



the
**Golden
Candlestick**

BORN FROM ABOVE

Part 3

SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

Chapter eight

THE THRONE AND THE ALTAR

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THE MAN IN GLORY

Reading: Ezekiel 1:26; Acts 7:55; Heb. 2:5-10; Phil. 2:8-11.

We come to the third and final phase of the matter which has been holding our attention in this series of messages — that which is born from above.

In the first place, we saw the fact that the coming of the Lord Jesus in the form of a man was God's introducing into the creation the Man to whom He would conform man, man as God ultimately intended Him to be when He created man, and that the Lord Jesus supplants, disposes, of the first man, and then God takes up the work of making Christ a corporate man, bringing His children by faith into the full measure of the stature of Christ.

In the second place, we have just taken a glance at that man to see something of what He is like, the kind of man God has in view. We have not gone very far with that, but I think we have gone far enough to make us aware that He is a very different man from all others, and that conformity to Him does represent a tremendous work.

Now we come to the third and final phase, the Man in the glory, "the heavenly vision" as Paul called it (Acts 26:19), referring to that objective, subjective revelation of Christ which came to him when on his way to Damascus he saw Jesus of Nazareth in heavenly glory, which had a subjective effect to which he referred when he said, "It was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:15-16). It was not just a vision by the way. It was an inward impress, a mighty inward revelation, not only of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, but something very much more than that, as we are now going to see.

The Man on the throne in the glory

These passages which we have read are just a selection from a number of others like them, bringing into view the Man in the glory, that same Man. Ezekiel said that he was with the captives at the river Chebar, and he saw visions of God (Ezek. 1:1). When he began to describe visions of God, he headed them right up to this that we have read: "Above the firmament ...

was the likeness of a throne ... and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above.” You have to read the whole of Ezekiel’s prophecies in the light of that. I do want to point this out to you, that right there in the revelation of that Man upon the throne, one whole comprehensive order of things was being dismissed: Jerusalem, the temple, the whole Jewish system and the whole Jewish nation going away into captivity, passing out. Then, with that Man in full view, as you move to the end of the prophecies, Ezekiel sees another Jerusalem, the frame of a city. He is carried away into a high mountain and shown the frame of a city, and then the temple that never had been and never has yet been, may never be on this earth. That is a very controversial point, but I am not one of those who believe that the whole Jewish system is going to be brought back again and Calvary undone. We will leave that. But there it is, a heavenly thing taking the place of the earthly, and this is all related to the man in heaven. It corresponds to the letter to the Hebrews, and it corresponds to the book of the Revelation. When you get to the end of Revelation, you have the frame of a city seen from a very high mountain. That in passing.

The Man in the glory God’s standard

My point is this, that it is the man in heaven upon the throne who governs all this, because, when that heavenly temple was brought into view, there is a man with a measuring rod who says to Ezekiel, ‘Follow me, son of man, take note, lay to heart.’ And this man took him in and through and round and up and down everywhere, measuring by the measure of a man, and it is a heavenly Man, the measure of heaven, for everything that is presented is undoubtedly a representation in figure of Jesus Christ. The Man on the throne in the glory is God’s standard of everything, to which God is going to conform everything, by which God is governing everything. The measure of everything is the measure of that Man in the glory. Everything is determined as to how far it counts with God, how far God can put a number upon it and say, ‘It counts’, and it counts with God by how much of Christ is there. That is the vision of God which resolves itself into the vision of the Man governing everything.

How comprehensive that Man is! How meticulously detailed that Man is from God’s standpoint! How particular God is when the man comes down and says, Son of man, mark well, lay to heart, take note! You are almost wearied to death, your head almost hums, as you go with that man trying to get the measurements of it all, seeing what it all means. Why all this? Why do you want the number of almost every inch? Why do you want to say exactly

to a detail how much space there is here, or what this measures? Because it is not just something earthly, it is something heavenly, and everything that is heavenly related to the Lord Jesus is of very great significance. It signifies something. It is Christ; that governs.

The effect of seeing the Man in the glory

You come to the New Testament, and having seen the Man introduced and the Man perfected, you see the Man exalted and enthroned. Heaven is opened, and the Son of man is seen standing at the right hand of God. He is there standing to govern all that happens. It is that heavenly Man Paul saw, and it was that vision which governed everything. I said just now that it was not just that Saul of Tarsus, who had regarded Jesus of Nazareth as just a man, an earthly man and an impostor, a pretender, came to see at that time that He was the very glorified Son of God. That was revolutionary, that upheaved and overturned everything for Saul. But what I see as to that vision, which he called the heavenly vision, which comes out in practically all of his letters, especially his teaching letters (I mean as differing from his pastoral letters), but even there it is found, that Paul saw that Man in the glory was not only the Son of God, but in some mighty, far-reaching way, that applied to him, had something to do with him, he had something to do with that; that it meant something so far as he was concerned and so far as the church was concerned. That is the real heart of the meaning of his phrase — “the church which is his body” (Eph. 1:22-23). He is God, but He is Man in the glory and there is some link between that Man in the glory, and the church, believers, and himself, Paul. And it seems so clear that when he in this letter to the Philippians — remembering it is not cut up into chapters, paragraphs, but is one continuous narrative — when he shows us that Man coming from the glory into humiliation, self-emptying, and passing to the cross in utter obedience to the will of His Father, and because of that, being given the Name which is above every name, exalted, enthroned, to be the object of worship, to whom every knee in the celestial realm, in the terrestrial realm, and in the diabolical realm shall bow, (Note his language — “In the name of Jesus” (Phil. 2:10) — that is the name of the Man). When Paul has said that, he passes on into what in our arrangement is chapter 3, and he begins to tell us that there were many things which belonged to him as the earthly man which he accounted as being of tremendous value among men — his birth, his race, his position in the nation but these are nothing, these are rubbish, this is all nonsense, veritable refuse because I have seen the Man in the glory — “that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). And then he begins to speak about

attaining. He is not already complete. I am not already perfect, I have not already attained, but leaving those things of the earthly man all behind, “I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). In some way I am linked with that, I have seen the Man in the glory, it relates to me, it affects me, I have in some way to come there, to attain unto that — not to Deity, not to Godhead, but to the Man glorified. That is the heavenly vision. That is Paul’s conception of Christ and the church His body. You can read that in his other letters.

