

The Cross,
the Church,
and
the Kingdom
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Chapter 1 - The Ultimate Meaning of the Cross

"...this mind... which was... in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even to death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:5-11).

I feel that there is one big question which it is imperative that the Lord's people should face in these days, and if we can answer that question in a living way and enter livingly into the answer, very great spiritual values will be secured. The question is this - What has God revealed as His supreme objective resultant from the Cross of Christ? The question which springs out of that is - how has God revealed that the objective shall be secured and expressed? Probably it will be that subsidiary question which will occupy us largely in these meditations, leading to the answer to the main question.

As we approach this main question, we may do so by a series of enquiries. Is the supreme outcome of the Cross of Christ found in there being so many Christians enjoying the knowledge that they are saved?

Further, is it found in so many saved people seeking to get other people to the same position – enjoying the fact of being saved?

Further, is the answer found in having so many saved Christians mainly occupied with their own sanctification, the way of victory, and a fuller life? And, yet again, is it to have so many Christians devoting themselves to the knowledge of deeper things, the deeper things of God? And if we put all the four together, have we got the objective, that is, God's full objective, in the Cross of Christ? All the things that I have mentioned certainly are part of it; but when we have them all – salvation, soul-winning, sanctification, education - does it end there? Are any, or all, of these the end? Will that satisfy God? Will that fill up

His desire and expectation and be an adequate outcome of Calvary?

Well, that is what we are going to look at, as the Lord enables.

The circle drawn by all the things which we have just mentioned may still be a limited circle in two respects.

Firstly, all that may still resolve itself into something personal - my salvation, my service, my sanctification, my spiritual education.

Secondly, it may all resolve itself into something very largely, if not entirely, earthly, having to do with life here on this earth - being saved, getting others saved, growing in grace, increasing in spiritual knowledge. It may be quite an earthly thing, although, of course, leading to heaven and having heaven ultimately in view. But is not that, after all, still a circumscribed position? Again, does it represent all the meaning of the Cross?

Now all of these phases that I have mentioned are seen in the New Testament. Indeed, in a certain sense, we may say that the New Testament in sections deals with these respectively. Romans may, in the main, deal with the first - our salvation. Corinthians may deal with the second - our sanctification. The New Testament does definitely provide for each of these in quite a specific and definite way, but what we ought to recognise is this, that we can never, by means of any one section of the Word of God, see the whole purpose of God. We need all the Word of God for all the purpose of God.

A People to Express Christ's Lordship

So when we come really to the Word, we find that the Cross as our basis and as our way leads on to these, but through them ever on and ever up to something much more than they are, either separately or collectively and inclusively, and it is that ultimate something which is the supreme objective resultant from the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

When I use that word 'ultimate,' I do not want to divert your mind from the present. I am not using it in the sense of afterward, final, in the sense of time; for that ultimate is now. God has shown that He would have a full vindication of the Cross of His Son now.

Let me stay for a moment for an extra word on what I have just said.

We Christians ought to be tremendously interested in our Christianity,

interested not merely as a mental matter, but as a heart matter; interested in heart really to discover where we are being led by the whole Word of God. We read the Bible; I suppose we read a few verses every day; some do a great deal more than that; but the Bible is the book of Christians, and we read it more or less. I wonder how many of us really do approach the Bible with this one heart enquiry - where is this leading? What is it all unto? This is not just something by the way in itself. There is something tremendous, something immense, involved. There is always a forward look, a prospect, something in view, something being pointed to, something toward which we are being urged, drawn on; and, putting it all together, where shall we arrive if we see what God has really put into this Word? How many of you do that? If we do approach the Word of God with that spirit - with that enquiry coming from our hearts, that is, born of the very love which has been begotten in us by the love of God: if we are not merely interested in Christianity as our religion but as a heart relationship with the Lord for His satisfaction - if we approach the Bible like that, desiring to know what it is His heart is set upon, and therefore what our hearts ought to be set upon, and if we take the Cross of the Lord Jesus as the key to it all, we shall find ourselves led to some very great conclusions, a very great position.

Can we try - for it will be no more than an endeavour - to set down in a mere phrase what that ultimate something is? May I put it in this way? The ultimate is shown to be the supreme lordship and headship of Christ expressed and manifested in the whole cosmic realm in and by a body of Christians in whom the Divine meaning of the Cross is an experimental reality.

A Conscious Spiritual Relationship, the Fruit of the Cross

Breaking that up further, what does it amount to? Well, in other words it is this. Firstly, believers living in a conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross. That is the first fragment - a conscious spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross. It cannot be anything but a spiritual relationship. We cannot live in an actual, personal, physical, conscious relationship with all believers. We do not

know them. We know but a mere fragment of all those who exist. We cannot organise this thing, bring it within the compass of an organisation, a society, or anything of that kind. It can only be a spiritual relationship, but it can be a conscious spiritual relationship. That it is spiritual does not mean that it has to be unconscious, abstract, nebulous, imaginary, something somewhere but undefined. No; a personal, conscious, spiritual relationship with all believers; though they may be scattered to the ends of the earth, yet something has been done by the Holy Spirit which has constituted those concerned people of a related consciousness with all other believers. That is absolutely essential to the ultimate – the expression of the lordship and headship of Jesus Christ. That is no abstract, ethereal thing. That is very positive and very practical, and if the whole cosmic realm is to feel the impact of that lordship, this conscious, spiritual relationship is absolutely essential.

All those powers which occupy that cosmic realm, which have their government there, have no interest in, or concern with, doctrines of Christian unity; but they have a great deal of interest in actual, spiritual relatedness; so much so, that they have never ceased from the day of Pentecost, to make it one of their primary objectives to divide the people of God in their spiritual consciousness. If they cannot get in between them in other ways, they will try to set up a sense of distance, of unrelatedness or disturbed relatedness, because of the tremendous importance of this matter of a living, practical, real, conscious, spiritual relationship between the people of God - something more than mechanical and organised, something spiritual. Then, we spoke of this relatedness as being the fruit of the Cross, because this can never be brought about apart from all the tremendous meaning of the Cross of the Lord Jesus in the realm which is now rent and torn and shattered to fragments so far as spiritual relatedness is concerned. This is a universe which has been broken to pieces, endless pieces. Its harmony and unity have been completely disrupted, and those cosmic powers are the forces which have done it, and are doing it. That hardly needs to be argued. We know it within ourselves - the battle for forbearance, for long-suffering, for

endurance, for kindness, for patience, for love, for consideration - all those are very practical matters in the Christian life. Look at the way this breaking up is at work, these endless discords in the whole creation, in the whole universe. There is nothing to meet that but the Cross of the Lord Jesus; and that is one of the primary meanings of the Cross to which we are getting at this time - a people in a living, conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross in them and in this universe. That is why we read those words in Philippians. The goal is His absolute sovereign lordship and headship. How do you reach it? "Have this mind in you..." And what is the contextual implication and application? "I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2). "Have this mind..." - one mind intervening to overcome two conflicting minds, and the only mind that will do it is the mind of Him Who went to the Cross and let go His own personal and individual position and rights for the sake of others. The Cross alone will meet this situation. Yes, the need is for believers living in a conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross.

A Spiritual Position Above this Earth

Secondly, the need is for believers as so related occupying a spiritual position above this earth; being here, and yet with a vast gap spiritually between them and what is here - and that includes what is here on this earth religiously, just as much as in other ways; it is possible to be religiously on and of the earth, in a religious way touching the earth. You understand that when I say 'touching the earth' I am not talking about touching the ground physically, but touching that realm in which a curse resides. There is a spiritual feature and factor - it has been cursed. Is that too strong? We could spend an hour or two in showing how true, that is. The mark of the curse is just this, that it does not matter how far men seem to advance and develop and produce and achieve; running alongside of every 'advance' (?), and keeping pace with everything that is called progress, every achievement, every invention, every production, there is the element of a curse which will turn that against man for his own

undoing. The very thing that he discovers, invents, produces, for the good of the world, turns out for the world's destruction. In the day in which we live we are faced with the fullest development of that principle of the curse that has been known in the history of this universe. When men make such a marvellous discovery and achieve such a marvellous thing that in a split second they can wipe out tens of thousands of people from the earth with one experiment, what are they going to do when they let loose the developed thing? Invention? Progress? Oh no, there is a curse attached to everything in this creation. Man's undoing is found in his own ingenuity. But that is a very intense and strong aspect and expression of this principle. This earthliness has become very refined in many respects; very religious; but still earthly, still something tied down here with its expectations, hopes and enterprises all here. It is not necessary, I think, to follow that unpleasant line very much farther.

But to return to this second fragment of the general presentation - we are thinking of believers living in a conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross, occupying a spiritual position above this earth, and who are concerned with earthly things only so far as those things relate to higher interests, heavenly purposes. They are a people living in the realm described in that unique phrase of the Apostle Paul "in the heavenlies in Christ"; a heavenly people; which means much more, of course, than we are saying at the moment.

Ever-Increasing Spiritual Fullness

Thirdly, the need is for believers who, because of this living, conscious, spiritual relationship, the fruit of the Cross, and because of this spiritual position above the earth, are characterised by ever-increasing spiritual fulness; for when the Lord gets people like that and in that position there is no stagnation, no limitation. There is constant, increasing, spiritual fulness. They have resources, and they have plenty, and far more than they can consume on themselves. That is not fiction, that is fact. The whole Word of God bears down on this, that the Divine thought is also a thought of fulness. Wherever you find God reaching His end, it is all by way of fulness. Is it the tabernacle or

the temple? - then it is filled with His glory. Is it the river of God? - it is full of water. Is it the trees of the Lord? - they are full of sap. Is it the waterpots? - they are filled to the brim. Is it the Church? - then it is "the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). So we could go on. The Divine thought is always along the line of fulness. And I said, this is not ultimate in time, this is for now - a people who have more than the ordinary, more than just enough to make ends meet or hardly that. The fulness of Christ - that is God's end by way of the Cross, and to be known now.

The Rule of the Heavens Expressed

Then fourthly, and finally for the moment, there is need of believers who, because of the three things already mentioned, are showing that the kingdom of the heavens is a spiritual reality and who are extending its range actually - showing that the heavens do rule, and that they rule through the medium and by the instrumentality of a people, a heavenly people, after this kind. The bringing of the impact of that supreme rule of the heavens to bear on the cosmic forces of this universe is the vocation of the Church of which we are speaking, of a people like this; and that is the meaning of the Cross ultimately. Where does the Cross lead to? Your salvation, my salvation? Yes, of course. Is that all? And then that I should be busy to get other people into that position? Oh, yes, of course, without question. And then that you and I should be growing in grace progressively, in sanctification, being conformed to the image of His Son? Oft yes, a hundred times yes, without any question. And that we should be increasing in the knowledge of Him, growing in our apprehension of the things of God, that our spiritual education should go on uninterruptedly? Yes, all that is in the will of God. But is that, or are all those things put together, the end? No, the end of the Cross is that the whole realm of evil spiritual powers and intelligences should meet the impact of all that - that there should be a practical registration of it all objectively. I said that this can all be personal after all - my salvation, your salvation; my sanctification, your sanctification; my life of victory, your life of victory; my education, your education. It can all be very largely

individual and personal, and it can all be something here, so that people gather into little groups on the subject of sanctification, others on spiritual education, others on soul winning. Oh no, that is not God's meaning ultimately in the Cross of the Lord Jesus; but He intends that by all those means, along all those lines, this end should be reached - that the whole system of darkness and evil and wickedness should be cast down and brought into subjection to the absolute lordship and headship of Jesus Christ; that every knee should bow to Him. And that should have a very real beginning now where you and I are concerned in this spiritual relationship. It should be a practical thing now, extending and expanding, so that this kingdom of the heavens, expressed through this people, should be registering itself and occupying widening territory so that the power and dominion and evil of the Evil One is being more and more limited.

That is the thing for which the Cross of Christ really stands. It brings in the individuals in every stage and phase of the spiritual life, but it goes beyond. It is this cosmic impact that is the ultimate justification of the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

The Needed Discipline of the Cross

Well, that is a challenge to us. At the outset I said that we, as the Lord's people, have to face a big question and I want to say again I do not think it is the question merely of our personal salvation. And it is not just the question of our being more zealous soul-winners. With us it should have become a reality long ago that there is a deep and earnest concern in our hearts for the salvation of others. It is not a question merely of our personal holiness. God forbid that we should overlook any necessities in that direction, that we should be closing our eyes to sins and defects in the spiritual life; but even so, there is something greater than that in view. And as for our seeking to know the deeper things of God, what shall we say about that if it is not going to work out somehow in this realm where we are conscious of the activities of spiritual forces, in this realm into which we have to move - some in this country and some in other countries - where the main problem is not flesh and blood but principalities and powers, the dark

things of this universe, those awful, sinful, evil forces which are at work? If we do not reach out to that our quest has failed and will leave much to be desired. That is the big issue. What has God revealed as the supreme result of the Cross of Christ? It is that His Son should be in the place of supreme and absolute sovereign headship in this universe, which will necessitate the deposing of every other sovereignty and name and authority. And the Word of God says that that is going to be done by that self-same Cross having been wrought in a body of Christians to bring them to the place where through them, because in them, that sovereignty, that headship, has been established.

It is a big matter, and it involves us in something very real in the way of spiritual discipline. You cannot go to college or institute to learn that. You cannot get that by conferences and meetings. You cannot get that along any academic lines. This involves us in a very real transaction with the Lord that that Cross, with all that He means by it, shall really do its work in us; and He has endless ways of doing it. The very nature of the work of the Cross involves this, that its operation will always be along the line that we do not like, that we would never choose. If we could have the Cross adjusted to our situation, it would be a very easy Cross. But no; it will always go against the grain; that is the nature of it. It will always call for that which we would never choose. When the Lord leads us on to consider the way that He has indicated, the way for reaching His end, we shall come up against those things. We shall then see that this whole cosmic battle has its centre in us by nature, and it has got to be settled there, at the citadel of the individual's being; and the citadel is the will. Oh, it is one thing to talk about cosmic warfare, about authority over the powers of darkness! Looking out into the battle, anybody who has any experience does not talk lightly about that. They talk very carefully and very prayerfully; for the whole thing, after all, is not outside us, it is in us, it begins in us. It is a matter of your will and my will. The dethronement of Satan and of all his mighty kingdom was accomplished by the will of one Man being utterly in subjection to His Father, and so far as He Himself is concerned He has left the

enemy completely worsted and cast out. He has left the enemy in being, not annihilated, in order to bring us to the same place as He Himself has come to, and it will be along exactly the same lines - the battle of the will, taken up on countless points, until Satan no longer has any place or ground in our will, and he is undone. If the Lord will, we will follow that out more closely later on.

You see the big question. Oh, it is a big question! For my own part, though I have been convinced about this matter for years I have never been more strongly convinced than I am today that the one need is for a people to rise up in virtue of an in-wrought work of the Cross to meet these evil forces which are against the purpose of God. May the Lord produce such a people in part, though it may be a small part, through these meditations.

Chapter 2 - The Spiritual Resources of the Church for its Heavenly Mission

"But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:16-19).

A Spiritual Challenge to be Answered

There is a challenge in this present time which is, perhaps, more acute and serious than at any other time in the history of this world. No doubt in the early days of the Church the challenge was very strong, but then the surface of the earth invaded by the Gospel was very small compared with the range in our time, and in many other ways things were far less developed then than they are now. The development of the centuries has provided so very much more of ground and means for the operation of the kingdom of darkness in relation to this world, and that challenge of the kingdom of evil is very, very serious and intense in our time. In many ways the Church of God is aware of it - perhaps not completely conscious of the cause or the reason, but aware of the fact that she is being stifled, resisted, in a very large degree nullified; made aware of a certain impotence and ineffectiveness and of the absence of authority and power to meet a spiritual situation which is becoming so intense. I say that is a challenge of this present time which does threaten to make the Church a thing which, speaking comparatively, is not to be taken very seriously. The world can pass on and ignore her, and situations can arise here and there with which she cannot cope, before which she is impotent and helpless - and knows it.

That challenge represents a need, and, while we have not the conceit to imagine that that need can be met by us, yet it behooves us to face the challenge and consider the need, and if God will take up the weak and the small and make them to count for something far, far beyond what they would do naturally, then there may be possibilities where we are concerned, if we really seriously face this matter before God.

We have spoken of a spiritual situation, and it is not necessary, I think, to say to you that, while we are very conscious that the temporal situation is increasingly difficult for the work of God, behind all the external difficulties is a spiritual rulership. The things seen are, after all, only the foreground, the stage, of something far greater behind. "World rulers of this darkness" is no meaningless phrase. It is there that the trouble lies, and, until there is in existence that which can touch things there with the authority of Christ, the situation for the Church is hopeless. We can recite so glibly - it is the slogan of all missionary enterprise - "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go you therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." I think the emphasis, at any rate the deduction in practice, is mainly on "Go you into all the world and preach the gospel," and not on "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." "Go you therefore..."; the word "therefore" has not been given and is not given its real and sufficient place. It is the link between the undertaking and the "all authority" vested in the Lord Jesus. And as for the Church standing in the good and value of that "all authority" well, it does not say much for the authority if the present impact of the Church is the standard of judging it. It is that that constitutes the urgency of this present time.

The Challenge Answered in a Spiritual People

Now, having indicated again that this whole thing is a spiritual matter to be fought out in the spiritual realm, the work of God must in consequence be seen in the spiritual realm before there can be any meeting of the temporal situation and overcoming it. We are brought right here to the heart of things. We have spoken in our previous meditation of a body of Christians, of a certain kind, in a certain position, doing a certain work. What do we mean by that? Well, to use mere words is not necessarily helpful. We must explain our words. If we say a spiritual people, in spiritual relatedness, occupying a spiritual position, pre-eminently meeting spiritual forces to their overthrow, that word 'spiritual' eludes us at once. What does it amount to in practical outworking?

The Marks of a Spiritual People

(a) Living by Divine, Not Natural, Life

Well, firstly, it means that the life of such people must be spiritual life. In the work of God there can be, and often is, the projecting of a great deal of natural life-force. You may call it by different terms - zeal, enthusiasm, drive, energy, any such word to describe putting yourself into the thing with all your might to make it go. So, by this zest, by this intensity, by this strength, you get the work of God done. Now, it is not that that I am talking about. If this thing is going to be done in the spiritual realm, it is only going to be done by spiritual life, and spiritual life is something altogether different from natural life. As we are basing everything on the Cross, allowing the Cross to be our basis and our interpretation, it is just here that the great cleavage is made, the great difference is recognised, the great turnover takes place. At the Cross, so far as spiritual things are concerned, all natural life ends; there, all natural energy, as capable of producing any spiritual effect, is brought to an end, is at a discount. Even natural physical life, energy, strength, as producing anything spiritual in effect, counts for nothing. When you are coming into touch with spiritual forces, what is the good of muscular or constitutional strength in the physical, natural realm? Those forces have only to touch the strongest body and it will be broken. So you find in the New Testament that all counting on the energy, the capability, the strength of the natural life, is set aside, and the men concerned are brought to an end of that and made to know that their spiritual work, their spiritual accountability, takes its rise from Divine life even for the body, so that, under the hand of God, they come to the place where, unless Divine life is administered even to their physical bodies - strong as they have been physically and constitutionally before - they cannot go on, they are at an end. Paul is a great outstanding example of that. The others were there too. Peter came to his crisis on that.

