



the
Golden
Candlestick

**THE INTERVENTION OF GOD
IN CHRIST**

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IN THE FULNESS OF THE TIME

Reading: Gal. 4:4; 6-7; Mark 1:14-15; Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 16:27-28.

These passages, and others of a similar character, represent a definite and ordered programme and timetable of God. By such words as, "In the fulness of the time", "the time is fulfilled", "at the end of these days (or times)", is clearly indicated a set and determined point of time for divine intervention.

"The fulness of the time" speaks of a completed period. It is a very interesting word, used in a great number of connections, and it simply means "making complete", or "filling up". In one connection it is used of a patch being put into a rent garment, and you know that the effect of a patch in a rent garment is to make it complete, to fill up the gap, to unite in a whole. On another occasion the word is used of baskets which have just been filled right up so that they can contain no more. That same word is used here: *the fulness of the time*, something completed, something brought to a consummation. The statement is that just then, at that point, God sent forth His Son.

That to which the time-point relates need not occupy us at length just now, because it does not for the moment come within the compass of our consideration; but undoubtedly earlier it had a twofold connection. On the one hand, it related to the Jewish dispensation, or the dispensation of the law. The law had been given, and the law had done its work; and the work of the law was to conclude all under sin, by showing how utterly incapable man was under the most favourable conditions of fulfilling God's law. God

had from among the nations taken out a nation, separated them and brought them under His own direct government, and placed Himself, so to speak, at their disposal, with all His power, with all His divine resources, to be for them, to be with them. Within the compass of that divine favour, He had given them His law; through a long term of years had tested them by that law, and eventually proved that man in himself, though he may be surrounded by all that God can do for him, objectively, outside of himself, is totally incapable of fulfilling that divine law. Now if that is proven in the case of a people detached from all the influences and forces, and down-drag of paganism, heathenism, and the world in general, and brought under the divine favour, within the immediate and direct operation of the power and goodness of God, then it goes without saying that all the rest of the world will break down. So that God made this people, whom He had favoured, chosen, with whom He dwelt, and for whom He worked, through a long period of years, an example and proof before the whole universe of the fact that there is nothing in man which can answer to His law. That was an aspect of the times, and those times were fulfilled as marking the special features of the law, the bringing of man under condemnation. On the other hand, undoubtedly the phrase applies to the Gentile world, because while God was proving in Israel the total inability of man to stand up to His law under these favourable conditions, He was working in the whole world to prepare it for a new order of things.

Thus, you find two things associated with the coming of the Lord Jesus. One is the breakdown of the law, or of man under the law, the total breakdown. And that is made very clear by the very presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, and explains His whole attitude towards Israel, towards Judaism, when He was here. It is made unmistakably clear to all that man under the law, even in favourable association with God, is a failure. But just at that very point where the thing is so fully and completely demonstrated, and revealed, there is also a wonderful preparedness on the part of the rest of the world for Christ. A preparation had been going on, and the Gentile world was never more ready for the Gospel than when

the Lord Jesus came. The rapid spread of the Gospel in its first years is a testimony to God's wonderful preparation to facilitate that spreading abroad. It was facilitated in a marvellous way, and thus went out rapidly because God had been preparing for a long time.

So that the Lord Jesus came at a strategic moment, at a moment of universal preparation, and it is expressed in this phrase: "In the fulness of the time".

We open Mark's Gospel and see that, without any introduction to His life, the Lord Jesus immediately sets out upon His work. In Mark's record the words with which He sets out on that mission are: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand ..." (Mark 1:15). What a crisis in the history of the world is marked by that simple statement: "The time is fulfilled." What time? The time of worldwide preparation, the breakdown of man under the law, and the preparation of the nations for the new order of things, God working to a timetable.

A twofold object

Turning to the intervention of God in Christ, it may be summed up as having a twofold object.

1. Revealing God's relationship and attitude towards the world

In God's intervention in Christ, there is the revelation of God's relationship and attitude towards this world. To put that in other words, the Lord Jesus is the expression of God's relationship and attitude towards this world.

2. Revealing man's relationship and attitude towards God as God would have it

That again, in other words, means this, that the Lord Jesus in His own Person expresses God's thought as to man's relationship

and attitude towards Him. Do you want to know what God thinks as to man's relationship with Him, as to man's attitude towards Him? You have to look at the Lord Jesus to see that.

Let us repeat that this intervention of God in Christ has this twofold object: on the one hand to reveal God's relationship and attitude towards this world, towards man — and to do so in a Person, and on the other hand, to reveal God's mind as to man's relationship and attitude towards Himself, and to do this likewise in a Person.

Christ the way of this revelation

Christ, then, becomes the way of this revelation, the way of this manifestation, the way of this twofold expression, and this again is fourfold in each aspect. We will consider first of all the God-ward aspect. God is revealed in Christ.

a) As Sovereign

The first aspect of God's revelation of His own relationship and attitude towards this world is that of Sovereign, and that is set forth, so far as the narrative is concerned, in the Gospel by Matthew. Matthew sets forth God's intervention in Christ in the terms of sovereignty. In other words, Christ expresses in His own Person the sovereignty of God, God's relationship and attitude to this world as Sovereign.

b) As Lord

That revelation of God as Lord, with regard to the narrative and history is gathered up in the Gospel by Mark. Mark is the setting forth of God in Christ as Lord, the Lordship of God in this earth among men.

c) As Saviour

The revelation of God in Christ, so far as His relationship and attitude towards this world is concerned, is also that of Saviour, and

that is set forth in the Gospel by Luke. In Luke's Gospel the Lord Jesus shows forth God as Saviour.

d) As Father

John's Gospel sets forth God as Father, as to His relationship and attitude towards this world and that is brought to our knowledge and recognition in the Person of Christ. The dominant word of John's Gospel is "Father", and we find that it occurs one hundred and eleven times.

Here you have, then, God's intervention in Christ as from Himself to this world as Sovereign, as Lord, as Saviour, as Father. Remember there is an order there, and it is the right order. He is never Lord before He is Sovereign. He becomes Lord after having become Sovereign. He is never Saviour before He is Lord, and He is never Father before He is Saviour. That is the right spiritual order, and it is very important to have that established. Because that order has not been recognized there is a terrible weakness in the preaching of the Gospel. There is an emphasis which is out of proportion, which results in an unbalanced and an altogether unsatisfactory spiritual life.

The Lord demands first of all a recognition of His utter rights as Sovereign in this universe. It is all very well to offer sinners the Saviour, but too often the sinner merely wants the Saviour in order to escape the embarrassment of his sin, and not for any desire of allegiance to God. He wants to escape hell, to escape the consequences of a bad life; to get out of all the misery that he has brought upon himself because he has sinned, but there is never a question as to God having absolute sovereign rights in his life, and therefore there is a weakness. The order is first that God has rights as Sovereign, and we have to bow to those rights, and recognize that as sinners we have not just sinned against ourselves and against our own good, our own convenience, our own comfort, our own well-being, but we have to recognize that the Lord Jesus puts these words into the mouth of the prodigal: "I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight ..." not: I have sinned against myself, and

brought all this misery upon myself, and I am a poor, wretched creature, and want, and need, to be saved! That says plainly that God's rights have been violated. Every sin that we commit is against God. This order must be restored.

The other side of this naturally follows, namely, man's relationship and attitude towards God revealed in Jesus Christ. Man is seen

a) *As subject*

If, on the one hand, in Mark's Gospel God is revealed in Christ as Sovereign, then Matthew's Gospel will reveal man in Christ as subject. The Gospel contains a demand. It demands the recognition of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Heavens. Why did the Lord Jesus in the first instance command His disciples to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and not to go to the Gentiles with the message? He did so because He was setting forth the truth that within that compass there had been declared through long generations the Theocracy, the government of God, God's sovereign rights. In effect He said to His disciples: Go and declare the rights of God where those rights are known! Then note that should they refuse, it would be more tolerable for heathen nations, pagan peoples, than for them — "Shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against (unto, ASV) them" (Mark 6:11). It was simply the declaration of the sovereign rights of God, and a calling for an acknowledgment of them in Christ. The sovereign rights would not be understood in the first place in the Gentile nations at that time. They had their own gods, their own deities. But in Israel the rights of God were understood, and the Lord was simply seeking once more to make it perfectly clear that God's sovereignty demanded man's subjection.

b) *As servant*

It is the same in the other cases. If in Mark we have the revelation of God as Lord, then Mark will set forth man's relationship and attitude towards God, as revealed in Christ, as that of servant. Mark is the unveiling of the servant of God in Jesus Christ. God

has rights, not only as Sovereign but as Lord. He has the right to possess and to be obeyed.

c) As sinner

If God is revealed in Christ in Luke's Gospel as Saviour towards this world, then, so far as man is concerned, Luke will reveal man's relationship and attitude towards God as that of sinner. The great central key phrase of Luke's Gospel is: "The Son of Man is come (came, ASV) to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God revealed in Christ as Saviour puts man before God as a sinner. When Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and seated upon a throne, he became conscious of his sinner-ship, and said: "*Woe is me.*" We must bring into view those universal sovereign rights of God, which have been violated, to have an adequate background for the conviction of sin. The absence of a deep conviction of sin is so largely because the holiness of God has been belittled, obscured, or not set forth. We see our smallness, when we see what a God He is, when we behold Him as Sovereign in the universe.

See how the letter to the Hebrews works on that truth. The first chapter is nothing but a matchless unveiling of the greatness of God in Christ His Son; Heir of God, through whom He made the ages! The Effulgence, the divine Effulgence! Then chapter 2 immediately takes up the mediatorial work for sinners. That is the order. In principle that is God's way of getting sinners to repentance. "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). "Repent ye *therefore*" (Acts 3:19). Let us get back the greatness of our God in sovereignty in Christ as the basis of appeal to surrendered life as servants, and repentance from dead works.

d) As son

If in John God is revealed in Christ in the terms of Fatherhood, then, so far as man according to God's thought is concerned, the word "Son" surely will be very much in evidence. Read the Gospel by John again with those two words in view and see how they practically sum up the Gospel. You will not get very far before you read:

"... as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name ..." (1:12). That is a coming into the family. "In the fulness of the time God sent forth His Son ...". There you have the relationship of a Father and a Son. "And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). The intervention of God in Christ in the fulness of time was through Sovereignty, Lordship, Saviourhood, to serve a family, sonship.