The destiny of that which is from heaven

Now that brings us surely right to the point, the destiny of that which is from heaven, the heavenly Man, as personally in the case of the Son of Man, so corporately in the case of His body, the church. The destiny — and the heart of it is not just a glorified humanity, it is the object of it being glorified. That Man there on the throne above in Ezekiel is there to govern everything, to govern the future course of things in relation to the man conception, the man idea, the man thought-intention of God. Everything that was to be governed by the man-principle, the man-standard, is now to be held to God’s thought. This down here has failed. The Jerusalem of Ezekiel’s time has failed. The nation, the Jews, of Ezekiel’s time, have failed lamentably. The whole temple service has failed. God dismisses it; the glory disappears from it; and now a heavenly vision of something that does answer to the Man in the glory is brought in in its place. It is a prophecy of what is to be, Christ in the glory is going to govern all the movements to God — not officially, but by reason of His manhood, what that manhood is. That is the point that I want, if possible to press upon you. Neither Christ, nor the church called into that great destiny of government for all the ages to come, neither Christ nor the church His body, is to fulfil that vocation officially. It will not be as on this earth. This world government can be put into the hands of almost anybody, qualified or not, very unqualified in many cases, in the place of government but having no right to be there, so far as qualification is concerned, just official. This is not so in heaven, not so with God. Government is the government of character, not of office, not of people as people, but of manhood according to God’s thought.

Spiritual quality governmental in God’s sight

Why is God so particular? Why, government for all ages to come is bound up with so many cubits; it may be only three cubits, six cubits, eight

cubits, twelve cubits (this is Ezekiel), bound up with small measures as well as large measures. It is spiritual quality that is governmental in God's sight. That is where the Jews failed over the Lord Jesus. They could not see how He could be king, looking at Him from the standpoints of men. He is a nobody in this world. But He is God's destined Ruler because of what He essentially was and is in nature, in character, and we are called into the fellowship of God's Son. And it is made clear to us that the destiny of the church which is His body, of which we are members if we are in Christ by faith, is that spiritual government of God's universe which means to have and to hold everything according to God's mind.

God's concern to produce spiritual quality

That is why God is so particular with you and me. The further we go with the Lord, the longer we live and walk with the Lord, the more particular we find the Lord is with us about things. We do not get away with things later as we did earlier. The Lord was dealing with us earlier as with children, suffering much in the early years, but He is not doing that now. He is bringing us to measurement much more carefully and closely because it is that thing that is to rule in His universe for all the ages to come. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12 AV), because we are, as He, "made perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10). This explains Philippians 3 and Paul's intent concern about things in the light of that heavenly vision. You do not think for a moment that all that concern and passion, agony and travail, is only to get saved. It is not a matter of salvation, not that he is wanting to get to heaven and is afraid he will not get there, but he has seen the significance of the Man in the glory. It is that he has seen that that Man in the glory represents God's idea for this universe in spiritual government. Now he writes his letters, and all his letters are with that in view. They are letters of strong, urgent exhortation and warning to Christians.

The possibility of missing the purpose of heavenly birth

In Hebrews he presents the Man in the glory. "We behold ... Jesus, ... crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9). He relates that to Psalm 8, and he relates Psalm 8 to God's thought in the creation of man. "What is man ... ? ... Thou makest him to have dominion" (v.4-6). He failed. We see not all things under that man, but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour; man in representation. He speaks of bringing many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10), and then some of the most terrible warnings that the Bible contains are in that

letter to the Hebrews, and I do not believe that they relate to salvation, to the possibility of losing eternal life, but they are in relation to this very thing that Paul spoke about in his Philippian letter. And I believe that at least Paul had a very real hand in the writing of the Hebrew letter. He is saying the same thing in another way. You may miss the thing for which you were born from above; you may fail to come to that, you may fall short of that very destiny which is bound up with your having been born from above. Being born from above is not enough.

Oh, you will get to heaven all right if you are born from above, but Paul is concerned about something far more than that. All this warning and exhortation is in relation to the thing for which you are to go to heaven, for which you were born from above and go back to the place of your birth. You are called, and in God's intention destined, to be a part of this great spiritual governmental administration of the body of Christ.

The heavenly Man a Man of abundant resource

There are figures of this in the Old Testament. You can take Isaac if you like. You remember that Isaac is the embodiment of the principle of resurrection. In our previous meditation, we spoke of that chain with all its links, each one of which represented and embodied some particular aspect, feature, constituent, of the heavenly Man. Isaac embodies that divine principle of resurrection. There are two things that come out in Isaac afterwards. We do not know a great deal about him after the great event on Mount Moriah, but there are two things. It says, "And Isaac sowed in that land, and found in the same year a hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him" (Gen. 26:12). The man of resurrection is the man of abundant, God-given resource. If you stand on this side of the cross, off the ground of the old man, where disillusion, barrenness, failure, disappointment and all that sort of thing reigns under the curse, but on the resurrection side, begotten to a living hope, you are on the ground of spiritual abundance, you have wealth, riches, resources, for the people of God.

