



the
Golden
Candlestick

**JESUS – PROPHET, PRIEST
AND KING**

Part 3

T. Austin-Sparks

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CHAPTER 6 (CONTINUED)

Yet even Paul came to the fulness of his revelation progressively; that is, he did not come at once into the full meaning of the particular revelation given to him. It came to him in parts, it came by private disclosures, and eventually he came into it in its fulness, but not until he had finally let go of Israel and Jerusalem. For a long time he held on to the hope of Israel, his brethren after the flesh. It may seem almost like sacrilege to talk of an apostle like Paul making mistakes, but he did, and he made mistakes in relation to Jerusalem and Israel. The Lord sovereignly and graciously overruled and brought him out of them. The Lord had told him to depart far hence, because they would not receive his testimony, yet he tried again in spite of the direct and explicit word of the Lord as to what the situation was and what the issue would be. Not until he had finally let go of Jerusalem and of Israel did he come out into the fulness of the heavenly meaning of things.

This shows how it is possible to counter the heavenly by clinging to something earthly. It goes back to what we were saying in the introductory word, that there is something which is of vast and unspeakable importance, but there is a price attached to it, and you cannot come into it until you are prepared to pay that price and to let go that secondary thing, however important you may think it to be, however good it may be in its own realm. There is something higher than that, and the good may be the enemy of the best; it may stand in the way of the fulness. So many people are unwilling to pay that kind of price. They are prepared to let the bad go for the good, but they are clinging to the good even when there is something better.

We must recognise that there is a difference between the foundation and the superstructure. The foundation may be that of the twelve apostles, as it is said to be, but the superstructure may be something more than that. It is what is going to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The twelve laid a good foundation. All the fundamental or foundational truths of redemption and salvation were laid by them, but the superstructure may be something more than that, and it is upon that that Paul built the heavenly church. So many people are content with the foundation, occupied all the time with the foundation of repentance, and faith, and so on.

All this has certain issues for us of very practical account, and we may as well face the issues as we go along. We will look at some of those

issues. Firstly, the nature of our spiritual life and work. Is it in relation to God's fullest thought, God's heavenly revelation, or is it something less than that upon the earth? Are we looking for something here? Are we giving ourselves to have something here, not only in work but in our own lives? How this pierces right through to the heart of things. What are we looking for here in spiritual life? Let us put that another way, what is our history of God's dealings with us as we go on? In the early stages we may have something that looks very much like something down here on the earth; that is, we come in spiritual infancy into that which is almost capable of being experienced in the senses, almost tangible. It seems that we have almost reached heaven down here. As we go on with the Lord we find that things are moving more and more away from the earth to heaven, and that our experience is growingly one of faith's utmost tests, even in spiritual matters. We only get through to a position of knowledge and experience where matters are actual, living realities in our history by means of the severest tests of our faith. We are put into situations and experiences where faith is tried to its full extent, and then, as the result of that, some new knowledge of the Lord comes out, and it becomes more like that as we go on. There was a time when we would have a severe test of faith, then there would be some decrease of intensity, and we would have a little time of respite and enjoyment. But as the years have gone on we have found that the periods of respite have become fewer and shorter, and the pressure upon faith is more prolonged and continuous, and we are getting more and more to the place where we only know the Lord at all by sheer faith for there is nothing else to help us. You have nothing on the earth, nothing to support you round about, nothing here that underpins your faith. If God in heaven is not real to the last degree then your ship is going to pieces, you are swung clean away from all that relates to this world and to this earth, and your life is hid with Christ in God; it is in heaven and you have nothing here. That is a proof of the heavenly nature of things.

What is true in the spiritual experience as we go on is true in service. The principle operates and governs still that in this dispensation God is not building up something on this earth. God is working to get everything of a heavenly order. Unfortunately so many of the Lord's people, with the purest and truest motives, have made far more of the earthly means than the heavenly end, and the earthly means of doing God's work is so great, and the heavenly end is so small that it is hardly worthwhile. There is a tremendous amount of administration, organisation, missionary parapher-

nalía, and what is the result? You may say, What is the alternative? There is a glorious alternative where, with a minimum, if any at all, of that human production, God by His Spirit can be doing something which is utterly heavenly. It is a test. All that other is going to break down; it is destined to do so, and then the thing which will still go on will be only what is heavenly in its nature.

We have not forgotten that we have the Prophet in view. It is a heavenly thought that is to be represented. This is the church in prophetic function — all things of God, God's mind, not man's. The issue which arises is as to the nature of our spiritual life and work, the measure of God's full thought, and that leads us to the necessity for a revelation as to God's full thought. The mistake has been made, and is being made, and there is failure because there is no perception of what God's thought and intention is. The trouble is the lack of revelation concerning the heavenly. That should be a real burden upon the heart of all who think that they see. Let us, if we think that we see, not condemn and judge, but pray. Paul knew quite well that the Ephesians and others for whom his letter was written, did not see. They had no perception about this heavenly truth, the church, the Body, but he did not rail upon them, he did not condemn and judge. He did not say, You do not have the light, you do not have the truth, you do not have the revelation, you are all wrong. He said, "For this cause I bow my knees (Eph. 3:14) ... that He would grant you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17). That is the proof, as to whether we have the thing in the head or in the heart. If we have it in the head then we shall talk down at people; if it is in the heart we shall pray to God with all our heart that He would grant unto them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him".

Another issue arises out of this, and is that of our willingness to be in a rejected minority. Paul was not understood. Even the other apostles could only go so far with him. James could not go all the way. Peter came under the influence of James and fell into grievous default, and Paul had to withstand him to his face. Paul had come in later than all of them. Yes, he had to stand up against the rest for his revelation. He was alone. What he saw made him alone, and he was alone to the end. Not that they did not love him, and that they did not believe him; not that there was no fellowship in the Spirit, not that they would not have said, 'Beloved brother Paul!' But with all they were not able to go all the way with him, to see as he saw, and he was alone because of his revelation. If ever there was a lonely man at the end from this world's standpoint it was Paul, just

as his Master had been, and it was his heavenliness of perception and understanding that made him that. The willingness to be in a rejected minority is an issue to be faced, and it is quite a real issue. You cannot avoid it. It is not an imaginary thing, and when it comes to the truth it is not a matter of somebody thinking they have something which nobody else has, and therefore are ostracized because of their conceit. The truth isolates if you are going all the way with God. You will find that you sift your following more and more.

