



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
THE TESTIMONY
BY RESURRECTION**

T. Austin-Sparks

Volume 212

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THE WAY OF GOD'S GREATER FULNESS

Reading: 1 Kings 17:8-24.

"Jesus Christ our Lord ... declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:3-4).

Romans 1:3-4 is basic to our present meditation and the portion in the book of Kings will be the means of illustrating the truth in Romans 1:3-4.

The last cry of the widow of Zarephath, as you notice, was "Now I know". The declaration of Romans 1:4 is "determined, declared, the Son of God in power by the resurrection of the dead".

If we turn back to things as they were in the days when this of which we have read took place, we remember that they were days of real spiritual declension. The conditions on the earth were but an illustration of how things were spiritually. There was a sore famine through drought, rain was long withheld, and therefore all fruitfulness was in a state of suspense, because, as we learn later in the great crisis which was already on the horizon, the great Carmel crisis, there was that state of indefiniteness, what the prophet called "limping between two opinions", a state of spiritual maimedness, haltness, the heart divided, and, because of that, there could be no spiritual fulness, there could be nothing of the real fulness of the Lord among His people. And what He sent into the natural world of drought and famine, speaking of a spiritual condition, was but the counterpart of what obtained in the spiritual realm — a divided

heart, a heart not wholly for the Lord, a heart largely set upon its own blessing, this world, therefore spiritual famine; days, we have said, of spiritual declension.

Elijah represented the Lord's testimony, the ministry of the divine, the heavenly, things as here on the earth, and, as we see, he was in a state of retirement from the public scene; he was not before the public eye. The Lord hid him, or commanded him, "Go, hide thyself", so that the real testimony of the Lord was not the thing which was the public thing, the recognized thing, the accepted thing. It was something which the Lord was keeping in secret, hidden, but nevertheless, very active, very energetic, but energetic along one line, as we shall see.

God, while He was working in a hidden, in a secret way, while he was hiding that which represented His full thought, was nevertheless caring for His testimony. In the first place, He supported it by the ministry of ravens, and then by the ministry of the widow of Zarephath. The Lord was looking after His testimony in a hidden way, was caring for that which was most precious to Himself. Now, that brings us immediately to the place where the Lord's message at this time comes up quite definitely. In going by the commandment of the Lord to Zarephath, and being brought to the gate of the city, this woman, this widow and her son, were brought into touch with the prophet, with the testimony of the Lord, with the full thought of the Lord along the line of their own conscious need. They were brought into relationship with God's testimony, and their need was met in relation to God's need.

God had a need; that need was represented by Elijah. It was bound up with Elijah, bound up with that instrument of testimony — there was a need there. If we may speak in spiritual language, the testimony had a need as well as the woman and the son. The Lord, as represented by Elijah, had a need. He was after something, He was working towards something. The sovereignty of God is very clear in these happenings. It was some distance for Elijah to go. When the brook Cherith dried up, the word of the Lord came to go to Zarephath in the land of Zidon, which was quite a journey. It was outside of Israel altogether. You remember what the Lord said about

this very matter. He said there were many widows in Zarephath in the days of Elijah the prophet, but to none of them was he sent but to the widow in the land of Zidon, outside of Israel. But this is the Lord's strange wonderful way. He sent His servant on a long journey outside of Israel, acting in sovereignty, because He has deeper and larger thoughts.

Of course, there is a dispensational line of truth running right through this, which perhaps we need not stay to show in any fulness, just touching upon the significance of the words of the Lord Jesus about this very incident. You will remember it was in the day when He, who was the embodiment of God's fulness, He, who was the testimony of God among men, had no place among them, but by God was a hidden one because of their spiritual state. Did He not cry, "The world knows Me not"? He came unto His own, and they that were His own people received Him not — like Elijah. It was then that God looked beyond Israel, beyond the confines of the earthly Israel, out to the Gentile nations, because He had a need in His own heart. That need was centred in His Son, and the letter to the Ephesians is the background of all that we are saying. The great phrase in that letter, and one which has caused us all so much perplexity, is "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints". Mark you, that word was being written, spoken, especially beyond Israel to that church which is greater than the confines of earthly Israel, for the letter to the Ephesians is all on that — the greater thing which God has ever had in mind, the greater thing than Israel. Then you notice, immediately the apostle has used those words, "What the riches of the glory of *his* inheritance in the saints", he goes on, "what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." Now, you have come back to Zarephath. It is all of a piece, this testimony, established along the line of resurrection and established in the church which is a bigger thing than Israel, which is beyond Israel.

So the Lord had a need as represented in Elijah, and the others found their need met by answering to the Lord's need. That is a prin-

ciple always underlying God's dealing with people, and that explains this strange and seemingly inconsiderate and selfish behaviour of Elijah. 'I have a little meal, I am gathering two sticks. I only want a couple of sticks, the portion is so small, to bake a little cake for me and my son' — no, it is not an announcement of imminent death, though it sounds like it — 'that we may eat and die'. My heart leaps with joy when I read that — 'and die' — because of that to which it is basic, to which it is essential. 'We may eat and die.' And then this seemingly inconsiderate procedure of the prophet, 'Me first'. 'Bake a little cake and bring it to me first and then you and your son.' It is a testing thing, a principle always pressed home by God when He is after something very rich. You and I will never come into God's fulness by having as our first consideration our own blessing, our own good, our own fulness. God's way is always to test us as to whether we have first of all His interests at heart, whether we discern and recognize that He has an inheritance and whether our hearts are set upon His inheritance. Oh, there is so much that is constituted for the blessing of God's people, and there is so much activity, feverish quest, for blessing, an immense amount of work that is for the blessing of the Lord's people.

Let us challenge our own hearts. Do you go to meetings usually to get a blessing? Well, that may be alright, I am not going to say that that is all wrong, but I tell you the way to get blessing. Suspend your anxiety to get a blessing and put in its place a desire that the Lord may get something, get what He is after, and you will get a blessing. But don't do it for that! You will be tested; the Lord will take away even that which you have got to prove whether this is genuine, this faith, this obedience, whether really your heart is set upon Him or something for yourself. He will just take away all that you have. He will say, 'Me first'. 'My testimony first, My interests first, what I am after first.' He will apply that in a very practical way, and He is applying it with most of us in a very practical way. He is bringing us more and more utterly to the place where, if the Lord's interests are not supreme with us, then we have nothing. We think it would be better just to give it all up.

That was the way in which this woman and her son came into

fulness. The challenge was accepted, the obedience of faith was given, that which represented the Lord's interests were put first, and their blessing, their fulness, followed. Remember that is always the way of the Lord. I am going to pause there just for a moment to press that home. It is the explanation of so much. You may have been on the line of blessing, and then the Lord brings you into touch with something which represents a great fulness for Himself, something which is very much more important with Him than that line of blessing. It has bound up with it His own satisfaction, the purpose upon which His heart has been set from before times eternal. You get a touch with that, and when you get a touch with it, immediately your line of blessing is affected, and that line of things begins to dry up, begins to be taken away from you. The Lord seems to withdraw that which you had, seems to require that you let that go, and you can see yourself gradually moving into a place where you have nothing left. All the blessing that you had is gone; God has taken it away.

Now, you have come into a place where there is only one question. It all resolves itself into one issue. Is this the Lord, am I persuaded that this is of God? What other course can I take? What alternative do I have? Am I compelled to believe that the Lord has met me at this point, in this way? If so, what can I do but say 'Yes' to the Lord. In saying 'Yes' to the Lord, we let go all that line of blessing that we have been in, and pass into a time of complete barrenness when we let go even what we had. The Lord has taken that, and during that time this testing is pressed to finality. In that time of testing, all sorts of questions arise and the enemy is never far away to give a construction to your experience, an interpretation, and will say, 'You have made a great mistake. You have lost all your blessing, you have lost all your usefulness. You were being used, now you are not being used. All the doors that were open to you are now closed. You have got nothing.' During that time you have all that sort of thing, but then the test is, What can we do otherwise? And concluding that this is the Lord you say, 'Well, I can do nothing else but simply be obedient to the Lord and wait for Him. I no longer have personal interests, even in spiritual things,

at heart. The Lord knows my heart. His interests alone are before me', and that issue is tested out thoroughly. When that thing has been settled, established — and the Lord only knows when it is established, these hearts of ours may think that it is all settled long before it really is — quite quietly, without demonstration or ostentation — a greater fulness of the Lord begins to come in, something which we have not had before. We know that we have come into an inheritance, but it is into the inheritance of that which is pre-eminently precious to the Lord; it is something very dear to Him, no longer a thing which is just personal. It is a thing which we now see to be God's own treasure, God's own satisfaction, the thing upon which His heart has been set.