Look at the Lord Jesus, the antitype of Isaac, on resurrection ground, off the ground of the old man; He is a Man of wonderful resources always. We pointed out earlier that He was constantly bringing His disciples to the point where they were at the end of their resources, and they had, so to speak, to say, Well, we can do nothing about it! So it was with the multitude and the feeding of them; so it was on the lake in the storm. They are at their wits' end, they are at the end of their resources; even as experienced and hardened sailors and fishermen, they are at the end of their resources. The Lord is

constantly bringing them to the end of their resources, the resources of the earthly man in order to show that the heavenly Man had resources altogether beyond their knowledge. He could meet the situation quite simply. They did not know where He got it from. They had to say, “Thou art the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33). This is Man; this is God. The man who lives as Christ did on the ground of the heavenly Man is going to be the man to whom God gives resources for others. This is the meaning of Isaac with his hundredfold in the first year.

A ministry throughout the ages of the ages

What is God trying to do with us? Why is He taking us this way? It is in order to make us people who have something to give, to minister, out of His fulness. And not only in this life. It would be a poor lookout if the measure in which we are able to give in this life, or even to receive, were the end of it all. You may not be very much troubled about the matter of giving. I confess to you, without any boasting, that it is a real problem with me. My trouble is, how can I get to the people of God all that the Lord has given? I see so much, but no opportunity to give, no scope for giving. If that is the end, what a mockery life is! I will be giving a long time after I have left this world. I am only illustrating, I am not talking about myself. When I was in Los Angeles, after one of the meetings a woman who was a strong advocate of Theosophy went up to someone else in the meeting, and said, You don't tell me that that man got all that in one life! — arguing that I must have had many incarnations before! I am not directing attention to anything I have. But if it only stays with one life, it is a poor lookout. God is seeking to fill us unto a scope and an opportunity and a need far beyond — not this earthly life and the next incarnation — but unto the ages of the ages. That is the function of His body — wealth.

And then that other thing about Isaac, the digging of the wells which the Philistines had filled up, the re-digging of the wells; the removal of the stuff that the Philistines, the natural man, had put into the wells to block them up. Isaac spent his life opening up those wells for others, and the herdsmen came and quarrelled about them. But Isaac said, Alright, quarrel if you like! I have no personal interest in this, I am not doing something for myself, you can take the old wells if you like; I am going on digging. It is the resurrection man who is engaged in securing supplies of life. The figure changes at the end of the book of the Revelation — the river of the water of life and the tree of life and then the leaves of the tree for the health of the nations, the water producing that which is for the health of the nations. If the city is

the church, figuratively speaking, there is something extra to the city which needs looking after. It does not mean there is imminent sin and disease. That is why the word is health, not healing; health, maintaining a state of life, maintaining a state of glory. It is to be ministered to. Nothing will be stagnation. Perfection does not mean stagnation. “Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end” (Isa. 9:7). I do not know how it is going to be done, but there it is. Life, life spreading, increasing, ever-growing fullness.

But it is to be ministered through that which is called the city. In other words, it is the church, and you and I have got to learn here by exercise how to get the resources, the water, for ministry. Our real ministry is yet to come. We may deplore the smallness of our ministry here, but God is seeking to do in us that which will make possible a ministry throughout the ages that are to come — a great ministry, where and when “His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face”. That is the vision of the Man, Himself becoming corporate in His members, to be in glory ministering and administering. Paul says: “unto the ages of the ages”; “that in the ages to come He might show (by the church) the exceeding riches of his grace” (Eph. 2:7).

Christ God’s final standard

You see the beginning, “Ye must be born from above” (John 3:3), has tremendous potentialities, immense possibilities, far-reaching destiny. That which is born from above is seen at last to be above in governmental function and fulfilment. But remember it all comes back to this: just how far we will let the Spirit of God build Christ into us, build us into Christ, conform us to His image, deal with us in the light of that Man, make changes, put us through discipline, chastening, conforming fires. It depends on how much we will let Him do that. We must remember that what I am here for on this earth, in God’s mind, as a Christian, is that Christ should be here and should abound. However much I do, if it does not mean an increase of Christ, however much I may say and profess, however much truth I may know and hold, if my presence does not mean the presence of the Lord Jesus and that in an increasing and growing way, I have missed the point, I have missed the way, I have missed the meaning. When it is all finished, the measure of the Man in the glory will be put against us, and all will be determined by how far up the measure of Christ we have come. That is heaven’s verdict upon a life. Christ is the verdict, Christ is the standard. Oh, then, let us give ourselves, not to intensive self-occupation and self-cultivation, and all that kind of introspective stuff, but let us give ourselves constantly before God that we

shall be found growing in the measure of Christ, that it may be true as heaven and earth and hell look on, that they are discerning and seeing Christ, feeling Christ, and having to say, He is here, Christ is here! Will you make that your quest with me?

Concluded.

SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

CHAPTER EIGHT

GOD'S KING IN ZION

(The series 'Spiritual Ascendancy' was published in volumes 87 to 90, and the editors only later discovered this final chapter.)

"I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6).

There were three phases of the life and history of God's people, Israel, in the old dispensation which related in their respective ways to kingship. One was negative and two were positive.

