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Golden
Candlestick*

**THE RECOVERY UNTO
ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PURPOSE
OF THE AGES**

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Volume 209

THE MESSAGE OF NEHEMIAH

'The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word' (from the hymn, 'We limit not the Truth of God' by George Rawson, ed.).

Perhaps that note is especially required when I tell you that the Lord has led me back at this time to the Book of Nehemiah. At the moment there is no particular part of the book that I am going to underline. But it is the message that this whole book has for us; and as I believe, a message very much needed and very suited to the time in which we live.

Those of you who are familiar with the book and with the details related to it, if I say a little at the outset as to the setting of this book, for the sake of refreshing all minds, and helping those who may not be so familiar with it. You may, or you may not, know that although there are many books bound together in the Old Testament, following this book, this is the last recorded piece of history in the life of Israel. That does not mean that it is the last part of Israel's life, but as a matter of Jewish history, this is the last record. There were prophecies after this, to which we may refer as we go on. But again, this book of Nehemiah stands as the final piece of historical record in the Old Testament.

In the Hebrew Bible, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one book; later they were divided into what the Hebrews called 'The Two Books of Ezra'; and then some centuries later, they were divided, as we have them now, under the two names, Ezra and Nehemiah. This book has its setting, in that return from captivity of a remnant of Israel, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah, that after seventy years, a remnant would return, and this book has to do with that returned remnant.

Under the inspired and inspiring ministry of Zechariah and Haggai, whose prophecies we must read in connection with this book, the temple was rebuilt. A beginning was made, then a period of some twenty-one years of arrest, delay and suspension, and then the resumption of the work. Then another period of delay and arrest for sixty years, bringing us to the time of the reformation under Ezra. On again, and another interval of thirteen

years, bringing us to the time of Nehemiah and Ezra in co-operation for the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and, as this book has to do with particularly, the rebuilding of the wall. But it was both Nehemiah and Ezra that co-operated even in this final aspect of recovery.

But that was not the end of the periods of arrest. There is somewhere a twelve years, of which we have no recorded details and the final reforms of Nehemiah recorded at the end of this book after the wall was completed, the settling in the cities of the land, and other things.

That is very briefly and very imperfectly, the setting of the book, and if I said no more, there is enough in that to let us see that the book has a message that bears upon the Christian centuries, and even upon the one in which we are now living. I think that will become more apparent as we proceed. This book does end in itself, but it ends with nothing brought to perfection and completion. Very much like the book of the Acts, just when you are wanting to know the next thing, how it worked out, it finishes, and leaves you there for a long time. That I think, also is significant. The book of the Acts was not finished, the story was not completed, because it has taken 2,000 years to add to it, and bring it nearer to completion. And this book was not completed, because nothing in the old dispensation could be complete, until Christ came, who is the completion of everything.

You have to remember that it was between fifty and a hundred years after Nehemiah's work and ministry, that the prophet Malachi prophesied, in which period, as you know from his prophecies, things had very seriously deteriorated. And that last book of the Bible is a very painful and tragic book showing again how prone God's people are to lose, to deteriorate, to depart from that which the Lord has so wonderfully sought to recover and establish.

Now this book of Nehemiah has three broad sections: the first has to do with the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. The second section has to do with the recovery of the word of God, and its establishment as the governing thing in the life of God's people. And the third part has to do with the localities, the settling of the people in the cities of the land. If we could recognise the spiritual significance of those three things, we certainly are not living back in the Old Testament when we read this book. We are not reading past history; we are right in the presence of the immediate activity of God. The rebuilding of that which is symbolized by the wall; the re-establishment of the authority of the Word of God in the life of His people; and the whole matter of His purpose in representation in local companies. There is a lot here that is very enlightening and instructive in those matters as they are so up to date.

But let us again make a survey. I have said the book has three main

sections, but there are five other things to be noted about this book as it embraces the history of God's people.

Firstly, a people called out of the nations to be a people for His Name. One has only to use that phrase, and we are in the New Testament immediately, and recognize the purpose of God in this dispensation to take out of the nations a people for His Name. This book embraces the history of such a people.

Secondly, it embraces that history of their powerful influence among the nations; the great spiritual influence that this people had among the nations when they were in right relationship with God. There is no mistaking that; you have only got to begin in the book of Joshua to see how, as constituted God's people in the land, immediately all three nations round about began to take account of them. They realised that they were a people to be reckoned with, and a people of whom they had great fear because they had such an influence. And so it was, from time to time, when their relationship with God was right, they were a people who could not be ignored among the nations. That is something to take a note of, because the loss of that influence is something that has to be looked at for the discovery of its cause or causes. It is not so now in the case of the Lord's people in this world; they are not something of which the world is afraid; they are not something that is being taken account of as representing a menace to the kingdom of darkness. Spiritual influence of the people of God in the world and in the nations is not something that is a tremendous challenge no one can ignore, as it was from time to time with Israel, and as it was at the beginning of the Christian era. It was like that; what a spiritual influence; what a telling force; what an upset to the world! Indeed, it was true, a people "that turned the world upside down" were there. This book embraces the history of that tremendous spiritual influence that they had once had, which they had lost, and which now God was seeking to recover.

Why, in the third place, was the influence lost? Because of the loss of spirituality of the people themselves. Their pure spiritual life and nature had given place, as we shall see as we go on, to other things — the spirit of the world.

Then, in the fourth place, the book embraces that long period of captivity, impotence, and deep, acute, poignant discipline, all with a view to recover what was lost.

And finally, for the moment, the return of a remnant, disciplined, chastened, to embody that which God ever intended to be the testimony of His people in this world. Those are the five things making up the history covered by this book.

Having said that about the book, let us still take a wider view. And here is what has come to me with tremendous force, and I feel if it should register itself upon you, it would have a very great effect. This book that goes under this name, Nehemiah, is in itself, a microcosm of the conflict of all the ages — think about that! When we reach the end of this book, which, as we have said, is the last fragment of historical record in the Old Testament, we are in the presence of an achievement intended by God Himself. Something has been *done* which God intended to be done, and therefore, something to which God committed Himself in sovereign purpose and sovereign power. That, to me, is the heart of the message of this book.

God's sovereign purpose and power

With the conclusion of this book, we find ourselves standing right in the presence of a tremendous achievement. Something has been done, the doing of which demanded the absolute sovereignty of God in purpose and in power, so that this achievement represents something to which God committed Himself, because He willed it, because He determined to have it. That is a comprehensive statement as to the whole conflict of the ages. At last, it may be, in the final end of all ends, that we shall stand in something like that; we shall stand in an achievement which God intended from eternity, to which He committed Himself, and which will be the monument to His sovereign power and His sovereign purpose. This book is a microcosm of this conflict of the ages, a representation of the much larger purpose and work of God through all time. And that is the reason why here we have such a wonderful, clear-cut movement from God's side, by His own initiative, in His own sovereignty, committing Himself to it. And who can read this book without seeing that whatever occupies the forefront of the stage, it is God behind this; it is God who is in this. The reason why in what is after all only a historic incident, a small fragment of divine history in representation, is not because it is something in itself, not because this began and ends with this remnant, but because this movement, this remnant, embodied or contained the principle and the attributes of that much larger, greater, eternal purpose of God. You see, the Bible is like that. Again and again you see God very interested in something or someone and acting sovereignly in relation to that thing or purpose, committing Himself, and letting it be known that He is bound up with that, or with them. Is it because God is so interested in the incidents of history in persons or things or places on this earth? No, it is not that at all. If you look deeper, you will see that those persons, or those things, or those places are the embodiment of spiritual and eternal principles. They are not just things

in themselves, beginning and ending with themselves but they represent what is of God which is eternal in His methods, in His laws, His principles. So this book of Nehemiah, shows clearly, and has all the evidences of God being involved, God committing Himself, and God acting in sovereignty, so wonderfully. May I say in parenthesis that the very movement of the infinite sovereignty of God's wisdom and power is not always in some demonstration, rending the heavens; it is in just ruling and overruling, and making things happen and work together. It all looks very simple, nevertheless, the thing would never have been but for God. The forces against it were far too great for the achievement, but for God, He is behind it all. Well, this thing embodies principles dear to God's heart, which are infinitely greater than the things of the persons. And those are the things that recur again and again in the movement of God through the ages.

He acts sovereignly; He commits Himself; He works, not because of the people of the moment, or even the method, but because there is something very dear to His heart in spiritual principle and in eternal law.

Let us see what constitutes that achievement, and it will not be difficult for us to make the transition from one realm of things to another. You have these two realms. On the one side you have the temporal, on the other side you have the spiritual; on the one side you have the earthly, over against that you have the heavenly; on the one side you have the historical, over against that you have the eternal; on the one side you have something that is quite local, on the other side you have that which is universal. And again, on the one side you have a limited representation; on the other side you have the divine fulness of reality. If you look at the things which constitute the achievement recorded in this book, it will not be difficult for you to make that transition, from the temporal, earthly, historical, local, limited, to the spiritual, heavenly, eternal, universal, and real. Then what constitutes this achievement?

God's dwelling place

We will break it up in this way: first of all, a place chosen by God, and appointed by Him for His dwelling. Here, Jerusalem was the local, earthly, temporal, limited representation of that far greater divine conception — a place for God's dwelling; a place where He chose to have His habitation. That is a far greater interpretation than any earthly Jerusalem. That goes right back behind everything, why God created this world, what His thought was: to fill the earth with His glory and with His character, to have a place chosen and appointed by Himself for His dwelling.

That is the first characteristic of this story and of the achievement. But it was ruined! There is a far bigger history than the history of Jerusalem in that word in relation to God's desire and purpose. It was ruined making it necessary for God to withdraw, unable to realise, for the time-being, that eternal intention to dwell with men. But recovered and rebuilt! If that is then its significance and import, if that is its larger meaning than its merely earthly and temporal, then we understand God acting in sovereignty, in power and wisdom, and committing Himself. A place for God suitable to Himself, where He may dwell with men. The City!

When God went into a pagan city to begin this movement of recovery, He found a man and appeared unto him as the God of Glory, and pulled him out of that city, and put into his heart another City. And that man, Abraham, looked for a City, whose Builder and Architect was God. He never realised it; he died looking for it. On through the Old Testament is the city, always in view. And yet, as an earthly thing, so disappointing, failing God. But the vision does not fade, and it is impressive that at the end of the Bible, in the last chapters of the Bible, the City is secured. "He carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, (made ready as a bride adorned for her husband, (Rev. 21:2)) having the glory of God: Her light was like unto a stone most precious ..." (Rev. 21:10,11). You have got the larger, the heavenly, the eternal, the spiritual interpretation of this book just in the word 'city'.

God's commitment

This 'wall' is the next thing, the boundary wall of the city, indicating a sphere to which God limits Himself in principle. That is, God will not commit Himself to anything and everything; God is particular. He will have things according to His own thought. The City is built and designed by God. It is something that answers to and corresponds to a divine thought. And the wall indicates that demarcation of what is of God; that limiting of things to a particular kind of spiritual thought; it is a boundary of God. It is only a figure or type in 'Nehemiah', or in the Old Testament, but it carries that spiritual principle. Here you will find that which is essentially according to the mind of God. It is marked off by that thought. That wall was shattered. It was like that to begin with in the 'garden'; God present, because everything corresponded to the mind of God, and He was able to say: it is very good! But it became broken down like the wall of Jerusalem! But God again moved to recover, restore, to rebuild. That is what this book is about; it is more than

a fragment of history in the Old Testament; it is a representation of a great spiritual conception out from the mind of God.