All this is set forth in the Gospels as the fourfold intervention of God. But it is only set forth by way of declaration, so to speak, and exemplification of fact. The apostles had declared all this long before they wrote it. At least fifty years passed before the first record of it all was written. But they had said it all, they had been declaring it all, long before they wrote it. It was a setting forth of fact, and then in the Person of Christ an illustrating or an exemplifying of those facts. If you want to see God acting in Sovereignty, you will see it in Christ. If you want to see God acting as Lord, you will see it in Christ. If you want to see God acting as Saviour, you will see it in Christ. If you want to see God revealing Himself as Father, you will see it in Christ. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father ..." (John 14:9). If you want to see man as subject, you will see him so in Christ. If you want to see man as servant, you will see him so in Christ. If you want to see man as sinner you will see him, not in the essential nature of Christ, but in Christ being made sin; for you must remember that the Cross dominates each of these Gospels. If you want to see man in the position of a son of the Father, you will see him in Christ.

That is set forth as a statement of facts and an exemplification of those facts in the Gospel, but when you turn to the Epistles you find all this in full development in a spiritual way concerning believers. You do not pass very far out of the Gospels before you see in Christ the Sovereignty of God: "... sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ..." (Heb. 1:3). "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). From that point onward the Lord is full of the Sover-

eignty in Christ. Then we know that the Epistles are simply full of the Servanthood of Christ as in the saints. If there was ever one man more than another who apprehended that it was Paul: "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ ..." (Rom. 1:1 RV). "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who ... emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant ... becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Philipp. 2:5-8). Let that mind be in you. As to salvation, the sinner, the Saviour, the Epistles have plenty to say. Acts gives us a governing word: "Him did God exalt ... to be a Prince and a Saviour" (Acts 5:31) — note the order there! Then as to Fatherhood and as to sonship, Romans has a lot to say about sonship, and Galatians is full of it. Hebrews also has a good deal, and elsewhere there is much.

Thus, you see that this great revelation in Christ has become a spiritual realisation in the saints. The fourfold intervention of God has been successful. God has broken into the history of this world at a given point in His Son, in this fourfold way, and the result is seen in the Epistles and ever since. We are of those — and there have been such in every age, and there are multitudes besides ourselves in this age who first of all recognize and glory in the fact that He is Sovereign: "Rejoice, the Lord is King." We rejoice in the fact that He is our Lord, our Master, our Owner, and we glory in being His willing slaves. We find no difficulty in speaking of ourselves as bond-slaves of Jesus Christ, but rather do we pray daily: Lord, keep us this day Thy slaves! Hold us in Thine own bonds! Curtail all liberties which are not of Thyself; our freedom is Thy grand control! Then what can we say enough about Saviourhood? Blessed be God, we are rejoicing that we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

All this divine intervention, from every standpoint, has become a spiritual reality, and there is a great deal more. That is only the beginning of it. There is a good deal to be said about the outworking of that, but we will not go further at the moment. We can meditate in our hearts upon the grand fact that Jesus Christ even now is Sovereign with the Father, and we are joined with Him in that. There

is a good deal which seems to dispute it, but the fact is unaltered. He is Sovereign.

So Matthew's Gospel, true to the keynote from which the whole movement of the Gospel springs, comes back again to its keynote at the close. "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore ...". He is Sovereign Lord.

GOD AS SOVEREIGN AND MAN AS SUBJECT

Features of Matthew's Gospel

It will be necessary, seeing we are considering the Gospel by Matthew specially in this connection, to take account of some features in this Gospel which so clearly point in this specific direction, and reveal God in Christ in His Kingship, His Sovereignty, and man called to be subject, or citizen in the Kingdom of God. Matthew has his own terms, his own peculiar and particular way of making this plain. In many instances he uses language of his own. For instance, Matthew is the only one who speaks of Jerusalem as the Holy City, or the Holy Place, or again, as the City of the Great King. That alone, which is but a minute fragment of this whole Gospel, contains a great volume of wonderful significance. Let us dwell with that for a little while.

Alongside of that simple, and yet so comprehensive, fact, place this other fact, that the Gospel as recorded by Matthew peculiarly relates to the whole of Israel's past. One of his objects seems to have been to bring all the past of Israel into relation to this intervention of God in Christ. This is seen by the way in which he quotes from the Old Testament. If you read through the Gospel by Matthew, you will find that he quotes the Old Testament very fully and very liberally, and one formula, as it might be called of Matthew is: "that it might be fulfilled". You find that phrase constantly repeated. Or again, "as it is written". Let those who are wanting to get inside of the Gospel, take those phrases and settle down with them, and

you will find that with those clues you are discovering, or having discovered to you, what Matthew is after. He is going back into the great past of Israel and is now bringing all that great past alongside of this present intervention of God in Christ and relating it to Christ. But he is doing more. He is lifting Christ into a place in which He not only sums up all that but transcends it.

What a history there is gathered up in such phrases as "the City of the Great King", "the holy city", "the holy place". All the history of Jerusalem is summed up in those phrases. All the greatest history of Jerusalem, the past history of the nation, is gathered up in them. Jerusalem in its best days represented Israel in its glory. Jerusalem was as the metropolis of the world, as the governing centre of the world. See what the Psalmist says in Psalm 87 about the absolute transcendency of Zion (another word for Jerusalem). He puts Zion in a place where all the other great world centres, with all their magnificence, pale before her. "I will make mention of Egypt and Babylon ... Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia ..." (verse 4). But what are these? "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" as though, with all their magnificence and their great history — they were nothing, as though there was no glory attached to them because he has seen Zion, eclipsing the glory of the world. For the Psalmist, and for Israel in her great days, Jerusalem, the City of the Great King, was the centre of heaven's government of this world, and of heaven's glory here. The Lord was there.

Bring the import of that into Matthew's Gospel, and alongside of the significant titles found there: "the city of the great king", "the holy city", "the holy place", and let it come upon your heart with its full force that before you have closed the Gospel by Matthew, Jerusalem is set aside, and there is a Man standing and saying: "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth." What has happened? All the glory of Israel has been transferred to a Man; all the glory of the City of the Great King has been transferred to a Man and transcended. Jerusalem is set aside, rejected. She has failed, fallen far short of the divine purpose. But God has secured everything in this Man, and He becomes the centre and seat of

universal authority of heaven's government in this universe: "All authority hath been given unto *Me* in heaven and on earth."

A very real significance is seen to be attached to the title "the City of the Great King", when you see what Matthew is after. He is bringing the whole meaning over to the One Person, and he is saying, in effect, All that Jerusalem ever was at its greatest has not only been transferred to this One, but transcended, eclipsed. He supersedes it all — "All authority hath been given unto *Me* ...". No longer is it vested in Jerusalem. When you get to the end of Matthew you see that the Lord Jesus has passed out of Jerusalem, and commissions His disciples from a long way off. He no longer commissions from Jerusalem; He commissions from outside. He has taken the authority in Himself away from Jerusalem, the place of the recognized authority among men. He has captured it Himself, and now it is not Jerusalem but Christ who governs, who reigns, who dominates.

In the Acts and the Epistles what is here set forth as fact and is exemplified becomes a spiritually fulfilled and realized thing. The Acts shows us all that spiritually expressed over against all the kingdoms of this world. Does Jerusalem seek to reassert its authority, seek again to enforce its government, its sovereignty? Jerusalem will go down before the Christ. Forty years — not a long time — after Christ was crucified Jerusalem was literally torn limb from limb, and not one stone left upon another. It raised its head against the One into whose hands heaven had committed all authority. You can observe the fierce working towards that in the Book of the Acts. You find Jerusalem rising up to fight Jesus of Nazareth, God's King. Jerusalem destroys Stephen and others, and persecutes the saints. "Having received authority from the chief priests", Saul of Tarsus persecutes them. Listen to that word "authority" as it echoes the boss of all that is, against the people of this Way, against Jesus of Nazareth. Well, if it is a conflict of authorities the issue is very patent. "All authority hath been given unto *Me* in heaven and on earth", said the Lord Jesus, and the rulers of Jerusalem gave Saul of Tarsus authority against Him. No wonder Saul of Tarsus came

down on that road, and was smitten to the earth, blind and helpless!

Pass into the Epistles. You are led on into the more inward fulness and meaning of this, and it is seen that spiritually the saints are brought to a place where they are seated together with Christ in the heavenlies, where Christ at God's right hand includes them, and they in a spiritual way share that authority. But that authority works so deeply that very often it is hardly recognized even by those in and for whom it is working. It is very often not recognized until afterwards. This is where we should find a good deal of comfort and consolation. The Lord is Lord on His throne, even though at times we seem to be so beaten and so baffled. Sometimes it seems that the enemy has got the upper hand, that the power and the authority is with him. Sometimes it seems almost impossible for us to lift our heads. Every voice seems to declare that anything is true but that the Lord rules. We go through a time like that, and all we are able to say is that we are counting upon the faith of God, but when we are through, we discover that there was a meaning in all that which we did not see, of which we were totally unaware at the time. Again and again we have found it to be like that. It was not that our faith was mighty. It was not that we were able at that time to stand on our feet and glory in His sovereignty and power. On the contrary everything seemed obscure and we were feeling utterly beaten and very uncertain in our faith. But God in His throne, rock-like, was unmoved through that tempest, and we have come out with some "treasures of darkness". We have discovered, and we do discover, that the Lord was sovereignly accomplishing something in that time, of which we were altogether ignorant, and that stands. Hell sought to frustrate it; all the power of evil stood to engulf it, to swallow it up. But just as the man child eventually reaches the throne, so the divine purpose, on every like occasion when the dragon would seek to swallow it up, persists through to God's end, and eventually the marks of God's sovereignty are clearly seen. It is not our measure of faith, neither our strength of endurance nor that we are always so marvellously triumphant in spirit, that is the ground of the triumph issue, but that we seek to believe that God

is faithful and hold on to that when we can hold on to nothing else. It is what God is in the throne, and what Christ is at His right hand, that is the foundation and the all of the victorious conclusion.

What we are saying, in other words, is parallel to what we find when at the end of the Gospel by Matthew it is declared that all authority in heaven and in earth is in the hands of the Lord Jesus, and almost immediately afterwards you have saints slain, the church scattered and persecuted, assailed, an apostle despairing of life, and all that sort of thing. Do these two things correspond? Is this not a contradiction? Men in bodies broken and frail, in prisons and dungeons, being stoned, sawn asunder, being scattered to the four winds of heaven, and all this disaster of evil, of demons and of men, and still the authority in the hands of Jesus Christ! Is this not an awful contradiction? No, there is no contradiction about it. The fact remains and when hell has spent itself, Jesus Christ remains Lord upon the throne.