"No king in Israel"

The first of the three is that which we have in the book the Judges, a period of some four hundred years, and the phrase which governs that whole period and state of things is, "There was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6); a kingless state, no king. As you read that book and spread it over that long period of time, remembering that, although you can read the book through in about half an hour, you are dealing with four hundred years, a long, wearisome period. As you read it and get something of the sense of how long and painful it was, you must remind yourself that it is all due to this one thing: there was no king; and the conditions which we find among the Lord's people during that period are the conditions which inevitably result from an absence of authority, of what is meant by a king.

(a) Chaos

In the first place, it was chaos, there was no order, no coordination. Life was just irregular, indefinite; no one knew what would happen next. It is always like that when there is no king.

We begin right down there. I know it is a very low level on which to begin the final message of this series. Nevertheless, if it does not come to us personally as the Lord's message, that is, if it is not applicable to us, if these things are not true about us as the Lord's servants, it may be as well for us to keep it in store for the day when we come up against the problems and the difficulties which are to be found among many of the Lord's people and in the Lord's work; to be able to put our finger immediately upon the cause. There are many individual lives of children of God, as well as many expressions of corporate life or collective life where there is really no order. There is just a kind of chance going on, not knowing what is going to happen next, not being sure about anything at all. There is no regularity, no coordination, no symmetry in the life, no balance, no sense of a plan and design. It is all so fragmentary, just going on from one thing to another, and there seems to be little or no connection between experiences. It all speaks of lack of coordinating control somewhere. There is no central authority, no real head functioning, no king.

(b) Variableness

The life of Israel during that period was also full of uncertainty and variableness. One day things may be going fairly well, and you may be happy because something is happening. A Deborah, Othniel or Samson may be helping out just now, and things may seem to be going a bit better. But it does not last long, and the 'up' becomes a 'down', and that repeats itself. Good times, bad times; happy times, down times; you never know whether you are going to be up or down from one day to another, the spiritual life is all full of uncertainty. We meet a lot of people like that: on top one day and as low as they can be next time you meet them. You never know how you are going to find them. I was in a lift in a store the other day and I said to the attendant, 'Well, I suppose life is just full of ups and downs.' He said, 'Yes, more downs than ups!' I said, 'You make sure the last one is up, not down.' It is a kind of escalator life for many Christians, up and down. It was so for Israel in the days of the Judges. There was no control, no authority, no king, and therefore no certainty and no assurance as to what things were going to be like at any given time.

(c) Unrest

That, of course, brought about a state of great unrest. You read the book of Judges, and the whole atmosphere is that of unrest and anxiety. When a Gideon is challenged by the Lord with the word, "The Lord is with thee", the almost querulous answer is, "If the Lord is with us, why then is all this

befallen us?” (Judges 6:12-13). All is anxiety and unrest. That is not an exaggerated picture of many situations in the lives of Christians. It is a terrible thing to say, but it is true. And in the work of the Lord in many directions it is like that; and really it is all a negative state. There is nothing positive about it at all, and a negative state always opens the door to all sorts of disruptive forces and elements. Israel was in a negative state, and so a breach was made upon them from all directions. One people after another broke in and pillaged and carried off their goods, and kept them in that state of weakness, defeat, anxiety and disorder. A negative state is like that, and whether the material that I use to get at the point just seems to fit you or not, I do raise this question immediately as to whether yours is a negative or a positive state. There are many Christians who are negative, and they are marked by a big question. If you want to know why — well, there is no king, that is all. The need is for a master hand upon the life to take its reins, to govern it and hold it completely in sway. That is a phase of Israel’s life which is a very tragic phase, especially as it comes after the book of Joshua. But we will not stay with that.

“A king like all the nations”

There is another phase which follows and that phase which lasted quite a considerable time, was introduced by a request. “Make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5). I am not sure which was worse, no king, or a false king; but in the realm of spiritual history they would signify different features. Each condition carries its own peculiar and particular features. Here was introduced a period under a king, but a false king. Saul was the embodiment of natural ideas, the sum total of man’s own natural judgments, and when you have Saul, you only have the kingship of man’s ideas about government. “Like unto the nations”; and it would be interesting to have a look into that which they wanted to copy. Right through that land and all around them there were many kings. See how many kings there were in the book of Joshua, And what were they? They were kings who had a city in which they reigned, and then they brought as much of the surrounding country under their domination as they could, and every man was a king in his own right, with as much territory as he could master. They were all rivals one of another, and only when Israel came into the land did some of them enter into a confederacy to stand against Israel. Up to then, it was division, rivalry, personal ambition, and reigning in your own little realm and being somebody yourself. “Make us a king ... like unto the nations.” What a poor sort of thing to imitate. As other people do, as the world does it: we would like to constitute a kingdom according to this world, according to worldly

ideas, natural ideas, man's judgments about government. That is where the mind of man comes in to govern; and what kind of kingship is that? What do you expect when human judgments are in control when the natural man has dominance? Well, whether you expect it or not, you get exactly what they got.