God's people

Thirdly, a people, scattered and alienated because of loss of divine character. We know from the prophets the condition of the people that led to their alienation, their being carried away into a foreign country, and their being scattered from the land. Loss of spiritual character, divine nature; a people away from God and God's essential thought. But a people in representation in the remnant, restored to their 'home' in God. Every one whom the Spirit of God recovers, spiritually, brings back to the Lord, knows quite well that they have come 'home'. A people at rest restored to their spiritual home. But a remnant saved, cleansed, and united under divinely appointed headship. What a lot there is in that — a people saved, gathered out of the nations, cleansed from their old sins, brought back into the place of fellowship with God, and united as a people under a divinely appointed headship. Well, you can carry that further, and you know that that is what the New Testament is all about. This book then embodies the eternal purpose, and the eternal future. And I started by saying it is a microcosm of this long-drawn-out battle of the ages for something wholly of God.

God's enemies

But there is one more thing: a people whose testimony and position represents the absolute impotence of all their enemies. That is no small thing. When the church reaches the end for which God is determined and has committed Himself, a church will embody this testimony; all the efforts of the ages on the part of the adverse powers have been proved impotent. They could not defeat God's end. Look at this book: you see the enemies to which we will refer later. There are many kinds all set upon the determined frustration and defeat of this object. But you reach the end of the book in an achievement which says: "No weapon that was formed against them has prospered; every tongue that rose in judgment against them, they have condemned!" (Isa. 54:17). They are the embodiment of the fact that when God determines something in a people, that people may be assailed from every angle and along every line, but in the end they are a testimony that the enemy is impotent; he cannot accomplish his ends.

Behind this recovery there is a long painful history which made the recovery necessary. Firstly, there is the history of a people's failure in faith

and confidence in God, proved and exhibited by their turning to the devices of men. If you look into Israel's history, that is just the trouble: again and again when they lost faith and confidence in God, allowed faith and confidence to wane, to weaken, or to depart; they turned at once to the devices of men, they went down into Egypt; they resorted to this and that and some other worldly means for their very survival. A tremendous amount of history in Old and New Testament bears that fact. That is why recovery became necessary, a recovery of faith and confidence in God that is altogether independent of this world and of men, and has its glowing testimony simply because God is its only resource and recourse — it is God!

Confidence in God

Have I said that we, in our day, are living in this book spiritually? There is no doubt about that; we do not want to embark upon criticism, censoriousness, and that kind of thing, but it is clear that this is the tragedy of the church through its centuries and today, that there are alternatives to God. That would not be admitted or put like that, but the church is looking to the world, to men, to devices, all sorts of things, for its survival, because it has lost that essential relationship with God of faith and confidence. If we look at the beginning of the New Testament, at that book of beginnings of this dispensation, what is called the 'Acts', were men in any way calling upon the world, looking to the world, dependent upon the world? Were they looking to themselves, the devices of men, the institutions of men, the organizations of men? That was the day of their mighty influence in the world, but the Glorified Christ was their one and only recourse at all times, in all matters, and that accounted for their power. Loss of confidence in God is always proved by what you turn to, your second course. Israel's history was failure in faith and confidence, leaning to men, resulting in dislocation, disruption, division, schism of every kind, a disrupted, disintegrated people; broken into a thousand fragments, no cohesion, no unity, no oneness. There was therefore no single testimony or impact upon their surroundings. That always follows the loss of a faith position with God.

The joy of the Lord

The nature of their condition when it came to be like that was always defilement and corruption, that is, a breaking down of the barriers between that which is of God and what is of the world, the world seeping in, the world touching holy things with its defiled hands: and, sadly, the people of God

reaching out a hand to the hand of the world and defiling their own hand. Defilement, corruption, and the general result — a false position, even a false life, which is always evidenced by frustration, disappointment, what the Bible calls ‘vanity’. That is, labour, expenditure, tremendous activities, but never getting there — ‘the money put into bags with holes’ — is that not Haggai? The bringing home of the fruit of the labour, and finding what seemed to be something turns out to be nothing. This leads to frustration and vanity, not getting through to anything. Life is spent, poured out, tremendous efforts are made, and then, what have you got? Malachi and Haggai give us the answer: Nothing! It is not commensurate with all our effort! So it was with Israel; that is a pathetic position; disappointment with life and life’s work, and a hollowness of heart. It is not worth it. And God shows in this book how to reverse that. And this book is a wonderful setting forth of the reverse of that. Now the people have a mind to work; now the people are giving themselves tremendously, but to what purpose! I have said, when you reach the end of this book, and you are in the presence of an achievement, not a frustration or a disappointment, an end is reached and an answer is given. It is a positive note upon which you end so far as this representation of things is concerned. ‘So the wall was finished!’

And I repeat, the book is a revelation to our hearts of how defeat, frustration, disappointment, vanity and vexation of spirit can be turned into a mighty achievement, with the ‘joy of the Lord’ as your strength. You know that is the great word: ‘The joy of the Lord is your strength.’ If I understand the meaning of that, it just means: God’s satisfaction is your satisfaction; if God is satisfied, every heart in fellowship with God will be satisfied.

Well, all this demanded a new activity of God, and the securing of a people in which that new activity could be shown forth and wrought out. That is what is here: God moving to have a people for recovery. Does that belong only to the book of Nehemiah? I believe still that God will commit Himself and act sovereignly when He finds a people disciplined, chastened, maybe broken, as far as all self-interest and self-strength are concerned, a people who, like the remnant, are sick of exile and all that it represented, and whose heart is back towards the place of the Lord. When the Lord finds a people who have no other counter or dividing interest, than that He should have that which satisfies His own heart, He will commit Himself. They will have their difficulties, their many adversaries and sufferings, but they will embody the fact that no enemy is sufficient, and no number of enemies are sufficient to defeat God, to frustrate God or to cheat God of His end. Maybe you and I are called to be a little part of such a movement of God in our day. Does your heart respond to that?

Remember what I have said: this book represents an end time, and an end time activity of God. We are in that time, even more than Nehemiah was — *the* end time of all end times, and this is what God would do at such a time. I pray that He may open your spiritual eyes, and either give or restore that vision which integrates His people, and makes us, like these people, devoted and united for God.

THE SPIRIT OF LEADERSHIP

We continue with the message of the book of Nehemiah, which I think we all agree, is a message for our own time. We have seen that the inclusive pervading thing in this book is the recovery of that for which the Lord has Himself been most concerned all through the ages, but which, from time to time, has been lost, or shall we say, suspended, sometimes almost eclipsed as though it had disappeared, and then, by His own initiative and sovereign action, has been brought back again. That is the all-pervading message of this book — recovery of that which is supremely in the heart of God.

Now we are going to note another thing which runs right through the book, which represents God's way of recovery. And that is 'the spirit of leadership'. Anyone who knows anything about this book will immediately recognize that that is something which pervades, runs right through, and accounts for everything in the realisation of that desire of God — the spirit of leadership. I particularly emphasize the *spirit* of leadership, for, undoubtedly, there is an atmosphere, a power, a dynamic, a force about this book. It is a tremendously energetic book. And all that constitutes this *spirit* of leadership.

Corporate leadership

The leadership is not just the leadership of an individual; it is something which, though it may come through an individual, reaches others. First it takes hold of those called 'the princes', or the 'elders', what we would call the 'co-workers', and then it still spreads and takes hold of the people. And so the spirit of leadership is expressed individually, and then in a group, and then in the whole remnant. It is something which is not just bound up with any one person, but which becomes, in its full expression, a corporate thing. For all Israel there is a company, a body, that inspires, or sets the pace, or represents the mind of God, in the first place. We will say that at the outset, although we will have more to say about it as we proceed. But it is about this matter of spiritual leadership that I am burdened for the moment. I anticipate that there

are those who would never regard themselves as leaders, who would feel therefore that any word about leadership has nothing to do with them. Now, I want you to understand that leadership is as much a corporate matter as it is an individual or personal matter. On the other hand, I can imagine that that word ‘leadership’ will find a very real soul reaction from some directions. It is very necessary therefore, to get away from the merely personal idea in leadership, and recognize that this is essentially a spiritual matter.

True leadership in the things of God is not official, professional, or personal as such; it is essentially spiritual. That could be put in another way, but that is the burden of the message: that, given real spirituality, leadership follows without any thought about it.

A spirit of real concern

Now this book, as you see from the very first chapter, is a very autobiographical book; that is, Nehemiah says a great deal about himself, always in a good way, never in a bad or wrong way. The personal pronoun occurs many times in the first chapter, and if you read it, and note how he speaks of himself, you immediately catch the significance and meaning of spiritual leadership. “It came to pass ... as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, that were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem ...” — *I asked them*. It is a simple way of expressing himself, but that contains a spirit of *real concern*. ‘*I asked them*’. “It came to pass, when *I heard* these words, that *I sat down* and wept, and mourned certain days; and *I fasted* and prayed before the God of heaven, and said, *I beseech thee, O Lord ...*”. Do you get the note? Now, that is the spirit that runs through this whole book, and in that you have the essence of spiritual leadership.

There is one thing that I would have you note, because it is vital to this consideration. Nehemiah is one of many names in this book. He may be the chief one, but there are many names in this book — chapter 10 is completely given over to a great list of names. Nehemiah, like the many other names mentioned in the book, would never have been known in this world, and to us, but for his heart relationship to the Lord’s interests. He says: I enquired, I wanted to know, I sought to get knowledge of the situation among the Lord people; and when I heard, I wept, I mourned, I fasted. That is no formal kind of interest in religious work and things; that is a heart relationship. There is no doubt about it, this man’s heart was heavily burdened over the state of things in his time. He sought nothing for himself; he was not just looking

for an opportunity to do something, something big; it was out of this *heart* condition, and this heart relation to the Lord, that everything came where Nehemiah was concerned. And I repeat that we should never have known anything about Nehemiah, nor of these people, but for this spirit that was found in them. Nehemiah was not a priest; he was not a prophet; he was not a king. Somehow or other he had been put into an honourable position in a pagan court, as cupbearer to a pagan ruler, quite a responsible position. But officially in Israel, he was nothing as far as we know; whatever he was, we are not told. He was a man, and a man with burden, and that was God's opportunity.

A heart for God

Who were all these people mentioned in chapter 10? Many of them are difficult names. Well, we never heard of them before and we never hear of them again. But they are in the Bible, they are on the page of Holy Writ, they literally fulfil the Word: "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." God has written them; their names abide century after century, hundreds of years; as long as the Word of the Lord remains, their names are there. This was not because any of them, Nehemiah included, was anything at all, but because they had a heart for God, and a heart for what God wanted most of all. They, in their heart of hearts, which meant, with everything that they had, were linked with God's purpose on this earth, in this world, in their time. They were the prisoners of the purpose of God, for its realisation. And, believe me, you may be a nobody in this world, among men, but if that should be true of you or of me, there is an eternal significance given to every such one and a significance that altogether outstrips any natural, human importance. God sees to that. You may never make a great name, even in the things of God, but there is a value attached to you which heaven gives, which God gives, which is of eternal account, if like Nehemiah, and these others, you in your heart are committed so utterly to the thing that God wants in your lifetime, in your day and generation. From 'nothing' and 'nobody' moving into eternal accountability before heaven and before God. That is a thing to be taken account of, but again, it is a matter of your spiritual life, and the effect of your spiritual life as being something positive. As I said to begin with, the method of God in realising His purpose is by spiritual leadership, but spiritual leadership is not something to which you are appointed. It is not the work; that is given to you by man; it is not any office, or anything official: spiritual leadership is spiritual influence, the contagion of downright spirituality, or committal to God's purpose. It springs from the heart and all such

counts with God; and the names go down, and a book of remembrance is kept, and such righteous ones are had in everlasting remembrance. You may not get your name into the Bible, but there is a bigger Bible than this one, being written in heaven, in which there are many more names than written in this volume, and the names are those who 'think on His Name' (to use the Book of Malachi). And that was what Nehemiah was doing: 'I enquired, asked, and when I heard, I wept, I mourned, I fasted.' That was not the end, 'Then I acted' — I acted! and we know the action of Nehemiah.