It is true that God has His heart set upon something which to Him is more than anything and everything else. "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45). The Lord Jesus is saying that about Himself. Was there ever a merchantman who understood his business better than that one? If His business is pearls, He knows all about pearls. He knows a good thing in the way of pearls when He sees one. He is a master at this trade, and when He says that He discovers a pearl of great price, you may take it that, with His knowledge of things, His understanding, His judgment, that statement is a perfectly accurate one, "a pearl of great price". He, God's Son, this great, divine Merchantman, goes and sells all that He has. Was there ever One who had more to dispose of than He had? "The glory which I had with thee before the world was". That was a part of it, equality with God; yes, all that He had. He sells all that He had, that He might buy it. He paid the price for that pearl and the price which He paid was all that He, God's Son, had. What is that pearl? The church. "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself up for it."

That is the parable of Ephesians 1:18: "What the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints". That is beyond us. God has His heart set upon something which to Him is of great price; that fulness in His Son which is to be in the church which is His Body, the fulness of Him that fills all. Our testing, our trying, on all matters of

personal value, is in relation to God's satisfaction, God's need being met, God reaching His end.

That all comes out of this simple and yet so direct challenge to the widow. 'Go, make a little cake for me first.' "Seek ye first the kingdom of God ... and all these things shall be added unto you." 'Me first'.

Now, along that line they came into an experience, and the nature of the experience into which they came, mother and son, was that they were set in, perhaps solitary, contrast to all the conditions around. Conditions all around were famine conditions, emptiness conditions, conditions of dissatisfaction, discontent, starvation, need, spiritual tragedy, and right in the midst of those conditions they were living with all that they needed. They had found in the midst of those conditions the secret of fulness, an experience which set them in contrast to all that was around; a secret thing, going on quietly, but there it was. Do they not represent that vessel of testimony which has been brought into touch with God's needs, God's desire, and been filled with His fulness, but which, nevertheless, is not the public thing, not the well-known thing, not the general thing, but it is hidden. It is a secret thing, even in the midst of God's own people, speaking of them as a whole. A contrast! The thing that characterizes their experience at this point is fulness. They have what others have not. It was the blessedness which came to them through that obedience of faith which sets its heart upon God's interests first, God's testimony first, and not their own blessing.

We hurry to a close, but it is on this closing note that we find our main emphasis. God has something more in mind yet. They have come into touch with God's fuller thought, they have come into an experience of the way of God's greater fulness. They have tasted, and are continually tasting, all the Lord's good pleasure, but something more has to be done. The testimony must be established in them in an inward way. I do want you to recognize this fine discrimination — it is a very important one. It is possible for us to have come into touch with the greater fulnesses of the Lord, and to be deriving blessing from them continually, and rejoicing in that knowledge and that experience, and yet, at the same time,

strangely enough, for the testimony not to be rooted in us. It may still be something that we are in, but it is not in that fullest and deepest sense in *us*. We are rejoicing in it, participating in it, benefitting by it. Yes, it is ours. The Lord has brought us into the sphere of it, and into the good of it, and yet He sees that somehow that thing has got to be made us. There is still something to be done.

So "it came to pass after these things", wonderful things, blessed things, "that the son of the woman ... fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him". Note, "that we may eat and *die*". "There was no breath left in him." He did die. He did not in the first place die because of circumstances. The Lord intervened there, but now he died because the Lord intended him to die for another purpose. There is a dying to death which is unto death, and there is a dying which is unto life. It depends whether you are, or whether you are not, in vital relationship with God's purpose. If you are out of relationship with God's purpose, you die unto death, yours is a death; when you come under the hand of God, you do not escape death, but you go through it. Put that in another way. He died, and this under the sovereignty of God, not under the sovereignty of circumstances. This is not the natural course of things. This is in the hand of God, God is doing something. He died, and we know what happened, and the end — Oh, that triumphant cry which does not come from a sense of blessing which has come to you, which you are enjoying, but which comes right from the very depth of the being, 'Now I know!' If you had challenged her before, she would have said she knew. By what Elijah had done for her and her son, she knew, but there is something more now. Job cried on one occasion: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but *now* mine eye sees thee". Now, there is a transition from the outward to the inward. That is what happened here. When the Lord gets us in hand in relation to His end, He may strip us of all that is the line of just personal blessing, to bring us into line with His own object and satisfaction, and then He will at once begin to operate with us so that the testimony is established in us, and the testimony of the Lord has never yet been established in the history of this world except on the ground of resurrection. "The last enemy that shall be

destroyed is death." That is being done in the church now. That is the thing left over to the end to be fully wrought out in the church.

Now, the testimony is established in an inward way by resurrection. If that is so, there must be death, and it may be 'deaths off'. I am speaking spiritually. It is the experience of becoming related to God's highest thought and fullest purpose, that the Lord takes his children into, or allows them to go into, experiences of death, not only physical death — maybe that sometimes — but death, that awful thing, that enemy of God, of God's purpose, of His church — death. It is a terrible reality, and strangely enough, it so often comes just as God is going to do some new thing, just as God is going to take some new step forward, and the thing is so real that even our recognition of that fact seems to become beclouded and deadened. If only we are alive to it when these experiences come, we shall at once say, 'This means that God is going to do something. There is something coming for God.' But the thing is so awful, you feel it is an end rather than a beginning. But whenever God is going to do some new thing in relation to His testimony, it is anticipated by the adversary who makes fresh assaults by death, spiritual death, working in mind, sometimes in body, around us, upon us, but it points to a driving of the testimony inward, the establishment of the testimony yet more firmly, for that is God's way, through death in the mighty power of resurrection to make His testimony to be an established thing.

"Determined the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection of the dead". That is what happens with you and me under the hand of God — established, determined by resurrection which comes after these experiences of death which come to us, not as accidents, not in the course of things, but as under the sovereign eye and hand of the Lord. But if it is incidental, incidentally something is happening. That is why I left out that clause. Now we will put that clause alongside another statement of the woman. When the son died, she turned to the prophet and said, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?" I do not know what she referred to and it will not do for us to suspect, to judge. Was there

something of sin in relation to that son? We do not know. But sin became an issue at that point. Now — “determined the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness”. Resurrection means that something has been dealt with and put away through death, some unholiness, something that was there which was a ground of death. God now is not judging unto death, He is judging unto life, He is dealing with the very ground upon which death has its advantage, and destroying death by taking death’s ground away. That is what He is doing in us. It is not just an experience of death. God is doing something to make life triumphant yet more possible by removing, dealing with, some ground of death, some unholiness. I say incidentally, but there it is — “according to the spirit of holiness”. The Lord Jesus Christ could never have been raised from the dead only according to the spirit of holiness. That means if sin had not been fully and finally dealt with and put away in His death. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is always God’s great declaration to the universe that sin is done with. He will never have a man back alive in whom there is sin. He has done with a man in whom there is sin and if He took our sins, His death bore them all away, and His resurrection declares that sin is finished with in that Man. If the testimony of Jesus is to work in us unto resurrection then we must have things dealt with in our hearts, in our lives, which give death a ground of advantage. Incidentally God is doing that. It is not judgment, it is incidental in the goodness of God.

But what He is after mainly is that His testimony shall be confirmed and established in an inward way; the testimony of God in Christ is the testimony of life which is ever triumphant over death, over which death has no power.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TESTIMONY OF HIS RESURRECTION

Reading: 2 Kings 4:8-37: Heb. 5:11-14.

"Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3-4).

Here we have the account of the death and raising again of the child of the great woman of Shunem. With this passage, we find ourselves advanced, taken forward, in the matter which is before us, which is the establishment of the testimony by resurrection. We saw in our previous meditation that what comes out in the case of the widow of Zarephath and her son is the establishment of the testimony in her through death and resurrection. She speaks to us of the testimony actually being confirmed in us.

When we pass on to the woman of Shunem, we have something on the same matter. Here it is not just the matter of resurrection itself. It is the object of resurrection, that which is to become the practical, concrete, definite expression of resurrection, the very embodiment of it. Resurrection may be something, while a power, still in the abstract, still a force at work, but that is not enough. It is a great thing to know the power of resurrection as a power. But then you can know the power of a good many things as power. Quite a lot of the things of the Lord may come into our experience as power, and they may not, as such, get us very far on the road. We may know, for instance, the power of forgiveness. We may know the power of deliverance from an evil conscience. These things come to

us in real power. There are multitudes of people who rejoice today in the power which operated in them, bringing them to know the Lord as their Saviour. The power is right enough and they know it; they know that they are kept by the power of God. That is something great, but there is something more, and it is just that something more that the Lord wants to bring to our knowledge.