A corrupt priesthood

How did it come about, what was the cause of it? Well, in type, the cause goes right to the root of this thing: The priesthood was corrupt. Eli, the High Priest, was corrupt; his sons were corrupt. Samuel too, that great man, that grand man, made an awful blunder, which led to this. He made Eli's sons priests irrespective of their spiritual condition. He allowed office without spiritual fitness for it, and when the priesthood becomes corrupt, the foundations are destroyed. The priesthood has to do with the cross, the altar, and it is there at the altar that the natural man is supposed to be put on one side. The cross of our Lord Jesus leaves no room for man's judgments in the things of God, for man's ideas about things, or for the natural man to come into control and dominate. No, all that goes in the cross. But if the cross has lost its place, you have opened the door to everything false, and although for a little time it seems to have been a wonderful move, it is only a matter of time before the rottenness of the thing is uncovered, as it was with Saul. Saul seems to be a great man, and you read wonderful things of him and of those who turned after him, whose hearts were knit to him, and things appear to be going very well. It usually is the case when you start to do something for God in all the strength and resource of this world's wisdom and of man's judgement. But under a fair exterior and apparent bigness, there was an infidel heart, there was something estranged from God. When it comes to the test of the altar — "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22) — it was at the altar that Saul fell. That is where his kingdom passed from him, that is where his heart was exposed, that is where the real nature of this thing was uncovered. At the altar, the cross, he was found to be false.

Disillusionment

That phase ended in a most awful tragedy — disillusionment is the word for Israel. Yes, many of the best people in Israel had gone after Saul. It was not until they began to be disillusioned to realise that a big mistake had been made somewhere — This thing is not going to last, this thing is going to get us into trouble — it was not until then that they began to secede to David,

and creep away to the cave of Adullam. And the secession went on. It was some of the best men who had been deceived by this great thing of man, this wonderful thing that man had made and brought in; but, alas, a false thing. There is a lot of history wrapped up in what I am saying. Disillusionment! And shall I say too much when I say there are a lot of the Lord's people slowly becoming disillusioned about the Christian system of things. "It is not standing up to it, it is not really delivering the goods, it is not getting through; there is something weak and hollow about this; we cannot track it down, but we have a horrible feeling that before long something is going to happen, and we are going to be left high and dry." A lot of people are feeling like that today about organised religion; there is a lot of disillusionment going on. Well, that has been everything to them. It has been their king; they have been bound up with that for so long. The thing is, Did it come in from heaven, or did it come in from earth? Did God really bring it in as His first best, or was it, like Saul, merely God's permissive thing because people would not have anything else?

Getting to the heart of that, this is what you find. There had been the theocracy in the days of Joshua; the Lord alone had been king. There was that day when there stood the man with the drawn sword. Joshua went forward, bowed to him, and said, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as prince of the host of the Lord am I now come" (Joshua 5:13-14). Joshua capitulated everything into the hands of that One, who took charge and became the unseen King from that moment; and it had been a wonderful time. But somehow Israel had come to a state where this was too abstract — This is too spiritual, and this spiritual life is such an uncertain life; you cannot see anything, you cannot get hold of anything; it eludes you all the time! Spirituality — yes, that is all right, but it is up in the air! Now, was it so, or was the trouble with the people? Well, the book of Joshua was the answer. It was quite all right when the people were all right, and there was never anything better than that the Lord should be King alone. It was not abstract at all, while the people were in a true position. While the people themselves were in the heavenlies, heavenly government was all right. When the people came down out of their spiritual, heavenly realm, then heavenly things became unreal. So they came to the place where they said, 'It is all very well this idea of God being King alone, but it is very unreal, impractical, nebulous; you can never have any great certainty about it.' That depends on 'where' you live, that is, how you view the spiritual things. If you live in close touch with the Lord, you know very well that His control is a very real thing. At any rate you know this, that if you get up against it, you are indeed up against it. If you have got out of the Lord's hands, you know all about it.

To lose the sense of the Lord being near is the most awful experience you can have, once you have had it.

Yes, it is very real until you really do move into another realm, then the thing is so irksome; to live on the Lord, to live by faith, to live the spiritual life, and you look for a king like the nations, somebody you can see and hear and handle. It was a loss of spiritual position which brought about the irksomeness of a spiritual life. That is the heart of it. So, losing their heavenly position, they make something after their own image, and in the end the awful disillusionment comes and the tragedy. They had chosen a false thing. There is a lot bound up with that which we will not stay to mention. That tragedy does not stand alone, it so often carries away some of the best — O Jonathan!

God's King on His holy hill

(a) Unity

But we have to close. There was the third phase of Israel's history. "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" — God having His king in his place. Type, David; result: coordination, unity, oneness. All this dividedness, divisiveness, insularity, all gone. "Thine are we, David" (1 Chron. 12:18). All Israel came with one heart to make David king. They found their oneness in a Head. Their oneness was realised in one central person; the only place where oneness is found. You cannot get any real oneness until you get there, until you come not only to the Lord Jesus, but to the Lord Jesus where He is in the heavenlies. So many people have made the Lord Jesus an earthly Lord Jesus, and so you have this 'church' and that 'church' which belongs to some nation or some denomination. It is the Christ of the earthlies, and so you have disunion and division. Oh, while it is never our thought or intention to say to any one person, You must come out of your church, your denomination, your mission, or anything that you are in; we do say this, that unless you transcend all such things, and are bigger and greater and higher than all, you will never know the absolute oneness of Christ; and not to know that is to fail in the other things that I am going to mention in a moment. Oh yes, we have to be *super*-national, *super*-denominational, *super*-mission, *super*-everything; we have to be in ascendancy, to be on mount Zion, united with Christ in heaven. All other things must be very small in comparison with that. When David came up and was made king up there, Israel found its oneness, they found their unity; and what a mighty thing it became.

