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# You Have Come to Zion

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a series of conference messages given by T. Austin-Sparks in January, 1954.

The spoken form has been retained verbatim.

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# Chapter 1 - Our Heritage

The key phrase to our meditation at this time is in the twelfth chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, and at verse 22: "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are en rolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel".

It is only the first clause of that sentence which is taken as covering what we have to say. Although perhaps later we shall proceed to other parts of the whole statement, the words are: "Ye are come", and for some of the time in which we are together, I believe it is the Lord's will that we shall be occupied with the heritage of faith.

It is understood by all who have read and considered this document called "the letter to the Hebrews", that it is a most momentous document in the history of God's counsels for it sees the taking up of all that is in the Old Testament (especially as to Israel) and finding its full and final meaning in Christ and in His Church. The letter (or document) covers a great deal of ground. It covers the three great sections of the Old Testament: from Genesis to Exodus - forming the first great section of the Bible; from Exodus to the end of the bock of Judges - a second great section, and from the book of Judges to the end of the Old Testament at Malachi. All those sections are taken up and are covered by this comparatively short document. And all that is found in each one of them and in all of them together, is shown to be gathered into, fulfilled, consummated, in the Person and work of Christ and transmitted to His Church. So that in Christ and by Christ we have this immense heritage - we inherit all. There could hardly be a fuller and greater content in so small a fragment of only three words: "Ye are come".

This letter (I prefer to call it a document because such it is in very truth, a document for the Church's inheritance containing the heritage of believers in this dispensation) this document sets us on the Divine road with God - God from eternity on the move; moving forward in purpose. Then it gives us a caravan of travellers on that road: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Melchizedek, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Barak, Samuel, David - the priests, the kings, the prophets - they're all here in the caravan on the road of God.

It touches upon some of the things that we find on the journey, such as the tabernacle and its ordinances - all pointing onward. It says that all these who were of this great Divine caravan on the road of God from eternity to eternity were in a quest, in a pursuit of an inheritance. They looked; they not only looked, but they searched. They had left everything behind, they're on the road in quest of an inheritance. The whole of the aspect of those ages is, "Forward": seekers, pursuers, on trek with God.

And then this letter tells us that we are come to that which was the object of their quest through all those ages. We have the heritage for which they set out. They received not, because God had some better thing for us, that they, without us, apart from us, should not be complete. And what this letter says over all that, is that all, all that is no longer future, it is present. So far as

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entering into it is concerned, it is present; it is present to our apprehension. "Ye are come" -they were seeking, pursuing and coming! "Ye are come".

God started on His road, these men joined with Him. God has reached the end of His road, and we are with Him at the end of the road. It's a tremendous thing that is here in this document: "Ye are come". We have arrived! The caravan has arrived, "Ye are come". The whole of that heritage of faith - for these were all men and women of faith - the whole of that heritage of faith is now present for our entering in. "Ye are come".

Now that needs breaking up. We take the first phase of it, for in the first place, this document corresponds to the first two chapters of Genesis. That is quite patent. How does Genesis begin? "In the beginning God..." How does Hebrews begin? "God, God who at sundry times in divers manners speaking..." "In the beginning God". God. In that particular it corresponds to Genesis. Then, in Genesis God is revealed as the great Designer, the great Projector, the great Worker upon His design which He has projected, and the great Perfecter of His work - "and God saw everything that He had made and God said 'It is good'". The letter to the Hebrews corresponds to that in every particular. It begins with God. It shows God as the great Designer, the great Projector, the great Worker, and the great Perfecter. We shall see that as we proceed, but the great point is this: God completed the creation, God completed the creation then, having completed the creation, He planted a garden. That was subsequent to the whole creation. And having planted a garden, He put man into it.

Now, it does not say that God created man in the garden. It does say that God put man into the garden. Man was a part of the creation as a whole - the garden was subsequent to the whole creation and to man. Man in the garden is something within the whole. You may not see any value in that for the moment, but you'll see before long that is not just an observation. Man was put into, firstly, a completed work; a completed world. When everything was done and everything was prepared, then, as a completed thing, it was provided for man as his heritage, his inheritance.

Let me repeat: man was put into a completed world to possess it, to exploit it, to develop it, and then to build up a family corresponding to, and suited to, the kind of world into which he had been put. It was a heritage provided by God for man; to be held and to be enjoyed through faith in God, through faith in the Divine Benefactor, for man was an heir of God - not in his own right, but by the benefaction of God.

God centred everything in man. Man was placed on a basis of potential sonship and man was destined for glory. If you could take all that, have it all before you in mind, and take it into the letter to the Hebrews, what you would find is this: that what was material and temporal and palpable in Genesis, is in every particular present in a spiritual way in this document. We could not have a more glorious message, a more heart-ravishing message, than that which comes out of a contemplation of this spiritual correspondence to God's activities in the creation. Let us look at it again.

Everything for man's glorious destiny is first of all wrought out by God Himself. Yes, wrought out by God in Christ. It is an accomplished thing, a perfected work. We use the phrase so lightly, "the finished work of Christ". The finished work and the perfected Man... all, all established before man gets a look in! Man has no place. He did not have any place at all in

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what God was doing up to the point of God saying, "It is very good". Man had no place and no part in it, and he never has had, and never will have! God independently took this whole matter into His own hands and did it Himself, and when the thing was an accomplished fact, the creation was there in its beauty and glory and perfection, He gave it as an inheritance to man. He put man into that. That is, dear friends, the great message of this letter. Indeed, it is the great message of the New Testament, but it's the thing that is here so patently and so gloriously. In Christ God has wholly, fully consummated the redemption, the new creation, and you and I have no part whatever in making that, but you and I are called to inherit it: "Ye are come"!

The whole heritage is presented to faith. Would to God that we, the Lord's people, more thoroughly apprehended this. There's nothing to add to it, nothing to add to it; God has done it. Everything, (let me repeat) for man's glorious destiny, a destiny which was determined before man was made, has been wrought out by God in Christ before man comes on the scene. God com pleted this heritage for man - glorious, perfect, potential - that is, containing unspeakably wonderful and great possibilities, eternal, a heritage of Light, of Life, of Rest, of Peace, of Power, of Victory. All those things are implicit in the first creation and then they are taken up in a spiritual way, and offered to us, to our faith - not as something still to be done, but something done. God did speak Light, and God has given Light. And what is true of that is true in every other respect. I do want you to get hold of this.

If I were to introduce a parenthesis here, by way of giving emphasis to the importance of this matter, I should say again that as we approach the end of the dispensation, which we are doing most certainly and most rapidly, God will seek to come back to His full thought concerning a people and to bring a people back to His full thought, that He will finish the dispensation consummately. If that is true, then a word like this is apropos of the time that you and I, first of all, and the Lord's people wherever they are, whosoever will, shall enter into the wonderful rest, and peace, and assurance, and power, and victory - light and life and liberty and glory of the fact, the simple, basic, inclusive fact that God has in Christ com passed all that is bound up with man's glorious de stiny, and has offered it to faith - wholly under cutting all this straining on the part of Christians to try to add something to what God has done, to try to make effectual what God has made effective, to try in some way to do this thing, to make it good. We have got to get adjusted over this matter. The matter of our responsibility comes out presently, but it does not and will not for one moment take away from this: that what was true in the creation of this world, that God did it all right off His own hand independently and self-sufficiently, and then gave it as a heritage to man simply on the basis of faith in Him as the great Benefactor. What is true in that connection is here in the Word shown to be exactly true in the much higher realm than the material and the temporal, in the spiritual and the eternal. God has done that. That is all gathered into this, this (we dare not call it "little") phrase: "Ye are come".

You note the turn of everything at that point on the little word "but". But! Oh, up to that point everything was a quest, everything was a search, everything was a longing, an aspiration, an effort. From the point of that "but", the whole thing turns and says, "It's here!" all that is here present in the Person, and work of the Lord Jesus, offered to you as a completed thing. The whole thing is wrapped up and offered to you like an object with all its meaning and potentiality. It is offered to us through faith.

Man was the heir of all God's work, and this letter says "heirs... heirs of God".

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Heirs

Then, what was true of the man then is spiritually true of the believer now. The believer as the new creation man in Christ is placed, is placed, in the heritage. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you". I'm not going now to launch out into all that there is in the Word to show that it was not of our choosing, or of our running, or of our deciding at all; any decision that ever we made regarding Christ and His work did not take its rise in ourselves. It came from God. Faith itself is the gift of God, and if we are the Lord's, if we are the Lord's it is not because at one time the whole thing had its commencement in what we call "decid ing for Christ". Where did the deciding come from? That was not the beginning. There was something behind the deciding, and we well know it. Placed in the heritage, we may have come by various ways and various means, the history of our coming may be as diverse and varied as the number of people who have come, but behind all there was the action of sovereign grace. And we have to say today that we are not where we are because we determined to be, because we chose, but because there was a moving on God's part, the initiative was with Him: He pursued us, He apprehended us, He has placed us in His Son. It is a wonderful thing to know that God has put us into Christ. "Created in Christ Jesus", that's the phrase: "created in Christ Jesus. Man was placed in the heritage.

Then the garden became significant of several things. The garden signifies firstly the defining -

The Defining of Man's Existence.

That wants explaining. What I mean is (and this is a throwback upon what I said a little while ago about the garden being subsequent to the whole creation) the garden represents or signifies the narrowing down of everything to man's personal life and responsibility. That is, man was not just a kind of general person roaming about the world. It was not just a general idea, a man... a kind of freelance in the creation. No, God definitely defined something which is called a garden. In the midst of the whole creation, He marks this out, He hedges this about, and He puts man inside of that hedge, inside of those gates, and so defines man's life, narrows the whole matter of man's life down to something quite concrete, quite definite, taking it away from generalities and putting it there right at the centre. So that everything became immediate and personal where man was concerned.

See, all this that God had done, all this wonderful work that had been completed by God and had God's blessing and approval upon it, had to be made something very concrete where the man was concerned. It's all very well to put him into that wonderful world and let him just wander about and live out his life in some indefinite way, in a kind of general line of things, but no, God says, "All this must be focused, and the man must come into a personal, definite, immediate responsibility to what I have done". And the garden represents that something very immediate and concrete of the relationship between the heritage and the man. Do you grasp that?

Perhaps if we follow that on with the spiritual application, it will become more clear. You see, what God really said when He put man in the garden right at the centre and heart of the creation was, "This is your personal matter. This is your personal matter, this all has to do with you, and you have to do personally with this whole matter". So it is, you see, with Christ and His work. In Christ personally and by Christ vocationally or officially, God has perfected the

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new creation. God has completed everything and entered into His rest, and we know concerning His Son, He has pronounced His verdict: "Very good". "My beloved... in whom I am well pleased". God has reached His end and His rest, it is all finished, but now God says, "Look here, that is not something of a general doctrine and teaching, that's some thing that relates to you personally and individually in an immediate way. It is something that you have got to take hold of as your personal heritage".

The whole question of responsibility comes in there, you see. It comes down upon the matter: "All this God has done; what have I done with it? What attitude have I taken toward it?" Now, dear friends, this is more meaningful and important than perhaps you are grasping. And for the moment the point may be this: you believe in what is called "the finished work of Christ" -that's a phrase which lies at the very root and foundation of your Christian faith: the finished work of Christ. You agree with all that I have said about God independently doing this thing right out from Himself. You agree that the new creation in Christ personally has the approval of God upon it; the expression of His perfect satisfaction. Then why look so miserable? Why all the time be going about with (forgive the phrase) that "hang-dog" expression about your salvation... whether you will ever arrive and get through and come to glory?

I mean this: when Adam was put in that garden and looked round and said, "Is all this for me? Does all this belong to me, is this mine?" there was a man full of amazement, full of wonder, full of thankfulness, full of worship! And probably the one expression every day was, "Isn't it wonder ful? Isn't it wonderful? Just look! Look at this!" Is it less so in Christ? Is it less so in the new creation? Is it less so in the spiritual than in the temporal? There is something defective about our apprehension, about our faith, about our faith. You see, this document is the document of faith from first to last. There is something defective about our faith's apprehension of all this.

Yes, we rebuke our hearts, we are ashamed, and well we should be. There ought, dear friends, to be more of the wonder of it all, more of the worship, we ought to be people who know more of the rest of faith. So God did not leave this thing in any kind of general terms, He reduced it, the whole new creation, He reduced to a very practical proposition when He made or planted a garden and put man into that and said "Now look here, this all has to do with you! All this has to do with you and you have to do with all this". Wonderful! So it is with Christ and His work.

That was the first significance of the garden as a garden. That's why, after the creation, God pro ceeded to plant a garden. And then to put man, not in the whole thing in general, but to reduce it to concrete practical terms, and say, "Look here, this is not some abstract, wide world, remote sort of thing, this is something that comes very near to you".

The second significance of the garden was that it was to be man's home.

Man's Home

What a home it would have been if man had made it his home. He had to be turned out; he lost his home. What is "home"? What is home? Well, home, to justify its name, to be true to its real meaning, means, to begin with, it's the place of rest. The place of Rest. See, Christ is our Paradise! Christ is God's way of making this great universe redeemed, concrete, practical, presenting to us. And Christ is our home.

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We are keeping true to the text of the letter. This whole matter of entering into rest is one which the writer dwells upon very strongly and very fully: entering into rest. God entered into His rest. God entered into His rest and He put man right into the heart of that which was His own rest and made that man's home, or made man's home at the heart of that - rest. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour..." to Me! "...And are heavy laden, I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me... and you shall find rest unto your souls". That's only saying in other words: He's our home, we have come home. Our wanderings, our wanderings are circumvented - he might have been a wanderer in the great world, but he was given a home -instead of being a wanderer he was given a home. Yes, God has done a great thing, but He has not just left us to wander about in His great thing. He has brought us to His Son that His Son shall be our Home in terms of rest. He is our rest because He is God's rest.

Home, if it is what it is meant to be, true to the word, is the place of man's pleasure. He has pleasure, he has pleasure there. All of his pleasant thoughts are bound up with his home, his joy. Well, these things need not take much time in their spiritual application. If Christ has really become our home in terms of rest, has He not become the very centre and sphere of our delight, of our pleasure? You know how true that is in the natural when a new home is being set up. Why, everything else, everything else is put up with, got through as quickly as possible, in order to get that home, make that home. The dominating thought and pleasure is that home. Such should be, such should be our attitude toward Christ in Person and Christ's work: our pleasure, our delight. A home is not a lodging, a home is an abiding place.

The Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, of course, spoke much parabolically, and I cannot think other than when He said, "In my Father's house are many abiding places"- 'mansions', the old version says, He was speaking in spiritual terms. Literally mansions don't interest some of us a little bit, but to come to the place where we can abide for ever and go no more out and find eternal satis faction and rest, that does appeal to us. And where, in all God's universe will that be if it is not in Christ? He is our abiding place, and therefore the writer does introduce into this letter, over against the instability of these Jewish believers, over against their variableness: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today, and for ever". It's a contrasting state ment you see, for they, they were not the same. They had pro fessed and moved away from their profession. They had taken a position and let it go. They had been drawn away, persuaded away, argued away, they were not settled, but "Jesus Christ", says the Apostle, "the same...", the same. And isn't that something to rejoice in, that He is not moving, changing His position, variable? He has the attributes of God with Whom there is no variableness, "neither shadow cast by turning". What a pregnant phrase. How many shadows come into life by the unreliableness of people... you can never be sure of them. "Neither shadow cast by turning". The place of abiding. More of that comes out later as we go on.

So Christ should be all this to us, because He is all this to God. God has come to rest. God has come to settlement and to certainty in the Person and work of His Son. God finds all His pleasure in Him and all His interest in Him. All that. And God has given Him in all these terms and senses to us as a heritage. It is a challenge to faith isn't it? Is Christ to us rest, our delight and pleasure, our abiding place, our one absorbing interest? That was what the garden was to Adam to begin with, all that, and it fore shadowed Christ. He is our Paradise.

The garden next signified man's vocation.

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Man's Vocation

God gave it to man as a heritage and told him to look after it, to develop its potentialities, to realise all its possibilities - made it his life work. The first man (now some of you, don't pat yourself on the back) the first man was a gardener. The first vocation in this world was gardening. It was man's life work. It was the avenue of his self-expression. That phrase could be used perfectly safely then in those situations at that time in unfallen man: self-expression, because God was his one interest. It's perfectly safe to express yourself if the Lord is everything inside to be expressed. The way of his self-expression, the way of his own development... for, while things were perfect as to nature, they were not complete as to possibility, either in man or in the creation. Perfect, yet to be perfected in the sense of brought to full stature. And a garden was the sphere and means of man's coming to full development himself and bringing out all that was there potentially of the work of God.

What a field that opens, dear friends, where we and Christ are concerned. Christ is our vocation! Christ is the occasion of our expression of all that is in us! Christ is the means of our enlargement, our growth, by exercise upon Christ. You see, the principles are all there. That is what is being said here in this letter in other language, in other ways and forms, but it is all here in substance, and meaning, and principle. This is the meaning of our being in Christ. He is our vocation; our vocation, our life work, our supreme interest, our means of our own spiritual development and enlargement.

And for the present I must close with this one other word. The garden was:

Man's Probation.

