# the Golden Candlestick

# THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMES

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#### **FAITH**

Reading: 1 John 5:4-5; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16; 3:26; Eph. 6:16.

The passage in 1 John 5:4 supplies the key word of our meditation at this time: "This is the victory that overcometh ... even our faith." There the word is given a specific application relating to overcoming the world. But it is of general application also as we shall see and relates to everything that has to be overcome; for there is no overcoming except by faith, and there are a good many things which have to be overcome, every one of which can be overcome by faith. So that we use the statement in its abbreviated form for our present meditation: "the victory that overcometh even our faith."

At the outset our meditation will be of a very simple character. The Lord will no doubt lead us on into greater fullnesses, but we need to lay the foundation for everything in one or two observations about this faith which overcomes, the victory of faith.

# 1. The quality of faith

The first thing we need to see is the quality of faith. Wherever we touch faith in the Word of God, we touch something that is positive. That is something to take hold of, and to follow out in connection with our reading of the Word to note for ourselves that wherever we come upon faith we shall find that it is characterized by a positive quality, a positive element. There is no such thing as passive faith.

Passivity is the opposite of faith in the Word of God. This does not mean that faith is always on the strain. We must be careful not to confuse positive faith with a mentally strenuous life. There is such a thing as an intensity and strenuousness of soul which leads to exhaustion and collapse; which brings eventually out into the wilderness, into desolation and barrenness, to a place where we can go no further, and where we think that our faith has been destroyed, broken, when it was not our faith at all, but our strenuous, intensive kind of soul life<sup>1</sup> which we thought was faith.

Positive faith does not mean that faith is always a strain, but it does mean that faith is never neutral.

#### a) Faith may be aggressive

At times faith has to be aggressive; it has to advance, as a part of the equipment of a soldier, whose whole life is not a defensive life, and whose life is certainly not a passive life.

# b) Faith may be resisting

While perhaps not attacking, very often faith has to take the positive position of sheer resistance. The very simile of "a shield of faith" implies that faith is a resisting instrument or means, something which refuses to let other things through, which positively sets itself against the inroads of certain things which are termed "the fiery darts of the evil one".

# c) Faith may be waiting

Very often faith has to be a waiting faith.

## d) Faith may be resting

Sometimes faith is resting; and there is such a thing as the rest of faith.

# e) Faith is never quiescent

Faith may be characterized by all these other features, but

I By 'soul life' the author probably means a mental exercise of devotion instead of trusting in God (ed.).

it is never quiescent or motionless. Even a resting faith is never quiescent. It is always positive. There is such a thing as labouring to enter into rest. That means that faith is a positive and not a little thing that you fall back into, collapse or recline on, but something which calls for deliberateness of mind, and heart, and will.

Faith's quality is its positiveness. However it may be expressing itself, whatever the immediate exercise of it may be, whatever the situation, faith is always positive. If you turn to the Word of God with that thought in mind and read anywhere concerning faith you will discover that that is its abiding, unvarying quality.

#### 2. The necessity of faith

The second thing for us to remember (we know it well, and yet so often we forget or allow the fact to fall into the background to some degree) is the necessity of faith. One of the things which we have to settle, and to take for granted, and yet ever to have in mind, is that our life from centre to circumference in relation to God is a life of faith; and it will never be anything else.

We shall always be discovering new forms in which that truth holds good and is to express itself. It is very easy to talk about a life of faith, but to the end, should we go the way of most, to our last breath, we shall discover new demands for the exercise of faith, and new forms in which faith is called out; and we shall never be beyond the place where faith is the basis of everything in relation to God. Indeed, one of the marks of spiritual maturity is the intensifying demand for faith. By contrast one of the marks of spiritual immaturity or childhood is that the Lord encourages faith by supporting it from time to time with helps which are seen. The further we advance with the Lord, the less shall we have of the seen and the fewer will be those things in the visible realm which help to strengthen faith.

Though we may see the results of faith, we shall never see them until faith has been tested to its last degree, and we shall come to this position that, although there may be lying behind us multitudes of miracles of faith which we know to be miracles, the next test will be such as to make then as very little. Sometimes we think that if only we had in the background a sufficient store of miracles of faith, we should never doubt again. That is not true to life. The people who have the most miracles of faith are the people who feel the keenness of the next trial in its nakedness, its bareness, as few others would feel it. We never get to the place in this life where faith is perfect in the sense that God cannot put us to a test which is no test. Right to the end faith will be faith simply because it is not anything else.

Faith is necessary from start to finish, it is the ground demanded by and indispensable to God for everything, and God never does anything in our lives only on the ground of faith. You may challenge me on that, but I shall bring you to the Word of God and show you that God does not begin His relationships except on the basis of faith, and does not continue His relationships except on the basis of faith, and does not consummate His work in us save on the basis of faith. The consummation of the nature of His work in us on this earth will therefore be final tests of faith. It may be very nice to dream about an evening of our life, when all the battle ceases and we pass out in perfect peace without conflict, but that does not happen in real life. Most of God's saints have met their greatest tests of faith in the closing moments of their lives, and found it manifested then as to how far faith had been a genuine thing all along. Nothing is possible in our relationship with God apart from faith.

That is set over against a false hope (for false hope it is) that God will independently do things with us, in us, through us, for us; that we have but to sit down and say, 'Oh Lord, we commit it all to you! You do it!' The Lord never does. If we get into a bad state, and cry to the Lord to get us out of it, the Lord never does until we have got on to a faith basis, until faith's quality has come into evidence, something positive towards God. It is only saying in another way what we said at the commencement, that passivity is a contradiction to faith and God does nothing save on that basis. All His works in us and through us are done by calling faith into evidence, by the

exercise of positive faith.

Surely the word of God is plain enough on this matter for us. The gospels set it forth in a practical way. Nothing ever came from the Lord Jesus of His divine resource into another life only as that life had the positive quality of faith drawn out. The Lord put faith to a practical test, and as the test was passed through the values which were in Him became the possessions of the person in view. Nothing is possible apart from faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God ..." (Heb. 11:6). That is a very comprehensive statement.

It would be well for us to lay to heart this particular emphasis before we pass on, well-known and simple as it is. It will come back to us again and again in the presence of fresh situations, at new crises in our lives. "This is the victory that overcometh ... our faith."

What has to be overcome? You may be aware of something in your own life which at this time needs to be overcome. There is a situation, a state of things, which holds for you the issue of defeat or victory, rising above or going under, going on or falling out, you are either going to triumph or you are going to be quenched; you are either going through or you are going out. That is perhaps the content of your present position, and you know that it is an utter one. There is no place for compromise. You know quite well that you cannot accept a halfway position, that it is all or nothing; and it may be that in relation to that particular issue you are crying to the Lord to do something and waiting for the Lord to do something. The Lord will wait for you. He will wait until that element of doubt, and unbelief, mixed up with the situation in our hearts is fully and finally thrust out, and our attitude towards Him is one of unwavering confidence without questions. The positive quality of faith is the victory that overcomes. We may be looking for other means of victory, for sovereign acts of God, altogether independent of ourselves, apart from ourselves. Where these can be, without involving our spiritual lives in danger and damage, the Lord may perform His sovereign acts; for He is not one who refuses such acts in situations where spiritual damage will not be done to any persons by His performing

those acts; but if our spiritual life is involved God will not act apart from co-operating faith, and God Himself is always paralyzed by our doubt. F.B.H. Meyer says: "God shall forgive thee all but thy despair"! I do not know that it would be right to say that that is the unpardonable sin in the scriptural sense, but it means that God can do nothing except on the basis of faith.

## 3. The sphere and source of faith

The passages to which we have referred have one common feature. That common feature is the little phrase, so very much used by Paul, "in Christ". You notice that wherever in these passages he speaks of faith he speaks of faith "in Christ": "That life which I now life in the flesh I live in faith which is in the Son of God ..."; "Faith which is in Christ Jesus". What does that mean? I want you to recognize that it is something more than objective.2\*2\* It is not merely that Christ stands over there and you or I stand here, and we say we believe in Christ, just as we could say of any man whom we see utterly trusted and highly esteemed, I believe in him! That is not the meaning of faith in Christ. Faith in Christ goes a long way beyond that. It is not just believing in the Person of Christ, the trustworthiness of Christ, the work of Christ; neither all these together, nor any one of them apart. Faith in Christ is more than objective; it is union. It is utter self-abandonment to God as revealed in Christ, and that utter self-abandonment is union. Faith is obedience, nothing less, nothing more; and obedience is committing yourself wholly, utterly to another. That kind of commitment in the New Testament is union. You will notice that the Lord Jesus demanded what amounted to that in every case in the days of His flesh. He was never satisfied with an objective declaration of believing in Him. He always demanded some active expression of committal, leaving an independent and personal ground for His ground.

<sup>2</sup> By 'more than objective' the author means that it is not just an objective theological truth, but something that concerns personal life-changing applications. So he does not use the term objective in a grammatical, but in a spiritual sense. For a grammatical and exegetical discussion on 'faith in Christ' versus 'faith of Christ' see note 3.

Take the case of the man who has become popularly termed the rich young ruler. He made a profession, an advance, he indicated a belief in Christ, but the Lord did not accept him on that ground. That was his ground, and he still had His ground. The Lord finished the whole thing with that man by demanding a forsaking of his own ground and all that belonged to it and coming on to His (Christ's) ground in an utterness which meant that Christ was his all, Christ his riches, Christ his possessions, Christ his life, Christ his ambitions, Christ his future; that Christ took the place of everything that was his. That finished the whole thing.