That is the secret of what happened as recorded in the book of the Acts. They were one, all of one accord. It was a marvellous oneness. What a testimony and what an influence, power and impact! But the foundation of that oneness is this: “God gave Him (the Lord Jesus) to be head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22). So it is that Paul appeals to that: “hold fast the Head” (Col. 2:19). That is where we find our oneness, our unity; not by agreeing to anything down here, but by holding Him fast. When the Lord’s King is really in His place, it is the solution to many of these problems of disruption, division, and so on. I am quite sure that whether this is a matter between individual believers or between all the bodies of believers on the earth, the principle is the same. If you will only get down before the Lord and let Him be Lord in the situation, you have the basis for clearing it up. Let two disagreeing children of God but get together and say, ‘Lord, this is not for Your glory, the situation dishonours You and destroys testimony, it is earthly. Lord, You must have the place of honour and glory in this situation.’ Then the Lord can do something, and you have the ground of a mighty victory. That is the only way in which it is really possible to clear up any kind of difference. Oh, crown Jesus King, not in word, not in language, not in hymns, but truly, and what a lot of division will be got rid of!

(b) Power

Well, out of that unity and oneness in His absolute Kingship, there will come power. We have said before that, right to this time when all Israel with one heart came to make David king, even from the days of entering the land under Joshua, there still remained peoples and nations in the land which they did not and could not cast out. They remained, and, what is more, as time went on, fresh ones came and set up their place in the land. They were there, and they were mighty people. The Canaanites were a mighty people. Apart from the Japanese and Chinese languages, every other language in this world, takes its script from the Canaanites. They were a mighty people, a great civilisation. While so highly developed, they were deeply debased. It is extraordinary how those two things have gone together. Marvellous heights of civilisation, education, culture, and awful depths of iniquity in the same people. That is why they had to be exterminated. They stood their ground, and there were others who held on through all the days of Joshua and the Judges, until David came; and when he came to Zion, not one of those powers remained unsubjected. Oh, Paul’s words concerning the Lord Jesus are wonderfully illustrated by David’s reign — “Whereby He is able ... to subject all things unto Himself” (Phil. 3:21). David did it. The kingdom had never been so far-reaching and absolute in dominion as it was when

David came to the throne. Power, yes; and David's, after all, is only a mere illustration, spread over a few hundred miles; but Christ's kingdom, oh, how vast, how absolute; far above all rule and authority and dominion and name (Eph. 1:21).

Power; but you have got to come up to the place, spiritually speaking, where He is to know it. The church will not know the power of Christ's kingdom while it remains an earthly church. Spiritually, it must know its place now.

(c) Fulness

And, finally, fulness. Not only extensive, but how full it was. You see, a new age came in with David and Solomon. You have heard of the different ages; you have heard of the Bronze Age and the Stone Age. You know that with David and Solomon there came in the Iron Age. They captured the secrets of iron which had been in the hands of those enemies whom they had never been able to subdue. The secrets of iron — that is something for you to study. It became a tremendous factor in building that kingdom; all the things you can make of iron. Imagine if you had to be without iron in any form, where would you begin? It came in with David and Solomon; that is, into Israel. I mean that it was there in the hands of the other forces, but they had kept it. It was one of their secrets; and they had many other secrets which are not our subject just now. So a new age came in, an age of fulness, and you read of Solomon's glory as the outcome of David's dominion; how full! Wealth, riches, abundance, almost redundance, because "I have set my king".

This is not just a beautiful story, this is true. Some of you know that spiritual fulness has become very much more your experience since you came under the absolute Lordship of Christ, and you are learning, as we are all learning more and more, that the Lordship of Christ, the Kingship of Christ, is not just a great idea. It is a thing which presses all the time. It gets right down into our very being. It touches our ways of doing things, our thoughts about things, our traditions, our inheritance, our upbringing, our associations; and before we are finished with this absolute Lordship of Christ, it will have touched everything in our natural and religious life, and an issue will be raised — is the Lord going to be Lord here? What is it you are putting up as the governing factor? I was brought up to believe this, and not that. Are you putting that up against further revelation from the Lord as to what He may want? Oh, yes; but — And that 'Oh, yes; but' — is really another 'lord' governing. The Lordship of Christ is such an utter thing that we shall find nothing that is not challenged by it. It is something that is both to increase and endure. "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his

dominion is from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:3), and in all realms. But that must be interpreted spiritually as well. It gets down to everything. Can the Lord do as He wants and likes with us, or have we got the ‘Yes, but’. As a new situation arises, something different from what has been, is your reaction, ‘Oh, but the Lord led me into that!’ The Lord may have meant that to lead to something else. You must have no, ‘Yes, but’ about anything. Our attitude must be: ‘I am ready for the Lord to do what He wants, I have no other idea, the Lord shall have His complete way: whatever the past has held, I am quite open to the Lord; I trust Him to safeguard and see that I make no mistake, but I am open to Him!’ That is the only way, with a perfect heart, to make David king — not a divided heart, or a little part of the heart. There must be no reserves but a perfect heart to make David king. When He is Lord all come in there: rest, certainty, coordination, power and fulness.

Concluded.

THE THRONE AND THE ALTAR

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-11.

It is helpful to take account of the leading words of any particular passage of Scripture, and you may know that in the Hebrew Scriptures the leading words of a passage are always emphatic and clearly discernible. They occupy a place of special emphasis. And in this passage, if the text were printed in the Hebrew form, that is, translated according to the Hebrew emphasis, various words would be thrown up in clear relief, and they would be, here in Isaiah 6, the following words: in verse 1, the word “throne”; in the same verse, the word “temple”; in verse 5, the word “woe”; in verse 6 “altar”; in verse 9, “Go”; and in verse 11, “how long”.