He was very sure of himself and what he could do, how far he could go, what he could go through and endure; but he had to come, by means of the Cross, in the very presence of the Cross, to the place

where he recognised that he could never get through on that. The words of the Lord to him had an immediate meaning - "You canst not follow me now; but you shall follow afterwards" (John 13:36); not 'hereafter,' that is, in the distant Hereafter, in the next life, but "afterwards." After what? - after you have learned this lesson of the utter impotence of human life, and the absolute necessity and potency of Divine life, even in the physical realm.

So that one of the great lessons that this people must learn experimentally is to know how to live by Divine life; and when we get on to that basis all issues are taken out of the hands of natural eventualities. Here is Saul of Tarsus, a man with tremendous force and seemingly great powers of endurance physically, a man of very great natural life - what we should call soul-force. What did the Lord do with him? He brought him to the place where he despaired of life in order that he might not trust in himself, but in God Who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:9). In so describing his experience he simply intimates - 'Well, naturally I am a dead man, the sentence of death is passed on me.' But here is this man going on - a dead man going on. And we do not find him at the last saying, 'I am now going to be executed, they are now going to finish me, I have got to give in this time.' No! The issue is not with emperors or governments or persecutors. He is going to finish his course - not to have it cut short; no 'broken column' here; he is going to finish his course, keeping the faith to the last moment (2 Tim. 4:7); not having to give up because of circumstances, but, as he puts it in another place, he will offer himself up as a libation (Phil. 2:17). Is he not in exactly the same position as his Lord, Who said of His own life, "No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father" (John 10:18). It is not with the High Priest, it is not with the Jewish nation, it is not with anybody else - it is with Him to say when He will die. They said, "Not during the feast." He said, in effect, 'Yes, during the feast; it shall be on the day of the Passover'; and it was.

Authority in Christ, then, is first of all in terms of life. If there is going to be this impact of the Divine authority on the spiritual kingdom of

evil and death, the people through whom the impact is going to be registered will have to come on to this basis where, even for their very physical life, they have to know the life of God, to know how to draw life from God and how to minister spiritual, Divine life to one another. Divine life is a tremendous thing, and if we are living by it we are not going to die because we are old. We are not going to die because nature says so, or the doctor says so! We are going to die when the Lord says so! And when the Lord has decided that Divine life is no longer required for the carrying on of His work through us, then we shall enter into life still more abundant, and it will not be death. That is the authority of Christ in the universe where death is the master opposing power. Such a people must know this.

To be brought there is not just teaching; this is grim, desperate business. It meets with a challenge, and a challenge from no less a realm than the whole hierarchy of Satan. The answer to that challenge has to come along the line of Divine life known by us for spirit and soul and body.

The Challenge to Life Must be Met Corporately

And how corporate a matter that is! I am talking about a people. Yes, it becomes individual; there has to be an individual exercise and experience; an individual knowledge and application and appropriation; but it is something more than individual. In that battle, every individual needs the cooperation and the encompassing of the Church. Woe betide the poor individual, whoever he or she may be, who gets out into that realm of spiritual conflict without the encompassing of the saints!

So this matter of triumph in the spiritual realm is a Church matter, and when I say 'a Church matter,' I mean it is a corporate matter. The Church may be indicated and implied by two or three in the Name of the Lord, but it must be that at least to minister to one another. Oh, if the Church more largely knew about that and stood right into it, what a lot of tragedies would never take place that are taking place! What a lot of people would be spared to the work of God who are being put out! What a lot of retirements from the work would never take place!

Do they represent the triumph of the enemy? Everyone who has to give up for want of Divine life - is that the triumph of the enemy? That is what I mean by spiritual people in a spiritual position meeting spiritual forces - firstly, knowing spiritual life (that is, Divine life) for spirit, the inner man: for soul, for mind: yes, and for body.

Natural Weakness Essential to Spiritual Power

Here is the great paradox of Christianity - "when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). "My power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). Divine life does not make of us Samsons in a literal, physical sense, so that our muscles develop, our biceps become abnormal, and all that sort of thing. Rather, in weakness there is something the withdrawal of which would mean that the frail vessel would crumple up and fade out very soon. There is something there which is not natural; it is the very life of God. Everything has to be accounted for on that basis. Let me add a word in order to guard against misunderstanding or misapprehension. I am not saying that you are wrong to be healthy, or even to be physically strong. I am not suggesting that you go to the Lord and ask Him to take your health and strength away. But I have said that if that is the basis on which you are working, if it is on that that you are counting for spiritual effectiveness, you are wrong; it does not count at all. You may be healthy and strong, but you need to recognise that it is not that that will see this work done, but your necessity is as great in the matter of spiritual Divine life as that of the weakest, the most helpless. There may be a place for your health and strength, but something more than that is needed to do the work in the spiritual realm.

(b) Spiritual Knowledge of the Lord by Revelation, Not Intellectual
The same thing holds good in the matter of spiritual knowledge. No amount of natural, accumulated, studied knowledge can touch spiritual things. There is a value in Bible study, there is a value in accumulating knowledge of things in relation to God's Word and God's work. Oh, do not despise that and do not let anything I say turn you aside from diligence in that; but, after all, though you have a vast

amount of such knowledge: though you know your Bible throughout: though you be what is called a Bible scholar: all that, at its fullest, stops short of spiritual effectiveness. It does not matter how much of that you have: when it comes to the question of registering on those spiritual intelligences, there is no natural knowledge that can touch them. You will never overpower the forces of darkness with natural intelligence and accumulated information, however great it is.

Spiritual knowledge is of another kind. You may have the intellectual - I say, do not despise it - but you must recognise the need of something extra.

Yes, I know the Bible in a way: that is, I know what is here in actual words and sentences and paragraphs; but that will get me nowhere when I come to deal with spiritual things. I have got to have something extra to that - a spiritual understanding, spiritual knowledge. Something has got to come from God by way of illumination and revelation into my own heart concerning God's thoughts in this Book. How can we explain that? It is so difficult, but there it is - perhaps you understand what I mean. Spiritual knowledge is of another order. It is only God Who knows in the way that can meet the spiritual intelligences.

So this people who count for something in that ultimate realm - that realm where there is the only true accountability - this people will have to be a people of spiritual knowledge and of spiritual understanding.

Paul prayed that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know..." (Eph. 1:17-18); and it is not without significance that that prayer for spiritual revelation and knowledge precedes what he writes concerning the wiles of the devil and "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers of this darkness" (Eph. 6:11,12). There is no training in any seminary or institution which can of itself equip you against the wiles of the devil. This requires spiritual training.

Spiritual Training Practical, Not Academic

Let me put here this parenthesis. Some of you who read this may be concerned about your life, your future, and you are wondering whether the Lord would lead you into His service. Some of you are definitely feeling that He will. The question in your mind is, how will you get your training, what about your preparation? Let me say this, that, while sound instruction in the Word of God will be a necessary foundation, do not think that that alone is your training for the work of God. That is not an adequate training, or qualification. The work of God lies in a realm where, though you may have all that, you may be at a discount altogether; you may be frustrated, broken, defeated, as many servants of God are today because they have not got the spiritual goods to meet the situation. Your really vital training will be practical, in the spiritual realm. That is, the Lord will deal with you in such a way as to develop you as spiritual men and women who know spiritual life and have spiritual knowledge, and that will only come by a very practical handling of your life on the basis of the Cross. There are many who are not willing to go through that kind of training. They will go to Bible studies, theological lectures, and all that kind of thing; they are ready for that, but they are not so ready to be put into situations where it is extremely difficult to live, to get on with other people, where you find you are rubbed up the wrong way all the time, and everything goes against the grain. In such circumstances the one drive on you and the one longing of your soul is to get out of it, to run away and find some other place, some other circumstances; and yet to do so would be to take yourself right out of the hands of God. To remain in His hands means to stay in that situation until the Cross has done its work and you are glad to be there, you are triumphant there, you have gained the ascendancy spiritually there, and the power of the enemy over you there has been broken. That is your training for the work of God. God can put you anywhere if He has you like that, and you will count; but all the rest may be nothing without it.

(c) Spiritual Influence - the Impact of Christ, Not of People

Then this people must be characterised by spiritual influence. What

do we mean by that? Well, we know what we mean when we speak of influential persons. For some reason or other, they are people who count. It may be their strong personality, their personal aggressiveness, their initiative, their conspicuous ability, either inbred or acquired. They are not nonentities; they are positives, not negatives. A lot of that kind of influence has been brought into the work of God, and people have been adjudged influential in the things of the kingdom of God very largely because of this or that natural characteristic, natural acquirement or natural inborn qualities. Now you may be a giant in natural influence, and yet in the spiritual realm the powers of darkness may laugh at you. Your stature is nothing there, your natural measurement means nothing to them. Your accountability in that realm will be just the measure of your spiritual life; your influence in the spiritual realm, with God, with men, and over the powers of evil, will be spiritual or it will not be at all. So it comes to pass very often that the weak things, and the things which are not, are the very things with which the powers of darkness and men have to reckon, of which account has to be taken. It often happens that if you take stock of some believers you do not think very much of them; you would not give them a second thought; you would put them in the category of people who do not count. But somehow you cannot dismiss them like that. There is something there you cannot explain by their personality or lack of it, by their physical presence, by their training. There is no ground on which you can explain this, and yet you have to acknowledge that they count for something; it is spiritual influence. A people constituted like that are the only people to meet the emergency of this time. Such a people will be the instrument by which God will vindicate the Cross of Christ. But what does it amount to? To this - everything with such a people has to be attributed to the Lord.

That is it. What did we say that God has revealed to be the consummate issue from the Cross? It is this - Christ absolutely transcendent over all other powers, and that expressed in a people. Then so far as that people are concerned the way to this will be by emptying, emptying, emptying - that in all things He may have the pre-

eminence. It is the Lord Jesus and not the people that must be in evidence. The evil powers may say, 'Jesus I know, and His servant Paul I know, and that spiritual people I know; but as for you people of pomp and ceremony and natural development, who are you, what are you?'

I hope you are really seeing what the Lord is after. The Lord must be manifested in His universe by means of a people of this kind. The challenge comes to us - will we accept all that it means to be of such a kind?

Spirituality Inwrought by Discipline of Circumstances

Now I must add this before I close. What I have been saying may call for an adjustment or a re-adjustment to your circumstances on the part of many of you. You see, my dear friends, young, middle-aged or old - and let us rule out that 'old' in the light of what we have been saying - it may be that you are as much in 'a training college' now as ever you could be. Going to a seminary or institution would not of necessity add anything to your opportunities of being prepared for the work of the Lord. That comforts some of you, but it calls for adjustment. If you are in the hands of God, you are in the school of God.

What are you being taught, what are you learning, what is the meaning of it? Well, is it to know the Bible better as a book, and all kindred and associated subjects, or is it to know the Lord? Give me the man or woman who knows the Lord before you give me the one who knows all other things without that. Bible knowledge and all that kind of thing is a valuable, important, yes, in a sense, indispensable foundation and addition, but the thing is to know the Lord. And how will you know the Lord? - in the way in which I have been indicating: knowing Him as your life, knowing Him as your wisdom, knowing Him as your influence. Adjust to your circumstances, to your situation. If I were to appeal for young men and women to come to a course of training, and were to say, 'Now, we are starting a Bible Institute; will you give your lives to the Lord and come and be trained for His work?' I think there would be some who would respond and say, 'Yes, I am

going into training for the work of God.' If you are not already in training, you will never become so merely by going to any such Institute. Adjust to your present situation while it is the Lord's will for you to be in it. Adjust to it as you would to a training centre. Enter on it with a new adjustment as seriously as you would if you were giving notice at business and packing your bag and going into a Bible Institute. Take that attitude toward your present situation and know that, while you are there in His will, God will teach you Himself; and that is the thing that matters. He will teach you how to live by His life, how to know Him with spiritual understanding and knowledge, how to exercise and exert a spiritual influence. I am not saying, 'Do not raise the question as to whether the Lord, after a probation and a testing of that kind, is wanting you to move out more fully into His work.' It may be; but I think you see the point of this word. We have got to adjust ourselves to our whole life situation. Many of you could never depart from where you are; but that is your college, that is where you ought to be learning. But are you?

Or are you all the time wanting to get out, merely enduring it, putting up with it, saying, 'Here I am; I suppose I must stay till something else opens up.' What is your attitude? Look at those fellows who row in the boat-race. The time comes when they go into training and they do it with a mind, they do it thoroughly, they set themselves to it. They have one thing in view, and everything has to come into line with that - fitness to fulfil the task before them. We have to take that attitude toward life where we are in the will of God - 'This is a setting in which I am in training, and I set myself to secure all the values possible in this situation of knowing the Lord, proving the Lord, living on the Lord, that I may be qualified to meet the need of the hour' - and it is a great need, a very great emergency, which is confronting the people of God today.

Chapter 3 - The Kingdom of Satan and its Overthrow

"And Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore..." (Matt. 28:18-19).

"...and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:19-23).

This passage from Eph. 1 is a very wonderful enlargement of the brief statement of the Lord Jesus that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him. The Apostle makes this wonderful exposition of the Lord's own fragment, showing what fulness was included in that "all authority" - far above all principality, all power, all dominion, all names, all ages. That is the "all authority" in its range and compass and content. Then the Apostle says, in effect, that when the Lord Jesus said to His disciples "Go you therefore...." - 'for this reason, because of this, go ye' - that self-same fulness was gathered into Himself as head of the Church; that is, that the Church stands directly under all that fulness. It is intended to be mediated from the head to and through the members. We might well ask, in a sort of paraphrasing of the words of the Ethiopian addressed to Philip in the chariot - 'Speaks the Apostle of some other Church or of this one? To whom does that relate?' - for it is very difficult to see anything that corresponds to that in the Church that we know. Does that apply to some other entity, or does it apply to us? I say, there is a lot of room for asking that question in the light of how very far short of that comes the Church known to us. But, dear friends, the Church, in the mind of the Apostle Paul - the Church referred to by him there - is the Church into which you and I have been baptised in one Spirit, and that exceeding greatness of Divine Power is to usward who believe.

Well, that is only another way of bringing us straight up against the challenge and the need of this hour, the challenge to measure up, and to find out why the Church is so otherwise, and how it can be according to that declaration. We commenced our meditations with presenting ourselves with this question – What has God revealed as His supreme objective resultant from the Cross of Christ? and what we have just read and said is the answer - a Church corresponding to that description, a people answering to that presentation of the Divine mind. Such is what God has revealed to be the supreme outcome of the Cross - all fulness gathered into His Son as vitally and organically related to His Church, His Body, and that fulness in action; the exceeding greatness of His power in action in and through that Body in the whole cosmic realm.

At the close of our previous meditation we saw that God is really dealing with us with that end in view, and that we are to regard ourselves as being now in God's training-centre - in the place where, for the time being, His will has appointed us. Training-centres, from the Divine standpoint, are not institutions, nor theological seminaries, but where we are in the will of God - that is our training-centre; and we called on ourselves to adjust to that, with this mind, that here God has chosen to equip us for the greatest ministry to which mortals have ever been called - the expression of the exaltation and sovereign headship of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to follow that up for a little, resuming at that point concerning our equipment for this ministry along the line of personal spiritual experience, discipline, training - equipment for this great Divine purpose of expressing in this universe, and especially in the great realm of spiritual powers and intelligences, the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus, firstly in terms of Divine life triumphing in us over the death that is working in us and over our natural life; and secondly in terms of Divine knowledge greater than any other kind of knowledge - the only kind of knowledge that can undo and set aside the far-reaching and deep-rooted deception of the false knowledge which Satan succeeded in getting the race to take hold of at the beginning; and then thirdly, in terms of spiritual influence - the registration of

something which is not to be accounted for by any human magnetism or personal impress or anything at all that belongs to man or woman - a spiritual, Divine influence.

These are the things which constitute the curriculum of the spiritual training which God has undertaken to accomplish in you and in me with a view to meeting that spiritual realm, and that is the service, above all other service, to vindicate the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

God's Quest - Spiritual Personality in Terms of Christ

Well then, that means one thing. It means that God is after persons. It is persons that are needed - not first preachers, teachers, 'workers,' ministers, missionaries, in the technical sense, but persons. Oh, what a false position we may find ourselves in by these titles! How many a one is called a missionary who is no missionary at all, or a minister who is no minister! There is something much deeper than the title. No title makes us what the title represents, and we can have the title and the uniform and not be the person. No, it is neither official people nor things that God is after - not exponents of some spiritual ideology, teaching, system of truth, but persons, just persons. We have to learn anew to draw lines of distinction. There is all the difference between a church in the New Testament sense, and a congregation. There is all the difference between praying and a prayer meeting. You can have a prayer meeting without praying in the true spiritual sense. There is all the difference between living testimonies on the one hand and ordinances and rites on the other; and there is all the difference between people who officially represent something, and personal embodiments of Jesus Christ. Yes, the main feature in our spiritual training is the person being trained; not the subjects being studied, but the persons being trained.

You see, there is a principle in spiritual training, the training which God is trying to carry out in your life and in mine, and that principle is spiritual personality. And that personality is Christ: not your personality or mine, but Christ's. That principle underlies everything in the Word of God. It is so clear, right on the face of the Scriptures, that God's view of the race is that - it is personal. It is a man; it is

Adam. That is the very principle of representative people in the Bible. Take the priest. The priest is the personal embodiment and representation of the whole nation of Israel. It is a priestly nation, and the priest is the one on whom God looks as on the nation. When the priest is right, in a right position and state before God and functioning according to Divine prescribing, the nation is right, and God meets the nation on the ground of the priest. When the priest is wrong, corrupt, polluted, be sure the nation is that, and that is how God sees the nation. It is all gathered up into the one man; the priest. So also with the king: as king, so people. He is the inclusive representation of the nation. It is as though the nation were but one man and that man the king; what the king is, the nation is. You do not need to look very deeply for proof of that. Look at Saul and see the state of the nation when Saul was king. Look at David and see the state of the nation when David was king. And so with prophet. The prophet was the personal representation of the people. He was called on to do all sorts of extraordinary and strange things, sometimes very degrading and humiliating things, in order to portray to the nation God's view of themselves. What about the very name - Israel? It is the name of a man, of an individual, but it is again the name of a nation; a man's name for a nation. That is the principle, you see; God views the race as a man, as a person.