Well, it is from among those of that spirit that God makes His choice. There is a sovereignty, in the choice of leaders, and in leadership. And yet two things always go together: God's sovereignty works hand in hand with the spirit of a man or a woman. He chooses according to His knowledge of the heart. If He chooses Nehemiah sovereignly, He had read Nehemiah's heart; if He chose David, He had read David's heart; if He chose Paul, with all his mistakenness and blindness, He had read the man's heart, and said: There is a man who will be utter for Me; there is the man whose heart, at least, is not a divided one, it is whole on what he is doing; there is a man who will give Me everything, withhold nothing. God reads, tests, looks upon the heart; He puts us into difficult situations, through long-drawn-out trials and adversities, sufferings and disappointments. But in all, He is watching the heart — Is that heart for Me? And if, in reading the heart, in spite of failures, in spite of our miserable, contemptuous disappointing of the Lord in many activities and ways, He can see the heart that is really towards Him, beneath and through it all, that is going to count with Him. And His sovereignty may, will, use everything, be economical about that, to see that there is no loss to Himself of anything that is really of the heart to Him. If He can find what He found in Nehemiah's and in the hearts of these others mentioned, something that would go with Him whatever it cost, not for gain, but just for Himself, for His satisfaction, then something will come out of that of practical value; it is out of that that leadership is born! A committal to God, and a standing by the committal through thick and thin. That is what we have here. They had their very heavy times, and they had what we might call very thin times, at the hands of their adversaries, but they stuck to their committal. God honoured that, took note of it. It was God's purpose that had captured their hearts.

God brought into evidence

Now, when you have got that far, and recognize that it is the purpose of God in any age or time, or lifetime, that really governs the heart, then you notice certain things issue from that.

First of all, it was the purpose of God to which these people were so utterly committed, that brought God Himself so much into evidence. That is a tremendous thing. God can be latent, or He can be patent. God can be passive, waiting, inactive, inoperative, standing, and people have to say: What is God doing? God is not doing anything. And such a time is a terrible time. Or God can be on the move; He can really be coming out in evidence and evidences.

If you look at the Bible and this book, you will see that it was the heart committal for *the* purpose of God for that day, for that time, that brought God out into evidence, that made God forsake a non-committal attitude, a passive condition, and come out. For, as we said in the previous chapter, this book is a book of divine sovereignty. God is here, and in the companion book, Ezra, acting in sovereignty. It is tremendous how God Himself seems to take the initiative, as though God has said: I am going to take this matter in hand and see it through! Come what may, I am going to see this thing through. You know that in the companion book of Ezra, the phrase constantly recurs: “according to the good hand of my God ... according to the good hand of my God upon me ... the hand of my God was upon me for good ...”. It was as though God had set Himself sovereignly to see this thing through. But God does not do that without a basis, and the basis was this: When He found this heart condition, and this committal, that itself made it, if I may put it this way, impossible for God to stand back and do nothing. The Lord had to say: ‘They have committed themselves; I must commit Myself; there is a people that means business; I must mean business. If they are going all the way, I must go all the way.’ “To the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward” (Psa. 18:26, KJV) and we could add a lot more phrases to that. God is to us what we are to Him. If we are careless, well, God will be like that; if we are indifferent, well, God will be like that where we are concerned. So God was drawn out into evidence by His concern for His own interests in that time.

God’s servants brought into evidence

And again, not only was God Himself brought into evidence, but His vessels and servants were brought into evidence, by their own heart attitude to the Lord. Do you want to count? Do you desire to be a profitable vessel? Do you really want to function? Let me say to you: it will not be by you being given a job; it will be by your spirit that God takes note of, and it will be spontaneous. It will not be organisational; it will be the spontaneous reaction of God to the values that He sees in you as a heart for Him, and you will begin to count, without wearing any uniform, or putting on any

badge, or being appointed to any work. It will happen! I am keeping to my context. There is nothing in this book or anywhere else in the Bible, to say that Nehemiah was officially appointed to this work; that the priest anointed him, or the king appointed him, or the prophet chose him, or in some way he was officially set apart for this job. He simply came into it; there was no ordination service for Nehemiah; there were no church meetings to set him aside for the work. In this case, he just came right into it; he was in it; he was it. It was like just walking in. You have to take notice of this: the Lord saw to that when He found what He wanted in the man. This relationship to God's purpose brought God into evidence, and it brought the vessels of His purpose into evidence.

All God's enemies brought into evidence

And it did a third thing which always follows. It was this abandonment to the Lord's purpose that brought all the enemies into evidence. But for their spirit, what would Sanballat, and Tobiah and Geshem and all the rest of them have done? We should not have known of them. Their names would not have been in the Bible with dishonour; they would not be remembered but for this. And I am touching something that is very real and true to life. Make no mistake about it, if you are like this man or this people, with a real heart for the Lord and His full purpose in your day and lifetime, that very spirit will make enemies and bring enemies into evidence. And you know there are two ways of looking at this: there is the way of feeling sorry for yourself, and we are always tempted to do that when the enemies come into evidence and begin to fight as they did here. Another way of looking at it is that it may be a complement to have a lot of enemies. Paul said: "A great and effectual door is opened unto me ...". He did not say: ... *but* there are many adversaries, he said: "... *and* there are many adversaries". It is a complement that the enemies paid to a spirit of devotion to the Lord. We will give the enemy credit for never wasting his energy or his time. He sees it is worth his while to fight a spirit like this; to break that spirit; to break this that I am calling 'the *spirit* of leadership': to break and nullify that *spirit*, which is a tremendous influence upon others for God. It was the sole object of all these many adversaries, in the various forms in which they set themselves to stop this work. Really, reading through it all, and see that their attitude was this: We must break the spirit of this man and these people; we must break this leadership and nullify this influence, this energy; we must in some way wear them out so that they lose heart and give up. That was the one object. Many were the ways of trying it, but only one thing was in view: we must break this

spirit. That is the enemy's object, to break your spirit if you are so set upon God; to take the heart out of you; to wear you out; to take the phrase from the book of Daniel — “wear out the saints” (Dan. 7:25). Well, this attempt at that was made in many different ways, along different lines.

First, there were threats to try and bring fear of consequences, fear of what the enemy could and would do. There was, when that failed, despising and contempt, ridicule, trying to make them feel foolish and ridiculous. ‘Look at their wall, if only a fox goes up against it, it will fall down’! Self-despising in a wrong way; there is a dignity that should be found in leadership; for Nehemiah said: Should such a man as I flee? And who is there, that being as I, will take refuge or seek security in the House of God? Ridicule failed. Then intrigue, trying to involve Nehemiah in a subtle scheme. Then misrepresentation! Misconstruction of motive! Perversion and distortion of intention! It is all here. They said: ‘Nehemiah is trying to make a name for himself, gathering around himself prophets to preach him, to preach his name: this is all personal interest.’ Ah! it is cruel, but it was not true. This achievement would never have been accomplished, this committal of God would never have been made, this divine sovereignty in action would never have been effective if Nehemiah, for one moment, was seeking a name for himself. God does not do that. If there is any personal motive at all bound up with our attitudes and relationships to the things of God, well, God stands back until that has gone and been disciplined out of existence. With Nehemiah, God saw that this was all lies, it was all false, and He committed Himself. He will not do that if you have any ambition to have position or name, or do some work that will be attributed to you. Maybe you wanted to be a great evangelist. You told yourself that you wanted many souls to be saved, but God reads the heart. There was some ambition to be something great in the Christian world. You wanted to be a teacher, people should say something about your gift as a teacher, or something else. And the Lord has not done it, and believe me He will not do it; it is to His Name, and His Name alone to which He will commit Himself. The Lord showed that He was in this business because the spirit of leadership was free from all that which the enemy sought to associate with it falsely, and attribute to it; it was all untrue. We must have purity of heart, that is the point; the enemy must never be able truly to accuse.

The work

Well, what about the work? We know that so far as the historical things are concerned, it was Jerusalem and its wall. What did it represent eternally and spiritually, and in the heavenly way it just represented that which was

wholly of God. Everything bears that out; it would never have been if it had not been of God, it was impossible. See how impossible it was. Right from Chaldea and around in the country, and around Jerusalem, everything constituted an impossible situation. But God wanted this, God's heart was on this, and that wall was the mark, the boundary, of something wholly of God. I cannot emphasize that too strongly, that God wants something. He has always wanted, and He wants it in this day, something which is essentially God; not a bit of man and a bit of God; not just man for God, but out from God Himself; something which says, in every way, where the people are concerned, where the work is concerned, where the spirit is concerned, where all the means and the resources are concerned — it is God! You cannot argue on any other ground about that. Look, and if you really know the truth about that people, and about that work, and about that situation, you have to say: Well, it is just God, that is all; you cannot explain it in any other way — it is the Lord! That is what the Lord wants, and that is what the wall represented: a mark between what was of the Lord wholly, and what was not of God. You find the merchants coming to the gates: that is the other element trying to impinge, insinuate itself, get in, and make merchandise of the things of God. But Nehemiah was up to that; he said: You shut the gates, and if you see enemies, you drive them away. And Nehemiah himself was quite ruthless with those elements which did not belong; they were foreign to what was there. And it is almost humorous the way he dealt with them: 'I chased them from me; I plucked off their hair.' Uncompromising! 'This thing is of God; take your hands off; it is of God.' And in order to have it like that, you know how much there is in this book about the great and varied purging of these people.

Purging! The mixed marriages had to be cleared up, and all that was mixture had to be put away. It was a thoroughgoing purging of the situation. Israel was called to be a people separate from the nations; they must not intermarry and intermingle in that way that would bring about a taint of any kind. And in that prescription of God, there is the abiding spiritual principle that God will not tolerate mixture between two kingdoms, His own and another. Anything that is a mixture of the kingdom of heaven with the kingdom of Satan, which is the kingdom of this world, God will not tolerate. And so we have this great time set apart for purging all mixture, clearing out all that was confused and contradiction: this thing must be pure, it must be of God. You and I must be like that. There must be no heart compromise with this world; no intermixture spiritually in an inward way with what is not of God. The Lord takes great pains to get us clean. He disciplines us and puts us through difficulty and this may take years. But He is after getting rid of these mixed

elements in us, these things that will just spoil everything, if He does not deal with them, to get us to a pure place, where it is the Lord — not ourselves in any way — but just the Lord. He must have it like that. This people were a purged and a purified people to express the nature of God, and thereby to have His testimony established in the earth: this is God. So the wall was the boundary, and we might say, in an intrinsic way, the true spiritual nature of God's people was represented by that wall, was within that wall.