That is the meaning of faith in Christ. Christ becomes the sphere of faith in a living way, and therefore the source of faith. Faith rises, so to speak, like a spring in Christ, and you have to come into union with Christ on the basis of that faith.

Faith is an act to begin with. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11). That is the act. But it begins a life. "That life which I now live I live in faith which is in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). It is an act to begin with, and it becomes a life. Faith is not merely objective. Faith is the utter commitment, without a reservation, to the Lord.

Where our own ground has been removed, taken away, and we are on the Lord's ground, that is faith. Faith is being on the Lord's ground, and not on our own, and we shall never stand apart from the Lord and get through to victory. We can only get through to victory as we stand in the Lord. It is faith in Christ. The preposition "in" does not suggest an objective faith. The preposition is "in", which is "in" Christ. That faith is at the centre of Christ. Christ becomes a sphere, and that faith is within that sphere, and we in true faith in Christ are within the sphere where that faith is.

I have heard it said concerning Galatians 2:20 that the words: "I live by faith, the faith which is in the Son of God" means Christ's faith. It means nothing of the kind, not in the sense in which it is said; it does not mean that Christ has faith and we live by Christ's faith. We do not live by Christ's faith in that sense that we cast ourselves upon His faith. It means that we in a certain relationship

with Him, draw faith from Him, take His faith, that faith becomes our faith. It may seem a fine distinction, but the grammar there makes it perfectly clear that it does not mean that it is just Christ's faith that we are living by, that is, that Christ has faith for us and we believe that Christ's faith for us will triumph, and so we are living by His faith. It does not mean that, it means that by relationship with Him we become partakers of His faith in an active and energetic way, and that faith has to be tested out in us. His faith has gone through, it is true. His faith has fully triumphed, and is a perfect faith, but that does not mean that we simply, so to speak, impinge upon that perfect faith and that is all that is necessary. That faith has to be perfected in us just as it was perfected in Him, but all this depends upon our relationship to Him, our union with Him.<sup>3\*3\*</sup>

This union means several things. It means, on the negative side, a departure from our natural basis of life.

Faith in Christ means that we have departed from our natural basis of life, our natural unbelief, and have come on to a new ground of life. That ground is Christ. It is a different realm, a different basis for life. If we are going to stand upon our natural basis, we are not going to get anywhere. If our natural unbelief is going to prevail, hold the field in any matter with the Lord, a serious deadlock at once arises, we come to an impasse, and the Lord says, Until you forsake that ground I cannot go on, and we cannot go on together! You are on your natural ground and must forsake it! Then we may say, But that means stepping out onto nothing! Yes, He says, that is just it! That is faith, stepping out on to what to you in nature looks like nothing! It is something. "He hangeth the world upon nothing"! But it is a mighty "nothing"! Abraham went out not knowing whither

<sup>3</sup> The grammatical and exegetical discussion among Bible scholars is whether the genitive use of 'the Son of God' in ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἰοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ should be interpreted subjectively or objectively. The editors plead with Douglas Moo (*Galatians*, BEC, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2013) for an objective rendering, the Son of God being the object of faith – the author's position as well –, so that it can be read as 'the-Son-of-God-faith'. Likewise, in Gal. 2:16, ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, 'by Christfaith', means 'by faith in the Son of God', over against ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, 'by law-works' (the law being the object). Translating it 'faith in Christ' and 'faith in the Son of God' is grammatically correct and consistent with Paul's use of the phrase in other places, where πίστεως Χριστοῦ should be translated 'faith in Christ' and cannot be translated 'faith(fulness) of Christ', e.g. Rom. 3:22, Phil. 3:9.

he went. So far as he knew he went out to nothing. It is a departure from our natural state, which demanded a certain basis for action, a certain sentient evidence, proof for proceeding, and the Lord never does anything until we have forsaken that ground. He calls upon us to do something which naturally is altogether out of the question. Nature clings to a certain basis. He demands that we forsake it.

This union with Christ means, on the positive side, a link with Him by the Spirit. The negative side is a departure from our natural basis, the positive side is a link with Him by the Spirit, and that makes everything possible because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of faith.

Union with Christ is an imparting of Christ in His victory to us by the Spirit as we proceed in faith. The first step may be very simple. The Lord graduates our course according to our state, and the first steps may be elementary, kindergarten, helped, but as we take that first step, the only step we have ever taken, with all the terrors associated with a first step, we find the Holy Spirit is there linking us with Christ.

Take the case of the child and the parent, and the first step. There is a gap, and yet there is no gap. That gap, which to sense, to sight, has nothing in it, is already filled. All that that child sees is that it is here and the parent is there, and between there is a pace, and that pace is filled with terrors because it is a vacant place apparently. But we know quite well that that pace is already bridged, that gap is already filled. It is not an empty one. There are all the forces, the potentialities, all the love, the concern of the parent already projected into that gap, unseen by the child but there, and when that child takes the step it is only a matter of less than an instant, quicker than thought, and the child discovers that the strength is in the gap.

That is the link of the Spirit. The unseen, the invisible Spirit, linking us with Christ, and then, as the step is taken in faith, what does that invisible Spirit do? He brings the strength to the child, and the Spirit ministers that way of Christ to faith every time. Sometimes the child may begin to go down, but that invisible link draws,

takes, applies the strength, and saves from the crash.

That is extended through life in much more complicated situations, much more definite positions. There is never a time when the gap does not exist where nature is concerned; to nature there is always that gap. To faith that gap is already filled, and faith goes on, taking it that really the gap does not exist in reality. It looks like it to sense, so it appears to all natural proof, there is nothing to work upon, yet faith says, in that gap there is an invisible link; and as faith steps into what to nature is a void, but believing that it will find God, that Spirit ministers Christ, and faith is ministered from Christ, victory is ministered from Christ, until bigger gaps are capable of being entered into. Faith grows, and there are bigger undertakings all the time. It is the imparting of Christ's victory of faith to us by the Spirit, as we are exercised towards it.

## God never gives up His plan

I hope that does not disturb you. Have you settled that, or are you still asking for the plan, and wanting the pattern of the future? God never gives us His plan. He teaches us to know Himself. We ask to know His way. He seeks to make us know Himself. That is very important from His point of view, and very important for us. God is never satisfied with having a lot of people occupied with His plans. He wants people occupied with Himself, knowing Himself: "I am the Lord"! What is the way, Lord? "I am"! How can we know the way? "I am"! The strange thing is that the more we know the Lord the more we are able to go on. We might say that if only we knew the plan we could go on, but I am not so sure about that. We should discover that we wanted to know the Lord to go on in the plan. It might be impossible without a knowledge of the Lord, but if we know the Lord we have both.

#### God never tells us His times

He calls upon us to *believingly* rest in Him. If we try to take things out of God's time we shall lose our rest. If we fret over things

that are not yet in the Lord's time we shall destroy rest. He never tells His times. When God's time comes things happen, and there is no fret about it. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons ..." (Acts 1:7). When the time comes you will know. Until the time comes you have to believe and believe that when the time comes you will know. God is faithful. God is never too late. God is never too early. If we had our way very often we should make God too early. That would only complicate things.

#### God never makes common sense His basis of procedure

He works on the ground of the impossible. We may take the historic illustration of Abraham as being a true spiritual guide. By faith he went out, and we shall always find that faith calls us to go out, not always geographically, or necessarily physically, but we shall find that faith always demands that we go out, that we have to leave a certain position. It may mean common sense as man calls it, the way of reasoning on the part of our friends, man's way of looking at things, all the opinion of the best we know around us, every kind of argument of nature. We have to go out from thence, not knowing. From the knowing to the un-knowing is very often the way of faith unto fuller knowing.

These things are easily said. They are not so many things collected to say at this time. They are born out of exercise of heart. The time comes, as we go on, when a maturity is essential to the winding up of the dispensation. God has appointed a dispensation in which to accomplish something. That must be accomplished.

If it is not accomplished in all His people it makes no difference. God must and will have His end, the end which is to mark the close of the dispensation, and God's object for the end of the dispensation, as the result of all His dealings with His people through the dispensation, is the faith which overcomes the *ultimate* forces of the enemy; not the faith which trusts God for daily supplies of temporal things, but something infinitely above that. It is the faith which meets the naked forces of this universe in antagonism to Christ and His Body. The question is justified, and has behind it a

tremendous significance, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find the faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). It means surely that the strain, the test, the pressure, the antagonism, will at the end be so intense that only an ultimate faith will go through. These are they which "overcame ... because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony ..." (Rev. 12:11 ASV).

I think it needs very little discernment to see that we are moving now into a time when faith in God's elect is being openly opposed by the powers of darkness. It is not even the test of whether you are prepared to lay down your life for Christ. It has gone beyond that. The test is as to whether you are prepared to live a life of dying with Christ. Paul's last days in prison are an illustration of an end time faith; with all saints leaving, departing, the work of a lifetime seeming to have broken down, alone after the most utter devotion to the Lord, and yet triumphant. This is the victory that overcomes! May the Lord strengthen and increase our faith.

#### THE WORLD

Reading: 1 John 2:15-17; 3:1,13; 4:4-5; 5:4-5,19; 2 John 7.

"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Here in this passage the specific thing in view is what is termed the world. You will have noticed how many times that word occurs in this letter. All those passages which are referred to deal with the world. There are several others in the letter which relate to the world in a different way, but not quite in the same connection. God sent his Son into the world for instance. It is impressive and significant to note how in such a short letter one term occurs so frequently, and when we turn back to the gospel written by this same apostle, covering a much larger range, we shall still be impressed with the place given to 'the world', for in the gospel by John the word occurs no fewer than seventy-eight times. That is impressive, and surely when there is such a preponderating of a term we are in the way of getting a clue to the message and the meaning of all the rest that is written.