Now, carry that over to Christ and the principle holds good. Thank God, He does not see us in ourselves. It is Christ Whom He sees when our faith has been reposed in His Son. We sing a tremendous thing when we sing:

What though the accuser roar
Of ills that I have done;
I know them well and thousands more;
Jehovah findeth none.

That is tremendous! God is looking on a Person, and that Person is His Son. That is why we said that a spiritual personality is what God is after, and that it is the personality of His Son. It is, in its effect and

outworking, nothing less than - so to speak - bringing out the Lord Jesus Christ, the exalted, glorified Son of God, from heaven into this universe, to register His presence, with all that such a presence means, amongst the forces of evil. You cannot do that except by being that. That cannot be done along any academic lines of preparation and qualification, or by any official titles and orders; that cannot be done in any other way than this - that God has wrought Christ into us individually in measure, and corporately in the united measures, and that it is Christ coming out by the presence of His people here; Christ moving out, not only on the earth to men and to nations, but primarily, pre-eminently, Christ moving out into the spiritual kingdom back of the nations, back of peoples, back of conditions.

The Impact of Christ on Spiritual Powers

His presence - what ought it to mean? You ask the simple question - if Jesus Christ were here, what would happen? Even in His humiliation, what would happen? Well, there would be a disclosing of themselves on the part of those evil forces; His presence would make it impossible for them to remain hidden. They would cry, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29). What a betrayal! Do they know that there is a time for their destruction? They do! And further, they know that He is the One Who is to bring it about. Tremendous, isn't it? Bring Him out, even in His humiliation, and there is registration enough in every realm. But listen - "the exceeding greatness of his power... according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name..." Bring that Lord in! Oh, this, dear friends, may sound to you like a wonderful idea. You are asking about the practical possibility of it. I believe that God is wanting to say to us that it has got to be much more like that where we are concerned than it has been - we in Christ and Christ in us; we together in that conscious, spiritual relatedness of which we have before spoken; that has got to tell in the spiritual kingdom. The enemy is having far too much ground and way, and it is

not God's will that it should be so; and it is as though the Lord were saying to us, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. What are you going to do about it? It is your matter! Go therefore....'

Spiritual Personality Secured by the Cross

Now then, - this matter of spiritual personality - which resolves itself into a matter of bringing Christ into events, and that primarily in the spiritual realm - how can it be? And the answer is - only by the Cross, but surely and truly by the Cross. It is the Cross which stands between those two men, the first Adam and the last, representatives of two races. It is just there that the Cross has its place, between the two. Before we can know what the Cross means, we have to know what those two men really are, what headship in both cases really does imply and mean; for there is a headship on either side. On the one hand is the body of sin; that is racial, the whole race. There is one head to that body of sin. In its own sense and meaning, that head is head over all things to that body of sin. Satan is head over the whole body of sin, the whole race of the first Adam. Christ, the last Adam, is head over this other Body, and head over all things to that Body - "to the church which is his body." We have to understand what headship really means in both cases, and in understanding that headship we shall know what the two men are; and we must understand in order to know the meaning of the Cross.

The Root of Sin Dealt with by the Cross

Remember, then, that the Cross goes right behind all that is secondary to what is primary. Sins are secondary; sin is primary. Sins always have been secondary, they are the result of sin; and, while God has made a provision, comprehensive and conclusive, for sins, He has gone right behind and done something very much more in relation to sin. The point in making that distinction is this - you and I must be perfectly clear on this point that, until the primary thing has been dealt with, there is little hope of the secondary being dealt with. Are you struggling against sins? Well, you will go on struggling. The key to

the sins is sin. You have to get behind your sins, to where God has gone. What is sin? Well, sin is Satan's kingdom in principle. Satan's kingdom is not some organised, official system, something literal and temporal, objective. Satan's kingdom is within us, just as, for us as believers, the kingdom of heaven is within us.

The Origin of Sin

How is Satan's kingdom within us by nature? It is Satan's nature in us that is his kingdom, and his nature is sin. It is a working power, like an evil disease - you may call it a toxin, a poison - permeating the old creation, actively at work in the system of the race. That is sin, and that is Satan's kingdom. Now we have got to deal with that side. You will at once see the other side, but we are not on the other side of the Cross yet. We can begin now here - the Cross and sin, the primary thing. We call it 'original sin.' What do we mean by original sin? Well, we mean something that goes right back to the beginning and follows through from the beginning continuously and is with us as from that far, far distant beginning.

Where was that beginning? The beginning was not only far, far back in man's history, but it was far, far back beyond man's beginnings. Sin commenced with Satan, and there are two factors in original sin where he is concerned: firstly its immediate and close up relationship to God, and secondly its seat in the exercise of the will.

Now let us get hold of our Bibles. Of course, your acceptance of our interpretation will depend entirely on whether you agree that there is always a double thought and a double side to what God has said in the Old Testament - that there is a present and earthly aspect, and also a permanent and heavenly aspect. If that is accepted, then we have no difficulty with these passages that we are going to read.

"How are you fallen from heaven, O daystar, son of the morning! how are you cut down to the ground, that laid low the nations! And you said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit on the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:12-14).

"Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord Jehovah: You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, the topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was in you; in the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub that covers: and I set you, so that you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your traffic they filled the midst of you with violence, and you sinned: therefore have I cast you as profane out of the mountain of God: and I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire" (Eze. 28:11-16).

You see the two things that I indicated as factors in original sin. Firstly, its immediate and close-up relationship to God. It is right in the very presence of God; it is something against God; it is a violation of the uniqueness, the solitariness, of God. There can be no two supreme beings in this universe, there can be only one, and anything which challenges that solitary, unique supremacy is a violation of it, is treachery; and that is where original sin began.

The second thing is that its seat is in the exercise of the will. You notice in Isaiah 14 the five-fold 'I will.' It is the heart of sin, the essence of sin; and the prophet, by inspiration, is caused to disclose something which was probably never uttered in words at all by the one to whom the words are attributed. It is probable, indeed I think it is certain, that Lucifer never expressed himself at all in words. "You said in your heart" - so that it was a heart matter, an attitude, a state before God. The inspiration of the prophet amounts to this, that he was made to disclose something that had never come out in verbal and audible pronouncement, something that had been deep down in the heart of this one. You remember the familiar words of Heb. 4:12 - "The word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and

piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." That is where God goes. It is deep down there in the inner life that this resolve was made, with this five-fold "I will." It is the inner working of the will, and God knows the secret of all hearts. We do not need to utter it. It may just be there; God knows; and that is original sin. It is deep down in the life.

We may as well face this. It is an ugly thing. We cannot understand the Cross until we know this. This only enhances the glory of the Cross, and brings out its matchless splendour, when we see its immense range - how far back it reaches, how far up and how far down. The Cross is a tremendous thing. Well, you see, that is the origin of sin - what we call original sin - and that is the toxin, that is the poison.

The Nature of Sin

Let us look at its nature. "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty" (Eze. 28:17). Oh, then pride is the essence of sin. It is out of pride that sin springs. No wonder the language about pride is so strong!

"Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 16:5). "Because of your beauty"; then self-esteem was the cause; and the accompaniment of pride is always rebellion. Did you ever know a proud person satisfied? Bring along somebody else who looks equally well-dressed, well-supplied; see the reaction of the proud person - 'I will go one better!' Pride, you see, gives birth to rivalries at once, and produces this spirit of rebellion, of discontent with even the best position. Pride is never satisfied; it must always get higher, have more, go better than another. It is rebellion; and rebellion in act led to perversity in nature.

In the Old Testament there are two words which mainly cover the ground of sin - transgression and iniquity. They are the two English words for two Hebrew words which mean respectively rebellion (transgression) and perversity (iniquity). Rebellion in an act produced perversity in a nature. We, in Adam, were caught in the act of his rebellion. Adam rebelled, prompted by a spirit of pride - pride

provoked by this suggestion: "Has God said...? ...God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God" (Gen. 3:1-5). Pride flared up, with desire to have and to be something that God never intended - and certainly never intended in that way, along that line.

The act of rebellion, the counterpart of Lucifer's rebellion, issued in a nature; and who will deny that in our very nature, we are perverse? It does not matter, dear friends, how saintly and consecrated and devoted to the Lord you may be, how deep may have been the discipline in your life, and how great a measure of Christlikeness may have been developed in you - if you have a child, see if it inherits all that!

Why, it will not be many hours old before you can see and hear 'I will,' 'I will not.' We do not inherit the Christlikeness of our forebears, unfortunately. Perversity is in every fresh generation. It is there, and from what we may call the simple form of that perversity in the rebellious, discontented, peevish cry of the little infant, right up and on to the vast circumference of this whole creation, in all this anarchy, strife, war, murder, cruelty, 'man's inhumanity to man,' it is the same thing, the same nature, the same in-bred perversity. Man cannot tame it, nor eradicate it nor heal it. He may set up his League of Nations or his United Nations Organization with intent to curb or to cure international perversity, and what happens?

Well, so much the worse for the League of Nations when it comes into collision with original sin! We who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, lovers of Him, devoted to Him, know only too well that if we are put to the test, tried by adversity and by suffering and by disappointment and by frustration and by the Divine withholding from us of those things on which our hearts are set, is it not all too easy for perversity and rebellion to rise up in us? Is it not all too difficult for us to keep it in check? It is there in the old man; that is the nature of sin. And this in Satan is the very fountain head of all this other with which we are so familiar and which is so common in the creation. That is where it came from and that is its nature, and from this source man has become what he is. That is how it is, that is why it

is.

Self the Stronghold of Sin

Well, then, we must look at man, and what do we find? What is the central thing in man? It is this same thing - self, self, self, in some way. What is born in the blood will come out. Self-will, self-interest; the calculating on a basis of how a given proposition or course will affect me, whether it will be to my advantage or disadvantage; and so on without end. It is not seen only in grossly sensual forms, nor alone in the more common forms of ambition that might even be called worthy - the desire to climb the ladder of success, and so on. But this thing can move right through into our spiritual life and become a secret hidden motive even in our quest for blessing, for power. It can come out in a Peter who, when his Lord says to him "If I wash you not, you have no part with me" (John 13:8) will respond, with eager desire to have as much for himself as possible, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

I do not want to get you analysing and introspective, but I say we have to get down to this thing before we understand the Cross and before this spiritual personality which is Christ can be developed; for it is only, as we have said, by way of the Cross that self-interest, self-sufficiency, self-realisation, and a dozen other forms of self go out. Not only the self which asserts itself, and is aggressive, imperious, seeking and loving the limelight, but also that which is pitying and drawing attention to itself because it is so poor and miserable and wretched a thing - it is all self. Anything which has the effect of bringing us into view is self, and the Cross stands right in the way of that and says No to the whole thing that came from Satan, whatever form it takes - whether it is self-realisation, asserting, forcing, driving, or self-pity with its negatives and its inferiority. Satan is somewhere behind it all, and he will use it, and the effect is the hiding of Christ; and it has got to be dealt with somehow. That is the school we are in. It is this alliance of fallen man with Satan in the very nature of things which sums up the whole Bible from one standpoint, and shows where God stands in relation to man when man is on his own ground and not on

God's ground.

Sin Essential to Satan's Kingdom

Well, the issue - it is a kingdom. That is where we started. What is the kingdom of Satan? Something out there, remote, objective? Are you proposing to gird on armour and to go out and attack the kingdom of Satan - something at a distance, in India, in China, in the slums of London? No; the kingdom of Satan is first of all within you. Until something has been done within, Satan is not dethroned, his kingdom is not overthrown; it is there. His strength is in the nature that he has bitten into the race as poison, by man's permission and agreement. That is the dark and terrible side, but it is essential that we apprehend the fact and nature of that kingdom. Until you see that clearly, you have not come near to seeing either the meaning of the Cross or of the kingdom of the heavens, for the Cross comes right in there, to say No - fully, finally; for ever, No - to that fallen creation; and, thank God, it not only says No, but accomplishes it also. We are in the hands of God if we are the Lord's people. We know - and if we do not know there is something wrong somewhere, there is a hindrance somewhere that has got to be looked into - we know, or we ought to know, by the Spirit's witness within us, whenever self asserts itself in any form. Oh, is that not the explanation of those many secret battles and experiences when we have had to get away alone, and have dealings with the Lord? We have said or done something that was not fitting; or our manner, if not the substance of our words, has been wrong; or we have had a self-important bearing, we have been talking about ourselves, and we have been bringing all the tinsel of this life and of this world into view and making something of what belongs to the old creation; and we are miserable afterward, we are wretched about it. 'Oh, was not that all death? Why did I get caught like that?' The only thing to do is to get away into the presence of the Lord and get readjusted. We know a lot about that. We are in the school when that is going on.

I think we must stop there, with just this rounding off. This, dear friends, is the nature of the kingdom that we are called to destroy. This

is the nature of the warfare. It is not primarily a matter of dealing with Satan and demons personally, but of dealing with the ground on which that kingdom is founded and which supports their power. That ground is sin, and sin is this inborn rebellion and perversity. Therefore the overthrow of Satan's kingdom is at the Cross of the Lord Jesus where the background of everything was dealt with, and Satan was cast out - not just personally: do not get pictures of Satan as a person being thrown out - Satan cast out in this sense, that his moral ground of strength was taken from him. He was confronted with another nature in which there was no perversity, and that nature was too strong for him; and there are given to us exceeding great and precious promises whereby we may become partakers of that same Divine nature (1 Pet. 1:4). It is along that line that Satan loses his power.

Chapter 4 - The Kingdom of God

We have tried to impart to you something of our strong feeling that we are at a very critical point in the spiritual history of this universe. To anyone who is observing the movement of these times, very little argument or evidence is needed to be brought to them that the movement is a very ominous one. So far as the work of God on this earth is concerned, it is a very serious situation. In different forms, under different names, and in varying degrees of intensity, the whole system of evil - that which is opposed to God - is becoming greatly accentuated; and it is perfectly clear that the effort is greatly increasing to press God out of this world. The place of God, so far as these things are concerned, is to be lessened here; even in those countries which have been called Christian, paganism is gaining the upper hand rapidly, and the mention of God is greatly decreasing. That of course we can see in other parts of the world in very much more intensified forms. What was once an innate tendency, more or less passive, has now become positive and is increasingly so. All this is a tremendous moving together of the one kingdom behind all, to raise the final issue - who is going to be the reigning lord of this creation? I could follow that very much more closely, raising many questions such as that of religious liberty, the freedom of mankind, and so on. But you see the direction of things, and the evil activity, by whatever name it goes. The one upshot of it all is this question of world dominion. We can see clearly that it is resolving itself, not into a number of issues but into one issue - which kingdom is going to prevail? That is a more pressing matter today than ever it was in the history of this world. All the Lord's people on the earth today stand related to that great issue. So far as we are concerned, we are being brought by the Lord to face it, and it is in that connection that all that has been said and will yet be said in these meditations has its significance.

The Kingdom of God God's Domain

So we stand back from the details to try and focus this thing; and we note that we are set in no less a realm than that of the Divine purpose in creation. What is that? We can only speak of it in very broad terms.

We say, then, that it is all gathered up into one phrase - the kingdom of God. We are so familiar with the phrase that I think we may have failed really to grasp what it means. Well, to begin with, the kingdom of God is God's domain; and the domain of God expresses Himself. It must be that. The principle running through the whole Bible is that. Wherever God will be, that sphere must be conformed to Himself, it must take its character from Him, it must express His own mind, it must express what He is Himself. The kingdom of God is God's domain which is expressive of Himself, which takes its character from Him, in which everything to the smallest detail speaks of God, shows what God is like.

The Blessedness of the Kingdom

It speaks of God, and therefore, taking its character from Him and becoming expressive of Him, it is filled with the blessedness of God; I know of no better word than that. You know there is a little fragment, which unfortunately is mistranslated in our version, "the gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1:11), which is, literally, 'the gospel of the happy God.' You can re-translate what is called the Sermon on the Mount in that way, not, "Blessed are..." these and those and those, but "Happy..." The Sermon on the Mount is, as you know, the setting forth of the moral foundation of the Kingdom, and it all represents a very blessed state of things, so that, when God's kingdom is really established and spread over all, it is full of the blessedness of God. It is not just an imperious, despotic reign and rule of God the All-Terrible. The kingdom of God is a very blessed kingdom, and everybody in it is a very blessed, a very happy, person; and that lies back of the very existence of creation - the intention of God to extend His kingdom.

The Extension of the Kingdom on this Earth

This may, in part, be a speculation, because we do not know the condition of other planets and worlds. It may be that that very blessed state always exists there, seeing that God created all. It may be that this planet is the prodigal, that it has swung out of its spiritual orbit and lost the Kingdom and has to be restored. That is speculation

because we do not know, therefore we have to use this phrase 'the extension of the Kingdom' with a certain amount of reservation; but I think we are not wrong in using it in this way - that God, so far as this world was concerned, was set on extending His kingdom; that this world is the extension of the kingdom of God which we have just defined, and that God created it to be in some particular way a representation and expression of His kingdom; in its spiritual character, to give a manifestation of Himself. There is a great deal gathered into that, of course, which we cannot stay to speak about. The very fact that it was on this earth that God became incarnate - with all that followed, God being in Christ reconciling the world to Himself - and all the wonderful revelation that has been given to us as to what God is going to do on and by means of and toward this earth, does at least suggest that the kingdom of God has some particular and peculiar application to the world in which you and I live.

But our present purpose is to indicate the intention of God which has been made unmistakably clear by revelation - that the kingdom of God is the object and motive lying behind this creation; and the kingdom of God is that of which we have spoken - His domain, taking its character from Him, and filled therefore with the blessedness of God Himself. But the kingdom of God is the sphere which is ruled by God - not under delegated government, but under His own personal government; and therefore infinite wisdom, infinite love and infinite power are the governing factors of His kingdom. Infinite wisdom is a governing factor in the kingdom of God; wisdom far, far outstripping all the accumulated wit and understanding and knowledge of man to fathom; yes, infinite wisdom. Infinite love, for God is love; and infinite power. Well, that lies behind. That is the kingdom of God in the meaning of this creation.

