



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

**THE SOVEREIGNTY OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT**

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Volume 211

(CHAPTER ONE OF THIS SERIES IS MISSING.)

MARKS OF THE LORDSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

“...ye are an epistle of Christ ... written ... with the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3:3).

“... who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

“...but their minds were hardened: for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remaineth, it not being revealed to them that it is done away in Christ. But unto this day, whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their heart. But whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:14-18).

We were being led by the Lord in our previous meditation to consider anew the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

We come now to look at one or two of the features of a truly Holy Spirit life and movement, those things which will obtain when the Holy Spirit is really Lord. The chapter which we have read, and there is very much more like it in the New Testament, brings some of these things before us. Let us note again that in three distinct clauses the Lordship of the Spirit is stated and presented. “The Lord is the Spirit” (v. 17). “Where the Spirit is Lord ...” (v. 17). “Even as by the Lord the Spirit (or ‘the Spirit who is Lord’)” (v. 18).

Where the Spirit is really Lord, certain other things in the chapter will be the nature and characteristics.

Life

The first of these is life. You notice what place in this chapter life has. “Written not with ink, *but with the Spirit of the living God.*” “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

So here we have a contrast and, mark you, it is a contrast in things relating to God. That letter referred to is the letter of the Old Testament Scriptures, the law and the revelation given through Moses and through angels, so the letter to the Hebrews tells us. It is something which came from heaven, from God, something which is recorded in the Scriptures of truth, which the Lord bound upon His people for a long time, and yet with all that, it is said to be dead, as a *letter* it killeth. The New Testament was not written when those Words were penned by Paul; he could only refer to the Old Testament. Shall we be untrue if we suggest that if Paul wrote today, he could and might say exactly the same thing about the New Testament? Whether he did it or not, the truth remains as a fact that the New Testament just as much as the Old as a letter may mean death, may be dead and may kill and it is true. It is proving true, it has proved true all along that to just take the letter of the Word of God, whether in the Old or the New Testament, and use it as the letter means death, brings death.

A mark, therefore, of a Holy Spirit committal, of the Spirit's presence, is not that you have and hold to the Scriptures. It is not that you stand by the written Word of God; it is not that you adhere to the truths of the Bible; it is not that you are all the time fighting for the place of the Bible and the Scriptures as such. That is no guarantee of life. You may do that and still be ministering death. Fundamentalism, as it is called, orthodoxy, as it is called, is not necessarily a ministration of life. It may still be dead and ministering death.

A mark of the Holy Spirit's presence is not that you depart from the Scriptures or that you hold them lightly, nor that you have something extra to the Scriptures, nor that we are independent of them or superior to them. The mark of the Holy Spirit's presence is that the Word of the Lord is, in our case personally, individually, as well as collectively, living; it is throbbing with life. The very first movement of the Spirit of God is that of life.

Let no one think for one moment, and far be it from anybody to go away from here and say that I have been making light of the Word of God. What I am saying is this that, while that Word remains the Word of God, and while it is a very sacred trust given to us for real purposes of going on into all the fulness of Christ, it has got to be something more than the Word of God as written in a book. It has got to be the Word of God to us. Until that is so, you will be all at sea and you will get into a great deal of confusion and trouble. I know of some people, I know them personally now, who, when the air raids started and came into their neighbourhood, went to the Bible and picked out some parts of the Scripture and appropriating them, made them to govern this situation in the expectation that they would be absolutely immune from any hurt or harm or approach of evil — Psalm 91, for instance, and other

Scriptures. But their homes have been wrecked and they have lost everything, and today they are in darkness because they believed that the Word of God was true and could be taken for their protection and it has not worked.

I believe that this Word as it is contained in the Book is the Word of God. Do not misunderstand me. But for us in experience it is not the Word of God until the Spirit of God has said it to us and we know it. If the Spirit of God comes to you and takes some portion of the Word and says it to you, then that is the Word of God in a fuller, deeper sense than it is as written in the Book. Do not misunderstand that. It is capable of misconstruction, I know. Unfortunately, some of us have to walk round almost every step we take to make sure we have said it correctly! However, with all the care and caution, I suppose we shall not escape. You know what I mean. The thing has got to live by the Holy Spirit in us if we are coming into the fulness of God. We are not going to get into it by studying, by reading, by memorizing, or by saying, That is the Word of God, that is the Bible, that is the Scripture! No — and in many different ways this applies.

Now, our point is that a real mark of the Spirit's presence in an unhindered way is life. Life in the Word, life through the Word, but life. I am not for the moment so particularly concerned about the Word, the Scriptures. I am only using this as Paul uses it, to indicate a difference — that you may have the Scriptures and be dead. You may have all the written Word of God and be prepared to lay down your life for it and be spiritually dead and ministering death, or not ministering life.

So then, when the Spirit gets His way, what you expect to find is not just truth as truth, the Word, the Scriptures, as such. You expect to find people living in that Word and that Word living in them. That is His work. So, out of the darkness of a judged creation, the brooding Spirit brings light and life. The Spirit of life moves — that is the point.

Let me press that for a moment or two still more closely. We all believe that the unsaved are in darkness and in death, but do we all recognize that we still carry about with us a whole weight and bulk of that darkened and dead creation, and that that part of us is very often bigger than anything else about us, and it is always present and always weighing on us? Our minds naturally are still as incapable of seeing the thoughts of God as they were when we were unsaved. Our natural abilities in this matter are still as much under incapacitation as they were before we were born again. The difference is not there at all, and the trouble with so many of the Lord's people is that they will continually move on that old creation ground in themselves with regard to the Lord's things, bringing their natural judgment to bear upon the things of God, handling the things of God on the basis of their natural capacities. The result

is that you only get something more or less clever, more or less shrewd. You do not get any more life.

The Holy Spirit, in order to make everything living, has got to deal quite definitely and radically by the cross with every encroachment of the old creation in us upon divine things. That is a difficult lesson to learn; it is hard to be understood, but it is true.

Now, I come back to the Word. The illustration is very much simpler and more obvious than the enunciation of the law, the principle. Here are those disciples with the Lord Jesus for three or more years and they hear all that He has to say and mark you, He says it very simply. You say, A child can understand His illustrations, similes, parables, stories, incidents, all to get home His great spiritual truths. And the disciples had years of that and John says that there was so much of it that if it were all written I suppose the world would not hold the books! So evidently they heard a very great deal more than we have heard, and yet the fact remains for all to see who have eyes that, at the end of that time, they did not understand, they did not know what He had been saying. They did not perceive what He was driving at. They did not reach the conclusions that He was seeking all the time to register in them, and when He was crucified, they were simply in a state of bewilderment, stunned and dazed and in the primal chaos of the old creation. There is no doubt about it, they were in the chaos and darkness of Genesis 1:2; they could not see any distance. Death reigned with them as on the way to Emmaus. You see what a state they were in.

Here are men in personal association with the Lord Jesus, in closest touch, hearing all that put in that simple way, and yet after all not understanding, not perceiving, nor discerning, having missed the point. The cross has done something. It has exposed the incapacity of nature in closest proximity to the things of God. How helpless and hopeless and useless it is! If Jesus Christ of Nazareth were to come here and come up on to this platform and begin to speak to you as He spoke to His disciples of old, simply, directly, with the most helpful illustration, and if He were to continue with that for hours, there is no guarantee that even He being present and teaching would result in your understanding what He was talking about. The result might just be the same.

Well, the cross first of all exposed that, showed how true that is in the case of the disciples, and what is true in their case is true in ours and in the case of everyone, but then that cross did more than expose a hopeless and helpless state in relation to the things of God. It accomplished the removal of that state. It dealt with the causes of such a condition, and, dealing with the causes, it made a way for a new condition. The cross exposed, judged, and in Christ removed that state. Then, that ground of condemnation, of judgment,

of helplessness, all that which was the nature of that inability being removed, a way was made for the Spirit to come and start again, start from the bottom, and when the Spirit came, they could see, they could understand. Do you notice that they had the Old Testament Scriptures? They knew them, but still they did not understand when He was speaking about them, but on the day of Pentecost, not only a marvellous survey of the Old Testament Scriptures, not only a marvellous citation of Old Testament Scriptures, but an altogether new insight was given them. Now the inner meaning has come to light, now they live. There is something altogether new here, and the mark of it is life as from the dead, and that is a feature, a characteristic, of the Holy Spirit's presence in a life. It is life, a thing you cannot explain, you can only know. It is that tremendous difference where at one time you are dealing with a written Word, a letter, and your business is with a Book, and it is a business, and then that thing happens where you are baptized into the despair of the cross as to the things of God. Believe me, there is going to be no new order until that old one has been despaired of, and then by the surrendering up of all that incapacitated natural life the Spirit comes and that Book lives. Now the things of God are not just things written in a Book. They are things written in your heart by the Spirit of the living God. All is alive.