The second thing, having of course two aspects, is that even though he may be unwilling, though he may not recognize and acknowledge it, man *is* subject. I believe there is a much wider application permissible to the simple statement that Christ is the Head of every man than simply that He is the Head of every believer. I believe that statement goes beyond the range of the church. He is the Head of every man. Whether every man will acknowledge it or not is quite another thing, but He is the Head of every man, and in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. Blessed be God, there is this side in which you and I rejoice, that we are subject to God in Christ. We find no difficulty in accepting that.

There is another aspect of this which comes out in Matthew's Gospel. It is not only the fact of His Sovereignty, but also the fact of the expression of that Sovereignty with His advent as the new Legislator, the Legislator of a new spiritual law, the King of a new spiritual dominion, the Founder or Builder of a new spiritual and universal church. The law through Moses went so far, but this new Legislator says: "But I say unto you ..." (Matthew 5). He Himself carries things through. He carries things from the realm of the

merely external act to the realm of the inward spiritual state. He legislates not for the external conduct of men in the first instance. Moses did that, but Christ legislates for the inward government of a spiritual condition. "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). We need the Epistles for the explanation of that, and when we come to them we see quite clearly that the Lord Jesus, by reason of His inward sovereignty, has set up a new inward spiritual state, with a new inward spiritual government and law. The letter to the Hebrews, for instance, expresses it thus: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers ... I will put My laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them ...".

Summing all that up in a word, it means this, that the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in our hearts creates a new kind of citizen, not now such as simply glory in the historic factors of a citizenship of an earthly Jerusalem or an earthly country, but such as are now spiritually related to a new spiritual city. So the apostle, in recognizing the transference of the franchise from the earthly to the heavenly, puts it in this way in the letter to the Galatians: "The Jerusalem which is above is free, which is our mother" (4:26). Jerusalem above, our mother, is free. From what? The old Jewish law, the thing which externally bound the earthly Jerusalem, the Jerusalem which is below; that law which the citizens of that city could never meet, never fulfil; which tyrannized and broke, and condemned, and judged. Now, by reason of citizenship of the Jerusalem which is above, there is freedom from all that. What is the nature of the freedom? It is that there has been introduced into the believer something which lifts on to an altogether higher level, a heavenly, and that now instead of being browbeaten by an external law of ordinances and commandments, the believer is able to say: "I delight to do thy will, O God." This is the fruit of being in Christ. It is the law of heavenly love, not a matter of earthly compulsion. It is a new citizenship, a heavenly citizenship, with a new legislation in the heart. It is simply the outworking in a spiritual way of the fact

that Jesus Christ is Lord within the life.

In this Gospel by Matthew one of the words which preponderates is the word *heaven*, and there is something peculiar about Mathew's usage of the plural *heavens*. *Heaven* occurs some seventy-five times in Matthew's Gospel. That is significant. One of the burdens of my heart continuously is the absolute necessity, for the Lord's people to come into a clearer, stronger realization and recognition of the fact of the heavenly nature of the believer, the Christian life, the church.

You and I are only here in this world for the testimony, and if we are going to have God with us one hundred per cent, if we are going to have God committing Himself to us, if we are going to realize God's purpose to the full, it will be necessary for us not to have any earth-ties whatever in spiritual matters. Everything that we have here of business, or home, or friends, or anything else, will have to be held for God and for heaven. If it is held for self, if it is held for the world, if it is held in any other realm than for God utterly, then Satan has crown rights in it, and he will secure his rights.

Let us try and illustrate this from the case of Isaac. Isaac was given by God. Abraham was given a vision by God of a son. It was a divinely given vision, and then God moved to realize that vision after long waiting and testing and gave him Isaac. That far the vision was realized, and Abraham at last possessed Isaac. Then what was God's next step? "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest ... and offer him ... for a burnt offering ..." (Gen. 22:2). What was God doing? A God-given vision, a God-realized vision, and now God taking away everything connected with that vision? I think the deepest explanation of such a thing is that you may have a God-given vision, and be brought into possession of that in which, and through which, the vision is to be realized, and then hold it for yourself. *My vision! My calling from God! My ministry! My work,* which I have received from God! God-given things possessed for ourselves. God said: This thing must be wholly of Me, and wholly of heaven! If you have Isaac, you will only have Isaac as held for Me, and not for yourself! Abraham had to have his Isaac on another

basis altogether from the purely natural.

In Matthew's Gospel we mark the governmental expression of that truth, that reality of the heavens. The word occurring as it does so frequently in this Gospel carries us right away from this earth. Matthew leads away from all that had been historical, of this earth. We have indicated it in one thing alone, that whereas Jerusalem has occupied such a strong place in this world as God's centre, now it is set aside and Matthew sees Christ taking the government away from Jerusalem in His own Person outside; and that too is our place spiritually with the Lord Jesus "outside the camp". He is outside of this world. He is in the heavens. No longer is He in this earthly Jerusalem, but in the heavenly Jerusalem. The authority is in His hands. That is what we are trying to indicate.

Let us go back for a re-emphasis of that which we have been considering, the tremendous need for our getting clear about this heavenly relationship, the heavenly nature of things. When the Lord Jesus said: "The prince of this world cometh to me and hath nothing in me", He was simply setting forth clearly and positively the great spiritual truth that the prince of this world can be cast out if he has no ground of authority in the instrument. To put that in another way: How was it possible for the Lord Jesus to cast out the prince of this world? How was it possible for Him to say: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out"? Simply because He was able at the same time to say: "The prince of this world cometh to me and hath nothing in Me". If the prince of this world can come to you and to me, or to anything which professes to be associated with Him, and finds in it something of this world, that is the ground upon which he will encamp to destroy the effectiveness of that life, or that thing. Therefore the measure of spiritual power, spiritual effectiveness, depends upon our heavenliness of life — if you like, our other-worldliness. Oh, the tremendous value of heavenliness in the life, and in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All this has to do with the greatness of the word *heaven*, and *heavens*, in the Gospel by Matthew. We must remember that the plural as used by Matthew relates to a dwelling place of God, and if

we are in the heavenlies in Christ we are in the place where God is. To put that round the other way, God is not now immediately related to this earth. He is governing, He is Sovereign, but He is not bound up with this present earth in its present state. The Lord has gone outside, and, as we have said, that also is our place spiritually. Our place is outside of this world.

The necessity for the cross

There are many other words in this Gospel which indicate the heavenliness of things, but we have seen enough, and can gather it up in a word or two. Let us remind ourselves of the place of the Cross in all this, that the Cross is essentially related to this heavenly life, this heavenly government, and to this operation of the Sovereignty of God in Christ. Matthew makes that clear, not only in the fact that the Cross stands there at the end governing everything, but you see the elements of the Cross running all the way through.

You see, on the one hand, a set of statements, or happenings, which indicate the Lordship of God associated with the Cross, and then, running parallel with that set of things, you have another set indicating the humiliation of the Cross, the suffering. For instance, you have on the one hand, the homage of the Magi, as they opened to Him while yet a babe at Bethlehem, their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh, a tribute to His Kingship, and over against that in the parallel column, the massacre of the innocents. This Kingship is not going to be realized, preserved, established without a good deal of suffering. Or again, there is a statement in the narrative of His royal descent from David, and then in the opposite column right over against that, the flight into Egypt for the preservation of His life. Of royal descent, the Son of a King, to occupy the throne of His father David, and, in contrast, fleeing into Egypt for His life. Do you see the marks of the Cross? Again, on the one hand a vision of angels, and then, standing right over against it: "Is not this the Nazarene?" Do you see the significance of that? Here on the one side are those things which relate to His Kingship, His glory, all

that God intended concerning Him in His ultimate supremacy, and yet running right alongside of all that there is everything which speaks of suffering, persecution, humiliation, right up to the Cross. Spiritual eyes look through what appears on the surface, and see a King, the most majestic and glorious monarch this world has ever known, crowned with thorns, nailed, scourged hanging on a Cross, despised, forsaken. And does not the deepest note in our worship today spring from this that spiritual eyes behold? We do not look upon Christ crucified as men might look upon One whom they deem to have been defeated, to have lost all, to have been made helpless, with whom the devil has done just as he liked and upon whom men have carried out their pleasure. Oh, no! We see something else in that Cross. We see that Cross as the mightiest thing in God's universe. Shame? There is no shame, but glory there! Weakness? Yes, in some senses weakness, but Christ crucified is the power of God! Foolishness? No, the wisdom of God! We see something beyond the Man hanging upon the Cross.

It is by that Cross that He triumphed. It is by that Cross He has come to the place where He now is. He reigns because of His Cross, and that Cross, let us remember, meant that He let go everything — and gained everything. He had seen the glory of this world; He had been on that great highway of the nations which ran through His own country away there in Galilee, that old road along which for centuries there had come all the commerce of the nations, all the resources of this world; He had been in touch with the outside world. Then Satan had shown Him the kingdoms of this world lying beyond, all the glory thereof, and had offered them to Him, and He let it all go. He could have had it, but He let it all go, and went to the Cross. But so He gained the more, not only the kingdoms of this world but all authority in heaven, and in earth. By the letting go He gained all.

Do we want to know the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus? Do we want to know in a spiritual way His complete power in this universe? Then in a spiritual way we must come where He is. By whatever the Cross means we have to come outside and hold everything as

only for God, and what cannot be held for God we must at least be prepared to relinquish altogether. A heavenly union with a heavenly Lord means a heavenly ascendancy, and power, and glory.

That is the Gospel. That is the heart of the Gospel. We turn to Matthew 24: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." What did He mean by that? Simply this: a declaration made in all the kingdoms of this world that Jesus Christ is Lord, is King. If this world is divided up by the evil one into principalities and powers, into states, and these states are governed by representatives of the enemy in an evil way, then within all the territory of the enemy, under his divisional governments, a declaration has to be made that Jesus Christ is Lord. Our business is to stand wherever God puts us in the nations of this world to represent the fact that Jesus Christ is King. On that ground we shall meet the full force of the challenge of the enemy. Because of that testimony we shall not find it easy to stay there. By every means he will seek to get us out of that place, because of what our presence represents. That is our business, to stand spiritually in the heavenly sovereign authority of the Lord Jesus just where He places us, to maintain that testimony, and that testimony will be borne within all the nations for a witness. Not to save all the nations, not to get all the nations converted, but for a witness and "then shall the end come."

Go through the Gospel by Matthew and gather up the occasions upon which He refers to the end, or the consummation of the age, and you will find that it occurs more often than perhaps you have thought. The consummation of the age in Matthew's Gospel reveals the Son of Man coming in glory. He is in glory, He is Lord, "... and then shall the Son of Man come in His glory". At present the world may not recognize where He is, and what He is, but unknown to the mass He is governing in heaven. Back of this world's affairs, and back of our affairs, He is governing, and the day is coming — it may be not far ahead — when the Son of Man shall come in His glory. But there will be some of us standing here who will not taste of death till we have seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom! Why?