The Kingdom on Earth Entrusted and Betrayed

(a) The First Adam

But we move to that terrible scene when that kingdom, for its realisation, had to be entrusted to man. Seeing that it is a moral kingdom - not just a mechanical one, not something brought about by

the sovereign determination of God irrespective of man's response - man had to co-operate by his own free will. We know how God committed the interests of His kingdom to man - in a sense, made man the custodian of His great purposes; and then the tragedy of the great betrayal, where man failed Him and betrayed His interests into the hands of a hostile one of whom we have spoken in our previous meditations, who had purposed in his heart to usurp God's place, and who, finding that that did not work, determined that he would have a counter kingdom to God's. Man betrayed the trust into the hands of that rival, so that, for the time being, the kingdom of God, so far as this creation is concerned, was suspended. But God did not abandon His intention because of the betrayal; so that, although the whole race which should have been the sphere of the realization of that Divine kingdom had been betrayed into those other hands, God moved in relation to His intention to take out of that race a people.

(b) Israel

We know the movement of God - first one man, then a family, a tribe, a nation; an elect nation in which all the meaning of the kingdom of God was to be illustrated in principle. It is a very wonderful thing to recognise fully the significance of that elect nation, that chosen people, that nation out from the nations but not reckoned among the nations. Why did God choose Israel? - in order to give in the midst of the nations a demonstration, an illustration, of the kingdom of God; a temporal and partial, but nevertheless a very true, expression of the kingdom of God, where the government is theocratic, and where God, having things according to His own mind and being able to express Himself, shows what a blessed thing it is for man to live under that government; for there is that side of Israel's history which is a wonderful, even if imperfect, expression of what God means His whole domain to be. You hear of a land flowing with milk and honey and all that there was therein; you see that people really settled in the great days of their national history with overflowing wealth, with prosperity, with everything abounding to them in that Divinely-chosen land of unexampled productiveness. It was indeed the centre of the

earth, selected by God because it could, in a temporal way, set forth something of what things could be like if God were all.

In the greatest days of Israel's history - the time of Solomon - the land was overflowing with wealth. Read those chapters telling of the gold and the silver and the precious stones and all the fulness that there was in that kingdom. It is a wonderful story. Why? Simply because God is seeking to show in temporal and imperfect terms, but in such a way as to be better than anything else known in the history of this world, what the whole domain of God will be when His kingdom is established; and so He chose a nation, in order that in that nation - as far as could be in conditions such as those which exist spiritually in this universe - there should be some faint reflection and indication of what the kingdom of God is, where God is all in all.

But that nation failed; they too betrayed God - and into the hands of the same enemy; for the cry of the prophets throughout was against the idolatry of Israel, and idolatry is, in principle and background, control by the evil powers in this universe. God was betrayed again; but He was not defeated, He did not give up. He was moving in relation to His original intention.

The Kingdom Secured Spiritually in the Last Adam

We go on through His movements to the greatest event of all - the advent of His Son. "The final Adam to the... rescue came"; with Him and in Him the Kingdom. And He was not now dealing with temporal things, with earthly conditions. In the first place He was going to the root of the matter, to the primary causes, not the secondary, as we saw in our previous meditation; getting right back behind everything, in His Cross dealing with principalities and powers and the whole world system of evil rulership. We have yet to see more about that.

But from that point we find the new movement in relation to the Kingdom. It is not merely temporal and earthly; that is, it is not just a matter of time and of things here. It is that ultimate realm of the Kingdom. The new movement from that time is a spiritual one in relation to the Kingdom. The kingdom of God has come. Where has it come? It has come in Christ. And where is Christ? He has come into a

Body, a spiritual Body, the Church which is His Body. That is the new elect, and yet the eternally elect, nation for this purpose; not an earthly thing, not a thing of time, not a thing now of temporal matters such as gold and silver and precious stones. Let the religious systems, whether called by Christian titles or not, be interested in what is ornate and luxurious on this earth, to make an impression; that is not the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. 14:17). This kingdom is spiritual, and it is now embodied in the Christ corporate; He Himself being Head of His Body the Church, the eternally elect Body. This is not some after-thought of God, something that has arisen because everything else has failed. God is not a God of dispensations, a God of then and now, but He is in the eternal Now. With Him a million years hence are as yesterday. He, from the beginning, foresaw, foreknew, fore-determined, pre-destined. Those are the great words we come on when we come to this particular vessel of His eternal purpose. So, in the fulness of time, Christ personally comes, and then constitutes for Himself a Body, and in that Body the kingdom of God from eternity is constituted.

God All in All

How? On what ground? That is God's first sphere of domain where He is all in all, where the devil has no place, nor man as such. That is the great meaning of the Cross at which we are trying to get, where no systems of men are the ruling things, where God is all in all. You must remember that that is the end toward which everything is moving. It is moving through and by Christ in the first instance, and then through Christ through His Church, back to God complete. "...he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father;... that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28). That is the setting in which we are found. God is all in all, to begin with. Is He? Well, that is the whole battleground of our inner life. It was that point which we reached in our previous meditation. There we shall resume later on, if He wills. But it is the question, first of all, of God being all in all, the Lord being Lord, and there being no other lordship - the lordship of our will, our likes, our dislikes, our preferences, our prejudices, our selectivenesses, and all

that belongs to us - that rises up and disputes the place and way and will of God. No other feature must have lordship, but He must be Lord of all. I do not expect literally to see Jesus Christ riding on a white horse with a name written on His garment, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." I believe that is a symbol of the great spiritual truth that He will ride in majesty as Lord of Lords; He will trample down every other lordship and bring it into subjection to Himself, and - metaphorically, but none the less very truly - ride forth triumphantly as King. That is the end, and that absolute supremacy which He has attained He will hand up to the Father, for the Father's ultimate satisfaction in accordance with the purpose which He purposed before the foundation of the world. The whole question of the kingdom of God is resolved in the very first instance into an inward matter in the case of every believer, as to whether He is Lord.

I said just now that that is the battleground in which we find ourselves continually; but, blessed be God, it is not all defeat! There is the mighty energy of the Spirit of God that makes it possible for us to cry - "when I fall, I shall arise" (Micah 7:8). That is not the assertion of self-assurance and self-sufficiency, but of faith that knows there is a power that works in us. The mighty energy of the Spirit of God is working the powers of the Kingdom in us, the powers of a coming age.

The Kingdom of God Within and in the Midst

And those powers are firstly spiritual, to bring this about. You and I, in this terrible conflict between the two kingdoms which is focused in our very souls - you and I, frail, faulty, a thousand times failing and slipping and blundering and erring - are nevertheless being carried on by a power and an energy that is not our own, that will bring us finally to the place of absolute ascendancy over the powers that are set against us. God is working that out in us; it is His kingdom. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, is within you. It is an inward matter; that is where it begins. And it is in the midst of you - which expresses the corporate setting of the Kingdom; in the midst of the Church, a people secured and constituted by God and in whom first of

all His absolute lordship shall be established.

I must add a word about the other aspect - that the Church is a people in whom the blessedness of God is known. Well, there is a sense in which that is true, but not true enough of us yet. The pressure and the intensity of this great spiritual warfare does register on us, it does take its toll. This persistent determination of the enemy to wear us out leaves its mark, and we are not too characterised by the blessedness of God's kingdom. But it does break out sometimes. We sing some of those songs of Zion together, we speak of the great day of Christ's soon appearing, we remind ourselves of all the wonders of His Cross - 'Oh, the sweet wonders of that Cross' - and when we dwell on these things the glory of His kingdom does well up; it shows itself from time to time. Perhaps that is one of the great blessednesses of Christian fellowship. We gather in meetings and in the Spirit, and the real nature of the Kingdom does come up and show itself. It is there, and more or less it is abidingly there, consciously there, all the time; but we are conscious too that we are up against things, we are in a grim fight. Yet in this kingdom we have to know more and more of the blessedness of God, the happiness of God. We must rebuke ourselves for what contradicts that and remind ourselves that, after all, we are a very happy people. "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 144:15).

The Church to Administer and Manifest the Kingdom

But then the matter does not end there. Israel were a chosen nation, not to be an end in themselves, but to display to all the nations what the kingdom of God is, and to administer that kingdom in the midst of the nations. There were times when other nations got the benefits of Israel. When they were not against Israel, when they were amenable or favourable, great blessings came to them because of Israel, and so it has been since then. I am not at all sure that we have not derived a great deal of blessing in this country because of the attitude in past years toward that nation - even in their rejection. "I will bless those who bless you, and him that curses you will I curse" (Gen. 12:3); and that holds good. But in a very direct way, when Israel were according

to God's mind, in line with Him, people were blessed because of them. And the Church is not an end in itself. We find in "Revelation" the end - the city is in its place of administration, and it is the nations that are deriving the benefit. The light of the nations, the leaves for the health of the nations, the water for the life of the nations, issue from that city. The Church, then, is to be so constituted as to be God's instrument of administration and manifestation of His kingdom.

The Practical Issue - Ascendancy over the Kingdom of Darkness

But while we are set in that as the ultimate, and all the practical questions and challenges and issues bound up with that have to be brought home to our hearts, the whole matter resolves itself for the time being into one of registering all that is meant by the kingdom of God, the mighty sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ, not now so much on kings and rulers of this earth as on those principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness, those spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies. That is where we are brought to, and if I were to gather into one statement what I believe to be the Divine intention in our present meditations it is this - to seek to bring us, as amongst that people, to the place where we count infinitely more in the spiritual realm than we now do, where we have to be reckoned with by the powers of evil back of this world system. It is there that value to God is decided in this dispensation. Now you can reject all that we are saying and still be saved. In order to be saved, all that you need is to "believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). With that you can go to heaven, you can be delivered from condemnation and from hell, without having any of this that we are talking about. Well, if that is all you want, you can have it. But I ask you this, are you as concerned to be useful to God as you are to be saved? That is another question. The matter of your value to God is decided here - what account are you to Him in the realm of the spiritual forces in this universe which are opposed to Him? How much account does the devil take of you? How much are you a menace to his kingdom? Not, how many services and meetings are you taking, how many addresses are you giving, how much running about are you doing; not

all those etceteras in Christian activity; but how much impact do you register upon that dark, evil kingdom? It is just there that your value to God is decided. Well, if the devil gives you a very bad time and has made you know you are a marked man, a marked woman, take comfort; it shows you are of some value to God. But we do not always remember that. We have terribly bad times under the hand of the devil and get under them, we think how terrible and wicked he is, we get occupied with that, and forget - perhaps it is a kind of humility - that we must mean something, after all. That is where things count with God in this dispensation. It is not how many structures you can put up nor how big an organisation you can create on this earth, it is not anything in the temporal realm at all. It is, in all, through all, by all, how much is counting against the kingdom which is opposed to the kingdom of God? That is the challenge which we must seriously face.

The Kingdom Present in Principle Now

The kingdom of God is something very much more vital than we have realised. Oh, what a pity that men have so systematized this thing as to rob it of its real spiritual value! Some tell us, for instance, that the Kingdom is for a coming age, that this is not the Kingdom age. That is not true. The kingdom of God is a present issue, the supreme issue of this whole creation; and it is concerning that that all the forces of darkness, under whatever name they may be working on this earth, are converging under one evil, spiritual government and overlord - to make it impossible for the kingdom of God to be established and extended in this creation. Well, Christian people know it. The big question in missionary magazines now is whether we can go on with our work in many places, whether we must withdraw, whether there is any prospect for extending in the future. Doors are closing. But what about God's kingdom? Is He Lord? Is He going to be pushed out of His universe? Well, the picture that the Word of God gives at the end is not that, but just the opposite. That is the battle we are in. It is a spiritual one, after all. The Lord bring home to our hearts the seriousness of the challenge, and help us to see that now it is a personal matter; the kingdom of God is a personal matter.

Chapter 5 - The Power and Challenge of the Kingdom of God

But I tell you of a truth (I tell you very definitely, emphatically, positively). There are some of those who stand here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27).

"The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day, in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:1-3).

"There are some of those who stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." "...by the space of forty days speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." The theme with which the Apostles were being occupied by the Lord during the forty days after His resurrection – the theme of the risen Lord - was the kingdom of God.

The Battle of Two Kingdoms in our Lord's Earthly Life

Looking back into the years of His life from the Jordan to the Cross, we can see that, in His own personal case during that time, the battle of two kingdoms was going on. Along various lines and through various instrumentalities, influences were being brought to bear on Him. He was moving within a circle of forces and activities the object and direction of which was to get Him to have a kingdom. At the very beginning, the conflict with the adversary in the wilderness during the forty days and nights headed right up to that issue. "The devil... shows him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said to him, All these things I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:8-9). His own disciples were constantly pressing on Him with their Messianic mentality and expectation, making it very difficult for Him in this way - that He knew they were as yet such children spiritually that it would be a disaster to disillusion them too quickly and disappoint their expectations and hopes. Those expectations, hopes and visions, and all that they included for these

men, were for the Lord like barbed wire all the time pricking Him. He could hardly say anything of a disillusioning character but at once the disciples were offended, questioning, thrown all over the place, even to revolt. The crowd, the hysterical multitude, on one occasion would come and take Him by force and make Him king. There is something at work, coercing. He was fighting that something all along, putting it back, rejecting, repudiating; and it was no easy thing. At the last, as He stood before Pilate, when the accusation against Him was that He said that He was a king, Pilate said, "Are you the King of the Jews?" and Jesus said, "My kingdom is not out from this world system - if my kingdom were out from this world system, then my servants would fight but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). It was the repudiation of a kingdom; which meant that inwardly He was standing for another. It was not the repudiation of the Kingdom. He was fighting all the way along against a false for a true, against a temporal for a spiritual; but the powers that existed were seeking to precipitate this other matter, to get Him involved in a kingdom which was not His real one. You can easily see what an involving it would have been. Suppose He had capitulated, accepted a kingdom out from this system, put Himself on this level; well, a little thought at once betrays the sinister nature of the pressure, the offer. No, He was not accepting the framework which embodied the kingdom of Satan - that is what it amounted to. Within the kingdom out from this system, Satan, the prince of this world, was established, and the Lord was not accepting that at all. Through all these temptations, even though they might come through the lips and by the mistaken zeal of a beloved and devoted disciple of the inner circle - no other than Simon Peter himself - He was adamant. On that very matter of His going up to Jerusalem and being delivered into the hands of men to be crucified, when the human counsel is "Be it far from you, Lord: this shall never happen to you," the instant rejoinder is, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:21-23). He sees Satan entrenched in the very suggestion, and that is not the kingdom the Lord will accept. There would be a kingdom which He would have, but not of that kind.

The Kingdom Recaptured for God Through the Cross

So to the Cross, along the line of repudiating a kingdom after that order; and there, in the Cross, He went behind the framework, behind all the form and the system, and dealt with the prince of this world, and cast him out. How He cast him out we have been seeking to see in these meditations; He cast him out morally. "The prince of this world cometh: and he has nothing in me" (John 14:30), so he is morally put out. And, casting out the prince of this world there in the Cross, He captured - let us rather say, recaptured - the Kingdom which had been betrayed by Adam into that usurper's hands; recaptured it as the last Adam, the second man, the Lord from heaven; and, having recaptured it in and by His Cross (a matter about which we have yet to say more) He rose, and His theme was the kingdom of God - the fulfilment of His emphatic statement, "There are some of those who stand here, who shall, in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." They saw it on the day of Pentecost, the recaptured Kingdom in the hands of this victorious Christ Who knew how to refuse quick returns - a thing which we know very little about morally; and because He was able to let go, He secured all. That is a law of tremendous value in spiritual life - being expert in letting go. We have seen the other one expert in laying hold - 'I will, I will, I will.' There again we shall have more to say. But now in the hands of this One, the Kingdom recaptured is brought in on the day of Pentecost in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit the Life and Power of the Kingdom

But note, the point for us is that it is a reformed kingdom, that is, its constitution is altogether different from and other than that which was in the minds of the Apostles and was offered to Him by Satan. It is another kind of kingdom, essentially spiritual. It comes in by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in charge of the Kingdom. He precipitates this thing and He keeps the reins in His hands in the projecting and the developing, the expanding and the establishing, of this kingdom. Everything is spiritual, and we find therefore that the Kingdom is, from first to last, essentially an inward thing. The Lord's words about

the kingdom of the heavens being within you were very, very truly proved on the day of Pentecost and afterward - it was the Spirit within that was the nature, the power, the life, the energy and the everything of this kingdom.

The Spontaneous Challenge of the Kingdom of God Through the Church

If that is the course and nature of things, what really is the heart of it all? Well, the heart of it is this, that when from the day of Pentecost men and women went out into this world in the good of what it meant that the kingdom of God as an actual reality had come, and that it was an inward fact, the thing which characterised them was that there was, by their very presence here in this world, an impressive and overwhelming impact of the kingdom of God on that other kingdom lying behind the framework of this world system. It just happened. Their very presence disturbed, challenged, provoked that other kingdom, and the fact of these two kingdoms being in such deadly opposition became a manifest reality simply because those believers were there; and, mark you - this is something to be marked - their predominant note in preaching was not the salvation of men from sin (which was the result of something else) but it was the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. Everywhere they bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus, and they proclaimed Him as Lord. When it came to dealing with exercise of heart under conviction, and with the enquiry, 'What shall we do to be saved?' then the interpretation or the application was that this Lord is also Saviour. You can be saved by Him because He is Lord. You can be forgiven because He is Lord. Let me say again - it is not just because He is officially Lord; but because He is morally in the position to forgive. Leave that again for a minute. What I want to concentrate on and keep to is this, that there needs to be recovered the spontaneous challenge of the kingdom of God in the Church. We may be preaching the gospel of salvation - let no one think for one moment any discrediting or weakening of that is intended - but that must come out of the established lordship of Jesus Christ in the preacher and in the Body representing Christ. It must be

that - that Jesus is Lord - not as an item of a creed or of doctrine, but as something which has become an inward power. The lordship of Jesus Christ as an inward power, both in the life and in the Church, has to be registered in a spiritual way, not first on men. I do not know whether you are able to follow further than I am saying; but why the vast amount of the preaching of the gospel to the unsaved without effect?

Does that not exercise you, or is that a question which ought never to be raised? It is true is it not? The gospel is preached and preached and preached with little effect. Is the gospel weaker than it was in those days? Is the Holy Spirit withdrawn from the earth? What is the explanation? Is it that the Lord is different, His gospel is different, or His Church is different? Ah, I think it must be the last. It cannot be the others.

What is the difference?