Here you have in the woman of Shunem a very different state of things from that which we find at Zarephath. There we find a woman and her son in poverty, in starvation, deep, terrible need. That need was met. When we come to Shunem we find plenty. We come into fulness, that is the place where the fulness is. She is a great woman, there are all the signs of plenty, affluence and of there being no straitness or need, and yet there is a need. There is a terrible lack. God is acting again sovereignly with His deeper thoughts. He brings His testimony in the person of Elisha in that direction. Well, you have anticipated what the matter is here. It is the question of sonship. There is fulness, in a way, blessing all around, plenty, but it is all of a general order. There is everything but sonship, in the sense of life fully grown unto maturity, or, in other words, life worked out and tested as to what it really is.

As we open the letter to the Ephesians we almost immediately come upon this: "Has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". I think that is the woman of Shunem. "Has blessed us". Now it is not a matter of coming into relationship with the testimony we are in and the thing is like that. We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. There is plenty all around us by reason of our position, but do you notice you do not get very far beyond that very statement before you find the apostle pouring out his heart in prayer for those, mark you, who have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, that "He may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being 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 is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe ..." — prayer for people who

have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. That they might know — understanding and intelligence. It is one thing to be in the position, it is another thing to apprehend, to be intelligently in touch with all that, to turn it to practical account, for that is the immediate issue of those words in the Ephesian letter. It is twofold; now unto the principalities and powers, and in the ages to come, manifested by the church. You have got something here which carries you beyond universal fulness and blessing as something which is yours by reason of position. You have come now to the place where you know, you understand, and, because you have understanding, you are able to count for something. Now that, in a word, is the meaning of sonship.

We have wealth in the case of this woman, but the question is, speaking spiritually, how can the wealth be made of practical account for God. That is the question. I think that is the question for us all, and that represents the object of the Lord's dealings with us which are sometimes very hard or seemingly hard dealings. Sonship is that which turns our good to practical account.

Here then we have this woman of Shunem. A son is given by a sovereign act of God. That is true of us all as the children of God. By a miracle we have been born of God, born into His family, and, as we understand now from the Word, by being born we become children of God. But does it not impress you — it is not a new thought for we have often stressed it — that even that which has been miraculously born of God is taken into death to know resurrection. It was so with the Lord Jesus Himself. And that particular Sonship of Romans 1:4 relates to resurrection and not birth. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is as the graduation of the Lord Jesus to take His position, to administrate. Up to that point, He was not administrating, He was learning. "Though He were a Son, yet learned he obedience ..." (Heb. 5:8). Sonship was there, but He was in a position of a child, learning, as we have to learn, how to live out from God by faith. All was His by birth, but He did not inherit it until resurrection. He was destined for the throne, but He did not reach it until resurrection. All things were from eternity to be put under His feet, but they were not so until resurrection. In resurrection He

was *determined* the Son of God in this full sense that now He enters upon His administrative work in heaven. Sonship is therefore in its fullest sense bound up with resurrection, so that even that which is born of God by the miracle of that sovereign act, has to come to that crisis where it knows resurrection in order to enter upon the practical expression of its relationship with the Lord.

Now, in connection with sonship, we could take another parable, for it seems to me that this is the very thing that lies right at the heart of a parable which has been used primarily for evangelical or evangelistic purposes, the parable that is known commonly as the parable of the prodigal son. That is not a Bible term. I do not say that this is not to be used or that it has no place in the gospel, but the real point is missed if we do not see exactly what the Lord Jesus was after in that parable. You see, the background of that parable is Israel. The elder brother comes in, and you know that the parable was used like a sledgehammer against the Jews. They stood in the position of that elder brother. Well now, for the moment the point is this. There was a transition which took place in the life of that son known as 'the prodigal'. By birth he was in the family. He had a claim to inheritance and he lodged his claim. He stood in relation to the father's fullness; the father recognized that relationship. He was in the house; he was already in relationship with the father. But what happened was that he virtually died. The father's double declaration afterwards was, "This my son was dead and is alive". After that — shall we call it — resurrection, for that is what it was in figure in the thought of the Lord, the relationship is on an entirely different footing. He is no more a part of the family than he was before, he is no more begotten or born than he was before, but he has come into a knowledge of his father which he never had before. Before he may have used the word 'father'. That was a formal title of relationship, but he came to know what 'father' meant. Through the ordeal of his life, he discovered something in that that he had never seen before. He had never known all that that title held and meant until he came onto resurrection ground. Then you notice all the other things that were new. A new robe, new shoes, and new food such as he had never had before — the fatted calf. This

was all new to one who had been a child for a long time. He was on resurrection ground. The eyes of his heart were enlightened, he saw and knew as he had never seen and known before. It was transition. May we not say that in the New Testament sense, that he had come to know what sonship means. It seems to me that the supreme thing about the whole matter was this, that, whereas he craved to be made a servant, the father put him in a place of honour which he had never held before, elevated him, gave him a ring, the token of authority in the house, the seal of right, of jurisdiction, in the house — able to take responsibility. Of course, it is all a marvel of grace, we never reach anything only through grace. Let no one think that we ever come to higher levels of spiritual life and position on any other ground than the ground of grace.

You see what sonship in the full sense means — that is the point. It is something more than just being a child as a born one. It is one set in position. Well that is nothing new, but I feel that what the Lord is really after in the case of every one of us and desires to bring with special emphasis to us in these days. We have got to see that sonship is the Lord's intention for all of us with salvation. It is the intrinsic value of salvation in Christ Jesus. It is not just our arriving at a position of advantage. It is something which means everything to the Lord.

If you go carefully into the Word with this thought, you will see how it is borne out. You turn to Hebrews 12:5-9: "My son, despise not thou (do not make light or little) the chastening (the child training) of the Lord, nor faint (lose heart) when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth". Get the literal language and you see what it means. "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (v.9). Why is the Lord taking this course with us, these measures; chastening, child training, discipline, a hard school under the hand of the Lord, the rod of the Lord, if you like. Not the rod of judgment, that is the devil's insinuation. The rod of judgment for you and me fell on Christ long ago. It is the rod of training, putting us right, keeping us

right, steering us in the right direction. Why is the Lord taking this way with us? Because of the destiny with which so much is bound up for Him. He has an inheritance in the saints, "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints". It is beyond our understanding, but there is the fact. In the counsels of God before times eternal, God invested in the church something of tremendous value to Himself. All His purposes of the ages are bound up ultimately with the church as the administrative instrument thereof, to be the fulness of Him. Now, that is altogether beyond us, but we must simply believe that God has something which is precious to Himself in the saints. God is seeking to secure that which is for Himself.

Well, if that is true, then sonship, being that spiritual state, the realization of God's desire and design, must be of tremendous value to Him, and so He is working at sonship in us, seeking to bring us to sonship. It is something of great value.

Only two things remain to be said. What is sonship really now in practical terms? It can be something in our minds, something quite nebulous, indefinite. Yes, sonship of course is spiritual growth, that you become something more spiritually. You are increased and enlarged in spiritual measure. That is sonship. Yes, quite true, but that is not practical enough for me, that is not practical enough for the Lord. What is sonship in practical terms? It is being where you can and taking responsibility in relation to the Lord's testimony, that you are not now primarily and pre-eminently a taught one, but you are teaching others. That is Hebrews 5:11: "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing ye are become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk." They were mature Christians. They had gone through suffering. But now they had become disobedient and were no longer faithfully going on with the Lord. And the apostle puts his finger upon the time factor. "When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers". Later he explains that to be teachers means to have your spiritual faculties of perception and insight exercised, developed, where you see and can tell others what they

are not seeing. You know, not by a reasoned out process of logical deductions and inductions, but you have spiritual insight, you know spiritually, and the Holy Spirit has taught you and you can teach because you are taught. You can pass on spiritual knowledge, not doctrinal information, because you know in this way.

Oh, do take this message to heart! It is a great and glorious thing to be in the first clauses of the Ephesian letter, "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". That is true of all of us if we are in Christ Jesus. What does it mean? What is its practical value? It is something more. That we "may know what is the hope of His calling, and 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". To *know*, know in a spiritual and living way so as to be able to take responsibility in the testimony.