Because it has already happened. Has it? When was that fulfilled? Surely it was fulfilled at Pentecost. Surely the Son of Man came in His kingdom at Pentecost. Surely the "all authority" started to work from Pentecost. Surely the nations began to feel the impact of the ascended Lord from Pentecost. The fact that we have received the Holy Spirit and know it in the work of His Spirit in our hearts, is the fact that we have seen Him coming in His kingdom. But that is the earnest of the more glorious fact that we shall see Him coming in His glory. He has come in His kingdom. He is coming in His glory. Those who have seen Him coming in His kingdom in a spiritual way will see Him coming in His glory. May we all be such.

IN TERMS OF LORDSHIP AND SERVANTHOOD

Reading: Philipp. 2:1-16.

Features of Mark and his Gospel

We are very familiar with the fact that each of the writers of the Gospel narrative had their own purpose in writing, and their own circle to whom they wrote, which very largely gave the character to their writings. The purpose of Matthew was to gather up all the best history of Israel and to set it forth in its relation to the Lord Jesus. Matthew therefore wrote specifically, although not exclusively, to the Jews. Luke had not so much the best history in mind, for there is not a great deal in Luke of the usage of the Old Testament with reference to Israel's history. Luke was rather moving out into that great progressive Gentile world of the Greeks, with a future extending far ahead, and with that mentality he wrote his Gospel and brought the great progressive expanding world of Greek life into relation to the Son of Man. John is not content with Jew or Gentile. He is not limited to the mere race, nor to the earth alone. He oversteps the bounds of Jewish history; he oversteps the bounds of world history itself inclusively, and reaches back into eternity, and out into the universe, and deals with the whole in relation to the Person of Jesus Christ.

Mark also had his object. He evidently wrote in relation to the Romans. His name is a Latin name. Strangely enough his Gospel is strewn with Latin words more than any other of the Gospels. I know that there has been much controversy over the statement

with which Peter closes his first letter in which he refers to Mark as being with him in Babylon, but I am going to be daring and venturesome about it. A good deal of Protestant thought is against Babylon being interpreted as Rome, but I am of the opinion that Peter was speaking of Rome, and was himself there, and that Mark was with him. Peter called him his son Marcus who was with him in Babylon. There are good reasons why Peter should have used the name Babylon. The Jews would have known quite well to what he was referring, and it would not have done in those days for Peter to write a broadcast letter betraying to the whole Roman world that there was a fairly substantial colony in Rome; so he called it Babylon. It gives Mark a setting in the Latin world among the Romans, and when you remember that — and this is not merely technical detail — it has a bearing upon the object and nature of his writing, because his form of writing is so precisely according to the Roman mind.

The Gospel by Matthew is exactly suited to the Jews. It is all Jewish in its atmosphere, its phraseology, and its content. Luke's Gospel is exactly suited to the Greeks; it has their mentality all the way through it. John's Gospel is perfectly in keeping with his object. Then when you sit down to read this little Gospel by Mark, and you have any idea of the Roman outlook it fits right in at once. Before we are through, I think you will see how true that is.

A great deal that needs to be said, if we are to get right to the heart of Mark's purpose, may seem to be technical but it is not really so. For instance, it is necessary not only to have seen what we have just noted, but to bring Mark himself a little more into view. It is practically a settled thing now, although there is no definite statement in the Scriptures anywhere of the fact that the writer of this Gospel was none other than John Mark, with whom we meet on several occasions in the New Testament, and whose associations are full of interest and of significance.

John Mark, as you will remember, was the son of that Mary whose house in Jerusalem was the meeting place of the Christians there in the early days; the house where the Last Supper was held;

the house where the Holy Spirit was poured forth at the beginning, and the house to which Peter went when he was released from his imprisonment. Peter, finding himself in the street, and coming to himself, went to the house of John Mark, where the believers were gathered for prayer, the very house where the Lord had gathered His disciples around the Table, the house of John Mark's mother. In this connection a point of interest for us is that when the disciples said to the Lord: "Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?" He replied: "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him ... And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared ...". It may be (for my part I think it to be most likely) that the man carrying the water-pot was John Mark, the son of Mary, whose house it was.

John Mark, you will remember, having had his home in Jerusalem with his mother, was found later at Antioch. While certain believers of the church at Antioch upon one occasion were waiting before the Lord in fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit said: "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). And they, when they were sent forth, took John Mark with them (verse 5). We do not know how he had come from Jerusalem to Antioch, but he was there, and he went with them. The next thing we know is that he has left them. Somewhere in the course of the apostles' movements John Mark had broken down, perhaps he had become homesick for we read that he went back, not to Antioch, but home to Jerusalem. The cause was evidently serious enough to make Paul take the very strong attitude which he adopted when later Barnabas proposed to take John Mark again. We know that he became the occasion for the rift between the two apostles. Then years afterwards he is mentioned again, and Paul sends a very loving greeting to him, and when writing to Timothy and asking for his cloak and parchments the same apostle says; "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11, AV).

All that has been mentioned, as well as that reference by Peter to

Marcus his son who was with him in Babylon, in connection with the express object of this Gospel. It is all a question of the Lord's rights in service, and our position in the Lord's mind as servants. Can you not see the servant features in all that? We referred to the fact that Mark wrote for the Romans. The Romans had no time for philosophy, and there is no philosophy in Mark's Gospel. The Romans had no time for the religious history of the Jews, and in Mark's writing there is nothing to be found. The Romans had no time for the artistic like the Greeks, and there is no trace of it in Mark's Gospel. You can almost hear the sharp precision of movement of a Roman soldier in this Gospel. Look at the predominating words. There is one Greek word translated into seven English words or phrases, and it occurs a great number of times the word 'eutheos'. It is found forty-one times in this little Gospel in different English forms such as "immediately", "anon", "forthwith", "straightway", "as soon as", "shortly". In the Authorised Version it is most frequently rendered "straightway". Put your pencil under every "straightway" in Mark's Gospel, and the number will surprise you. Straightway! Forthwith! Immediately! Anon! It is the movement of a Roman soldier, is it not? It is the sharp precision of an order given and obeyed without any hesitation. There is no discussion, no argument, no philosophizing, no temperamental moodiness. You get into the spirit of the Gospel when you recognize that, and see what Mark is after.

On the one hand the very spirit, atmosphere and mentality of this Gospel sets forth the fact that God has intervened in Christ to declare His rights. His right to be obeyed, His right to service. When, however, you widen that out into the latter part of the New Testament, that is, into the Epistles, and see all this as a spiritually realized thing, you find that in no way is it simply the case of One coming in and declaring that He is Master and means to be obeyed, of One affirming He has rights and is going to see to it that they are recognised! You find that you are taken deeply into the spiritual meaning of it all. That is why we referred at the beginning to the second chapter of the letter to the Philippians. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although existing in

God-form, in equality with God, did not regard it as something to be grasped at, held on to, held for Himself, as His own right that He would not let go on any consideration, but emptied Himself of His own rights. No one in this universe was more entitled to that glory than He. There was no room for any question or disputing of His right to that position. It was not a position which He assumed, which He took hold of, which He aspired to, but one which was His by absolute universal right, and He emptied Himself of His absolute sovereign rights, and took on Himself the form of a servant — the word is stronger than that, it is a bond-slave. Then He became obedient even unto death, yea the death of the Cross. *Obedient unto the death of the Cross!* That at once reveals the Cross to be no mere matter of man's crucifying of Jesus of Nazareth. The profound thing is that God made it known to Him that it was His will and He was obedient to the death of the Cross.

The letter to the Philippians gives us the clue to this great universal fact that heavenly glory, heavenly order, heavenly beauty, all the great wonder of the divine thought for this universe can only be expressed, established, realized, enjoyed along the line of the servant spirit. It is almost too familiar to us, but it seems necessary to point out again that all the heavenly order for man, all the divine thought of the glory and the beauty of the divine intention for this universe was destroyed because someone who did not possess the right, grasped at equality with God. The right was not his, but he sought the position: "I will exalt my throne above the stars ... I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13,14, AV). That was the ruin of everything.

It is closely in line with the central theme that the apostle says, If there be any beauty, any glory, any loveliness, anything which expresses God's own thought, "fulfil ye my joy, that ye be of the same mind ... look not every man on his own things ..." (Philipp. 2:2-4). All that looking on your own things, not being of the same mind, is the result of this thing which was done, which broke up the harmony of God's universe; and it was because one who was a servant of God — a very high servant, it is true a very exalted

servant, but none the less a servant — aspired to be master; left his own sphere, high and exalted as it was, in an attempt to take God's sphere. He ceased to be a servant in a high place and strove or aimed at being master in the universe, equal with God. In order to recover, to restore the harmony of this universe, the beauty, the glory of heaven, the divine order, it was necessary to destroy that evil spirit in the universe, because it became a spirit. Adam became poisoned with that evil spirit: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof ... ye shall be as gods, ..." (Gen. 3:5). Adam succumbed to the suggestion that he could be equal with God, and the race was involved.

Is not that the spirit of the world? Is it not heading up rapidly to antichrist along the line of dictatorship? What is all that but mastery, dominion, government, summed up in a man, and God being steadily and firmly relegated to a back place. Oh, the blindness and the folly of it all! Oh, fools that they are! They read history with their eyes blinded. It is simply the outworking of this rebellion. It is going to work out to its own destruction. But God is doing a new thing. He has intervened in a world thus corrupted, and in the midst of it He is doing a work in you and in me of a spiritual and moral character, where we will let go of self-strength, ambition, all self-will, and become servants and bond-slaves of Jesus Christ; and that is no easy thing to the flesh. It is all very well to talk about it, but when men of this world set themselves to get an advantage over us, to take advantage of us, to get their own ends at our expense, vaunt themselves in an assumed position of superiority over us, and take the attitude that we do not know anything and cannot do anything, how the flesh revolts and wants to show them that we do count for something after all. This devil-ridden and dominated fallen nature revolts against the servant spirit, and there are a very few people in this world who can graciously be servants. It is thought to be a mean thing to be a servant, a most despicable thing, a position altogether lacking in honour — "Surely there is something better than that!" No! By the spirit of Christ the principle of servanthood has upset the whole history of the devil's work. God is recovering

His heavenly order along that line. To be subject to God, to Christ, in spirit in the House of God is the way to the restoration of the heavenly order, joy and peace.

Yet to what a degree has the very realm of Christianity become the realm in which fleshly nature has risen up to get advantages for itself, to make for itself a reputation, a name and position, prominence, and all the rest of it. But the Lord's triumph is in the realm where the Cross has smitten that, and is constantly smiting that, and where the true spirit is the true servant spirit. "Ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5, AV). Why "for Jesus' sake"? Because the ends of the Lord Jesus can only be realized in that way, and it is for His sake, that is all.