That is very simple, very elementary, but it is a tremendous challenge to us. I am not just giving you the technique of Christian truth. If I did not know something about this, I would not talk to you about it. I wonder what sort of position you have come to? Are you interested in Bible teaching, Bible truths, Bible doctrines, Bible books, Bible themes, the content of the Bible as such? Well, of course, it is a realm of tremendous interest and can become very fascinating, but how far does it get us? Some of us did that sort of thing for years. Bible lectures, Bible analysis, how to study the Bible as a book — all this may be very valuable. I am not saying that there is no value in having a knowledge of what is in the Book. But what I am saying is that, if you leave it there, you may just as well have never touched it for all the divine ends that may be reached. Something more is essential. Now, do you know that something more? Do you know life in this matter, life in the Spirit, that everything lives? Oh, the Lord save us, deliver us, from just being Bible students and those who have a lot of information about things in the Scriptures! The Lord make us those who live by His Word!

So you will come to a time — if you are going on with the Lord, that is, if you are going to come under the Holy Spirit's sovereign government — when you will say to yourself, I am tired of subjects, themes, truths, doctrines, the Bible, the Bible as a book! I want to know the Lord, I must know the Lord! You come to that place under the Holy Spirit's government where you must

know the Lord. You are not going to know Him apart from His Word, but it is the Lord.

That is just the direction in which the Holy Spirit moves. Here is Paul or Saul of Tarsus. I doubt whether there were many in his day who knew the Old Testament better than he. He knew the Scriptures, but he did not know the Lord. He saw Moses and the prophets, but he did not see Christ, and the thing which made all the difference with him was — “It pleased God to reveal His Son in me” (Gal. 1:15,16). A revelation of the Lord Jesus will make the Word of God living throughout, but an assault upon the Scriptures is not necessarily going to lead you to the Lord Jesus. I know many have been led to the Lord through the Scriptures — that is not my point. I say not necessarily does it lead you to Him, the living Christ. What about that Ethiopian to whom Philip went? He was reading in the prophet Isaiah, chapter 53, as it is in our Bible. There it was, and he said to Philip, “Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?” Then Philip began to preach unto him Jesus, and the man could understand the passage he had been reading. Philip was a man filled with the Spirit and when he preached Jesus, it was not the technique about Jesus. It was the living revelation of Jesus and the other man, seeing Jesus with his eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, saw what Isaiah was saying. A revelation of the Lord Jesus is the key to everything, it is life.

We cling to the Word because this Word is going to be made to live in a new wonderful way when once the Spirit has opened our eyes to see Jesus. I know that it works both ways, but the point is that the Spirit wants the testimony of Jesus in life, not just in accuracy of doctrine in life. That is the mark of the Spirit’s sovereignty among the Lord’s people and in them. Everything lives. So you will find wherever you look in the Scriptures that life is a great symbol of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is represented in terms of life, whether it is fire or water or wind or whatever it may be, it is life.

Newness

Another thing as a mark of the Spirit as here is newness. A feature of the sovereignty of the Spirit is newness. Paul elsewhere makes this contrast — “not in oldness of the letter but in newness of the spirit” (Romans 7:6), and newness is a characteristic of the Spirit’s presence. That is a challenge. Some of us can understand this and can appreciate it and we rejoice in it very greatly. When the Holy Spirit really does His work by the cross He makes all things new, but that newness is not something once and for all; it is continuous, it is always going on. The Holy Spirit’s presence and free operation will always mean that you and I and the Lord’s people can never become

static, stale, fixed, or merely traditional as bound by past traditions. We sing: “The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word”. Are you afraid of that? Some people are afraid of that. Anything fresh is suspect at once; anything new will be immediately called into question which means that there are certain settled and fixed lines which are recognized upon which the Lord must always move and any deviations from that cannot be of the Lord. The sovereignty of the Spirit means that there are going to be many surprises, overturnings and upsettings and will call for many adjustments. The Lord is going to keep things new when He has His way.

It is a newness of this kind — I have seen in relation to that part of the Word of God firstly something which was wonderful to me. And then in relation to the same thing later something which was more wonderful still, and then again that was transcended and all the time the oldest, most well-worn fragments of the Word are taking on new glories and new meanings and I am seeing more today in them than ever. The Word of God never becomes exhausted. No fragment of the Word is something the meaning and value and depth of which you have plumbed and that is the end of it, you never get beyond it. No, it is new. But there are those who will not leave room for that. Someone said a certain thing about that Scripture so many years ago and no one can improve on that. That was taught by So-and-so and you dare not add to that or go beyond that. Oh, you will find death there. No, newness is a wonderful mark of the Holy Spirit’s presence and we have got to leave room for that, for the Lord to do things that we have never heard of and never seen.

I do feel this Word about the sovereignty of the Spirit is so necessary, because apart from it there is a terrible limitation. You see, if the Lord lays His hand upon someone or some company of His children and leads them by some way that is not usually the recognized, established, conventional, traditional way, then they must have gone wrong! That is the conclusion; therefore beware of them! Is that right? Before Almighty God, is that right? The Bible is strewn with this sort of thing, the Lord taking hold of a people and causing them to move in a way that has never been done before, extraordinary, there is no convention for it. The Lord has a right to do that and, mark you, never has the Lord done that without there being those who have taken up a very strong attitude and position and have interpreted that as a departure from the Lord. You find it in the New Testament, but the truth is this that, whenever God has a new order in view, He usually does it in a new way or does what is new to those people who know all about it. Who will say today that what the Lord did through John Wesley, for example, was not a necessary thing? Oh, the state of things in Wesley’s time — and the Lord is going to move in a new way and He lays hold of John Wesley and leads him in a way that is altogether

contrary to the accepted way of the religious people of his time, and therefore John Wesley must be wrong and must be doing the devil's work! That is the verdict. And you cannot put your hand upon any instrumentality which the Lord has taken up to use for a new movement into His fulness, without there being those who say, That is not of the Lord! Why? Because they have never seen it done like that before, or because they had their rails laid down for the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit must keep on those rails and so the Lord is limited and the Lord's people are held in that limited straitness of spiritual life and the measure of Christ.

The Holy Spirit breaks through our conventions, traditions, and takes things into His own hands and does a new thing. "I will do a new thing" (Isa. 43:19). The challenge to us is, are we ready to let the Holy Spirit do something we have never heard of and about which everybody who knows all about it will say, Be careful, that is dangerous, that is not how it has been done before, that is something new! Are you ready for all that? Are you ready for the sovereignty of the Spirit to do a new thing with you, not just an extra thing, but a different kind of thing from what He has been doing, or what you have been accustomed to?

Liberty

One final word is that a mark of the Spirit is liberty. The sovereignty of the Spirit demands liberty, "Where the Spirit is Lord there is liberty." In order to bring us into all the fulness of the divine thought, we shall have to be brought to a place where we are absolutely free from all the binding systems of our Christianity and free to go on with the Lord. It is a liberty which on the one hand is very costly, but on the other hand it is a glorious thing when you know it.

How can I illustrate it? Well, if I may speak out of my own experience in this connection very briefly it is this. Time was when, in the things of the Lord, one was bound because one was man's servant. So many sermons had to be preached every week, so many addresses had to be prepared and given. You were paid for it, you had got to do it. It was your business, business for God, but there it was. There was the fixed course of things and the soul chafed against it, and the longing was, Oh, to be in a place where one could speak only when there is a message from God, and if there was not a message from God, to keep out of the way, hidden. The day came when the Lord made that actual, where He brought that old thing so much under death that it had to be, and I came out and said, I am never going to preach again unless the Lord gives me a living message! I am not going to be bound by this religious

system! Well, what might it have meant? It might have meant starvation, the cutting off of material things, salary and all the rest. You cannot do that sort of thing nowadays in the present system. Nevertheless it had got to be, the Lord had brought that crisis. Well, whatever it meant, the step was taken with God. What has it meant? I can tell you it has not meant bondage, limitation or straitness. It has meant emancipation, liberty. It was out from a thing into the Spirit. That is an imperfect illustration of what I mean. It is just that, that the Spirit must have us free. A mark of the Spirit's sovereignty is that He is free and we are free. We are out with Him and He can do as He likes, take His own course, and when He does that, it is life, it is liberty, and it is glory.