Now we have to ask ourselves, we who have, so to speak, the position of the widow of Zarephath, who have had an experience, know something of having our own need met, of coming into touch with salvation, do we realize that there is that further step towards responsibility? God has done something in our life through a deep experience so that the testimony of the Kingdom of God is in us and we are able to say, 'I know it is true'. Now, there is another step. We have got to take responsibility, and the question which comes to every one of us is, Are we taking responsibility for the testimony of the Kingdom of God? Not only in touch with it and benefiting by it and knowing something of it, but are we taking responsibility or are we leaving responsibility with our ministers, those whom we regard as the responsible people for the testimony?

Well then, the letter to the Ephesians, which is dealing with this whole range in spiritual principle, will lead us on, and you can just obliterate all chapter divisions — they are not there in the letter originally, and you must go straight on.

"When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry for the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:8,11-12).

We are inclined to think that those whom we call the responsible people for the testimony are the apostles and prophets, and so on, but we have forgotten that they are given to the church in order to equip us for the work of ministry — to take responsibility. It is the church that has got to take responsibility. The divine, the sovereignly given gifts from the risen, ascended Lord are only to equip the church to take responsibility for the testimony of the Kingdom of God here and now. The apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists are not the ones who bear the responsibility of the testimony. Their responsibility is to make the church a responsible thing. Now then, sonship, that step in advance, is coming to the place where we do take responsibility. Are you children still being taught, needing to be taught, in the place of being taught all the time, or are you taking some measure of responsibility? Have you taken a responsible attitude for the testimony? I am not asking you to go out and begin to talk about things, but have you on your heart taken responsibility that, as far as the Lord enables you — and you will not know how far He will enable you before you move — that others may come into the knowledge of the risen Lord in the power of His risen life. That may be ministered through you. It is important. The Lord is working at that with you and with me. I tell you how you prove it. It will get you into a tremendous amount of trouble, and again and again you will come to the place where you say, 'It brings me into conflict, brings me into touch with all the powers of hell, and makes trouble for me everywhere. I am not going to talk so much about it'. In fact you are going to decide from time to time that you are going to resign from this! I have been there more than once! But here I am talking to you as much as ever. Why? You cannot help it, you have got to get on with this thing. It is far too living and real to be a theory you can give up. It has become you. It has been wrought in you. You have got to resign from yourself in order to resign from it. It is too much a part of your very life. Are we getting there? Is that sonship in the case of all of us? The Lord wants people who are taking responsibility in His testimony.

The last word, of course, is that it comes by resurrection. Just as everything before has come through resurrection, so now this

comes in the same way, by the same process. The ultimate revelation of our being children of God will, according to 1 John 3, take place at the great resurrection at Jesus' return, but the principle and thus the experience of the resurrection is already working in us day by day. We come to take responsibility, to be responsible members of Christ's Body, to have ministry — and let that not be a technical word or phrase or idea. We have that to minister when we go through experiences which are like death experiences and prove Him in the power of resurrection. This Shunammite's son was born by an act of God, but sonship necessitated that even so he should die and be raised. It is sonship that is in view. It is the law of God. There is no other way of coming to the place of responsibility, and our usefulness to the Lord, for that is what is in view, is increased and enhanced by every fresh experience of death on the one hand, and resurrection, on the other. The church will go that way.

I think that is what Paul was after in Philippians 3. He had seen something, a place of transcendent value to the Lord, and he cried, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Phil. 3:10). "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). I think you catch the idea of the thought of value to the Lord. That is sonship — value to the Lord, usefulness to the Lord. It comes through the deep experiences of death and resurrection as we go on with the Lord, passing from the place of being taught ones, those who are being taught, to the place where we are able to teach others also.

What does this all mean? You perhaps have not grasped altogether what death and resurrection mean. Well, we can put it in another way which is very true to the experience of both of these women, the widow of Zarephath and the woman of Shunem. They had their hearts broken. There was a brokenness which God brought about, right at the very centre of their being. If you like to call death and resurrection that, you may, for the effect is that. We know what the Lord can be to a broken one: strength to those who have no strength; wisdom to those who have no wisdom. Yes, every kind of

supply to those who have none. It is the experience, the acknowledgement, that the life of the Kingdom of God is resurrection life, a life enabled by resurrection power through the Holy Spirit. But that is the way to the responsibility of sons.

MAKING THE TESTIMONY AN INWARD THING

Reading: Matt. 8:5-8,13; Mark 5:22-23,35-42. Luke 7:12-16; John 11, 12:1.

"Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3-4).

The thing which we are being led to consider is how the testimony of Jesus is established by resurrection, and that in the experience of His own people, not as a matter of doctrine nor as a matter of objective fact so far as He personally is concerned, but as a matter in the life of those who are to be for Him witnesses. Witnesses are the embodiment of the testimony.

In our meditation on the woman of Zarephath in chapter one, we saw how the testimony was established in an inward way in her life through resurrection. The first step is the making of the testimony an inward thing. That is the first significance of the Lord Jesus in resurrection. It is that which marks the special difference and distinction between Elijah and Elisha. Elijah in a particular way represents the Lord Jesus personally in this connection. That, briefly, is the meaning of Pentecost — making resurrection real as an inward thing. You do not get anywhere until that has become an inward thing. The disciples, the apostles, never got anywhere until the resurrection of the Lord Jesus had really become an inward thing. It was not enough that they saw Him during forty days after His resurrection — that would not have done. No, we surely know our own hearts and our own natures well enough to know that that

will not do. Sooner or later, if that is all, we begin to wonder whether we have hallucinations, whether we are seeing things. When you are really up against things, anything, although it may be in the realm of strange phenomena, which is just outward and is subject to being brought into question, when the thing becomes an inward thing, as it became for the apostles at Pentecost, then things begin to happen, you are on solid ground. So that the consummation of our relationship with the Lord Jesus is the making of His resurrection an inward thing. I say consummation, because it was the consummation of a course, of a period. They had companied with Him during the days of His flesh, and they had seen Him after His resurrection, but all that would have fallen short of its real practical value but for Pentecost, when it was made inward. Now, that comes out of the simple story of Elijah and the widow at Zarephath — making the testimony an inward thing.

Then in our meditation on the great woman of Shunem and Elisha, we saw that, when the testimony in resurrection has been made an inward thing, God moves to constitute that testimony something very concrete and definite, so that it is not just a theme, a subject, an experience or a power, but it becomes a responsible thing in terms of sonship, and that brought about by resurrection.

In our present meditation, it is a matter of how the testimony is carried on by resurrection, and the testimony of Jesus is only carried forward through the dispensation to the consummation by resurrection at Jesus' return. That is its law and its basis, and God very definitely holds the vessel of that testimony of His Kingdom to that law — only by resurrection.

Just to revert to Elijah for a moment. Elijah is the master who at a certain point ascends to heaven in a chariot of fire, at which point Elisha asks for a double portion of his spirit. Elisha comes, we may say, into the place of the church, the successor of Christ here, so far as the testimony is concerned. The church, which is His Body, is intended by the Holy Spirit to carry on the testimony of the Kingdom of God. The whole life of Elisha is carried out on the principle of resurrection. Every stage and every step of his life was a matter of the operation of resurrection. The very first thing, as you

remember, was at Jordan when he took the mantle of Elijah which had fallen from him and smote the Jordan and cried, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?", not raising a question in the realm of doubt, but really affirming a fact, making a declaration. "Where is He? Why He is here, here is the proof of it." Smiting the waters, they divided hither and thither, symbolizing — may I suggest — that death is riven, smitten and driven asunder to make a way for the vessel of the testimony of the Kingdom of God to go through and on. So out from the victory of Calvary, the church takes up the testimony to go on in the power of resurrection.

Then he goes to Jericho. You remember the state of Jericho — death and blight resting upon field and orchard, everything failing to go through to real perfection, dying before its time. Elisha healed the waters of Jericho. It is resurrection life coming in unto fruitfulness.

Next the three kings in league, and their predicament for want of water. They will lose the battle, they will lose their lives, they will lose their armies — there is no water. Then the word of the Lord came through Elisha, "Make this valley full of ditches". Without any sound of wind, no rain, the water came and filled the ditches. The situation was saved — resurrection life at work.

Next the widow's oil, so well-known, and needing only to be mentioned. The situation saved, fulness of life coming in at a time of desperate need. Then the Shunammite's son, then the poisoned pottage, the cry, "O man of God, there is death in the pot" and the turning of death to life. Further Naaman the Syrian, we need say nothing about him. The axe-head, the man who is engaged in building for the work of God. The axe-head comes off and he cannot go on with the work. The act of Elisha by which the iron did swim. It is resurrection again, turning the course of nature, triumphing over the forces of nature in life triumphant. Again the feeding of the multitude, and finally Elisha's own grave. They cast a man hurriedly into the sepulchre and as soon as he touched the bones of Elisha, the man lived. It is all one long story of resurrection, carrying on the testimony in resurrection. That is the church's side of things, going on here with what is true of the Head there.