Then another thought. When we remember that these writings of John were the last writings of the apostolic times, that also carries its own significance, that as the times of the apostles were passing out, and the last apostolic writings were being sent forth, there should be such a strong emphasis laid upon the world. Surely

that signifies at least that it was in that direction that believers needed warning, exhortation, special help. It was from that direction that they were meeting their temptations, their difficulties, their dangers, their perils.

That being the case it becomes necessary for us to understand what the apostle meant by using this term. What did he mean by the world as something to be overcome by believers as a special besetment and peril, and to be overcome by faith? How is the world overcome by faith? What is meant by overcoming 'the world' by faith? You can only answer that as you understand what is meant by 'the world'. Does it mean the sphere in which we are? Well, there is no sense in overcoming a sphere, a place, by faith! Is it overcoming the people in that sphere? Well, the same word is used of the people as of the sphere? Does it apply to the people, that we overcome the people by faith? There is not much more sense in that! Then the same word is used of the system or ordered arrangement of things on the earth; it is called 'the world', what we would call the organisations of mankind and things. Do we overcome it by faith? Has it to be overcome? Well, there may be a good deal that is not right about it, and it would be better ordered otherwise, but I am quite sure that the meaning is not there. Then what does it mean?

If you take all these passages from the letters of John, you will find that the term the world is an inclusive term. It is the whole realm of the things of time and sense.

Man is regarded by the Word of God since the fall as a "worldly" creature. We use the word worldly in a very much more limited sense than we ought. When we speak of someone being worldly, we mean that they either go to theatres or cinemas, or dress in a certain way. These are incidental things which we call worldliness, or perhaps someone who simply lives for this world and not for God and not for heaven. We say they belong to the world. But that, after all, is only a limited way of speaking of worldliness. The Word of God regards man since the fall as a worldly creature. He is bound and horizoned by this world. He is the slave of this world, the prisoner of this world. This world is his everything. He is born

into this world, he lives in this world, all that comes into his life is of this world. He dies in this world, is buried in this world, and all that he has gathered in this world passes with him in this world. He is the slave of this world in the sense that he knows only this world's standards, this world's resources, this world's everything. He knows it more or less, but that is all, and he has no other way whatever of judging things, no other standard by which to judge, by which to go. He has no other mind, no other conception. For him in mind, and heart, and will, and in the whole range of his being this world is all that he has naturally.

If you present to him the standards outside of this world he cannot follow you, he cannot go with you. It is like trying to make a cat or a dog appreciate the higher arts. It is no use taking a dog to listen to a Beethoven sonata with the hope of getting any appreciation, any understanding, being able to follow the movement and enter into the whole thing. It is no use taking a cat to the Art Gallery and explaining all the beauties and wonders of the artist's creation. That is not the cat's world any more than music is the dog's world. They have their world. Take them to see other dogs and cats and they can appreciate that and enter into that in a lively way. That is their world, the other is not.

In that sense man is a worldly creature, because the whole range of his conscious life is this world coming to him through his senses.

Now we are beginning to get to the heart of what the Holy Spirit through John means by overcoming the world. This world sense, the fall — in which man by nature is a prisoner, not only in the sense that he is bound, that he is not free, but in the sense that he is limited, within a certain range of confine — is regarded as cut off from God, and in a state of opposition to God, and all that is of God. It is opposed to the things of the Spirit. It is against God. It is, therefore, against obedience to God, and by reason of its nature — not its wilfulness now necessarily, but its nature — is against faith. Faith is not the law of this world's life. Sense is the law of the world. What the world can understand it will accept and follow. What the

world can see and feel and have presented as proof and evidence to its senses, it will accept, but what cannot be demonstrated, proved, presented as evidence to this world — in a word, what is of faith in the Biblical sense — the world cannot accept, and it is against that, and thinks that anybody who takes that line is mad. Madness is simply that you do not behave or act as people who regard themselves as guite sane expect you to. Paul was regarded as mad — "Thou art mad" (Acts 26:24) — simply because he was proceeding according to a standard which was not this world's standard. The world could not follow him out there. He had gone outside of its range of comprehension, therefore he was abnormal to this world, and the world called him mad. John gathers this meaning of the world up in that lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the vainglory of life. There you have a very fine explanation and definition of sense. What is the lust of the flesh? It simply means the strong desire of the flesh. The strong desire of the eyes. The vainglory of life. That is sense, that is the world. John says, all that is opposed to God, that is not of God.

To bring this immediately to our present consideration, it becomes clear that faith which overcomes the world means that all that way of being governed in your life is transcended; being governed by the flesh, the eyes, the vainglory of life; being governed by the standards of men out of relation to God; being governed by the limitations of a world, a creation which has lost its spiritual faculties, and is therefore bound within certain very restricted limits of understanding, of knowledge, of sight, of judgement, of capacity, of consciousness.

Then, governed by the eyes. "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes ... but with righteousness ..." (Isa. 11:3-4). That is the word concerning the Lord Jesus. The Lord does not look on the outward appearance; the Lord does not judge as man judges. This is the domination of the eye, what the eye sees; that is the limit.

The desire of the flesh. That is to be gratified in oneself, that one's own sense, desire, shall be satisfied. What is a desire of the flesh? It is to see things happening. If you do not see things

happening you do not believe things are happening, if you are a worldly man. Inasmuch as we are worldly we *demand* statistics, proof, evidence to the senses of what is happening.

What is the vainglory of life? Reputation, a name, position, influence, being well-thought-of, all those things which man likes to have to make something for himself in which he personally can have joy and gratification, some show. Every form of pride is vainglory, whether it be pride of race, of birth, of heritage, of position, of achievement; and the world makes much of it. Worldliness is always talking about who he is, and who she is; and what he has done, and what she has done; what he has achieved and what she has achieved. That is pride. It is not of God, it is opposed to God, and God is set against it. From God's standpoint it is foolishness.

Overcoming the world is getting outside of that. How do you get outside of sense, the domination of the senses, where you must see things, and feel things, and have tangible proof? What is it that takes you outside of that? Every time it is faith. You never do get outside of that but by faith. Nothing happening! No proof! No evidence! Is that the last word? Is it true? Is that all there to be said? Put it round the other way: there is all the evidence pointing in the direction of failure, disaster, breakdown, tragedy, catastrophy, everything has gone wrong! There is any amount of proof of it! Is that all you have to say? Faith is the evidence of things *not* seen. If the apostle had been thinking in another direction he would have put it the other way as well. Faith is the contradiction of a great deal that is seen! Faith has made men say that the things seen are temporal, and that that is not the last word; there is another story somewhere lying behind all the things seen which is God's side of the matter.

Take Paul again in person. All they in Asia had turned away from him. This one gone, that one gone. Churches disrupted, divided, apostasy creeping in, evil men leading believers astray, his life work being laid in ruins, he himself imprisoned, cut off from all direct means of teaching and helping the situation. The whole situation shouts, Failure! A man's life thrown away! Is that all? He did not

believe that. Many centuries have proved that that was not true, but he could not see it, no one could see it.

Take an even greater instance still, that of Christ on the cross, crucified through weakness, crying a cry of despair; and that over against all the mighty statements as to who He was, over against all His miracles, teaching, His tremendous claims. There He hangs, stripped and fastened with nails to that cross, crying despairingly about being forsaken of God. What is the evidence to the senses? The evidence to the senses is anything but the truth. Everything bears out what His opponents had said: An impostor! Making false claims! A pretender! Is that all? That is what it looks like to this world. We know guite well that there was another side to that, but the other side is only apprehended by faith, you only get into the good of the other side by faith and overcome the world. No one ever comes into the triumphant side of that cross other than by faith. They have got to accept it by faith, and stand into it by faith, before it ever becomes a living reality with value in your own heart. The world has to be overcome.

The world then, is that whole order of things related to man as he is by nature, by which he is governed and dominated, and in which he is imprisoned; an order opposed to the Spirit, to God, to obedience to God, to faith. It may not be that world of dark hostility to God, it may only be that we want proof, that this flesh of ours must have evidence, that we must see things happening, or we cannot go on with God. We must see souls being saved or else faith goes to pieces. We must see the work of God progressing, prospering, or we come to a standstill. We must see in the realm of sentient evidence proof that we are right, or else we stand still. There is a realm in which we have to stand apart from all that, where we can alone stand, and say, Well, I cannot move from this position! This position has been wrought in me by God! Everything would argue that I am in a wrong position, but my knowledge of God hangs upon my maintaining this position. It is not simply that I am pigheaded, mulish, clinging to my convictions, afraid for my pride; it is something deeper than all such considerations. The vainglory of life does not come into it. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, does not come into this. Though it costs everything, costs reputation, costs following, costs support, costs everything, I can be no other. On this I know God. That is the faith that overcomes the world.

Do you see what the world is? The world is there whenever you and I are tempted to a human or natural consideration, in whatever realm, to accept that which is presented to us through our senses.

Now, faith is the victory that overcomes the world. Faith overcomes sense, sight, personal desire, everything that this world craves for. Faith says, There is something more than that. That, after all, at best and at most is limited, fading, the world passes. Faith says, there is more than that, and I go for the more.

Has not that always proved to be true? Has it not been faith which has got more than the world? Always! It has overcome and got more than the world could get. Through his faith Abraham became heir. Of the world? Ah, yes, but his heirship ranged beyond the world! "We are all children of Abraham through faith." The promises reached beyond this world.