The scene and sphere and occasion of his testing and his proving... here responsibility is intro -duced. But note the focal point of responsibility; responsibility was not to do anything for his own salvation, to provide anything to make up his glorious heritage, it was all complete. He was put into it as a completed, perfected thing, and then he was made responsible. But what was the focal point of responsibility? Into what did the whole matter of responsibility become gathered? Just one thing: faith. Faith. Everything stood or fell as to his faith attitude toward the great Benefactor - whether he believed God, whether he trusted God - and trusted and believed Him so utterly that no other voice, no other voice could turn him aside. It was the test of his faith in the One Who had given him this heritage.

Responsibility all comes to that. Isn't that the argument of the letter to the Hebrews from first to last? The great word of this letter is "faith", isn't it? The great finale, the summing up of everything at the end, is faith, faith, faith. But it has been faith all the way through from the beginning, the great letter of faith. Tremendous things are said in this letter about responsibility. And when you focus this whole matter of responsibility down and say, "Well, what does it amount to? Believing God? Believing God? Having faith in God?" Faith of that kind, of that kind that shuts you up and into God. It's a very energetic thing, the faith that is in this letter, isn't it? It's the faith that repudiates, faith that forsakes, faith that leaves a whole world.

Look at what it says about the faith of those men on this road. Moses alone is an example. Moses' great faith... what did it do for him? "By faith he forsook...", he forsook. And why did

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he forsake Egypt? Because God's purpose was not there, that's all. And faith drew him in the direction of God's purpose, and he forsook. By faith, by faith... much more. It is a tremendous thing, this faith, but everything hangs upon that. Everything hangs upon that.

Responsibility, dear friends, is not that we have got in some way to make our salvation, to save ourselves, to perfect ourselves. Not at all. God is the author and the perfecter of faith, it says here. But how is it going to be done? Believe God! That's what it comes back, after all, to this. Is it, is this really true? Is this true? Is this true, that this whole thing, right on to glorification, is an accom plished fact so far as God is concerned? It lies now in the perfect tense: "Whom He justified, them He also glorified" - the perfect tense? Is it true that the whole thing, so far as God is concerned, is finished and offered to Him as a finished thing? Oh, if only I could grasp that, what relief! What comfort! What relaxing of strain and tension! What rest, what joy! What strength to go out, for that's what follows, to "go out with Him without the camp, bearing His reproach". You'll never be able to do it, or any of the other things that we are bidden to do in this letter, unless, unless you have come to that settled assurance: "It's all right! There is no question, no hazard, no risk at all in this. It is settled and finished! All that remains is for me by faith to take it, believe it, grasp it, and hold on to it, and go on with it." "Let us go on...".

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# Chapter 2 - Our Inheritance

We return to our key fragment of Scripture in the twelfth chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, at verse 22. For a little while longer, we continue with the simple and imperfect fragment of the whole statement, "Ye are come". Whether we shall get beyond that will remain to be seen!

"Ye are come..." and we have been seeing that that is a very com prehensive fragment gathering up everything that God has ever intended by way of making provision for the realisation of man's glorious destiny. We began by pointing out that this wonderful docu ment, the letter to the Hebrews, takes up the Old Testament in its three great phases - the first: relating to the creation; the second: from the book of Genesis into Exodus where the nation of Israel comes into the counsels of God; the third great section: that which covers the prophets. And all those phases of the movement of God are collected and transferred to Christ and His Church in a spiritual way in this letter.

So far we have been occupied with the first; noting that as Genesis begins with, "In the begin -ning God..." so this letter to the Hebrews begins with "God... having of old times spoken..." -everything beginning with, and proceeding from, God. God alone - acting, designing, projecting, working - until He has everything completed to His own satisfaction. And then in the second chapter of Genesis and the second chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, man is brought on that scene. You will remember how that was so in the second chapter of Genesis, and you will recall that in the second chapter of the letter to the Hebrews the matter of man's position, the design of God for him, is introduced, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him... Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands".

We spent most of our time upon that most glorious of all truths and facts, that God has everything completed for man before He brings man in. That is, that man comes into something that God has perfected. We have not to make anything for our salvation, our perfecting, or our glorification; God has done it all, and then brings us into what He has done. It is the heritage of faith in the great Divine Benefactor.

We went on to see man placed in his heritage, and what placing in the garden represented and typified spiritually. I am not going to go over the detail again. I just remind you, because there are one or two additional points to be considered, but in the first place, it did define man's existence. It brought the whole creation down to something very practical and immediate so far as man was concerned. And the garden was the microcosm of the whole God-satisfying creation, and was given to man and in effect, God said, with the garden: "This is your matter, this belongs to you. This has a very practical relationship to you and you to it. You are not just turned loose on the earth, but the whole thing is focused here to become something that you have got to appre hend, that you have to really lay hold of by faith and make it good". So the garden meant that in the beginning, and it is perfectly clear that when we come to the New Testament and to this letter to the Hebrews in particular, that the whole of God's wonderful new creation work through redemption in Christ is presented to faith as a practical proposition- that it becomes something not of general teaching, doctrine and belief, but something that you and I have really to apprehend, to take hold of, and to really believe what God says, "This

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is all for you! This is all yours! Now then, what are you going to do about it?" That was the upshot of the garden for Adam, "This is yours! Now then, what are you going to do about it?" And so the great work that God has perfected in Christ and through Christ is presented as a finished and completed and altogether God-satisfying work, and it's presented to us for us to accept, to make ours. It's very practical.

Then we went on to see that the garden was intended to be man's home, which means that it is his place of rest, of pleasure, of interest, and his abiding place. And these are the things into which we are brought in Christ where God's new creation is; that a right apprehension of Christ by faith does mean, is intended to mean, that you and I come into rest of heart. Rest of heart! Rest is not inaction, doing nothing. Rest is not just sitting in an armchair (if that's your idea of home, well, sometimes it might be in cluded, but the armchair doesn't comprehend the whole idea of home, does it?) only some of you, like some of us, find rest more in satisfying work, than in doing nothing. We are very restless in doing nothing. The thing that really does bring real satisfaction is to have something creative on hand, something worth while. And in Christ we have that kind of rest.

It is interesting and significant that when the Lord Jesus was saying that coming to Him, rest would be found, He combined with it "Take My yoke... take My yoke", and "yoke" is the symbol of service. And if we are going to find rest in service, it must be very heart-satisfying service. Well, that is home. It is the place of rest, it's the place of abiding. These are the things, with many other features of what "home" means, which we are supposed to find in Christ. We are supposed to be - and I am very careful now because of my American friends: very "homey" people. Some of you don't know the significance of that!

Now, man's vocation was represented and signified by the garden, and it became his life-work, or was intended to be his life-work: the sphere of the expression of the deepest things in himself, the place of his active interest, and the way of the development of his own life. That was the garden. These things are true in Christ, that Christ becomes the very life-work of the believer.

We are introduced by Christ and in Christ into a great vocation. A great vocation, into the realm where that which is deepest in our being through the grace of God finds its expression, love for God, the answer of our own hearts to God's goodness - going out, expressing itself, pouring itself out - in vocation, in service. But let us be very careful what we mean when we use that word "service", it is far better to speak of "ministering" to the Lord; that covers every form of service, and if what we do is not ministering to the Lord, then it's not service to the Lord. And in Christ by exercise, by exercise in Christ, as Adam in the garden, so our own lives are developed - there's an increase, we grow up in Him into all things.

Finally, so far as the afternoon was con cerned, we saw the garden as the place of man's probation, where he was on test to be approved or disapproved; the element of responsibility coming in in relation to all that God has done for us and has offered to us in Christ. But responsibility is summed up in one word: faith, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him". Faith is our answer and will cover everything; will cover everything.

We leave that and go on to just these one or two other things in relation to the first phase of interpretation.

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We said that man had to possess, exploit, and realise all that God had given to him. This letter to the Hebrews bears down very strongly upon that. It tells us early what has been done for us by Him, and in Him, and through Him, and then it calls upon us to answer. In the first place, there is the apprehending, or the possessing: making ours, of what God has offered. There can be a gap, you see, there can be a gap or there can come about a gap between God's presented facts and fulnesses and our deliberate and positive faith apprehension of them. And many of the warnings and exhortations in this letter have to do with that.

I am not going to turn aside to remind you of the occasion of this letter, why it was written, but you will see that again and again the writer comes back on this kind of exhortation, even warning: "Here is the fact presented, here is everything offered, here is that to which you have come..." Now, one little phrase is constantly reiterated: "Let us..." let us, let us, "let us fear... lest a promise having been left us, any one of you should seem to have come short. Let us fear lest we drift away from them". There is much in that strain, just that gap between God's great presentation of all that is our heritage in Christ, and our laying hold of it and definitely and positively possessing all that.

Possessing Christ

Now, the New Testament has a lot that bears on that matter of really possessing Christ by faith, really taking hold of Christ. There's an exercise here for the man in the garden, he's got to lay hold of this. It's very nice of the Lord to have said, "Now look at all this, this is very lovely, very beautiful, very wonderful, there are great possibilities in this. Now you just sit down and have a look at it and think about it and be very pleased with it". But no, the Lord says, "Do something, get hold of this whole situation, possess it, get it into your hands, make it yours, turn it to real account". And dear friends, there is, I fear, a weakness here in many, many Christians, that they know the truth and the truths, and all the promises, and all the gifts, and all the wonderful things that God has done and has said in Christ, but they do not get down to this thing and by faith lay right hold of it and appropriate and say: "That's for me, and I make it mine". And because there is not this kind of reaction to God, there is a loss, we drift away, we come short. That's what the letter's about: to be possessed, in the first place, to be exploited; that is, it's got to be taken up and made to yield its inherent and its intrinsic values. That is general language, but, you see, here is Life. For instance, right at the heart of this garden is Life, is Life... and everything in this garden is living.

Now then, for us in this letter to the Hebrews the Lord Jesus has tasted death and has overcome him, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and this letter throbs with Life, doesn't it? In many connections this whole matter of Life arises, Melchizedek and so on, Life is here. Well, of course, you and I all believe, we all believe that Jesus is the Life, that Life and incorruption were brought to light through the gospel, that our heritage is eternal Life, it is the gift of God. We believe all these things, but you know, very often, very often that thing is only doctrine, is only objective when it might become a very practical matter. We, after all, now are in a realm of death.

Death is all about, and it really does become a necessity for us to lay hold on Life. Any day, any day we may be conscious of this blanketing of death, and what do we do about it? It comes in anywhere. It comes into a prayer gathering when we are gathered together for prayer, and sometimes there spreads over a woolly blanket over the whole thing. And we perhaps struggle

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through and come out the other end, and go home, and say, "It was death, all death". Yes, but what have we done about it? Immediately we sense that, there ought to be a collective and corporate reaction: "We are not going to have this! This is not our heritage. Life, Life is God's gift; why tolerate this?" We can do that as to our own individual lives physically. Physically, if we don't resist the encroachment of spiritual death upon our bodies, we'll die; we'll live a living death. That is a contradiction I know, but it will be just like that, like that: wrapped around.

You see, in so many ways, individually, physically, mentally, spiritually, collectively, in the world it's this battle; this battle for the asserting of Life. We have got to lay hold - that's Paul's phrase isn't it: "Lay hold on the life eternal" - now then, exploit, exploit what He's given you. Oh, that God would get this into us! We'd see changes in our gatherings if we are sensitive enough to register the encroachment of death and know then that's the time for us is to do something; not to accept it, but to do something: exploit Life.

What is true of Life is true of everything else that constitutes this inheritance in Christ. It's given, but it does not become effective, it does not become fruitful, until we do something about it. A remarkable thing that God has given us all this in its perfection, and yet it does not become fruitful in us, in our experience, until we exploit, and all the purpose that is here inherently and intrinsically has got to be realised, and it will only be, strangely enough, realised as we come into faith action about it. It's a great heritage, but somehow or other, we just do not realise all that it means without doing something in relation to it, the works of faith. The works of faith! Works do not justify, but a justified person works; putting their faith into action, proving that they have faith by doing something about it. Well, that does not need enlarging.

We pass on from that, that's really additional, or an additional emphasis to what we were saying this afternoon: Christ to be possessed, exploited, realised. The Person and the work of Christ in entirety are presented to faith for our inclusive apprehension.

A remarkable phrase, a remarkable phrase here: "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls". "Ye are come... receiving the end...". Faith leaps over time and takes hold of the ultimate: the end. And faith arrives there now, "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls", inclusively apprehended by faith. Oh, that we could make that clear, I am sure you were grasping it. It just amounts to this, dear friends, that you and I, again and again, under pressure, in trial, in spiritual difficulties, have to stand up and say, "Yes, this is a bad catch, this is a difficult phase. Today everything is black, dark and apparently hopeless, but it will be all right at the end. This is not what it will be at the end. In the end I shall be out and up and through; on top, in victory". Receiving the end and laying hold by faith of that end today, not giving away everything because of the present, but laying hold of God's end.

That is very practical. Try it! That is exploiting your inclusive inheritance - not a bit of it, but the whole - presented to faith for progressive development, progressive development of what is given to us in Christ. That does not mean to make it more, because you cannot make it more, but it does mean to draw out what is in it: far, far more of possibility, potentiality, and value in that garden than is just apparent. There is far more in Christ than we have ever yet seen. We shall discover that He is an inexhaustible fulness only as by faith we get to work upon Him, and upon what is given to us in Him; development in that sense. When we speak of a man

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developing a piece of property, something that He has inherited or bought, we do not mean that he is enlarging it, we mean that he is getting out of it all that is there, and that is what I mean when I speak of developing Christ: getting out what is in Him.

Now we can pass on to the next thing which has not been mentioned, which is a correspondence between this letter and the beginning of Genesis.

In that garden, man was given a trust and a commandment combined with the trust. The trust was Life, and the commandment was:

"Be Fruitful and Multiply".

So that the garden was intended by God to be the place and scene of the constituting of a family, and a growing family, corresponding to the garden; suitable to the garden. That's a very important point: suitable. When man was no longer suitable to the garden, he was thrown out of it, and God was not going to have in that garden a family that was not suited to it, did not correspond to it. That would have been something that was inherently contradictory. That could be easily illustrated, easily illustrated by putting different kinds of people into different kinds of environments. If they are not suited to it, it does not suit them, they are a misfit, they are unhappy, and the whole thing is a contradiction. A contradiction; they must have things which are like themselves... like themselves... that is the whole secret of slum life, isn't it? Take people out of those environments and put them into a lovely place and they are miserable and unhappy and they will very soon turn it into a slum. That suits them! They are quite content in that. Sometimes they don't think they are, but there it is. And the same is true the other way round. Put somebody into something that is altogether inferior, they're not happy in it, they're going to make it different to come up to their standard, you see? It must answer to what they are, and that's a principle with God. And everything in that and every person that was to be put in that garden was to be perfectly in sympathy, in harmony, with the garden itself.

Now, that is better understood when you transfer it to Christ, and let Christ represent that garden: our Paradise. You know quite well how unsaved people are miserable amongst Christians, and so they ought to be; there's something wrong with the Christianity if they're not. And you know how miserable Christians are in the world. There's a difference, isn't there? Now here was to be a family wholly corresponding to the setting. Transferred to Christ, this letter to the Hebrews brings this matter out so much. Perhaps you haven't looked at it like this. What is all this about? "Wherefore, holy brethren... He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying I and the children... bringing many sons unto glory... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn ones". You see the language, it's the language of family isn't it? That's distributed through this letter from beginning to the end. What does it mean? Well, this Family is an object of God: a Family of those conformed to the image of His Son, and a Family of those who take their character from Christ, a Family of those who correspond to the great heritage that God has given them in Christ. You see? If, if in Christ He has given the great inheritance of rest, then a Family enjoying rest or whatever it may be; a Family that has these features: the features of Christ and of the work which God has perfected in Christ - to have such a Family.

Now, man was put in the garden first of all with the responsibility of Life. You and I, in and through Christ and His work, have been given that Divine Life. It's a different order of life, we

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know, an altogether different kind of life, this Life which we have in Christ and through Christ. It is another Life, but it is a tremendous responsibility. We just cannot have it and stop it with ourselves, there goes alongside of it the command: "Be fruitful and multiply... replenish the earth". See, the justification of Life is in the measure of Christ in others through us. The justification of our being called Christians, the justification of our standing upon the finished work of Christ, the justification of our very existence as new creation people is to be found, not just in our having Life and being saved, but in the measure of Christ that is found in others through us. That is the justification of our existence, and the vindication of God in giving Life. Life... oh, it's a challenge isn't it? It's a test, but here it is: the Family is in view.

Paul spoke of having begotten the Corinthians through the gospel. He said that he had begotten them through the gospel. Of Onesimus he said, "whom I have begotten in my bonds". You see the point? Yes, the great prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus by way of His suffering and His Cross was, "He shall see His seed", but how? Through the church. Through the church and here is Paul, as one member of that Church, saying, "whom I have begotten through the gospel, whom I have begotten in my bonds".

You see the point: spiritual birth being brought about by the transmission of Life from one member to others. It requires a living church to bring about an adequate salvation of souls. It requires a living member of the church to bring another into Life. It is always the way; always the way, it's the repetition of what happened with the prophet: when the child is dead, he stretches himself upon that child, hands to his hands, feet to his feet, lips to his lips, and transmits Life from God to that corpse and drags it out of death. That is the responsibility of Life.