That wall and city did not signify division or exclusiveness among the people of God. Don't let us make a mistake about this; it is very important for us to keep this in mind. We may stand for utterness for God, for a pure testimony, and for the fulness of Christ, but never allow the idea to creep in that that makes you and your testimony a divisive thing among the Lord's people or makes this an exclusive kind of thing. So far as this work was concerned among the Lord's people, it did not create division or represent division or schism among the Lord's people, and certainly nothing exclusive among the Lord's people. If that wall spoke of dividedness and separation, it was solely and wholly between what was of God, and what was of the world. That is the meaning of the wall; that is the meaning of the gates; that is the meaning of those gates being closed on the Lord's day. That is something of God, sacred to God, and therefore the merchants and tradesmen who tried to come in, and bring their goods, and trade upon what is of God, had no place with Nehemiah. It was the walls and the gates that said No to the world and the spirit of the world; and you know there is a great deal of commercialism in Christianity. The wall is not division among the Lord's people; let us be careful that we never imply that a testimony of utterness and fulness of God divides us from the other people of God. Never allow that to be suggested. And certainly, it does not represent anything exclusive, but it does represent this very definite division between what is of God and what is not of God, that is, of this world.

This wall was a protective thing, a defensive thing against the world spirit. There is a spirit that is of God and for God inside, and there is a spirit of the world outside. The wall was there to defend and protect against that world spirit.

Unmixed devotion

May I just say one other thing. This wall gave a great opportunity to the Lord's people to let it be known exactly where they did stand in relation to the Lord's fullest interests, to God's purpose. You know, it was the least pleasant thing to live in that city; it was not the thing that the natural heart

would choose. Only a tenth of all the people agreed to live in the city; the others preferred the country outside. But, look again, a special blessing was conferred upon that tenth, the tithe of all the people, who agreed to live in the city. I think there is something there to take note of.

This position for God of unmixed devotion to the Lord, utterness for *the* purpose of God, the fulness of Christ, all that this represents, this is a test, you know. It really is a test; it will find us out. There are the greater number, the nine-tenths, if you like, who prefer an easier way, not this way. Yes, they are still the Lord's people; still loving the Lord, serving the Lord, working for the Lord, living for the Lord, but not going this way; shrinking from this way — it is too exacting. But this wall gave a real opportunity for the people to show really where their hearts were, whether their hearts were in the real purpose of God or not. The Lord does that. He raises up something, and it is a tremendous test to people, and many will not face it; many will not go that way. Many say, as did some in the days of the Lord Jesus: This is a hard saying; who can hear it? or, This is a hard way, who can go it? It is a few perhaps who stand the test, and live in the city.

Do you see what all this means? There is a great need today of a consolidating and re-confirming vision of God's purpose, really what the heart of things is with God. We can miss the way and lose, if we do not see, and if we are not captured and captivated with what the Lord would have specifically, not generally, but specifically, in this time, of a recovered testimony to His Son in fulness.

GOD'S COMMITMENT TO HIS SON

We have been directed back to the book of Nehemiah. And so we continue in our consideration of its message, which is an all-time message, and as we feel, with a special underlining and emphasis for the time in which we are.

We have seen in this book a microcosm of the purpose and the conflict of all time. This book which goes under the name of this man, Nehemiah, is but an historical representation of the one all-governing purpose of God in creation, in redemption, and in glory. Nehemiah is a very useful and helpful means of understanding, not just a phase of history, but the whole Bible, and all that the Bible is about. I am quite sure you would all agree, if it could be stated in just a sentence or two, what this mighty volume, with its very many sides and parts, is all about, that would be helpful. If we could read our Bible in such a way that every part of it falls into line with just one thing, that would help us with our Bible quite a lot. And I can give you that key, or I can show you that in this little book we have the key, not only to the whole Bible, but to that before the Bible, and if there is an 'after the Bible', to that also.

God's presence

The one all-governing intention of God is to have His dwelling among men; that God would have a place where He can, in pleasure, dwell in His creation, among men. That is the purpose for which He created this world, for which He created man. And it is in relation to that one purpose, that all the history that is recorded in this great book is a part. We have come to regard the Bible, and especially Christianity, as a matter of quite a number of things, and because this one supreme thing has either not been seen, or has been lost to view, we have all the confusion, all the complications, all the difficulties that there are in Christianity, and in the Christian life. To really see, and be able to grasp this one thing alone, for it to get possession of our hearts, is, in itself, a redeeming thing, a saving thing, a delivering thing. We must make

it our very deliberate, applied business, to reconsider and reconstitute our whole mentality as to God and His will, in the light of this one thing. It will come right back upon us individually to put us right, to save and adjust us. It will come back upon all our Christian relationships; it touches the whole matter of Christian fellowship, and all the other aspects of the Christian life: this one thing, that God may be there, God may be present, God may delight to be present; finding the conditions that satisfy His heart, so that it can be said: 'The Lord is there'.

As I have said, this little book of Nehemiah gathers up the whole Bible into itself on that one thing, and is a microcosm, on the one hand, in the first instance, of that age-long, or timeless purpose of God. Reread your Bible in the light of that one thing. On the other side, of course, there is that persistent and determined effort of contrary powers in this universe, to frustrate and nullify that divine purpose. So that this book is a book of conflict, a book of assailing in many ways and many directions. It is a book of striving for God's purpose, on the one side, and against it, on the other. And I repeat that that also is the conflict, not of Nehemiah and his people and his day, but of all time. If you want to understand the meaning of all spiritual conflict, spiritual antagonism, spiritual opposing forces in this universe, the meaning of evil and evil personified, there is one explanation. That is to see to it that God does not get the place for Himself that He has set His heart upon having in conditions suitable to Himself; the frustration of God's purpose in your life and in mine, that God shall not be seen in us. That is the battle; that is the battle every day; to counter and nullify the presence and manifestation of the presence of the Lord. That is the history of the church's conflict; because of this divine calling. That is the history of the ages; a purpose being countered. As far as all those myriads of evil forces are concerned, if perhaps, the thing can be made null and void. Those who have any acquaintance with this little book can see that that is what is gathered into its few pages.

A people taken out of the nations for the Name of Christ

Now the realisation of God's purpose is shown in this book to be bound up with the spiritual state of God's own people, a people taken out of the nations in relation to this purpose to be the people where God is, where He may be found and known. In the historical, temporal, earthly representation that was Israel, but you look through Israel to the very much larger, the people taken out of the nations for the Name of Christ. And, as I have said, the realisation of this great purpose of God to have an abiding place, a dwelling in satisfaction and pleasure, from which He need never depart,

to which He can give Himself without reserve, wholly, completely, that is bound up with the spiritual condition of that people chosen for this purpose, in the first instance. There is the sovereignty of God; He acts sovereignly, and He will sovereignly reach His end, but strangely — and this is one of those paradoxes of which the Bible is full — even the sovereignty of God is linked with spiritual conditions. And this purpose of God is clearly seen in this book, and everywhere, to be tied in with the spiritual state of the people chosen in the first instance for this purpose. It is strange that even the infinite God, in wisdom and power, has limited Himself to the spiritual conditions of His people. God is limited to and by the people of His purpose as to their spiritual state.

And that, of course, raises a very big issue for us; we are called according to His purpose as we are, chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, in relation to this great end, that God may come and never depart, find His eternal dwelling place in glory and in pleasure. If we are called according to that purpose, the realisation of it depends upon our spiritual condition. And that is revealed so fully in the history of Israel in the way of type and representation, and it brings this whole matter of spiritual condition very much to the fore. You and I may limit the Lord; individually we may limit the Lord's purpose; we may, in that measure, hold up His purpose, put it back. Our assemblies may limit the Lord, and postpone His purpose as far as they are concerned. And, as it is true of the individual, and of the companies here and there, it is, of course, fully true as to the whole church. The Lord waits for a condition for the satisfying of His hearts and providing Him with His place.

God's grace and mercy

Well, we have seen how, again and again, as in this book of Nehemiah, there was a condition which made it necessary for the Lord, for the time being, to suspend His operations, but then how, again and again He returned, for the recovery of that which would provide Him with His means. And this book of Nehemiah is one of those activities of God in recovery. I am very glad of that word because it does embody all the grace, mercy, patience, longsuffering and forbearance of God and all the determination of God not to lose anything if by any means He can conserve it. The story of God's movements again and again for recovery is the long story of the grace of God. What I have said just now about individuals and local companies, and the church, is true in this connection; God is not going to lose anything, if He can possibly, by any means of grace, save it. You and me, we lapse; we put back the purpose of God in our lives; we lose a lot of time, a lot of our lives,

because of those lapses, those departures, because of the conditions that we allow to come into our lives, the interests and the dividedness of heart, and what not! We lose a lot of our life keeping God waiting, and yet He is not waiting; even in those times He is doing something as with this people. He is doing a deep work of discipline, instruction, teaching and how unprofitable it is to be out of the will of God. How little we really gain in the end when, having been called we do not follow on to know the Lord. He is working, in the dark days, deeply, painfully, and at length, moving again to bring us back, to recover. That is true of many a life once given to the Lord; that is true of many a company. The Lord does not just lightly, because of some faults, or some weakness or failures, wash His hands of the whole thing, and say, I have done with it! He will return to His purpose, if there is any prospect at all, through grace and mercy, of furthering it. And so with His church it will be like that. I thank God for the word 'recovery'. Where would any of us be today if the Lord had let us go, if He had not recovered us? Maybe some of us have gone, have let go. But the Lord is not giving up; we go through a dark and difficult time under His hand, in which we will learn that there is no gain in that way; and He will react again, and come back, and seek to draw us back, not only to Himself, but to the purpose of our being called into the fellowship with Him.

Well, this little book is a monument of the recovering activity of the grace and mercy of God.

The purpose of God concerning His Son

There is so much to which that introduces us; it is quite impossible to say it all. But I want to say, if possible, in this chapter, a little about the identifying of the two main factors in this great matter. Firstly, the purpose, and then, the power by which God recovers His purpose. I have spoken in general terms of the purpose of God; I have just brought into view the fact of a purpose, and I have said something as to what it is, but we really have not got to the heart of it. We have just to stand right back from this book, and from the Bible as a whole, from all the forms and all the things which are crowded into this volume, the Bible, and seek to see one all-overshadowing reality. For these after all are only representations, pictures, figures, symbols, ways of speaking, ways of teaching. Behind them, and over them all, is one inclusive, all-overshadowing figure, and that figure is God's Son. He overshadows everything; He stands behind everything that is in the whole of this Book in all its forms of representation. The purpose of God is concerning His Son; it is Christ who is to satisfy God in this matter of which we are speaking,

both to be and to provide for God that in which God can have pleasure to dwell. It is Christ.

We must see, of course, that Ezra and Nehemiah with their contemporary prophets and governors, are just one. There is special emphasis in Ezra on the temple and special emphasis in Nehemiah on the wall. But the two are one; they are only two parts of one whole — the temple and the wall. The temple. God's sanctuary. It would not be difficult and it certainly would be unnecessary for anybody knowing the Bible for me to embark upon showing how all temple representations in the Bible, is in its very constitution a comprehensive representation of Christ. It is the purpose, however, that must hold us; God being among men; God being here and God finding it possible to take delight, to enjoy being here. It is Christ, and only Christ, that has brought God into this world; it is by His Son that God has drawn near and offered to dwell with men, and to make them His temple. It is in Christ. God cannot realise His purpose apart from His Son, because the purpose is so inextricably, inseparably bound up with His Son. And to identify the purpose is to see Christ as everywhere, in all things, the answer to this heart quest of God, to be among men. You will see how much is gathered into that: the meaning of the incarnation; the whole nature of Christ and His Person. Christ is the purpose of God. Let us not think of divine purpose in abstract terms, as some *thing*. Let us see that the purpose is a Person, and there is no possibility of realising the purpose apart from the Person. Therefore, if we are called according to the purpose, it is on the basis of our being called into the fellowship of God's Son. Our realisation or fulfilment of God's purpose in this very creation, and in our existence, demands a vital relationship with the Lord Jesus. That is where it begins. There is no explanation of the existence of men or creation, only in this way: God's determination to have a dwelling, and that that determination is realised and fulfilled, firstly in the Person of His Son, and then, secondly, in all where His Son is found. You see, the one thing leads to the other. The presence of God, and all this wonderful thing that God has determined from all eternity, depends upon the presence of Christ and upon the measure of the presence of Christ. You will find God in the measure in which Christ is present. What a lot is bound up with that! God is where Christ is, and nowhere else. And God is in measure present in the measure in which His Son is there. If you and I want God in our lives, let us be quite clear about this: God will only commit Himself to His Son, not to us. God does not commit Himself to men; Jesus never did that; He did not trust Himself to men — He knew what was in men — it says so! God does not commit Himself to you and to me. Men are always trying to take hold of God and use God, even in religion; to manipulate God; to make

God fulfil their schemes, desires and ambitions, in some enterprise or some undertaking. But God does not commit Himself; He never does that. We must be perfectly clear that God only commits Himself to His Son, because it is only Christ who satisfies God and provides Him with a sanctuary, for His presence, His dwelling.