Well now, there is so much that can be gathered up into this that is really a part of it. It runs right through the whole Word of God. We have read passages from all four gospels with the general purpose of pointing out that the Lord Jesus among men had what establishment there was as to His Sonship made along the line of resurrection. They indicate that the whole of His life and work here on earth was centred in that one thing — resurrection, and you notice the result, always testimony. "They marvelled", "we have seen strange things", "a mighty prophet has arisen", "they glorified God". The testimony — and it was all connected with resurrection. That is all I want to say about those incidents for the moment. It is the carrying on of the testimony of the Kingdom of God on the ground of resurrection.

I want to gather it all up into one or two quite simple and positive things for us to lay hold of. The fact is quite clear that the testimony of Jesus is maintained on the principle of resurrection. That is that which proves Christ's Sonship — His resurrection. I am not sure that we have really grasped sufficiently clearly the importance of the establishing of that testimony. That testimony has been challenged and assailed in every part of this universe, and in every part of this universe that fact of His Sonship has got to be established or re-established. Before times eternal in the equality of the Son with the Father and the counsels of the Godhead, appointed as heir of all things. Somewhere away in that remote part of the universe, beyond this earth, that was disputed and challenged, and the heavens registered that challenge, requiring that the very heavens eventually should be purged of that. A remarkable thing, but it is a statement of the Word of God that the heavenly things themselves have got to be cleansed, the heavens have got to be cleansed. Something has happened there first of all which has got to be put out. Heaven has got to be purged of that thing.

On the earth that challenge has come about. "If thou be the Son ...". "This is the son; come let us kill him and the inheritance shall be ours." It is a challenging of the place, the right, the position, of the Son. Heaven and earth and hell; devils and men. This — oh that they saw it! — this is the grievous sin and tragedy of any

so-called modernism which brings into question the utter Sonship and Godhead of the Lord Jesus. It is an iniquitous thing, but it is here. In every part of this universe, the testimony of Jesus has got to be established and God's method of establishing it is by resurrection. "Determined to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead".

Now, that testimony has been established so far as God is concerned. God has raised Him and set Him at His own right hand. The testimony is established from God's side in this universe. So far as the heaven or the heaven of heavens is concerned, it is all purged of that challenge. There He is undisputed Lord in resurrection. In the other heavens, the challenge still goes on; among the principalities and powers, in the earth, it goes on, but the thing is established.

When the Holy Spirit entered into the church at Pentecost, He brought in the established fact, and the church, more than in any other matter, is *the* vessel of God in which an established fact resides. Right at the very heart of the church, the Body of Christ, there is something which can no longer be disputed. There ought to be right at the heart of the church a note of finality about which there is no question. *We are not fighting to get something, we are standing on something that has already been secured.* Every movement of the enemy is to get the people of God to fight for something, to take up the battle to try and get something, and the church, the people of God, never get through until they stop that line of things and come and take the position, 'We have got it, we stand on it', asserting a fact. The enemy's great effort is always to get us on to the ground of a doubt, an uncertainty. "If thou be the Son of God", which was just an effort with the Lord Jesus Himself to get into His action a doubt, so that He would accept the uncertainty by proving the thing. Oh no, the Lord Jesus was not moving on to that ground to prove the thing at all, and in so doing admit that there was an 'if'. He stood firm. There is no room for an 'if' about this. It is resisting everything that would bring in the element of an 'if'.

So Pentecost was the depositing in the church of an established

fact, a testimony, and from that moment the one clarion note in the church of those days at the beginning was "God raised Him". "This Jesus, whom ye crucified, God has raised." Above all other things, the great declaration was concerning Jesus raised from the dead by God. The testimony is carried on through the dispensation on that ground, that it is an inward thing and the inward thing of an absolute certainty.

That has got to be made to apply to everything. Resurrection is God's positive. God stands on a positive ground and God has put His positive ground into the church. In reading again Exodus 37 recently, I was impressed again with one feature of the description of that candlestick. In describing the form of the candlestick, the prescription is definitely this, that on each of the six branches of the candlestick there should be three bowls like unto an almond, and on the central stem should be four bowls like unto a almond, making twenty-two almond bowls in the one candlestick. Almonds are everywhere an obvious feature of the candlestick, symbolizing resurrection life . But what is the candlestick for? It is the keeping of the testimony alive — that light must never go out. It is the maintaining of the testimony in relation to the service of God's people. It is in the place of service, it is in the Holy Place. Priestly service is related to that. It is the ministry, the active testimony going on, always alive. It is all on the ground of resurrection.

It is God's positive. He has put it there right at the heart of things. He has established it. In every way He has said, 'My living testimony is constituted on the principle, the fact, the reality of resurrection that must go on alive to the end'.

Well now, God's positive is resurrection, and the point is this, that you and I and all the Lord's people have got to have a positive testimony, a positive note. We must never accept a negative as the end of our testimony, as the end of our relationship with the Lord. It will be easy to do so. Again and again it would be quite possible for us to accept defeat, an end, failure, or a situation which spells our undoing, that it is no use going on. Yes, very often it would be easily possible for us to accept a negative. If there is one thing about those passages which we have read and about all other passages

in connection with this matter, it is this, that a definite and positive attitude, a practical attitude of faith was called for in relation to the act of resurrection. Faith has challenged, faith was drawn out. "Fear not, only believe." But put yourself in the place of the man to whom it was said! He had got the report that things had just reached the fatal stage, discouraging him from pressing his suit any further, it was hopeless. "Fear not, only believe." Well now, when you and I get into some desperate situation, something that has gone beyond human possibility of remedying, and someone says to us, "Fear not, only believe", what is our reaction? 'It's easier said than done! It's all very well — only believe'. Everything is bound up with that. God's positive is bound up with that every time. Wherever you find the matter of resurrection coming in, there is a challenge to a positive attitude. You have got to take God's ground and forsake your own ground, forsake the ground of appearances, circumstances, arguments, reports, everything, and take God's ground. God's ground is positive. Resurrection is God's positive, and for every issue that is to be the position and the attitude which you and I take.

On the one hand, there must not be a quitting, abandoning the situation, however hopeless it may seem to be. On the other hand, there must not be a passive attitude: 'Well, we will wait and see'. Just flopping. There has to be God's ground which is positive.

Oh, if there is one case which sums up all the others and brings us to the consummation of the life of the Lord Jesus here on this earth, it is the case of Lazarus, and in that we have this challenge. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" It is a battle with unbelief that the Lord Jesus is engaged in in the case of Lazarus. He is seeking to draw out some faith in relation to this man, a positive ground. "I am the resurrection and the life." Taking the ground of God in Christ, positive ground.

It all comes back to this that, in the carrying forward of the testimony of the Kingdom of God, to the end it is going on this way. Again and again, scores and perhaps thousands of times in the course of our history and experience in relation to the testimony of Jesus, the next step forward will be only, but surely, on the basis

of a new, positive, asserting faith in the God of resurrection. I am not sure that, as we go on, we are not going to find that the thing, from any other standpoint than God's, is going to be more and more impossible if there are grades and degrees of impossibility. But this is going to be driven down into us as we go on and we are going to realize increasingly how impossible this matter is but for God. And therefore we are going to be brought to the place where faith becomes far more triumphant if it will take God's positive ground, and in the end it will be such a tremendous situation of impossibility so far as the testimony of Jesus is concerned, that the consummation of that testimony will be by reason of one final triumphant act of faith on the part of God's children to go through. The testimony of Jesus will be carried through always on the ground of resurrection.

But do not let us think of the testimony of Jesus as a doctrine, as some teaching. Let us remember that it is a spiritual thing primarily. The testimony of Jesus is not primarily what you or I say. All that we can say can only be a description of truth. The testimony of Jesus is the living fact that Jesus lives, but His living represents supreme power in this universe, that He is supremely Lord throughout this whole universe. God has made Him that by resurrection. The Son, the heir of all things, that is the testimony of Jesus. It is a fact on the ground of resurrection.