Just a word on this particular point which arises: "... this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world ...". Notice the change. From what we might call the abstract there is a change to the concrete. "This is the victory that overcometh the world ... our faith." Now it is made personal: "Who is he that overcometh ...?" Then in 2 John 7 we have: "For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh." I want you to notice the place in this whole matter taken by the incarnation. "Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh." I want you to notice the place in this whole matter taken by the incarnation. "Jesus is the Son of God." The Jews in Christ's day disbelieved the incarnation; that is, they disbelieved that He was the Son of God on natural and worldly grounds. Christ was a challenge to their worldliness. What were the things constantly arising in the impact of Christ upon the Jews? Personal interests, reputation, position, influence, ambition.

For envy they crucified Him. There were too many people following Him. He had too much influence. He undermined their influence, got in the way of their being on top, at the head of things. If they did not get rid of Him, what did they think would happen? The Romans will come and take away our nation, our country, our position. Personal interest! The things which were constantly coming up when He was present were the personal, selfish, worldly interests and ambitions of the Jews. There was a tremendous clash between Him and their worldliness, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the vainglory of life. The vainglory of life? He dragged it out to full view: "... they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (Matt. 6:5). What a picture! See these men, standing right in the middle of the market, where the crowds congregated, and doing all their praying in such a loud voice, and in such a way that people would say, He is a very good man! They loved people to say, He is a very devout man! It is a nice sensation when people say you are a very good man. These men went out of their way to do that, and they could not endure His presence because He exposed that thing as not being of God but being of the world.

That is why John, whose gospel has more than any other to say about being spiritual, speaks so much about the world. Spirituality and the world cannot go together. So the Jews disbelieved that He was the Son of God on those moral, human, or worldly grounds. They would not have Him, because He challenged their worldliness too much. If they had admitted that He was the Son of God, where would they have stood? If they had consented for one moment to the fact that He was the Son of God come from heaven, they would have been bound to quit their position, change their manner of life, but to maintain that they must cast Him out, and therefore they would not have Him as the Son of God. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19). If they were to admit that He was the light sent from God they would either have to capitulate and change their whole manner of life, or fight

directly against God, and so the way out is: He is not the Son of God! He is an imposter! He is false! To accept Christ means alliance or union with Him against the world in ourselves as well as outside of ourselves.

Now you see the place of the incarnation. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is come in the flesh, you have to ally yourself with Him, and if you do you have to forsake the world. Union with Christ means separation from the world. The word does not just mean giving up going to this or that, doing this or that. It means accepting a position outside of this world in spirit, a faith position with Christ where worldly standards are no longer going to govern, where worldly limitations are no longer going to hold in bondage. Faith rides over all those and carries us out into a larger realm altogether, but we never get into the larger realm except through faith. That step of faith enlarges our horizon and brings us into touch with powers which we never knew. Every fresh test and proof of faith throws down some barrier of limitation, destroys something that has held us in bondage, makes possible things which we could never do before. It is in this sense that the apostle says: "Now if any man be in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). What is the new creation? The new creation is marked by a new set of capacities, an entirely new consciousness, a new relationship. The new creation is through faith.

The world means the limitations of our natural life which governs. Faith means union with Christ, bringing us outside of that domination of the senses, of the world, of the natural life, into a realm where there are other considerations, and other standards, other possibilities. It is all of faith. New possibilities which to nature are impossibilities! That is faith. The whole force of the Word of God bears down upon that, that faith is an enlarged world, a liberated life, a new knowledge, a new power.

May the Lord give us the faith which is the victory which overcomes.

#### CHAPTER THREE

# **CHOSEN OUT FROM THE WORLD**

Reading: John 1:10; 7:7; 12:31; 15:18-19; 16:33; 17:31; 1 John 3:1,13; 4:4; 5:4,19.

This is rather a remarkable series of passages. It would almost appear at some points as though there was a contradiction. For instance, there is the statement: "The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth"; and then: "Because I have chosen you out of the world, the world hateth you." Then again: "Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out"; "The whole world lieth in the evil one." It looks like a contradiction, but of course the Word of God never contradicts itself, and the explanation is not far to seek.

# 1. The transition from a worldly to a spiritual position

The first thing which we have to notice, therefore, is that these passages represent a movement, a development, a transition. They make it very clear that the Lord's people have advanced. They have moved from one position to another; something has taken place in them which has changed the situation for them outwardly. At one point the world does not hate them, and that is no compliment to them. It is no compliment to anyone in relation to the Lord Jesus that the world does not hate them. At a more advanced point, when that relationship has become different, more inward, more spiritual, the position is changed and the world (which we have already defined and will not stay to deal with further now) is

hating. The more spiritually advanced the believer becomes, the more there is a going on in a spiritual way with Christ, the deeper, stronger, keener will be the hatred of that which is called 'the world'. It is therefore of value to recognise at the outset the transition that is indicated by the seemingly contradictory passages.

Of the world! "The world loveth its own." Of the world: "The world knoweth its own." Of Christ! "Chosen ... out from the world." The world no longer knows, and the world no longer loves. A change of position, a change of relationship, a change of consciousness, and that a progressive one, one that is continually developing, and, so far as anything of Christ is concerned, the attitude of the world will growingly and increasingly be that of ejecting it, driving it out, making its stay here impossible.

It is in that realm, and because of that, that we come into the meaning of this second apparent contradiction: "Now is the judgement of this world, now is the prince of this world cast out"; "the whole world lieth in the evil one." How can you reconcile those statements? Christ enthroned at God's right hand is the establishment of the fact that the prince of this world has been, so far as the ultimate purpose and intention of God is concerned, and so far as the supreme government of this world is concerned, cast out; that Satan is no longer the factor in the government of this world, but that government is now vested in Christ ultimately. "The whole world lieth in the evil one." Yes, but the victory that overcomes the world is the faith that Satan is not the final word in the government of this world, but Christ is, and that there is an overcoming of the world by reason of a relationship with Christ as outside of this world. What has been made true in the case of Christ Himself is to be made true in the case of the church by faith. It depends entirely upon the attitude which we take towards Satan and the works of Satan as to what the issue is going to be. If our attitude is that the world lies in the wicked one, that the evil one has the last say in everything, then defeat is absolutely certain and unavoidable; but if we are not of the world, and therefore do not lie in the wicked one with the world, but are in Christ as apart from and over the world,

and the authority is not ultimately in that evil one but in Christ, then this is the victory that overcomes the world.

So we notice that this represents a transition from one position as in the world, of the world, related to the world, and therefore in the first place known by the world and loved by the world, to a spiritual position in Christ, outside of the world, no longer known nor loved by the world. That is simple. It is elementary. It is the first step. But it has to be recognized that this is no contradiction. It presents a spiritual movement, a movement which commenced when we became by faith united with Christ, but a movement which goes on continually and intensifies as it goes.

## 2. The fact of estrangement and antagonism

I think it hardly needs to be stressed, but perhaps we might remind ourselves of it, that these words do clearly declare the fact of an estrangement. The world knew Him not, therefore the world knoweth us not. That is an estrangement. "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). That is the antagonism.

I want to put my finger once more upon the heart of this thing. When we speak of the world we are not speaking of the people of this world in the full consciousness of all this, for although the people of this world have a degree of consciousness of this difference, this estrangement, and this clash, the people of this world are not finally and fully responsible. They lie in the wicked one. They are not conscious that they lie in the wicked one. They have never been in anything else. If you and I have ever been delivered, and then we get back, we know, we are fully aware of the fact that we are not where we should be, and we are where we would be; but never having been anywhere else, we are not fully conscious of our state. It is only when we are awakened, when by the operation of the Spirit of God we come to ourselves, awake to a position which has not registered itself upon us keenly up to that point, that we

know that this is not our place. The world has not been awakened, and it does not therefore know, and has no keen, full consciousness of the fact that it lies in the evil one, and yet it does. The evil one is working through the world, and creating in the world, effecting in that world this estrangement and this antagonism. The world becomes aware of the estrangement, of the difference, and of that clash and antagonism, but cannot explain it.

Behind the world there is an intelligence which knows all about it. Those who are out from the world in this spiritual sense are suspect before anything is known about them naturally and humanly. It is not necessary to declare to the world that you are a Christian; if you are truly with the Lord, it comes out. It is not long before the very atmosphere is full of strain and conflict. It is not that we adopt an attitude or a position of difference; it is there, intangible and yet the most real thing to our consciousness and to the consciousness of the world. There is the fact. The world does not love us, although it may know nothing about us, and it may not understand its own lack of love for those who are Christ's, but the fact is there all the same. The world may not be able to explain it, but it knows that it is so. The evil one is there, and he knows that we are not of his company.

That leads us to the point that we have in view for this moment, to note

# 3. The nature of the suffering

"In the world ye shall have tribulation." The word is really the word "anguish". Ye shall have anguish. What is the nature of this suffering of the Lord's own heart in this world? It comes right along the line that we have just laid down or noted.

# a) Difference of spirit

First of all it is a matter of the difference of spirit. There is a great deal of the suffering of the Lord's people due to the difference of spirit in them and in the world. You can never proceed with the world as you can with believers. You can never assume with the

world when you can with believers. While very often, we find we can only go so far even with believers, nevertheless we can go so far with believers, but we can never go that far with the world. We can assume that believers have a relationship with the Lord which makes possible a counting upon them to react in a certain way.