So you see you have some six leading words in this passage, and those words give you very largely the key to its message. What is clearly represented by this chapter is that the whole question is that of *holiness*. Everything else is included in that. It is not first of all, as has so often been stressed, a message about service. Service is there, but it is not the main thing. It is not worship primarily. The passage has been very often used, and is constantly used, as something for public worship, to introduce the element of atmosphere of worship. Well, worship is here, but that is not the primary thing; it is again conditional and contingent. There are three things here in this portion which could be dealt with as things in themselves, but everything is included in one thing. The whole question is that of *holiness*.

Holiness

It relates to Israel’s condition to begin with. As you see, the chapter brings that in, and the chapter itself is set within that realm, with regard to Israel and then with regard to the nations beyond. It is a question of holiness. The Lord, in taking account of things, in raising up this prophet, does so because of an unholy state, which has made necessary the determination to judge, and has brought for a time into view the closing of those mercies of God, and for a period the casting off of His people, though He will not cast off for ever. Captivity is in view, judgement is in view, and it is all a matter of holiness. The terrible issue of this chapter, as you notice, is that what the

people have been doing themselves spiritually, is now fixed by the Lord. They have been closing their eyes; now the Lord fixes that state. They have been closing their ears; the Lord takes action. They have been hardening their hearts; the Lord hardens. They have been living for themselves; the Lord hands them over to themselves. So the judgement fixed is by reason of an unholy state, and everything has to do with holiness. That so far as Israel is concerned.

Then so far as the prophet is concerned. First of all there is his call. He is brought in, and his call carries with it the necessity for separation. You notice that immediately the question of holiness is raised the prophet becomes conscious of being involved in the whole state: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." He is conscious, as he was never conscious before, of his being involved in a state utterly opposed to God, and his call necessitates complete separation from that state of unholiness. And then his commission necessitates his cleansing. Notice, he is going to be the mouthpiece of the Lord in judgement. He is going, in effect, to fix the state of this people from the divine side. He is saying: 'You have closed your eyes, then you shall not see even if you want to. You have closed your ears, then you shall not hear, even if you want to hear. You have hardened your heart, then you will not be able to turn your heart to the Lord, even when you want to. You have lived for yourselves; very well, the Lord hands you over, and the Lord will not accept you, even when you turn to Him.' Now, nobody can take action of that kind and at the same time be involved in the condition. You and I, if we are going to preach, to testify, must be altogether outside of the condition against which we are testifying, or else we are testifying against ourselves. So that this man, in order to fulfil his commission, must be separated and cleansed from the condition against which he is to testify, and he must become involved in the judgements which he is to declare. So that holiness governs everything here. It is the thing which governs the judgement of God, it is the question of holiness that produces judgement. It is the thing which governs the call of God. It is the thing which governs the commission of God. Holiness is basic, and the background to everything in the divine activities. God's judgement against sinners and His methods with His servants; everything is directed by holiness.

The throne based on holiness

Then there is this other thing. The throne, which is the throne of infinite holiness, and the majesty of that throne, is based upon holiness. The very majesty of the Lord is the majesty of His holiness. He is in that position as

here represented, because of holiness. We must remember that in passages like this in Isaiah and elsewhere the throne is not just the throne of Infinite, Almighty and Eternal God. That is, that it is not the throne of the Almighty One alone. It is that, but that is not the feature of the throne in this portion and in others. It is the throne of holiness, but that holiness is by reason of something having been done. It is comparable with Philippians 2:9: "Wherefore God highly exalted Him, and gave Him the Name which is above every name". It is comparable with Hebrews 2:9: "We see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour ..." (AV), because of the suffering of death. Something has been done in relation to sin, which establishes that throne in holiness, and gives to that throne a right, the right, to judge sin. It is not just the judgement of men as creatures, under the hand of an Almighty God. It is the judgement of a sinful state under a holy state. There is all the difference between a potentate upon his throne, governing in sheer majesty because of his superior position, and One who, because of something which has been done in relation to sin, being established in holiness, is dealing with an unholy state. It is very important to see that.

Redemption by the work of the cross

This very law can be seen in two chapters in the book of the Revelation. First of all you have a song in heaven: "Worthy art thou, our Lord, ... for thou didst create all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). Then the next chapter brings in a new scene, and the sealed book is presented. And this is not the book of grace; this is the sealed book of judgment. The apostle says that he looked to see who would unlock the book, open the seals, but there was no one found who could unlock those seals and open that book of judgment, and he says; "And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book ... and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book ... and I saw ... a Lamb" (Rev. 5:4-6).

And then another song is heard immediately: "Worthy art thou ... to open the seals thereof, for thou ... didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9). You see the first "Worthy art thou" is on the basis of creation, but that was not a sufficient worthiness to unlock the seals of judgment, because judgment is not merely upon the basis of creation. Judgment is upon the basis of redemption. Our attitude is not towards the Creator, but towards the Redeemer; not towards God in His creative power, but towards God in His redemptive work.

Judgment is upon that. We shall never be judged by God simply because we did not recognize Him as Creator. The judgment will be because men did not recognize His redemption. Therefore the Lamb comes in with a superior worthiness to creation because of redemption.