YIELDEDNESS TO THE SPIRIT

Reading: 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 6:1-14.

*“Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own affections”
(2 Cor. 6:12).*

The Lord has been leading us to face anew the matter of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and we have been seeing something of what that sovereignty means and how it works out. It is wonderfully and powerfully represented and demonstrated at the beginning of the book of the Acts on the day of Pentecost by a mighty, rushing wind which takes everything into its own hands and takes everything out of all other hands and proceeds as it will in its own way, to its own ends, by its own means. That is what the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit means in a life or in a church, among the Lord’s people as a whole. The Holy Spirit’s object is continuous enlargement upward, that is, that which is away from all that binds and limits here. And if He is going to bring us into that universal fulness of the Lord Jesus which is God’s fixed goal for all things, then of course He must be sovereign, He must have a sovereign way, He must be given both the right and the permission to do as He likes, to have what He wants, to move with an entirely free hand. Enlargement, we have said many times, is the Spirit’s object, but enlargement is a painful thing, a costly thing. But the Holy Spirit will bring it about if we really do give Him the right to do it, if we will really hand the matter over to Him, and whenever He comes up against something which has got to yield, if we will allow that to yield, the result must be spiritual enlargement, spiritual increase.

Hindrances in the way of the Spirit

Now here, in this little Word we have read, the apostle says to the Corinthians, “Ye are not straitened in us, ye are straitened in your own affections”, straitened in the things to which your hearts cling, toward which your hearts move! These are the things which limit you, and therefore work contrary

to the Holy Spirit! We might change the metaphor of Acts 2, and I think rightly so according to the Scriptures, from the mighty rushing wind to a mighty torrential river. I think Ezekiel's river has its counterpart and spiritual fulfilment in Acts. Probably you have seen a river in torrent, in spate. I am reminded of several rivers that I know in the North and have known from almost infancy, and I go now to those rivers when they are in torrent, and I see two things which I recognize as having been features of those rivers all my life.

One is that I still see the same old rocks in the same old place doing the same old work as was the case so many years ago! There they are in the river; the river is rushing with a terrific force, but those rocks stand in the full flood, as far as I can tell at exactly the same spot doing the same thing; that is setting themselves against the force of the waters. They have never moved, they have never grown, they have never yielded. There they are, they are like that.

There is another feature. Just up on the banks of those rivers there are trees, and I remember many years ago some of those trees being very small, just saplings, but I recognize those very trees now planted by a river as having grown and grown. I know them, but they have grown, taken advantage of, and profited by, their position by the river. For them the river has meant progress, development, increase. For the rocks it has meant nothing.

It seems to me that those are the things that come out in the New Testament after Pentecost. The rocks are things with which the apostles had to do and concerning which they wrote a very great deal of what they did write. That is, the river of God, the Spirit of God, came against things which were not prepared to yield to Him, and the terrible result is found in this, that some of the most terrible things written in the Bible are brought in as warnings to Christians. Has it ever occurred to you, has it ever really struck you with any force, that most of the things which are the most frequently used texts or passages of Scripture for Gospel addresses to the unsaved, were originally used for Christians? Do you recognise that? You know how often in the New Testament the Scripture is cited from Israel's falling in the wilderness — "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart". Well, you have rarely heard that passage used to Christians, but you have heard it perhaps hundreds of times used for the unsaved, and yet every time of the number of times in the New Testament where that Scripture is quoted, it is used to Christians.

Here is another case from Isaiah quoted again — "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation". You have heard that preached to the unsaved scores of times, but it is being preached by the apostle to Christians here. It is used not to the unsaved but to believers, and that is the terrible and tragic feature of the New Testament that things like that have to

be said of necessity to believers. Why? Because the Holy Spirit in His onward movement with His object of continuous enlargement has come up against something, and that something is not yielding to Him.

The grace of yieldedness

A feature of the prevailing sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in a life or in a church is this, an utter yieldedness to the Lord. If you have not already proved it and if you are really going on with the Lord, and if the Lord is really going to have His way in your life, you will come to know that one of the things for which the Lord aims is the grace of yieldedness, the grace of letting go to the Lord. It is a wonderful mark of a Spirit-governed life, the grace of letting go to the Lord. We saw it in a previous meditation in Peter who got up against the stream of the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit was seeking to move on to Caesarea to the house of Cornelius to open wide that gate to the Gentiles. Peter said, Not so, Lord; never has anything like this happened before in my experience: as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be ...! That is the effect. Not so, Lord! The Holy Spirit came up against something.

But I do like to note that, years afterwards, Peter wrote some letters and one of the big words, one of the main tones, in Peter's letter is that word 'subjection'. Have you noticed that? It represents something of the Spirit's triumph in Peter, because of all men, Peter was the one man who found that his difficulty. You remember just before the Lord suffered, Jesus, knowing that His hour had come and that the Father had delivered all things into his hands, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. Then He poured water into a basin, and came to Simon Peter, and Peter said, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Thou shalt never wash my feet! Here is Peter getting right up against the Lord, and it was like that all the way through with Peter. He is constantly found standing up against the Lord, up against the movements of the Lord, up against the judgments of the Lord, up against the intentions of the Lord, and here he is again. Not so, Lord! But at last the Spirit has triumphed over that in Peter and he writes those very valuable letters, the main theme of which is grace. You change the word 'acceptable' in Peter to the word 'grace', which word it really is. It ought never to have been translated 'acceptable', it is 'grace'. "If you do good and suffer for it, this is — our version says 'acceptable', in the original it is 'grace' — this is grace with God" (1 Pet. 2:20). With Peter, grace has come to be expressed in terms of letting go to the Lord. The Spirit has triumphed, the river has started on its course. It has met things, it has met them in Peter, but, perhaps after a battle, the Spirit has been allowed to carry Peter on. He has yielded and there

is wonderful enlargement in Peter. The sovereignty of the Spirit will work for a letting go to the Lord.

The hindrance of possessiveness

It will, perhaps, come up against our possessiveness. That may be one of the rocks in the way of the Spirit — our possessiveness. Possessiveness has many forms. You may not be ambitious to possess a great deal in this world, this world's goods and so on, but that does not mean there is no possessiveness. You see, Peter had a way of swinging round on this very point. When the Lord came to wash his feet, he first of all said, Dost Thou wash my feet? Thou shalt never wash my feet! Then the Lord said, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me! Oh, then, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head! That is only another form. It is for me, I want all I can get! — drawing to himself, another form of possessiveness, and possessiveness can be very spiritual.

I want to get at this very closely. Have you noticed how slow the Lord is, or seems to be so often, in responding to our tremendously strong appeals for blessing and for the fulness of the Spirit? What is your experience about that? Is there anyone who can say, The time was when I felt a great desire for the fulness of the Spirit, and I simply went to the Lord and got it at once, or for a certain great blessing, and I went to the Lord and without any waiting, the Lord just gave me what I wanted!? It is not the common experience. Some of us prayed intensely for years, we prayed day and night for some great enlargement of spiritual life, a greater fulness of the Spirit. We can put it in different ways, but what we were after was something bigger, something mightier, and we prayed for many years and struggled and strained and groaned and cried. It seemed that nothing happened. Oh, there was something happening all right. We did not know what was happening, but something was happening, but not as we wanted, and our prayer has not been answered by the Lord as we desired it to be answered. What did happen was this, that eventually we came to the place where we thought that this was an end of everything, and that the Lord must do a new thing more than He had ever done or else it was the finish for me. It was a position that represented this, that we no longer wanted a thing, it was a matter of life or death, it was all or nothing, and unless the Lord Himself came in, there was no future. The Lord had been working towards that all the time we had been praying, gradually, imperceptibly, underneath, bringing us down, lower and lower, until we touched bottom. Then it was either a matter of going right out, or it being all the Lord. Yes, towards that He had been answering our prayers, but you see, before there was so much of us

in the picture that if the Lord had given us an answer to prayer, we ourselves would have taken hold of the very Holy Spirit and traded with Him to our own glory, to make a name for ourselves to be something, and that is infinitely perilous. What the Lord was working at was letting go, our possessiveness being broken. It may be that some of you are in that process now. I don't know that we ever get to the place where that sort of thing has gone utterly and forever, where there is not something more to be done.