So then there has to be the recognition of the fact that God has intervened in the course of this world's history, to show in His Son the way of the restoration of the heavenly order, and that is by an utter recognition of His Lordship.

Eventually that has to be universal. No one can escape it. It will be a universal acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. To us that brings no dread or fear of heart, but for many that day will be full of terror. Yet even for us the outworking of that to its deepest very often may cause some pain, some little struggle, some little conflict. The independence of this human nature, the wilfulness, the strength of self-determination, all these things cause us a lot of trouble while the Lord is dealing with them. But see the end! It is simply a matter of letting go to the Lord Jesus, of the acknowledgment of God in Christ as Lord, as Master. Saul of Tarsus came there when in the dust he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6, AV). His career started in the servant spirit. If we want anything like the value of Paul's ministry it can only be in the same way: "Lord, what wilt thou ...?"

Let us repeat, that God has intervened to reveal in Christ His Lordship, likewise by Christ the true Servant. What is a true servant? If Mark's Gospel says anything at all, in its spirit and its language, it says, prompt obedience, instant service. In other words, no arguing, no discussing, no getting round corners.

What was there that was singular about that man with the water-pot on his head? It was a most significant thing, since the men were not wont to carry the water-pots; the women did that. A most unusual sight in Jerusalem was to see a man carrying a water-pot on his head, as the manner was. That was the work of the servant, and the woman was the servant. So this man was marked out by the servant spirit, and the servant spirit led the way to the preparation of a place for the gathering of the church, led the way to the place of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This may only be symbolism in the case of John Mark. He was a young man, perhaps full of enthusiasm for the movement, who went from Jerusalem to Antioch. Things were working in Antioch, and he was there, and then when it was proposed to take him on the missionary journey, he went full of enthusiasm, broke down, returned home, and is out of commission for some years, but not out of the hands of the Lord. Blessed be God, we may break down, but we do not get out of the Lord's hands. We may prove failures, but the Lord does not give us up. We may have an 'off time' because we cannot face the cost of the way, but the Lord does not abandon us, and in the end, in the case of John Mark, the apostle is able to say: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me ...". What has happened? The man has clearly passed from the level of his own natural weakness. His natural enthusiasm motivated him. We do not find fault with his intention, desire, will, but he went in the strength and glow of his own enthusiasm for the Lord, and that does not carry us through. Something more is needed if we are to persevere in this calling. It needs the divine hand; it needs the spirit of the servant. It may be that John Mark had visions of being a great apostle, a great evangelist, a great missionary, a great worker for God, and all secretly, perhaps imperceptibly, of John Mark being a great man for God, a great soul winner. But it is John Mark! If there is anything of that kind it undermines your spiritual history, and so it proved that John Mark broke down because it could not be otherwise with him when put to the test. But when God had done with John Mark there was something more than John Mark; there

was the servant spirit, not the master spirit — "... he is profitable to me for ministry", for serving.

The necessity is for Christ in what He is to be right at the centre of our being in the power of that mighty service, the strength of which is not that of master but of servant. There is something mighty about the Lamb. There is something terrible about the Lamb. But, oh, how difficult it is to believe that. How difficult it is to practise that. How difficult it is to live on that basis, that the Lamb overcomes. We can believe the Lion overcomes, that the lion and the bear come out on top eventually, but to think that the Lamb is coming out on top when the dragon is abroad is very difficult. The most difficult thing perhaps that many of us have to learn, the explanation of the severity of the work of the Cross in many of our lives, is just this, that it takes us so long to believe that the Lamb overcomes. Are you quite prepared to accept that, that when people begin to treat you with scorn, to tread on your corns tomorrow, the way to get the better of them is the Lamb? When people begin to come up against you, to take advantage of you, and set you aside, set you at naught, are you prepared to believe that the Lamb overcomes? It is very difficult to put that into operation, but there it is.

By becoming a bond-slave the Lord Jesus destroyed the devil and all his works. The Lord give us that grace. We must pray that this mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus, who emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, and became obedient. The Lord give us that grace.

IN TERMS OF LORDSHIP AND SERVANTHOOD (CONT.)

We are told that Mark was a cousin of Barnabas. Barnabas was a Levite. Therefore in Mark there was the Levitical strain, that is, he was of Levitical descent. That constitutes another important and significant feature in relation to the theme or the subject of Mark's writings, for we know that the Levites were chosen, appointed, separated to fulfil the service of the Lord.

This thought of service is a very definite and clear one right through the Word of God as being out from the mind of God Himself, and it is in a very special way, or a very emphatic way, related to Israel. When the Lord said to Moses from the burning bush: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters ... and I am come down to deliver them ..." (Exodus 3:7-8), He immediately proceeded to their deliverance, and His commission to Moses was that he should go to Pharaoh and say unto Pharaoh: "Let My son go, that he may serve Me ..." (Exodus 4:23). So that the very emancipation of Israel was connected with service, and that demand was repeated by Moses in the presence of Pharaoh. "Israel is my son ... and I have said unto thee, let my son go, that he may serve me; and thou hast refused to let him go: behold, I will slay thy son, thy firstborn." Israel coming to the place of sonship in relation to service is what is represented by this commission of Moses to Pharaoh.

Further, in the substance of that commission you have Mark's Gospel gathered up in a very wonderful way. You have the Son introduced in the Person of the Lord Jesus, and then you have

service related to that Sonship, the service of God and finally you have the gathering out of a people to the Person of the Lord Jesus for the purposes of service to God.

The features of Mark's Gospel are very largely illustrative, symbolic or typical. For instance, if you read through the first eight chapters of the Gospel you cannot fail to be impressed with the large number of references to the sea and to boats. If you look at those chapters, you will notice again and again that the words *by the sea* occur. You will read that Jesus was walking by the sea, and then two verses on that He was walking by the sea again; and throughout those first eight chapters you find Him on some twelve occasions referred to as being by the sea, having to do with nets and fishermen and boats. That carries its own symbolism. The sea in the Scriptures is a type of humanity, mankind, and here are the means of working, as it were, among mankind. The activity is represented as being in the midst of mankind, in association with the sea. In that connection the Lord Jesus says to certain men: "Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). It is service for God in the midst of men, in the midst of the multitude, in the midst of the whole of mankind.

The point for the moment, before we touch that more fully, is that here is the Son, who is representing God's thought in the matter of service, and right down in the midst of the whole mass of mankind as represented by the sea, He is at work gathering to Himself, in fellowship with Himself, a company for the service of God.

Let us leave that and go back to the Levitical idea of service. It is tremendously important that you and I should know what the service of God is. It will be time well spent if we see a little more clearly the meaning of the service of God. One does not want in any way to judge or be critical, but I do feel that we have reason to believe that the ideas of the service of God have gone somewhat astray from the divine thought. Perhaps our most profitable and effective way of correcting things is always to state positively what the service of God is. The question, therefore, arises, What did the

Lord mean when He said to Pharaoh through Moses: "Let My son go, *that he may serve Me*"? It was a dominating idea, repeated again and again, "that he may serve Me". The subsequent events will answer the question. When the people were let go, when God had His people in the wilderness, He constituted them a serving people. The point came when the firstborn in all Israel became too many, and the tribe of Levi was substituted for the firstborn of every family and became the tribe of the firstborn ones in a representative position, that is, representing and including in themselves all Israel. So that all Israel were constituted a serving people in Levi.

What was the nature of the service? The whole work of the Levites was to present to God those features in which God had a delight. When the people brought their offerings, whether it was an offering by blood, or a meal offering, or any other kind of offering, it had to be of a certain order and to have certain characteristics. It had to be wholly and solely something according to God's mind, with no foreign strain in it, nothing whatever contrary to the divine thought; searched through and through, within and without, so that the eyes of infinite and perfect holiness could detect nothing which would offend. The work of the Levites was to bring *that* to the Lord for His acceptance, for His satisfaction, for His pleasure.

The case might be that of a sin offering — that is where a beginning is made in relationship with God by the sinner. The first step in the establishment of relationship with God is the step of the sinner confessing his sin and bringing a sin offering to God as atonement for his sin. But the only means by which the sinner can come in the first instance into any kind of touch with God is to satisfy God with something which is according to His own mind. And from that first step all other grades or aspects of approach towards fellowship with God are on the same principle. Something has to be given to God which is according to His own mind. Now that whole range of things was the service of God. That was what God meant by: "that he may serve Me". What is the service of God? To bring to God what is according to His mind. In principle it is exactly the same thing in Christianity as it was under the Mosaic economy. In principle it has

not varied one hair's breadth. Christian service is exactly the same. The service of the Lord today is according to the same law.

Let us note this particularly, that the service of the Lord is not rushing about all over the world preaching to people. The service of the Lord is not doing one or more of a hundred things or all of a hundred things, by way of Christian works, whatever they may be. Christian service is not the propagation of Christianity. The service of the Lord is that from the very first step onward to finality you are bringing to God Christly features. That may not be easy to follow for the moment, but it is worth staying with. Here is a sinner. You are seeking to lead that sinner to salvation, and you call that Christian work. But what really are you doing? You are not supposed just to be getting men and women who are sinners to make some kind of confession by which they become Christians. You are seeking that right there in the simplest, most elementary form, that life, that heart, apprehends Christ, should see the meaning and value of Christ. Here is a God who demands righteousness, holiness, sinlessness, and this sinner is unable to bring that to God. This sinner has nothing like that to bring to God. Is there a man or a woman in the creation who in his or her own natural state can bring to God satisfaction in righteousness and holiness and goodness? We repudiate any suggestion that such a thing is possible, whatever the self-righteous may have to say about it. It is a settled thing with us that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwells no good thing. We can bring nothing to God for His satisfaction, and there is therefore no hope of fellowship with God unless that something which satisfies God's heart is brought to Him. But that is just where service comes in, to get a sinner to see that God has provided in Christ that which He requires for His own satisfaction, to get a sinner to come to apprehend Christ as his righteousness, as his goodness, and, then to bring that back to God. That is service. The service of the Lord is to show a sinner Christ and to enable by the Holy Spirit that sinner to apprehend Christ and to bring Christ, the virtues of Christ, to God. That is where service begins.

That is rather different from setting out certain details of Chris-

tian profession, Christian creed, Christian doctrine, and saying, Do you agree to that? If you do, then you are a saved man and you can reckon yourself as accepted by God! God never accepts any man or woman on the ground of their saying, Yes, I assent to that! God only accepts on the ground that they see their utter helplessness before God. You and I have in service to deal with the Lamb of God, to put Him as it were, into the hands of a sinner who has seen that apart from that Lamb of God there is no hope, but because of that Lamb there is hope.