There is another side to that. I know quite a lot of people who have isolated many quite unnecessarily by reason of their foolishness, tactlessness, pride and conceit, but that is not what we are talking about with Paul. No one could ever lay such charges at his door. Here is a man with a revelation, a man who knows God, a man who is standing for the thought of God in an utterness that is peculiar, and he is isolated and alone. It will always be like that. It is something to be faced.

Let us refresh our memories as to what Paul says in Galatians 1:10-19 and 2:1-14. There you will see that Paul is letting us into his inner history as to his stewardship, and the points which he makes are his detachment, on the one hand, from that which was of repute among men, from the accepted position however good, and from the things of flesh and blood in his ministry. On the other hand there is his attachment to heaven. His revelation is seen to be of a double character. Firstly outward: "The Lord appeared unto me", he said. Then inwardly: "when it pleased God to reveal His Son in me." It was that inward revelation of the outward reality that Jesus of Nazareth was God's Son, and all it meant that constituted Paul's peculiar revelation and ministry. It was not the fact, but that which it meant. All the others believed in Jesus as the Son of God, but Paul got a revelation of what that meant: he saw a Man in glory. They believed that Jesus was in heaven, but Paul received, shall we say, the full-orbed revelation of the meaning of God having glorified that Man, His Son, in heaven. All his teaching came out of that. He had seen Jesus of Nazareth in heaven with the glory of God. It had flung him to the ground, completely broken him and made a tremendous and indestructible effect upon him. 'What does this mean?', was what he said in effect. He must go away alone with this. He spent long months and years with that, alone with God, and the thing began to break upon him, and by the explanations of the Holy Spirit he was taken back into the eternal counsels of God before the world was. He took that fact of a Man in the glory back there, and he saw what God was purposing, and he saw what God determined and decided.

He saw God's Son becoming the model for all His creation, and then he saw that developing, and he saw God's Son assuming the form of a corporate Man. He saw a corporate Body, and that Son as the Head of that Body, and he saw the end was that Son glorified, filled with God's glory, and that Body filled with that same glory. It was shown to him that God had predestined that, and then that Body was an elect Body, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. And then he saw the operations of God by His Spirit in gathering out from the nations men and women who, as they came out, in their spiritual life shed what was natural, what was of the earth — nationality and everything else — and assumed the nature and form of God's Son. He saw conformity to the image of God's Son as a foreordained thing, as a process going on. Then he saw the Spirit of God's Son introduced into those who were being gathered out, and God's Son fully formed in them. And then he saw the climax of that spiritual process in a day which was called "the day of the adoption as sons", which meant the taking of the veil away and the revealing of them in the likeness of Christ, the manifestation of the sons of God. Then he saw that as the key to everything in the universe, and all the havoc and all the travail and all the vanity in the creation ceasing, and the creation becoming all that God intended it to be in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, the day of the adoption of the sons.

Oh, we have only touched the fringes of it! Paul saw it, and to that vision he was abandoned. No one had seen it like that. Only one had seen that. He could not stand dissimulation or mockery after that, even of Peter or James or Barnabas. If they acted inconsistently then he must rebuke them. It made him a lonely man, but what we owe to that loneliness!

All that is gathered up into the prophet. There is the Prophet at God's right hand. That is the full realisation of that eternal thought, the Man Christ Jesus. By revelation Paul became the prophet to the church, and through his ministry the church comes into that prophetic office, ministry, and function, to embody God's thought, to express it and to minister concerning it. The church has a prophetic ministry in that sense. We have limited the word prophet, or prophecy. We have to take it in its fullest sense; even its meaning in time has been limited, and it has gone perhaps a little too wide of what it ought to be. It is said that the prophet was one who predicted, and we pass from that today into the one who preaches. 'Pro' means 'before', and 'phaino' means 'to set forth', and the root of this word means 'illumination'. Therefore, the meaning is: to give a fore-illumination of God's thought, to set forth, to go before with God's

thought is the office of the prophet. That is the church; that is Paul; that is Jesus Christ. It is not just prediction in the limited, historic sense, and certainly not just preaching in the general sense; it is bringing God's thought before men in an illumined way in the light, so that men see the light as God's thought is presented. That is the function of the church in relation to Jesus as God.

CHAPTER 7

THE EXPRESSION OF JESUS AS PROPHET CONTINUED IN THE CHURCH

(CONTINUED)

We resume in the letter to the Ephesians in chapter 3:8-9. Here we have set forth the fact of a superlative fulness in Christ, and the apostle Paul was called to minister in a peculiar way to bring that to light, to make all men see. Alongside of this runs the fact that it is the divine purpose for the church to come to that superlative fulness. There is a ministry raised up and established in relation to that, in order that the church may attain to it.

Then a large part of this letter is occupied with making it clear that the church as a whole can only be what its individual members are, and what its ministers reveal. We are brought away from mere abstractions, something visionary, something mentally conceived or perceived in an objective way, and reminded that this divine purpose requires that every individual member shall, in due measure, come to the superlative fulness, and that the church as a whole will only reach the divine end as the members recognise that they are responsible individually for the divine purpose and for the realisation of the church's calling.

If you read chapter four you will see the importance of that. The apostle speaks about the unsearchable riches of Christ, the nature of which is simply what we have been saying: the universality of God's full thought and intention for His new creation. You move through the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and you find that truth, that fact, set forth repeatedly in

different connections. Israel was chosen for the purpose of occupying an elected sphere, and the governing thought about that twofold election is fulness — God chose them, and God chose the land for them.