And how, how, how solemn and serious are the Scriptures on this matter, that no person is supposed to be a dead end. Any kind of dead end by carelessness or wilfulness, receives the most serious rebuke from the Lord. That can be taken naturally: it brings it's nemesis if, by our likes or dislikes, or fancies and fads, and wills, and preferences, or by wilfulness, we stop Life with ourselves. I am speaking now in the realm of volition where we have a will about this, then we shall meet a nemesis sooner or later in the natural. What we sow there, we'll reap in the spiritual. In the spiritual, where there is no Life that can be spared, Life that can be given, Life that is more than we need for ourselves, where there is no such Life that can be transmitted, then that thing or that individual is an end in themselves and they are not standing up to their obligations and to their responsibilities and they will bring disfavour upon them if they become an end in themselves. "Be fruitful and multiply", which postulates the fact that you have got something, something of a deposit to make that possible.

So the Family is here very much in view in this letter, and it is a proving that God has done all this and given all this in Christ, and a proving that we have entered in by faith to really apprehend all that God has done. The proof is by how many other people are getting Life through us. Oh, dear friends, covet above all things that you shall not be an end in yourself, but there will be many who, by the grace of God, can attribute their spiritual Life to you as a channel. You make it your real business in life to see that there are many who have received Life through you. That is the justification of our existence, that is the vindication of God in giving us Life at all. Indeed, it is the vindication of the Cross of Christ. "He shall see of the travail of His soul... He shall see His seed... the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands... Ye are come..." ye are come... ye are come to all the provision for a life like that, for a

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vocation like that, for a multiplication like that. It's all there, it's all there. It can be, because God has already made the full provision. Today it's so largely a matter of our exercise.

Now, if you can bear it, I would like to go on for a little while with the next word. I would like to say that it is not my thought at all in this conference, unless the Lord so leads, to go beyond the next word in this great statement in Hebrews 12, but this is very much on my heart, "Ye are come to Zion".

To Zion

You notice the turn of the argument is upon that little word "but". It has been Sinai, the palpable mount that could be touched, burning with fire, earthquakes, and lightnings, rendings of fire, a voice, terrors... "Ye are not come to that", says the writer here, "but ye are come to Zion". What I want to point out is that while it is quite true that Zion is the antithesis of Sinai, and is mentioned here in contrast with Sinai - not that, but this - that is not all that is meant. What is meant here is in keeping with the whole letter, that is, you have come to the end of the road, Sinai was at the beginning; at the beginning of the road. Not only do you not now come to Sinai, but you've left that long behind, that lies a long way back there in the course of things; it has its own significance and implications, but it lies right back there and you have journeyed a long way from Sinai, and you are now come, not to an advanced point on the journey, but to the end of the journey.

Do you remember when (and you see we have moved from Genesis now into Israel) when they were on the salvation and life side of the Red Sea, a psalm sprang up. And in that psalm, that song, you have this, "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, oh Lord, which Thou hast made for them to dwell in, the sanctuary, oh Lord, which Thy hands have established". Right there at the beginning of the journey the end is in full view, and the end is said to be "the mountain of their inheritance". And if you look through the Old Testament, you know quite well what mountain that is: it's always Zion, always Zion. "The mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, oh Lord, which Thou hast made for them to dwell in, the sanctuary, oh Lord, which Thy hands have established". That's Zion!

From the beginning of the journey, the end is provisioned, and the end is Zion. "Ye are come..." not only to a contrast with Sinai, but you've come to the end of the road of which Sinai was but the beginning. You see, this whole letter is a letter of things that are left behind isn't it? Oh, how many things there are here left behind! They belong to back there, but we have, we have come to something that is right on here. Back there it is all partial, imperfect; now we have come to the complete and the final, and Zion is that. So Zion is an inclusive and comprehensive term. If Zion came into view at the beginning of the journey on the shores of the Red Sea, then, as the end of the journey it means that all that the journey represented is summed up in Zion, the whole thing is comprehended in Zion, it's all covered in Zion, it's all included in Zion. There is no more after that.

It's so inclusive and comprehensive, is this term, "Zion". It is the sum (that is, symbolically) it is the sum of all God's work in Christ. Now, you've only got to look at the whole section of Scripture from Sinai to Christ, and see everything, everything speaking of Christ, pointing to Christ, moving on toward Christ, isn't it? Everything, from Sinai, it's all Christ in view. Now gather it all up in Christ and call it "Zion", if you will, Zion becomes the sum total of all God's

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work in Christ. "Ye are come to Zion. Ye are come to the consummate, comprehensive, all-inclusive work of God in Christ", you've come to it! It is another emphasis upon the same thing. But Zion, while it means that inclusively and comprehensively, has a lot of other meanings in it, and in the light of the Old Testament, with all that it has to say about Zion, you find that Zion comes to be a people. A people: it's the people of Zion. It passes from a thing, an object; it comes to mean a people, "The children of Zion shall be joyful in their king... the virgin daughter", that's a people, and so on. And Zion, therefore, is not only all that God has accomplished in Christ and all that Christ means in Himself of God, Zion comes in the next place to mean a people in the good of that.

"Ye are come to Zion", which means we have come to be a people in the good of all that God has provided and accomplished in His Son. It is the sum of God's salvation enjoyed by a people.

"Ye Are Come"

If you read about Zion in the Psalms, the predominant note in that particular connection there, is always one of glorying, rejoicing, praising. Yes, it's the note of song, the note of delight, "Walk around Zion, count her stones... mark her bulwarks... Zion, the joy of the whole earth" and so on. You get into the prophets, and it's another story - another story. Not the glory, but the sorrow; not the song, but the sob... a people who have lost their inheritance and their heritage. But let us keep to the bright side for a little while.

Zion, then, means a people really in the enjoyment and in the glorying in Christ - really, really having a good time; that's what it amounts to in Zion, having a good time because of all that the Lord has done. Oh, that we were more living on that side, corresponding to that picture of Zion, that it were more true of us. Yes, we have good times, but we are not always in the enjoyment and good... having a really good time because of what Christ has done and what Christ is to us. I don't mean about... because things are all going well, but simply because of what the Lord has and is, and has given us. There ought, I feel, to be a good deal more of the good time about us, don't you? In that sense. Yes, well, in the Psalms, people are having a good time, and it's all connected with Zion. And that means: because of what the Lord has done and what the Lord is. Very simple, but that's the meaning of Zion. "Ye are come..." well, are ye? We are supposed to have come, God has made all the provision for us to come.

Then you see that Zion is the symbol of His inclusive, transcendent victory. You remember the beginning of Zion don't you? The stronghold in the hands of the Jebusites, thought to be so strong, so impregnable, that when David came, they just fortified it with the blind and maimed; an impossible thing for anybody to overcome. Well, David did overcome it, and made it his seat and his stronghold. The point is this: Zion symbolises transcendent victory - transcendent victory - over all the enemies of God, over all the enemies of Christ, and over all the enemies of man. God's people; that's Zion. Now I could gather so much into that from Scripture, so much we could quote, couldn't we, about that. It's a song of victory, that is the song of Zion.

Come to your letter to the Hebrews, and what have you? You have sin. Is sin an enemy? You have satan, he is here mentioned, "He that had the hold on death, that is, the devil" - sin, satan, death. Are they enemies? Are they like impregnable strongholds? And what of the next thing: "man"? I don't mean man who is deliberately and consciously opposed to God, but man in his

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own state. In his own state, he's here; these are all here in this letter to the Hebrews. And everything that God has done in Christ has to do with those enemies. Sin - what's all this about the blood and the atonement? Man - far from God... what's all this about the Mediator between God and man, this great Mediator, this High Priest? Death - what is all this about death bringing an end to everything in the Aaronic priesthood, that they could not continue because they died? What is all this about death? Satan who is behind all these things: sin, man, and death, what is it all about? Well, all the context is that what God has done in Christ has been to destroy all that; to put it out of court. The sin that keeps us away from God has been dealt with: "Let us come with boldness to the throne of grace". The devil using death to bring an end to everything nullified - death destroyed.

What a mighty victory God has wrought in Christ, and that's all gathered up at the end of the letter, into Zion: "Ye are come to Zion". What does that mean? Why, that which seemed to be the impregnable fortress of satan, sin, of man's fallen condition, and death, has been overcome and taken by Christ through His Cross. That victory is given to you. Zion is the symbol of a comprehensive victory in every realm, and ye are come to that.

What a heritage is ours! This is not fiction. This is not theory. This is something, as I have said, to be put to the proof: "Ye are come to Zion". I think I had better finish somewhere. Perhaps that's a good note on which to finish. There are other things of tremendous value related to Zion, but they can wait for later consideration.

We just finish on this note of the perfect tense, for so it is written here, in the perfect tense: "Ye are come". It does not say, "Ye are coming, ye are going to come, you may come, you will come one day...." it says, "Ye are come". How can that be possible? Well, it is again just this: God has done it all and handed it out to us and said: "There you are! That's for you if you will believe it, if you will accept it in faith, all that is yours! Now then, take it, get to work, go on in the good of it". "Let us", rings out, let us... "let us go on to full growth".

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# Chapter 3 - Where God Lives

The twelfth chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, verse 22: "Ye are come... unto Mount Zion". Yesterday we were mainly occupied with that aspect of the heritage of faith which is found in the spiritual counterpart to what God gave to man in the creation. We saw that God Himself took in hand to bring into being a world for His own satisfaction and pleasure. Concerning which He could say without any reserve, "It is very good". And having completed that, He put man into it and made it man's inheritance. The counterpart of that is found in the first two chapters of the letter to the Hebrews, the letter beginning as the book of Genesis begins, with: "God...". Then the working out of a whole scheme and plan of redemption and new creation in Christ and through Christ, the second chapter of the letter, as the second chapter of Genesis, brings man on the scene. "What is man that Thou shouldest put him over the works of Thy hands... Thou madest him in order to have dominion over the works of Thy hands". So that the believer is brought into something that God has comprehensively consummated in His Son: it is the heritage of faith. Now we are not spending any time on that aspect.

Last evening we moved on to the second phase where Israel comes into the picture and again the whole matter of a heritage is in view, offered to faith. That stage and phase is arrived at with the extra word in this clause, firstly, "ye are come" and that applies to what God has offered to us in Christ: this marvelous new position with its marvelous new inheritance as heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Then it follows, "ye are come to Zion..." and we were saying that Zion is an inclusive and comprehensive conception. Zion really comprehensively means that in which God's full salvation and purpose is found - that is, Christ and a people who are joined to Him partaking of the values of what He is and what He has done.

Zion, spiritually interpreted, is Christ and His people in all the good of God's perfected redemption and provision. Breaking up that inclusive significance of Zion, we went on to see from the history of the earthly Zion, the light that it throws upon the spiritual Zion to which we are come, that it is the symbol of His transcendent victory as Zion of old represented the great victory of the great king, the greatest king of Israel. It was the stronghold of Zion which stood out against him and tested his faith, his real power, as nothing else did and then he took it and made it his seat, his abode, the place of his palace. It therefore symbolised the transcendent victory of the greatest king of the old dispensation. And that is carried over spiritually to the Zion to which we are come. This letter to the Hebrews sets forth the strength of that which stands against the Lord in the first place: sin, man's own nature, death, and "him that had the hold on death"; that is, the devil. And in a very few words in this letter to the Hebrews, all that is seen to be nullified: "He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" - what a triumph! That is Zion! Ye are come to that.

Now we proceed with one or two more features of that to which we are come, by the grace of God, and that is offered to us for faith's appre hension. Zion, as we so well know from many Scriptures in the Old Testament, became the place of God's dwelling, or always represented the place of God's abode. The Lord dwelt in Zion; was represented as dwelling in Zion. The Lord speaks out of Zion. It is:-

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His Habitation.

Now, dear friends, we must draw very near to this matter in all its aspects, and not just con -template it as some set of beautiful ideas, truths, and things that are in the Bible. These are not only grand and glorious truths, doctrines, teachings; they are, every one of them, a tremendous challenge to us. They are set forth in order to find us out: whether we really are children or citizens of Zion, that is, whether these things are true of us. There are great values here for us.

And when we speak about Zion, (remembering all the time that this is Christ and His own which we are supposed, at least, to be) Zion being the Lord's dwelling-place, we touch upon something of tremendous practical importance and value. For you and I know very well that the one thing which perhaps more than anything else governs our interests, governs our lives, is where to find the Lord; where and how we can find the Lord. You agree that that's an important matter, isn't it, for us? To be in touch with the Lord, to know just where we can be sure to find Him. That's a very important matter, indeed, if we don't know that, we are certainly at a loss: life will be all awry and confusion, weak and defeated, if we are not really in touch with the Lord. Where is the Lord?

Now, remembering that Zion is a collective conception, it is not just a matter of so many unrelated and unconnected units and individuals, but Zion is always a collective conception in the Word of God - it is the Lord's people together with the Lord - that's Zion. Where there is a mutuality of Life in the Lord, that is where you'll find the Lord. I do not mean that the individual cannot find the Lord alone, that can be. And I do not mean that if you have not possibly, possibly (and I underline that) facilities for fellowship with the Lord amongst His people, the Lord will not make some special provision, will not meet you in some special way, but God's normal way of being found in greater fulness in that measure which means everything to His people, the normal way is the way of Zion, that is, the way of spiritual fellowship in Christ.

It is absolutely essential to our Life that we have some kind of relatedness with the people of God, which brings us into a touch with the Lord, which is more than that which we can have individually and apart. To our very Life this is essential, imperative, that in some way, whether in the location or not, in some way we have a relatedness, a vital connection, a powerful and positive union with the people of God of a spiritual kind on the basis that it is Christ - not that we are a society who are in existence on some agreed basis of either teachings or practices, but that we are a people based upon Christ who is our only concern. It does not matter one little bit about the institution, about the particular framework. The thing is that we are based upon Christ and we are a people based upon Christ, where Christ is wholly and fully apprehended, and honoured, and exalted, and is recognised and acknowledged as the Son over God's House -there we shall find the Lord. And we shall find the Lord in a very special way. It will be, it will be our testimony, if that is true of us, that whenever, whenever it is possible for me to enjoy that fellowship, I somehow or other meet the Lord, and the Lord meets me, and there is something more of the Lord afterward than there was before. And, mark you, everything that the devil can do in earth or hell to stop that, he will do; by every trick, and cunning, and device and fury, he will prevent you from that fellowship. He will keep you away from that, somehow he will just see to it if he possibly can, that you will not get there, you'll not get there. And dear friends, over this whole matter there is such a need for vigilance.

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Oh, how pained we often are when we know that such and such need the time of fellowship, they're in desperate need of it, their spiritual life is crying out for it, and then they decide under a move of the Lord in their hearts to take advantage of the opportunity and then, through lack of sufficient positiveness and watchfulness, some little thing arises, some circumstance, some trick, something happens, and they accept it that they're not to be there, after all. Oh, there has to be a fight over this matter. This is not going to be had cheaply. Zion is always represented as something very precious.

We have to speak about that at another time in another connection as something very precious, but you don't get precious things cheaply, they just do not fall to you. You have got to be prepared to pay a price for precious things. We are not talking about salvation now, we are talking about this heritage of faith. And if there's one thing that this letter to the Hebrews makes clear and emphasises, is that these men, in that great caravan from Abel onward toward the inheritance, one thing that characterised them was their persistence, their determination not, not to be robbed of the inheritance. Whoever it was: Abel let his blood be shed, Abram left Ur of the Chaldees, Moses left Egypt behind with all its treasures and learning - these men counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than those of Egypt. They recognised the tremendous importance of Zion in principle and therefore fought for it, and let everything else go for it. And to find the Lord in this way, we are going to have to be very, very positive in our attitude over this matter of relatedness and fellowship. And don't make any mistake about it, dear friends, if the devil can, by any way, by hook or crook, destroy the values of related Life in Christ, he will do it; and he knows what he is up to, he will mar the glory of Zion if he can. That has always been his object.

So, where shall we find the Lord? Yes, we find Him in our own room alone, praise God. Yes, we'll find Him far away there in some remote place where we have no Christian fellowship, the Lord will meet us, but we must not even so, even so, as individuals or in remote places, accept that we are unrelated, that we are just individuals. Let us remember that Zion is one, and we belong to Zion, and we are not all Zion, either individually or in local companies, we are not all Zion. Zion is something very much bigger than that.

Then, a further thing about Zion was and is that in the old literal presentation, representa tion, Zion was the seat of government, the place of the Throne.

The Place of the Throne

Here in this letter to the Hebrews you make that tremendous move almost in one clause: having tasted death in behalf of every man, He moved to heaven, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty, waiting... and ye are come, ye are come to the Throne, the government. Christ and a heavenly people (note this) become the governmental seat and instrument of the Lord. Zion is a governmental conception.

His Throne is in Zion. He rules from Zion. His sovereignty operates in relation to Zion. That is only saying in figurative language that when the Lord, when the Lord has something after this kind that satisfies His heart according to His Son Jesus Christ, God is tremendously jealous about that and puts His sovereignty, His sovereignty into action in relation to that. It is there that His Throne is. It may not always appear to be like that according to our human ideas of sovereignty and government, it may sometimes seem that the enemy is on the throne. It may

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sometimes appear as though the Lord has really vacated His throne and the Lord is not looking after things, but oh, don't make any mistake about it, it has been like that many times in the history of the Church when it just seemed as though the devil and his kingdom were running riot and swallowing up everything that was of the Lord, so that what was of Christ seemed to have disappeared in what we call "the Dark Ages". But, but that's a phase; that passes. When the Lord comes back, He comes back to greater fulness than He had before.

The Lord never does vacate His Throne. The Lord never does give up Zion. The story of Zion in the old dispensation is a marvelous story isn't it, of God refusing to give it up. Yes, it may fall on bad days, enemies may overrun the land - God doesn't give up. For a dark, long period of seventy years it looks as though nothing has happened, but God comes back for Zion's sake and He acts again. He does not give up, and His sovereignty is marvelously at work in relation to Zion. And that in itself is something that could occupy all the time that we have, to see how God sovereignly and secretly works in His sovereignty in relation to Zion.