It does not end there. It goes right through to the point where the apostle was when he said: "... that we may present every man perfect in Christ; whereunto I labour also ..." (Col. 1:28-29). What is labour? What is service? What does he mean when he says, "I labour"? That is the service of the Lord. It is simply to bring to believers a continuously growing, acknowledgment of Christ, so that what is not of Christ is going all the time, and what is Christ is coming in, until they are perfect in Christ, and it is Christ from the very first step to the last. The whole course of Christian growth, and Christian service, is simply a matter of Christ becoming everything. That is the service of the Lord.

No wonder results are so meagre, so small. There is so little of Christ to be given. There is such a small apprehension of Christ on the part of us who have the ministry, who have given the word. Our business is a growing apprehension of Christ, that we may serve. No man can minister Christ by taking a college course. No man can minister Christ by simply saying, I am going into the ministry, I am going to take up Christian work, I am going into Christian service! A minister of Christ is one who has Christ to minister, and we can only serve in the measure in which we have Christ to impart, to put into the hands of others, so to speak, that they may offer Him to God. That is Levitical service.

In the wilderness these people were not rushing all over the world doing Christian activities, or Jewish activities. They were shut up in that wilderness to an appreciation of Christ. Ah, but it had a universal effect. If ever that people should move on into the higher

ranges of the service of God, where the forces of evil were dispossessed, driven out, overwhelmed; if ever they should come into the land and there should be a testimony in that land wholly of God, that will only be as they have come into the large apprehension of Christ. The course of their life in the wilderness and through the Jordan was all typically to be a growing apprehension of Christ, in order that they might come into that higher spiritual service of the heavenlies.

We can never serve the Lord in that higher realm of spiritual effectiveness against the forces of evil only on the basis of a very large apprehension of Christ. Jericho stands at the very gateway to that realm, and that type of spiritual service of God speaks of something which is all of God. No human strength is introduced, no wit, no wisdom of man, but the perfect picture of foolishness and weakness, just walking round silently. This thing is going to be controlled by God or it will not be at all. And what is true at the gateway has to be true of the whole course. There has to come about a wonderfully full apprehension of Christ.

Now you understand why it is that when you open Mark's Gospel you almost immediately come upon this: "And passing along by the sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (1:16-17). First of all you have the representative Servant: "Come ye after *Me*". Here is God's type, God's living expression, God's representative of service. Is there any question about that? There is no need to show that the Lord Jesus in all His life and service was utterly for the Lord. "The words that I say unto you I speak not from Myself: but the Father abiding in Me doeth His works" (John 14:10). "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner" (John 5:19). The law of service is that there should be nothing out from self and all things out from God. Here is the Representative. "Come ye after *Me*". It is all bound up with the Person. "Come ye *after Me*, and *I will make you to become ...*";

"I will make you"! So many people rush into the service of the Lord before they have been made, and that is the tragedy of their work. There is some making to be done, and that making can only be in close and abiding fellowship with Him. "Come ye after Me ...". That interpreted in the later New Testament light is made perfectly plain as meaning a close, deep, spiritual fellowship with the Lord.

The language here, because things were in this elementary stage, was very largely illustrative, but even then the Lord Jesus had His deeper meaning. He did not mean simply, You come to Me; when I go into Galilee you follow Me there; when I go into Judea you follow Me there; when I go into Samaria you follow Me there: follow Me everywhere I go! There is something deeper than that. "Come ye after Me ...". That is made clear, even by John, as meaning a spiritual abiding in Him. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15:4). That is a spiritual relationship, a spiritual fellowship, and the measure and value of spiritual service always depends upon the measure of our inward fellowship with the Lord. That is a thing which can never be given to us from without. That is an inward secret history with God. It is inwardly getting to know the Lord, growing in the knowledge of the Lord. That is the true preparation for service. The other things may be very useful, but *the* real basic preparation for service, the spring of service, is our inward life with the Lord.

"Come ye after Me, and *I will make you ...*". All that is represented by that *make you*; being made to become, making to become fishers of men. That is the drawing out from this world, from the whole mass of humanity, a company for God in Christ, bearing those features of Christ with which God is well pleased. That is service. That is the work of the Lord. In spiritual association with Christ being prepared by being made, resulting in the gathering of a company from the mass of men, in which company there are those elements of Christ, Christ apprehended, Christ appreciated, with which God can be well pleased. That is the service of the Lord.

Concentrate upon the inner law of service. Remember this, that

our business in service is to seek from God enablement by the Holy Spirit to reveal to men's hearts what Christ is for them from God, and to God for them. It is not the acceptance of Christian truth. It is that men should say, Well, I see that Christ satisfies God on my behalf, that as I bring Christ (not my miserable, wretched, lost self, not my constant effort to rake up from the debris of this moral wreckage of my life something that God can accept, not my everlasting trying to find in myself God's satisfaction, God's pleasure) He is the ground of peace, of rest, of assurance! I see that God has provided His own good pleasure in His own Son, and I grasp Him with both hands, and bring Him to God! That is the nature of our service for God.

All this springs out of the little element that Mark had a Levitical descent. Mark is the man who speaks of service, and that is what God means by service. The Lord Jesus brings everything to God for His pleasure: "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psa. 40:8). The Father is able to say: "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). I am delighted, I am satisfied! God will always say that when you and I apprehend God's satisfaction with His Son and bring Christ. It is an old story, but it is being said not only that we should come afresh to rest upon the ground of God's good pleasure in Christ, but let us cherish this truth, let us hold it strongly. We who think that we stand, we who think that we would never waver on this matter, may some day be caught in an hour, in a day, when the enemy lets his fiery darts fly at our faith, and we come to question whether, after all, we have not been all wrong. The enemy may get that in somewhere, and we need to hold firmly with both our hands that it is not what we are not, it is what Christ is and we hold to *Him*, He satisfies God. Let us always give the enemy the answer on that line. The enemy says, But you are so sinful, and you are so unworthy, and you are so faulty! Look at this, and look at that, and look at something else about yourself! He tries to get us down under a cloud of despair but let us remember Luther's answer and stand on that ground: Yes, all that is true, and much more than that (and the devil can never tell the whole story) but "the blood of

Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin".

The first step in the service of the Lord is to bring before men the values of Jesus Christ to God on their behalf, and all subsequent service is on that ground, to increase before the knowledge of men the values of Christ, so that they are built up in Christ, and Christ becomes more and more, and greater and greater, until that perfect day when it will be Christ *All* and in all.

IN TERMS OF SAVIOUR UNTO SALVATION

Features of the Gospel by Luke

“And the angel said unto them ... there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10,11). A Saviour which is Christ the Lord! You will find that everywhere in Luke’s Gospel, with peculiar clearness and strength.

As we have considered these matters in the other connections mentioned we have taken up a good deal of detail by way of getting at the heart of the message, detail as to the writer, and detail as to his writing. But while there is perhaps a greater mass of such detail in the Gospel by Luke than in either of the other two, it is not our purpose to follow that line again. It would take far too much time for this present occasion, and so we want, as the Lord enables, to seek to gather up the whole of this Gospel by Luke within the compass of one or two comprehensive words.

First of all let us remind ourselves of the scope, the range, the direction of Luke’s intention. We saw that in the case of Matthew there was a taking up of the whole of the past Jewish history and bringing it into immediate relationship with, the Lord Jesus, so that the object of Matthew’s Gospel was, in the first place at least, connected with the Jews, with Israel. Then we saw in the case of Mark that the particular connection was with the Romans. Mark wrote with a Roman atmosphere and mentality, and the narrative which he penned is marked by those features of action, energy, precision, which are characteristics of the Roman make-up. Now

when we come to Luke we get beyond the Roman and beyond the Jew, and, while he wrote to a Greek, and while the Greek mentality very largely governs his writing, he really moves into a larger sphere even than the great Greek world to which he wrote. His thought and object is clearly to touch the whole race. His word is *Man*! The great key phrase of this Gospel is: "The Son of Man", and in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Luke does not stop where Matthew stopped, he presses things back still further until he reaches Adam (Luke 3:38). With Luke the Lord Jesus is taken up from Adam, and thus he means that the Lord Jesus is comprehensive in the racial sense, that He bounds the whole course of human history; and as to detail it is not with any one section or department but with the whole race of men that he brings the Lord Jesus into that relationship. It is true that John's Gospel will go even beyond that, will have even a wider range than that of Luke, but Luke covers the whole ground of human history and links Christ with man from the beginning. When you recollect that the keynote is "A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord", you are immediately made aware that He is the Saviour of all men from Adam onward. There are no partialities, there are no preferences, there are no favourites, but all men, from the first man to the last, are embraced in this intervention of God in Christ as a *Saviour*.

That give us our ground of movement in this Gospel. The whole Gospel can, therefore, be gathered up into two thoughts: (1) Comprehensiveness or universality, (2) Grace. Another word, which is but defining grace, is gratuitousness, what is universally free, what is free for all. That is the essence of Luke's message concerning the Son of Man — grace in Christ for all men of every time and place. If any man can take his place in the category of the lost then Luke says: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10); and, for our part you cannot put any man outside of that compass. Whether all men recognise it or not, that compass embraces all men. Lost! It is grace, free, gratuitous grace for all men which is brought by this intervention of God in Christ, according to this third unveiling.

Now you want to go through the Gospel chapter by chapter with that statement as your interpreter, and you will find that the Gospel lies open before you. We cannot go through the Gospel at this point, but we will take what may be an illustration of the whole Gospel as found in one fragment of it in chapter 4.

Grace declared

“... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19). Why the word *acceptable* should have been put there I do not know, because it is the word *grace*, and the accurate translation would be: To proclaim the Lord’s year of grace!¹ or, To proclaim the year of grace of the Lord! The Lord Jesus said: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord! That clearly brings us back to the beginning, that there is a divine intervention. God has broken in in Christ at a point in the history of this world with this included in His fourfold object, to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord. If He has broken in in Christ to declare Himself as Sovereign King, if He has broken in in Christ to declare Himself as Lord and Master, He has broken in in Christ to declare the year of grace, and that as Saviour for the sinner.

Grace demonstrated

This chapter very well illustrates that. “And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down: and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears. And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth: and they said, Is not this Joseph’s son? And He said unto them, Doubtless ye will say unto me this

¹ As far as we know all Greek manuscripts, including the LXX-translation of Isa. 61:1-2 quoted here, render the adjective δεκτός (*dektos*) of which *acceptable* is an accurate translation. The original Hebrew word in Isa. 61:2 (MT) is the noun וְרַחֲמֵי (*rāṣôn*) that is translated *favour* or *will* in most cases (KJV) and eight times *acceptable*. What makes the author think that it should be translated *grace*, we do not know (ed.)

parable, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in thine own country. And He said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is acceptable in his own country. But of a truth I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian" (verses 20-27).