What we mean is this, that if there are those who are truly related to the Lord and walking in the Lord, we can rest assured that if they meet anything which is contrary to them, they will have to reckon with the Lord as to how they react to that. If they react badly, we say, They have to answer to the Lord for that, we need not trouble about that, that is between them and the Lord, and we know that sooner or later they will come up against the Lord in that matter! Or, because they know the meaning of the cross, and the letting go of their own soul, they will react, they will triumph, they will get on top of that quickly, there will not be a going under. But you can never proceed on that ground with the world. The world moves at once on the ground of what you give you get. You have nothing to count upon as to the grace of God in the heart. The world meets you on a purely natural, fleshly basis, and that means suffering to the spirit. You are of another spirit, and to have to meet in your spirit that other spirit, that other ground of reaction of life, means a good deal of suffering. You have to maintain a spiritual position in spite of no one being able to come onto your ground and meet you there. That is spiritual suffering. That is tribulation.

Take the case of a carnal believer. If you proceed on a purely spiritual basis with a carnal believer, and then that carnal believer begins to treat you in a fleshly way, come back at you on the ground of the flesh, what spiritual suffering that causes! You can do nothing with that. All you can say is, Well, we must wait until they come to some new spiritual position!

That is the spirit of the world, and in that realm there is tribulation, there is suffering, there is anguish, because of a difference of spirit; the spirit of the world, and the spirit which is of God. These are at variance, but we are called upon by the Lord for a time to live in a world where another spirit than the spirit of Christ is widespread, almost universal, and there is this constant clash.

I remember someone saying to me once that they always assumed that people were crucified until they proved otherwise, and proceeded accordingly. And that person was always making the most painful, terrible discoveries. That person would proceed on the basis that people with whom they were dealing were crucified people, and then they got an awful shock and became bewildered and stunned and went through agonies. I do not know whether that is a right principle or not, but the fact is that unless there is the spirit of Christ there will always be suffering for those who have the spirit of Christ, who are of His spirit, and this world which has another spirit.

I have my mind very closely upon the Lord Jesus Himself. There is behind what we are saying a following of Him through His earthly life, and we can see how true in His case was the suffering because of the difference of spirit in Him and in the others.

## b) Difference of government

The world is governed by its own nature, its own basis, and that basis, that nature, is purely selfish. Ultimately you find something which comes back to self in this world. If it is not in one form, it will be in another. The world is absolutely governed by the mind of the world, the thoughts of the world, the judgements of the world, the standards of the world, what the world thinks and feels, and how the world acts, and those things which the world calls success, effectiveness, those things which the world regards as of value. It is a large realm.

The Lord Jesus, in that world where men would say, Now, this is the recognized thing to do! even religiously; and, This is what you ought to do, and this is what you ought not to do! This is the expedient thing! This is the common-sense thing! This is the wise thing! This is how it ought to be done! In that world the Lord Jesus was being governed outside of this world, by an altogether different standard. What the world would call success is, after all, the low standard of temporal effectiveness, something that is for a

time, a show, a pretence, and then it will go. That is not the true success. It belongs to the world which passes with the fashion thereof. There is such a thing as being governed by an altogether different standard outside of this world. The world cannot understand that standard. The world cannot enter into that meaning of things. It has no capacity for appreciating, for understanding, for recognizing those values. The world calls those values waste and has no power or faculty for appraising divine standards or values. The government is different.

To live in this world by a heavenly standard is agony because you are constantly up against it, and the world has got into so much which stands to represent God that even the Lord's people are governed by the world's principles. They would, of course, strongly repudiate that they are worldly. They would even speak about being far less of this world than many, and yet back of things it does matter, and it does count, as to what effect is registered upon men, how men look at things, whether men call it a success or not, whether men see it as a going concern or not, whether it comes up to the standards of what men naturally call a successful thing, an effective thing. Just how far men praise, men recognise, men acknowledge, men are prepared to take it into account as something to be recognized, are the things which govern. And it is the most difficult thing for the flesh — which is only another word for the world, because the world works through the flesh and the flesh is bound up with the world — to accept the verdict of all others that the thing is not a success judged from its standards. We crave for recognition, we crave for acknowledgment, and to have the thing established in the eyes of men.

The Lord Jesus, as we have already pointed out, went out of this world not established in the eyes of men, but very much to the contrary. Paul the apostle died in a time when he was under a cloud of suspicion as a failure, and went out of this world not a success from this world's standards. Now the success of Christ can only be seen outside of that world. When you get onto resurrection ground you are outside of this world altogether. The success of the

apostle's life can only be seen by a spiritual appraising. Christ was in this world and was governed by another world, another standard, another order, another system which the princes of the world could never know, never understand, never value. Ah, but it is agony to be in a world like that; it is suffering, it is tribulation, the tribulation of having constantly to let go your own soul. "He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25).

The world is constantly trying to do something to let it be known. That is exactly what the world said to Christ, and his own brethren were mixed up in it, and suggested that He went up to the feast and showed Himself openly. It is exactly what the devil said in the wilderness. Go up to the temple pinnacle and cast Yourself down and all will believe! You will get a following! You will get recognition! Capture the people by showing them what You can do! Make a display and you will get applause! That is worldly, and to live in a world like that and to repudiate it all and to be governed by other standards is anguish to the soul. It is tribulation. A power is needed to lead you to do that. You cannot do that merely on the basis of asceticism, as something in itself. You certainly do not do it as governed by those interests of gaining something, the ascetic idea that you will gain immortality by afflicting yourself in various ways and denying yourself. That is not the governing law of this life in Christ. The only power by which such a life is possible is the power of faith.

There must be something there that lifts you above this whole realm, and it was that in Christ. How did Christ overcome the world? We will not go on to that at the moment, but we are led to that point. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." How did Christ overcome? In a word, Christ overcame by believing in the Father's character, and not in the Father's acts. That will carry you a long way. If He had lived upon the Father's acts then when the Father sent Him to the cross, and forsook Him, and the Father allowed Him the deep and terrible agony, then He would have been offended with the Father. He was

not living on the acts of the Father.

If you and I have our faith in God simply because of what He does for us, then we are exposed to very great perils for He will do some very strange things. Are we going to be moved one way or the other by the acts of God? Well, when God acts kindly we shall be all up, but when God acts mysteriously we shall be all down. I am afraid many of us have had our faith in God, as we would call it, rather as a matter of what God does, and when God has not done what we wanted Him to do but has done very much other than we wanted Him to do, our faith has gone down, and there has been a big question. But Christ did not believe in the Father for His acts. He believed in the Father for His character. He stood back of the acts on the character of the Father, that the Father is what He is, and therefore He will not contradict Himself, and His acts must be according to His character. God will not do a thing which is out of keeping with His character. If you take the thing, you will misunderstand God. If you take the character of God you will see that, although He causes suffering, it is in keeping with His character. There is something out of His nature, what He is, which is governing that course of procedure. It is a difficult lesson to learn, but a lesson which we have to learn sooner or later, that God does everything because of what He is. We have to go to the Lord and have it settled once and for all that God is what He is, and nothing alters that. He does not change; He does not vary. Now then, if He is that, this present act of God must be according to what He is. So Christ looked beyond the act to the character of the Father, and fastened His faith in the character of the Father, and overcame the world.

Satan would suggest that the Father's acts were motivated by something other than the Father's love. Take the fasting in the wilderness. Here is the Son hungry, exhausted, and Satan says: "Command these stones that they become bread." The suggestion is, Well, You have been declared to be the Son, and now here You are being allowed to starve: that is not in keeping! He would have Christ work from His experience of God and interpret God according to His experience, interpret God on the ground of His suffering, and

say: Well, I am suffering this, therefore God is not kind, not God, God is so-and-so! Ah, but He turned the thing right round the other way, and took His ground, not upon His experience, but upon what God was, and then He was able to deal with this thing because He believed God.

"The victory that overcometh ... our faith"! Faith in what God is, and not what God does or is able to do; that is the victory that overcomes the world.

#### THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

Reading: 1 John 5:4; Eph 6:16; Heb.11.

When we turn to the letter to the Hebrews, and the eleventh chapter, there is a very real sense in which we might write at the beginning of the chapter, 1 John 5:4. "This is the victory that overcometh the world ... our faith." If you take that passage as the key to the chapter, you can carry it through every part and see how it is true in the case of every one referred to in the chapter. It is not our intention to do that throughout, but it might be indicated in a word or two.

#### A ruined world

Take verse 3: "By faith we understand that the worlds have been formed (framed, ASV) by the Word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of the things which appear." Take that passage back to the commencement of the book of Genesis, and, noting the state of things there — darkness and chaos, wreckage and ruin, hopelessness and despair, see that that condition is overcome by faith; that world, so to speak, is conquered by faith.

# An unrighteous world

Or take the next, with reference to Abel. Abel overcame a world by faith. It was a state of universal unrighteousness, all were included in unrighteousness before God. Abel, through faith,

emerged into a place where he had witness borne that he was righteous. He overcame the world's unrighteousness by faith and triumphed through faith unto a righteousness which is of faith.

#### A world displeasing to God

Follow on to Enoch, and here the whole world is Godless, living apart from God, leaving God out of account, denying God, giving God no place. Enoch, through faith, overcame that world, had witness borne that he was well pleasing to God. In a world displeasing to God there was one man pleasing to God. A Godly man in a Godless world. It was the triumph of faith.

#### A judged world

Pass to Noah, and we know the state of things in the days of Noah, the state of the world. The whole world was lying under the judgement of God. Universal judgement was proclaimed. Noah triumphed over that world in its state of judgement, through faith he overcame the judgement, by faith he escaped the judgement.

# A purposeless world

From Noah we pass to Abraham. A world estranged from or bereft of divine purpose, without the purpose of God in it, and through faith Abraham became *the* instrument by which divine purposes were recovered in the earth. A purposeless world overcome by faith. One thing which characterised Abraham's life was that he marked the introduction in a new way of divine purpose. He came into oneness with God in His purpose in this world. He overcame that estrangement from, or loss of, divine purpose through faith, and became the instrument through which the purpose of God was realised in this world.