The Church is taking up something, and giving it out, very largely as objective teaching; of course, knowing something of the blessedness of being saved, of the good and joy of what the Lord Jesus is in terms of salvation. That is all very good, it gets so far, but somehow or other there is a tremendous margin of ineffectiveness; and the reason may be - I put it in that way - that first of all the preaching is to men, the registration is on men, and there is not that which comes from behind spontaneously. The kingdom of God is not something worked up, properly arranged in addresses and sermons, it is not a theme, a subject, but it is the mighty power of the Holy Spirit coming from behind. You are there as the Lord's witness, and there is something more than the power of the enemy present; the power of God is there too. The kingdom of God has come. The kingdom of God is an overwhelming thing. That, is the meaning. It is in this realm that the weakness of so much preaching lies. Now, we will go on with our preaching of salvation, we will proceed with our approach to men and women about this matter of salvation; we must, more than ever. But remember, if we come without the kingdom of God - not as a subject but as a power coming through us, so to speak, as from behind, coming right through and registering itself, not on men and women in

the first place but on those forces behind in which the whole world lies - we shall be largely ineffective. It is very true that no one can believe, no one is free to turn to the Lord - however much they may crave to do so - unless the Lord does something to release them. This strong man has to have his house broken into by a stronger than he; and who is stronger than he? This kingdom has to be raided by another kingdom greater than itself. And so, although the Lord had given the disciples the sphere of their activity and the commission to go out into it, He said, "But tarry you in the city, until you be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "John indeed baptised with water; but you shall be baptised in the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). 'Until then, do not attempt the commission or you will fail, and the other kingdom will prevail over you.'

You see the point for us. It all centres in that, it is all summed up in that. What is our real business here? Is it to propound doctrines, expound truths, give out volumes of interpretations of Scripture? No! Whatever place that may have for edification, for instruction, it will all be unprofitable so far as real spiritual effectiveness is concerned, unless the kingdom of God is coming through - that is, unless there is the real registration of the fact that Jesus is raised from the dead and is Lord. It is no use saying that, unless you say it in the power of the Holy Spirit. "No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). That does not mean that you cannot use the phrase "Jesus is Lord," but there is something more in saying than using words. When God said; "Let light be" there was light - and that is the kind of saying that we are thinking of - a saying which is a fiat, an impact. One man may say, "Jesus is Lord," and while it is quite true, the doctrine is correct and sound, nothing happens. Another man in the power of the Holy Ghost declares the lordship of Jesus Christ, and you feel something, you are conscious of something coming through of God. Now, this is not the privilege only of Apostles in the ecclesiastical or official sense. This is for the Church, and you and I are the Church in representation. Oh, that our prayer should be the impact of the Kingdom on that other kingdom! That is what my heart cries for; for prayer should not be a list of petitions, a lot of things asked for, but

there should be something done behind things. In all our teaching, though it may not be instantly seen, there should nevertheless be a steady work going on which is producing lives in the power of this kingdom - people becoming factors to be reckoned with by the enemy. It is the only justification of all our teaching, that those who receive it shall themselves become in turn factors which are marked by the enemy; of whom, as we have said before, the demons can say, "Jesus I know, and - so and so - I know." It ought to be that we are known to the enemy by name as people to be reckoned with, to be taken account of, and not included in the category of those who do not count - "but who are ye?" (Acts 19:15).

The matter which occupies the risen Lord is the kingdom of God. It is the thing with which He would occupy His servants. The kingdom of God - not some framework of a temporal system, but the kingdom of God - is not in word, but in power; not in eating and drinking but righteousness in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17). That is the kingdom of God; and you and I, dear friends, are in the very happy position of being included in that former statement of the Lord - "There are some of those who stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." That is our privilege - to see the kingdom of God, and for the kingdom of God to come through us with a sense of Divine power. That is the heart of things. I have said already that all the rest we are talking about in these meditations gathers round that.

The Importance and Power of Letting Go to God

You say, 'Well, I believe that is true, and all my heart responds, and I pray God that it may be so where I am concerned. I want it to be, but nothing happens. How can it be?' That is just what we are getting at; and I have hinted already how it can be. It is intensely practical. When I said that the Lord Jesus was the greatest expert at letting go, I touched the heart of this matter. We have said again and again that everything is centred and focused in the human will. Let me ask here (though I shall have to refer to it again later on more fully), have you not many times discovered that your real power - the power which delivered you, the power which lifted you up and set you on high -

came when you let go? You were holding on - and I am not saying that you were holding on to something that was necessarily wrong; you were simply holding on. It may have been something given to you by God, and your own natural possessiveness had got hold of it, and you were holding something of God to and for yourself, and saying 'hands off' to everybody else. There is no question that Isaac was given of God to Abraham; he was a perfect miracle, impossible unless God had given him. And then we read, "God proved Abraham." He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love" (and, He might have said, whom I gave you) "...and offer him... for a burnt-offering" (Gen. 22:2, etc.). Abraham did not say, 'You gave him to me, do not contradict Yourself and take him away again; You made all Your promises to hang on him; I am not going to give him up!' He gave him up and he got him back; got him back with a whole kingdom by which he became "heir of the world" - that is the statement (Rom. 4:13). He has the kingdom by letting go - the foreshadowing of this Son of God Who let go. They would take Him by force and make Him a king; He let go. He got His kingly place with increase, but He got it in a realm where Satan could not touch it; it was beyond the power of death. If He had accepted that thing which was offered Him it would have been subject to death. Here in resurrection He has it, and death has no power over it. But He got it like that - by letting go to God. You see, it is intensely practical. Oh, how can this be? By getting yourself out of the picture! That is why it cannot be - because self is in the picture! Self-will, self-interest, self-realisation. That is the kingdom of Satan, and God is not going to give you His kingdom on that ground. That was the ruin and the loss of the kingdom of God for man. You cannot restore it; like cannot overcome like. Something different, other, is needed; and whatever that self may mean, it has to get out of the way if the kingdom of God is to come in. This is practical. I have to be quite sure that I am not in this, that some secret ambition of mine, some motive of mine, is not at work. Oh, how subtle are our hearts! You and I perhaps are ready to be utterly for the Lord. We mean well, and we mean it thoroughly. We would sing really with our hearts and with our voices at full strength, 'None of self, and

all of Thee,' and we would mean it, and there would be no uncertainty so far as we are concerned. And yet God knows that we are all the time defeated in our very sincerity by secret motives, and nothing but a test position can prove whether we actually mean it. So He brings us to a test - to a prospect, and then a disappointment. How do we react? Is our sorrow, our pain, for the Lord or for ourselves? Are we disappointed, or is it really only the Lord for Whom we are concerned and we are not in it at all? You see what I mean - a test situation to find out after all whether it is 'None of self, and all of Thee.' We can never discover it except in practical ways along the line of very practical testings. The Lord knows it all right, but it is not enough that He knows it. You see, in order for us to come in, we have to come in intelligently and co-operatively. That is the point of every test. The Lord could do a thing with a stroke, it could happen mechanically. But we are in a moral world, and God acts towards man on moral ground. Man has a will that constitutes him a morally responsible person, and so he must exercise his will in co-operation with God.

You remember the words in Deuteronomy 8:2 - "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not." Our version does not convey the full meaning. The words as quoted might raise a question as to whether the Lord knows what is in our hearts without trying us out. We cannot have any doubts about that. No, the real meaning is this - "that he might make you know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not." It was necessary for Israel to come to the place where they knew their own heart and repudiated what was contrary to the revealed will of God; and that was the battle of the forty years. The Lord had shown that His purpose for them was the promised land. They were discovering that in their hearts Egypt still had a place in opposition to the land; and the Lord was calling on them to recognize what was in their hearts and to repudiate Egypt - repudiate it as much in the wilderness as they had repudiated it when they had fled from it. It is an inside thing. Until their hearts were wholly toward the land and for

the land, the Lord could not get them into it. That is where Joshua and Caleb were - they wholly followed the Lord. Why did they go in when all the others of their generation failed? Because they had completely and finally and utterly slain Egypt, not objectively but subjectively, and embraced the land as God willed. These others were being tested, day after day, year after year, on that ground - 'Do you really mean that you want to follow the Lord? You say, Yes - but do you? Let us try it out!' The Lord was doing that, to make them know what was in their hearts.

I say, this kingdom of God within is very practical, explaining the Lord's dealings with us. When we recognize the laws and principles of that kingdom there must come the test, when we give up our Isaac, not because we know we are going to get him back again but knowing that perhaps the Lord will really require him of us and that he will not be given back to us. There is the battle and the victory. None of us has fully got there yet, and that is why the Kingdom has not fully come where we are concerned; but inasmuch as we triumph in that matter, the Kingdom is coming through - power and salvation are coming through; and also, I believe, rest for our own hearts' deliverance. The Lord show us the meaning of this word.

Chapter 6 - The Significance of the Death of Christ

"He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

So far we have been occupied with that side and aspect of the Cross of the Lord Jesus that has to do with sin, and we have seen that sin is the basis and nature and power of the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of Satan. We come now to one further inclusive word on the matter of the nature of sin before we say a word about its result, and then we are brought immediately to the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

The Essence of Sin - Independence of God

What does this whole matter of sin amount to? Can we put it into a word? I think we can, and that word is independence - independence of God. Yes, the kingdom of Satan is really built on independence. He himself decided to take a course of independence. Before he became Satan he was Lucifer, the covering cherub. The Scripture says "thou were created" (Eze. 28:13), and a created being must be less than, and dependent upon, the Creator; but this one decided to be independent of Him and to proceed to have everything centred in himself and not in God, to be his own lord, to be god himself and to refer and defer to no one - absolute independence; and it was that which he introduced into the race by Adam. "Has God said...? God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:1,5). The inference of his words was this 'Why not have your eyes opened? Why always have to refer to God? Why not be as God?' To that suggestion man fell. He used the greatest gift that God has ever given to created beings - the power of choice, will - he used his great trust, freewill, and chose independence. There are many ways in which this independence works out. It works out along the line of self-sufficiency, and we see that history right up to date is only the story of independence, self-sufficiency, in one form or another. At different times or in different sections of the race this independence expresses itself variously. Sometimes, and in some places, it takes the form of definite and positive Godlessness, where God is deliberately and openly and unashamedly thrown over,

repudiated, denied. That sort of thing covers a very large section of this earth today and is powerfully at work - utter and positive and deliberate Godlessness, giving Him no place. Sometimes and in other places this independence has been, and is, expressed in a system of ideas of human greatness. The word 'ideology' has sprung so much into our vocabulary. It is simply a system or scheme of ideas about human greatness - how great man is and how inherently good he is; you have only to give him scope and facility and suitable conditions, and you see what a wonderful creature he is, both as to his ability, his potentialities, and his inherent goodness. It is only another form of independence of God, of man's blindness; for man's blindness is most of all seen in his inability to recognise his own need.

Or again, the same thing shows itself in religious systems, systems of works, salvation by works. This may be positive or it may be negative, but it is the same thing. The positive form is seen in Judaism and in Romanism and in other systems - the religion of salvation by works. Paul summed it up very well, speaking so sadly about his brethren after the flesh - "Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). That is the point. They have not done that thing which is just the opposite of independence - submission to the righteousness of God. That whole system, however it comes out, is simply the system of 'what a good boy am I!' 'I do this and that, I don't do this and that; see how good I am!' - seeking to establish their own righteousness.

But this Satanic thing is behind it all, and the Lord Jesus uncovered it. He said to these very people who were making broad their phylacteries, making long prayers in the market places, parading themselves like peacocks with their tails spread religiously - "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do" (John 8:44). Pretty scathing for religion, is it not?

Or it may be negative. It may be the poor ascetic, cringing and begging, with his miserable face and his poor emaciated form, and he is only saying in another way, 'What a good boy am I! I am very religious, I do not do the things that all you other people do. I am a man of prayer, of

abstinence.' It is the same thing.

He counts on getting to heaven that way - independence of God.

Or again, it may come in the most subtle form of all - spiritual pride amongst the real children of God.

There is no worse pride than spiritual pride. I think there is nothing more abominable to the Lord, because it exists just where much better knowledge ought to exist; it exists right in the realm of grace. If you think it is too strong a thing to say, remember, we are poor little pygmies compared with such a man as the Apostle Paul: we cannot match up to him as to spiritual stature, as to his knowledge of God: and even such a spiritual giant as he will say, "That I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7). It is there, it is always there, it is always present - some form of self-congratulation; and the peril is greatest, always greatest, where blessing is the greatest. Oh, the infinite peril running side by side with the blessing of God! How very difficult it is for the Lord to trust us with blessing! How very difficult it is for Him to use us! How pleased we feel! Yes, it is in the highest of all realms that Satan appears - amongst the sons of God (Job 1:6). Yes, in heaven. I cannot understand that literally, but I can understand it spiritually - that in heaven Satan appears amongst the sons of God; and Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light when the Lord is using and blessing His people. 'This is great! We are becoming somebody!' - and there it is amongst the sons of God in heaven. Independence - trying to get us unwatchfully, imperceptibly, unconsciously, unintentionally, to presume, because the Lord has done something. How terrible this sin is! You can never track it down and finally lay it to rest.

Now you see, power is based on authority, and, as we have said before, like can never cast out like, Satan can never cast out Satan, the flesh cannot cast out the flesh. "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (Mark 3:25). Authority rests on right, and right is moral. Hence, we have got to know what the kingdom of God rests upon, and there has to be a very wide cleavage between the two kingdoms.

The Result of Independence

(a) Enmity Against God

What is the effect, the result, of all this which we have summed up in this word independence? It is firstly, enmity, so far as our relationship with God is concerned. All that is the sum and the essence of enmity with God, and there is enmity on God's part toward it. Any form of independence on our part where the Lord is concerned is a positive factor of warfare with God. Perhaps that needs a word adding to it, because probably no one here will deliberately take a line independent of the Lord. If it came to the immediate issue of the Lord and you, you would not do it. But there is a good deal of independence about us that does so often seek to evade the Lord. The independence may show itself in various directions. The Lord therefore has constituted His house in such a way that the test of our willingness to rely on the Lord, to trust Him, to commit our way to Him, is found in relationships, in matters of the House. We cannot say that we trust the Lord, that we commit everything to Him, that we depend on Him, and then perhaps take an independent course where another child of God is concerned. That is a contradiction. "If a man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:20). The proof of your love for God is your relationship to your brother. So in this matter of independence, it is tested out in many practical ways in the Christian relationships of the house of God. I speak of 'the house of God' as a spiritual thing - the relatedness of all believers. That by the way. Now this all comes to be something positively set against God - enmity. If this is Satan's nature, then Satan is enmity against God. That is in us. There is the innate enmity against God in us. We have only got to be put to the test in a suitable situation and it comes out. I have only to ask you, have you never in your life been put into a situation in which you have found it difficult to yield to the Lord? Have you always, in all circumstances, at all times, in all conditions, in every trial and difficulty, found it perfectly easy to say, Yes, to the Lord? Have you? But here we are, we are put to the test in numerous practical ways as to whether, after all, there is not something in us that has got to be overcome in this matter of natural enmity against God.

(b) Distance from God

And the enmity, of course, creates distance. That is how it was at the beginning. Immediately the enmity came into Adam, God withdrew, distance was created. It was distance of nature, not only distance of Persons. God had to put man apart from Himself, and man knows perfectly well by nature that he is at a distance from God. One of the characteristics of the unregenerate man is that he feels that God is such a long way off. Where is God? - somewhere out on the rim of the universe. God is far away. One of the first blessed characteristics of a born-again soul is a sense that God is near; the gap is closed up; God is at hand.

(c) Impotence

And sin brings impotence, helplessness. It is a fact, whether we realise it or not, which is brought out very clearly and strongly immediately the question of real salvation arises. Even though you may be one who has most thoroughly stood for salvation by works, as did Saul of Tarsus, when it comes to the real matter of the relatedness of salvation to your inner life, you have to say, "The good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise... Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:19,24). Impotence, helplessness - that is the result of sin.

The Issue of Independence - Death

That leads us at once to what that amounts to, what that is. It is death. What is death? We know it is not cessation of being. It is the change of the nature of our being, change in our relationships in being. Here death is the awful sense that God is against you - enmity working itself out in fear and dread of God; your full consciousness awakened to the wrath of God. That is the realm of enmity; that is death. Distance? - ah, yes; far, far away, far out of reach, out of call. You cannot get Him, you cannot find Him. You cry, but no response; He is far away. That is death, when your consciousness is fully alive to it. Impotence? - no hope, no resource, no recourse, helpless, abandoned; that is death. That is the result of sin.

We come to the Cross. Do you understand that aspect of the Cross of our Lord Jesus? There are two aspects to the Cross. We have said that Christianity is a system of paradoxes or contradictions. At one time you will be reading about the Cross as the most awful thing - the place of the wrath of God, the darkness, the terror. At another time you read about the Cross as that in which the Lord Jesus offered Himself without spot to God - God fully satisfied: all the heart longings and cravings of the very nature of God are answered to fully. That is the other side of the Cross. Those two things meet in the Cross of Calvary, and you find that God has in all time given pictures of those two sides.

Types of Sin

(a) Leprosy

You turn to the book of Leviticus where the whole question of relationship is being threshed out. In the fourteenth chapter you have the matter of leprosy and the cleansing of the leper. Two birds are called for for the cleansing of the leper and the cleansing of his house. One bird is killed, its neck is wrung, its blood is shed. It is killed as by an act of anger, of destruction. The other bird is sprinkled with its blood and let go. It lives - touched with that blood, but it lives. That is the cleansing of the leper from his leprosy - a picture of sin dealt with. Leprosy is the Bible's worst picture of sin; leprosy, the thing which is hateful, in which are all the elements of enmity. And leprosy separates; it is so against everything that is lovely and beautiful. There is an element in it of hostility to all that is good. The enmity leads to separation, and the poor leper has to depart. Lest anybody should come near, he cries with his hollow cry, Unclean! Unclean! He is put aside. And what can a leper do? Of course, today we have remedies, we are able to rescue the leper. But then leprosy was regarded as a hopeless and a helpless thing. How is the leper cleansed? Well, there are two sides to his cleansing. Typically, he must bear judgement and be destroyed from the presence of the Lord, but, being sprinkled with the blood, he may also live. It is the same person, not two halves. On the one hand, judged, condemned and destroyed from before God; on the other hand saved, the blood sprinkled. Judgement has passed,

destruction has been carried out, but somehow 'from the ground there blossoms red, life that shall endless be.' The leper is saved.

(b) The Scapegoat

You pass to Leviticus 16, and you have the ritual of the great day of Atonement, and the central things are two goats. The priest brings the two goats and places them before the Lord. Then lots are cast upon the two goats, one for the Lord, one for the Scapegoat or "Azazel" - meaning for abandonment, dismissal. The latter goat is for judgement, all the sins of Israel being put on it. It is driven out of the camp, away into the desolation of the wilderness, never to come back again, to be lost forever, never again to be looked upon. I have often thought one of the most pathetic pictures in the whole Bible is that poor goat.