It is a type of the church, chosen in Christ; Christ appointed by God — shall we say, eternally elected — as God's fulness, and a people chosen to occupy that fulness. When the land is described it is always described in the terms of a land flowing with milk and honey. It is a great description of abundance and fulness; it is superlative. The people were chosen to occupy that chosen place.

So the unsearchable riches relate to Christ, and all that is in this letter points to the fact that we are chosen by God in Christ to come to that fulness, to the unsearchable riches. Paul was the great apostle of the unsearchable riches, hidden from all ages, hid in God, who created all things. That is the mystery, and his is the stewardship of that mystery, to bring out the things hid in God, the unsearchable riches of Christ, so that the church may enter into them.

The apostle tells us how we enter in. That is a matter of great practical interest at once. He tells us in this letter quite clearly that the first thing in entering into that place of the unsearchable riches, the fulness of Christ, is by way of apprehending the heavenly position of the church. It is in the heavenlies that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. The fulness, the unsearchable riches, and everything in this letter is in the heavenlies, and that follows so closely upon what we were saying about the apostle himself.

The great feature and factor of Paul's revelation was the heavenliness of everything for which he left all that was earthly, even in the things of God or things related to God. It is the heavenliness of Paul's vision that governs. It is from that heavenly place that he has such triumph in all circumstances.

We must repeat this because it is impressive, because these letters, such as Ephesians, being written at the end, were written when that which had been brought about through the apostle's ministry was completely disintegrating. "All they in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). That is Ephesus. That is all the churches in Asia that came in through the apostle. Then, this one has left me, and that one has left me; not converts but fellow-workers, yoke-fellows, companions in the Gospel: "only Luke is with me", said he. With everything in a state of disintegration and breakdown so far as the earthly side is concerned, you find that the apostle is able to write with such exultation and freedom from depression, with

constant references to the heavenlies: "... blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies"; "made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". The secret of his own endurance and triumphant faith was that he understood that the earthly side of things was not that with which God was ultimately concerned. God was getting a heavenly thing.

There is an earthly side to us as the Lord's people, which is a very disappointing side — the side of failure, the side of weakness. But by what the Lord is doing with us, and in us, through the trials and adversities, it is as though He were taking up something all the time to heaven, accumulating some spiritual values in heaven. And eventually when all that which is of us which is going to pass does pass, that which has gone to heaven will constitute our new being, so to speak. It will be the constituents of the heavenly man that we shall be.

That may be a strange way of putting things, but it does seem like that, that something is being stored up in heaven all the time. I look around and look back and see the tragedy of certain things. I have had great blessing from the ministries of certain servants of God, who have now gone to glory. I have had great blessing in my time from the ministry of Dr. A. J. Gordon of Boston. His ministry was of great value in its time, and when the opportunity arose some years ago of being in Boston, I went at the first opportunity to Clarendon church. What did I find? A church with Modernism in it. I looked around to see if there were any traces of his ministry, but I could see none. You may say, 'That is a tragedy!' Where is that ministry? It is in heaven. I have had great help from the ministry of Pastor Stockmayer, and the opportunity came of going to Hauptville to sense the atmosphere of Otto Stockmayer and to breathe in something of it. What did I find? No trace of that ministry. I did not meet anyone at all living in the value of that ministry. Some knew him, but they were spiritually dead. It was all gone. Where is it? It is not on earth, it is in heaven. I do not mean merely that these people are in heaven, but that the value of the ministry is in heaven. We see all around the tragedy and the failure, and if we lived on that, we should despair. A thing grows, and when it is past what is there? It is stored up in heaven.

The apostle realised that even though there be a turning away from him it was not all loss; God has something in heaven which will not fade or pass away. He is building something in heaven. It is a heavenly Body. The earthly side may be very disappointing, but every test of faith and every triumph through a test sends something up to heaven which is preserved and which will be there eternally. Something is going up,

constituting an eternal thing, making a spiritual testimony which will come back in the ages to come in a very real, concrete form. Nothing is lost that is of God or that God has ever done.

The apostle triumphed by that realisation, and it is the only way to triumph. We need to get the heavenly point of view. To enter into the unsearchable riches of God's full thought requires that we shall, in the first place, apprehend our heavenly position, the heavenly position of the church, and, of course, that means the heavenly issue of the cross. The cross is not all tragedy, not all defeat, not all failure. The cross has a heavenly issue. The triumph and the fruit of the cross is seen there, not here. If we did but know it, we should see that there is far more resultant from the cross of Christ than we imagine. When the apostle was caught up into the third heaven he evidently saw things like that.

The second thing necessary for entering into God's full thought, the unsearchable riches of Christ, is, as the apostle says here, "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him". Now it is important to underline the actual word there which is not translated into the English correctly. All we have is, "... in the knowledge of Him". We must pause, because this is not written to the unsaved, who need to know the Lord, and this is not written to mere infants who have just some knowledge of the Lord. It is written to people who have had a real ministry. You must remember that the apostle was with them for three years himself. He has given these Ephesians a very rich ministry, and not only they but others to whom this circular letter was sent. So it is not just knowledge unto salvation, and it is not just that knowledge which brings salvation, the knowledge which spiritual children have. The Holy Spirit, therefore, uses a word which means "... the *full* knowledge of Him"; "... a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him ...". The unsearchable riches of Christ are the full knowledge. Unto that a spirit of wisdom and revelation is needed. The apostle would not have prayed for that if it had not been possible, if it were not for us.