#### A hostile world

So we could go on through the whole chapter, and see how every one mentioned in some way overcame the world in which they were. If it were Moses, then he represents faith overcoming all the positive hostility in the world against the Lord's testimony. Abraham had introduced the testimony; his seed was the vessel of the testimony; now in Egypt you find Abraham's seed crushed, imprisoned, smothered, and the divine testimony quenched by this positive hostility to what is of God. Pharaoh and Egypt represent the positive aspect of antagonism to what is of God, and that is drawn out and revealed in its intensity by the judgements of God. How deep-seated and intense that antagonism and hatred really was! Moses overcame the world of positive spiritual antagonism to the Lord's testimony through faith.

That is only a key to one line of understanding this chapter, and all the history that is in it. Chapter 11 of Hebrews can be seen from so many points of view, it has so much in it, that you can approach it along quite a number of lines quite properly to tremendous value. That is one way of seeing how the principle operates in the overcoming of the world by faith.

# The reaction of the enemy to faith

Another aspect of things is in our mind in connection with this chapter. It can at most only be introductory again. It is the reaction of the enemy to faith. That is suggested by the passage in the Ephesian letter: "Withal (over all) taking the shield of faith." Literally, take the big, or overall, shield of faith. "Wherewith to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one". That means that there is a reaction of the evil one to faith, that when faith has been taken, or a position of faith has been adopted, the enemy reacts to that and tries to break through that guard, to overcome that defence, to pierce that resistance. And it is true that we can never deliberately take an attitude of faith on any matter without there being — usually before

long — a reaction of the enemy to that faith. I want you to see the working of that fact in some of these people's experience mentioned in Hebrews 11 and what the reaction really meant.

Verse 4: "By faith *Abel* offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts ...". The Revised Version Margin is: "over his gifts". The first movement was clearly one of faith. Abel moved in faith in his offering. It was a faith offering. It represented a definite expression of faith as over against Cain's works. Abel took up a faith position and acted upon that ground.

The next thing was a divine attestation. God bore witness over his gifts. God attested that he was righteous. In some way as Abel offered his sacrifice, God there, over the sacrifice, gave him the sign that his sacrifice was accepted and the witness that he was righteous, the attestation of his faith. It came into his own heart.

Following that was a challenge of the evil one. Cain slew his brother. Cain slew one whose righteousness God had attested, whose standing before God as a justified one had been witnessed to by God. The evil one made that attested one, that man of faith, the object and target of his malice, and put forth his power and enmity in a definite way unto his destruction.

The point is this, that although God had attested that faith, and borne witness that he was righteous, God did not protect him from the evil one. That is so often a reaction to faith which it is exceedingly difficult to bear, because so difficult to understand, which really does prove the nature and quality of the faith. What we mean is this: the fact that one is by divine attestation righteous, or justified, does not carry with it of necessity immunity from the evil work of the devil. Because that is true, it is in that realm that the conflict of faith has raged so bitterly in the lives of so many of the Lord's people. Somehow in our hearts there is rooted the idea that if we are accepted of God, attested of God, and God is for us, and not against us, God is on our side, and we stand in divine favour, then we ought to be protected from the bitter malice and destructive

work of the devil. It is along that line that Satan assails, and God allows him to assail so that faith shall still remain faith.

Think of the consequence of its being otherwise. Supposing everybody who accepted the divine ground of justification immediately became, once and for all, immune from all the evil that the devil could bring upon them. The whole world would take that ground at once. It would be worth while. Indeed, we should be able to say we did not serve God for nothing. But you see God does not want people on that cheap basis to believe in Him, just because of what they get out of Him. Faith is faith, and history shows that it is the men of faith, the men whom God has most mightily attested, who have been through the deepest waters of satanic opposition and subtilty, and God has not protected. But let us remember that the fact that the enemy is allowed so to assail, and to smite, and to go so far in his injuries, never for a moment argues, of necessity, that God is against us, that we do not stand justified before God. That is no argument at all. Abel introduces that truth, that a justified and righteous man is not therefore necessarily immune by the protection of God from the assaults of the devil, even unto much harm apparently. So I like the last part of that verse: "... he being dead yet speaketh ...".

There is something which goes on beyond the worst that the devil can do, which is of abiding spiritual value. That is the quality of faith overcoming the world, overcoming the devil, overcoming death, overcoming hatred. Faith has perpetuated something of divine value for all generations, and for eternity.

Let us note then that with Abel it is a question of faith bringing onto a ground of righteousness under divine attestation, and then being challenged up to the hilt by the devil by divine permission. God is associated with that and vindicates such faith.

Verse 5: "By faith *Enoch* was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him; for before his translation he hath had witness borne to him that he had been well-pleasing unto God."

The thought that has come to me in connection with Enoch in

this special relation is the loneliness of Enoch's life. By deduction you conclude that Enoch was an exception. He walked with God, we are told. Well, why is that said if there are a dozen other men doing the same? Why mention Enoch alone if there were other men doing it? "Enoch walked with God ...". It seems therefore that Enoch was an exception. This walking with God must therefore have been a very lonely thing. He must have been one by himself. He had no others to walk with. He had to walk on this earth alone with God. That requires some faith. That calls for faith in quite a number of directions.

Notice the remainder of the statement: "... he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him" (verse 6).

That is one direction in which faith was required so far as Enoch was concerned. Godliness disappeared from the earth. What represented God totally eclipsed. No one reflected anything of God. God apparently vanished from the earth. All the others, the multitudes of men and women, were without God. And one man believes that God is. He is not here, you cannot trace Him, no one can tell you anything about Him, no one has anything to do with Him, no one has any touch with Him, He is not to be found here, and yet God is. God is, so truly, so really, in spite of everything around, that you can abandon your whole being to Him as being more real than the world, more real than things seen and things as they are. It takes faith to abandon yourself to God on that basis, to utterly abandon yourself to a God of whom there is no evidence around you, with whom you can have no touch through others and through things, who is so completely outside of everything; and then to let yourself go, utterly repudiating all this, and saying, He is more real than that! That is faith.

Then think of what it must have meant to Enoch. It is so easy to say, Enoch walked with God! Then undoubtedly he was singular! He was extraordinary! He was fanatical! He was being different from everyone else! He was trying to set himself up as something more than the rest! He was putting *his* way of things over against

what was universally accepted! All those charges would have been laid against him. Oh, Enoch, he thinks that he is right and everybody else is wrong! He has nothing to do with our way of things at all, he keeps himself apart! When you find yourself isolated like that, and find that everybody else has another mind, and no one believes that you are right or agrees with you, it takes faith to go on. It requires a lot of faith to be lonely in the will of God; having your own knowledge of God, your own fellowship and communion with God, and to be prepared to follow that when no one else can go with you or will go with you and no one else will accept your way, but rather everyone else stands apart and regards you as singular and extraordinary, unusual, being different, and thinking yourself better, imagining that you know more and better than all the rest. To go on means that you must have a mighty faith in God. We know so often that when we step out in a course which has been made perfectly clear to us as God's way for us, and no one else has seen that, the enemy does so often come back upon us and react to that faith, and say, Well you know, you ought to give the large number of good Christians, Godly people, credit for knowing something, and being a little right, and not set yourself up as knowing better than all the rest of them! Do you know that argument? We have had it put to us so often by others, Well, we know the Lord, and yet we cannot agree with the way you are going! And the enemy would just encamp upon that, reacting to that faith which has led us along that line, as we are assured that for us at any rate it is God's will. The enemy will encamp upon that ground and try to break our faith, and turn us back, because of the loneliness of the way.

Remember that the way of faith is always a lonely way. It does not matter how many have gone that way, or are going that way at the same time, for the individual concerned it is as though no one had ever been that way before.

True faith is personal. Faith is not a mass thing. When there is a mass movement, faith in the individual is weakened. It is so easy to go with a crowd, but faith is always an individual, personal thing, and therefore it is a lonely thing. As I see Enoch, I see a man who

walked a lonely path with God, and no one else was able to go with him, or understand him, and he could not walk with anyone else; not because he would not, but there was no one else to walk with in that particular way. The quality and character of Enoch's faith was that it was ready to go on with God alone. If no one else in all the universe could go on with him, he was going on with God.

Coming back to our point. There is always a reaction of the enemy in that realm, and I am quite sure that Enoch met many a reaction to his lonely life, a hit-back, fiery darts. We can understand the nature of some of those fiery darts beating upon our faith. Suggestions that we are mistaken after all, and that the mass mind is more reliable, and it is always dangerous to be singular, to be different from the rest. There is a kind of separateness that is wrong. Some people cannot get on with anyone else, they will always be a law unto themselves, but we are not speaking of such, we are speaking of such as know God and are brought face to face with the question of going on with God alone, or capitulating to the popular mind or the more generally accepted order of things, the traditional thing, It wants faith to go on with God when it is against tradition, against general acceptance, against what is recognized as the thing to do.

Verse 7: "By faith *Noah*, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

We come to another aspect of faith, in faith's *testing*. What I see about Noah is this, that Noah had to work for a day which had not arrived. So far as the value of Noah's work went it was nil for the time in which he was doing it. What is the good of an ark if there is no water to float it on? He spent years (some say he spent one hundred and twenty years) building his ark. That is a small section out of his lifetime, which went into a good many more years than that, but it was long enough to constitute a fairly real and genuine test of faith. Year after year a man is working, not for the time being but for a day yet to come, with no present justification for all his

toil, preparing for a later on. The present, and the long present, being sacrificed to the future, and no one being able to appreciate, understand, or to enter into the meaning and value of all that he is doing now year after year. The situation was not at all understood by the people. They could not appreciate it at all. They saw no use for this, no need for it, no meaning in it. And this that Noah was talking about had no precedent at all. Probably they had never known what rain was. The earth had been watered in other ways until that time. Rain! What is rain! They know nothing about it. No precedent for this at all! No history to go upon! And yet to something without precedent, without historic background he laboured on, meaningless to those around him.