Do we desire to have the Lord really and ultimately and supremely on our side? Do we want to be related to the Throne, the sovereignty, the government, of the Lord, the mighty, providential overrulings of the Lord in relation to an end which He is seeking? Do we? Where is the place of His Throne? It is centred in Zion. It is there which is the focal point, that is the focal point of the Lord's real concern and the real determination of God to have what His heart is set upon. You are recalling, probably, some of those words from the prophets on this matter when Zion had seemed to be eclipsed, and oh, the Lord comes back... the Lord comes back.

You know in chapter 62 of Isaiah's prophecies (which we may consider more fully at some time) it is the Messiah who is speaking, it is the Messiah who is speaking and the Messiah says, "For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace... for Zion's sake will I not take rest, until, until, until..." this is the Lord speaking: "I will not take rest, I will not cease". He comes back for Zion.

If you really want to be in line with the movements of God secretly, but very positively, toward His end - ruling and overruling, and bringing all life's affairs under that sovereign, providential government - then have your heart in Zion and you'll find that it will work out like that, it will work out like that. You do not see it perhaps in the stages, but with the long view, you come to an end of a long period and look back and you will have to say, "Had it not been the Lord that was on our side, when men rose up against us, they'd have swallowed us up quite, had it not been for the Lord..." this is something, this is something which can only be attributed to God. Yes, the Lord is jealous in His sovereignty for Zion - His throne is there. In a word, Christ, Christ is going to be vindicated. We can say He has been vindicated, but He is going to be fully and finally vindicated, His life, His death, are going to be vindicated up to the hilt in the end. Oh yes, it's wonderful, isn't it? It's wonderful!

You see the two bounds of Zion in the Word, as we pointed out yesterday, the first reference to Zion came on that victorious side of the Red Sea. Victory, yes! Victory over Pharaoh, his hosts, and Egypt; mighty victory, then they sang the song. And in the song they spoke of Zion, the beginning of the journey, but Zion there right at the beginning took up the note of victory, the note of the Lord's absolute sovereignty - let Egypt exhaust herself and Pharaoh resort to his final device, and in the Red Sea the Lord will bury the lot. That's victory! And out of that victory, Zion comes into view, see? Zion comes into view. I think it's very wonderful!

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What is the last mention of Zion? Fourteenth chapter of the book of the Revelation: "And I saw a Lamb upon Mount Zion..." a Lamb upon Mount Zion! Now, that Red Sea victory was based upon the Lamb of the Passover, it was the victory of the Lamb worked out. Here at the end of the whole Bible and the whole story, it is the Lamb upon mount Zion: victory, complete victory, through His blood. This is sovereignty!

It's good to take final visions, isn't it, final pictures, final representations - how is it going to be in the end? What will it really be like at last? Not, how is it today, but how will it all work out? What will be the final and ultimate conclusion to the whole matter? A Lamb upon Mount Zion. That, that's the picture. It will be like that, however other we may be feeling about it today, it will be like that at the end, but that is presented to faith. "Ye are come, ye are come, to that absolute sovereignty of the Lamb upon Mount Zion" - "Ye are come to Zion".

And then one more thing which we have al ready mentioned and that is that Zion was the focal point, the focal point of fellowship.

Fellowship on the Basis of Christ

But what was the nature of the fellowship in that dispensation as based upon and centred in Zion? It's in one little phrase: "Zion, the city of our solemnities". And what were the solemnities? They were the feasts. It could be rightly translated, "the city of our feasts" - the place where we come together and have a good time. Oh, how they longed to go up to Zion, how they lived all the year round for the time to go up to Zion, how Zion, whenever it was thought of and remembered, just lifted the heart, even away in Babylon, "How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?" the songs of Zion. And to think about Zion was a lift far away. It brought this sense of festivity; festivity. And dear friends, there surely ought to be a little more about this, of this, about us; don't you think so? That our coming to the Lord Jesus and all that He has done for us and offers to us and all that He has brought us into, placed us in; all this that Zion means as a spiritual inheritance for us, we ought to be a people of a more festive character - not superficially, emotionally excitable and noisy, and all that, but really a people who are enjoying themselves together in the Lord. I think we do have just a little taste of that when we come together at these times don't we? Drawn from far and near, to spend a day or two together, and there's something good about it. And I think that many look forward to the next time. It's good, it's good to have this fellowship. Well, that is really Zion: practical, practical experience and working out. But we ought to live more continually in the good of Zion, "We are come" we are come. For us, Zion is not a distant prospect, not something toward which we are going, or from time to time we go, Zion is ever present.

If we were really in the good of all that the Lord Jesus is, and has done, together, together, we would be a happier people, we would be a festive people! "The city of our solemnities..." if you like, "the city of our festivities", this is Zion, and Zion is so much more. And although I am so concerned when I am saying all these things, that they do not just remain good, pleasant, true ideas and conceptions, and parts of teaching, if you knew, dear friends, the background of these times together, you would know that there is no just seeking of some subject for addresses, that it is a real, real exercise deep and long before the Lord that a crisic thing should be said; that every time we come together should have something to do with the hour - be of that crisic character that relates to the hour and God's thought for the time. We have no interest in anything other than that; something for God's people in this day according to God's mind.

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And I feel sure that this word, borne in upon my own soul, is not just to fill up a conference with messages and teaching - good, bad or indifferent - but a message from God to us, to show us that God is seeking to recover the idea and conception of Zion in a people, because His heart has always been bound up with Zion. It is so: His heart is bound up with Zion. He must have Zion, in other words, He must have that which is a blessed, corporate, collective representation of what He has done and has given in His Son. When He finds that, He is satisfied.

And so He would have us occupied with what occupies Him, that the things that He desires should be our desire, and, mark you, they are essential to our Life. They are essential to our Life, you take these things as being life and death matters, they are, there is no doubt about it. If you really are set upon the Lord, you'll take note of these details which are presented; true, in symbolic language, we are always afraid of symbolic language, because it does somehow or other get people into a mystical air and realm. No, these are very, very positively practical.

What I have said this morning contains tremendous issues, this matter of relatedness and fellowship; don't you make any mistake about it, your life depends upon it, your spiritual life depends upon it, and the devil knows that too, and will spoil this whole thing if he can in some way or other. Oh yes, he hates Zion with a bitter hatred, and if the earthly Zion or Jerusalem has been the focal point of the contest and conflict of the nations and the ages all the way from its inception, that is only, only an illustration in the temporal and material of something that is very much more true in the spiritual, in the heavenly: that this thing is contested, this thing is hated, this thing will be a battleground. We leave that for a later time, but remember that we are represented as having come. This is a present thing to faith - to be taken, not as being now made, but as being completed in Christ and offered to us.

So, go away, not thinking of Zion as a thing, do not contemplate Zion as a thing, an object, but remember Zion is Christ in Person in the value of all His work in His people. That's Zion, and that comes very close to us. That is not the person even next to you, that's you! And then it becomes the one next to you, and all the others. It's very, very practical. Oh, that Zion should be in our hearts as it was in the hearts of the people of old.... If it was so much to them as a temporal thing, and at most a transient thing, ought that which is the real thing, that of which the earthly is only, after all, a poor picture, ought not the real thing (far more real to us because so much more a matter of life and death) ought it not to be of far greater store to us, to be cherished? To be cherished, to be watched over, to be cared for, to be exploited for all its wonderful possibilities: "Ye are come to Zion".

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# Chapter 4 - God's Standard

The first letter of Peter, first letter of Peter chapter two, verses six and seven: "It is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on Him shall not be put to shame. For you, therefore, that believe is the preciousness: but for such as disbelieve, the stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner; and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence".

The letter to the Hebrews chapter twelve, verse 22: "Ye are come unto mount Zion" - "I lay in Zion a chief corner stone" - "Ye are come to Zion". This letter to the Hebrews (as it is traditionally called but, as it has proved to be in the dispensation, this most serious document for the church) was written at a crisis. It had to do, and it will again have to do, with a crisis; a turning point in the dispensation.

It is not sure, to our knowledge, when the letter was written. Opinion differs, but the difference only amounts to a matter of perhaps two or three years, but it is very strongly believed that it was written about the year 69 A.D.; in the year 70 A.D. the whole Jewish system - as centred in Jerusalem and the temple and the priesthood - was swept away. That was the year when everything changed from what it had been for many centuries: an established system, a recognised and accepted world system of religion with its teaching and its practice. In A.D. 70 it was swept into the vortex of that overflowing of the pagan world: hostile to God. And from that day to this, there has been no temple in Jerusalem. The nation has been scattered, and the Jewish system has been practically inoperative as it was before.

Anticipating that turn in the centuries, in the dispensation, the Holy Spirit led to the writing of this letter; the producing of this document. If read in the light of that great, historic event, it is much better understood, appreciated; its significance is more clearly grasped. Yes, a mighty age crisis is represented by the letter to the Hebrews - nothing less than:

The Passing of a System or an Economy.

If we look into that and examine it as to what it was that was passing, what that signified, we shall get the real, abiding message of this letter and we shall see that what is here in its real signifi cance and abiding meaning, will lie behind another crisis - which crisis we are in our day seeing. Dear friends, it is no exaggeration to say that you and I have come actually to live in a time when the whole complexion of things in Christian tradition is changing.

I have got to try to be careful not to be misunderstood and wrongly reported, and I know I am taking risks in what I'm going to say, nevertheless, we have got to be very faithful and look things squarely in the face. For, some thing well over a century, God has been moving in a certain way which has not been His ultimate, and fundamental, and supreme way, but which has been in His sovereign way - for reasons which we need not stay to discuss or even point out - He has been moving by means of a system of things, realising much of His purpose. That method of the Divine movement is completely changing, it is passing. The day of organised foreign missions, organised foreign missions - note my words - is ending. We are seeing the close of that order and method, that what is foreign is now being wound up in nations. It does

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not mean that God is finishing or has come to an end of His work; it's a method, a kind of means.

Now come back to this situation here as represented by the crisis of this letter. It was the passing of a system, or an economy, which was meant by God to achieve one thing. It did achieve that one thing up to a certain point, and then ceased to do it. And from that time its days were numbered. The thing which it was meant to achieve in the economy of God was the securing of spiritual men and women.

The eleventh chapter of this letter, or that part of the document which has subsequently been marked off by that number 11, we would be well to dismiss those numbers from our minds at the moment and view the document as a whole, but that point which, for our convenience is registered with number 11, shows how that by a certain economy through the ages God secured spiritual men and women. A galaxy of spiritual men and women is found in that section - what God took out from the world and attached to heaven, attached to Himself, some -thing intrinsically valuable to Him: the men and the women of such faith that the world was counted as nothing, and life as nil, in the light of this relationship with God and His purpose.

The economy was sovereignly raised up and used for that and for no other purpose than to secure spiritual men and women out of the nations; not to secure adherents to an earthly system of religion (though that was a pattern of things in the heavens), not to secure adherents to a pattern, but through the pattern to secure men and women in that of which it was the pattern: the heavenly. That is the all-governing law and principle of the Old Testament. The means was employed not to be an end in itself - priesthood was no end in itself, and that is what is stated in this letter. The tabernacle was no end in itself. That whole system was no end in itself. It was something used sovereignly by God, or meant by God, to secure men and women who saw through the pattern to the spiritual reality, and became attached to that - men and women living on this earth, but related to heaven, the things that were real. That was the system and that was God's meaning in it, and it did do that for so long.

The time came when it became something in itself, an end in itself, and it was no longer producing spiritual men and women. It was producing religious people who were still carrying on the forms, the ceremonies, and the whole paraphernalia of the system, but they were no longer spiritual men and women in rela tion to heaven. The thing was going on, but it was empty, meaningless. It was not serving the purpose for which it was meant, and God wrote it off. God defined its conclusion.

The letter to the Hebrews sees the executing of that decree, the carrying out of that decision. And if it was written in 69, it was only a year afterwards that all that is written here about things which can be shaken, being shaken and more than shaken: brought down to the ground. Then we are told that that was done in order that the things which cannot be shaken should remain. And the whole letter, you see, is concerned with this - not with being parts of a religious system and tradition, even something which God has in the past used to His end, but men and women who are now wholly, not mediately, but wholly and directly and immediately related to the ultimate thing that God is after, that is: spiritual men and women. That system which was meant to secure that end, when it ceased to do that and just went on, perhaps, on its own momentum, by its own drive, because of its traditions, because of its antiquity, because of a past which was glorious under the hand of God, but all that: now gone. Simply being carried

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on as something in itself, stripped, and bereft, and emptied of its real spiritual meaning so far as God is concerned. That passed in the year A.D. 70. That's the crisis of this letter.

That system, though used in the sovereign purpose of God, though meant to reach that end, was strictly governed by spiritual laws. Oh, I cannot under score that heavily enough. The whole thing was governed strictly by spiritual laws. It was not something in itself. No movement of a priest or Levite of old, no vessel that he used, nothing whatever at any point in that system, was something in itself. It had behind it a spiritual meaning, a spiritual significance, and was governed by a spiritual law. Nullify that spiritual law, and the thing is no longer even sacred to God!

The amazing thing is that when that thing is in its right relationship to God, you cannot touch it without meeting God. Touch a vessel of the sanctuary in its right relationship, and you meet God and will be smitten. You'll die if you touch that altar. The thing is it's vibrant with the very majesty and glory and holiness of God when it is in its right relationship, because, because it's getting the end. And yet those same things, whether they be altars, or any vessels, or anything else, when the real spiritual object is no longer being served, it is not sacred to God. God can just hand it all, the whole thing, over; send it away.

There was a time when, if that ark went amongst Philistines, the Philistines were very glad to see the back of it. There was a time when that ark could be disposed of, and no one felt its impact at all. It was no longer accompanied by any sign of God, God doesn't care for the thing. What was at the begin ning a wooden chest overlaid with gold, became something which was full of the throne of heaven. There was a time later when it was no more than a chest like any other chest, overlaid with gold. See? Things that God raises up, He does not commit Himself to eternally so far as instrumentality is concerned. He only commits Himself to anything when the object for which He raised it up is being reached. And God's one all-inclusive object is to secure men and women who are spiritual people. Anything, anything that claims to be related to God which is not serving that end has no place, no sacredness with God and the day will come when that can go. Tremendous things to say, but it's perfectly true. It's true to history, and it's true today.

You see, I have a very great regard for the instrumentalities that God has used. When I speak like this, don't think for a moment that I am despising or undervaluing those sovereignly used instrumentalities, for God has used missions and missionary institutions and many things like that. He has used them and blessed them, and they have been vibrant with God, many of them. But, but... as time has gone on, various elements, various elements have become dominant. And one element is foreign, is what is represented by the word "foreign" - foreign. Oh, oh, if men only saw, realised, had perception and discernment, spiritual sensitiveness, how they would not only abhor, but how they would shrink, shrink before that name "foreign missions". Foreign. That word has spelt the doom of missionary activity. It's foreign, it's imported, it's something that belongs, not to the place where it is operating, but to somewhere else. You see, Christ is never a foreigner, He is never foreign. There is nothing foreign about Christ, and the true church, the Body of Christ, is nothing foreign. The very element of what is foreign has to be eliminated; completely eliminated. I'm not even meaning by trying to accommodate yourself to native habits and dress and so on, but I mean becoming so, so much one in the spiritual concern, for the spiritual interests, that it is perfectly manifest that this is not something from the outside, this is from heaven! This bears the imprint of heaven! This is

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Christ, who is not national or anything like that on this earth. This is something outside, altogether different; it is not bearing this stigma of what is foreign. There is a lot wrapped up with that, dear friends, and it's because of that word that we are seeing this change.

An entirely new orientation of the whole picture and course of things is being demanded. And so it will be, that if there is going to be a continuation of what we call "evangelisation" it will be just by men and women and not by institutions. They may have to be business, professional men and women, but it will be not what they are professionally as so-called "missionaries", it will be because they are men and women of God, because they bring Christ in and not some institutional interest from somewhere else. That is happening today. That defines the present crisis and tremendous change over.

Everything that God uses is conditioned most strictly by spiritual laws, and when the spiritual laws are not discerned and observed, the thing's day is fixed; the end of that is settled. It will pass no matter what its tradition, what its history, what its past may have been, it has become something in itself and for itself. It is wound up. I want a lot of time... whether we will be able tomorrow to spend more time on this matter, I want a lot of time to speak about this whole conditioning of everything by spiritual laws, but there's the statement.

That system which was about to pass, that crisis of the dispensations which was imminent when the letter to the Hebrews was written, that system was at most only for a matter of time. However much we may say about Israel, past or future, it is only a temporal thing. Even if there is a future for Israel (some dispute that, but most believe that there is; we won't argue with it) if there is, it will only be for a time; it will all give place to the eternal age: a new heaven and a new earth in which there will not be a Jewish nation and others, not even Jews in the church. It is at most for a time, and it was at most for a time, until! "Until" is a governing word, mark you, over the history of Israel, oh, until... the time factor. Mark you, the time factor was fixed in the eternal counsels and foreknowledge of God. You cannot get away from this as you read the Bible - things are moving to a timetable, moving to a timetable.