The third thing as necessary to enter is, "... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man". It requires an inner strengthening to arrive at the full knowledge of Him, the knowledge of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Now the stewardship, as the apostle calls it, of this mystery, of these unsearchable riches of Christ, is essentially connected with the revelation of the Body of Christ. That is stated here quite emphatically. That is a

point upon which we must settle, and it must be allowed to take hold of us and sink into us. The stewardship of the unsearchable riches of Christ is essentially connected with the revelation of the Body of Christ. Unless we have a revelation of the Body of Christ we do not have the stewardship of the unsearchable riches of Christ. If we are to have a ministry of the fulness of Christ we must have a revelation as to what that fulness is for, with what it is connected, and that is the Body of Christ. It is not enough for you or for me to read the letter to the Ephesians, to study the letter to the Ephesians, to analyse it and even to memorise it, and then say, 'We know what the church is as the Body of Christ.' We may have all the terms, and all that is said not only in this letter but elsewhere about the church as the Body of Christ. We may know it like that, but never have had a revelation of the Body of Christ. That makes all the difference. Some of us lectured on Ephesians and preached Ephesians for years, and talked much about the Body of Christ, the church which is His Body, and the day came years after that when the revelation of the Body of Christ came to us. It came through the Word, but it was a revelation, and such a difference was made as to have proved utterly revolutionary. In the first place it was emancipating; it simply lifted us clean out of everything else. Then it meant a Holy Spirit ministry that has been growing and going on without hard labour in the ministry, but rather the flow of the Spirit in revelation.

It makes a tremendous difference when you get the revelation of the thing, and that is what the apostle is here seeking to bring over to his readers. He is saying things; he is putting it down in writing; and then it is as though he almost recoils and says, 'I wonder if they will understand this? They will read it, they will see these things as I write them, what I have written, but, oh, I do not want these people just to have something in *writing*, I want that all to become a mighty revelation to them as it has become to me. I want it to mean to them what it means to me; I want those people emancipated; I want them under an opened heaven.' "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, that He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation ...". Then perhaps he wonders if they may faint in view of it all, what a tremendous thing it is, and how conscious they may be of their own weakness and imperfection, and be discouraged so that they might say, 'Oh, we shall never attain unto it'; "for this cause ... I pray that He would grant you that ye may be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inward man." It is all in relation to the unsearchable riches.

So these three things are set forth as the way: firstly, a recognition of the heavenly position of the church; then, a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him; finally, the strengthening with power by His Spirit in the inward man.

There is a big difference, you will agree, between a human being and a mighty set of machinery or organisation. There is a great difference in the mode of operation between those two. In the machinery there is no mind; the mind is outside, apart, it does not belong to the machinery. In the machinery there is no power. The power is supplied to the machinery from outside. In the machinery there is no spontaneous movement; it has to be driven. In a body the mind is in itself, the energy is in itself, everything is there self-contained. It is the difference between the church as the Body of Christ and the church as an institution. Here in the church, which is His Body, the government is from the Head without human counsel; the unity is without human arrangement; the resources are by divine augmentation without human appeal; the growth is without organised effort. The government is from within as by the Head, the Lord's government, and not man's counsels. The oneness is the oneness of the Spirit. It is not arranged or brought about by man. The resources are the resources which come direct from the Head Himself to meet all the requirements. They are never brought from without by effort and appeal. The development and the growth is from within, and not by organised efforts.

When you really get the Body in expression that is exactly what you get. You can dispense with all committee work, and in prayer know exactly what the Head is doing, and desires to be done, by revelation of the Holy Spirit within. That principle applies to everything when you have a Body. It is self-contained in every way. It is not that the Body has a Head, it is that the Head has a Body, and that makes all the difference. It is not that the Body has to get a Head, and gets everything in that way; it is that this Head has a Body, and *He* is governing, *He* is directing, *He* is supplying; *He* is in charge. So the apostle says here, "... gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him ...". The Lord is in charge of this. The Lord has His own work in hand, His own end in view. You must get onto the basis of what the Body means in order to know this fulness of Christ, to know this working of Christ. It is not theory at all; it is truth. You get onto any other ground of the conception of the church, and you find that the responsibility rests with the people, someone or some company has to take responsibility for it all, but when you get onto the ground of the Body you find that the Lord takes

responsibility. He takes responsibility for the ministry. He meets all the requirements of the ministry. That is a boon to those who minister. We know the difference between an old form of ministry, where the responsibility was on our shoulders, and we had to meet the demands and find the wherewithal, and it meant keeping abreast of everything to be able to keep up the ministry and be fresh in our preaching. You come onto the Body ground and the Lord takes responsibility for that, and it is by revelation; there is spontaneous fulness, and spontaneous flow. You come onto the Body ground and the Lord takes responsibility for the resources, for meeting the need without your making appeals, and that is no small thing. And so it is with everything.

You have come to the place where the Lord Himself is simply doing His work, expressing Himself, giving Himself. It is the Lord Himself; that is all. Can you imagine the risen, ascended, glorified Lord going cap-in-hand to this world to help Him do His work? It is unthinkable! He does not have to come down to these poor, mean levels of human resource to tap them; He has everything; all the fulness is His. The Body is not a Body if there is no Head. It is the Lord in effect, and He is going on, but going on now in all the universal resource and freedom of His heavenly position. That is why it is necessary to come spiritually into heavenly union with Him.

It seems that the Lord wants that stressed and recognised, that it is this which constitutes the prophetic function of the church — simply the personal expression of the Lord, His representation and His embodiment.

So there can be no action upon merely intellectual theories as to the nature of Christ's work, as to the need of man, as to the character of our commission. We do not sit down to think this out, work it out intellectually, and say, 'Now then, Christ's work is so-and-so, and the need of man is so-and-so, and the character of our commission is so-and-so.' That is beginning at the wrong end. The governing factor is that the Holy Spirit dictates; it all comes that way. You do not have to sit down and plan it out; it comes to pass when you are in Holy Spirit union with the Lord. We can go all wrong in applying our minds as to what the Lord's work is, and what we ought to do, by simply reasoning as to what man's need is. The Lord knows that very often we get surprises, that when we thought a need was such-and-such the Lord does not take account of that at all, and we are compelled to deal with things along an altogether different line.