God's presence related to the measure of Christ

And what is true of the foundation is true of the superstructure; the presence of God in power, in activity, depends entirely upon the measure in which Christ is there. If God is to be really manifested, our greatest concern is, that the one possible measure of Christ shall be found in us, and where we are. The building of this temple and the building of the wall just says that. The temple is the sanctuary, but the wall, what is the wall? It is the definition; it is the distinction; it is the limit of what that temple represents; it is the boundary of the presence of God; it defines what is within! It gives distinctiveness as apart from all else that is outside. That wall says: within my limit you discover what is God is like and where God is. Look at that temple. I am the testimony that God is not only present, but God is like that. And there has to be a distinguishing line and mark between what is of God and what is not of God, but is of the world outside, from which all these counter-activities are coming to spoil everything. The wall, understand, is that which speaks of a definition. No one will dispute with me the statement, that, if there is one thing that is needed more than anything else today, where the Lord's people are concerned, is definition. Distinctiveness! Oh, how things have got mixed up; how much more has come in than what is of Christ, what is of God. How confused the situation is! But that wall says: as far as God is concerned, there is to be none of that; no confusion; no uncertainty; no indefiniteness; no indistinctness. It is going to be all clear-cut, clearly defined; it is going to be God and only God, and everything that is not God is excluded. That is Christ in extension. That is what God is after. He must have it like that.

In principle, we know how true it is; get a mixed-up state, and how much of the Lord do you find there? Get a confused condition; get the world seeping in, and how much of the Lord do you meet? Get what is of man, and the Lord is limited. Christ was not like that. He never was. You see, Christ was a sanctuary not made with hands, that is, not of this creation (to use Biblical language). That is the deepest mystery and meaning of His birth: "not of bloods" (the mixture of bloods), "nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God*" — only of God! His birth was an act of God. He is different. No wonder there has been such an assault upon the virgin

birth. Undercut that, and you have undermined this whole purpose of God to have everything according to Christ. He is not made with hands, not of this creation, not of man at all; He is of God. This wall says so clearly: Christ is different, Christ is other, Christ is not of this world, and His kingdom is not of this world. He is apart; in a word: wholly of God.

And so it must be if God is to have His end, and in fulness. There must be this constant work of putting what is not of God outside the wall. Notice, this book has a lot to do with that. There was a time when an enemy on the inside brought furniture into the House of God. But Nehemiah took action, and he pitched that furniture out, and, if the metaphor is not contradictory, ‘lock, stock and barrel’! Out! None of this in here! It does not belong! And so, I expect, he pitched it over the wall. At any rate, metaphorically, that is what he did. And Christ constantly says: it doesn’t belong; And all that does not belong has got to go out; the wall says that. Discriminating definition is the testimony of that wall: wholly of God.

Now I must stop there for the moment. It is not a small thing to be called into this great purpose, to give to Him in our own lives, and in our life together as His people, and in this world, the answer to the eternal desire of His heart. We may count it a small thing, it may not make an appeal to us, we may not sense the importance and greatness of this, and we can let it go as something said in a meeting or a subject spoken of in a conference. It should register with us as the very explanation of this creation and our being at all, both in creation and in redemption and the explanation of Christ’s coming, living, dying, and rising and going back to heaven, as our Priestly Intercessor. The one explanation is, that, in you and in me, and in us together, God shall dwell and make His presence known. If that does not appeal to you, then I can only say that you are a very selfish person, because the very essence of selfishness is, not to let the chief One have all that He desires, and not to be concerned about it. Then it must be that we have other interests.

It is no small thing to be called according to His purpose; to be called to answer to the deepest and ever-abiding desire of the heart of God, and therefore, God takes infinite pains to make the place of His habitation suitable for the manifestation of His glory. That is the end; He is coming to be glorified in His saints — *in* His saints, to be marvelled at in all them that believe! What an end! Have you ever thought about that? “To be glorified in His saints” (2 Thess. 1:10). All the heavenly intelligences will look on these saints and say: Isn’t it marvellous! And you know, angels and archangels do know something about marvellous things. They have marvelled at the creation: the sons of God shouted for joy — they marvelled! They marvelled in the birth of Christ; they sang for joy — Glory to God in the highest. They are acquainted

with marvellous things, but now it says: He shall come to be marvelled at. Who is going to do the marvelling? Well, it must be to these principalities and powers in the heavens that His wonderful race is displayed in the saints, and the angels are going to say: Marvel of all marvels that He should be glorified in people like that! What a marvellous thing grace is! That is the end, and He is working towards that. That explains why He does not let go altogether and comes back again to recover, why He disciplines. At the same time He allows us to go through deep and difficult ways in order to, on the one side, counter this that would counter Him; and, on the other side, bring in that that would provide Him with the suitable ground for His full expression.

You and I know something about that discipline and suffering. But we clearly understand and can interpret God's ways with us. We can see on the one side there was much that had to be countered, broken, burned up in the fire, and we say, Amen, quite right too! On the other side, we cannot say too much about this, nevertheless we know that grace is doing something. We are being changed; we have more love for God than we once had, more of the love of God in us than we once had, and changes are taking place. We cannot speak much about that because it is all too slow and too little; nevertheless, He is doing it, and the end is: 'to be marvelled at'. Christ is marvellous, but not just apart from His saints, but 'marvellous in all them that believe'. May we have grace to cede Him all the ground for His purpose.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE ENERGY OF ALL DIVINE PURPOSE

We are, as you know, in the book of Nehemiah. We have seen that this book represents, in a historic way, the greater eternal purpose of God; what God has, from before the foundation of the world, had in His own heart and in His own mind, as a purpose concerning His Son Jesus Christ. That purpose, being that, in Christ and through Christ in those in whom Christ dwells, God may have a place, a vessel, for presenting Himself and making Himself known; that is, a sanctuary for God. That is His eternal purpose.

The Holy Spirit realising God's purpose

Now we come to that particular aspect of this matter which relates to the way in which God realises His purpose. This book of Nehemiah, when it is read in its larger context of its spiritual meaning, is full of valuable instruction as to God's way of reaching His end, realising His purpose. We have already spoken of one pervading thing throughout this book, which has only to be mentioned in order to be recognised — that is the spirit of leadership. Now we have to see that that is not something impersonal and abstract. The book simply throbs with a mighty energy in initiative, in leadership — the spirit of having a great business on hand of supreme importance; calling out all the resources of spirit, mind and body. I say the book throbs with that which we have called the spirit of leadership. But, what we now have to see, is that, in a larger setting than the merely earthly and historical, this is not something impersonal, and it is not something abstract. We must see in the book of Nehemiah, the energy of the Holy Spirit. I think that there is no doubt that the energy here corresponds with the energy of the Holy Spirit. It is not just an abstract energy, though very positive; and it is not just the soul force of a man or of some men; behind it there is the energy of God. As seen in the larger

spiritual context, the Holy Spirit is very much in evidence in this book, as the One who is carrying out this great enterprise, and moving towards the realisation of this great purpose.

And that is perfectly in keeping with all that we have said regarding Christ and God's purpose. We have pointed out that this temple and this city and this wall, with which this and the companion book of Ezra are occupied, is but an earthly representation of Christ as the dwelling place of God, as the sphere in which God is to be found. Christ it is who is here in this book, in the terms of the temple, the city and its wall. Christ in nature, character, what He is in the mind of God; the meticulous prescription for any dwelling place of God, whether it be tabernacle or temple or church. God is so very careful and strict as to the prescription, what it is to be like; as to its character; as to its components and constituents, simply because it is an expression of Christ. And Christ is the very effulgence of His glory, the image of His own substance. God dwells in His own character and nature, and comes through any expression of that. So He is very particular.

Well, it is Christ who is in view here; you must read the book from that standpoint; as to the nature, purpose and the function of Christ for God. If that is true, we, quite naturally, make the transition from Christ to the Holy Spirit. Christ is presented, and presented as God's pattern, God's model, God's idea and conception of His own dwelling place, where He will be, on what ground He will be present. It is a tremendous revelation. And if that were all, and it were brought to us, and imposed upon us, and we were told: Well, there you are; you have got the pattern; you see what God wants; and now, provide God with that. Every one of us would shrink back and say, No! Impossible! So far as we are concerned, it cannot be; it is quite hopeless to satisfy God in that way, or even for us to do anything towards fulfilling the purpose of God. That is our constant temptation to despair of the realisation of anything like this. So that the counterpart and complement is our salvation from despair — the mighty energies of the Holy Spirit, "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7).

The Holy Spirit's energy to fulfil all divine purpose

So here, in the energy that pervades this whole book, we must see the Holy Spirit working this thing through to fulfilment. It is always the Holy Spirit who is the energy of all divine purpose. God conceived the rescue of this cosmos from chaos — "The Spirit of the Lord brooded (moved) upon the face of the deep (waters)" (Gen. 1:2). What was the attitude and the feeling of the Spirit of the Lord when He brooded on the face of the deep? When

He hovered over that chaos? We see Nehemiah looking at the ruin, and then telling us that he wept, mourned, and fasted some days before he took action. If the first chapter of Nehemiah represents the disposition of the Holy Spirit, may we not conclude that, when the Spirit of God brooded over that chaos, it was the spirit of grief, disappointment, sorrow, the spirit of tears? It was a heart relationship to the situation because of the way in which that situation must have been contrary to what God would have. The Spirit of God moved on that ground. The energies of the Holy Spirit are the energies for God's pleasure and satisfaction; they are the energies which are a reaction against anything that does not honour and glorify God. That is what this book says: the mighty energies working through Nehemiah and through this people. It is all prompted by the Spirit of God, who says: This is not to the glory of God; this is very, no, *utterly* contrary to what God ought to have. Remember, that is the nature of the energy of the Holy Spirit. Whatever may be our thoughts about the Holy Spirit working in power and so forth, let us remember that the Holy Spirit begins with a great heart concern and longing for the satisfaction of God. You may pray to be filled with the Spirit; you may think many things as to what it means to 'receive the Holy Spirit', be 'anointed by the Spirit', be 'governed by the Spirit'; let me tell you this, that, if ever the Spirit of God gets a purchase upon your heart, the first thing, and the continuous thing, will be that you will become possessed by a great concern for the satisfaction of God. Not that you may be something, or do something, or that there may be some *thing*, but, one thing only; that anything that disappoints God, or deprives God of what He ought to have, touches your heart very deeply. Yours will be a life that is dominated by this one thing: God must be satisfied and God must be glorified. And if I see anywhere, anything, that is contrary to God, it gives me a pang. That is the Holy Spirit; that is the energy of the Spirit that makes us deeply grieved about things contrary to God in ourselves, in one another, in the people of God, in the world. That is the first mark and characteristic of the Holy Spirit's energies — to link our hearts with God for His pleasure and His satisfaction and glory.