Now that fact, as I said at the beginning, is not an objective thing to which we point. That fact is a subjective thing which is an inward reality, and the church is called to carry on the testimony of Jesus in that subjective, inward way. That is the manifestation, the witness to the universe, to men and demons and angels, of the fact of the risen Christ as an inward reality. Well, that can come down to anything. It can come down to all our moods, all those experiences that are common to the children of God when they cannot explain things at all, why they feel so dead, so crippled. We cannot cover the ground where the testimony of Christ's risen life has to apply, but there it is.

But when it is a matter of carrying forward definitely and concretely the meaning of Christ as risen, Christ as Head, Christ as Lord, we are brought into conflict with every spiritual force that

is opposed, and that testimony can only be carried through in the power of His resurrection.

God has a positive note about which there is no wavering, no suggestion of uncertainty. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ and all that that means. Oh, what a lot there is in that familiar phrase, "the exceeding greatness of His power ... according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead". "The exceeding greatness of His power". Perhaps we are beginning to understand a little in experience of what that means. The exceeding greatness of His power as over death, for if there is one thing that is coming home to the consciousness of many of us more than another, it is that it takes the exceeding greatness of His power to get us through some of the things that we are having to encounter and bring us out triumphant. There is a law connected with that "exceeding greatness of His power" — "to us-ward who believe". Our attitude has got to be toward the Lord — 'Lord, by faith I draw that power in my direction for the testimony's sake, for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of Your Kingdom'. There it is, but it is only to us-ward *who believe*. We have to take up the positive attitude toward the positive fact, and we shall prove the power of His resurrection. May the Lord settle in us, in the midst of the difficulties, the trials, the adversities and the shakings, this positive note — Jesus lives! That means everything. Ultimate triumph; because Jesus lives, we will get there. We have got to settle that and bring that fact to bear upon every fresh situation and to write it over every fresh test of faith — Jesus lives! That spells the defeat of every force in this universe that is set against God's end. The appeal then to us is that we shall have in us God's positive, that there will be nothing in us that is uncertain, wavering, questioning. One central, definite, positive note — God's positive. The Lord write it in us!

CRISIS AS A REAL MARK OF LIFE

In our recent meditations the Lord has been directing our attention very much to the matter of life and as representing the chief, supreme feature of His testimony, for, when we have said everything we can about the Lord's testimony, then the whole thing becomes a question of life. The presence of the Lord's testimony, when all the talking is done, is proved by the presence or absence of life, the manifestation of spiritual and divine life. In that, everything else is gathered up.

If that is true, if spiritual life is the ultimate proof and evidence of the Lord being present and the Lord's testimony being in any one or in any place, then we have very carefully and continuously to consider the way of life. For life has a way; divine life takes a way. It is possible to be out of the way of life — we know that. It is possible to be in the way of life.

The Lord has constituted His creation in which the principle of life operates in this way, that that life expands and produces an enlarged vessel or channel by a series of crises. That is true in our physical bodies. We are supposed to change our physical frame once in seven years, so that some of us have had a good many bodies already! The body of the second seventh year is not that of the first seven. It is different and normally it is enlarged. It is the effect of being alive, having life in us. It is changing us and it is enlarging us. That is also true in the kingdom around us. Every year we go into our garden and we see changes, not the changes which make it impossible for us to recognise what is there — we see it to be in form the same — but we should see in a normal line of things,

enlargement and increase. We should see a larger tree or plant, and we should see more fruit as the years go by. It is the result of life operating in its normal way, but every year that development and that increase is the result of a crisis in which death takes place, death works, and then resurrection takes place.

We know that in the physical realm in our own bodies, especially in those earlier sevens, the crisis is marked by something quite critical. It does represent a critical change in the physical organism. It is a crisis of death and of life.

The Lord has constituted His creation on that law and that principle. It is this, that life itself produces crises, which crises are for increase and enlargement, and, strangely enough, it is the very life principle which brings about death. In most cases — there are one or two exceptions I know — but in most cases a tree which cannot dispose of its leaves at the end of the season, is not a healthy tree; it lacks vitality. Life is in a poor state. The evidence that life there is strong and healthy is that it can change its strength; it can go from strength to strength, it can shed a form which has served its purpose up to that point and prepare the way for something more, something new, something that will bear again the evidence of newness of life, and so creation goes on and so the spiritual life goes on. In the things of the earth we can find endless types of heavenly things.

The heavenly truth is the same. How is life of the testimony of the Lord in us maintained? It is maintained by that very life itself bringing us up against a crisis, in which crisis something has got to be let go, something must go out. That is, there must be a handing over to death, and when that happens, the way is clear, and there is newness of life, there is greater fulness. I suppose those crises in the secret, hidden, realm are quite severe crises. We do not always understand the meaning of things happening in us. We are aware in our own physical lives of certain things, and perhaps hardly aware of them, and yet we bear the marks of them. We know that in the case of children. They get to a certain stage and, while they do not understand themselves we know that they are going through something, they are under strain. There is a crisis taking place. As

we get older, we begin to realize that we are losing certain powers we once had. We do not sit down and think it all out. All we know is that we are conscious of something happening. There is a change taking place. These crises are real things. They are not, perhaps, the things upon which our minds dwell a great deal, but they are very real things, and so it is spiritually. The life itself does this. Of course, the analogy is not perfect between the natural and spiritual, I know, but the principle is the same.

Now, do you want to go on, to grow, to increase in spiritual capacity, or, in other words, do we desire that life shall be maintained as reigning? Well, the way of life is that we shall, right through to the end, be brought up against things which, on the one hand, demand a letting go, perhaps a letting go of our own ideas. We have been brought up or trained to think in a certain way about certain things. Our convictions are such and such, or we have never thought about certain things. They have never occurred to us. And then, in the course of our walk with God, our desire to go on with the Lord, suddenly we are confronted, or steadily we find ourselves being confronted, with something. Something has come up. It has been intimated to us. It has been brought on our horizon, and then perhaps for a little while we have not had very much to do with it. Then it comes back and we just faintly begin to recognize that that thing has been up before. And then again a little later, and so we find that particular thing coming up again and again. It may constitute a battle, because it is something we have never been taught to believe, never thought to be necessary, we have never given a thought to it, and so on. But now we have got to let go somewhere. In the matter of our will, perhaps, in the matter of our reason, perhaps; or it might be even in the matter of our desire — that is the last thing that we want. But it is a crisis and it is a crisis of life. Life has done that, and I would say to you, never you do anything because someone else tells you you ought to. Always wait until the Holy Spirit puts His finger on that and holds you to it. When it comes up in life then things happen. You are up against it really; it is a crisis. Now then, your enlargement of capacity, your increase of spiritual measure, your growth in spiritual fruitfulness,

lies in the direction of getting through that crisis. If you are going to hold on to your position, you are going to reverse the order of spiritual nature. That is a new term! The order of the Spirit, the natural order of the spiritual life is that way. "Always bearing about in the body the dying (the deadness) of the Lord Jesus, *that* the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh". It is a principle that, on the one hand, there has to be a dying, a process by crisis. On the other hand, a living process also by crises and every new increase and enlargement of life and capacity comes by a crisis and that is a thing that all of us have got to recognize.

The first crisis may be that of our initial surrender to the Lord. Well then, life begins. Later we may come up against another crisis. Sooner or later, if we are going on with the Holy Spirit, we shall. I do not hesitate to say that. I have lived long enough now and had enough to do with spiritual things to know that, if anyone is really going on with God spiritually, sooner or later they will have to face another crisis. Then there will be still another, and you and I have not got through our last crisis yet. We may think that we have got over a good many of these things and do not have very many difficulties in the matter of going on with the Lord, but I will not assume that I have got through the last crisis, and a crisis is a crisis. A crisis is something which is not pleasant. It carries with it features that are not comfortable, not nice to the flesh. If we have got through our last crisis, let it be at once recognized that we have become stagnant; we are fixed. Who wants to be fixed? Who wants to come to a standstill? Oh, it is painful if we, because we have refused to go through a crisis, have not moved for years. We are just where we were years ago spiritually. There has been a putting of that thing on one side, but the Lord has never put it on one side, and it struts the path as surely as the angel straddled the path of Balaam. That is the principle of growth. Life, to be maintained, has got to bring us up to repeated crises which are in the nature of a new death on one side, and a new life on the other, a new fulness of life.

I must just make this word clear. It is not the life of the Lord which dies. You see, there is a sense in which the child of God is a paradox. There are two natures at work. There is the tree of Ezekiel,

trees on either side of the river whose leaf never falls, bearing fruit every month. That is a contradiction of all that I have just said, is it not? That is one side, that is the expression of divine life. Divine life never dies, divine life is never unfruitful; it is perpetually fruitful.