I remember that Dr. Meyer was traveling once in America, and sitting in the compartment of the train or in the coach, on one knee he had his Bible open, and on the ether knee he had a timetable. A man sitting by looked at him with something of a sneer, and said, "You don't tell me that you believe in that worn out, out of date book, do you?" pointing to the Bible. Dr. Meyer looked up and in his quiet way, which some of us knew so well, and a kindly smile, "My dear friend, do you see that on my other knee I have a timetable? And do you know why I have got that timetable open on my knee? I am taking this long journey, and I see in the timetable that we are due at a certain time at certain points. Now, the next stop will be so-and-so at such-and-such a time. I am watching to see if we are on time at each point. In this other Book that I've got here open, I find God's timetable. There are time marks when certain things will happen, and as I look back over history I see that those things happened just when God said they would happen. Jesus came in the fulness of the times..." and so he went on. He said, "That's why I believe the Bible. You don't want me to scrap the time tables of your country, do you, and say they are out of date, outworn, no good, unreliable? They are proved to be something of value, because here they are, they say such-and-such a time at such-and-such a place, and perhaps within a few minutes we are there. No more can I scrap my Bible. I see God is working to a timetable". Dr. Meyer went further, and dealt with some of the signs of the times, but that's sufficient for our point.

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There is a timetable back of everything, fixed in the knowledge of God, that things happened when God appointed beforehand they should happen, and are doing so. And yet, and this is one, of course, of the difficulties, the problems, connected with such a fact, while the times were fixed in the foreknowledge of God, strangely, they coincided and synchronised with certain conditions. Those conditions were not brought about by God, they came about, and when they came about, something happened which had been before determined. The time synchronised with certain conditions.

Now note as to this letter; oh, so much had been foretold, made known beforehand concerning Israel and what would happen. The Lord Jesus had, in a parabolic way, spoken of and acted toward the fig tree, the fig tree withered from its roots, symbolic of Israel's being set aside. Oh, I am not going into all the prophecies concerning this matter, but there it was. But it would take place, not just willy-nilly, but strangely enough, in the knowledge of God, because of certain conditions. And so it coincided with what? The system and framework having become a substitute for, or something more than, the essential purpose for which it was raised up. The thing had become a substitute for the purpose of its existence, or it had become more than the purpose. In some way the real purpose had shrunk or disappeared, and then the thing happened.

The thing that was fixed to happen in a time, synchronised with that condition. And, mark you, God works like that. There is a time fixed when God will sift out everything in Christianity, sift it all out, to find out just how far the real purpose of its existence is being fulfilled, and the things which can be shaken will be shaken. Spirituality in men and women is the thing which governs all this, and decides the crisis. Decides the crisis. We shall come to that crisis individually sooner or later. Why do you bear the name of Christian? You call yourself a Christian, we call ourselves Christians. Why do we have that name upon us? Sooner or later, it will be found out whether we are Christ-ones or not, whether it is Christ; how far it is Christ.

I wonder if I dare, in a parenthesis here, introduce something that I've read recently... it was only the dream of a girl. She said she had a dream, and in her dream she saw a glorious angel sitting... sitting on the village green where her home was. And in his hand was a large measure standing up, being held by his hand up beside him. And as she looked at that measure, she saw it marked off: Christ, Christ. There was so much of Christ, an inch of Christ, two inches of Christ, more inches of Christ, right up to this large measure. And then she heard the angel call, and the angel called the name of someone known so well to her, who had a great reputation for doing a lot of things in Christian work - always running about here and there, always active in philanthropic interests in the name of Christianity - a very busy person in what is called "Christian work". And she knew that person so well, everybody thought that person was a very wonderful person, that they would stand well in the great day of reckoning. The name was called, and this person came up so confidently, quite assured as well that she would stand well by the measure, and when she came up by the measure, she began to shrink in her stature. She became smaller and smaller and smaller until she was a little, tiny person, down there at the bottom of the measure. Everybody looked and got the surprise of their lives! "Is this Miss So-and-so? Is that really all the measure of Christ, after all?" The angel gave her some strong, kindly words of advice, seeking to point out the difference between all this that is outward, and the real measure of Christ inward. And she went away very crestfallen.

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And so, one by one, people known were called by the angel. There was one person whose name was called, known by the dreamer as a very poor, weak, little soul. No one thought a great deal of her. She lived in a back place in very, very uncomfortable conditions. No one, no one made a great friend of her; they left her very much alone. They didn't think she mattered at all. The angel called her name, and she came forward very tremblingly, fearfully, just scared of standing up by that measure. And she came and stood by it. As she came into touch with it, she began to grow and grow and grow. Her whole stature developed and increased until she was bigger than all the rest! The angel didn't have much to say to her, but just a kindly, kindly word. "Yes, Mary, yes Mary I know all about your secret battles, all your secret sufferings, and how bravely you have borne the despisings of others, and how you have carried it all in secret to the Lord in prayer, and drawn your strength from Him to go on. You count for much in His sight".

The dreamer had her name called, and she had to stand there. She was very fond of dress and of worldly appearance and all that sort of thing. And for her, the things of this world counted for everything. And she, because she was popular, because people thought so much of her and were always pointing at her and saying she was a model of a well-dressed person, and the kind of person that everybody would like to be, she thought that she might stand well before the measure. But she found that as she came near, she also began to dwindle and to shrink... to lose all her sense or feeling of self-importance and so on. The angel just quoted to her a bit of Scripture from Peter's letter: "Not the adorning, plaiting of hair, and ornaments, but the ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit, which is of great price in the sight of God".

Now, I have risked introducing that. It seems fanciful and fantastic, but it perhaps gives point to this whole matter. You see, God's standard, after all, is:-

The Spiritual Measure of His Son.

That is what really is inherent in this word from Peter, "I lay in Zion, in Zion a chief corner stone... Now then, everybody, measure up". The preciousness of that is to you that believe, but to those who disbelieve? My word, what a terrible effect that corner stone has as a gauge, a gauge of spirituality - the measure of Christ. Well, you see, God is not interested in anything which is not productive of real spirituality. That's the point. And Zion, as we have been saying throughout this conference, is the sum of God's thoughts for His people, the sum of the virtues and values and victories of the Lord Jesus to be apprehended, to be known, to be entered into, to be enjoyed through faith. Zion is the great test. It's the great test of everything and of every -one.

Yes, Zion is like God's plumb-line (to change the metaphor) the test of everything. There has to be an answering to God for anything provided by Him. Yes, anything that God has provided cannot, it cannot exist, it cannot be present as though it did not exist. That's a very solemn statement, a very solemn statement, a very challenging, searching statement. Dear friends, if God has raised up anything, presented anything of Himself as to His Son, and brought us into the knowledge of that, into proximity to that, into association with that, if that has come within the orbit of our lives, it can never be as though it had never happened. Sooner or later, we shall have to answer to God for that. That is the verdict of the book of the Revelation which is the sum of everything.

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We have so often pointed out that the beginning of God's weighing up, the presentation of the plumb-line in the first chapters of the book of the Revelation was to the churches which the apostle Paul was used to bring into existence - churches in Asia who had received that revelation, that wonderful revelation, of Christ and of His Body which had been given in a particular and peculiar way to Paul. The churches had had that ministry. Paul had long since gone to be with the Lord. As he was closing his life, "all they which were in Asia turned from him...", repudiated perhaps. At any rate, they let him go, passed away from him. Do you think that is the end? Oh no! Very well, very well! Those very churches are brought to toe the line of what Paul had given; to be judged by what the Lord had presented. That's the standard. That's the standard. Sooner or later it's like that; we don't get away from it, it will be. Perhaps it is not necessary for me to say that with strength. It sounds, it sounds so hard, it's like a frown, isn't it? But what we are saying is this: that God presented something which had spiritual signifi cance. The thing was kept on with, was held to, the spiritual significance was lost. Eventually God judged not according to their continuation with the form, but according to their departure from its spiritual meaning. It's like that, it is like that, it will be like that now and at the end. It is just that something, that something that is deeper and more inward than the framework and the form, even though God may have used that, it is just that something that finds us out; it finds us out.

"Ye are come to Zion... Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone" which, of course, architecturally means that from which and to which everything moves. It takes its rise from that, it moves from that, upward. And it all relates backward to that, the whole structure: a chief corner stone, a chief cornerstone means that everything, everything is related to that. "I lay in Zion that, that something which is to be the test... a test".

Our time has gone for the afternoon, otherwise I should have gone on to show how Zion has been God's instrument of testing in the past dispensation, and how that which Zion represents now of a spiritual quality and a spiritual measure is going to be the test of everything at the end. It is like that. I think I can stop there for the moment.

We may go further, but the afternoon has contained in the purpose of God, I believe, this one particular emphasis. If I am wrong, I am mis leading you, and I would not do that. I submit it to your own enquiry, observation, discernment, with this question: Are we seeing a change, really a change, in the whole complexion of things in this world so far as Christian activity is concerned? Are we? Are we? Is this thing growing over the earth? You see, it is so different isn't it? So different. Some of us remember so well in our younger days in Christian activity, how tremendously we were taken up with this whole scheme of world evangelisation along the accepted line.

Now, let me say again, it is not for one moment an undervaluing of what God has sovereignly used - and He has - but we know! Now, we today, we haven't finished our lives yet, we may be getting on, but we have lived to see that it is no longer possible to do it in that way. What is the use of appealing today for missionaries to go to China? And what is true in that connection is growingly true, isn't it? On the old lines, in the old way, it is nonsense now, isn't it? That doesn't mean that the end has already arrived of missionaries going out into the world, but we can see the drift of things. There is a change, a change coming, and if there is going to be a prolonging of this matter (and I don't assume that world evangelisation is it at an end) if there is going to be an extension of time for testimony in the nations, it is going to be in another way,

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on another basis, by other means. As I have said, it is going to be by men and women as such, and not as under some title and institution and so on, just men and women unprofessionally being witnesses; perhaps in business and in other ways in the nations. If it is going to be at all, that's the way for the future. This is changing, isn't it?

Now, why? What is the upshot of it? What does it mean from God's standpoint? Oh, you see, it is just this tremendous emphasis of God and of heaven that God in the consummation of the age is going to come to the essential and the intrinsic, and to strip off the secondary; to get right to the issue without going round it in long drawn-out circles - get right to it. Look here, you people in the nations, you have got to know God first-hand, not by foreign means! You've got to know God for yourselves, and be able to stand altogether without foreign help in any way - first-hand spiritual men and women. And what is true in those nations is going to be true in every nation, is going to be true here. Something is going to happen which will throw us all back upon God. It will, dear friends, we here in this place are going to be thrown upon the Lord.

In some way it is going to happen, that if we haven't got a life with God and don't know the Lord, it doesn't matter what the set-up is, it won't save us, it won't help us, it won't suffice. We are going to be pressed into this: that we are going to be men and women who know the Lord and are spiritual men and women. That is the issue, and God will overturn anything to get that, no matter now long its tradition, no matter how much He may have used it in former times. He is going, in the long run, to just con centrate upon one thing: do you know the Lord? How much do you know the Lord? What does your knowledge of the Lord amount to? What can it carry you through? What can it make you stand up to? Those upon whom you have leaned may prove to be broken reeds. You may find disappointment all round. You may discover things that shock you, and could turn you aside and make you offended, but you are being tested now according to Zion - whether you stand or whether you stumble; a Stumbling-block, you see.

If we are not really men and women who know the Lord... oh, do understand this! If I said nothing more, and I could say nothing more important than this: dear brothers and sisters, what God is trying to do with us in our experience is to make us know Him for ourselves, and have nothing second-hand, but direct. That will not make us independent of one another, it will make us perhaps the more dependent upon one another, but it has got to be like that. God will shake everything that can be shaken, in order to find out how much there is of that kind: conforming to Zion.

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# Chapter 5 - The Children of Zion

We will read in that place in the Word of God upon which the hymn we have just sung is founded. That is, in the eighty seventh psalm, Psalm 87:

"His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, oh city of God. I will make mention of Egypt and Babylon among them that know me: Behold, Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia: This one was born there. Yea, of Zion it shall be said, This one and that one was born in her; and the Most High shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the peoples, This one was born there. Selah. (Which means, think of that) They that sing as well as they that dance shall say, All my well-springs are in thee."

The letter to the Hebrews, chapter twelve, at verse 22: "Ye are come to Zion".

It is always a most happy and a most helpful thing to have a suitable setting for preaching. This evening we might seek to speak about the blessings of the Christian life and tell those who do not know and are not in the enjoyment of them, what a good thing it is to belong to the Lord. It might resolve itself into saying a lot of things, of arguing those things out, of trying to persuade, but it would be hard work if there was not some kind of setting for all that. And I think the best argument and the best statement of that fact is found in the very atmosphere of this gathering.

I was just thinking, as you were singing, that if I had been an unsaved person who did not know the Lord and was not really in the enjoyment of salvation, and I had come in while that singing was going on, I should have been compelled, if I had been honest, to say, "Well, these people are having a good time, they have got something!" And that really is the best preaching, isn't it? So I say to you, that whatever I may state in words, has a good, strong and genuine backing by the situation in which we are found this evening. And if you cannot accept the argument, if that doesn't go down with you, the argument of words, then just look at the people, listen to the people. And if you are not convinced that the people of God have got something worth having, well, you are very thick-skinned; you are a diehard.

Well, that's a little introduction; the right kind of setting and introduction for a meditation on this eighty seventh psalm. With its present application, there is that and all that is said there about Zion and the citizens of Zion, and here in the New Testament is the statement: "You are come to that". That is not something in the Old Testament, long ago and far away... that is some thing here for you now; it is present for you to know and to possess: Zion - we are come to Zion.

Now let us look at this eighty seventh psalm and draw from it some of those things which are brought to us in the Lord Jesus at this very present time.

"His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God". That is the first section, and, as you see, it contains some first contrasts; contrasts represented by two words on each

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side: "Jacob" on the one side, contrasted with "Zion" on the other side. "The tents of Jacob" on the one side, "the gates of Zion" on the other side; a double con trast. And the statement is that the Lord very much prefers the one to the other; indeed, it is couched in strong language: "The Lord loveth this more than that". And, of course, our enquiry is as to what it is that is the foundation, the basis, of this discrimination and this partiality of the Lord. What is it that the Lord loves so much more? It is not a statement that the Lord doesn't love Jacob, nor the tents of Jacob; He does, but He loves Zion and the gates of Zion very much more. Why? Well, you see, Jacob represents:-

The Simple, Pure, Mercy of God.

Whenever we come on Jacob, whether it be the man himself, or the people going by his name, that which his name represents, we always, invariably, find ourselves in the presence of that which calls for and demands the mercy of God.

The very name "Jacob", the "Supplanter", is that which, but for the mercy of God, there's no hope for that, there's no place for that, and yet how very much of Divine mercy is exhibited in relation to Jacob! How often in the prophets, in the prophets (and that is significant because Israel had sunk into the Jacob realm again, from the great Israel, the prince-with-God position, they had fallen into the place of men governed by the flesh, fleshly interests) and so the name of the prophets for Israel is so often that of Jacob. And yet how much there is in the prophets of God's great mercy to Jacob, He will have mercy upon Jacob. It's just wonderful! It's just wonderful when you think of all that that name means, to see how God went out to Jacob: the patience of God, the longsuffering and forbear ance of God, God never giving up when Jacob was at his worst. Yes, Jacob always symbolises that which draws out the mercy of God.

Jacob postu lates mercy. Well, the Lord loved Jacob and showed Jacob great mercy in such terms as patience, and longsuffering, and forbearance, and longing love. Yes, He did, but do you think that that is all that the Lord wants, that which just demands His mercy, mercy, mercy, all the time? That with which He has got to be patient, longsuffering, because of what it is? Do you think that that is wholly according to the Lord's heart? Surely not! Surely not. Then what is it that the Lord looks for, longs for, delights in, more than that?

Thank God that He is a God of mercy and He is merciful to us in our Jacob state, but don't let us conclude that because God is so merciful to us as sinners and all that we are in our human weakness, frailty, and failure, constant breakdown, do not let us conclude that, however great His mercy is, that that is the thing that satisfies Him fully, just to have us as objects of His mercy.

And so He contrasts Jacob with Zion. And Zion represents something more than the mercy of God. It represents:-

The Full Response to the Mercy of God.

That is something more. When you come into what is represented by Zion, then you find that which answers back to the mercy of God, that which says His mercy has not been in vain. If you like to change the word from "mercy" to "grace", you can; the grace of God has not been in vain. He has not just had to go on being merciful, and merciful, and merciful... and that's

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where it begins and ends. But no; His grace has begotten something, His grace has provoked some thing, His grace had drawn out something, and Zion is represented always as the place of praise, praise, praise.

No, it was there in Zion the sons of Korah carried on the singing. The singing! Zion is a place of song, and if song-singing praise is genuine and from the heart, it means an expression of appreciation of the grace of God. That's the true note in Christianity isn't it? So much of our singing, (and it is really the only real singing religion in the world, there are dirges in other religions and awful noises), but singing, praising, rejoicing, you do not find it in any other religion. It's only in Christianity. It's made up so largely of hymns isn't it? And so many of our hymns are just the answer back of the heart to the grace of God.

God inhabited the praises of Israel. So Zion represents some thing more than mercy. It represents that which comes back to God because of His mercy. It means that all that the Lord Jesus has done, has taken effect; is really producing something in us. And the Lord loves that. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob". The Lord loves Zion. While He loves Jacob, He loves Zion infinitely more. He loves the people who have so apprehended His mercy and His grace, that they have nothing now for which to live but to give back to the Lord that which His mercy merits. That's Zion.