Now that is what is here, it is holiness that governs. The throne comes in as the throne of holiness. But note, in relation to this unholiness in which the prophet is involved, from which he has to be separated in order to be God's instrument, the throne does not, even in its holiness, directly operate. It operates through the altar. There is the throne; there is the altar. The throne does not directly deal with him; the throne comes to him through the altar. The throne always works through the cross. That infinite holiness can only be made good in us through the cross, the blood of His cross. There is no gift of holiness, there is no cleansing, there is no deliverance, there is no separation, there is no commission, only on the ground of the making active and experimental in our own hearts the work of His cross. The throne, in all its wonderful power, moves by way of the altar. The throne brings in a terrible consciousness of conviction of unholiness, and brings from the heart a cry, but the throne cannot in that direct way deliver us. It can only condemn us, make us aware that there is a holiness before which we cannot stand. How shall we live before such a throne? How can we be delivered from death in the presence of that infinite holiness and the impact of that holiness upon our sinful state? By being led to the altar, by being brought to the precious blood, and when the cry is wrung from the heart concerning an unholy state, which carries with it a cry to be delivered from it, "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin forgiven" (Isa. 6:6,7). Then everything else follows, the way is open for all else in the way of commission and authority.

"Unclean lips"

The point is, when all has been said, that everything hangs upon the holiness which is produced by a living application of the cross to our hearts in the power of that throne; the power of that holiness operating through the cross of the Lord Jesus in our hearts. Whatever may be the state, whether it be general or particular — in the case of Isaiah it seems that he focused the whole question upon what is implied by "unclean lips". I do not think it is difficult to trace what he meant by that. He did not mean that he and his people were guilty of language which was not right. What is meant in the

Scriptures by “unclean lips” is that things were said with the lips which were not true in the heart. Profession of allegiance to God, faithfulness to God, yet they said, “Wherein have we robbed?” (Mal. 3:8). They were all the time professing to be the Lord’s and yet contradicting in their hearts. Their lips were unclean by reason of a life which contradicted the thing. It was a lie. What they were saying was not the truth in their own hearts.

That was Israel’s state. It was not that they were outwardly, voluntarily, manifestly blaspheming the Lord, declaring that they would have nothing to do with Him, but they were keeping up the old system and professing to be what they were not; that is, they were uttering a lie, and their lips were defiled.

In may be specific in our case. Lips may in that general sense be defiled, unclean. They may be in a more specific sense unclean. We can never fulfil a ministry of holiness, we can never bring home to others their sin, we can never be a voice of judgment against wrong if in either general or specific ways our lips are unclean. Lips may be unclean by empty talk, gossip, criticism. This is usually unintentional — for who would intentionally injure the Lord’s interests — but so often we just let ourselves talk. And in the end there is mischief, there is a seed sown unintentionally that bears a crop.

It may be lips, it may be other things, but with the Lord it is all a question of holiness. It is not our thought to deal with specific sins, but it is our leading just to put our finger upon this matter of holiness, which is basic to everything. Holiness has to work out in every part. We can be unclean by what we allow ourselves to listen to. Sometimes it would be the maintaining of holiness before the Lord for us to say, ‘Now I do not want to hear that, that is not good, that is not glorifying to the Lord.’ For we are not going to get anywhere by that, it is only death and injury along that line.

It may be eyes. Sometimes the question of holiness is bound up with our refusing to take account of some things. There are many things that in responsibility we have to take account of, but there are times when we could afford to shut our minds to some things because they are only going to lead to an unholy state. It is all a question of holiness, because holiness is life. We read in Leviticus 16: “... that he die not”. All relates to Aaron going into the most holy place and not dying before the presence of infinite holiness, having on the garments of holiness, and taking the precious blood. All the garments are for every part of the man, that his whole flesh be covered up, “that he die not”, when he comes into the presence of the Lord. The Lord says, in a full and inclusive way, that there must be life in everything, in all work, in all service, in all relationships, and it is a question of holiness. If there is talk that is not holy then there is death. If there is listening that is not holy

then there is death. If there is taking account in an unholy way, then there is death. Holiness is life; unholiness is always spiritual death. The altar works by reason of the throne, the throne works through the altar.

The altar

Now one other word, it is a very blessed thing to realize what these two things do say, the throne and the altar. You have two pictures. That altar is the Lord Jesus, that blood is His blood, that sacrifice is His sacrifice, that live coal is the Holy Spirit working in relation to the work of the Lord Jesus in His cross. And yet at the same time that throne is just as much the Lord Jesus as that cross, that altar, that sacrifice. These are both the Lord Jesus, the two things in Leviticus 16 making one thing. The ram for Azazel — the wilderness, the unknown land — bearing sin, and the ram offered to God and accepted, are really one sacrifice in two halves. One bearing sin and carrying sin away out of God's sight, out of God's remembrance, into an unknown land. At the same time the other half, the other side of the offering coming into God's presence, being accepted, going right through. Here we have the two aspects of Christ. One is the altar, the cross: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?", forsaking sin. The other side is being accepted and in the throne. But the fact that He is in the throne, that you see Christ there is the great declaration of the fact that that cross was absolutely successful and triumphant. It means that all that the cross represented is perfect and complete in its result. He occupies the throne by reason of the once and for all perfection of the work of His cross, and He never sets that aside. In His throne He says, 'I witness to that all the time, to the perfection of that.' Fellowship with the throne means that we stand absolutely in the complete and perfect work of His cross. Israel was losing fellowship with the throne because all that the altar represented had not become real in their experience.

You see what the altar does. It declares to us that the thing has been done fully, finally, perfectly, and that there can be fellowship with the throne. It works both ways. Not only does the throne work through the altar to us, but we have perfect fellowship with the throne because of the altar. We are today able to stand in the presence of infinite holiness because we by faith have recognized the perfection of the work of Christ's cross, where there is no fear, and yet we must also recognize that that cross and that precious blood demand that at every point unholiness is put away.