But the point is that the Holy Spirit's sovereignty means that there has got to come about in us the grace of yieldedness to the Lord. It was not long after the river started on its mighty course on the day of Pentecost before in all sorts of directions and connections, challenges arose. But it entirely depended upon the reaction of those concerned as to whether the presence of the Spirit in fulness meant enlargement or loss, and we must remember that the Holy Spirit's presence does inevitably work out in one or other of those directions. No one can ever come in the line of the Holy Spirit's operations and remain the same. They are either going to lose out or they are going on in the increase of God.

So you see this double effect beginning in the New Testament. On the one hand the Holy Spirit challenges possessions. They have got lands and houses, they have got things, and in effect the Holy Spirit says, I want those, I need those, I need them for the church, I need them for your fellow-members! Well, in some hearts He had an instant response. These that had lands and houses sold them and distribution was made, nothing that they possessed did they call their own, it was the Lord's. That is the way of enlargement. But there was Ananias and Sapphira. They had lands, they had possessions and the Holy Spirit came up against possessiveness in them and a business instinct to turn the things of God to personal advantage. In their case, that personal interest in spiritual things meant death, meant the loss of everything. It did not mean that they were left where they were. No, they lost everything. It is the effect of the Holy Spirit.

I was looking in the book of Samuel and recalling what Samuel said to the people when they said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations", and I do not know whether I am right in this, but it seems to me it was not necessarily a wrong thing — though the people were wrong in asking for a king (I do not think it was necessarily a wrong thing that Samuel said about the king if he were given.) Here it is —

"This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you; he will take your sons, and appoint them unto him, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and they shall run before his chariots; and he will appoint them unto him for captains of thousands, and captains of fifties; and he will set

some to plow his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and the instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks: and ye shall be his servants” (1 Samuel 8:11-17).

I do not think I am wrong in saying that is exactly what the Lord does when He is King. He puts His hand on everything, everything that we have. It is a challenge of Kingship, the sovereignty of the Spirit. Can the Lord have what He wants — that is the point. Can the Lord do as He likes, for that is the prerogative of a King. Is He going to come up against things? Start again with the New Testament and read it in the light of this. Take the Corinthian letter if you like, and you do not begin to read before you find the Holy Spirit coming up against things. “One saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.” These are rocks in the course of the river; these are things withstanding the Holy Spirit. There is that love of wisdom found in chapter 2 of I Corinthians, and the love of power. Go right through the letter and you find all sorts of things which are arising in people withstanding the Holy Spirit. We cannot even mention them all, but the point, I think, is quite clear.

If there is going to be this mighty enlargement of life, of the Spirit, of Christ, then we have got to be prepared for any opposing of our minds, our reasons, our affections. “Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own affections”, straitened by the things upon which your hearts are set.

We must just leave it there, and I am quite sure that, apart from the particular things mentioned, the lesson is clear, the message is perceptible. The Lord simply says to us, I am out for enlargement, My thought is enlargement all the time, but you must be prepared for Me to take My own way, to do as I like, and you must not oppose Me by tradition or anything else! You must be prepared to bring everything and just hand it up and let Me do something that was never done before if I want to, something that looks like a contradiction in itself, but it is not in reality a contradiction! The Lord will test us on all sorts of things. Yes, He will test us as to our yieldedness to Him even to the point of calling upon us to do a thing quite in the opposite direction of what He has told us before. He tests us — He may not carry the thing through, He may not make that demand ultimately, but He will bring us to the mountain top with the wood under our arm and the knife lifted. Then He will stop us and say, Now I know; I knew, but I have had to bring you to that

place where you were prepared to let Me have My way! The Lord does not work on theory, He works on practice. He does it in us, He knows all about it. That is the point — being brought where, however strange and contradictory it may seem, the Lord gets His own way. That is the sovereignty of the Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND A VESSEL IN RELATION TO THE PURPOSE OF GOD

Reading: Ezekiel 1:1, 4-28; 2:1-2.

We shall continue for a little while in the matter which the Lord has been bringing before us, namely the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. We shall turn back to this book of Ezekiel again, because if there is one book more than another in the Old Testament which sets forth the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, it is this one.

“Visions of God”

The first chapter is not easy to understand at a first reading nor at a second. You have to read it quite a few times before you can really get in your mind a clear definition of what it was exactly that Ezekiel saw. We can put it into few words, remembering that what is here in this book is called ‘visions of God’. It might be well just to pause to let that light upon us. God is revealing Himself. What is here then, is that which discloses God, brings God into view in different ways and different connections. In these visions, the all-inclusive vision is in chapter 1, which is very much in relation to the rest of the book what the first chapter of John is to the rest of the Gospel. You know how the first chapter of John contains all that follows in that gospel and all the remainder of John’s gospel is just a breaking up and working out of what is in chapter 1, and so it is with Ezekiel. The first chapter includes all the prophecies and governs all the content of this book. The rest is just the leading-out of the implications and significance of this first chapter.

Well then, Ezekiel says that he looked and out from the north there came a whirlwind, a stormy wind, with fire infolding itself, that is, turning inward upon itself, and revolving upon its own axis, something which is moving by its own impetus and volition, and as he looked and saw this oncoming whirlwind, it began to take more definite shape or to show some distinct features, all of which he sets down.

First of all, there were four living ones with their features, the man, the lion, the ox, the eagle, and then, as beneath them like a chariot, wheels, great wheels, fixed in every direction, that is, according to the four points of the compass, embracing in a word the whole creation, and looking closer the prophet saw that the rims of these wheels were full of eyes round about which represents universal vision, all-comprehending knowledge. The living ones on the wheels moved straightforward because the spirit of the living ones was in the wheels. And then, looking higher, he saw above the living ones a great firmament, a heaven crystal clear, and above all a sapphire throne, and upon the throne above it the likeness as of a man. But the description of the man is a very awful description — to use the word in its proper sense — full of awe, and then finally as encompassing the throne and encircling the man upon it above, the rainbow.

We said that all that gives character to the rest of the book and if you were to take up each part of that first comprehensive vision and recognize its significance, you would see that it is all applying all the way through the book. That is not our intention in this meditation.

I want at once to pass right over to the book of the Acts and to point out that what we have in the book of the Acts is exactly that in spiritual counterpart. This was a vision, but it is summed up in the precise statement that all this comprised a presentation of revelation of the glory of the Lord. When we then come to the book of the Acts, we have Ezekiel 1, not now in a vision, but in reality. The language of the day of Pentecost is the sound of a mighty, rushing wind, and there appeared tongues of fire parting asunder. You cannot mistake the symbolism. A whirlwind, wind and fire, moving not by the will of man, not as propelled by any human organization or institution or committee, or board of directors, but by its own almighty, independent, self-contained volition. That is Pentecost. That is the movement of the Lord. Wind and fire — two of the mightiest elements in God's creation.

The living ones

Living ones — they appear again and again in the Scriptures and especially do we see them in the book of the Revelation, and without staying to say what has been said before at considerable length, let us point out that these living ones are the symbolism of Christ and His church, Christ and His Body.

Christ, in the first place, as the Man, speaking of and setting forth representation, representative before God, representative of God; that is, on God's behalf to man, and for man to God; the Man — representation.

The lion — He is Lord. Now, you get those two things in Acts. The

testimony is concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man mighty in Word and in deed. “I see the heavens opened”, said Stephen, “and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Get alongside of that and immediately relate to it the testimony, “God hath exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour” (Acts 5:31). “He is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). Here is the lion feature — He is Lord. The Man who is Lord. The testimony of Pentecost is that Jesus is Lord. Jesus the Man is also Lord of glory.

The ox — “I see ... the Son of man standing”. When the Lord Jesus is presented at the beginning of the book of the Revelation He is girded. In the Scriptures the ox is forever the type and symbol of divine service. The Lord Jesus is God’s servant. That is sometimes translated in our version in that way. You remember — “Thy holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:30). The service of the Lord Jesus comes into view with the ox aspect of the living ones.

Then comes the eagle, that is heavenliness of life and of vision, always carrying an element of mystery. The eagle is supposed to be the symbol of knowing everything, universal knowledge. There is a little word you remember, that says, “There is a path that the eye of the eagle hath not seen” (Job 28:7). That is saying a tremendous thing. “There is a path that the eye of the eagle hath not seen.” Well, that must be something beyond all range of knowledge but that of the Holy Spirit — that path. Quite a lot of people who worship intellect are not prepared to admit that there is a path that the eye of the eagle hath not seen. Now then, I will take you out to the eagle’s standpoint, and you test your vision against the eagle’s. Why, he is far beyond you every time. What you would never detect, he has seen. Oh, we are outstripped by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus is in that position.