Does not that provide very good ground for the devil to react to faith; is not the whole of human nature bent upon having a quick return, having the bird in the hand, seeing something for your labours? To put it the other way, does not human nature find it exceedingly difficult to work in abstracts? How do you know that after all you are not mistaken? You have not proved that you are right! And yet it is laid upon you, the urge of God; you have got to do this thing, and at present no one understands what you are doing, no one appreciates what you are doing, no one can see the value of what you are doing. They are looking to see the result, and you can show them no result. They are looking to see the value and you can show them no value at present. They are looking to see the necessity for this, and it is very difficult to bring home to them that what you are doing is absolutely necessary, vital, essential. At any rate a very large part of the work relates to a day which has not yet come. God is preparing for that day. When that day comes there will be something prepared, something provided, a necessity will arise, a situation will come about, and then there will be those who thank God for those who in faith provided against that day. But, oh, how the enemy reacts to that faith, because it is so lacking in present proof that what you are doing is of value, is of meaning, is necessary.

I believe that very probably, something like that is going on

today, and a situation is slowly creeping over this earth for the Lord's people, a new situation is coming about. The majority of them do not understand, do not recognise; they are occupied with the present, they do not even see that the thing is changing to any great extent. They are still bent upon the old order, the old method; they are not seeing that it is breaking down, and that a new position is becoming necessary, new resources are becoming essential, and that before very long they will find themselves unable to go any further on the old ground. God knows, and it may be that He puts into the heart of some to give themselves as to prepare for a coming day, when His own people will be thrown upon the last of their resources and that for which He has prepared will be the only thing which will save them in that day.

That is real faith, and there is a real test there. It is not nice or pleasant to the flesh to feel that you are spending the best part of your life for a day which is not yet, and which perhaps you personally will not see. The good of it will be entered into perhaps when you are gone. But is not that true of most of the men of faith? "These all died in faith, not having received the promises ...". But they prepared the way and made a provision. The enemy does come in on that ground. Yes, you are throwing your life away, you are accomplishing nothing, you think that your work is very important, but after all what have you got, where have you arrived? The only answer to that is to go on. It will be manifest some time in the future, for what is of God is bound to come into its own sooner or later.

Verse 8: "By faith *Abraham*, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Here in this passage there are two or three things said about Abraham. The two things here about Abraham are the land and the son, and faith was challenged in both these connections, along respective lines.

As to the land. God in some way made it clear to Abraham that a certain course was related to His purpose. Abraham believed

God, and went out and took that course, moved in that definitely indicated direction, and then that faith was met with a very severe challenge. A land was God's objective and intimation: "A land that I will show thee ...". In faith Abraham took his journey towards the land, and I think we might say that Abraham would guite naturally expect to find certain conditions obtaining there, and expect that there would be an immediate realization of God's intention, that everything would present to him a position which justified his faith; whereas when he reached the land nothing justified his faith, so far as the situation, the position, the condition of things were concerned. His faith met a tremendous challenge. A God-chosen land! And the God-chosen land was full of idolatry from end to end, of the most wicked character. A land God-given! And yet it is impossible to live in it by reason of a famine. The reaction to faith by a position utterly opposed to that which faith would expect to find. Apparently one of those strange contradictions of God.

The enemy takes hold of a position like that very often. When you expect that your obedient faith is going to bring you into a certain situation, a situation which you have previsioned in your mind as being quite in keeping with God — God's wisdom, God's leading — the enemy will immediately pounce upon that and say, Look here, you have gone wrong, this is not in keeping with God, this is all contradictory! You had the right to expect something other than this when you left all and trusted God! That is a severe challenge to faith.

As to the son. God promised the son, and then faith was met with a negative. In the case of the land it was an opposite position. In the case of the son, if it is not a contradiction in terms, it was a negative position. Nothing whatever to uphold the promise of God, nothing in nature to offer any assurance whatever that God was right, that God would do it. We need not dwell long upon that. We keep closely to our point.

Every movement of faith is challenged, and there is always the possibility not long after we have taken a step in faith, adopted an attitude of faith, to question the whole thing. It is strange that

it does not matter how much is involved of sacrifice, letting go, suffering, in our step of faith in God, very rarely is there an immediate vindication of that faith up to the hilt, but usually (I think I could say invariably) there is the opportunity and the occasion for questioning the whole thing soon after. Have you not found that? You have known that God wanted a certain line followed, a certain course adopted. You have known that God was calling you to a step of faith, and you have taken the attitude, and you have adopted the course, and you have found yourself very soon in a position where you had every reason *under heaven* to question it and to doubt it.

The big question for every one of these could have been, Well, am I right, after all? Have I not been wrong? Have I not been mistaken? Have I not thought that it was God, and it was not God? And there is the temptation to recoil and go back upon your course! All these men's faith was a victorious faith because it pierced through that argument, which was so against their course, against their faith, in everything of nature, the enemy using situations and circumstances to press home that argument. They won through.

Verses 24-28: "By faith *Moses*, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the firstborn should not touch them."

There are several things here about Moses. There is first of all his great renunciation: "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter". That was no small renunciation. It was no small giving up, no small sacrifice. So far as this world was concerned it meant everything. It was a step of faith, we are told. Just think for a moment of what that meant to Moses. It meant certainly all the resources of this world for his support, his maintenance. It meant more than that. It meant a great deal of luxury. Then it meant

position, influence, prestige. It meant many advantages. It meant security, reputation. On the other hand there were these oppressed Hebrews, driven, lashed, harassed, crushed, hated, loathed. By a sublime act of faith in God he forsook the one to take sides with the other. That is the faith.

Now comes a challenge. He went out and took sides with the Hebrews on the ground of that great renunciation, that great sacrifice, and the Hebrews did not appreciate it one little bit, had no room for him, and turned upon him. He would be the hero. They did not want him as their hero. He would be their champion. They did not want him as their champion. What an awful disillusionment! When you have made the full and utmost sacrifice in the interest of people and those people let you know very quickly that it is all wasted, they are not a bit interested in your heroics, in your visions, that they do not want you! He supposed that his brethren would have understood that God by his hand would deliver them, but it was a false supposition; they did not understand at all. That is coming up against things in a pretty terrible way. The very people for whom you give all that you have, and suffer the loss of all things, are the people who do not want you, and do not want your message, do not want what you have to give; they have no appreciation for that. You would lay down your life for your brethren in Christ, suffer for the Body's sake, and yet they suspect you, reject you, ostracize you, misunderstand, misconstrue, impute false motives. That is a fairly good challenge to faith, as to whether you are prepared to go on with this business.

It is a grand thing to see Moses fighting through for those people until he got them out. He fought for their deliverance even while they had no interest whatever in his scheme, in his enterprise and gave him no cooperation, but rather suspected him. He fought through and got them out. Relics of that old attitude are discovered in the wilderness again and again: "As for this Moses we know not what has become of him." Why have you brought us out into this wilderness to die? Were there not enough graves in Egypt? They had no personal love for Moses. It was all, after all, in their getting

out, a matter of their personal advantage. If Moses could get them an advantage, and really get it into their hands, all right they will accept Moses, but it does not matter what he goes through for the advantage. And yet this man goes on, steadfastly enduring. Faith through heart-rending disillusionment, faith that this is God's way, God's purpose, God's intention. The challenge to faith comes very often along the line of the romance of things being altogether upset and discovering that those people whom you dressed up with such sentiments, that they would devote themselves to you and to your cause — if only you allied yourself with them, do no such thing. All your sentimental thoughts of these people all fade away; it is all an imaginary thing, and the real naked facts are that you are dealing with gross flesh which is hard to win over to God and the things of God, and because you bring them up against challenges you become the object of their dislike. These are real factors in the work of God. If Moses had been energized by anything less than a mighty faith, he would have washed his hands of the whole lot of them and said, They are not worth the sacrifice! and the devil would have scored.

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." Faith and fear never do go together. They are mutually exclusive. If Moses had feared the wrath of the king then he would have had no faith in God. Having faith in God meant that he feared not the wrath of the king, for "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." If he had seen the king he would not have endured. It is always like that. If we see the things seen, nine times out of ten we shall go down, but if we see the unseen things we endure. I am not absolutely certain as to what this verse refers to. The old expositors used to apply it to the day when he fled from Egypt, but there it says distinctly that he was afraid and that he fled in fear. I think it is more likely related to that day towards the end of the judgements when Pharaoh in great wrath ordered him out and said: Depart! Go! Let me see your face no more! And Moses, not fearing the wrath of the king said: "I will see thy face again no more." All right, I leave you, and you shall not see my face again!' There is no fear of his

wrath, leaving him abandoned to his fate. Whatever it was, we take it that in principle, at the heart of things, there is no contradiction in Scripture, and the point is that it was his faith which triumphed over fear, and it was seeing Him who is invisible which made him bold in the presence of him who was visible.

