this, because He has taken pains to bring us to the place where, but for the Lord, it is the end. But for the Lord there is no more possible. However, again and again, He has changed that hopeless, impossible situation into something for His own glory, putting everything on His glory!

Now, do you see what He is doing in all this? He is putting our life upon the same basis as His own. He came and lived His life on that ground, the glory of the Father. Nothing that was not to the glory of the Father could be done. All was to be to the glory of the Father. Everything was tested and challenged by this: ‘How much does this serve the glory of the Father? If it does not, there is no place for it. Only if it does do I entertain it.’ Now He turns that over and puts our life on to that same ground. He put the people in Cana on that ground. He put the woman of Samaria on that ground. He put Nicodemus on that ground.

The Pool of Bethesda (John chapter 5)

And I left out one case, the man at the Pool of Bethesda. What a story of hopelessness that is, in chapter five! This man will let you know that he feels his situation is a hopeless one! He had been there thirty-eight years, and every time he tried to get into the water someone got ahead of him. A cry of despair — and Jesus changed it. He was putting this man’s life on the same basis as His own.

All the way along it was like that. It is a very safe position to have your life on the same basis on which the Lord Jesus had His. And, you know, that is the destiny of the church. What is it that Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians: “Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever” (Eph. 3:21). How? Just this way: that the church’s life has been a life of impossible situations turned

to glorious realisations. Is not that the history of the true church all the way along? See at the beginning, and you say ‘Impossible!’ Nero slaughtering ten million Christians! That shows how the church had grown, how quickly and mightily. But it is computed that he massacred no fewer than ten million Christians! Well, that is a lot, and leaves things pretty small, weak and hopeless. And again and again the church has gone that way through history — but on it goes. It is greater than ever today. Hopeless and impossible ... but for Jesus! And what is the object, what is it that is governing this? Oh, it is not because the church is anything, or that you and I are anything; His glory governs everything. It is unto His glory — “Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.”

There is much more that supports this in those passages which we read. You remember one occasion, near the end, at the Feast of the Passover there were at Jerusalem, among the multitude, certain Greeks going up to the Feast. They were going about looking at the sights of Jerusalem, and they included in their sightseeing this One of whom everyone was talking, Jesus of Nazareth. They came to the disciples and said, “Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip comes and tells Andrew: Andrew comes, and Philip, and they tell Jesus.” And what did Jesus say? Immediately — “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abides by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:23,24) How is Jesus glorified? How is Jesus really seen? They said, “We would see Jesus”, and Jesus said, in effect, ‘You don’t just see Me when you see Me after the flesh. You see Me when you see “a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9). One grain, having died, reproducing itself in a mighty harvest. That will show forth My glory. That will let you know who I am. Not just one of the sights of Jerusalem, but one of the sights of heaven.’ It is a new revelation and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. That was the thought there: how Jesus is really known or seen, how He is produced in other grains of wheat, in you and me and in many others. That is how He is glorified. He puts our life on that basis.

And so He says to us that it is to be the same with us as it was with Him, falling into the ground and dying. And He immediately adds, “He that loves his life loses it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25). You let your life go for Christ, you pour out your life unto death in His interests, and glory will come along that line. That is the way of the glory.

I think I have said enough to make my point clear. This is the work. The Lord Jesus has put everything of His own life and ours upon this one foundation, His glory; challenging and testing everything according to that; governing everything by that, saying to us, ‘Now, it must be true of you as it was of Me that you have your life governed by one motive and one interest: how much does this minister to My glory?’ That dismisses all talk about, ‘Well, *must* I?’ or, ‘May I *not*?’ ‘Have I *got* to?’ There is no place for any talk like that, dear friends, when we are mastered by this — His glory. ‘If this does not serve His glory, then I’ll let it go’, and, ‘If this way can lead to His glory, no matter what it means to me, then that is the way I am going.’ It is the way of the glory all the time, the ground of the glory.

May the Lord write this word deep in our hearts and make us men and women, people who are committed to the glory of our Lord Jesus!

Concluded