"The tents of Jacob" - "the gates of Zion". This is another aspect of the contrast, the first contrast, and it is only a following out of what I have just said, because these couplets go together, they are a part of each other. Dwellings or tents of Jacob, and gates of Zion.

What is represented by the second couplet: tents, gates? Well, you see, they are two distinct pictures, if only you could recognise it. It is a transition; it's a change of position and time altogether. When you contem plate the tents of Jacob, you're contemplating them in the wilderness. Look again, and you will find in the Old Testament that when Jacob is in tents, they're in the wilderness. When the people are in Zion, they are no longer in the wilderness, they're in the city. A different position, a different time altogether, almost a different dispensation. They have passed out of the wilderness, now into the land; they have reached the City. Zion is a realised thing. They have been looking toward Zion through the wilderness; now they have arrived! The tents and the gates. But what does that mean? Well, you see, in the wilderness, in the wilderness in their tents in the wilderness, they were learning by discipline, learning by experience to know the Lord; gaining spiritual history.

What a time of spiritual education it was in the wilderness, wasn't it? Spiritual education under the hand of God. What hard lessons they had to learn! What severe blows they suffered. Yes, it was a time of testing, of trial. It was forty years, which always im plies probation, a time of testing to find out and to prove and to bring to some position along that line. That is the implication of the tents of Jacob: all that they were going through in order to learn in the wilderness - the school of the wilderness.

The gates of Zion - what's happening in the gates of the city? Why, here are the elders gathered together, the mature people, and council - in a position of that knowledge, possessing that knowledge gained through experience which is being turned to account for the people of God. Gates are the places of counsels in the Bible, of conference of the people who know. The judges sit in the gates. People of intelligence are there, conferring together and making

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decisions in the interests of the people of God. They are the people who have learned, and have brought the good of their learning, of their education, of their training, into practical application to the nation. You see the point?

Yes, the Lord loved them in their tents in the wilderness, there's no doubt about that, but what a lot of patience and forbearance through the forty years. Here, in the gates of the city, all the good of their discipline, their training, their education, is gathered and turned outward to the good of others. And the Lord loves that, you know. He does not want us all our lifetime to be in the wilderness learning, learning, learning, going through it, being tested, being tried, being brought to understand ing... He does look forward to the time when you and I will be in a position to turn what He has taught us to account for others. That's far more precious to Him.

Now, are you in the wilderness or in the gates? Are you a people still out there wandering about, learning, slowly learning by discipline and adversity, or are you a responsible person in the gate?

Those who know their Bibles, of course, have the advantage over those who don't as to this matter of gates and the counsels in the gates. But I hint at it for others, that in the Bible the idea of gates is that the city counsels took place there to decide matters, to judge matters, for the good of the people. The Lord wants people like that. Like that! You know that that is what the Apostle was speak ing about to the Corinthians, Paul to the Corinthians, his word to the Corinthians. He had to say to them, "Now look here, some of you have got difficulties between yourselves, and you're taking your matters to the law courts of this world. You are going before the world to judge of your matters. That's a, that's a mark of immaturity! That's a sign that you have not got very far on the way. Now you ought to be able to judge one another and judge your own affairs! And if you would judge yourselves, you would not be judged of the Lord. You ought to be in a position to decide these matters, not take them to worldly wisdom". See? What the Lord loves is that kind of maturity which means that, well, we know from the way in which the Lord has taught us, disciplined us, know what we ought to do and are able to help others with counsel.

The difference between the tents and the gates, you see. And the Lord, yes, He'll be very patient with you while you are in the wilderness, but don't think that He wants that to be the beginning and the end of everything. He looks for the day, and it will be the day of His so far greater joy, when you and I will be in the gates of Zion. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the tents of Jacob".

Then the Psalmist goes on to another set of contrasts, and they begin in this way: "I will make mention of Egypt, and Babylon, Philistia, and Tyre, Ethiopia". The contrast with the whole lot, not each one of them alone, but with the whole lot put together is one word, one name. You can bring all the greatest names of this world to gether, lump them together, and there is one name that is more than all together: Zion. See?

The Contrast: Zion

I think we need not stay to speak of what these various things represent, Egypt... well, we know what Egypt stands for, the power of this world. Babylon: the pride of this world. Philistia: the presumption of this world. Tyre: the commer cial glory of this world. Ethiopia: the

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darkness of a human heart in this world. Over against that, by contrast, by prospect, by value from heaven's standpoint stands Zion.

The Psalmist says here are people who are boasting, boasting that they were born in Egypt, they belong to Egypt; glorying that they had been born in such a place, that they held the franchise in such a country. Others were boasting that Babylon was their native country and city, "Oh wonderful Babylon! Wonderful Babylon, I was born in Babylon!" a man boasts. Another boasts that he was born in Philistia, and so they go on, "Tyre, wonderful Tyre..." read the thirty-seventh chapter of the prophecies of Ezekiel and you'll see what men boasted in as to Tyre. Tyre built up to the very heavens, exalted to the heavens, the glory of the commercial power of this world. Well, bring it all, with all your vaunting and boasting, that is your heritage, that is your heritage. And when you have put all those together and made all of them that can be made (and it is not a little, it's not a little), when it says that Moses accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, it did not mean that the treasures of Egypt were things to be scoffed at, it only puts the reproach of Christ on a so much higher level because the treasures of Egypt were undoubtedly very great.

If you know anything about the glories of Egypt in her great days, you know that it was no small thing. And Babylon and the rest, no, this is no small thing to have been born there, to be natives of those places, but when you have given them their due and said all that could rightly be said about their glories, their position, there's something that overtops them all. "Of Zion it shall be said..." and notice that sentence begins with "Yea..." I wish it had begun with "but", but the "yea" is quite as good, it's an emphatic exclamation which simply means "More than all that; of Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one was born in her'". The citizens of Zion, the citizens of Zion have weighed up Egypt.

Moses was a true spiritual citizen of Zion, although he never literally, literally came to Zion, but he was a true citizen of Zion spiritually. He weighed up Egypt, he summed up Egypt, he took the measure of Egypt for forty years. For forty years he took the measure of Egypt, and then, by a deliberate calculation, he came to a conclusion: it is better to be in the reproach of Christ than to have all this. Note: not in the final glories of Christ, but in the reproach of Christ. My word, the lowest level of union with Christ is better than the highest level of union with Egypt! That's not an exaggeration is it? If words mean anything, that is what it means. Far better, far better to be with Christ in His sufferings than to be in all that this world has to offer outside of Christ. That is the Christian's testimony, that really is what it means when you've rightly understood what Christ has done and offered. It is more than all. And, after all, after all the simple Christian, the simple Christian who knows his or her Lord truly, looks pathetically upon these poor people of the world, "You have got all that, but I am sorry, you think you are having a good time, but I really pity you, you really don't know anything about it". That is what it amounts to, that is what it means. I say, the citizen of Zion has weighed up Egypt, has weighed up Babylon, has weighed up Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia, and written it off as a bad bargain if you lose Christ.

Paul was a great citizen of Zion. He looked at all his heritage naturally, his birth, his birth yes, an Israelite indeed, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee of the Pharisees... everything else, and he looks at it all squarely in the face and sees how much other men think of this, and how he made everything of that himself once; it was his life, it was his glory, it was his ambition, it was his sphere of interest. But then he has found Christ, and he

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looks at all that, and says, "Well, I count it as the veriest refuse compared with Christ..." He used the word "refuse" about all that, but you never do that until you've got something with which to compare it! This is a comparative matter. It is something very wonderful for those who have nothing more, but if you have Christ... if you're a citizen of Zion, well, it's poor stuff, after all, it's poor fare all that, however much it is. The contrast. And right between these contrasts the Psalmist puts this: "Glorious things are spoken of thee, oh Zion, city of God... glorious things are spoken of thee". And it would take a long time to dwell upon the glories of Zion, but there are two things that we could just mention in that connection.

What would you consider to be the most glorious thing that could be true of your life? If something could be said to sum up your life at the end, as really quite truly expressing and representing the value of your life, what would it be? Well, I don't know exactly the best way in which to put it, but as I view that, it would be something like this: to have brought satis -faction to the heart of God. If only, if only my life could mean that God was well-pleased, that the good pleasure of God rested upon my life, that God could say, "Well done, well done good and faithful servant" I would want nothing more than that. Nothing more than that. Could you have anything more than that? What could you ask for? You see, Zion is that which brings God satisfaction, and that's the most glorious thing that could ever be said about anything! Glorious things... glorious things. This is only bearing out all that we have been saying through this conference, what Zion means to God as answering back to Him for His pleasure.

He takes delight in Zion, in her stones and in her walls. Yes, and calls Zion precious, precious to Himself. "And unto you that believe is the preciousness" it is the preciousness of Zion to God. That is a glorious thing to be spoken, isn't it? And, dear friends, you are come to Zion. Here is the Lord Jesus Who has found the full, final, utter pleasure of His Father, so much so, that because of His life and because of His work, the Father says, "My beloved, in whom I am well pleased". If God could say that to you and to me, well, what should we feel like? What should we feel like? We wouldn't sleep for a year of nights with joy! "He hath made us accepted in the beloved" - "Ye are come to Zion". We are accepted in the One who has the perfect approval of God! Oh, how difficult it is for us to believe that, to accept that, to apprehend that, and yet it's a refuge to which we must constantly flee when harassed and pursued by the Accuser who would remind us of ourselves and our sinfulness and our failures, and constantly belabour us with the whip of an evil conscience.

Our refuge is what? Flee into Christ and say, "In Him God covers all my sin... There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus", taking the whip out of the hand of the enemy and lashing him with it: justification by faith, made just through faith, accepted in the Beloved, Beloved. And so the word comes back repeatedly - beloved of God, beloved of God, beloved of God, and that to such miserable creatures as you and I. "Ye are come to Zion... Glorious things, glorious things are spoken of thee".

And then:-

The Prospect of Zion

For Zion, as we have said, is not just a place and a thing, it's a people, it's a people in union with God's Son. What is the prospect of Zion, the prospect of that people? Oh, just contemplate again the things that are said about the church in the ages to come. The church in the ages to

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come; what a place! What a vocation! Unto the ages of the ages, and the crowning word: "Now... now unto Him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever". That word "church" is only a synonym for Zion: "Glorious things are spoken of thee..." we cannot dwell upon the glories that God has prepared and given and unto which He has called His church for the ages to come; glorious things.

My dear friend, if you are outside of Christ, you are missing something. You are missing something, indeed, you are missing everything. Whatever you are gaining now, you will lose it all and have nothing left. But glorious things are spoken of Zion, the people of God. Whatever we do not have here, we have got something that is more than all. "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the peoples: This one was born there in Zion". Which raises the question forthwith: Have you been born in Zion? Have you been born again from above? Have you been born anew by the Spirit of God? Have you got another place where your name is enrolled in the Lamb's Book of Life? Are you registered in heaven? Can you, can you present your certificate of new birth? Have you got the credentials of this heavenly country in your heart, in your life? What are they?

Well, absolute assurance. You know. That's something, that's something that you know. You have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, you are not in conflict with heaven, but you are on happy terms with heaven, you have peace. These are the credentials of new birth, and many other things. Do you know anything about that? Do you know what I am talking about? Most of you do, I know, but it may be somebody does not. Let me say to you that if the Lord Jesus, when He was in this world, said to any man "You must be born again", He meant "You can be born again" - if you must, you can - and you can be born again.

A final word, "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the peoples: This one was born there. Selah..." think of that. Think of that! "They that sing as well as they that dance shall say, All my well-springs are in Thee". The citizens of Zion have resources to draw upon of which others know nothing. They have invisible means of support. You have people talking of no visible means of support, well, that's all right! That is a glorious position to be in if you are a citizen of Zion - no visible means of support, but plenty of invisible means of support, and no less real for that. The Lord Jesus lived on that basis. In the wilderness satan came and said, "Command that these stones become bread", but He had bread - bread of which satan knew nothing. The disciples at Sychar's well came to Him and said, "Master, eat", and He said, "I have meat to eat that you know not of". Yes, spiritual resources, and those resources are for the citizens of Zion. "All my well-springs are in Thee..." we do know something about that, what it is to draw upon the Lord for our life, our subsistence, and more than that, drawing of such an abundance: we are not just going about in a half-starved condition, we have enough! And blessed be God, it doesn't matter how many of you come, we've got something to give you. Isn't that true? It's a good thing to be in that position. Hungry people, let them come, let them queue up, we have still got something to give. Yes, all the time that is the testimony of the citizen of Zion, isn't it?

We lack nothing, we have plenty, there is always a margin for others. We have an affluence, we are wealthy people: "All my well-springs are in Thee". This is the testimony, but this is what is offered, you see, is how it should be, "Ye are come to Zion" this is presented, all this is presented to faith. May the Lord give us a new heart to lay hold of this heritage of the children of Zion.

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# Chapter 6 - The Controversy of Zion

This conference time has been focused upon the present significance of a little clause in the twelfth chapter of the letter to the Hebrews and the twenty second verse: "Ye are come to Zion". Various aspects of that statement have been considered, and without any review, we are proceeding to another this morning.

And I want you to have before you one or two other fragments of Scripture. Firstly, in the prophecies of Isaiah, chapter 34 at verse 8: "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense in the controversy of Zion". Chapter 31, and verse 4: "For thus saith the Lord unto me, Like as when the lion growleth, the young lion over his prey, if a multitude of shepherds be called forth against him, will not be dismayed at their voice nor abase himself for the noise of them. So shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight upon mount Zion, and upon the hill thereof".

In the prophecies of Jeremiah chapter 25. Verse 31: "A noise shall come, even to the end of the earth for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations. He will plead with all flesh; as for the wicked, He will give them to the sword, saith the Lord". And in the second psalm: "Why do the nations rage, the peoples imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet I have set My king upon My holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree: The Lord said unto me, Thou art My son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel".

And this morning we are to be occupied with the meaning of that little phrase: "the controversy of Zion".

The Controversy of Zion

We know that in the Word, Zion and Jerusalem are often synonymous terms. If there is a difference, Zion just means the intrinsic values of all that Jerusalem is supposed to represent and contain. We recognise that difference and must keep it in mind, because when we come to Zion, we are coming to the high peak; the ultimate significance of all that Jerusalem stands for.

Speaking of Jerusalem, we know from history, from the Scriptures, that Jerusalem has always been, and still remains, the storm centre of the ages. There's a little phrase in the Old Testament used of Jerusalem that she would be, "a cup of reeling to all nations", a cup of reeling. And behind the phrase is a picture, it really sets forth a threshold, and on that threshold a cup; full. And those who come to that threshold and drink of that cup, stagger and reel; are thrown into confusion. And Jerusalem is said, in that picturesque way, to be like that to the nations.

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The nations coming against Jerusalem would find that on the very threshold they met something that threw them into confusion; com pletely upset all their calculations: a cup of reeling to the nations. To the nations, yes, that is what Jerusalem has been and still is; literally. They do not find that they can just play with Jerusalem, cope with Jerusalem, do as they like with Jerusalem - they meet something that is more than Jerusalem.

Not only to the nations, but Jerusalem has always been a decisive point to Israel herself; a kind of sign, a barometer, a telltale, representing the spiritual condition of Israel. If Jerusalem was in the ascendant, it was because the spiritual life of the people was in the ascendant. If Jerusalem were other than in the ascendant, that represented the spiritual life of Israel - its condition. Jerusalem was always indicating spiritual life. And Jerusalem's security and peace was always bound up with the spiritual condition of God's people. So, it was always a controversial matter, a spiritually controversial matter, whether to the nations or whether to Israel.

If these things are true (and they lie right on the face of history) if they are true in relation to the earthly and temporal Jerusalem and people of God, they are even more true in relation to that of which the earthly is but a figure after all; what Paul calls, "the Jerusalem that is above" and what this writer of the letter to the Hebrews, whoever he was, speaks of when he says, "Ye are come to Zion". It is that controversy over this superior and supreme Zion that is to hold our attention this morning, for there is undoubtedly an even greater controversy over this that is meant by the spiritual and heavenly Zion than has raged over the earthly.

This is the very thing to which Paul himself referred in his letter to the Ephesians, when he spoke about our wrestling being with principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness and hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies. That follows straight on from his presentation of the Church, the Body of Christ. And this is only another way of saying there's a tremendous controversy in heaven over this thing - this is the occasion of cosmic upheavals, uprisings, disturbances, something going on in the unseen of a furious character, directly and immediately related to this: the Church, the Jerusalem which is above, the Zion of God. It is to this same thing that Peter referred when he said, quoting from Isaiah, "It is contained in Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence", something that immediately raises a controversy; throws things into the realm of conflict and dispute.

Again, it is to this very thing that John refers in the Revelation when he sees that multitude who have come up out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the victorious host over all the forces of evil, and then says, "I beheld, and lo, a Lamb upon mount Zion". A Lamb upon mount Zion - this, this is a presentation of the tremen dous conflict, conflict that circles round this; this that is called Zion. Yes, and just as in the temporal and earthly and historical Jerusalem, or, if you will, Zion, it's a sign of the times. So it is in the spiritual.

A Sign of the Times

I'm not launching into prophecy, but it is clearly understood, I believe, that Jerusalem, the earthly Jerusalem, has always been a sign of the times - and still is. We have come to be almost commonplace in saying, "Watch Jerusalem, and you'll know the time of day. Watch Jerusalem, and you'll know where you are in the dispensation". A sign of the times. Why? Because God is

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acting in this whole world in a re lated way. Watch and you see the movement of nations, the movement of policies. You see things shaping, forming, moving in the whole world. God is moving and acting worldwide in a related way, and acting in the earthly history in relation to Jerusalem. It's very significant. A sign of the times so far as the world is concerned, so far as the nations are concerned: God moving.