I was saying that is how it was in the beginning of creation: the Spirit of God was the energy of all divine purpose. What was true, in that initial instance, has always been true and is true today: The Spirit of God is the energy of divine purpose, and divine purpose is to find that satisfaction to which He can commit Himself for ever. So the Spirit is seen here initiating; it is just spontaneous. No committee of men sat to discuss this rebuilding of Jerusalem and the wall; there was no Board of Directors to carry this through and to lay the plans; we know of nothing of that kind at all; it simply comes about because God found a man with a heart for Himself. So, it is almost

natural, it is quite spontaneous, the thing opens in that way and begins; but here it is a purely spontaneous initiation of this thing by the Holy Spirit. There is very much more in that than perhaps appears from what I am saying, and if we were really thoroughly dealing with this whole matter, especially for the sake of responsible servants of God, we should say very much more. But this thing which is indicative of what I mean, can clearly be seen. At the beginning of the book of the Acts (so-called) of the apostles you will look in vain for any laying of plans and drawing up of designs, and organizing of enterprises and schemes. I do not believe that those men intended, in a way, to do what they did afterwards; they had not even foreseen what they would be involved in. The simple basis of everything there is that God got hold of the hearts of a band of men. They did not know where they were going, what they were going to do; they did not know what it was going to mean at all; they did not foresee the whole development. They had indications from the Lord, certain things that they would do. Until the Holy Spirit came and got His grip upon these men inwardly, they never moved. If they intended to move, as they did, it was a perfectly spontaneous movement. Indeed there are indications that they were settling in Jerusalem, and they were building up in Jerusalem, increasing the multitudes of Christians in Jerusalem. And although the Lord had indicated beyond Jerusalem, it took a real movement of the Spirit to get them out of Jerusalem and get them abroad. The point is: the initiation of the purpose of God is in the hands of the Holy Spirit. And if the Holy Spirit can get hold of our hearts, and get hold of our lives, He brings us into His own initiation of purpose, and into His own energy, or His own energy into us. It will be like that: a spontaneous thing.

The Holy Spirit's direction

Might I say this: we, at the beginning of things, so many years ago, never foresaw how things would develop, and what would happen; we had no plans, no schemes; we had not thought it out, and put it on paper, what this would mean, how it would work out, to the ends of the world, and all that has happened. I don't mean to draw attention; I am only illustrating; we just did not have it. But God got hold of our hearts, and I think I can say, in such a mighty way, that He could do, progressively, not all at once, because He had still to get more ground, but progressively, through the years, He could do what He wanted to do. And those who know best would say: Well, we did not foresee this, and this — the new stages and the new phases that would come from time to time, but they were quite spontaneous; we never planned them; never decided this or that; they just came along the line of life.

The Holy Spirit has the initiative in His hands. And not only the initiative to initiate; the Holy Spirit has the direction. The direction here in Nehemiah is very clear; it is just wonderful if you follow this progressive and developing movement — the way, the wisdom, the insight — it is all there. And it is not just human acumen and ability; it is the energy of the Spirit directing this whole thing from stage to stage, and phase to phase. He has it in hand like a clearly defined course where He is concerned. And not only that, initiating and directing; but, we cannot explain the persistence to a conclusion on merely human grounds. Look at the discouragement, look at the opposition, look at the difficulties. The people themselves were always ready to give up, to throw in their hand. One of the things constantly assailing was discouragement which did for a time suspend everything. If you read the whole story you find that there was a period perhaps of twelve years, when they were just too discouraged to go on; things were too hard, too difficult. Nevertheless, the Spirit again energized and re-initiated. And then the thing was finished. And you cannot explain it merely on the basis of human energy and persistence and determination. Completion can only be explained by the energies of the Spirit of God. And what is true in this book is an illustration of the so much greater: the Spirit initiated at the beginning of this dispensation; clearly He directed in those early years, and the continuance. The continuance of anything of God can only be accounted for by an energy that is superhuman, not natural, persisting to the conclusion, when it can be said: “So the wall was finished” (Neh. 6:15)! Oh, what a tribute to the energy of the Spirit, to be able to say that, in view of all that sought to make that issue impossible. Initiation, direction, persistence, completion; this is all the story of the Holy Spirit’s energies.

So, looking into this book, we see, as an illustration this great truth of the energy of the Holy Spirit in anything that is of God. You and I are committed to something of the Lord, which is countered by many, many adversaries, and much discouragement and heartbreak and disappointment. I am quite sure Nehemiah was often disappointed with his people and with his brethren. There are signs of that, evidences of it; from time to time they failed him, and disappointed him. We may find much disappointment in the directions in which we should least expect to find it, but if the thing be of God, there is the committing of the Holy Spirit, with all His energies to it, to see it through. I take comfort from that, and you should do the same. Of course, the important thing is to be in line with God’s purpose, and then you are endowed with God’s power. The thing does not rest with your weakness; only be faithful and not disobedient, and the Spirit will see it through. That is Nehemiah’s energy.

The Holy Spirit as the custodian of God's purpose

But note this, the vision of it all was with Nehemiah alone to begin with. He came, by that sovereign overruling and ordering of God to Jerusalem, and he went out by night. 'I told no man', he said. He went out and surveyed the situation by night, and went home. We are not told, in as many words, what happened when he got home, but we know from the issue what happened. Nehemiah surveyed and saw that there was very much rubbish; the walls were broken down; the gates were burned — a deplorable situation! And the issue clearly indicates that Nehemiah did not say: it is a hopeless situation, nothing can be done: I give it up and go back to my job as cup-bearer. In the silence of the night, he planned, he saw, he conceived, he became possessed of and gripped by the vision of a re-built Jerusalem, and wall, and inhabited city. It was with him alone, to begin with; afterwards he drew others in — two, then more, and then more — and inspired them with his own vision. Now, the point is this, that the vision of all was with Nehemiah alone to begin with, and if Nehemiah represents the energy of the Holy Spirit. This is the point: the Holy Spirit is the custodian of God's purpose, of God's plan; it is with Him, and to begin with, with Him alone. I am very glad of that, are you not? I am glad that I never conceived this thing, that it was never *my* idea, that *I* drew up this whole scheme of things, and decided to carry it through. Well, it would have been short-lived; it would not have gone very far, I am quite sure of that. But no, the Holy Spirit has the vision of God's purpose from eternity, and it was with Him alone to begin with. He only had it. That means far more than my words indicate. You and I do not know the whole thing: we do not see it all; perhaps it is as well that we do not. I wonder how many of us would have gone through if we had seen all the coming years, and what they would hold in the work of God. Probably we would have said: No thank you; I am not going that way. The Holy Spirit has it all, the whole pattern with Himself, and He will unfold it gradually, bit by bit, and make it known. But it is all known to Him; I am glad of that. The Holy Spirit is not making discoveries by experiment; He is not finding out by trying, to see if it will work — not at all! He sees the whole thing; all the involvements, all the cost, all the demands; He has got it all before Him. And that 'it' is Christ, the perfected Man, the perfected representation of God's thought for a dwelling place. He sees all. And the Lord Jesus has told us, the Spirit of truth, He shall take of Mine, and reveal it to you; He shall not speak of Himself; He shall guide you into all the truth — He has got it all. The Holy Spirit

has the whole perfected pattern, Christ, fully in view, and He says: God intends that to be reproduced in a people; I am committed to that; that can be because God wills it in every detail.

Take this to heart, that what God has purposed, He can carry out. There is no doubt about it; He can realise it, He can fulfil it, and the Spirit of God has assumed responsibility for God's eternal purpose. He has taken the responsibility. But, it is with Him. And that also carries with it this further factor, that you and I as responsible believers need to know that God never commits the whole pattern to us. He reserved it for the Holy Spirit, and we will only get any fragment of it as we live in and walk after the Spirit. It is most essential that you and I are impressed with this fact, that God does not hand over everything to man like that. But God says: Walk with Me today, and you will know that which belongs to today. I am not going to tell you anything about tomorrow. Walk in the Spirit *today*; assume nothing, presume nothing, recognise that you have to go step by step in the hand of the Holy Spirit, and as you do so, the pattern will unfold. You are in the dark today as to what next week, next month, next year may hold. Don't worry about that. My law is that this is tied up to the Holy Spirit, and you cannot know one fragment unless you walk in the Spirit. That is a good thing, but you see, it makes great demands upon us. The developing purpose, the unfolding plan, requires that you and I who are related to it know what a life in the Spirit means.

That does mean much more than I have time to explain, but I do see that so much of the tragedy of the situation today among Christians, and the chaos, confusion, weakness and spiritual limitation is due to the fact that so many of the Lord's people do not know what life in the Spirit means. They have got their idea of the Christian life in an objective way. To be a Christian is so-and-so, according to certain doctrines and beliefs, and responses. To be a Christian is to do a certain kind of work; to be concerned about the salvation of souls, and be working for the Lord in many ways; it is so objective! Now, I could take you back to the book of the Acts and show you that the basis was the mastery of the heart of these men. They had a great concern for the salvation of souls and for the building of the church of God, and the churches. But the Holy Spirit has left it on evidential record that with all that, they could not do what they decided to do; they could never act according to their own judgment. They knew God wanted men's souls saved; they knew God wanted the Word preached everywhere; they knew in a general way like that, and their hearts were in it, but here it is: "The Holy Spirit suffered them not" (Acts 16:7); they were "forbidden of the Holy Spirit" to preach the Word in certain places. What is this? Well, it is clear, and we know it from our own

experiences perhaps, that if they had persisted in spite of the Holy Spirit, it would have been disaster, at least it would have been terrible disappointment. No, even with all that the Lord wanted, and all their concern, they had to move in each movement with the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit, and it proved fruitful every time. And if you can ever detect that they did otherwise, you will find that it did not prove fruitful. This is the law of the Spirit. The Spirit retains the right and the prerogative to hold the pattern and plan of God to Himself, and only show it as He has men and women who are wholly governed by Him. There are vast amounts of Christian work, activity, and organisation all over this world that are not getting through even after two thousand years and a vast part of this earth has never yet heard the Gospel. We know in our own country the deplorable situation of ignorance of God. Many there are who don't know anything about the Bible, and many who do not know of the existence of the Bible. You speak to many of Christ and they don't know who you are talking about. What is the matter? A Spirit-governed church would not leave a situation like that: it did not at the beginning. The Spirit knows, but He demands complete government by Himself in every detail of the purpose of God.

A sense of responsibility

You notice again in the spirit of leadership, the energy of the Spirit, represented by Nehemiah, and the discerning responsibility which characterised him. Read the whole book again in the light of that one thing. How Nehemiah felt himself charged with a great responsibility Godward. It was the thing that saved him again and again. This was not something that he was doing for man; this was not something that he was doing for himself: this was something that was for God, and he felt his responsibility to God all the time. I wonder how much that conveys to you of impress, because, you see, if you follow that through with Nehemiah, it was that that made him so alive and so alert to everything. This man was right on the mark all the time; you could not steal a march on him; you could not ensnare him. He was alert, he was alive, he saw through every subterfuge; he saw the implications of every countermove, he was just all eyes! And that alertness, aliveness, discernment, perception, insight, far-sight, through-sight was all born of his sense of responsibility Godward. You know it is true, if you have any sense of responsibility for a thing; and it is very important to you, it is very vital. You are not caught asleep; you are alive to everything that is going to affect that. How the Holy Spirit needs to create or impart His sense of responsibility to the people of God, as Nehemiah did. People are caught by any little trick

of the enemy, the devil. Christians are caught these days by anything that the enemy likes to put up, and very often, he has not put up anything very clever; something so simple, and we are caught. The Lord has something related to His purpose in His great Son in view, and we ought to be there, in relation to that; we are involved; we are a part of it. Well, some little thing arises, over the telephone, a call, a *seeming* demand; something to divert. The result is, we are not there; we are not there at the time; we are not there at all. We have just been caught, and afterwards, well, no real purpose has been served in the other direction, and the purpose of God is entirely lost in this.