But if this fourfold symbolism of the living ones represents Christ, it also represents Christ in a corporate capacity — His Body and members. We are not going to stay to show how that is in the Scriptures, but it is so, and it means that the church which is His body is to take character from Him in the sense that it is to represent God here. The church, the body of Christ, is as Christ here. So often, as you know, in the New Testament the church is spoken of as though it were identical with Christ. Such language as — “As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12).

One body, many members — identification. So the Man is Christ — and then Christ expressed and revealed in His Body.

The lion — well, the church is to take its character from Him and come into fellowship with Him. “All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore ...” (Matt. 28:18-19). That is identification with Him in His authority, and you notice how in the book of the Acts the

Lordship of Jesus Christ is being expressed, ministered, through the church in the Name of Jesus, and every power in creation has to yield there when the church speaks in the Name of Jesus.

But even alongside of that, the church, His Body, is a servant. Peter says, “Not lording it over God’s heritage” (1 Pet. 5:3). However exalted your position may be in union with Christ, not lording it over God’s heritage. “Ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Well, you see, that opens up its own realm of Scripture. The servant of God is the church, the body of Christ, the ox.

The eagle — “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe” (Eph. 1:17-19). That is the path which the eye of the eagle hath not seen, granted by a spirit of wisdom and revelation to those who have the eyes of their hearts enlightened.

Well, that all came into a living expression on the day of Pentecost. The church was there with the exalted Lord and took its character from Him.

The wheels

And the wheels — what are they? They go straight forward, they turn not to the right hand nor to the left. They go straightforward. How did they do it? You do not know. You see, that is the difficulty and mystery of divine things. You have got a wheel pointing in that direction and a wheel pointing in this direction and another one in another direction, all going straight forward, keeping together in the same direction. These things cannot be reduced to our minds, but the significance is perfectly clear, if you see what the wheels are. What really did happen on the day of Pentecost? Well, Peter stood up with the eleven and said, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16), and in making that statement, he gives us a clue.

This is what? Well, God has all the way along had His counsels settled, His purposes established, and God right through the ages has been going on with His eternal counsels, and this is that! This is not something that has suddenly come up. This is something which has been foreseen and fore-established long before, and long before Joel. It is coming out of eternity and it is moving on and it has to do with every bound of the earth and of the creation. It reaches it and points in every direction, the counsels of God from eternity concerning this whole creation in its fourfold direction. God is moving on in

His eternal counsels, and Pentecost is just that, God in sovereignty coming and taking up those purposes of His from eternity and going on.

It is a great thing to realize that it does not matter really what happens in the nations. God is going on with His settled purpose. Here in Ezekiel things are apparently on the earth in a very serious and tragic condition. Everything seems to be upset and in chaos, but it is making no difference to God, He is going straight on. In Ezekiel, Israel and Judah have departed from the Lord and they are about to be abandoned by the Lord, but God is going on. He is not abandoning His purpose. In the book of the Acts, all Israel has rejected God's Son; God is going on. All the nations are in tumult, but God is going on. Let us remember that in a day like this. A heavenly vision means that you do not become despairingly entangled in the chaos of earth and in all the tragedy of this world. You do not become involved in it as though it spelt disaster. No, heavenly vision means that you see through it all that God is going on and straight on. He is not deviating a bit because of all this, He is not being deflected a hair's breadth because of this. The counsels of God move straight on towards the ultimate end.

If we could only stay with that — what a wonderful story! There is no romance like this in all history. Why, the book of the Acts is just full of it. Listen to them — “Jesus of Nazareth ... ye by the hand of wicked men did crucify and slay” (Acts 2:22,23). I wonder if ever, in reading the story of the arrest and trial of the Lord Jesus, you have ever felt — I confess that sometimes I have felt — Oh, what a pity that Pilate was not a little stronger, had a little more courage, that he did not yield a little more to his wife when she told him her dream! — how near you get sometimes to the point where just a little more on one side of the balance, and the whole thing would have taken another course. What a pity, the whole thing giving way just for want of a little bit more! But then I have had to come to what it says here in the Acts. Yes, by the hands of wicked men they slew Him, they crucified Him, but it also says here — “According to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”. Is this an accident, a slip, a mishap, a misfortune? Has something gone wrong? No, God is going straight through this. This lies directly in line with the eternal counsels of God. This is no accident, there is not something unfortunate about this. It has got to be. God is cutting sheer through all human aspects of this with divine counsels.

Acts is full of that, history is full of that. See how things which look like the manipulation of men and if only this had obtained things would have taken another course — no! God is moving right through the whims and fancies of men. There is a romance behind the Word of God and it is the romance of these eternal counsels, the sovereignty of the Spirit of God taking

hold of everything, moving through everything, and Paul puts it into that sublime word so precious to us — “We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called *according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28). Always add that last bit on, don’t forget that. A lot of people like to take the first bit, that all things work together for good. But don’t make any mistake — they work together for good when you are in line with God’s purpose, not otherwise. Do take hold of that. In line with God’s purpose, He works all things together for good. That is, nothing can, in the ultimate sense, harm you. You may suffer in the meantime, but in the ultimate sense it cannot harm. It will be taken hold of by the sovereignty of God and made to facilitate and expedite God’s end rather than frustrate. “I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:12). The Spirit is sovereign in adversities. It is also good to know that in these eternal counsels and purposes of God there is all-comprehending knowledge and understanding.

“Full of eyes round about”

Nothing escapes those eyes, the eyes of God’s knowledge. Everything is taken in. “Full of eyes round about”, not missing anything, and you know when we come into perfect oneness with God in His eternal purpose under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, it is just remarkable how we discover that the Lord has got His eyes upon the details. It is no accident. If only we were to come under the sovereignty of the Spirit, how many more things could the Lord do, how many more things could the Lord make us aware of. We miss so much because we are not under the Spirit’s government. You do not know why you are constrained to go to a certain place, take a certain course, why it is that you are either impelled or held back, but you know it. You know inwardly that there is something happening, causing you either to move or not to move, and if you obey the Spirit, sooner or later you know that the Spirit saw something, and your moving in that direction had an Ethiopian down in the desert. You did not know any more than Philip. All he knew was that the Spirit told him to go that way which was desert. A strange thing, out of revival to a desert. But the Spirit could have his way with Philip, and the Spirit was vindicated down there. The Spirit is seeing everything. I do not know what your cry is; my cry daily is that I may be so governed by the Spirit that all contacts may be arranged by Him, all the moving and the not moving, because that is a very fruitful way. Well, for the moment, that is enough about the wheels, full of eyes, moving on and obeying because the Spirit is there.

A firmament

A firmament above, crystal clear. All this is heavenly in its nature. This after all, while it will make contact with the earth and it will relate to things here as a testimony, you notice that it is not earthbound, “When they were lifted up from the earth ...”. This thing is being governed by the heavens, this is the rule of the heavens. The church, you see, here, the body in union with Christ under the Spirit’s sovereign government, is being actuated from heaven, and is serving heavenly purpose. The tragedy is this, that the New Testament church so soon lost its heavenly position and relationship and life, and came down to earth and resolved itself into an earthly institution. This came to its great climax and consummation in the fourth century under Constantine when the church and the State joined hands and became one, and the leaders of the church said, The Millennium has come and the thousand years has started! — an earthly institution and an awful delusion. Come down there and the devil can delude and rob and spoil, as he did. The Lord re-acts to get a people with a testimony towards the earth, with an impact upon the earth, but not by any means bound to the earth; a heavenly thing under heavenly government. The sovereignty of the Spirit will have that, you see.

I am marking every step by this; this is what it means when the Spirit is sovereign. You are moving directly in line with eternal counsels, the purposes of God from everlasting to everlasting in His Son through His church, and I am with that when the Spirit is sovereign. It is a straightforward course and it is heavenly in its relationship, in its life. It is not earthly at all.