Do you see the meaning of grace? Within the pale of Israel merit was the ground upon which men stood. Israel would take the position that they had a right to these advantages and benefits which would come from God through the prophets. The prophets were theirs, therefore the prophets in all that they could bring from God to men belonged to Israel, and Israel stood upon the ground of right, of merit.

Elijah? Yes, "there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah ... and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon", outside of Israel, to a woman. That is grace going outside of those recognised bounds of merit, of considered right. It is the Lord breaking out into a new realm to meet need beyond. It was a daring thing for the Lord Jesus to say this at Nazareth, and it was a daring thing for Luke to write it down.

Pursue that further. Unto Zarephath! What happened in Zarephath with that woman? You remember the meal and the oil, and you know how the Lord through Elijah intervened for the woman so that the meal and the oil did not fail but increased unto the salvation of her and hers; and we know from the typology what that meal and that oil represent. The meal in the Old Testament represented none other than Christ Himself. The meal offering is the Lord Jesus. The meal is Christ, the very life of man. The oil is the Spirit. So that here you have offered to Gentiles, offered outside of the limits of Israel, Christ in the Spirit, Christ as the life, and the Spirit as the life, to save from death. The woman was, so to speak, on her last legs.

She had but a little, a morsel, and she said she was going to eat it and then die with her son, and the prophet came in with the meal and the oil and she did not die. That is a very simple illustration.

The Lord Jesus in applying it here is speaking parabolically, that He is the life for the world, not just for Israel, but for all dying men and women outside of the covenant of Israel, life to the ends of the earth, free. The woman had no claim, no rights, she was an "outsider". Ah, but that is grace. Grace does not act on the ground of our having rights and claims. Grace comes to us when we have no ground at all to stand upon. We are sinners, doomed to die, for whom there is no hope unless God intervenes. But He did intervene in Christ for a lost and dying world, and He gave His Son in the power of the Eternal Spirit to be the life of that dying and doomed world, outside of all realms of considered favour and right and merit.

"And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." Naaman the Syrian is outside of the covenant, but Naaman had to go to the Jordan, and bury himself in the Jordan, and he had to rise out of the Jordan to be a new man.

The grace of the Lord Jesus operates in that way for all, not just in Israel, but for all men. Here is Calvary's grace typified in Jordan, cleansing a leper doomed to die, who has no covenant ground to stand upon at all. And was that not brought home to him by Elisha? When he came in a patronising way with his great retinue, stood some yards away from Elisha's tent, waited for Elisha to come out and take account of his greatness, came in a patronising way, the prophet did not so much as look outside of his tent to see what sort of a man this was, but sent a messenger to tell him to go and dip himself seven times in the Jordan. That added insult to injury. Naaman was working the wrong way round. "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given victory unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper" (2 Kings 5:1). The Holy Spirit never makes mistakes in the way in

which He puts things, but Naaman rather put things the other way round. Naaman the leper, but I am a great man! The Lord put him right: Yes, a great man, but a leper! And what is the good of your greatness when you are a leper? You are a doomed man! Naaman had to be brought to the place where he recognised that all this world's pomp and glory is nothing if the sentence of death is in him. He must accept the fact of doom, judgement and death, and go into Jordan and acknowledge it.

But Naaman comes within the compass of the divine operation, and the Lord will not refuse a Naaman, though he may have to humble a man of the world to get him to the place where he recognises his need. Nevertheless, when once he yields, the grace of God comes out to him. There is no one outside of the range of divine grace. Grace is universal, and grace is free for all who will recognize their need of the Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Grace rejected

Thus we have grace unfolded, grace represented and illustrated in Zarephath, and in Naaman. Then we read, "And they were all filled with wrath ..." (Luke 4:28). Grace declared, the year of grace of the Lord, grace demonstrated, and now grace rejected. "And they were all filled with wrath ... and they rose up, and cast him forth out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong" (verse 29). That is what they will do with grace.

How this flesh of man revolts against the idea that it is doomed and smitten, and is full of leprosy, and how the flesh, the natural life of man, revolts against the idea that it must accept the Cross and die; there is no good in it; God has sentenced it to death. Do you revolt? Are you angry? Are you filled with wrath when that is said to you? It is so with many. God save us from putting ourselves outside of the range of grace.

Grace triumphant

Blessed be God the chapter does not finish there. "But He passing through the midst of them went his way. And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the sabbath day: and they were astonished at his teaching; for His word was with authority. And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil; and he cried out with a loud voice ... and Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him ... and amazement came upon all ... and there went forth a rumour concerning Him into every place of the region round about ... And when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them ... And when it was day, He came out and went into a desert place: and the multitudes sought after Him, and came unto Him, and would have stayed Him, that He should not go from them. But He said unto them, I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also: for therefore was I sent" (verses 30-43). That is grace triumphant.

This is what we might call a cameo of Luke's Gospel. You put your hand on it here and there, and feel the throb of this same heartbeat of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Oh, hear again that story of the lost sheep. It is grace which says, Yes, I know I have ninety-nine, but one has gone astray! Anything but grace would have said, Well, what does it matter about one? You have ninety-nine! Grace says, One is astray, and I must go and find the one! And he goes after that one until he finds it. That is grace!

The story of the prodigal (so-called) was grace, was it not? What would law do with him? Read the story in the light of the law, and you will have to put a great deal out. You will hear this man talking in that realm of law, Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants! Law would say, Yes, my boy, that

is all you deserve, and from today that is all you get! But the prodigal could not get those words out; they were stifled with the love of the father; "... this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found". Grace covers a multitude of sins.

"Grace there is my every debt to pay."²

So we could go through this Gospel. We have said enough. We glory in hearing the story recounted. We are never tired of hearing this story of the grace of God, God's intervention in Christ in the terms of Saviourhood, grace free and universal for all who will recognise their need of it. It may be that this message has for some, a note of peculiar meaning and value, because they are deeply and terribly conscious of the need of this grace. Oh, beloved, God has no favourites; never talk as though God were partial in His love and grace. Never say: Oh, that may be for you, but never for me! God has no favourites. He has intervened, He has broken into this world at a given point in the Person of His Son to declare that His grace is for all men, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. He has illustrated His grace, and demonstrated it outside of Israel, to a poor widow woman about to die, outside of the covenant of Israel, and grace visits her and saves her. He has illustrated His grace, and demonstrated it in the poor man, great in this world but wretched and miserable before God, and grace reaches unto him where he is really before God, with no claims nor rights, and grace embraces him and enables him to pass from death to life. The grace of God, free, universal, comes to you, reaches even unto you, miserable as you may be, wretched as you may be, despairing as you may be, having put yourself a hundred times outside of the pale of God's mercy.

"The Son of *Man* is come ...". Not the Messiah of Israel only, the Son of Man is come.

That goes outside of Israel. All men find Him linked with them, in that great, that magnificent designation. He has come to seek. Do you know that you are miserable? It is because He is seeking.

2 From the chorus of the hymn "Saviour, hear me, while before Thy feet" (The Penitents Plea), by Herbert H. Booth.

The day when you should begin to despair is the day when you cease to be miserable about sin. Your worst state will be when you no longer care. He has come to seek and to save that which is lost.

IN TERMS OF FATHERHOOD AND SONSHIP

Features of the Gospel by John

The divine intervention in the history of this world in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Gospel by John, is in the terms of Father, with the desired result of constituting His family, and believers becoming His children, His sons.

It is a wonderful thing to think of, and to contemplate, that God has broken through into the history of this world, and of man, with this great object, and all that it means. Looking back over these four aspects of the intervention of God in Christ, we see that these are not watertight or self-contained, but they are but aspects of one relationship. The subject to the King is not something apart from the servant to the Master, or the saved to the Saviour, neither are any of these things other than, or apart from, the child to the Father. If the idea of a Kingdom and a Sovereign and a government is brought into view, then it is a royal household, and the service is the service not of vassals to a despot but of devoted children to a Father. It is all of a piece, as we have pointed out already, but of necessity these things have to be viewed in this order, first of all there has to be a recognition of the absolute sovereign rights of God in this universe. When that has been accepted, and gladly accepted, then the possibility of serving the Lord is introduced, and if the possibility of serving the Lord is introduced it must not be upon the basis of compulsion, even by a King or a Lord, but it must be the outgoing of a heart conscious of its need, the outgoing of

a life which glories in having been saved. This King is Master, and this Master is Saviour, but the relationship goes deeper than that, and in the Gospel by John we have the very deepest, closest and most inward revelation of God's attitude towards man, and of His desired relationship of man with Himself. Here that revelation is in the terms of Father and Son.

The nature of the intervention of God in Christ

We think, in the first place, of the intervention in Christ. God's way of breaking in and showing all this is not in a narrative, not in a treatise, not in a manual; it is in a Person, the Person of His own Son. God has spoken to us at the end of these times Son-wise. This Gospel by John is full of one thing, it is that Christ Himself reveals the Father. Think of the language of this Gospel. In chapter 8 there is a specimen. The very language expressed (which fails to get outside of this form of expression), this mind of God as to His wonted relationship with us and with the world. When you think that in this Gospel the word "Father" itself occurs some one hundred and twenty times, you are conscious that must signify something as to the theme of the Gospel, as to the mind of God, if the Holy Spirit is responsible for this. That in itself is fairly substantial evidence of divine intervention. Say it to yourself one hundred and twenty times or more, and see what effect it has upon you. By the time you have exhausted the occurrences of the word in this Gospel alone you will say: Well, evidently that is the theme of the Gospel! and you will be very much alive to the impression which the Holy Spirit has sought to make. Or take another method. Just go through the Gospel and put a thick blue or red line under every one of these occurrences of the word "Father", and when you have done it go through the Gospel page by page and see what your Book looks like. Then proceed again along another line with the word "Son", and while you will not have so many occurrences you will have something like fifty, quite enough to make an impression, and quite enough to indicate as to what it is all about. There are other words also which come

within the same realm, such as "love".

This is just to point out that the language of the Gospel itself is a very strong indication of what the nature of the divine intervention in Christ is.

Then, departing from the words themselves, and following a governing idea, you will see that throughout this Gospel there is kept continually in view the thought of fellowship and union and communion, of an inner relationship, not just an outward walk but an inner relationship. The Gospel is full of that. And so you arrive at your conclusion that God has come into this world in a Person, and with that Person there have come two dominating words and ideas, "Father", "Son", "union", "communion" in an inward way, by reason of an inward relationship.