We find that in the beginning things were of a spontaneous character which was simply the living expression of the Holy Spirit's sovereignty in

the church. Nothing was done by mere mental conclusions as to the scheme, the policy or the objective. It all sprang out of the supremacy of the Holy Spirit in the church as the Spirit of Christ.

The expression of Jesus as Priest continued in the church

Now we will pass on for a few moments to that next feature of Christ's ministry as taken up in the church, namely, priesthood. We shall not be able to go very far, but we can indicate some things which should be of profit. We have contemplated Christ as Priest, and seen what the priestly function is. Now that has to be taken up in the church just as the prophetic function has to be, and we can sum up the priestly characteristics and activities in a few things.

One very full expression of priesthood revealed in the Word of God in type, and taken up by the Lord Jesus, is that in priesthood, certain things are opposed to one another. A condition exists which threatens the realisation of God's purpose; it stands in the way to obstruct and render impossible the attainment of the revealed mind of God for man. Priesthood, as we have seen, comes in to meet the situation, and to oppose it point by point, to counter it and render it nil. So that in the first place priesthood stands to oppose sanctification to sinfulness. The priests represented Israel. They were not a class apart, but Israel was gathered up in them. Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests, or a kingdom and priests. The one thing about Israel, therefore, as represented by the priests is their complete sanctification. They are separated from all defilement, from everything that is opposed to God's thought; they are a consecrated and sanctified people. And in the power of that sanctification they oppose an active force of sinfulness, and in that opposing they render nil the thing which threatens God's purpose.

The Lord Jesus undoubtedly has done that in His priestly work. He has met all sinfulness, and opposed it with His own sanctification. He has destroyed it in the power of holiness. Holiness, we must recognise, is a mighty, active, energetic force. It is not just a passive state. That is where we make a mistake. We think that to be holy is something very lovely, quiet, beautiful and enjoyable, but remember that whenever you come to holiness in the Word of God you meet something awful. Come and touch God's holiness and see how you feel. Should anything that is not according to the holiness of God come into the presence of God, in His holiness it will be met with the awfulness of that holiness. Sanctification is an

active force opposed to another active force in this universe, and there is terrific impact.

Is not that one explanation of the holy life of the Lord Jesus viewed from a certain standpoint, that His very presence roused something? His very presence disturbed; He could not be endured; His presence brought conviction. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone", and they all went out from the eldest to the youngest. There is something not just in the words that is conveyed; His *presence* smites. It is a tremendous, potent thing; it destroys; it opposes. As He offered Himself to God a holy sacrifice, without sin, that holiness was an effectual power, destroying that which stood in the way of man's coming to God's end and realising God's thought. Lay hold by faith of that sanctification of the Lord Jesus, and it is something which operates to deliver you from the paralyzing power of sinfulness. It is an active force. That is priesthood.

The church, being called into that one office of the priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus, having by faith stood into His holiness, and walking today according to that holiness, in separation unto God, sprinkled with the precious blood, becomes a mighty, active force to clear the way for man to come to God's end. It operates in the virtue of Christ's holiness against sin and sinfulness, to destroy and nullify it as something that stands in the way of man coming through.

That sounds like something very big, and perhaps technical or hard to understand. But you and I know that if we seek to deal with some sin that has risen up to arrest the spiritual progress of some life, to get that life delivered from the bondage of that sin which has come across their path, we know quite well that if there is conscious sin in our *own* lives we are paralyzed in the matter of helping that other life. The whole thing comes back on us, and we find ourselves helpless in dealing with things like that, and we have to get to the Lord and get straight with the Lord before we can help that other one, because holiness is not only a state, it is a power, something that brings conviction. Remember that this is the value of living a holy life. You need not tell anybody where you stand. (I am not saying there is no need to testify). You need not in the first place tell anybody that you are a Christian and that you belong to the Lord Jesus. If you are living a life of communion with the Lord your presence will arouse the devil, your presence will raise resistance before you have said a word, and your presence will be God's strategic occasion for helping someone through. How often it has been like that. Someone has been in difficulty, and have found there is sin in their life, and they have longed to

get through. They have looked around and no one has spoken to them, but they have known somebody within the circle of their associations who represented the solution to their problem. They know when there is a true Christian about, a child of God, and they have so often gone to that one. A life lived in communion with God through the virtue of the ever-cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus is a strategic thing for God in delivering souls, in making a way for man, in clearing the path for realising God's full thought. There is a mighty power in holiness which is not passive, but very active. That is priestliness. We are all called to be priests. Every child of God is a priest.

Then priestliness is the life in the Spirit opposing life in the flesh. You look at the priests again, and you see how very careful and precise the Lord was along this line, that, so far as they were concerned, no flesh whatever was to appear in their lives; their whole bodies were to be covered. There was precaution taken that even when they mounted the steps of the altar their flesh should not become uncovered. It is a type of tremendous significance. There is to be a life lived not in the flesh, with no flesh appearing, but in the Spirit, under the anointing, opposed to life in the flesh. It is a mighty thing. It related to the expression and manifestation of God in the midst of His people to all around. If there is flesh then God is obscured.

Now apply that to the spiritual life. It is only as you and I live and walk in the Spirit, and not after the flesh, that we have power. Carnality is the destruction of all spiritual power. We are immediately laid low spiritually when carnality arises. We know it quite well, and we have to go back and say, 'That was flesh', and repent of it, put it away in the grave. When we speak of flesh, please do not think we are speaking of something that is obviously and grossly iniquitous. We are speaking of the life of nature, self-life, that whole body of the old creation, which the Lord says was crucified and put in the grave of the Lord Jesus. If we bring it back again and are actuated by it or allow it to influence us, our spiritual power is immediately nullified. But as we walk in the Spirit and not in the power of the flesh we oppose something that is in the way of the full purpose of God. It is Spirit opposed to flesh, a mighty energy clearing the way for God.