Something, dear friends, that we should lay hold of in days when everything seems to be in the melting pot, everything seems to be in turmoil and tumult and dis turbance, we should remember that God is not only the God of Christians, He is the Lord of all creation, of heaven and of earth, and that all the nations are as a drop in a bucket with Him. They are in His hand, and He is manipulating the course of history, the movement of nations, and all these things that are happening are not just the wild, lawless, run-amok events in the world. They are all governed from heaven relatedly, every one of them. There is no political movement that is not under heaven's government just now in a related way, concerning something. And all the nations are like that with the Lord. It's all indicative of God's object, God's interest. It's a sign of the times, it's a sign of spiritual conditions. For God is not only acting in that kind of chronological way, working to a programme and timetable in a cold, mechanical way, He is moving upon a spiritual basis, and it's all connected with spiritual conditions and spiritual conditions are all related to it.

Now, having said that, we arrive at this: that it is made clear in the Word of God (and we will not spend time in dividing between the temporal and the spiritual) it is made clear in the Word of God that Zion will be the occasion of the supreme and final conflict in the history of this world, this present world order. Zion (if you like: Jerusalem) will be the scene and the occasion of the final, consummate conflict of the ages of this world. It will be upon Zion that everything is focused.

Now, let us keep to our side of this matter.

What Does Zion Symbolise?

Let us say it again, as we have said it many times in this conference, Zion (the earthly, the literal, the material, the temporal) is, after all, after all, at most a symbol, a representation of spiritual things. Those spiritual things can be detected in the material, for God's material things always contain the elements of His spiritual. And Zion therefore symbolises a full heavenly and spiritual testimony to Christ in the significance of His Person, and the value of His work, and finally to His God-determined destiny. Now, that's a big statement. If you could break that up and grasp it, you'll comprehend the whole history of the earthly Zion, Jerusalem, and understand what that's all about. It is true, in Israel, of the earthly. For, there in Zion, when Zion is as God intended it to be, you will have a full, heavenly, spiritual representation or embodiment of God's mind concerning His King and His reign and the basis of it - always the altar and always the sanctuary. There are your elements. We are not going to follow those too closely, we have so much on hand, but let us transfer that in its spiritual meaning to this Zion to which we are come.

What is Zion, then, for us? The Zion to which we are come, this Jerusalem which is above, nay, this Jerusalem of which we are citizens, this Jerusalem which has no existence apart from the people of God themselves who are the Jerusalem of God; what is it? It is this: a full, a

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heavenly, a spiritual representation, embodiment, expression of Christ in the significance of His Person in God's universe; the full, heavenly value of His work. That, of course, means the work of redemption by His Cross, and the full declaration of the place that God has eternally destined that He should occupy. That's the testimony of Zion. If that is true, and that is no small thing, because any one of those three things could occupy the Christian for a whole lifetime and more.

The significance of the Person of Christ in God's universe... can you range that? Can you fathom that, can you exhaust that?

The value of His work by His Cross... have you ever ranged that?

The eternally destined, predestined, place that He shall occupy in God's universe... can we comprehend that?

Put those three things together, and they constitute the testimony of Zion, and no wonder there's a controversy, and no wonder that the controversy is as great as it is. You're not surprised, are you? This is no little campaign, no little battle, no little fight; this is ultimate, this is all-inclusive.

But let us go on. This conflict and controversy has three aspects. One, as to the nations. Two, as to the realm of Christian profession. And three, as to the ministry of the testimony of Zion. Let us look at those more closely. The controversy has to do, in the first place, with:-

The Nations.

We have already stated that in general terms, but we will look at it more closely, because I am keeping to the Scriptures; I am not outside of the Scriptures, although I am not quoting every chapter and verse. The convulsions, the upheavals, the conflicts, the unrest, the frustrations in national and international affairs, are all related to this testimony of Zion. That's saying a tremen dous thing.

They are all related to, in other words, the inheritance of God's Christ. The nations are related: "Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession", that follows upon this: "I have set My king upon My holy hill". So that all that is happening in the nations, between them and amongst them, is connected with this whole matter of Zion's testimony as to the inheritance of God's Christ, and of course, the inheritance of the saints with Him.

We have some very striking and forceful illustrations and instances of this kind of thing in the Bible. We are all so very familiar with the controversy in Egypt with Pharaoh and with Egypt and with the gods of the Egyptians. What a terrific controversy that was; how long-drawn-out, how thorough! Steadily moving with growing momentum and force, working itself down ever deeper, exhausting all the opposition, but what a conflict. The whole cosmic realm was involved: natural phenomena, the sun, heaven, blackness, darkness - all nature was in convulsion. Everything was gathered into this controversy with Egypt, with Pharaoh. What was it all about? Something that God had in the nation - something that belonged to God, something that in the sovereignty of God was chosen to be the vessel of His testimony in the

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earth. And so this nation, this mighty kingdom of Egypt, is thrown into convulsions, and all nature is thrown into convulsions, over this one thing at the heart of the nation.

Babylon... true, the people have failed the Lord and have been sent away into Babylon, but the Lord has not forsaken, and the Lord has not given up, and the Lord has not abandoned His testimony, so that... what do we read? Well, let's look at it in Isaiah 43 verse 14: "Thus saith the Lord your Redeemer..." 'your Redeemer', even in Babylon, "the Holy One of Israel: for your sake I have sent to Babylon, for your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all of them as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships of their rejoicing. I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King". "I have sent to Babylon, and will bring down all of them", the margin says there "nobles": "I will bring down all of them as fugitives... for your sake". Do you know what happened in Babylon? It is a wonderful story isn't it, what happened in Babylon. It just looks like the pageantry of world empires, one following another, but oh no, God says, "I have brought all this about". It's a wonderful story which we cannot take time to go over, the story of the overthrow of the Babylonian empire, the onward march of Cyrus, the approach to the doors - when they were all inside, off their guard in revelry, that night Belshazzar was slain. The doors were found unfastened, they were unguarded, and in came the next empire. And the Lord just describes that, and says, "for your sake I have sent to Babylon". All this, the overthrow of empires - the Babylonian Empire was one of the greatest in the history of this world - the overthrow of empires... why? What for? Because of a people right in the midst. All this, all this is focused upon some deposit of God in the nations.

The controversy is with the nations over some object, and that object is this Zion. Zion! And if that, dear friends, was true of the historical and earthly, it is even more true of the spiritual and heavenly. God has a deposit in the nations, and we are told that He has looked to take out of the nations a people for His Name. He has got in the nations a people for His Name, and the things that are happening in the nations, though we may not be able to detect and follow and define, things are happening in a related way.

Just as the nations will vomit out the Jews and be glad to get rid of them, as did Egypt, so the nations will. So, so, a true people of God in this earth will make this world sick that the world will want to get rid of them. And the sovereignty of God will make that very attitude of antagonism and hatred and expulsion His, His own way of securing His people. He is working in the nations. It's a tremendous thing to recognise this, "For your sake...". Our point is that, just as the nations are being dealt with (or have been dealt with) in relation to Israel of old, so the world is being dealt with in relation to this Church that is in the field.

Note in Matthew 24 we have some of those signs of the end of the age given to us: wars, rumours of wars. Now, you say, as some do, "Well, there always have been wars and always will be wars. What's the difference between those of Matthew 24 and the others?" Well, to begin with, have you counted the number of wars in recent years? There have been more wars in recent years than in any previous time in the history of this world. And we are never out of war, whether it is hot war or cold war, we are never out of war. Well, I am not going to dwell upon these signs, but there they are, and the signs in the heavens. But what is the statement here? The Lord Jesus said, "All these are the beginnings of birth pangs". Got that? "The beginnings of birth pangs". We are a long way advanced, I think, in this matter; beyond the beginnings; be that as it may, birth-pangs... then something has got to be born! That's how the

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Lord viewed this whole situation: this upheaval in the nations, this tumult, this unrest, this frustration; for you know that's the word that is really so apropos of the situation.

When He said "distress of nations", He used a Greek word which was employed which gives a picture of a trade, a business, which has no way out. It's shut up, it's a business that has become or been shut up. The Greek word means busi ness: no business, no business, no way out. That's the word translated "distress". But then the Lord says, "When, when you see this state of things, the nations having no way out..." oh, isn't it true? No way out! They're trying all the time to find a way out, aren't they? To find a way out, all the way round, a way out, a way out of this dilemma, this predicament, this situation, and they can't find it! All their expediencies and policies and diplomacies, all of it is not succeeding; they're having to make compro mises all the way round, and none of their compro mises give them a way out. No way out.

Then the Lord says, "When you see these things... lift up your heads, for your way out cometh". Your way out - we know the way out! That is, however, by the way. It is all to emphasise this: that this is the beginning of travail, of birth pangs, something is going out, it is going to have a way out. That which has been locked up in the nations is coming out. The Church is the only Body that has a way out. It has got a way out. Yes, convulsions... birth-pangs, is the word. But that is so much in keeping with what Paul says isn't it, in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8 verses 19 to 22: "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now... for... the manifestation of the sons of God". Yes, there is travail and groaning in the creation. We can hear it, we can hear it with our spiritual ears.

Well now, let us go on. There has to be a testimony in the nations upon which God can work, which justifies His judgment of the nations, which gives significance to His government of the world and the nations. There has got to be a testimony in the nations and such a testimony as will provoke God to jealousy among the nations. We have so often quoted in this connection the words of the prophet, "I am jealous for Jerusalem with a great jealousy, I am jealous with great wrath", and that is connected in the prophecies, you see, with this. The Lord has a controversy with the nations, He is jealous over something, something that is there that is very precious to Him, and very important to Him. He must have a testimony like that, and when He has got that, His sovereignty comes into operation in all sorts of ways concerning that. He may work on the long, patient line, but, "His mills, while grinding slowly, are grinding very small; though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all". It is all related to that which is His in the earth.

There is something, something in this earth, in this world, which is a disturbing factor. A disturbing factor: it has set up inflammation. You know that's true wherever a Christian, a true Christian, goes. You get an adequate testimony and you see the inflammation that's set up; the conflict. You see what happens, there's something there. You don't have to try and make trouble, nothing whatever to do to precipitate it, it's spontaneous, it happens. You may be the meekest, and the mildest, and the quietest person on God's earth, but if Christ is vital in you, or as a company of such, you will find that your very presence provokes something, and that provocation has the direction of, "We must get rid of this! It's foreign to us, it doesn't belong to us, it is something that is not of our constitution. We must get it out of our con stitution". That's the world's attitude. That's the attitude of the devil and his kingdom. There is something provocative in this earth: disturbing. There's so much and that is all we can say about the

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relationship of Zion to the nations. I trust you see more than I have said, the significance of God having an adequate testimony in this world. And what a tremendous thing!

We must hurry to the next: Zion, and the testimony of Zion, in relation to the realm of Christian profession.

The Realm of Christian Profession and Tradition

That realm in which, with the name of Christian or of Christ, the natural soul has its kingdom. It's a terrible thing to say, but it is quite true, that right there with the Christian title, there is that which is just after all, only the kingdom of the soul of man: the natural life. And you find (we say it with grief) you find that there is correspondence, even there in the realm of Christian profession, to all that you have in the world in principle. All the same elements are active as in the world, commercially and socially.

"Whence come jealousies, rivalries, ambitions, personal interests"? You find them all rife and in riot in a certain realm called "Christian". They do not come from God, they do not come from the Spirit of God, they do not come from heaven, but there they are! Yes, I repeat: rivalries in Christianity, in Christian work, in Christian interests. Jealousies... jealousies for Christian things: personal interests, to bring men into position, into reputation, into influence. If you have touched them, you meet something, a kick-back. Christianity is a sphere of many selfish, personal, natural ambitions. Men sport themselves in the realm of Christianity to get advancement, to gratify their own natural desires. One grieves to say that, but it's a fact, we know it so well... there it is. That's one aspect of that realm of Christian profession. The eyes as a flame of fire see through it, they see through it; they know all about it.

Another aspect is that it's a realm of zeal without knowledge. And that's a terrible realm, you know, a terrible kind of thing: zeal, but not according to knowledge - a kind of shadowland where men are seen as trees walking... that is, something indistinct in spiritual apprehension: no power or capacity or faculty for discriminating between what is soulical Christianity and spiritual Christianity. Things are all mixed up and confused.

I said at the beginning that some of you weren't going to understand some of the things said; perhaps that's one of them, but it's a most sordid thing to most; things are mixed up. In so much that is going on, you cannot draw even a thin line between man's soul and its ambitions and its activities and its heat and what is really, purely of the Spirit of God. It is all so mixed up and people don't seem to be able to discriminate or discern between the two. Therefore many, many innocent people are carried away by the semblance of things, thinking that it is something quite good and quite right! Everything is indistinct; confused, with very limited revelation.

This was the kind of thing with which Paul had to do in Judaism. Judaism: a confusion of the old covenant with the new, the old position with the new, trying to mix them up and make a Jewish Christianity - making one thing of it. One thing of it: Judaism and Christianity, no gap between and no difference - Judaizing Christianity and Christianizing Judaism. Paul was up against it. No, these two things belong to two different realms and kingdoms altogether. One belongs to the realm of the soul, and the other belongs to the realm of the Spirit. There is a cleavage to be made between these, a cutting through: discriminating. But, in the realm of Christian profession and tradition, there is not the capacity for that discrimination, things are

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all mixed up, again I use Christ's metaphor: "men as trees walking" - no power to clearly define what it is; what it is. It seems to be like this, and yet it is not all clear, and so on; a confused state of things.

Much that is believed to be the truth is being fought for, and it is, after all, only a legalistic inter pretation of the truth. There is so much failure, so much failure, and so much inability to grasp the meaning of the truth. You know, there is such a difference, dear friends, between a truth stated in Scripture, and God's meaning of the statement. If you are not able to discriminate between those two things, you see, you will be in constant confusion. That is just what we have here. Here is the letter, but what did God mean by that? If you cannot discriminate, you can take that letter to support a thousand different opposing things! Take any bit of Scripture and use it to support something that is entirely in conflict with another thing based upon the same Scripture. It needs the Holy Spirit's interpretation, enlightenment, witness, and government to bring us to the truth of the Word, but in the realm of Christian profession, there is not such a capacity or faculty.

Now, God has got a controversy with that sort of thing. For His true testimony He will have a controversy with what is called Christianity as surely as He had with Judaism. He will indeed. And very likely the thing will rage in greater intensity in that realm than in any other. I cannot follow that further, but this is a matter, this is a matter about which the Lord has very, very real concern. Zion, Zion represents (amongst all the other things which it does represent) the transparent light of heaven, Zion's light: "Thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" - that's absolute transparency, that's clear seeing of issues, that's clear discrimination. That is what Paul meant when he spoke about the things discerning, the things that differ. The things that differ... and as you know, he was speaking about, not the wrong and the right, but the good and the best. The good and the best; Zion represents the best, and God will not be satisfied with anything less than His full and ultimate testimony.

Now I must come to the end for this morning. The third application or realm of the controversy as to the ministry of Zion.

As to the Ministry of Zion

Of course, this includes one and two: the conflict with the nations, the conflict with tradition and formal Christianity. But it comes very much more inward when it comes to the ministry of Zion... yes, much more inward.

This controversy rests upon some things that we must seek to understand, dear friends. It was in this particular connection that I was speaking at the beginning about having understanding. You see, the ministry of Zion, the ministry of Zion is a greatly disputed thing. The ministry of Zion is something around which the battle circles more hotly, perhaps, than in any other connection. This whole matter of mini stry in relation to God's full purpose. What a battle, what a battle! Paul knew something about this. How he besought believers repeatedly that they would pray earnestly that he might be given utterance to open his mouth to speak the mystery, that a door might be opened to him to speak the mystery. This is not something about which you can get up an address, and go out willy-nilly and begin to give it out. If it is rightly constituted, it is fraught with the most terrific conflict.

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This ministry, if it is the true ministry of Zion, rests firstly upon and is constituted by:-

A sovereign apprehending of a vessel.

A sovereign apprehending of a vessel for it. Of course, that is so true of the historical Zion, isn't it? God's sovereign choosing of Zion. It is there in the Scripture declared and made clear very positively: it was a sovereign act of God that chose Zion. But Zion is a vessel, a symbolic vessel. And a vessel for Zion (that is, for Zion's ministry): the fulness of the significance of Christ and His work and His place in God's universe; a vessel for the ministry of that is something sovereignly apprehended by God; raised up by God.

When I say "sovereignly", there is no explanation for it other than that this is of God. You cannot account for it in any way whatever, but: the Lord. Touch it; you meet the Lord. Be amongst it; you meet the Lord. Somehow or other, the Lord is responsible for this; its existence. Whether that be collective or individual, it is something sovereignly raised up by God. Anything cannot do this, you cannot do this by choice, you have no choice in this matter of ministry. You cannot aspire to this. You cannot walk into this. You cannot put your hand upon this. You cannot take up this ministry. Oh, it is such a sifting and discriminating thing. Many people like it; like the ideas, and they are going to propagate those ideas, going to take up this thing, see, and make it theirs. But it just doesn't do! Either they get into confusion, or other people do, or something happens and it doesn't work out. You have a caricature, you'll have a contradiction, you have the absence of the vital thing. It's something that you cannot just like that take up at your own will.