But the other goat - the lot has fallen on him for God, and he is offered to God.

Now in the Bible and in the Hebrew language, there are two words which are of particular interest in this connection - one, holiness; the other, consecration. Holiness means 'set apart for God.' Consecration means 'devoted.' I do not know why, but in the Authorized Version the translators have strangely translated that word 'devoted' as 'accursed.' You remember, Achan took the accursed thing (Joshua 7:10- 26). It is the devoted thing. Saul was commanded 'to devote' Amalek to the sword - man, woman, child, and beast. (1 Sam. 15:3 R.V.M.). Here are two sides of one thing. One, separated to the Lord as holy to the Lord; the other, devoted. Ah, but what does devotion mean? It may mean devoted to judgement, devoted to destruction. Achan found that. He, his family, his tent, all that he had, was destroyed. He was devoted, consecrated. You have a new idea of consecration now, have you not? Consecrated; devoted to destruction from the presence of the Lord. That was the goat of dismissal. Devoted to be shut out for ever, never again to come back into the company of what is God's.

The Significance of the Cross

(a) Christ Made Sin for Us

There is the Cross. Looking now on that dark side of the Cross, what

happened on that side? Is it too terrible a thing to say that the Son of man took the place of Satan? He took the place of that very nature which had come from Satan into the race, the place of the outpouring of God's wrath because of enmity.

He was made sin in our stead (2 Cor. 5:21). What is sin? We find in this dealing with the goats on the day of Atonement, the words are these - "Aaron shall... confess over him all the the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins" (Lev. 16:21). All their sins; their transgressions (their rebellions) and their iniquities (their perversity). That is put on the goat of destruction - rebellion and perversity. Does this not give some new tremendous meaning to that word "obedient to death"?

Why did the Lord Jesus sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground - what the Apostle speaks of as resisting to blood, striving against sin (Heb. 12:4)? He had been called on by the Father to become rebellion, perversity, to take the place of iniquity and transgression, and to have all that laid on Him. "He was wounded for our transgressions (rebellion), he was bruised for our iniquities (perversity)" (Isa. 53:5). Why did He say "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14)? Why was it a serpent that was set up? You see the nature that He was asked to accept at that moment. Know Him in the truth of His being, know Him as He really was, know how for three and a half long, weary, bitter years He fought against all that evil, refusing everything that belonged to it - refusing pride, refusing the temptation of the devil to act independently of God, to accept a kingdom independently of God - how He had fought all the way through against that which Satan tried to put on Him - and at the end to be asked by the Father to accept it for our sake! Can we enter into it? We cannot. "He became obedient." Oh, what obedience meant in His case! Obedient to God Who said, 'Will you, for the sake of the race, take all that, be judged as that, be dealt with by Me as that, step right into that very position and let Me deal with you so that My wrath due to enmity against Me is poured out on you in judgement, and so that the complete withdrawal of My presence becomes known to you in awful

reality and you cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As to helplessness - "He was crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4); He could not save Himself. The outworking of sin in the Cross was like that; the goat of dismissal sent far, far away. "I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer" (Psa, 22:2). There is no one to answer the crying from the desolate wilderness of God-forsakenness, God-abandonment. We cannot enter into it. In order to undo for us that power of Satan, for one terrible, eternal hour, He tasted death; the wrath of God, the remoteness of God, and utter impotence and helplessness.

(b) Christ Accepted of God

Yet there is the other aspect of the Cross (of which we shall have to speak more again if the Lord wills) where, while all that we have been saying is true, and we take nothing from it - the awful darkness and blackness and terror of it all - something else is going on. He offers Himself without spot to God (Heb. 9:14). He was an offering to God. That is the other aspect. The word gains strength for us - "who delivered us out of the power (authority) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. 1:13). That is the value of the Cross. Out of that darkness into this - into God's absolute good pleasure. "The Son of his love." "Accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Out of one into the other by the Cross. Oh, I wish that it were in my power to make the Cross known in more of its wonderful depth and fulness in both its aspects. I trust that you see a little more. We are now thinking of the Cross in both aspects -judgement and acceptance. Let us see what He has done. He has devoured and swallowed up all the wrath of God; there is no more remaining for us if we will believe. He has bridged and closed up the mighty gulf between God and us, and brought us nigh to God through the Blood of His Cross, if we will believe; and He has brought us back into the place of the power of God out of our impotence, that we should be endued and endowed by the Holy Ghost with the mighty power of God. "...strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. 3:16). While in ourselves remaining weak, we are nevertheless able to say, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). There is the great change over.

The Practical Application

But, you see, the practical application has got to be made. We have got to come definitely to the meaning of the Cross like that, and say, 'Well, if that is what the Cross means so far as I am concerned by nature, there is no place left for self-will, for independence; that must go to the Cross; and all that belongs to the old creation must go to the Cross.' And, thank God, the Cross is not just some wooden thing set up long years ago, neither is it a crucifix to be worn around our necks; it is a mighty power of God. "Christ crucified... the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:23,24). To do this thing, to save us from the strength of our own will, to break the power of this enmity in us against God, to transform us into the image of His Son, there is the power of God centred in the Cross. Oh, what an immense thing the Cross is! Let us go away from this meditation solemnly - I would almost say brokenly - worshipping for what it cost Him. Obedient! Have a proposition like that put up to you! Even in our sinfulness, in all our great capacity for sin, if a certain proposition were put up to us we should shrink from it, and say, 'God forbid that ever I should have to touch that!' We know a little of shrinking from atmospheres and conditions which are so contrary to the Lord. Think of Him! We cannot, we just cannot, understand what it meant to Him, the Holy One, to be sin, and to be asked by the Father to be placed in a position - not doctrinally and technically, but actually - where the wrath of God was let loose and exhausted itself on Him, and the far, far abandonment of God broke on His consciousness; He could not find God. He was helpless, impotent. That is what it cost; that was the meaning of His obedience for our salvation. Oh, how costly is our salvation! Let us dwell on it with reverent and heart-moved adoration. But we are not left there, thank God. Not one of us ever need taste the judgement of God; not one of us ever need know God-forsakenness or God even at a distance from us. We know just the opposite of that in our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith in Him. May the Lord take the feebleness of this presentation and impress on our hearts how great is the price of our redemption. We were redeemed "not with corruptible things, with silver or gold... but with precious blood" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Chapter 7 - The Triumph of Righteousness

"My heart overflows with a goodly matter; I speak the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. You are fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into your lips; therefore God has blessed you for ever. Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, your glory and your majesty. And in your majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness: and your right hand shall teach you terrible things. Your arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under you; they are in the heart of the king's enemies. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of equity is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows" (Psa. 45:1-7).

"...but of the Son he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, hath anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows" (Heb. 1:8-9). Into those two fragments of Scripture a great amount is gathered. In our previous meditation, we saw something, if it were but a little, of the meaning of the Cross of our Lord Jesus, and what judgement means. Now we move to the other aspect of the Cross, and come to the ground of righteousness. Sin to judgement has so far held our attention; now, righteousness.

The Conflict Between Two Kingdoms

But may I just say here once more, for the sake of the setting of everything, that what we are seeking to see in these meditations is that the cosmic conflict between the two great kingdoms, the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God, of darkness and light, of death and life, is heading up in a very intense and comprehensive way at this time to the end, and that the Lord's people everywhere are involved; and in a very real sense the conflict rests on them for its issue. The Church is the eternally chosen instrument and vessel in and through which the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus is to be manifested and administered. Unto that a deep spiritual preparation has to be

made on very practical grounds and along very practical lines, for these kingdoms are not just systems set up in an objective, external way. They are not political; they are not economic; they are not earthly in any sense. They are spiritual; and the very essence of their nature and strength and existence is a spiritual state, and that state is found within the very constitution of those who belong to the two kingdoms respectively. We have sought to see that the kingdom of Satan is really within man by nature. It is there in man's own nature that Satan now has his strength. On the other hand, the kingdom of the heavens is an inward thing. It is within you, and it is therefore a matter of inward constitution. Therefore one thing which arises for us is as to whether this kingdom, the kingdom of the heavens within the life of the people of God, is really going to manifest and express its supremacy, its ascendancy; and that is what we are called unto, and that is really the challenge of these meditations.

A Kingdom Ruled in Righteousness

Now we shall pursue that in an inward way again - as to what it means; but this time, on the side of righteousness. You notice that we read, "Of the Son he says, Your throne, O God." Do not draw mechanical lines between the kingdom of the Son of God's love and the kingdom of God. It is the same thing in meaning and value and effect. "Delivered us out of the power (authority) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. 1:13). What kingdom is that? "Your throne, O God," He says of the Son, "is forever and ever" - an everlasting kingdom: the same phrase as is used in the Old Testament of the kingdom of the Most High God (Dan. 4:23). "The sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you...."

Righteousness the Expression of the Righteous One

Now, if the kingdom of Satan is based on sin, and if sin is what we have said it is - rebellion, perversity, with all its outworking: pride: self in all its forms; to enmity against God, separation from God, and

utter impotence and helplessness to redeem itself - if that is the basis of the kingdom of Satan, then the kingdom of God is based on righteousness; that is, on that which is exactly the opposite of sin. If Satan is the embodiment of sin, then Christ must be the embodiment of righteousness, when rightly understood. The point is that it is something personal, not abstract or something in itself. Do not talk about sin as some abstract thing. Sin is the expression of a person. Satan is sin, and all that emanates from him is sin. In like manner, Christ is righteousness, and the righteousness which is of God is Christ, Who is made to us from God righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). He is "the Righteous One" (Acts 3:14). It is personal. We need to say that and emphasize it, so that we shall not get any kind of mentality that we are dealing with things. We are dealing ultimately with persons, and therefore with kingdoms. On both sides it resolves itself into 'Who?' not 'What?' Who is going to have the kingdom? Now if 'kingdom' suggests dominion, authority, power - as, of course, it does - then dominion, authority, power, rest on and spring from a nature. They are not official, exercised and asserted by an appointment. They spring from the nature of the person or persons concerned; that is, you and I will know no more of Divine power than we know of Divine nature, of Divine likeness. Our spiritual power, dominion, authority over the power of the enemy, depend on nothing other than our nearness to God and our likeness to Him. Any system of teaching about authority which takes up a certain kind of phraseology and begins to throw about phrases at the enemy without a deep knowledge of the basis of authority is a most dangerous and pernicious thing, and will involve all concerned in inevitable trouble from which it will not be easy to extricate them. This is not just a statement of ideas, this is fact. Some of us have seen the devil make awful havoc of people who stood up talking about Satan being a defeated foe, and throwing at him phrases from the Bible. The end of that has been scattering and shattering. But that does not mean that there is no such thing as authority over the enemy. What I am trying to emphasize is that it is necessary to know the basis of authority, and that basis is what is here meant by righteousness.

Features of the Righteous One

(a) Meekness

So then, in coming to the nature of the Kingdom which is founded on righteousness, we see how opposite it is in all its features to the kingdom of Satan. In the latter, as we have seen, pride is the starting point, the first feature of revolt, rebellion, and the long history of perversity. "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty" (Eze. 28:17). Therefore the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Son of God's love, must have at its very foundation the opposite of pride, which is meekness; and I would call your attention to the large place that the matter of meekness has in the Word of God, in both the Old Testament and the New. Let me give you but a little handful of references, which will make many others spring up in your mind immediately.

"The meek will he guide in justice; and the meek will he teach his way" (Psa. 25:9).

"The meek shall inherit the land" (Psa. 37:11).

"The Lord upholds the meek" (Psa. 147:6).

"He will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psa. 149:4).

"(He shall) decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. 11:4).

"The Lord... has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek" (Isa. 61:1).

All that leads us to the One Who was the full embodiment of that feature. "Take my yoke on you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). To Jerusalem the prophetic utterance was made, "Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and riding on an ass" (Matt. 21:5). And Peter speaks of this as of great preciousness when he says, "Whose adorning... let it be... a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet.3:4). Paul said, I Paul myself entreat you by the meekness... of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1). To the church to which, through him, had just been given that immense and incomprehensible revelation of the fore-ordination, the predestination, the election of the Church in Christ before the foundation of the world, and of the object for which those Divine counsels chose it - to the church to which had just been given that

matchless unfolding of the Church's eternal calling and heavenly vocation and resources, he comes right down, so to speak, from that high pinnacle and says, "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith you were called, with all... meekness" (Eph. 4:1-2): 'Do not let all this result in spiritual pride.' What is the way of the realisation of it all? By self-assertiveness? No - "all lowliness and meekness."

These fragments, surely, are sufficient to bring us right up against this fact, that power over the whole power of Satan is found centred in the first place in meekness. It says that all that mighty power of sin, all that mighty kingdom which Satan has set up, into which he has drawn all the sons of men by nature - his kingdom is to be undone by meekness; that meekness is a greater power than that.

(b) Yieldedness and Obedience

We use another word here in this connection - yieldedness. The actual word does not occur often in the Scriptures, but what it means fills the Scriptures. We saw that in Lucifer's rebellion, and then in the great betrayal of Adam into his hands, the thing which influenced and governed the enemy and Adam was possessiveness, drawing to self - 'I will, I will, I will' and all Satan's force was bent on having and holding and not letting go; so his kingdom stands on that. Does that need any argument? Look abroad to day - the grab, the acquisitiveness, the stretching out of the hand to have, to take, to hold, to dominate by possession. Over against that is the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, and the characteristic of Christ and of His kingdom is yieldedness.

It is again a significant and impressive thing that in the letter to the Philippians this matter of yieldedness arises, though unfortunately the actual word itself is not used in our translation. We know what that letter contains. Euodia and Syntyche were evidently standing for their own rights. Somehow or other, they had got across one another. One of them perhaps had been the offender, and the other was standing to have her own rights established. 'You must apologize to me, you must ask my forgiveness, you must restore what you have taken from me.' Then, as his means and method of meeting a situation like that (which

you might think is, after all, only a little private quarrel between two people; why make so much of it?) Paul brings in the greatest argument that it is possible to find. By implication he goes right back, before this world was, to that scene we have depicted earlier, where the covering cherub, walking up and down midst the stones of fire, the most glorious created being, next to the very throne of God, said, "I..." and all the mischief started. And in Euodia and Syntyche, two people on this earth, away there in Philippi, the very same thing is being expressed. Here is division because of pride and personal interest and personal possessiveness. It is exactly the same thing, and it divides. So the Apostle appeals. He says, 'Because in principle it is the same thing and therefore in outworking it will have the same effect of rending the Church, see how it has been dealt with and adjust yourselves. There was One Whose right it was to be equal with God; He did not grasp at that equality, He emptied Himself, became obedient to death, yea, the death of the Cross.' In our previous meditation we saw something of what that means - obedient for the sake of rescuing this disintegrated universe from the thralldom of Satan. Because of that principle of possessiveness at work, the Father asked the Son, 'Will you be made sin? Will you allow all the consequences of that evil to be laid on you to the extent that the great divide takes place between you and myself, and you go out into the land of forgetfulness, far, far from me, where you will cry and not be heard?' - and much more than that. And, He became obedient. He said, 'Yes, I will'; and He died of a broken heart because of all that. Paul says to Euodia and Syntyche, two people on this earth - 'That is the range of this situation between you, that is the significance of it; this thing has got to come to its right relationship and focus.' "I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord." "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). 'Yield! The devil is in this; he has a foothold here and is aiming through you two to disrupt the very Church of God, to do here what he did in heaven long ago, and what he has done on earth all through the centuries. It is the kingdom of Satan that is here. The only way to undo it is by yieldedness.' So (keeping in mind that setting) a little later in the letter the Apostle says, "Let your

forbearance (yieldedness) be known to all men." The translation in the Authorized Version - 'moderation' - is unfortunate and weak. "Let your yieldedness be known to all men." The Lord Jesus was the great Master of the art of letting go. There is a sense in which His whole life on this earth was a life of letting go. Men and Satan offered Him a kingdom; He let it go. All the time He knew how to let go; in that way He came to possess. "You hast... hated iniquity." goes to the heart of the whole thing. "Therefore God... has anointed you." 'You have the Kingdom because You let go.'

He was "as a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7). There can be no more perfect picture of yieldedness. "As a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." You remember that when He was before His accusers, before those who were to slay Him, they did everything they could to get Him to open His mouth in self-defence, but "he gave... no answer, not even to one word" (Matt. 27:14). That was yieldedness. But oh, that we knew something more of the power of yieldedness, the spiritual power of that kind of thing! We ought to dwell on it long, we ought to search our hearts.

We are not naturally made that way. We are very ready to give a back answer, to justify ourselves, to vindicate ourselves, to stand for our rights, to take offence, to be very upset if in any way our interests are challenged or cut across. Yes, in the bus, in the train, when things do not go easily and people do not treat us as we think they ought to treat us, we are up in a moment. It is so easy to be caught; the spirit of meekness is not always there. We have a lot to learn.

Now again, it is not a matter of introspective self-examination and analysis. It is a matter of knowing what is the meaning of having the Spirit of Jesus resident within us in order to make us Christlike; and the thing to be kept in view is not only our need of being Christlike but the reason for that need, namely, that there is a great kingdom to be overthrown. Yieldedness is the way to it.

And, yieldedness includes and issues in obedience - the opposite of rebellion. In view of what we have been saying, I do not think we need dwell in more detail on this; but it is well that we ponder the specific statement that concludes and crowns the declaration concerning the

yieldedness of the Lord Jesus - "becoming obedient even to death... Wherefore also God highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:8,9).

(c) Dependence

Then dependence; the opposite of independence, with all its many forms of outworking, of which we were speaking earlier - either throwing God over altogether, seeking to realise our destiny without calling on Him, or through the various less blatant expressions of independence on to the place where even the sanctified man begins to show signs of spiritual pride because the Lord blesses him. It is so easy to assume that, because He has blessed, a step taken can be repeated without the need for going back to the Lord and saying, 'Lord, even though the last hour was a mighty hour, nothing can be for the next hour unless it comes from Thee.' That subtle movement, the taking of a second step because the first one has been blessed, springs from spiritual pride - presumption.

Look at the Lord Jesus. If there is one thing that stands right out as you follow Him in those years here on the earth, it is this matter of His dependence on the Father. "The Son can do nothing of himself" (John 5:19). Very often you can almost feel Him waiting, poised, suspended between doing and not doing, going and not going, with constraints and influences being brought to bear on Him to cause Him to act.

You recall His mother's words, "They have no wine" (John 2:3), with their suggestion of an opportunity for Him to save from embarrassment in a very unhappy situation, to do something quite kind. But He is for the moment poised. "My hour is not yet come." He cannot, He will not do it simply at her suggestion.