Then in priesthood it is life in the Spirit opposing death. Of all the characteristics of priestly ministry, that perhaps is the most outstanding. You will notice that all the time the priest has to do with life and death. He has to take account of death through sin in judgement. Death is the last

enemy. Death is the final expression of a state opposed to God's mind and it is recognised by the priests. The priest, in virtue of the precious blood, opposes life to death.

You will notice that because of the priestly function everything is made to live, there is life. If it were not for the priest, to come into God's presence would be death. You cannot come into the holy place and live. You cannot come into the Lord's presence and live apart from the priestly function in virtue of the blood, but because the priest is operating in virtue of that blood everything lives. It is a testimony of life; it is life all the time triumphing over death. That is priesthood. It is life opposed to death being the great obstructor of God's purpose.

We are taught that Christ's own priestly ministry, taken up after the order of Melchizedek, is after the power of an indissoluble life. That is the essence of His priesthood, an indissoluble life — death entirely set aside, overcome. That is taken up in the church, and while these other things are indispensable, this is the ultimate, supreme work and testimony of the church, to minister life over against death. The Lord's people are here primarily and ultimately to be a testimony of life against death, a mighty resistance to death, and there is plenty of scope for that ministry. Death is active. We are not speaking merely in the physical realm. What a tremendous power there is in spiritual death! Why, sometimes when you pray you feel you are right up against an opposing force of death that will suffocate, throttle and kill you. With ministry in the Word it is often like a great wave of death everywhere; it has gripped everything. The church is here in the priestly work of the Lord Jesus to oppose life against death, and to nullify it, so that the one thing that should characterise us when we are together is that death is vanquished. There may be a battle, but you find life triumphing. The Lord is training us in this priestly ministry by allowing us to have a good deal of experience in the matter of conflict with the devil. The further we go on with the Lord the more we come to understand the nature of spiritual death and its terrible force. The Lord allows that in order to bring us out into our priestly ministry; that is, to have the testimony of life opposed to the testimony of death.

The last glorious phase of the conflict will be: "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." I do not believe that any of these things that we are told will be destroyed are destroyed in a kind of official way, as though the Lord came forth and smote the thing and it died. That is not the way things are slain. The Lord opposes them in His people. All those things have to be wrought in a body; a Man has to do this. "By man came

sin”, by man has to come the riddance of sin. “By man came death”; then by man death has to be vanquished. The church has to take that up, and in the end the last enemy will be destroyed, not by the Lord coming out and smiting it, but by the Lord in His church destroying it. Oh, what a conflict that will be! It will be the last agony! It will be terrific to meet the last force of death. The issue is victory, however intense the conflict will be.

That is priestliness: opposing those things which are set in the way of God’s full thought with life. God causes His church to function in this priestly way to nullify those other things by virtue of spiritual forces, holiness, life in the Spirit, and life as against sinfulness and flesh, nature, self and death.

Open your heart to let the import of these things in. It all means this, that the Lord Jesus occupies a certain position. In heaven as (Prophet) Man He represents God’s full thought. In heaven as Priest He stands opposed to all that which has come in to frustrate God’s thought in fulness. In heaven He is King, with whom is the ultimate issue of dominion. The church is an elect Body, brought in, through which He can express that. He can express what God’s thought is and set it forth before men, He can meet all the opposing forces to God’s thought in and through the church, (and that is what the church is for), and He can show in and through the church that He is universal Lord when He is on the throne.

We have not yet considered the church as related to the throne and the King, but this is what it amounts to. Living, Holy Spirit union with Christ means just that. As we go on we shall learn the meaning of these things which are very real. You may ask, ‘How did you come to know all these things?’ Not by study, nor by reading, but through a number of years in the hands of God, being taken into experiences strange and mysterious, dark and difficult, fighting a way through defeat and failure and a lot of other things. It was in all these adversities and perplexities discovering divine secrets, the Lord showing where things were wrong and what was the secret. So we come to know in a living way, and things become very real in that way. If we go on with the Lord we shall all come into the secrets of the Lord, and to come into the secrets of the Lord is to be put in a very strong position. It means that there is something there that Satan cannot overthrow. He can overthrow a lot of things, but he cannot overthrow what is wrought of God.

THE EXPRESSION OF JESUS AS KING CONTINUED IN THE CHURCH

Reading: Ephesians 1:20-23; 4:10; Philippians 2:9; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 2:9; Ephesians 2:6; Numbers 23:21.

Christ enthroned! That means that God's end is reached. Do you notice what those words in Hebrews chapter 2 teach? "We behold Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour ... For it became Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, (the margin says, "having brought") to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings ..." This teaches quite clearly that the enthronement of the Lord Jesus is the perfection of the Captain. He is first seen crowned with glory and honour, and then it says He is made perfect. We know that does not refer to Him as Son of God, but as Jesus the Son of Man. In the throne, then, the meaning of His enthronement is that He is perfect. It is the perfection of the Son of Man. God's end as to man is reached in Him; it is perfect. But God's end is reached in Him in His perfection as Captain of the salvation of many sons who also are to come to a like position and condition, to be perfected, to come to glory. Christ enthroned is God's end reached as to man. God's purpose is secured, and the many sons are secured unto perfection in His enthronement. It is a good thing to recognise that the glory is connected with the perfection. When you come to perfection according to God's mind you have come to glory. That clearly indicates that the destiny of man according to God's mind is glory and the glory comes when he is perfect and in Christ the perfection is secured. The marginal is quite one with the Ephesian tense which sees the thing done from God's side: "Hath made us to sit in the heavenlies in Christ"; "... having brought many sons to glory". From God's side, when Christ is there we are all there; it is as good as literally done. It is secured. God's end is reached in the enthronement of the Lord Jesus.