"By faith he instituted the Passover" (RV). Now we come right back to this threefold reference to the faith of Moses to see a further inclusive reaction. He has made the great renunciation. He has met the cost and has gone through. He has gone on in faith to the final issue. He has instituted the Passover by faith, putting his entire confidence in the blood as victory over the death and him that had the power of death. Faith has gone through to complete victory, takes its position in a full and final victory. Will it meet no more challenges? It is most remarkable that not long afterwards he, with the whole host, stands against a locked door of the Red Sea with no way out and the wrath of the king behind, the fury of the oppressor on his track. It looks, on the face of it, like a direct contradiction to every step that he has taken in faith. Now if Pharaoh overtakes and overcomes, his renunciations fail, his courage of faith is proved false, his faith in the power of the blood is proved false, the whole of his faith on every point is proved to be false. It is all gathered up into one inclusive test at the Red Sea. "By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land"! Triumph on every point.

Here is the challenge. It seems to me that as we go on with the Lord faith's tests become so severe as to touch almost everything in our whole life, to raise a question about the whole of the past. It is not just the last thing that we did, but everything leading up to it. There is a question raised by the devil about it now in a big, inclusive test. It looks as though almost step by step we were being led into a trap thinking we were being led by God, and the trap is an inclusive trap. The whole of our life in relation to God is gathered up in this one big trap that we seem to have been led into step by step, thinking that we were in the will of God. At that point faith rises to tremendous heights. It is not faith now upon a point, it is a faith which covers everything, and embraces and justifies

everything. You never do move in faith without the enemy coming in with a challenge and raising a question about whether you were right, after all, in doing the will of God as you thought. We never get far beyond a step of faith or an attitude of faith without having to question the whole thing. We are forced into a position in which we have plenty of room for question, to question our steps, but faith has not only to take a step but also to repudiate the challenge. Faith is established, not by our taking a step in faith, but by our standing on the ground which we have taken when everything challenges that ground. Faith's victory is not always that we adopt a course of faith, but it is in our remaining victor on the ground when all the hosts of hell assail with their fiery darts to say we are wrong.

That is where the passage in Ephesians comes in. "Stand ... withstand ... having done all, remain victor ...". Literally the words are "remain victor on the field". It is one thing to stand; it is another thing to withstand; and then it is a still further thing to remain standing. Faith calls for the stand, faith calls for the withstanding, and faith calls for the remaining standing.

## THREE PILLARS OF FAITH

We are thinking of faith at this time mainly in connection with our life in relation to the Lord, and all that it means, and all that it requires, and our relationship with the divine purpose. These two, of course, must not be separated. They are one, for our union with the Lord is unto His purpose. And yet they are two phases of one thing. There is the personal walk with the Lord, which is a walk and a life of faith in all its elements. Everything which has to do with our going on with the Lord in the growing knowledge of Him, in the development of our spiritual lives: all this is a matter of faith. And, on the other hand, there is the more active feature or character of our lives with the Lord as we are workers together with Him concerning His purpose. Usually we call that "service". Unfortunately service has become in many minds something rather set and related to certain forms of expression. I think the word "vocation" would be very much better.

As we see this relationship with the Lord in His Word in life and in purpose, we see that there are at least these three things which undergird its faith, which are the pillars of its faith.

## 1. The exaltation of the Lord

As far as I can see everything begins with that. There will be no triumphant living, and there will be no triumphant serving apart from a recognition and realisation that the Lord is exalted, that the Lord is on the throne. The prophet Isaiah brings out this first great factor in a life association with the Lord and His purpose, and

it is presented to us in the portion of his prophesy so well known, marking chapter six: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." "I saw the Lord, high and lifted up"! That is the key to everything. Victory is bound up with that primarily. The Lord's commission to His disciples was based upon that: "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye, therefore ...". When Stephen was put to the final test, the supreme test, he triumphed on that: "I saw the heaven opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." When Paul was called into relationship with Christ for life and apostleship, for his great vocation, it was all founded upon that. He saw the Lord exalted, Jesus in the glory. When the apostle would seek to save a widespread company of believers from a vital backward step into mere symbols, types, pictures, illustrations, away from the realities, he based the whole of his mighty appeal upon: "... we see ... Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9).

Isaiah won through; Stephen won through; Paul won through; and all who have ever won through have won through by a faith which was first of all and above all supported by the exaltation of the Lord, resting upon the fact that the Lord is the Lord, high and lifted up over all, blessed for ever.

That is simple. That is not fresh information, but it is as well for us to know that upon which we proceed from this time, and it has to be settled in our hearts. There are other times when it is not quite so easy to rest our faith implicitly upon the fact that the Lord is on the throne, the Lord reigns. That is the first pillar of faith. Faith cannot be sustained apart from that. Faith will crash if that pillar is not erected and established.

## 2. The sovereign providence of the Lord

If you like to make two words of it, instead of a compound word, say the sovereignty and the providence of the Lord. Jeremiah, as among the prophets, brings this into view. "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee I knew thee, before

thou camest forth I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations." That is sovereignty. "Then said I, Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:4-8). That is the providence. The sovereignty is in the Lord choosing whom He will. The providence is the Lord choosing that which men would never choose and equipping those who are naturally unequipped.

This is developed in a statement familiar to us in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. "God hath chosen the weak things of this world ... the foolish things ... the base things, and the things which are not." That is sovereign-providence.

Go back to Moses, as another illustration. "Come now and I will send thee", said the Lord. Moses objected. "I am not eloquent." The Lord said, "Who made man's mouth?" (Ex. 4:11). You are not eloquent! I do not say you are, but if your mouth is not eloquent, I made it, and I have chosen an ineloquent mouth in order that what comes out of it shall not be man's eloquence but My Word! Man's eloquence very often gets in the way of God's Word. There is a great peril, a tremendous snare, about natural eloquence. It may not all be to the good to have natural facility of speech. It may be very much to the glory of God if the Lord puts a word into the mouth of one who is naturally hesitating, without the gift of language. There is sovereignty even in a mouth made without ability to speak for God themselves, when He puts His word into that, and takes up that one and provides what is necessary for the fulfilment of the ministry. That is providence allied to sovereignty. "Say not, I am a child." Do not stand on that ground in your objection. I know exactly what you are. I know you are a child. Nevertheless I have chosen you. Before you were born, I chose you, in sovereignty I chose you, and now, being what you are, I equip in providence.

You remember what was said of the twelve. "They took note of them that they were ignorant and unlearned." We read that

they were all amazed and astonished, absolutely defeated in every attempt to explain this thing on natural grounds. That is sovereign-providence. That is a pillar of faith, and faith has to rest upon the sovereign-providence of the Lord. You and I may very often have complained, and even fretted over the lack of natural equipment for the work to which God has called us, and we may have told the Lord He had made a mistake and chosen the wrong man or the wrong woman. He needed someone with better equipment than we have. Well, if the Lord has called, if we know after all argument that we are where we are not by our own choice or forcing in or persistence, but because it is the Lord Who has done it, we have to hand over all those other elements to the Lord and say, Lord, You know what You have chosen in your sovereignty, and You must make provision accordingly! Faith must settle it that while we keep within our measure and do not try to do the thing the Lord has never called us to, the Lord sovereignly will provide unto the fulfilment of all that to which He has called us. We shall have to settle that. I do not know whether you have had any controversy with the Lord on that ground. I know I have told the Lord scores of times that He had the wrong man, He had made a tremendous mistake, and it was So-and-so He needed for the work that I was attempting to do. The Lord has simply made it perfectly clear to me that if I am going to stand on that ground there will be a standstill. The Lord says, If you make that the ground, the criterion, I cannot go on! Are you prepared to trust Me with what you are, or what you are not, and let Me meet all the demands? When faith settles that matter and rests upon the sovereign-providence of God then the Lord goes on, and we make wonderful discoveries.

## 3. The energy of the Lord

Among the prophets Ezekiel is the one who brings this into view. You cannot get away from the element of energy in Ezekiel's prophesies. You find it is tremendously bound up with those prophesies. The first chapter is a chapter of tremendous energy. Here

are these wheels, and eyes, and wings, and the spirit, and there is a tremendous, irresistible straight forward drive, and on the basis of that there comes the commission. "And He said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet" (Ezek. 1:1,2). That is not a man on his back; that is not a man prostrate; and yet this is not a man standing in his own energy, his own self-sufficiency; it is a man on his feet by the energy of the Lord. And when he got there, on his feet by divine energy, the Lord said: "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to nations that are rebellious, which have rebelled against me: ... thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious house), yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them" (Ezek. 2:3-5). From that point it is tremendous energy. Ezekiel has to rest all the way through upon the energies of the Lord.

We know how true it was in other cases among the Lord's servants. Look at Paul. How often he uses the very word energy, translated in our English version "work" or "works" or "worketh". "It is God that worketh in you ...". The Greek word is ἐνεργῶν, 'energon'. "It is God who energiseth in you both to will and to energise for His good pleasure, according to the power that worketh (or energiseth) in us." "Striving according to His energy which energiseth in me mightily". It is a worthwhile study to go through with that word. Paul rested his faith upon the energy of the Lord. But, of course, all those who have known the Lord truly have done so. I have no strength! I have no energy! Are we to stay there? Is that to be the end? If so, well, the measure of our effectiveness will be the measure of our energy; and yet if we have got energy of our own there will be very little real spiritual effectiveness. When we recognise that it is the Lord's energies which are the basis of all effectiveness in life and service then in weakness His strength is made perfect, and we proceed accordingly. We act upon that. We do not yield to how we feel, but we move in faith in the energy of the Lord. Then things beyond our imagination, beyond our ken, will be accomplished.

Take these three things with you. Go back to difficult places to live and serve. Set up your three pillars and let your faith rest heavily upon these things: the exaltation of the Lord, the sovereign-providences of the Lord, the energy of the Lord. You will overcome through faith. This is the basis of the faith which overcomes.

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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