His brethren urged Him to go up to Jerusalem at the time of the feast of tabernacles, but His answer was "Go you up to the feast; I go not up to this feast" (John 7:1-10). Then, when they were gone up, He Himself went up. All through His life it was like that. Not because other people did it, not because it was the recognized thing to do, not because of any consideration, sentimental or otherwise, did He act in any matter. It was - 'Father, do You want this?' He would not act apart

from the Father. He was absolutely dependent on the Father. Was not Satan's kingdom overthrown in that way?

Were not many of these things all of a piece with that threefold temptation in the wilderness? - "Command that these stones become bread"; "Cast yourself down"; "...if you will fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:3,5,9). What is behind it? - 'Act on your own initiative, do something out from yourself, take the matter into your own hands!' But He refused, knowing that He had been committed to the Father and that He was the Father's bond-slave. "Behold, my servant" (Isa. 42:1). This was dependence indeed.

Now our whole being revolts naturally against the idea of dependence. Our pride will not let us be dependent; we are independent by nature. Yes, that is the poison of Satan in us. If that comes into the spiritual realm, it is in principle the kingdom of Satan coming into the kingdom of God.

But dependence is the way of power. Why? - because it is the way along which the Lord comes. It is the meek, the dependent, to whom the Lord looks. "To this man will I look..." (Isa. 66:2). Power results from having the Lord with us. We may presume and assume and go on with some activity, but what is the good if the Lord is not with us?

(d) Selflessness Born of Love

All this is summed up in selflessness, which is not simply negative - self-abnegation, the cessation of desire, such as is seen in Buddhism. Selflessness is the fruit of love, and love is a very positive thing.

Why did the Lord Jesus take that position and hold to it and fight out that battle right to the end, even to great drops of blood, against all the pressure brought on Him from the spiritual world? Why did He say, "Not my will, but thine, be done"? Why? Because of His love for His Father. Love was the positive factor, and selflessness is positive when it comes into this realm. It is love, the love of Christ constraining. When love comes in, self goes out. So we are not going to take the negative side in this matter; we are going to ask the Lord to fill us with His love, and self will go out. Those two things can never hold the throne together. Selflessness - that is how love shows itself; that is the

fruit of love.

The Effects of Sin Negated by Righteousness

What is the result of all this meekness, yieldedness, obedience, dependence, selflessness? Well, just the opposite of what sin was on the other side. Sin was enmity against God; the result here is love, the love of God in Christ shed abroad in our hearts, destroying the enmity. Sin put at a distance; this nature of Christ brings nearness and likeness to God. Instead of impotence comes power with God and the power of God.

The Issue of Righteousness - Life

Now if you turn to the book of the Revelation - where all things in the Bible are brought to a consummate expression - you find there that the end of movements in the cosmos is the hurling from his height of "the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan"; hurled down at last, with all his, to his destruction; and then the coming down out of heaven of the New Jerusalem to take his place. But how has it come about? "The Lamb shall overcome..." (Rev. 17:14). John at one point said he saw in the vision a book sealed with seven seals and he heard a voice saying, "Who is worthy to open the book...?" and there was none found to open it. And he said, "I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book." But the angel said, "Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome to open the book." And John turned to see this Lion, and being turned, he beheld "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:1-6). You are familiar with that. A Lion? - power, majesty, dominion? Yes, all that. Where? - "a Lamb... as though it had been slain"; a slain Lamb, the embodiment of all the features of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11). Oh, there is spiritual meaning in all that! It ought to find us out, it ought to pierce our hearts! How shall the enemy be overthrown? How shall his kingdom be destroyed? By the nature of the Lamb being so developed in us, the people of God, that all that other kingdom of Satan is undone in principle. And the power of this

kingdom, which is an everlasting kingdom, is the power of the nature of Him of Whom it is said, "Your kingdom..." It is His nature. "You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore..." And this is life triumphant over death; and when the Lamb has made war and has prevailed, and the Church has come into the good of that in fellowship with Him because of the blood of the Lamb, because of the word of their testimony, having loved not their own lives to the death, then the way is opened for the final scene - the new Jerusalem; and from the midst of the city issues the river, the water of life. That is life!

What is life? It is letting go to God; it is meekness; it is all this that we have been speaking of; it is Christ, the Life. We are not dealing with things - although there may well be a very literal side to all this and it is not simply all principles and abstract ideas; yet behind all else there are spiritual features. We are not thinking of going to heaven until heaven has come to us. We are not thinking of going to the Lord till the Lord has come to us. We are not thinking of a kingdom which is going to be given to us until that kingdom has already been constituted in us. All that depends on what the Lord does inside us now and our intelligent co-operation with Him in what He is after.

The Kingdom Established Within by the Tests of Faith

Why is He treating us as He does? Why does He lead us through the experiences that we go through?

Do you ever have the slightest sense that the Lord has left you? In spite of what we have said about Christ bearing all for us, do we not from time to time feel the Lord far away? Why? Oh, we have puzzled over that! He has said, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even to the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20); "I will in no way fail you, neither will I in any way forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). 'Then where are Thou, Lord, today? You dost seem to be a thousand miles away today, I have no sense of Your presence.' Why? just this; God's fact is that He is not far away. What about your faith in God's fact? Are you living on facts or feelings? by faith or by sight? - for everything has to be established by faith. Faith must rise up and say, 'Lord, You dost seem to be a thousand miles away today, but You are not, You are here,

according to Your promise. I repudiate the devil's suggestion that You have left me, and that I have grieved the Holy Spirit and You have forsaken me; I repudiate it on the ground of all that You have done to bridge that gap by the Cross.' When faith thus asserts its position things are restored, the trouble is cleared up.

And as it is with that matter, so it is with all others. We are in the school, where we are to learn that we are not just living on the Bible in an objective way, and that there is a sense in which the Bible merely as a book cannot help us or do us any good. Somehow or other, there has to be something done between us and that which God has said, in order to make it real, and that is done through testing and trial; and thus the spiritual reality - the Kingdom - is established within us, and we learn to reign over that other kingdom. The Lord help us.

Chapter 8 - The Triumphant Christ and His People

There remains this one section where everything is gathered up into Christ and the believer.

I do want that we should really understand what it is that the Lord is bringing us to in these days in which we are living; that is, to understand, and very clearly apprehend, the super-earthly setting of all that is going on. (I have before used the word 'cosmic.' I do not like that word at all, and I am not sure that everybody understands or grasps the force of it; so perhaps if I say the super-earthly nature and setting of things, you will understand better what I mean.) The significance of that is that things are not limited to that which is going on on the earth, but there is another setting of everything, a spiritual background, and it is there that things pre-eminently count. That is the realm in which we are moving, and it is what relates to that that is heading up in these times to a final encounter and conclusion, and therefore it is necessary that we should be very much aware of that setting so far as Christ and believers are concerned.

We have all read accounts of the life of Christ, and we have found them more or less interesting and, in a way, profitable. We have found it interesting to know who the Roman rulers were in His days: what sort of place it was in which He was born: what Nazareth was like: the features of the Lake of Galilee: what sort of men the fishermen were; and a thousand and one other things like that related to His earthly life, all very informative and of a certain kind of value; but is that the life of Christ? Is that all? Is that the story of Jesus? You see what I mean. The real life of Christ was not in Galilee or Judea, not in this place or in that, amidst these scenes or those. The real life of Christ was altogether outside of that realm. The story of Jesus is a story which can never be written in terms of places and things and people. The real life, the real story, is back of all that. It is set in the super-earthly realm. Really, the interest is supernatural interest, not merely human. The whole thing has a meaning which may be entirely missed by studying only what He did and where He went, what He said and what happened to Him. It is that other that matters - the setting of it all as in eternity, as at the centre of a great universe, in the presence of

spiritual and unseen intelligences and forces. That is where the life of Christ is written, that is where it is alone truly known, and, although we may have all the other information, with all its interest or even fascination, it does not get us very far. I ask you, how far will it get you, in your desperate and terrible conflict with sin and the powers of evil, to know that Jesus was born in a little village called Bethlehem with its terraces of houses, and so on? It does not get you very far, does it? But see that other scene and know what is happening there, and you may find that it has a very great bearing on your deepest spiritual experience. That is what I mean by the super-earthly setting of it all, and it is with that that we are concerned for a little while now.

The Sphere of His Triumph

So we will first of all seek to see Christ as in that setting. We must therefore recognize that there was one inclusive thing at the heart of Christ's coming into this world. It had two sides, but it was one thing. On the one side, it was the undoing of the kingdom of Satan, in firstly the virtual, and then the ultimate, destruction of that kingdom. Virtual - yes, it was done. Ultimate - it has yet to be done. Demons recognised the significance of His presence. "I know you who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29). That points on to the ultimate destruction. But His presence then, and His Cross, were their virtual destruction. We come into the line of the second, the ultimate, when we come into the virtual; but that is for presently. On the one side, then, it was this destruction of the kingdom of Satan which lay right at the heart of Christ's coming; on the other hand, there was the inauguration of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God - now its virtual inauguration, later its literal establishment. Those are the things which are central to His coming; not, coming to live the life of a good man, however good, and to propound certain teachings, 'the teachings of Jesus,' and to set a great example of how men ought to live, and then to be the supreme example of how men ought to be willing to die for their principles. How far short all that is of the real meaning! Now then, there are three aspects of this of which we have just spoken. The

first is the universal – what we have called the cosmic - relationship of everything in the life of the Lord Jesus, and that is outlined for us here in the incarnation, the temptation, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the exaltation.

(a) The Triumph of the Incarnation

Let us note how from its very commencement even before it actually happened - the incarnation, that coming in flesh and tabernacling amongst us, touched those cosmic, super-earthly factors of which we have been speaking: the factors which constitute the kingdom of Satan, the very nature of Satan – that pride, that rebellion, that perversity by which that satanic kingdom is constituted and maintained here. I say, even before His birth that was touched. Listen again to the conversation which took place between the angel and Mary as this great proposition was put to her. It was not imposed on her - that is the point; it was not something brought to her and of which it was said, 'This must be, you must do this, it is required of you.' No; it was a proposition, an intimation, the presentation to her of a great Divine thought and intention, involving her, so far as human life and relationships were concerned, in the most difficult and sensitive position; and that is suspended before her. She looks at it, weighs it up. She sees the implications on the human side. She sees what this could easily lead to - that she might be an outcast of society. We will not follow that. She is alive to it, and as you read that story it is not difficult to see, to feel, that a real battle is going on in her soul - a battle, and, at last, a victory; a victory in her will and a victory which requires the casting down to the earth of pride, of all self-interest. A mighty victory - "Be it to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) - the absolute self-surrender of Mary to the will of God. "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord" - the servant spirit. You can see in the light of that what is being touched. If pride had had a place...! See what was involved so far as the kingdom of Satan was concerned. If self-interest had governed, if there had been rebellion, perversity, unwillingness to let go - well, I expect the Lord would have found another vessel, but, we do not know anything about that. What we do see here is the great

drama of the ages concentrated in one woman's soul, and the issue is, Will she yield, let go, submit, to the will of God? It was in that self-abandonment that there came about that union of her will with the will of God which brought into being, so far as this earth was concerned, the One Who was going to dethrone Satan; and the very dethronement of Satan required the undoing of the pride, the rebellion, the perversity, the selfhood, which had asserted itself in God's universe; and the first battle was in that woman's soul. We have the Christmas season and we talk about the birth, but I do not think we have seen the terrific thing which lay behind the very first step in the incarnation, the setting of it right out there in that vast realm. We have been a little afraid of talking too much about Mary because of that wicked, pernicious system which exists, which worships her, and has given an exaggerated and false meaning to the words of her song - "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48); and, of course, we have the phrase 'the blessed Virgin Mary' and we are afraid of it. Well, the devil is very clever. He has covered up, by that very falsehood, the truth that there in her soul the first steps were taken in the conquest of his kingdom - the overthrow of pride and the absolute surrender of will so that the will of the woman became one with the will of God, to make it possible for Gen. 3:15 to be fulfilled - "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: he shall bruise your head..." But that is not all, even then, in the incarnation. There is the mystery of the virgin birth. We do not accept the theory of the 'immaculate conception' which makes Mary a sinless creature. In the genealogy of Mary there were sinful people and naturally she inherited a sinful nature: but the angel's words to her concerning "that holy thing" meant that Jesus would not inherit a sinful nature, but would be sinless, uncorrupted and incorruptible. By Divine act there was a clean cut between the first Adam and the last as to nature, and the last was an altogether other, which does not belong to this realm but to that which is over there, where God is in His apartness and in His difference, His 'otherness.' Somehow there is a miracle being wrought by the Holy Ghost to separate that Holy One from the unholy

inheritance. It was necessary, you see, for the undoing of the kingdom of Satan. It is there, in the utter separateness of Christ from the first Adam, that this cosmic battle has its greatest force.

And then see how interested the other forces were in this whole matter. There is a tremendous activity going on, not only in Bethlehem's stable, and in the fields around and in the lands afar - whether it be the land from whence wise men come, or in Judea where Herod is. There is a very much bigger interest being taken in this whole thing. Here, on that victory in the soul of that woman, with the principles that were involved, and that miracle of the Holy Ghost in cutting in between the stream of Adam's sin and that "holy thing" - here is focused the whole course of the battle of the ages; yes, Gen. 3:15, not only as a prophecy and a statement, but as something with tremendous, far-reaching consequences immediately arising. Oh, the murderer! The story of Cain and Abel shows us the beginning of the battle of the two systems, and that battle of two systems develops, expands, from individuals to tribes, from tribes to nations; and you see it all the way through the Bible, along two lines, on two grounds - murder and mixture. If the adversary cannot kill, as he sought to kill Moses and others of the servants of the Lord who were in the line - if he cannot slay the elect people and destroy them directly, he will entice them, he will ensnare them, he will somehow bring in mixture, by mixed marriages, mixed worship, and accomplish his end. The Bible is just full of that - murder and mixture in order to frustrate the overthrow of the evil kingdom and the coming in of this other; and it is all that universal interest and concern that is focused here on the incarnation. It is that which lies behind Herod's murderous, iniquitous, barbarous edict to destroy all the male children. We have known that done before to get another in this line - in order to catch one, just one. The devil stands at nothing to get his object. The incarnation is set in that realm. The birth of the Lord Jesus - oh, would to God we could strip it of a lot of that which has come in and simply ruined its spiritual value, these annual festivities! If only we could see what a tremendous thing this is, beyond all that has to do with eating and drinking, and so on, on this earth! I think I have said enough to

indicate that in every one of these points the setting is the same.

(b) His Triumph in Temptation

The temptation, we know, was in that setting, and the same factors were in that temptation. What were they? - mixture or murder. Does that need threshing out in the three temptations of the Lord Jesus after His baptism? It is quite clear that seduction was the enemy's object - to seduce Him on to his, the enemy's, ground. "All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). 'You can have, if...' Seduction by bribery; and by bribery, corruption. The enemy will even quote Scripture to seduce, urging the Lord to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple on the ground of a certain promise in Scripture. "He shall give his angels charge concerning you: ...On their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone." But the Lord's response exposed the snare - "You shall not make trial of the Lord your God." There are some ways in which God will not preserve us - the ways of presumption.

Presumption is the way of the devil. David might well pray, "Keep back your servant... from presumptuous sins" (Psa. 19:13). It would have been presuming on God and His word to have done it at the suggestion of Satan. You see the subtlety and depth of the seductive art to corrupt, to murder. God could not have kept Him in that way, and He would have died. How deeply laid was that plan! Yes, His temptation is set in a far bigger world than men have made of it. What a lot we have read about these temptations, purely of an earthly nature and meaning.

(c) The Triumph of His Death

As for the crucifixion - our earlier meditations have been enough to show that the crucifixion was something more than the death of a good man for his convictions. It had very far-reaching meaning, far beyond this earth. The Apostles give us very clear indication of what took place out there when He stripped off principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross (Col. 2:15). That is the setting.

(d) The Triumph of His Resurrection and Exaltation

As for His resurrection and exaltation, well, listen to Paul again - "When he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:20-21). That is not earthly, that is not just here. We see the setting of Christ's raising and exaltation. What we have thus far said is only the first of the things included in this great setting - the universal or cosmic relationship of everything where Christ was concerned.

The Dynamic Power of His Life

The second thing is that which is gathered into the word 'life.' That was the focal point, that was where the issue was really centred. Life! The Lord Jesus knew that He had come with a dynamic force and virtue which would answer everything. "I came that they may have life" (John 10:10). "I give to (my sheep) eternal life" (John 10:28). He knew that He had in His possession a dynamic force, the nature and the power of which would solve everything - what we call Divine life. It is not only a force, it is a force because it is a nature; its power is found in its nature. It is Divine, it is life. One thing against which the enemy is set is that. All his activities are centred on that life - firstly to prevent men receiving it. And what lengths he will go to in offering alternatives and substitutes and imitations rather than that they should have the real, the genuine, thing! What colossal systems of religion he will build up just to get in the way of one thing - to prevent the reception of Divine life, the very life of God Himself. And then, when he has been outwitted and the life is received and within, if he can by any means do so he will throttle that life. He will set himself to destroy the vessel of that life, the very body in which it exists; and how many arts there are to do that! How much wisdom is needed by the children of God to see to it that they do not violate the laws of Divine life! If that life can be by any means suppressed, thwarted, hindered, limited, then that is the enemy's object - to do it. On the other hand, how great is the need of the Lord's people for

understanding and education as to the ways of that life, and that they should not touch that in which death is. That is the real battle all the way along. You know, I am sure, what I mean by touching death. You know it in your own heart. If you speak a proud word, if you begin to boast as a Christian of anything that is earthly, personal, if you speak or act in ways which are unseemly for a child of God, what is the feeling? Something seems to have died within you - that is the feeling, as though something had died. Your joy, your rest, your peace, your sense of the Lord's nearness, have gone under a cloud. Something has happened; you know it; you have touched death. The ways of life demand that you should not do that sort of thing. You learn; the Spirit of life is within, teaching in that way. That is anticipating the believer's education, but it is helpful here to see. This is the thing which relates to that great cosmic conflict; it is life. If that life can get in and have its way, and if the Lord's people will learn how to co-operate with and correspond to the laws of that life, why, in them and therefore because of them, Satan is losing ground all the time, and the other kingdom of the Son of God's love is gaining ground, because that kingdom also is not an external system; it is a spiritual thing which has to do with our inner life. Let us leave that there.