Christ's enthronement links with the original thought of God as to

man, and says most positively that God's purposes cannot be frustrated. It is a long history from the counsels of God, the projecting of the intention of God in the creation of man; it is a long history of the saddest, most tragic nature. It is a terrible history of the apparent triumph of God's enemy, of his success in making havoc of God's purpose. Many times in the course of the ages it would have been very easy to have despaired of there being anything of God in the creation at all. You find in the Bible various points and periods when it looked as though there was nothing left at all, that the imagination of the heart of every man was only evil. It looked like universal success of all that which came in to say, 'No', to God's intention, but over against all that Christ enthroned declares God's purposes cannot be finally frustrated. When God decrees it does not matter how much and how long forces may rage and work against that decree; it cannot be set aside. "I will declare the decree, I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." That was prophetic. That is a Psalm written long years before the resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ; a Psalm, as you know, taken up several times in the New Testament in connection with Christ, showing that with God there is no time factor at all; it is complete from the beginning. Christ ultimately enthroned shows that there never was any question at all about God's purposes being open to destruction. That is strong solid ground for our feet.

This also means that Christ enthroned sees every adversary and opposing element overcome. Not only do the decrees of God stand and the purposes of God remain impossible of being set aside, but everything that comes in, no matter what it is nor how much it is to work against those purposes, is destroyed when God has His King upon His holy hill of Zion. And if we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour we see in Him and in that fact the utter destruction of everything that has been set against God's purpose concerning ourselves.

We must seek to get our feet planted firmly upon the fact that Christ enthroned does mean that if there has been a universe of evil precipitated against God's intention, for you and for me all that has been defeated and overcome, for Jesus is enthroned! That is what it implies.

You notice that the Word teaches that His enthronement is because of what He has done in His suffering and death. "Wherefore, God highly exalted Him ..." is linked with His obedience right to the point of death, even the death of the cross. He obeyed God step by step in all that that obedience to the Father required, even unto death, and that, the death of the cross. And that obedience took Him into the realm where He had to

meet everything that had ever risen up in history to hinder God's purpose, and meeting it He overcame it. His enthronement is in view and in virtue of that overcoming. That is very simple, and it may seem elementary. But it is good for us to remember that this enthronement of the Lord Jesus is not just the automatic movement from earth to heaven, from heaven to earth and back to heaven again; it is a process of the operation of a tremendous force against a whole realm of antagonisms to their overthrow. He is in the throne as Man who has overcome everything that ever came in to hinder man reaching the destiny which God had fixed for him. That is our destiny. Our destiny is where Jesus is now, and as Jesus is now, crowned with glory.

Now we come more to the side of the church. The church is the elect vessel for the expression of Christ's enthronement. He is beyond the reach of the enemy. I suppose the enemy has given Him up, but he has not given the church up, and if the enemy can no longer touch the Head, he will turn upon the Body and assail it, which he has always done and which he is doing. There is no more hope of his success with the Body than there has been with the Head, but he knows quite well that we are still here in the flesh, cumbered about with a lot of the old nature, in the midst of a great deal that is very serviceable to him. He knows that we are here in training, that we are not yet perfected in ourselves. If by any means he can retard or arrest our progress towards that glorious destiny he will stand at nothing to do it, and so he assails us as he assailed the Lord Himself.

Certain necessities, therefore, arise for us, and the first of these is that the church should apprehend its place in the heavens in Christ. You and I should apprehend our place in the heavens by faith. It is declared to be a fact from the divine side that Christ being in heaven, we are with Him. God regards the church, the elect vessel, as inseparable from its Captain, or its Head. There is no such thing as a division from the divine side between the Head in heaven and the members on earth. As God sees it we are in Christ there, as God sees it we have reached the end. Therefore we are not allowed to raise such questions as to whether we shall ever get there, as to whether we shall ever get through. That is just what the enemy wants us to do. He constantly reminds us what we are in ourselves, and the hopeless state that we are in, and the hopeless mess that we are, to try and get us to accept the suggestion that we are going to fall by the way and we are not going to get through. In God's sight we are already through.

That is the faith that overcomes. It is the faith which advances to

God's end realised in Christ, and anchors there. Today there may be a terrific storm and a great strain upon faith's cable; we see nothing. Paul in his first shipwreck, for many days saw neither sun nor stars. So it seems. There is no sign of heavenly government; all seems to have been blotted out in this terrific upheaval. It is often like that spiritually. The enemy threatens us and seeks to get us to doubt as to our getting through, to accept that we are going to be submerged and defeated; that the whole thing is a myth, the bottom has fallen out of it all and it is a terrible unreality. The church must say, I stand by the grace of God in that place where there is no question about this after all. It is not left with us; it is settled in Christ in heaven.

It is a necessity for triumph, and for the expression of Christ's triumph in the church that the church takes that position. You and I can only be an expression of the Kingship of the Lord Jesus as by faith we take and hold to our position with Him in the heavenlies; that is, as we seek to stand into the position that there is no question as to the issue of this. The issue is victory. It is fixed. If Satan can pull the Lord Jesus from that throne and hurl Him down, then we have no ground for faith. But as long as it is impossible for Satan to undo the enthronement of the Lord Jesus we in faith hold on to that and we are indestructible. The fact of His enthronement is manifested in the church.

In that connection there are two things to consider. I have usually found that when you speak about being seated together with Him in the heavenlies there is always a reaction to that. The inability to grasp its meaning results in people saying, 'Yes, but after all, you know, we are not in the heavenlies, we are here. That is all very well, but here we are on this earth, and things are as they are. It is very nice to contemplate that, but in reality we are here.' Well now, what position are you going to accept spiritually? Your own position or God's position? Your own view or God's view? What we are in ourselves, or what we are in God's sight? Where we are in ourselves, or where we are according to His mind?