You know, that is a challenge. It is a challenge to a very great deal that is here today which is called ‘the church’. It is not just an idea that you come out on a doctrine of ‘come-out-ism’, that you decide to leave all the organised system of Christianity and take an independent position. No doubt a lot of people have done that. If you have done that as a matter of policy, by any suggestion to you from the outside I suggest that you go back again. If you get a heavenly revelation, a vision of God, you will be out, even though you stay in. In the innermost reality of your spiritual life, you will know that you are no part of an earthly organization, though it be called ‘the church’, that you are out, you cannot possibly be bounded by earth and earthly limitations, even religiously. You are out in the universality of the heaven. And no one who has not had that as a spiritual experience can understand what I am talking about, and of course you cannot understand Ezekiel 1 in any case, but this is what it means. It is heavenly, there is a firmament, and the firmament is governing. It is what Daniel meant when he told the king that

the heavens do rule, and the king acknowledged it, he had to come to know that the heavens do rule.

And above the firmament a throne, and upon the throne above it the likeness, the appearance, as of a Man. I need not stay with that throne and that Man. We all recognize Him.

A rainbow

But then we must not omit the encirclement of the throne with the rainbow, for it ever speaks of the grace and mercy of God in covenant. Storms, deluges, judgments for sin, yes, but judgment is not the last Word, destruction is not the last Word. The last Word, the eternal song, will be of His infinite mercy and grace, and so it is a throne of grace, after all, and not finally of judgment, although there are going to be judgments.

You see the symbolism, but all this is in Acts. You can see it there and it is all summed up in this one thing: when the sovereignty of the Spirit obtains, this is the sort of thing that is going on.

Revelation of God's eternal purpose

Now, I want you to realize that this was a vision given to Ezekiel, a servant of God. It was to his spirit a revelation of things as they existed with God in the unseen. No one else saw this, but he saw great spiritual realities which lie back of the universe, back of all that was happening on the earth. Only Ezekiel saw it and knew it.

The point in that is just this. We may be very much impressed and taken up with the happenings on the earth, history itself, the chequered course and career, the rise and fall of empires, the tragedy of wars and conflicts, and the sufferings of man. But there is something behind all that, something very definite behind it all. To come under the sovereignty of the Spirit is to begin to see this that lies behind all, to have another knowledge, another information, and to be in fellowship with God who is working to a plan which lies behind all this. The sovereignty of the Spirit means that. It is a very great thing to have had the eyes of the heart enlightened to know what is in God's mind, what is meant by that recurrent phrase — "according to the eternal purpose". That is the thing to govern and that is the thing to save when everything on earth seems to be going to pieces and to be going wrong. God is working to an eternal purpose, and the Holy Spirit, when He gets His way in a life, begins to lift away from earth and give this assurance and this conviction and this concern, and furthermore, enables to come into cooperation with this

eternal purpose back of it all. Ezekiel saw in vision what was behind, what was eternal, and it saved him. He is called 'the prophet of hope'. His name means 'God my strength'; Ezekiel will have to go through a very great deal of suffering, of sorrow, of distress. He will have the tragedy of his people forced through the very arteries of his heart in travail, but he will be saved and be the prophet of hope to his people because he has seen what lies behind everything.

If we are going to have any ministry at all that is going to save in the day of earth's tragedy when men's hearts are failing for fear, when everybody does not know where they are, we have got to see with the eyes of the heart enlightened, what God's eternal purpose is, and to be cooperating with God in that.

The question at once arises with you. What is the eternal purpose? — that Jesus Christ shall fill all things and be all in all. But that has got to be made good in spiritual experience. Is there suffering? Well, that suffering can be unto death and eternal barrenness, or, under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit, that suffering can be made to bring about a mighty increase of Christ in the most direct way, and who will contradict that? If you have suffered according to the will of God and if in your suffering, you have taken this attitude — Lord, I am not asking for deliverance from the suffering, to escape from it, to have it taken away, but I am asking you to fulfil the divine purpose in it; then, when that is done, if you will take it away ...! If you have taken that attitude towards suffering, you know quite well that your suffering has been used of God to bring about an increase of the Lord in your life. It is always like that. And what is true in a personal case is true for the church, and may it not be that the limitation and weakness of the church today is largely due to its having such a long period without any suffering? The Lord may be going to rectify that.

But you see there is a purpose to which God is working. I only merely barely indicate that. The purpose of God in the end is that Christ is going to fill all things and He Himself is going to be all in all, and that works right down to details of our lives. Recognize then, that what the Lord is working at from eternity is to bring you into the fulness of Christ and to bring the fulness of Christ into the church, the church which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. The Spirit must be sovereign, must have His way, if that purpose is to be realized. It is the great purpose in grace which God has covenanted, given in the symbol of the rainbow. The rainbow is the symbol of His covenant, grace reaching His end.

Ezekiel saw the glory slowly leaving Jerusalem. It seemed to move in three stages. It lifted up and hovered as though God were waiting to see if

perhaps yet they would turn and forsake their sin. And then it moved out to the Mount of Olives a little way off and hovered. Oh, the Lord is loth to leave anyone, to withdraw, He waits. He hovered again, but no — and then the glory moved right away. Israel was left, Jerusalem was abandoned, but God works — judgment, adversity, destruction, captivity, and you work through these many chapters, firstly of Israel’s judgment, then the judgment upon the nations, and then what? The way cleared for God, new visions of the house, and the glory coming back.

Pass over to Acts. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:37-38). The glory is passing from Jerusalem. It hovers on the Mount of Olives, longing, but no! They cast Him out, they reject Him, and the glory is withdrawn from Israel, and Israel shall know her judgment. “There shall not be one stone left upon another.” But then the book of the Acts, the new house, the church brought into view, the glory coming back and filling. You see the type and the antitype between Ezekiel and Acts.

An instrument with revelation

But what does it lead to? It is this — when the Holy Spirit is sovereign, He will first of all secure unto Himself a prophetic instrument, that is, a vessel, which has God’s thoughts. The church is supposed to be that and is intended to be that. As a whole, the church is not that, but nevertheless, God does not abandon His line of procedure, and He will secure unto Himself an instrument which stands related to Him in the capacity of the prophetic ministry for the time of declension and departure, an instrument which sees, with heart eye-opening, what God’s thoughts are for His people. Ezekiel is that, and he is a man who is abandoned to the Holy Spirit. This is the kind of instrument that God will use. You know very well, as you read through this book, how repeatedly the Words are used — “the Spirit lifted me up”, “the Spirit carried me through”, “the Spirit took me out, the Spirit set me upon my feet”. *The Spirit*; and here is a man who is utterly in the hand of the Holy Spirit. All that is happening is because the Spirit is so absolutely sovereign.

Now, the first thing that the sovereignty of the Spirit means is that He gets hold of an instrument that has God’s thoughts for His people in a dark day when those thoughts have been lost, when the knowledge, the vision, the clear sight of those thoughts, has become darkened. God raises up an instrument, maybe small, but He raises up an instrument, a vessel, in which His full thought for His people, or shall I say His fuller thought for His people, is

deposited. That is what the Holy Spirit will do. Here is the instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit which has revelation. Oh, how important it is in a day such as Ezekiel's and such as this that there shall be somewhere something here among the Lord's people which has revelation by the Holy Spirit of what God's thoughts are.

The faithfulness of God requires that He shall have such an instrument. That is, He cannot abandon His purpose nor His people. He must have an instrument like that in revelation, seeing what lies behind the chaos, the tragedy, what God's thought is.

The instrument made a sign

Then — and this is the more difficult aspect — I suppose our hearts might leap and bound at that idea of an instrument with revelation. But there is no room for the flesh here. The flesh is never allowed to exhibit itself in divine revelations, and so the instrument raised up for such a purpose will be one which itself is made a sign, that is, it will go through the very things themselves in personal experience, and those things will go through it. "Son of man, I have made thee a sign to the house of Israel" (Ezek. 12:2,6). Do you see what that meant? Do you know that Ezekiel was away in captivity already? The ten tribes have gone into captivity, and Ezekiel was with them. Now, two tribes, Judah and Jerusalem, were back there still, and far away from it all Ezekiel was having the whole tragedy of Jerusalem passed through his heart in experience. It was being worked through him so that he could tell the people on the spot what was happening and going to happen, although the actual news of it did not reach them for months afterwards. It has all been wrought in him, and he is telling them.