When you and I are passing through experiences of deepest death and we feel ourselves to be as dry as ever a winter leaf felt, that may be an evidence of life, and it is not necessary, when we are having one of those experiences of death, that everybody else should recognize that we are having them. It is not necessary that other people should be conscious of death where we are concerned. It may be true that death works in us, but life in others. Very often that proves to be so, that when we are feeling most dead, other people are getting the greatest blessing. The seed of the divine life is never dead under any circumstances. Our consciousness of it is quite another thing. It is necessary at times that we should not have the consciousness of fulness of life, because the Lord is taking us through something unto enlargement. I mean that so often when we are in the sense of blessing, enjoying things, we would so cling to that, hold on to it, as not to go on to anything else. So the Lord sometimes has to remove our blessing or the sense of the blessing, in order to move us from one thing to the next thing.

Now, to keep the testimony of the Kingdom of God in us and in the church a living thing, it is necessary that there should be these crises. It is a living thing for the church to go through crises. The church or a person never going through a crisis is something quite dead, quite stagnant, at a standstill. It is a real mark of life to have crises in which there is the travail unto a new life, a new fulness.

Do you want to go on? Do you want enlargement, increase, greater capacity for spiritual things, a rising up, a release of the Lord? Are you faced with anything? You know. You know where your battle is. You know where your difficulty in getting through is. It is a mark of life that we have exercise. It is a mark of life that we are faced with something as the Lord's will or mind for us. If ever we settle down to a place where we are satisfied, content, we have got it all, we know — well, we have reached the end; no one can touch us any more — the Lord have mercy on us!

So I promise you still a good many hard times, difficult times, and that is the very expression of life, a very healthy state of things, as long as you do not take that crisis and go round and round it too many times, but you face it and deal with it and go on. You will know increase, enlargement, new life, and then will come another thing. The Lord keep us in that place!

It may be that the angel of the Lord with a sword in his hand is just standing across your path. It is no use your thinking about all those glorious things which the Lord has for you — every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies becoming a reality. The way is the way of the next step of obedience, which will cost you something. That step may cost you everything. That is the way on. The Lord keep us going on in our life, maintaining a testimony of His Kingdom in that way, a life that testifies of the reality of Christ's resurrection.

LIVING IN THE REALITY AND POWER OF HIS RISEN LIFE

Reading: Rev. 1:2,9; 6:9; 11:7,11; 12:11,17; 19:10; John 1:1,4; 1 John 5:11-12; Rev. 1:17-18; 2:7,10; 3:5; 4:6-9; 7:1-3,16-17; 20:4-6; 22:1-2,18-19.

These passages are by way of laying a foundation for some quite precise matters which I feel are the Lord's message to our hearts at this time.

In the first place, we take note of what was and still is the peculiar and particular ministry of the apostle John. All that we have read is from his ministry, and it is only a mere fragment of one specific thing which abounds throughout all of his writings — his Gospel, his Epistles, and the Book of the Revelation. Clearly then, his specific ministry relates to life in Christ, *life* in Christ. You can see that everywhere in John's writings. While there are other words which have a very clear and large place in those writings, this is the word which lies back of all others, and, as we shall see, governs all the others — life.

He opens his gospel, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, by making this declaration, "in Him was life". You pursue that word through the gospel and you will see how large a place it has, not only as a word but as a theme, for John uses a very great deal of material in the life of Christ here on the earth by way of showing that in Him was life. His gospel is full of that which speaks of life. You know from the first chapter and the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, working right up to Lazarus in the eleventh, that there is the following through of this great truth that in Him was life.

Then in his letter you know also what emphasis is laid upon this matter. "And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life; he that has not the Son of God has not life." "We know that we have passed out of death into life."

We have made a fair selection of passages in the Revelation which have to do with the matter, but by no means have we exhausted them. John deals with life in Christ and in a word, he says, "This is the testimony of Jesus". If you want to know what the testimony of Jesus is, it can be summed up in one word — life. If you understand what that means, then you know what the whole Bible is about. Then you know what all the trouble is about in this universe. You have the key to everything.

From what took place before the foundation of this world, the glimpses we are given into God's counsels, purposes, then into what took place when this world was created, that great scene and drama of the Garden, and all that has been happening, not only as seen on the earth and through the history of this world, but as lying behind all that is going on now and all that is yet to be in the great winding-up of things, there is one word which explains it all, and that word is life, but it is life in Christ.

Now let us allow that word to take us back and to take us through and to take us on. It takes us back and becomes for us, or is shown to be, the basic thing as to the whole of the conflict of the ages and the purpose of God. The purpose of God was clearly that a creation should inherit eternal life. I use that word 'inherit' very carefully. I do not think that we have got the significance of it as it is used in the New Testament in connection with eternal life. Adam did not have eternal life, but he was called to be an inheritor of eternal life, he should have inherited eternal life. The great heritage of Adam and the whole race and creation in Adam was eternal life, but he never inherited, he never attained unto eternal life. That creation in Adam had to die.

The whole creation then as in Adam has missed the way, has missed God's intention. That is the bare fact. There are other facts lying within and behind that. There is the sinister intent of the

adversary to frustrate God's intention. There is the uprising of that intelligence in animosity to God's Son working behind that losing of eternal life, that missing of God's intention. Then, with that, there is all that which has come in as of that adversary which is just the opposite of what eternal life means and is in its nature and operation; all the terrible story of sin and suffering and sorrow, the story which we cannot read. I venture to say that there is enough suffering in one tiny spot of this earth if it were all known, to blow the mind of any of us. That is, if we could register all the suffering of man and beast that is in this world. I am not exaggerating, and I am not making up something. We could not bear to know it — and all that through sin, through Satan, and through the missing of God's way of life. That is just the opposite of life, that is death. So that life is the key; life, divine eternal life, is the key.

Now then, we are ready to see something of the significance of possessing eternal life. If all that — and what a terrible 'all' it is, an unthinkable and unspeakable all, you and I know today of the state of things on the earth, and expanded back through generation after generation, through centuries and centuries, all the suffering and the misery, sorrow and anguish of this creation right through the thousands of years — if all that is the result of missing eternal life, then to have eternal life means that all that is made impossible. Eternal life is that which counters all that, eternal life would have prevented one fragment of that from coming in.

Well now, you see the significance of Jesus Christ and eternal life in Jesus Christ. What is the meaning? It takes us back to the beginning and it takes us right on to the end, and it says this — eternal life takes up that whole thing and ultimately destroys it all. It destroys the devil, sin, sorrow, pain and suffering, all that is contrary to God's mind, and it brings in a new creation, the Kingdom of God, in which there is none of that, and in that day when life triumphs fully in the creation, God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces, and there shall be no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain, no more death. Now, you have all that summed up in the book of the Revelation in the figure of the four living creatures referred to so frequently in the central part of the book. To a

good many people, that part is still mysterious. I think to some it is extraordinary. Well, in a word, four is the number that symbolizes creation, and in the symbolical form of the four living creatures you have the whole new creation represented, and that full-orbed representation of the whole creation is said again and again to be *living* creatures. That is the characteristic of this creation — living. Note their position before the throne of the Lamb. The *Lamb*. The Lamb slain, yes — but living. It takes you back to the beginning of the revelation. This central part embraces all. It takes you back. "I am He that lives and was dead; and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages." It leads you on to the last chapter, the river of water of life clear as crystal, the tree of life. It is the Lamb in the throne, the centre of a new creation in which there is life.

Now, between the beginning of the book of the Revelation and that central part, you have a lot that is dealing with death. But there it is dealing mainly with death in relation to the Lord's people. From that part onwards, you have dealing with death on a wider scale. The centre of all dealing with death in every realm, making possible that glorious consummation of chapters 21 and 22, is the Lamb at the centre of a new creation which is alive with His own life, and He is the explanation of that new creation. "The Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world". Do you see the significance of life? It is the greatest thing that is possible to man to have eternal life in Jesus Christ, for the very possessing of that life is itself the testimony of Jesus. What is the testimony of Jesus? It is nothing less than this, that, by His own life, He has destroyed Satan and sin and all their consequences and brought in a new creation in which there is nothing of that. That is the testimony of Jesus. It is all gathered up into something which in Himself we possess, God's free gift, eternal life. Not to have that means all the other. To have that eternal life in Him means to have dwelling within us that which eventually is going to prove to have been the undoing of all Satan's work and the destroying of all Satan's fruit in the creation. A tremendous thing — the significance of eternal life. It goes back right to the beginning. You see, immediately you and I receive the gift of God in Jesus Christ which is eternal life, so far

as that innermost reality of our being is concerned, so far as that position is concerned, the ages from Adam to our time have been blotted out and we have got back beyond Adam's fall. That is true of what is innermost in a child of God. And then it goes on, and, while there may be many a conflict, yet there is that which is within which declares that the end for us is not the triumph of sin, not the triumph of suffering, pain, sorrow, not the triumph of death, but the triumph of life in Jesus Christ. We have got that in us now! It takes us back and on, it is here. It is no small thing to have eternal life in Jesus Christ. It is not just some abstract thing. It is Jesus Christ Himself by His Spirit resident within in the power of His own victory, for He has Himself swallowed up sin, sorrow and death.