The purpose and possibility of the intervention of God in Christ

What is the purpose of this intervention? What is the possibility of it? Very simply it is this — and it is stated right at the beginning of the Gospel, "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). That is the purpose of the intervention, and that is the possibility of the intervention. From that point there is a growing, an enlarging unveiling of that great reality in God's thought, in God's purpose. When you reach the stage which is in our arrangement marked off by chapter three, the question of the Kingdom of God looms into view. That is the realm in which God, and God only, God utterly, rules, has dominion, the realm of God's reign and government. The question is, How can a man come into that Kingdom? How is it possible for a man to be in the Kingdom where God, and God only, and God utterly, rules and reigns and has dominion, and has everything according to His own mind? That is the grand question.

The Lord Jesus, who is God's revelation of that, explains that it is a Kingdom of born ones. It is only possible to be in that Kingdom by being born into that Kingdom. There is no other way. Ah, but

there is a deeper factor in that, and we are referred back again to what that birth is: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (verse 13). If you want to be in the Kingdom where God is King, then you have to be a son in that Kingdom by birth. That is the great possibility, and that is what we meant when we said that it is not just a family, but it is a Royal family. It is a Kingdom, where God has utter and absolute dominion, is Sovereign, is King, and then He begets the subjects of that Kingdom, and all the subjects are royal children. That is the purpose and the possibility of this intervention of God in Christ. It is a good thing for us, in all that which seems to contradict these great facts, to see that we are of the most wonderful family that the world has ever known.

The nature and basis of this union

We have said that it is by birth, it is Sonship. How? On what basis? The statement right at the commencement, as a foundational statement, is: "as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God". Chapter 8 shows us just what is the opposite of that, and you notice that it raises the question of parenthood. Here is the Lord Jesus, on the one side, speaking about God as His Father, and then saying of them: "Ye are of your father the devil ..." (verse 44). The thing which determined that difference of parenthood was simply the question of receiving or rejecting the Son, and that chapter is a ponderous thing levelled against them because they would not receive the Son. They would not receive. In what way would they not receive? What was the ground or the background of their refusing to receive Him? They would not have Him because they would not believe Him. If we do not believe the Lord Jesus, how can we receive Him?

There are different grades of believing or disbelieving the Lord Jesus. There is that extreme form of chapter 8, where they would not consent in any way to anything which He said. But there are other forms in which that same thing can be existing. If the Lord

Jesus has said certain things to you and to me and we do not receive them in a practical way, and go and act upon them, we are really not believing and we are certainly not receiving Him. It is just possible for us to give an assent to every statement contained in the Word that ever the Lord Jesus said, either Himself or by His Spirit through the apostles, and say, Yes, I agree to that, I believe that, I assent to that! And we might be far removed from saying, I do not believe it, I will not have it! and yet we might give an assent to it and still be in the awful place of not having received the Lord Jesus. Why? Because we really have not believed what He has said. We have given a kind of mental assent to it, but it is with the heart that man believes not with the head. How do you believe with your heart? When your heart really gets into operation most other things have to give way. When the heart begins to take things in hand it is not long before you begin to be active, you do something.

That is just the romance of every love affair. When the heart has taken the reins, bolts, and bars, and everything else, have to give way. Nothing can obstruct the course of a heart that has taken possession of a situation. Somehow or other when the heart gets really moving the whole life comes into play. Very rarely can you see a person whose heart is deeply and wholly moved who can sit still and be thoroughly philosophical about it. With the heart man believes, and when the heart is won over, the life is won over. There is action, there is committing of oneself, there is the taking of a course. You cannot be cold, and simply say, Yes, I assent, I agree to that, I believe that to be the truth, if your heart has come into the matter. The proof that we believe the Lord Jesus is that we take a practical step in committing ourselves to Him. Anyone who says, Yes, I believe that! and at the same time does not go and commit himself or herself utterly to that has not really believed it in the New Testament sense. Although they might declare a thousand times a day, Yes, I believe that to be true, we still have to say, You do not believe it at all; you are not living on it; you are not acting upon it; you are not proceeding according to it; you have not committed yourself to it; you are not standing upon it. When it becomes a

Person, it means that you have cast yourself upon Him, and you ask no more questions on that matter, you take Him at His Word. That is believing from the heart.

"But as many as received Him ...". How do you receive Him? The Lord made it clear to them in that eighth chapter. He said that the refusal, the rejection was because His Word had not free course. Surely that, put round the other way, means this, that to receive the Lord there must be a heart believing of His Word. The Word not having a free way means that there is a block somewhere, there is a check, there is an arrest, there is something lying across the channel. What is it? A reservation, a doubt, a question. What is that? Unbelief. No free course! How then can you receive the Lord? The channel has to be cleared, His Word has to have a free way, and with all doubt, unbelief, and question put aside a free way given to Him. That is how you receive Him, and when you receive *Him*, you receive the right, the prerogative, to be a child of God. What is the right, the authority, the prerogative of family relationship? It is that Christ has been received. That is all elementary and simple, but it is very important. The first step to receiving is believing. Ninety-eight times in this Gospel you will find the word "believe". Surely that points the way to God's end. It is new birth. Receiving the Lord Jesus means new birth. It means that He as the Son takes up residence inside and constitutes the believer at the very centre of his or her being, a son with Himself, to share the Sonship. The apostle will explain that for us: "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts ..." (Gal. 4:6). Sonship is the Spirit of His Son in our hearts.

Another note of emphasis in this Gospel as to the nature and basis of this union is in the phrase "eternal life". He gives eternal life. That phrase is used some eighteen times in the Gospel. The relationship again is in relation to our having received eternal life. It is again important that you and I should know that this is no merely objective legal kind of transaction, but it is a living thing right at the inside of our being, that there is placed there something which no mortal ever had, God's very own life, incorruptible, indestructible,

therefore eternal, not only enduring through time into eternity, but something of a different character from any other life in this universe, the very life of God Himself. It is that which constitutes this relationship. It is on that basis that God secures the end of His intervention in Christ. God has given His Son, and with Him has given us eternal life. This life is in His Son, and He that has the Son has life.

There again this is something of which to constantly remind ourselves. While we in the realm of our humanity are going on in this world, and are subject to changes, there is something somewhere which is not subject to change, and which is not the slave of time, which can never be affected by anything that may happen to us here. It is that which has come out from God in Christ, and which will go on and carry us in the deepest reality of our being right through into eternity and will be the very centre around which God will give a deathless body, sharing that life which is His own life. That is new birth, that is the relationship which God has projected as the great purpose and possibility of His intervention in Christ.

Let us look at one more thing as to the basis and nature. It is found in the meaning of the oft repeated word "abide". That word occurs seventeen times in this Gospel. What does it mean to abide in Christ? Let us get all mental conceptions of this set aside. The Lord has given us the picture of Christ, but pictures and illustrations are always inadequate. We need more than the Gospels to explain what is in the Gospels. There we have a thing set forth in a picture, or in a symbolic form. In the Epistles we shall have the whole thing explained in a spiritual way. The Lord has given us a picture of a vine with its branches, and there the idea is that if a branch gets separated, detached from the stem, then it dies; it ceases to be fruitful. The Lord says, using His picture, which He Himself would know quite well demanded a much fuller revelation later on by His Spirit to explain it, "Abide in Me ...". What is it to abide in Christ? If the life is in the stem, if it is the stem which is the very channel, vehicle, shall we say reservoir, of the life, then abiding in Christ means this, to live continuously upon His life, to draw continuously

from Him. To abide in Christ means that we start the day with a recognition that we have no life in ourselves, but He is our life, and through that day we are going to draw upon Him for everything, at all times. We are not going to attempt to meet anything ourselves in our own resources, in our own energies, in our own wisdom, but always for all things drawing upon Him. That is abiding in Christ. We know quite well — whatever may be the doctrinal, theological difficulty about this abiding and not abiding, (a lot of people have spoiled this very chapter by raising questions which are doubtfully permitted by the chapter) — in experience that the fact is that unless we do continuously draw upon the Lord we know death, defeat and failure, we know that we live upon a much lower level of energy than we need do. We know quite well that we begin to fade away, and our only way of maintaining life at full strength is continually to draw upon Him. That is why many of us have so often stirred ourselves up to be at the place of prayer. We say, Life will be there, the Lord will be there in life! We go weary and tired out, and there we receive life, and go away renewed. We live on His life, and we know quite well that very often, tired and wearied, and disinclined as we may feel, if we were to stay at home at that time then we should lose something, and certainly we should not get the real gain that is available. That is abiding in Christ.

There are a good many other things that can be said about it, but the family relationship means that there must be a continuous drawing upon the Lord for life. In other words, abiding in Christ.

You see by all this that it is something altogether different from an earthly relationship, an earthly life. This whole Gospel seeks to show that it is something which is not at all understood by men. How clear it is in this Gospel, in such a chapter as the one to which we have referred, that men, even religious men, do not understand this thing at all. When you remember that this narrative was continuous, it was not broken up into chapters, and you have this part marked now by chapter 8, where these people are so totally incapable of grasping, of seeing, so completely in the dark. And then you remember that immediately, as Jesus went forth, He saw by the

roadside a man born blind and proceeded to open that man's eyes. That man came immediately into collision with these very people to whom He had been speaking and became the instrument in the Lord's hands of showing them exactly what their trouble was. Then you see how blind they were. They needed to be born with their eyes open, born again.

So the Lord says that it is a matter of a new spiritual capacity, which is something altogether different from the greatest religious capacity that a man has if he is not born again. It is a different kind of seeing; it is spiritual seeing. The man who has not walked for thirty-eight years takes up his bed and walks, and it is a new kind of walking. It is walking now in the energy which is the energy of God in Christ. That is a different kind of walking. Everything here is of a different kind. The woman had been drawing water from the well for years, and had never been finding life, and now the Lord Jesus comes and becomes her life, and it is a different kind of life. It is heavenly, it is spiritual, and it is not understood at all. Every one of these people argued, and not until they stopped their arguing and received Him did they discover the secret. It is all heavenly, it is all divine, it is all in Christ. That is the relationship that God has brought about.

You and I know something about that. We are enjoying this family blessing as children of God. We have come into the good of His divine intervention as Father. It is a matter of active faith in the Lord Jesus. The great principle is: "He that will do shall know ...". However much you may have assented to, however much you may think you know or believe, you do not know unless you have done. The only way of knowing livingly is to act upon, to cast yourself upon, take your position upon the Lord Jesus, and stay there. The Lord bring us all to an established place in Him.

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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