For instance, on the day that Jerusalem actually fell, Ezekiel's wife died. You remember the story, and how the Lord took hold of that domestic tragedy to use it as a sign to Israel, to make it the vehicle of a message to the House of Israel. The Lord has lost His bride, and the Lord's loss of Jerusalem which He had betrothed unto Him, the Lord's loss of His people of whom He was able to say, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Jer. 2:2), and how He described Israel as being beautiful, "I remember thee", and now that is lost to the Lord and Jerusalem is destroyed, and that has its reproduction and expression in the domestic circle of the prophet. That day his wife died. There was no reason why she should die, not naturally, but God was working out His own divine history and fulness in the life and heart of an instrument, so that that man could not only stand up and say, I have received

a message from the Lord! He could say, I know this by personal experience, this thing has been wrought in me, this is a part of my being! Believe me, that is a law of usefulness to God.

Paul said, “I fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). He had Christ’s sufferings in part passed through his very heart, his very life. Paul was no retailer of doctrine, Paul was a man who spoke out of what God was doing in him, and it is not so easy to be a minister on that basis. It must be like that. “Son of man, I have made you a sign”, and you know how Ezekiel was setting this thing that was happening forth all the time and he did not know that it was happening by any direct course. He got it from heaven, and the way in which he knew it was the Spirit working day by day in his own life.

Yes, God will have an instrument, but that will be an instrument deeply wrought into the thoughts of God through suffering and experience. The sovereignty of the Spirit means that. Are you ready for that? When you ask the Holy Spirit to be absolute Lord and Sovereign and to have perfect mastery in your life, what do you expect? I know what I expected — very different from what I got! There began a history of deep suffering, out of which any little ministry that could be should flow. I am thankful it is like that. It is good to be able to say that we have learned in experience, we know it under the hand of God, we are not talking out of a book. It is good to be in that position. But it is a costly way. The Spirit will take us that way — that is the point. When He is sovereign, He will.

Holiness unto the Lord

What rises out of this whole revelation through Ezekiel, all his prophecies, comes out in full view at the end in positive statement. But it is here inherent in chapter 1 that the sovereignty of the Spirit demands an inward state which is in conformity to God’s holiness. The vision, the beginning, is just that. I said it is awful, it is the sapphire, it is the crystal, it is the fire, it is the burning, it is the lightning — it is terrible! What is it that is terrible? It is the holiness of God. The glory of God rests upon God’s holiness. There can never be glory and glorification until there is holiness, and in the end you know when the house is brought in in vision and the glory returns. The statement is that the whole bound, the whole dimension, the whole order of the house is holiness unto the Lord. That was the trouble here — unholiness, and when the Spirit takes in hand the purpose of God and becomes sovereign, He works towards a state *inwardly* in conformity with God’s holiness. The people went on with their religious performances, they continued in their

religious rites. It was not that they were not going to church, that they were not offering sacrifices. It was not that they abandoned the whole temple order and system. They were keeping it up. But inwardly it was all unholy and God who sees all can never allow outward religious forms to be a substitute for inward holiness. The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit means that God is going to have things inwardly according to His own holiness.

Pentecost was indeed a holiness movement from heaven. Ananias and Sapphira discovered that. Yes, holiness. Well, is that terrible? Would we have it otherwise? Surely not! We pray that the Holy Spirit may do that work in us, may have a full way to see to it that in our inward parts it is holiness unto the Lord.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

Reading: Ezekiel 40:1-4; 43:10-12.

It is necessary for us to bow to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and we are brought to a very practical application, for naturally I think, our judgment would have decided upon a course other than the one which seems to be definitely the leading of the Lord. I have but one emphasis, and it is quite a distinct emphasis in my heart as to the Lord's leading for this meditation, and we must just trust Him that He will be proved right as we obey.

We were seeing in our previous meditation the correspondence between the prophecies of Ezekiel and the book of the Acts, commonly called the Acts of the apostles, more properly, the Acts of the Holy Spirit. What the Lord is stressing so emphatically and clearly at this point is the desire in His own heart to lead men and women into all His fulness in Christ, and that in order to do that, it is most necessary that His Holy Spirit, to whom is given that work, should have His perfectly sovereign place in our entire lives and in His church. That is, that the Holy Spirit should be allowed to do exactly and altogether as He likes in us and with us, without any question or objection on our part.

We saw how Ezekiel, as representing an instrument and vessel in relation to the full thoughts of God for His people, was utterly yielded to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and what a large place the Holy Spirit has in his ministry throughout. And we saw how the first chapter of his prophecies has its spiritual and actual counterpart in the book of the Acts when the Holy Spirit came, and in His place of complete Lordship, took things into His own hands and brought an instrument under His power, with certain very distinct results.

The Holy Spirit's pre-eminent concern in this dispensation

Now, we are going to advance upon that, to see yet more of what is the result of the Holy Spirit having His complete, sovereign position, and

here again in Ezekiel we have the illustration and foreshadowing of what came about in the book of the Acts. We have passed over much history to reach chapter 40, but it is here that our heart-exercise for the moment is found.

When the Lord has had His way cleared for Him in the judgment of sin and of all that which was frustrating His purpose in and through His people, and the Spirit is able to resume or take up again that great purpose of God, you notice that the first thing which comes into view is the house of God. In Ezekiel those judgments have been carried out and the way now, through death and resurrection — you remember chapter 37, the great movement of the Spirit in resurrection in the valley of dry bones — now the Spirit can go on to His positive ground. We may say that all that is negative in the sense that it is something to be dealt with, to be got rid of, to give the Spirit a clear way.

Having got His way, it is impressive, significant and of vital importance for our recognition, that He brings the house of the Lord into view, and so with chapter 40 this house is revealed, a house which has never yet been literally built, and I am not going to stay to argue whether it ever will be literally built. But I do know this, that the house is in existence, and that the New Testament shows that house of Ezekiel in existence, and that it came into spiritual existence on the day of Pentecost.

Our point here for the moment is this, that the Holy Spirit in sovereignty is concerned, not with so many individuals as individuals, but with that body of believers which is a house of God in the corporate sense. The Holy Spirit is pre-eminently concerned with that in this dispensation, and I think we may say for all time that has been in the divine view and purpose, making this dispensation the most important dispensation of all. Not many of us have come to appreciate that, that is, to be thankful that we are alive in this age above all ages. Nevertheless, it is true that upon this age all the ends of the ages are come. That is, all ages past and future meet in this age. The ages past lead up to it and demand it for their justification, their vindication. All future ages take their character from this age, from what God is doing in this age, and the thing therefore which lies right at the centre of all the ages as characterising the dispensation in which we live is God the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven for one precise purpose, to be realised perhaps by many means, but one purpose only, that is the spiritual house of God. To be governed truly by the Holy Spirit, to come utterly under His sovereign government means that the thing which is uppermost in us is *the* thing which is uppermost with Him — the spiritual house of God.

The measurements of the house of God

So Ezekiel was again laid hold of by the Spirit and in the visions of God brought into the land of Israel and set down by a very high mountain and then he saw the frame of a city and a man with a measuring reed, and that man took charge of him, led him in, led him round, led him through, led him out, took him up, set him down, and at every step the man was saying, This is the measure of that, put it down! And this is the measure of that, put it down! I have brought you here for this purpose, you take very careful note! You have got to show this in all detail to the House of Israel, so watch carefully! And so every point, every angle without and within, up and down and around, the dimensions of the house, were given. Everything was marked out and set down as a precise, detailed, minute expression of God's thought.

A Holy Spirit governed life will not just be general, but will be concerned about God's thoughts in detail. You see, these measurements, whether they be small or great, round just so many inches or feet of material, of ground or of fabric, these measurements are spiritual qualities of Christ. You know that is true by turning to the part of the New Testament which has more than any other the house in view — the letter to the Ephesians, and in that letter, measurement is a very important thing. "The breadth and length and height and depth" (Eph. 3:18). "Till we all attain unto ... the *measure* of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), so that you are not just dealing with numbers and technical details; you are dealing with the living Person, and what that living Person is in nature and character and meaning and implication. And the Holy Spirit's great object is to get the house which is conformed to the image of God's Son in every detail. It is a house and that house is not a thing; that house is a divine Person in expression, in manifestation. That Living Person is no other than God's own Son.

That may not be very new to you, but it is one other very important emphasis in this matter of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. No Holy Spirit governed life will ever make light of that which relates to the house of God, the body of Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit. But a Holy Spirit governed life will have great reverence and great concern for that house, and will have a great travail over it. Hear one who really did know something about the government of the Holy Spirit in his life: "I would have you know what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (Col. 2:1). What conflict! He said — "that I may present every man complete in Christ — unto that I have great travail, great conflict". That is a mark of a Holy Spirit governed life — a great concern and travail for the saints to come to completeness in Christ.