Believers in the Sphere of His Triumph

There is a third thing to be mentioned - a multiplied seed. This is His way - a corn of wheat passing its life through death into a hundred, a thousand, other corns, multiplying and multiplying. That is, the union, the organic and vital union, of believers with Christ by which is fulfilled in a spiritual sense the ordinance - "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. 1:22); by Divine life transmitted through His death, a multiplied seed. That is the way to the undoing of the kingdom of Satan, that is the vessel set in the midst of the whole universal scene.

(a) Triumph in a New Life Imparted

Now what is true of Christ is true of believers, because we have simply passed from Him personally to Him corporately. We have to see that, just as much in our case as in His, we are set in that cosmic setting.

Our lives as believers, as children of God, are set in and given that universal significance. What is the meaning of new birth? We have reduced that and limited it far too much to a matter of our personal avoidance of hell and entrance into heaven, of escaping the misery of our sins and coming into salvation and therefore into peace, and when we have got there, well, perhaps we shall learn a few things and grow in grace a little; but it remains very largely for a multitude of people quite a personal matter – their salvation and the salvation of a lot of other persons as such - and it all ends with the persons. But is that all? What is new birth? Well, it is what we have just been saying: this new life, which cannot be overcome of death, introduced to a new organism - "quickened... together with Christ... and raised up with him" (Eph. 2:5,6) - a new organism with a new life, this Divine life, imparted. And then the battle starts.

Why do we not understand the elementary conflicts of a new born child of God? It is not until a child is born that the battle starts; and the battle starts inside. Why? Because with the birth of the child, it is set in a world of other relationships where it is no longer just an individual with a world to itself. It is now set in another world; there must be other wills and other ideas; and it finds itself up against something more.

Its own life comes into conflict with the life of that world. If you try to perpetuate the conditions of the life of the newborn child afterward, and make the whole world belong to that child, you will ruin it. We speak of spoiled children; what do we mean? We mean that we have made them the centre of the world, as though the world was created for them and they are to have everything they ask for, and to be denied nothing. By such treatment we are countering the whole principle of life in a child, that of responsibility.

Carry that over to the spiritual, for it is only a parable. When we are born anew, and that Divine life is found within, we are introduced into a world which is a world of conflict; that life in us is at once thrown out into a realm of conflict, of contending wills, and our spiritual education begins along that line and that life has got to find its own inherent, natural potentialities of overcoming. That is exactly why

Satan has been left here. You may ask yourself often why, when the Lord Jesus met him in the Cross, did He not utterly wipe him out? If only He had done that, look what a lot would have been prevented! Look at all the centuries of trouble for which he is responsible! Why did not the Lord finish him there and then? The answer is that in doing as He did the Lord is going to get much more than He would have done by finishing him. He has given us a chance of proving the tremendous potency of Divine life, even to the point where that life is ultimately triumphant over all the power of death. It begins in new birth. Birth from above is a tremendous thing in all it points to and includes.

(b) Triumph in Transformation of Character

We go on to transformation. What is the transformation of the believer? In a word, it is simply breaking down on the one hand and building up on the other. In the physical realm that is going on in the body of every one of us. There are two things going on, one breaking down the food we eat and extracting the food properties. This is called catabolism. The other activity is the positive building up of the body by means of the breaking down of the food compounds and the liberation of their potential energies. This is called anabolism. The word which covers both of these processes is metabolism, which means, change of life. We all know how changed we feel after healthful food when the body is needing it. It is like that spiritually.

Transformation in the Christian life is like that. This life process in us is breaking down and getting rid of what is poison and not required; saying, 'No, that is not good, we do not want that, that must go'; on the other hand, there is the inward witness, 'This is what we need, what we want, this builds up.' If Christians do not know and are not learning consciously what is good and what is not good for them spiritually, there is something wrong with their spiritual health. If the life of God is having its way in us, those two things are going on. We are getting more intelligent to things that will not help us, and we cast them off; on the other hand, we do know what is good, what is of value spiritually, and we say, 'That is what I am after.' It is spiritual

intelligence, and by this twofold process of breaking down and building up we are being changed. It is a life action. The transformation of believers comes along that line.

(c) Triumph in Learning Christ through Trial

And you gather into that all the New Testament has to say about spiritual understanding - being "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Our Christian education, then, lies in that direction, but it comes along the line of testing, trial, adversity, suffering. If we know anything at all, we have learned it through suffering, through trial, through adversity. If we know the Lord, how do we know Him? Well, our real knowledge of the Lord is not book knowledge, but just what we have learned in the fires, in the trials. We come to knowledge when we have been really up against things with the enemy.

(d) Triumph in Manifestation of Secret Victories

We pass on for a word on the manifestation of believers. What do we mean? I am putting this all in that fuller, higher, spiritual realm. The manifestation? - well, Romans 8 tells us, all about that. "The earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God" (8:19). When the education is complete and the graduation takes place, that which has been going on under cover, hidden deep down in the believers, will be revealed. A great deal goes on unsuspected by even those nearest at hand - all those secret battles that others know nothing about, all those conflicts in which we have to get away alone and seek the Lord for grace, victory and strength. The whole cumulative conflict of the spiritual life, though so largely hidden from view, has been having an effect, it has been doing something, it has been changing us, making us different, making us more Christ-like, more gentle, more humble, more dependent. It has all come out of the secret education, but it is all going to be manifested; sons are going to be manifested, and with their manifestation it is going to be found that that is what the whole creation has been waiting for. Why, the creation was made for this, for a people to occupy it who are like the Lord - full

of His glory. And when that is wrought out, then the creation's meaning is explained, and the creation itself is delivered from the bondage of corruption. That brings us to our final word – glorification.

(e) Triumph in Glorification

I pass over this very rapidly and in a general way. After all, glorification is only the manifestation of that life in fulness. It is the very nature of that Divine life brought out to fulness; and with that, the great cosmic battle ends. When we are manifested with Him in glory the fight is finished, the war is at an end, Satan has no more ground and no more place, and the new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven.

That is a lot said. I am only concerned that our breadth, expansiveness of thought, and many words, may not take away from the immediate challenge and import. That is the thing that we are in now. It is a grim business. There are tremendous issues hanging on this whole matter of our setting - from our spiritual birth to our manifestation in glory; tremendous things hanging on our spiritual life - on what is going on in us, how we are learning, how we are growing, how that life is having its way, how we are coming to know the Lord, and how we are counting in the unseen. True value does not attach to us merely as people belonging to a religion called Christianity, who believe and do certain things, but our real value is as living men and women who count, just as our Lord counted, out there in the realm far beyond this earth surface. If we do not count there it is all a caricature, it does not mean anything at all. The Lord make us count for Him in that way!

Chapter 9 - The Crowning

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the Crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has stood the test, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).

"Fear not the things which you are about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

"And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, you shall receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Pet. 5:4).

"We behold him who has been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9).

The above passages bring into view and sum up practically all that we have been dealing with in our earlier meditations. Three words compass all - righteousness, life, glory. You will notice that there are said to be three crowns at the end - the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory. Of course, what is meant by 'crown' is the sealing of a course in triumph, with honour, with exaltation, the crown being the symbol both of victory and victorious honour.

Crowning in Relation to an Ordeal

You will notice this common feature in all the passages - in every case the relationship was to an ordeal.

The Apostle Paul said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"; an ordeal expressed by three metaphors - a fight, a race, a trust - all indicating that something very serious was at issue. The other two passages, from James and from the Revelation, suggest an ordeal, a time of severe trial and testing.

"Blessed is the man that endures temptation (trial)." "Be faithful to

death." And similarly also with Peter. You know that Peter's writings can very largely be summed up in the words "suffering" and "glory." It is he who writes so much about the trial of faith, but he also writes much about the glory after the trial. Here it is in Peter - the crown of glory. "When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, you shall receive the crown of glory."

Now the point is that there is something very serious on hand; and that is, of course, the sum of all these meditations. From beginning to end, the Lord has been seeking to make us aware of the serious business that is on hand just now for the Church - no less a thing than the fulfilment of its vocation, the accomplishment of its course, the preserving intact of its trust. Expressed in other terms, that is no less a matter than proving the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ in the realm of Satanic forces - forces which are so evidently pressing in and seeking, with new, far-reaching efforts and activities, to set the kingdom of God aside and to rule out the Lord Jesus from this world. If I am not mistaken, the Lord would rally His Church at this end-time and make it aware of that for which it was eternally chosen in Christ and for which it exists as the instrument and vessel - the answering of that challenge in this universe to the sovereign rights of the Lord Jesus.

Are we really alive to the fact of the tremendous challenge to the kingdom of God that exists in the world today? We hear of many disturbing things happening. I hope you are not regarding them all simply on the earthly level and becoming more or less paralysed by the outlook. Rather we ought to look behind the events, and see the portent, the significance of them. What we see and hear is only the forefront of the situation, the earthly aspect, of something more, something other; and that other is Satan's bid - perhaps his last - for the kingdom.

We are getting very near the last days. Spiritually discerning people can surely see the drift of things today, and in the light of that the people of God must know where they stand, and it is not beside the point at all to quote words like these - "The devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have

tribulation ten days." Do not take that literally; ten is the number of responsibility. 'You are going to be put into a position where the whole responsibility for the testimony of Jesus will be worked out in whether you stand or go under, and it will become a matter of faithfulness to death.' Now, whether there be a literal prison or not, we can see that the people of God are facing very serious prospects at this time. We may not all be feeling the full force of the antagonism just now, but such statements are very apropos to the situation of many. The evil thing is creeping on; and the Church is chosen to give the answer to it. And in our measure we are all involved. Of course, how much you really count spiritually depends entirely on how much you are going on with the Lord, what your spiritual position is; but some of us, who have had time enough to learn, do know that spiritual pressure is a thing more intense today than ever we have known it in our lives. The enemy did at one time seem to give us a certain amount of respite, but he does not give us very much now. One thing follows another. I may be talking into the air for some of you, but sooner or later you will find that this is true.

The Crown of Righteousness

Now, you see these three things. First of all, righteousness - the crown of righteousness. What we have been saying in earlier meditations is that righteousness is the battleground of this great cosmic conflict between the two kingdoms. And what is righteousness? Well, after all, it is a matter of God having His rights. Those rights of God to absolute lordship were disputed or challenged long ago - before this present world creation was brought about. Failing in heaven, the challenge followed in the earth. A great betrayal of God by Adam put this world and this race into the hands of Satan. Self in all its forms of pride - self-interest, self-realisation, the Satanic 'I will' - reared itself up in Adam against God; and that is unrighteousness. And righteousness, we have been seeing, is just the reverse of that - no longer 'I' but the Lord, the changing of the centre of things, from the self-centre to the God-centre. That is the battleground, and we know that that is not outside of ourselves but inside; and when we are told that He was

made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21), we know that provision was thereby made for us to enjoy a change of disposition. Righteousness is a disposition that God shall be all in all, that everything shall be centred in God and be to Him. Unrighteousness is a disposition that we shall be the centre, and everything to us; and that is Satanic.

Now if you look at it, you will see that that is just what Paul was referring to. He is the great Apostle of righteousness. That goes without saying. When we look to see what Paul meant by righteousness, and what it meant to him, how constantly are we confronted with the Cross, and the Cross in relation to the man! We are so familiar with those chapters in his letter to the Romans, notably chapter 6. We know Gal. 2:20, and many other passages like it, such as 2 Cor. 5:14 - "One died for all, therefore all died." He did not regard righteousness as something abstract. Righteousness with him was a matter of one man being displaced by another - of Adam altogether put out of court and Christ put in his place. That is what the Apostle meant by righteousness. It was focused and centred in the Cross, where not only the secondary effects of the fall - sins - are dealt with, but also the primary effect - sin. Sin is the dethroning of God from His true place. Righteousness is the bringing of God back into His place, His rights and His rightful position; and the Cross did that. Paul was the great champion of the righteousness which is established by the death and burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and it is to that fight he refers. In effect, he is saying, 'I became committed to the great fight that God should have His place utterly and absolutely. I became involved in a course, the end of which was that God should be all in all. That was the trust deposited with me - to secure for God His rights through the Cross of the Lord Jesus. My life has been poured out for that; that has been the fight.'

And that fight was very often an inward one with Paul as well as an outward one. He could speak of fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus; he knew about the objective aspect of that fight. But oh, how much he tells about his own fight, about what is going on inside! And it was for Paul no easy thing to maintain that position of utter self-denial,

self-refusal, and maintain a course with and for God. 'That,' he would say in effect, 'is the way in which answer is given to this challenge to God's place in this universe. It is centred, it is fought out, on this battlefield of righteousness, and that is a personal and inward matter.' And he is so personal. You remember these words written to the Philippians - "That I may... be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own... but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings" (3:8-10). He is thinking of the battle on this matter of righteousness, which in the end is the dethroning of the enemy.

So far as we are concerned, the first aspect of this thing comes right home to us as a challenge; how far are we going to let go our personal interests - all that is personal in our lives here in this world - that God should have His place? That is very simple in words, but a tremendous thing in experience; it is a real battle. It comes to this; is the Lord, at all costs, really going to have His place? Paul said, "...for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse...", and that is how it must be. In so far as we have any self-ward direction, any personal interests to serve, and are not utterly abandoned to the Lord's having His way, to that extent the kingdom of Satan is upheld, is intact. It has always been by means of the people who had no interest in life or in death but that the Lord should have His place and His end, that the kingdom of Satan has been broken into and overthrown. And that is righteousness; there is the battleground. That is the thing which draws us out and is the test of our real interest in life. The Apostle says there is a crown of righteousness at the end of that course. He is not saying that it is the crown called righteousness. It is the battle of righteousness fought through, the course of righteousness completed, the deposit of righteousness preserved intact, and God crowns that at the end; He gives the seal and the mark of approval, the crown of righteousness.

The Crown of Life

The crown of life. Of course, this is also in the setting of difficulty,

suffering and adversity. "The man that endures temptation." But life is not the battleground; life is the object at stake. From the beginning it has been that - the battle for life. Satan at the beginning schemed and worked in order that he should capture the race for himself and defeat God's ends in the race. Wherever he has succeeded, he has done so in this way - that he has hindered men from having Divine life: because Divine life is not only continuity of life, it is a nature, a kind of life. It is the issue over which all the battle is raging. Life is the mark of victory now as well as afterward. Whenever we triumph on this battlefield of God having His place, His rights, there is a new release of life. Whenever in some controversy with the Lord as to His place, as to His will, there is victory gained and He is given what is His right, we know life rises up at once. Until that is settled, there is arrest. When we get to the Lord and face the matter out and get through about it with Him, then the hold-up goes and life springs up again and we are released. It is just that thing which is the object of all the activities of the enemy - to try to quench that life. Life is the issue. Now, says the Word here, you are in the battle for life. Satan is out to quench you, to destroy you. As the Lord's child, the issue is with you. Just how much you will lay hold on the Lord's life, how much you will stand on that Divine ground, how much in faith you will resist that working of death, in that degree you will know life. Oh, how that works out in so many ways, in so many details! Almost any day in our lives that issue arises - whether we are going to let death have its way. You know what I mean by death. I am not talking about being put in your coffin, but about spiritual death - those stifling, numbing, darkening forces that come on your body, mind and spirit, and wrap you around. You get up in the morning wondering what is the matter with you. For no apparent reason you feel depressed, 'dead.' What are you going to do about it? Are you going to give in and say, 'Well, I am not feeling too good, I think I will give up for a bit'? Are you going to yield to it? Well, if you do, you will not be able to get yourself free again until there is a real fight put up in prayer. You will find that there is something more than just a passing bad feeling, it is the battle for life that you are in. We are all in that, and from those simple, personal forms the battle is

intensifying and enlarging just now, and it is becoming the battle of the Church - that is the point - in an inward way. Is the Church really going to rise up and overcome this terrible wave of death that is spreading over the earth? It is a matter that is left with us; but that is the issue. Why do we not more quickly recognize what the issue is? We look at the secondary causes, we think at once that the explanation is this or that, but the real trouble has come from somewhere else, from behind; and that sort of thing is increasing. We are in the battle for life; it is the great issue from the beginning to the end. Now then, in the presence of it, what are we going to do? "Blessed is the man that endures trial; for when he has been approved, he shall receive the crown of life." How are we going to be approved? You have never seen a scholar approved who threw aside his test paper and said, 'I can never do anything with that! No use trying!'; or who got so far, and said, 'I cannot do any more, I give it up!' "Be faithful to death"; go right through to the end with this thing. That is what the Apostle is saying. Is it a battle? Well, do not give in. Is it a course? Do not drop out. Is it a trust? Do not surrender it. Go through with it, and you shall receive a crown of life.

The Crown of Glory

"When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, you shall receive the crown of glory." What is the crown of glory? Well, it is simply the nature of righteousness and life manifesting itself; for righteousness is glory hidden, glory is righteousness manifested. Glory? It may be that somehow or other it will be perceivable glory in the sense of some radiance about us personally. Sometimes you can almost see that in people - those in whom there is such an utterness of devotion to the Lord and such a complete selflessness of life. In such people you sometimes see something of a radiance about them, even physically. At any rate, looking at it the other way round, it is true to say that in people who are always occupied with themselves, and taken up with their own troubles and the difficulties of their way, you do not see very much that is other than a dark shadow, even over their faces. They bring nothing of light and brightness and glory with them. Well,

it may be that actual, literal glory will break out through these glorified bodies at last; but I believe the source of it and the seat of it is spiritual. It is that life of the Lord manifesting itself in fulness. It is that nature of the Lord - righteousness - breaking out and showing exactly what it is. It is the outbreking of the triumph over sin and death that is glory.

It is very significant to notice the setting of Peter's words. He has just been talking to the under-shepherds, and telling them to feed the flock - not for filthy lucre, not for praise, not that they should get something for themselves, and not because they are under an obligation to do it; but to do it selflessly, disinterestedly, abandoned to the Lord's interests, denying themselves. It may be costly to do this work for the Lord, but if you do it like that, with no other motive or object than the satisfaction of the Lord, "when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, you shall receive the crown of glory." Well, it is, in the end, the result of this self-life having been completely set aside and of the Lord alone filling our vision and governing our hearts and being our motive. Righteousness - God having His place; and because of that there is release, there is life, there is victory; and when God has His place and the life of God is regnant in us, then there is glory at the end. These three crowns, these three seals, these three marks that we have triumphed, that the Lord has got what He set His heart on - with these He attests in the end those who have been with Him in the battle. The battleground, righteousness; the object of the battle, life; the outcome of the battle, glory. May the Lord find us all in the running for the three crowns; but it is a battle, a deadly battle, and an inward battle. I sometimes think it would be so much easier if we were only in an outward battle; if only we could strike out against something objective. When the thing to be overcome is inside, when it is myself that must be slain, it is not so easy. May we be faithful to death.