What is the reason for that? Oh, take this to heart. Be alive! Be alert for the wiles of the devil! What is the thing that will counter that, and save you from being tricked, and snared, and misdirected, and preoccupied, so that you cannot be in what the Spirit of God is doing. It is a lack of a sense of responsibility Godward. If we have that, it will create an alertness, an energy of discernment. And we shall see, Oh, that is a move of the enemy to get me off-track, to keep me away, to cut across: I see! That is why the apostle Paul links with prayer: "... and watching thereunto with all perseverance ...".

But this sense of responsibility? Do ask the Lord to create it in you, increase it in you, for there is a serious need, an almost tragic need among the Lord's people, that they realise that they are responsible people in this whole purpose; 'I am a part of this; if I fail in this, if I am caught by the enemy, the whole thing is going to be somehow affected!' See it like that.

The Holy Spirit negative and positive

The Holy Spirit, in this book, was active all the time along two lines. He was active in His energy along the line of God's 'No' on the one side, and it is clear, as you read, that it was quite apparent that God was taking a negative attitude towards a certain kind of thing; a certain state of things and certain things. God was saying, No! I cannot bring them all out; it would take months to empty this book of its content. But, the Holy Spirit was making aware of that towards which God took this attitude: No, none of that; not that. On the other hand, He is not only negative; He is positive. The Spirit was saying: Yes, yes! And there is a very great need in us to register that No, and that Yes, of the Holy Spirit, if God is going to reach His end. I hate to say things like this, but the Lord loses so much because so many of us are not sensitive to the Holy Spirit saying: No, not that, not that way. Or sensitive to the Holy Spirit saying: Yes, yes. Now, you see, you have a greater than Nehemiah for your example. Look at the Lord Jesus, anointed, governed, filled with the Spirit; and notice that anointing again and again in His life

saying: No. And He, saying Amen to the Spirit, saying, 'No, not that way; not that thing; not that time; not yet.' The Spirit was saying No! but on the other hand, the positive, the Spirit was saying: Yes. Our Lord was governed like that, and He is the fulfilment of God's purpose. It is very essential that it should be so.

Now, in order that it might be so, there is one tremendous thing that comes up in this book. There were people round about who wanted to sponsor this thing, and who offered their services, and said: Let us come and work with you, and help you in this great thing that you are doing. That is where the Holy Spirit came in with one of His No's. And this is where the spirit of discernment in responsibility, and through responsibility, is so manifested. Not only did Nehemiah say to these people: You have no part nor lot in this business; but there was a point in this history when every man that was going to have any place had got to prove his genealogy. He had got to provide his 'birth certificate'; he had got to have evidence that he was a pure-born Hebrew, a Jew, and that there was no taint in his blood. These people who were offering were not such; they were a mixture of Assyrians and Hebrews who had intermarried in the land. It was a subtle trick of the enemy to get in that way. But discerning responsibility would say what that would mean: God's hatred of mixture. And so the demand is: only spiritual men, born of the Spirit, can come into this purpose of God; pure-bred heavenly citizens only may enter this city, men of the Spirit from their very beginning. It is essential. Is it not due to failure in that particular thing in the history of the church that the church has been paralysed and crippled? Is this failure not due to the fact that people who are not born again come into the church and into the work of the church? This is not something that even in sincerity can be taken up. Though you might want to help along the work of God, you cannot do it. Your motive, your meaning, and your intention may be very good, but you just cannot do it until you are under the mastery of the Holy Spirit. Christianity has drawn people in to help on the work maybe because they have money, or because they have a title, or they are men of influence in the business world, or they have considerable acumen in some branch of civil or industrial life. In other words, they are great business people. Therefore, bring them in, and let them serve the kingdom of God. No! a thousand times No! The only basis upon which anybody can have a place or a part, is that they are *filled with the Spirit*. That was the beginning of the church. Every member must be under the control of the Spirit of God, born again; no matter if they have millions, if they do not have the Spirit, they are out of court here. They may be the cleverest men in business, having been most successful in the things of this world, but they have no standing here on that ground, if

they are not men of the Spirit. Oh, the energies of the Spirit require men of the Spirit; the purposes of the Spirit requires spiritual men and women: that is a great declaration in this book.

The unity of the Spirit

But I would close with this: the energy that is in this book, which is, in figure, the energy of the Spirit, did one wonderful thing; it may have been progressive, but it came out all right. The energy of Nehemiah, a type of the energy of the Holy Spirit, gave the people one vision which united them as one man. The people had a mind to work, it is said. They were welded, melted into oneness, so that they were as one man. The whole wall was united and all the people on the wall were united; and they were united in this man, Nehemiah. He was the uniting, integrating personality of the whole thing. See in him, then, the energy of the Spirit, and this energy of the Spirit creates a oneness of vision which makes the people of God one. If you and I have diverse visions, conceptions, well, we will not be one; we will be apart; and that will be our weakness; and that will be the defeat of God's purpose among us. We must be men and women with one vision that makes us one; not two visions, not pulling apart, not tearing asunder, not wanting different ways and different things, but we see clearly what it is that God has purposed and has in hand, and what the Spirit is committed to, and we are in that, without reserve or division. And if you can get a dozen men and women like that, you have got a solid whole that means so much.

The effort of the enemies of Nehemiah and this work was to divide these people and by division, to weaken, and eventually nullify this whole undertaking. That is the enemy's perpetual way to divide. But oh, may the Lord give us a clear perception, not of a thing, but of His Christ, as His objective, His end, His purpose, His pattern, to which our hearts are committed. And may the energy of the Holy Spirit weld us together as a people, wherever we are, set on that one thing — God's satisfaction.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH

“And all the multitude kept silence; and they hearkened unto Barnabas and Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles through them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, ‘After these things I will return, and I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men may seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who makes these things known from of old (the beginning of the world)’” (Acts 15:12-18).

There is a marginal alternative, as you notice, to that last clause: *“Who doeth these things which were known from the beginning of the world.”*

That paragraph which we have just read is the New Testament counterpart of the book of Nehemiah. As you see, it refers to the tabernacle of David; its fall and its rebuilding. And the quotation is from the prophet Amos. Now the prophet Amos prophesied when that tabernacle or temple of David was about to be destroyed. He was a prophet of judgment; judgment upon the sin of the people of God, and that judgment was going to culminate in the destruction or fall of David’s great temple, representative of David and his people. This meant their overthrow and captivity. And with that imminent, Amos prophesied that there would be an afterwards, and the Lord would return, and build again the tabernacle of David which was fallen, that the residue of men upon whom His Name was called would seek after the Lord. Here we have that prophecy quoted in the book of the Acts by an apostle. It is full of significance and impressiveness to note how the apostles interpreted the prophecies of Amos.

David’s tabernacle, or temple, did fall. The book of Nehemiah sees it in ruins, with the city and the city wall. But a remnant has returned from

that judgment captivity, and in Nehemiah and its companion book, Ezra, is found rebuilding the temple. And the apostles were not at all satisfied that was what Amos fully meant; they saw in that no exhausting of the prophecy of Amos, only perhaps a very poor and partial fulfilment, for a time. The apostles saw that there was a very much fuller and larger fulfilment than that which took place at the time of Nehemiah and Ezra. And their interpretation of the prophecy of Amos is here in the book of the Acts; to find the prophecy of Amos on the way to its fullest fulfilment, you have to read this book. We ought to be duly impressed with this fact that the apostles, seeing, as they did see, that this prophecy of the Old Testament was certainly not all that the Lord had in mind when He inspired the prophet to utter it. God had something very much bigger in His mind. No one did see, until the Holy Spirit came, and took hold of these apostles, and gave them the fuller meaning of the prophetic utterance. Now we will survey and gather up the various features and factors in this revelation, and presentation of truth. There are several particulars.

Christ the sanctuary of God

Firstly, there is, what the tabernacle or the temple represents, and is really the heart, and more than the heart of what we have in the New Testament. Christ answers to that in fulness, as Himself the sanctuary of God. He had used that very word of Himself: “Destroy this *sanctuary*, and in three days I will raise it up (again).” A tremendously impressive statement! He spoke this of His body. And we know, without fresh study of the New Testament, that Christ Himself answers to that whole vast thought of God, to have a dwelling place among men. That is realised, in the first instance, in a perfect way, in God’s own Son: ‘Emmanuel — God with us’. God tabernacled in Christ. God was *in* Christ Jesus — *in* Christ — says the apostle. God was *in* Christ. God, who looked upon Him, was able to find in Him that about which He had once been disappointed when He made the world, and when He created all things, and when He made man, and finished His work. He looked on all His work, and said: it is very good. And God walked in the garden; God took pleasure in dwelling there with man. It was the beginning of the answer to a great thought and desire in the heart of God concerning His creation. And then He was robbed of it; man let in that which was contrary to God, and God had to withdraw. But in His Son He found the recovery and the restoration of that sanctuary which had fallen. We speak of the ‘fall’ — it was that; it was fallen down, and it was ruined; and it was laid waste, and God had to withdraw. And after the long centuries of many representations and types His own Son came; His new creation Man; His full thought. And

looking on Him, He could say: “My Beloved, in whom I am well pleased!” — *in* whom I am well pleased!” I believe that carries more than being pleased with Him; I believe it implies ‘in whom I am well pleased to dwell’, satisfied that here is that which gives Me a resting place. My Beloved, in whom I am well pleased; it is very good. He answered the eternal desire and thought of God. He is the sanctuary recovered, which had fallen down. It is Christ. That is what comes out in the New Testament. If you want to know where God is, or you want to know where to find God, it is only in Christ, but truly in Christ.

Christ extended in the church

But then there is the extension of that. Let us see that that is what the apostles saw. Oh, wonderful thing, that they came to see that! After all the mystery, all the misapprehension, all the failure to see, while He was with them in the flesh, at last they saw, and they saw Him as glorified. The counterpart, in spiritual reality, of David’s temple, which, when it was complete, was very magnificent, very beautiful, perfect as a type, and the Lord filled it with His glory. So here, on the day of Pentecost, Christ is in heaven filled with glory, and out from Him the glory shone and proceeded to take up its residence in that extension of Christ. For by the Holy Spirit, Christ is extended; He comes to dwell in born-again believers. And as He remains One — never dividing into so many, remaining one — He constitutes them with Himself as the dwelling place of God. The day of Pentecost sees that extension; God coming to occupy the larger realm, known to us as the church. And it was something at that time that bore all the marks of God’s good pleasure. The men and women were not perfect in themselves, but there was something so much of Christ there, that God is smiling upon it; God is well pleased to be there. The whole scene at the beginning of that book is one of God being able to say: I am well pleased! God finding His home and His rest and His satisfaction. That is what the apostles saw as the fuller fulfilment of the prophecy: I will build again that which is fallen, the tabernacle of David. Christ, God’s sanctuary, and then extended to a chosen people taken out of the nations for His Name, who also become known as His temple, and His holy city, His dwelling place. That is where we begin with the books of Nehemiah and Ezra; that is where we begin with the book of the Acts. The thing is now transferred from the earth to heaven. That may be one reason why the Lord did not let them stay permanently in the earthly Jerusalem. In a very effective way the Lord was saying: Here we have no continuing city, we seek one to come. Our city is not of this earth at all. So He allowed the earthly Jerusalem to be a scattering place for the church, because now Jerusalem is in heaven

and not on earth; and perhaps they were again inclined to make it an earthly thing. And the Lord said: No, not at all. My Jerusalem, My city, My temple, is not down here; it is in heaven; it is My Son! They came to see that.