I do not want to stay to press that challenge. If it were pressed, it would raise big questions in some directions, but let us recognize the truth about this and ask the Lord to bear it home to our hearts in the way in which it needs to be borne home in our case. A Holy Spirit governed life is given a great concern that God's great end should be realized, which end relates to His house. That concern may begin with the unsaved, and it surely should begin there or it surely should have its bearing in that direction, for the house can never be realized without the salvation of those who are to be the living stones. But if anyone allows their concern for the unsaved to go that far and to go no further, then somewhere the Holy Spirit's course has been interrupted. No, He is going right on, and He is not going to leave things there and we must recognize that the work of the Spirit is not in parts, fragments or watertight compartments, but it is one work right on to the end. To that work He may give the specific or particular passion in different ones, but it is one passion and one work, never to stop with the salvation of the unsaved. It is the house that the Spirit has in view.

The Spirit's concern for the details of the house

And then the Spirit has very great concern, that all the details of the house should be honoured and respected. We selected out of this rather extensive section just those bits which stress this matter of the detail. You may think that it is unnecessary repetition, but there is nothing in the Word of God like that. "Make known unto them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the egresses thereof, and the entrances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof; and write it in their sight; that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof" (Ezek. 43:11). That is a tremendous emphasis upon detail. Everything in this matter is very sacred to the Lord, and it does just amount to this. You and I will never make progress spiritually unto all the intended divine fulness of Christ unless we are very particular about the laws of the Lord's house, the laws of our related life, the laws of our spiritual fellowship. It will work out that way — it will work out just like this. There will be some arrest, some deadlock, some hold up, and we will not get on. We may pray, we may do everything, but we will not get on, and sooner or later we will have to come to recognize we are not getting on, not getting through, ours is not a way of progress and growth; we are very much where we were. We will come into great trouble of heart about this matter of spiritual growth and increase. Then in our distress we may cry to the Lord, and it will be disclosed that there was something about our relationship, perhaps with

another or with other children of God which has to be dealt with, which is the cause of our arrest. If you have got a critical disposition of the Lord's people, and you let that critical faculty about children of God have play, you can settle it for ever that you are not going to come to any spiritual measure. You are really frustrating the Holy Spirit. How can you grow? There may be plenty to criticize — that is not the point. There may be much that is wrong. Well, there was plenty at Corinth, but the attitude of the apostle towards what was at Corinth which was much and very terrible, was the attitude of entreaty, of a mother over a wayward child, or as of a father with an aching heart for his children — loving entreaty. You have nothing in the Bible to compare with 1 Corinthians 13 as an expression of a heart that loved, and it is remarkable that that matchless unveiling of the nature and quality of love should be given to Corinthians who naturally were the most unlovable of all. The apostle did not wash his hands of them, did not go about the world criticizing them, did not tell other people all the faults of Corinth. No, he sought to win, to woo, by love, by forbearance, patience, longsuffering, humility, broken-heartedness, tears. That is how he dealt with the faults, and that is the Holy Spirit's way.

Oh, let us accept the rebuke. Let us open our hearts to the smiting, if necessary. The Lord lead us to have a very definite transaction with Him about this once for all, because the Holy Spirit's great object in bringing the house to glory is simply set back and frustrated when those in it give way to careless, damaging criticism of its members. I use that just as an illustration of what I mean.

The Holy Spirit is particular and it is settled. Nothing will get over it or round it. Our spiritual progress comes under arrest if in any way we fail to have that Holy Spirit yearning over the Lord's people, and work rather in a way that hurts and injures the Lord's people than helps. This is a matter in which He is very particular, and we only retard our spiritual growth if we do not take account of this and put it down and write it in our hearts as a law of the house.

It is the positive constructiveness of the house that is a mark of the Holy Spirit, and after all, where would any of us be if He was swift to mark iniquity? I have often thought if the Lord was quick to take account of my faults as I am to take account of other peoples', it would be a poor lookout for me.

That leads us, then, to see what a large place the matter of mutual love has in the house of God. I ask you to go through your New Testament again with love in view, letter by letter, and you are going to be impressed, if not astonished — I have been doing that myself so I can tell you the effect. If you have got an object in view as you read, you will be surprised how much

there is that comes out in that connection. If you take this matter of love as a building thing, a means of spiritual increase, you will find — and I am not exaggerating and I stand to be corrected — that there is nothing in all the Word of God which stands for spiritual increase more, if as much, as love does. Yes, that is the way of the house — the mutual love which we have one for another.

Now, that is quite clear when you begin with the book of the Acts — baptized into the Spirit meant being baptized into the love of Christ, the love which let go all that was personal in possession and interest, the love which turned outward all the time for the good of others, the spiritual good of others first, which looked not on its own things but everyone on the things of others. That is the very essence of love and especially of the love of God, and those are wonderful chapters of the love of Christ in expression when the Holy Spirit was in His place as sovereign Lord. Well, forgive me for being so elementary, but I am quite sure there is not one here who would say that this is unnecessary, that we know all about that. Oh no, I am quite sure we need a Word like this, but we need this thing in reality.

And so He brings the house into view, but not as one great, abstract conception and idea. Oh, it is great to think of the church, the body of Christ, the house of God, the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, to get wonderful visions like that out there with this great truth, but the man says — Look here, point by point, that is the house; this small dimension here, this great dimension somewhere else, it is all the house! I do not know that I am just getting over to you what this thing means in my own heart, what I see. This man, whether it is an angel, the Lord Himself or whoever it is, he is one who is revealing God's mind. And he comes along and he goes into all the details and says, Now, take account of it, make a note of it, I have brought you here specifically to show it to you. Give your heart to it, give your attention to it! And then he goes round measuring everything, a passage or a pillar, a room or a court, a wall or a gate; everything is given its measure.

That is what the Holy Spirit thinks about the house of God in detail, and He will, if He gets hold of us, bring us back to the details, hold us to the details of our related spiritual life. And we shall find that we cannot get away with big things while we are ignoring some — what we might call — little matter of our relationship with other believers. The smallest things carry with them the significance of the whole house. That is what the Holy Spirit means, because it is not a thing, it is Christ, and every part of Christ is important, every thought of God in Christ is vital.

Why is it so important? Why is the Holy Spirit so particular? Would you think it unimportant, in building the new world order after this war, as to

whether you should be very particular? Let me put that in another way. Do you not think that if it were really recognized that there might be not only a repetition of what is going on now, but something infinitely worse, those who had the building of the new order would say, Look here, we will leave no room at any point for that, we will be very careful about this matter! Do you not think that would be the wise thing to do, because there is the building of that which is to govern all the future, to secure all the future against a repetition of this?

What God is doing with His house, this spiritual house, this elect company, the body of Christ, has a responsibility for all the ages to come to govern this universe according to God's mind. God is going to have this universe governed utterly according to His mind. That is a tremendous thing! It is going to be governmental; the governmental instrument in the ages to come is the church which is Christ's Body, His house. It is the governmental instrument, and God is very particular that it shall be wholly formed to His thought, His mind, in Christ, and He will leave no room whatever for a repetition of what there is now in His universe. He is very particular. So the whole law of the house is holiness. The Holy Spirit is particular about this whole matter.

Let us recognize this, that when the Holy Spirit comes in sovereignty and takes up His work, what He does is to bring that great object, the house of God, fully into view and then, to begin a detailed work upon it. And if you and I get into the hands of the Holy Spirit, He will deal with us in a very detailed way. You do not want it otherwise, do you? It is a great thing to know that what we are in is a real and living thing; it is not all imagination, doctrine, teaching, but you are really up against it. It is something that works, and it is true that when our lives get into the hands of the Holy Spirit, He deals with us on details. He makes things very real to us and, although there may be much perplexity, even bewilderment, we know as we go on that it is a living God with whom we have to do. It is not a system of religion, it is a living God, a living Person, who has a direct and immediate relationship with us individually, and has us in hand. Whenever we think of other people and say, What shall this man do? — He turns back on us and says, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me!" (John 21:22). I am dealing with you! He makes it a personal matter, and the Lord is going to be very thorough with us if we will let Him, because He has a very great end in view.

(Concluded)

The purpose of this publication is to encourage God's people to lay hold on eternal life, the hope set before them, knowing that Jesus Christ, their Saviour, will soon return to establish His eternal Kingdom, "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:12).

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