"I am He that lives; I became dead. I am alive unto the ages of the ages and have the keys of death and of Hades." "I am the resurrection and the life." "This is the witness, that God has given unto us eternal life and this life is in His Son." We cannot grasp, we cannot sense the significance of having eternal life. How far-reaching it is, how it bounds the universe, how it swallows up everything! This is the life which has in it the *guarantee* of immortality. So it undoes one whole state of things which Satan has done, it reverses one order of things which Satan has instituted. It secures one great, glorious, divine purpose which Satan sought to frustrate and all that is in the life which Jesus Christ gives and which we have in Him. It is all in that life. That is the testimony of Jesus. How important it is then that everyone of us should, in the first place, make sure that we have eternal life. Are you able to say, right from your heart, 'I know that I have passed from death unto life'? Are you able to say that with full assurance? It has got to be a personal matter. Now let me say to you that you have nothing whatever to do of yourself to get that assurance. If there is any doing at all, it begins and ends with this — *put your trust in the Lord Jesus*. This life is not merited, is not secured by any activity of ours, it is God's free gift to anyone who will believe in His Son. That is the simplest expression of the gospel for anyone who does not know for certain that they have eternal life. Unless you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus, you have no hope of deliverance from sin and the judgment

of sin, no hope of deliverance from death, no hope of deliverance from the grip of Satan, for all such deliverance is in that life and in our possessing that life.

But, having received that life, how important it is that we should all be co-operating with that life. As we pointed out in our previous meditation, divine life has a way of its own. It does not go our way; it does not go the way of our thinking, our reasoning, our arguing, our debating. It does not go the way of our will, it does not go the way of our desire or our liking. It has its own way and there has to be a continuous yielding to the way of life, a co-operating with its own laws. If life is going to lead us through to the place which it is intended to reach, we have got to go with it. We have got to yield to it. We have to recognize its laws. We must not pull against it. There must be an utterness of abandonment to the Lord Himself; there must be a swift response to every indication of the divine will, quick obedience to every indication of the Lord's way.

I must confess that there are a lot of things I do not understand in the Word of God. I do not altogether understand this last thing about his name being taken out of the book of life, but I notice that it has to do with a part, 'his part', and it seems to me that there is this suggestion that it means that some have not gone on with that life which they possessed, so that they have not come to that which was intended for them. They have stopped short and their part — what God intended for them — is lost. It is just possible to cut across that life so that it is arrested and it is no longer able to lead us right on to God's fulness, for God's end is fulness of life. We may miss the part that was meant for us because we have checked the life. Well, that is quite understandable and that is perfectly reasonable. We may know Christians who have stopped there; they are not going on. They have come to a standstill, they are not growing, they are not developing, there is no increase.

On the other hand, there are many who are going on. Do you mean to tell me that it does not matter, that all are going to have the same part whether they go on or not, that we all come to the same end, the same measure? Not at all. God has written us in His book of life for some great end, fulness, and we may miss it. I am

not saying that we may miss or forfeit eternal life, but we may miss the end to which it is intended to lead us, the part to which God would bring us. It is important to go on in the way of life because of all that is involved. That is the trouble in the first section of the book of the Revelation. The Lord introduces Himself as follows: 'I am the living One. I became dead. I am alive for evermore.' He presents Himself to the churches with that particular feature of life, and He is dealing with the churches in the light of the fact that He is the living One who became dead and is alive. You may analyse the trouble in the churches and say it was that and that and the other. You may give all the troubles a name, but, when you have tabulated all the trouble, you come back to one simple explanation and summary. It is one trouble. This and that and the other thing were only the things which came in to arrest life. 'The trouble with you is not just that there is this and that and the other thing. The trouble is that you have not gone on, that the life has been checked, and, inasmuch as that is true, you have really allowed the opposite of life to come in; you have given place to the devil.' He is dealing with the churches according to the law of life in Himself, and, although He points out that there is this and that and the other thing that He does not approve of in the churches, it is the effect. "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." That is the issue for the churches. It is a question of life.

Satan has a multitude of ways and means by way of which he achieves his end. It may be what is wrong in Ephesus, or it may be what is wrong in any other of the churches, things particularly mentioned, but whatever the means, whatever the way, the issue is one. Life has been arrested, and the testimony of Jesus is therefore no longer there. Lots of things are there, but the testimony of Jesus is under arrest, that is the trouble.

The Lord would say to His own people, 'It is not a matter of whether you are doing a lot of work. "I know thy work." It is not a matter of whether you are trudging on, patiently on, resignedly on. "I know thy patience." It is not a matter of whether you have a very real, keen sense of right and wrong. "I know that thou canst

not hear them that are evil." It is not a matter of whether you have a highly developed sense of truth and error, whether you can scent error afar off, whether you can sniff whether a man is unsound leagues away! I know all about that. Your love of truth, your sound doctrine. I know, but that is not enough. You may labour. "I know thy labour." I know, I know. But there is something that I miss, and the absence of that something cannot be atoned for by any of these things. There is no substitute for that'. All these things may, after all, only be comparatively dead things. You may have dead orthodoxy, you may have a dogged deadness in going on, simply because you will not give up or are afraid to give up, but oh, where is the life? That is the question with the Lord. He is challenging everything in view of life. That is the testimony of Jesus. Life as in Himself, the living One. It is not whether we are this and have that. It is life in Christ.

So the first section of the book deals with the Lord's people and the matter of life and it all comes to this. Nothing, any number of things, good in themselves, which He may take account of, can be a substitute for life in the presence of One whose all and everything is unto life. The Lord Jesus did not die and rise again, did not overcome Satan and sin and all that realm of things, in order to make us good workers, patient workers, determined supporters for truth. He did it to make us live.

We have read that little fragment to do with the two witnesses. The two witnesses exercised such a tremendous power and then were overcome and slain; their dead bodies lie in the street and then they rise up and were caught up to heaven. The point right at the heart of that thing (and nothing really matters but this because the whole book of the Revelation is centred upon one matter), is that the witness, the adequate witness, is life. The number two in many places in the Bible stands for adequate testimony. "He sent them forth two by two." That is adequate testimony. Here you have two witnesses. They stand in the power of life, and there is a manifestation of what that life means. It is terrific, if you read the thing again. All hell is allowed to be loosed upon that testimony, and it looks as though that adequate testimony is quenched, is dead.

There it lies for days. Satan from the pit has triumphed. But wait a bit, we will see. You cannot deal with life, God's life, like that. That is only allowed to show what that life really is. What is that life? Why, that life draws upon itself, in the permission of God. All the power of hell seems to go under it, and then strips it off and climbs to glory! It is the adequate testimony of life. You need not bother who the witnesses are. Get the principle. If you want to be in the line of the two witnesses, do not worry about names. Get into the life, the life will prove. That is the test of everything. It is the power, the effect, in the realm of the devil, that is where the ultimate registration is. There you have, right in the middle of that book, the two witnesses, adequate testimony in the power of divine life, and then the pit opens, hell divulges itself, and everything converges upon that testimony. It seems to overcome, to overpower, to quench and to finish, and then life enters in. It is all that is needed; that is God's answer.

God has only to put His life in and where is hell and where is earth? The testimony is in heaven. Hell is defeated! It is a wonderful thing, life in Jesus Christ.

You can follow through the book of Revelation. May the significance of what I have said be taken hold of. You need not worry about the message, the things said, the things left unsaid. It is what it is all pointing to, the tremendous, the unspeakably great significance of our having in us now eternal life in Jesus Christ. It is big enough to attract all the attention of hell and to drag out all the power of Satan and his kingdom in desperate determination to try and quench it, because it means so much. It means their overthrow, it means the undoing of all their work, the change of the whole course of things, the bringing in of a new creation, the Kingdom of God — all bound up with this life in Jesus Christ. You understand the battle we are in, and why it is. May the Lord then make the testimony of Jesus be for us not just a teaching, but a living reality, the power of His risen life.

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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