Christ and His people separated from this world

And then, in this Old Testament book we proceed to the wall which was particularly Nehemiah's work of reconstruction; the wall, as representing the landmark between Christ and His church, and that which is of the world, apart and outside and contrary. We have said so much about it, but it cannot be too strongly emphasised and stressed, that there is that very sacred demarcation. To overlook or override this is to spiritually nullify all that God intends as to His dwelling. You cannot break down that wall without breaking down the real House of God. The wall will lead to the temple, and breaking down will be thorough once the wall is broken down.

God will not be found there if the wall is destroyed. And it does really represent that great spiritual truth that Christ and His people are a separated people from this world. The great work of all the enemies, (as with Nehemiah's enemies, so with the enemies of Christ with His church) is always to remove that landmark, that distinguishing factor, and to override and bring in what is the world. It has been like that all through the centuries, and more so today perhaps, than ever; in many ways religiously, as well as secularly, to bring in the spirit of the world, the methods and principles of the world; something of this world which lies in the wicked one into the sacred area of what is God and Christ alone. Do it, and you will find God has gone; God has withdrawn. As truly as it was literally the case in the Old Testament, so it will be spiritually in the New Testament era. There can be no preserving of the presence of God if we let that Evil one come in in any shape or form. That wall must be maintained intact; that demarcation must be preserved unsullied; that landmark must remain, strong and unbroken. Let us lay this to heart. The most vital thing where you and I are concerned, and where any company of the Lord's people are concerned, and where the whole church is concerned, is the presence of God. It is not a hundred and one things that go to make up Christianity. Ultimately and supremely, it is the presence of God. The presence of God in you, in me, in all of us; that we meet the Lord in one another; and others meet the Lord in us. By our presence here on this earth the Lord has a way of satisfying Himself and His desire, and of showing Himself and what He is like. That is the vocation of the church; that is the vocation of the believer. Concentrate upon this, for this is where the Spirit of God concentrates — the presence of God! Oh, let us be diligent and devoted

about this thing. Of course we know that if we lose the Lord's presence or the sense of the Lord's presence, everything is hollow and empty. It is a hollow shell. The old tabernacle in Shiloh might still remain as a structure, but when the Lord is gone, it is a hollow shell. So, in any life where the Lord has to stand back, or in any assembly where He is outside the door, or in His church where He cannot commit Himself, it is a hollow thing. Life is hollow without the Lord. But oh, that we realised that the great thing that is to justify our existence is that the Lord should more and more be known and met in us and where we are.

Well, at the beginning of the Book of the Acts, it was like that. There was no doubt whatever that the Lord was in His Holy temple; the Lord was there. But on the one side, it was because the Holy Spirit had made that so distinct mark of difference between that people and the world. On the other side, notice how no sooner did God have that pleasure and that satisfaction than the old enemy started up his old tricks: Ananias and Sapphira — instruments inspired of Satan to let the world's commercial principle into the church. Again and again it was like that; some impingement upon what was of God for personal ends, for earthly and worldly ends. One man, seeking gifts by the laying on of hands, that *he* might be able to do something; and the apostle says: 'Thou hast no part nor lot in this; thy heart is not right with God' — there is no place for *you* in this business. But you see, the enemy is busy again trying to find some crack, some crevice, some place through which he can force himself and his evil system into the area defined for God alone. You and I like Nehemiah, must be very diligent and watchful, that the Lord does not have to stand back because we have let something in that is not of the Lord.

The Word of God restored to its place of full authority

And then, something that we have not said much about as to this book of Nehemiah — the place of the Word of God. If you look again, you will see there was a point at which the Word of God was restored to its place of full authority. They searched for the Word of God; they brought it in and they made it the governing thing for their life in all departments. The absolute authority of the Word of God. Perhaps little need be said about that; I am not talking fundamentalism, about the inspiration of the Scriptures, and that sort of thing. There is something very much more than that. I suppose most of us believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and that the Bible ought to govern the life of the Christian. But that means very much more than a general statement or belief.

This Word of God has hidden in it the pattern for God's purpose. Christ is there as the Model in every respect of God's sanctuary; He is hidden in all the Scriptures. That is the Word of God; it is not the letter; it is what lies behind the letter, what the Spirit has put into the letter. And that is Christ; He is the Pattern. Your approach to the Word of God, to the Bible, must always be with one question in mind: What has this to say to me about Christ? What is there here that can teach me more of Christ, both positively and to the contrary; one side, Yes, and the other side, that is not Christ. The Bible is divided like that. But the authority of the Word of God is not just the authority of letters; it is the authority of the living Word within the written Word. And He is that; He is the Pattern there in all the Scriptures; and He is the absolute authority as the living Word for the church, for the people of God. That is a statement of truth, and it must be applied. Make no mistake about it, there is no revelation from God that is superior to the Scriptures, that puts the Bible on one side, in any fragment whatever. If the Bible says something, that is what the Bible means — what it says, just what it says. And, if we are superior to that or violate that, it is to our own peril, and with the effect of putting ourselves outside of that in which the Lord is fulfilling His purpose.

If you look at chapter eight of Nehemiah, you will see that when the Word of God was recovered, brought back into its place, brought in to become the governing authority in the life of the people, it had to be interpreted. You see, these people had been in captivity for seventy years, and they had forgotten their own native tongue; they had learned a foreign language. And when they came back after seventy years, the new generation and the old people, they did not understand their old native language when it was spoken. And so there were appointed some thirteen interpreters in addition to the Levites. It is bad enough for you to have one interpreter! But on that day, or those days, in reading the Scriptures, both the Levites and then thirteen extra men, stood among the people, and as the Word of God was read, they gave the meaning and the sense. They said: Now, do you hear that? That means this! And in that I see a wonderful spiritual principle, because I see that happening in the book of the Acts. By reason of our spiritual alienation we don't understand heavenly language. It is difficult enough when we are brought back to understand the things of the Spirit; we are having to learn a new language all the time, as a new generation, born again. But here in this book of the Acts, here is a wonderful thing: these apostles, who were the interpreters, filled with the Holy Spirit, taught by the Holy Spirit, governed by the Holy Spirit, were interpreting the Old Testament in a way that those most familiar with it did not understand. It is one of the impressive things what they saw in those Scriptures with which they were familiar.

Here is an instance — Amos. Well, the orthodox Hebrew would say of the prophecies of Amos: Of course, that referred to the remnant returning, and to Nehemiah, and Haggai, and that time when they rebuilt the temple. It is only common sense to see that Amos was talking about that, and that that fulfilled the prophecy of Amos. Now, here are Hebrews in Jerusalem, filled with the Holy Spirit, and they are seeing what no orthodox Jew saw in that prophecy — that it was not fulfilled in Nehemiah or his time; the fulfilment is *in Christ, in our time*. And if you will look again at the preaching of these apostles, it was just like that; they are saying things about the Scripture that no one without the revelation, illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit would see in the Scriptures; and in that way they became vital. And so I take that up as a very important thing, because we are in this dispensation of the Spirit, and the spiritual, and the heavenly. I have said with great emphasis, there is nothing extra to the Scriptures in themselves, but oh, what a need there is for men filled with the Spirit to interpret the Word of God according to the mind of God. We have got any amount of man's interpretation, and exposition, but how little we have of real Holy Spirit illumination of the Word of God. And the other does not get us very far, does it? But anything that really is a touch of the living Spirit upon the Word, oh, how it helps! How it quickens, enlivens, lifts and enriches, as we are able to say: Oh, I never saw that! How wonderful that is! We need the interpreters, who see God's meaning in the Word, and through the Word; we need this New Testament ministry. Pray that the Lord will recover this among other things in His recovering work in this time, as He brings back a people, as He brings back His sanctuary, as He brings back His wall of demarcation. Pray that He will bring back spiritual interpreters of His mind, of His Word, to fulfil a ministry of real illumination and revelation to His church. Pray that God will secure such men; we need them badly. We do not need technical teachers and preachers; we need interpreters by the Holy Spirit of the Word of God.

The absolute authority and government of the Holy Spirit

We pass to two remaining things: the Word of God and the absolute government of the Holy Spirit. These are the two great governmental factors in the House of God, among the people of God. We must remember, all through that book of Nehemiah, that there is a secret mighty energy at work and that is the energy of the Holy Spirit carrying out the divine plan to its full realisation and that is what we have here in this book of Acts. The Holy Spirit has the responsibility; He has taken charge of the divine purpose; He Himself by His own energy, might and wisdom, is carrying it out. Oh, what

a romance of the Spirit that book is! How differently He does things from how men would do them! What He does that men would never think of! We have to say, Well, I would never have thought of that! — as we see the Spirit moving and His strategy. And there is a great need of this recovery too, I need not argue that; you and I need the recovery of the absolute authority and government of the Holy Spirit in every respect. The local company needs that, wherever it is. And the whole church of God needs that. ‘Other lords have dominion’ — other heads are in His position. The Holy Spirit is today not able to exercise Himself because there are other forces at work which are not of Him. We must pray, in all our praying for God’s recovering work, that this shall come back with His purpose.

Local companies

Finally, there is the matter of the local expression. The last phase of this book of Nehemiah sees the peoples settled in the cities of the Land. That which corresponds to that, of course, in the New Testament, is the churches over the world, the local companies. What we have to say about that is, that that is the outcome of something; that is the outcome of Jerusalem being rebuilt; that is the outcome of there being an arch-type, a model in existence, from which all that is local and scattered can take its character. Now here, you see, there is that spiritual thing secured on the day of Pentecost, Christ and His church, His members — a model in those beginnings. And then, because that is in existence, it is there, the local churches take their character from that; they are but an extension of the full thought of God, of that which is there spiritually. And if all that I have been saying about the purpose and desire of God for a dwelling place, about the character of that dwelling place — about its absolute separation from the world; the government of the Word of God; the government of the Holy Spirit; if all these things go to make up the whole purpose of God and are the features of what God Himself has secured in His Son, then in every locality where His people are, there should be that in representation. Those things should be true where there are the Lord’s people. It only requires two of you to be a representation: “Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I.” The Lord is there! It only takes two ‘in Christ’ to be a microcosm of this whole wonderful thing that God is after. You two in your home! Oh, perhaps you deplore that there are not others, that there is not an assembly there, but there are two of you. The Lord can be there, because He is in you two; and your home can be a dwelling place of God because He is in you two. And in that place all that I have said can have its expression: the Holy Spirit can be in government and

authority; the Word of God may be the rule of your life; all this providing the Lord with a place for Himself and His pleasure. And He can take pleasure in being there. If there are only two of us somewhere, that is the possibility of two because the Lord has said it. If there are three, so much the better; and if there are more, better still, but the principle, not the multitude, provides the Lord with that which makes it His pleasure to be there. A heart for the Lord; two hearts for the Lord, where the Lord alone is Lord. The Lord grant that out of this there may be inspired in our hearts such a purpose and such a meaning in life, and we shall say as one said long ago: As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And if you want to know what serving the Lord is, it means giving to Him that upon which His heart is set, and this is it.

Concluded