That is why we referred to Numbers 23 at the beginning of this meditation. Israel is in the wilderness. The story of Israel in the wilderness is a sorry story. It is a story of failure and weakness. It is a pitiable story when you read it in the light of what they were in themselves. Oh, these things that Balaam is made to say about Israel, how utterly untrue they are. Yes, they are untrue if you are looking at Israel as to what Israel is as a people in themselves, but that is how God looks at Israel in virtue of certain things. You see, just before this the serpent has been lifted up, and then

the springing well has broken forth. Where the curse has been removed the Spirit has broken in, and in view of the cross and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the people, God sees them in another way. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob." I think that is one of the most wonderful statements in the Bible. If there is a more wonderful statement, it is: "I am the God of Jacob." Of all the mean and contemptible men in Holy Writ Jacob was the meanest. "I am the God of Jacob"; "The God of Jacob is our refuge." If Jacob can find refuge then we can. No one need despair if He is the God of Jacob. Now this is God's point of view.

If Balaam could have depicted Israel according to Israel's own natural colours he could have gone the whole length in cursing Israel, but because he was compelled to depict Israel according to God's thought, in virtue of the blood and the Spirit, there was no place for a curse, and he had to come to the point where he said: "... and the shout of a king is among them." What is that? That is victory; all the work of the enemy is destroyed. There is no place for a curse; Satan cannot bring them under condemnation. "The shout of a king is among them." It is victory, and you only get victory when you look at things through God's eyes, with the blood. It is the efficacy of the blood having been sprinkled and the Spirit of God having come to reside within that makes that possible. When the blood is there, and the Spirit is there, there is the shout of a King, victory over all the attempt of the enemy to bring into judgement and under a curse. Our power of ascendancy over all the work of the enemy is to ever keep in view how God views us in Christ, not in ourselves. Sit down and begin to take account of yourself as you are, and Satan will soon triumph over you. Keep holding on to that ground of where you are in Christ and the shout of a King is in the midst. That is the meaning of Christ enthroned.

That which might be only ideal and theoretical has got to be made spiritually real and that is what the Lord is doing with us. The ideal may be, 'Yes, we are in the heavenlies, seated with Christ, and the Lord is at work to make it so.' God never accepts mere ideals, and He certainly never accepts mere theories. Doctrinal positions are no good to God; actual positions are the only things that He will have. Our training under the hand of God is all to teach us how the fiercest assaults of the enemy only issue in ascendancy. There is the love of God. How we have retarded our own spiritual progress! How we have kept ourselves in defeat by our reaction to the Lord's permissive will in allowing the enemy to assail! The Lord has allowed a time of fierce assault of the enemy, when everything

has seemed to be brought to an end, under eclipse, and in the fire doubts and questions and bad feelings have arisen. But in His grace He has brought us out into a place of enlargement and a place of blessing through that. The reaction then was, Oh, why did I question the Lord? Why did I doubt the Lord? Why did I not rejoice in it, and thank the Lord for it?

A few experiences like that have steadily, gradually begun to bring about this position — Oh, here is another assault, here is another bad patch; nevertheless we shall come out higher up, further on, there is some gain coming out of this! That kind of thing has started to grow, and the Lord has been at work seeking to produce that.

Some of you have got to the place where you can enter into the darkest and most fierce experiences from the devil, and in going through you never wavered for a moment; you rejoiced as though you had all the spoils of the battle already. But the point is this, the Lord is seeking to train us to get there, and what is the meaning of that? It means that we have already in faith reached the place of Christ enthroned. That is, we have fully apprehended the fact that this is not defeat; this is victory. We are learning to reign in and through all that the enemy is allowed to do. In this way the Lord is using the enemy for our training. This is how He turns things upon the enemy and uses him to manifest in the church the very victory of Christ, which Satan intended to set at naught. That is sovereignty; that is the throne set up in the church.

“That now unto the principalities ... by the church may be known the manifold wisdom of God.” I suppose our wisdom would say the best thing to do is to finish the devil right off in one stroke, and get rid of him, but God’s wisdom says, ‘No! I will use him to realise the very end that he is seeking to defeat.’ Only God knows how to do that. God can override with a superior wisdom all that cunning, wit and diabolical ingenuity of Satan. God can so override with a superior wisdom as to make it serve His very end. That is the wisdom of God, but it is being displayed in the church. When the members of Christ’s Body pass into such times, and have an awful experience of suffering and adversity at the hands of the enemy, and a weak saint looks up to the Lord and says, ‘Lord, I am having a bad time, but I know I am coming out alright and this is not going to be loss but gain; it is not going to be defeat but victory; this is not going to be greater weakness but greater strength’, then the very throne of the exalted Christ is, in essence, in that very action. That is a display of Christ’s exaltation and enthronement, and the Lord is thus using the church to express the Kingship of His Son.

This is all very practical. We do not open ourselves to anything by what we say, but we recognise what the Lord is doing. Faith is being trained to take the position of Christ's victory as to God's purpose in every assault and trial, so that it may be made known how exalted Christ is. If our course were without trial and without adversity, there would be no occasion for the victory of Christ to be displayed, and while we are here that victory is being made known.

It is that to which Paul refers when he says: "Thanks be unto God who leads me on from place to place in the train of His triumph, to celebrate His victory over the enemies of Christ." In the train of His triumph! The triumph is in front. I am following on in the triumph. The victory is not to be gained; it is to be celebrated in every place. That is triumphant faith. Oh, that I would always look at things like that. I see Paul going from place to place and in every place his life was a prey unto him. Oh, the tremendous difficulties that met him in every place. Looked at naturally it was anything but a triumphal procession, but he viewed it like that. We may say, 'This is a difficult place, this is Satan's triumph, this is a stronghold of the devil, this is a manifestation of the power of the enemy!' Not at all! This is a place for the celebration of the victory. That is how the apostle Paul faced these situations. How far you have got there I do not know. I do not profess to have got there, but I see that this is what the Lord is seeking to do in me, and in the saints, in the church, that through trial and adversity these things only issue in advancement.

When the people were going into battle it was not the Field Marshal, the militant Captain who came to the front and made a proclamation and gave an address to the troops; it was the priest. Therein is this significance, that it is He who has triumphed by the blood, and whose triumph by the blood is the basis of victory, who governs all our conflicts. He is in His victory there as King, because of the priestly work of the blood of the Lamb.

Concluded.