If God Himself has not apprehended you for that purpose, He may have apprehended you for something else, but if He hasn't apprehended you for that, it's no use; keep out of it. It is something of the sovereignty of God. There's a lot of things that touches, doesn't it? You see, dear friends, it amounts to this: that this whole matter of such a testimony is a matter of life and death with us, and nothing less an issue than that. It is not something we can take up and drop. It is not something that we can come into and then not like it and be offended and resign, draw out. It is a matter of life and death. And I am there because my very life is found in my being there, and it would be committing spiritual suicide for me to drop out. That's very utter.

I'm not saying that God's sovereignty operates only in this ministry, or that ministry of utter fulness of Christ. It operates in other ways, but I am saying, as to the testimony of Zion first of all, it's something right out of the sovereignty of God, and man has no place in it other than that of faith and obedience. Man has no proprietary interest in this, no possessive place in this, no controlling place in this; it's the Lord's, wholly, utterly the Lord. And if it should cease to be that, everything goes. Everything goes; man cannot just carry that on. He can carry the frame -work on, but he can't carry that. He can still have the tabernacle in Shiloh, but the glory is departed. It is the Lord. That's a very solemn word, a very searching word.

Zion is constituted then, by a sovereign apprehending of God, then by:-

A sovereign government of God behind the history of the thing.

Of course, that wants a lot of explaining. It can be illustrated, Paul the apostle said, "When it pleased God, who separated me from my birth, to reveal His Son in me..." he touches this very

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point: "From my birth! From my birth... my birth. My birth was into a Jewish family. My birth was so utterly, one hundred percent Jewish - my history, my family - but right there, while I was like that, in a most complete and utter Jewish setting: birth, blood, training, education, while all that heat of antagonism to Christ was still in my blood, although it had not come out until it was provoked, but it was all there, while my hatred of the Gentiles whom I called 'the dogs' was in my very constitution, God had already separated me to be the messenger of Christ to those Gentiles, to have all that hatred in my blood against His Son quenched - rather, a new fire kindled in love for that Son".

But the point is this: right behind the man's earthly history was the sovereignty of God: foreseeing him, foreknowing him, forechoosing him, and arranging everything! Arranging everything in line with his ultimate calling and the purpose of his life. It's a difficult thing to believe, isn't it? But it's like that, and yet, when God has a vessel for a purpose in view, that is no after thought. It does not just arise at some point in time; God has seen it, foreseen it, known all about it, and has worked in relation to it. And its very birth and environment are under His sovereignty to some good purpose in relation to the ultimate meaning. We may have to live a long time before we discover that.

Nay, let me put it this way: we have to get right into line with God's purpose and God's thought before we see anything of how true that was, that our very birth, and constitution, and environment, and all that, has some relationship to the thing to which we are called. If you can't understand and grasp that, don't worry about it, but it's a fact: the sovereignty of God lying behind our earthly experience and history in relation to the purpose - that constitutes this vessel.

And then, in the third place, this ministry of Zion is constituted by

A drastic and deep work in the vessel.

A drastic work in the vessel, a deep work in the vessel. This is not something that we can take up apart from something that has been done in us, that God is doing in us: the undoing of us, the taking of us to pieces, the stripping of us, the emptying of us, and bringing us to zero and starting from there all over again with us. That's the sort of thing connected with Zion and Zion's ministry.

Don't you make any mis take about it, the nature of this ministry, dear friends, the ministry of which we are speaking, Zion's ministry, the ministry of Zion, is something utterly diff erent in its nature and its realm from all other ministries. It's possible to look on and admire. It's possible to walk in and out, or sit down inside, and appreciate the truths and agree with the ideas, and to recognise something of the values, and to desire the benefits, and to seek to participate. It is possible for all that, and then for there to be a great dividing "but". With all the agreement, and admiration, and recognition, and desire, there may be lacking the constitution of Zion.

The constitution of Zion... the constitution of Zion is what? That God has broken clean through all natural faculties and abilities for understanding and, by revelation, planted right deep down in the centre of the being a knowledge of a spiritual kind which is different from natural knowledge. It is not taking up the phraseology, and the ideas, and all that sort of thing, and

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appreciating, and valuing, and agreeing, and then going repeating it. It's something that has been done inside and the thing has come by revelation of the Holy Ghost. That's the ministry of Zion, and I say that discriminates, that divides, and it is because things are like that, that you have so much conflict. You find the very conflict in the realm of that ministry. It rises there, it rises in the realm where people... yes, they agree, and they accept, and they repeat, and they like, and they want, and so on, but they are not constituted. Violent, violent conflict arises in that realm.

If you only took the matter of ministry itself (I mean now public ministry) you'll find it is the most controversial point in all Christianity. More trouble, more trouble has arisen over "ministry" than over anything else; platform ministry. And in Zion, no one has a right to minister, no one has a qualification for ministry, who cannot sit back and do no ministry at all, quite easily, if the Lord wants it. Have you got that? It ought to be just as easy for a minister of Zion to take a back seat and wait for the Lord and watch for the Lord, as it is for the natural soul to want to be on that platform. That may be speaking to a very limited company, but I focus upon this matter of ministry: the ministry of Zion. It's of a quality, of a kind, of a constitution that is not studied, that is not the result of going to books and taking out of books the truths... observing and hearing and then reproducing; it's something inwrought! But oh, how the devil rages over a ministry of that kind, because it is going to do something. It's going to do something: it is going to touch God's ultimate purpose, and if he can, he'll destroy it and destroy the vessels of it. He will stop at nothing to bring an end to that kind of ministry. It is true. Here the controversy of Zion rages. It rages over the ministry of Zion.

You see, the whole point of the controversy and the conflict is its reality, its essence, its essential value, the very life of it, the very power of it, the very distinctiveness of it. For if satan focuses upon one aspect of such a testimony more than another, it is to destroy its distinctiveness - to in some way get it drawn out into a generalisation, conform it to a recognised system, take away that distinctive definiteness. And it's a terrific battle all the way along to keep the testimony clear, dis tinct, unmixed. It is, friends, you may not know all that I am saying, but it is quite true. It is something in a different realm from mere mental apprehension. You can't have the same truths by study.

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# Chapter 7 - Zion's Destiny

We continue this afternoon to explore some of the depths and fulness of that little fragment in the letter to the Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 22: "Ye are come to Zion".

It is common knowledge that this document called "the letter to the Hebrews", marks the transi tion from one dispensation to another - one order, system and economy, to an entirely different - from all that was temporal and earthly, material, of God's ways and God's means in Israel, to the spiritual counterpart of that as it relates to this dispensation and to the church; that this term "Zion" is inclusive of all that was in that economy. It came to sum up everything from the day of Israel's going forth from Egypt, when the vision was brought fully into view and their being brought in and planted in the mountain of His inheritance. All that was subsequent to that, found its deposit and consummation in what is called "Zion". All that is taken up in a spiritual way and made the heritage of the church, our heritage, the heritage of faith.

"Ye are come to Zion". We have been, as I have said, we have been seeking to explore and exploit the fulnesses of that heritage. We just take one more fragment of that this afternoon. And we have for our basic word a fragment in the one hundred and thirty second Psalm, Psalm 132, verse 13: "The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever, here will I dwell; for I have desired it". Of all the full statements regarding Zion in that Psalm, the fragment for our present occupation is: "The Lord hath chosen Zion".

In the very blood of the true Israelite is the element of selection and election, that is: of a difference and a destiny. Every true Israelite has that in his blood, it is a part of his very being, of his constitution. The deepest thing in him, in his consciousness, in his very make-up, is that he is something different and that he has a particular destiny. It has become customary to refer to Israel as "the chosen people", or "God's chosen people", and that is the consciousness of the Israelite - chosen by God, distinguished by God; in the appointment of God apart for some particular purpose. That is in his blood: a sense of destiny.

These two things go together: difference and destiny, apartness and purpose. I say it's a constituent of their very being; they can't help themselves, it just comes out. You meet it, sometimes it shows it self in arrogance, independence, superiority, and in many other ways, but there it is. They just cannot help themselves, that's how they are made, they are different! And they know it, and there is something which is bound up with that difference in the nature of purpose and destiny, which is their heritage. And this sense of destiny has always been a tremendous factor in their history, a tremendous factor in their endurance. It has been something which has enabled them to endure. And God only knows what they have had to endure in suffering, in work, in vocation. It has been a potent factor in their survival, their very survival. When that consciousness was alive, they were in strength. When that con sciousness faded, passed under some cloud of doubt and question, they lost its keenness, they were in weakness.

Their strength or their weakness related to the strength or weak ness of this one thing: this sense of calling, this sense of vocation, this sense of destiny. When they were in right relationship

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with God, that consciousness was regnant, it was the dominant element in their life. It was a powerful motive and principle. When their relationship with God was not right, then that consciousness faded and ceased to be the motive. They hung their harps upon the willows then, and ceased to sing the songs of Zion.

Zion, you see, contains this very element and principle and dynamic of destiny, of purpose, of calling. In the Psalms this is regnant, we have read a specimen this afternoon. This glory of Zion, this glory of Zion's calling, purpose, choosing, election, destiny... it is regnant in the Psalms. People are in a state of tremendous buoyancy there, because Zion is unclouded, undimmed. In the prophets it is latent or even absent, so that it became the chief vocation and purpose of the prophets to recover that very thing. And the voice of the prophets is always attuned to that one note, "My servant, whom I have chosen... My elect in whom My soul delights... I have chosen him... thou are My chosen" (Isa. 41:8). See, that's the note of the prophets. You look again at Isaiah 43. You find that is the supreme note there, "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer", thy redeemer... and their re demption goes hand in hand with this reassurance, "I have chosen thee". Well now, that all relates in that part of the Bible to the earthly people and to the earthly Zion.

We hear coming back to us from this writer in the New Testament: "Ye are come to Zion", not to that one, but to another one: a superior, transcendent Zion, the heavenly Jeru salem, the spiritual Zion. "Ye are come to Zion". And coming to Zion, amongst all the other things that it means, means coming to that very thing, coming to the eternal counterpart of the temporal, that Divine choosing, that Divine electing, that Divine calling, that Divine, that heavenly, destiny. We find this made clear in the New Testament in two ways. Firstly in:-

New Birth.

If it was true that in the very birth, that is, in the very blood and constitution of the Israelite, this sense of vocation and destiny was so strong, so powerful... that is true in the new birth of the child of God. It is there as a great factor: present, but in birth as a general principle. We do not define it in this way, we do not give it this kind of definition in words, but when it is put to us in this way, yes, that's just what we know: that when we were born again, when we were born again we immediately became conscious of there being, after all, some purpose in our being on the earth. It was then that life took on its real meaning. Whatever we had, thought and felt about life up to that time, now we become conscious of there being some meaning about life of which we were never conscious before.

We just feel that now, now we have begun to live, and now life has got a meaning, a purpose. I say that is there as a general principle in the very constitution of the new birth. It is a test as to the reality of the new birth. It's a testimony to a very great fact that somewhere behind our birth, all unknown, beyond our under standing and comprehension, there is a design; there is a purpose. We are no accident, there's a meaning. I say it's (if I may use this of the spiritual) it's in our blood by new birth. That, of course, is open to your attesting. You know it's true.

It is at least, at least, as potent a reality and fact in the birth of the child of God by faith as ever it was in a Jew. If your new birth has not brought that, not so that you can put it in the words, the form, in which I have put it, but something that you know to be true: that life has only just begun, and purpose has only just come in, a sense of destiny has only just arisen; if that is not

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true of your conversion, then you have missed something. You have missed something because it is, I say, a blood constituent of the new generation. It's there as a general principle in new birth and that is the meaning of being born anew. But then the New Testament goes on to show us that a life in the Spirit (which, after all, is the enlargement, the fulness of the meaning of new birth) a life in the Spirit becomes intelligent concerning this matter of purpose and destiny and difference: intelligent and specific.

Intelligent... I mean we come to know what Paul has spoken of about having been chosen in Him before the foundation of the world; what Peter meant about the church when he said, "We are an elect race". It is only another word, another English word for the same original: chosen, chosen, elect. We come intelligently to understand that now we are somehow chosen by God, before we had a being, and that has been introduced to us at our new birth. We become aware of it, we begin to understand something of what that means: God has chosen us! We can understand what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you; I chose you". This is some thing that God has done for which there is no accounting on any other ground than on the ground that God did it. It's God's sovereign act. We begin to understand it, that it is so. And intelligently we are able to grasp more and more the teaching, especially through Paul, concerning this matter of election, choosing and calling.

Calling... what a favourite word of Paul's that was: "calling", "called according to His purpose", called according to His purpose; called... purpose! Purpose, "according to His purpose... the purpose of Him", and so on. These are great words which are all gathered into the one word: "destiny".

Destiny

And a life in the Spirit, a life in the Spirit, mark you, means growing intelligence about that, a growing understanding of that. It is not only now the basic consciousness, but the growing understanding of what that means. And as we grow in under standing of what it means to have been chosen, to have been called according to His purpose, life takes on a great deal more fulness of meaning and value and power. It becomes something, something of tremen dous power and potency in our lives, as we grow into the understanding of that. It's a mighty motive, a mighty motive. It is the thing that also girds us for the race, the journey, and the battle.

You see, this is very closely in keeping with this letter to the Hebrews, because it is this very sense of destiny that is being spoken of in relation to men right back from Abel onward. The whole caravan, as we have called it, from Abel, Enoch, Noah, and right on. These men had in them this sense of the hand of God having come upon them with an object, for a purpose. And it was that sense of destiny which enabled them on the one hand, to leave the world behind, its affairs and its interests and its possessions, and on the other hand, to go patiently on, patiently on through the years. They were men who had seen something; they had seen something! "Abraham saw My day", said the Lord Jesus, "Abraham saw My day" he rejoiced to see it. They had seen something, Abraham had seen something that this world could never give the answer to: a city and a heavenly country. No matter how much they possessed of this earth, that never answered to it; they had seen something that still kept them going.

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Moses saw something, yes, he saw the God of Israel, and he saw the pattern of the things in the heavens, but he saw more than that. He saw more than that! What a tremendous suggestion is found in this: "accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than of Egypt". "The reproach of Christ"! He had seen something that could never find its answer in the types and the figures and the symbols of the whole earthly representation, he had seen something heavenly!

And so all these men had seen something, you see, and that seeing was bound up with this sense of being called and of destiny, and it kept these men going. Of Moses it says "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible". He had seen something, and he en dured... he endured! They endured, and what was the power, the thing, that girded them to endure, to suffer, and to die, still in faith, not having obtained? It was this something in them that was a part of them, not something they had taken on, but some thing that was inborn: a sense of purpose, God-appointed destiny. Yes.

The letter to the Hebrews gathers that all up and says, "Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run..." Let us run (as they ran) "the race with patience". Let us lay aside every weight, and the so-easily besetting sin: that doubt, that doubt - that's unbelief, as the context shows. Lay it aside... run with patience. Girded by this same wonderful seeing, sensing, knowing we are called, we are chosen, we are related to some tremendous destiny. But then this becomes specific. It becomes specific; it is not just general.

Zion is something that becomes very concrete in Israel. It is, so to speak, the gathering up of all that the nation means and all that the land means and all that the city means, and concentrating it, so to speak, at one point. It is something very concrete and concentric. So that this sense of destiny becomes, not something quite general and spread over and indefinite, but some thing quite focused. Focussed, and: "Ye are come to Zion". This is but a repetition of something we have said more than once in the conference. This is something that is presented to faith, and something that you and I have got to recognise as being a matter which concerns us. So that, while the apostle will present the truth and tell us the facts about being chosen in Christ, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, and so on, while he would tell us all that, he would say, "Look here: walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called". Make this something that comes into your every day life, and it will redeem your every day life from the ordinary, from the monotony, from the trivial; it will lift you right up on to another level. You know that you are, as a child of God, related to some tremendous purpose. And you've got to live on the basis of a great purpose. It becomes specific in that way. But let me analyse that.

See, Zion, as we have said, is:-

A Collective Conception.

That is, it is that which joins the Lord's people, all together in one. They found their concentric point in Zion, as a nation. It was Zion that was their cohesive strength, the thing that brought them together. Of course, naturally and literally that was true as they, at the given times, all went up to Zion. From all the tribes they came there and their national unity was celebrated or enjoyed. But, although they had to live apart in many places and during the intervening months they seemed to be insular, really they were not, and Zion was the testimony to, and the experience of, their oneness as a people.

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Now, that is a great factor about this whole matter of Zion where we are concerned spiritually: that it is a collective... shall I use the more familiar word? A "corporate" thing. And while, perhaps in every, and truly in every individual Jew was this sense of election and destiny, every Jew held that relatedly. No individual Jew thought that he was the elect and that the whole purpose of God related to him alone. He knew that what he had of that, that calling, that election, and that destiny, was a related matter, and he found the strength of it in the relatedness. See, it is the people, not the individuals as such; the individuals share it in their relationship with the whole people. God is after a people for a purpose and for His purpose. And you and I will have our main sense and strength of destiny and purpose in a related way.

There is always a great deal of limitation and danger about indivi duals thinking that they are the elect, and that their job is the job of all jobs; God-given. Anything like that is a breach of principle, and it will certainly lead to a dead end. We have this relatedly. That is, God's purpose is bound up with a people, His church, and that which truly represents His church, that is, which takes the true church character, the heavenly Body character. Wherever that is found in representa tion collectively, there these things obtain. And it's in that relatedness that we shall come into our purpose in God, and we shall come into this mighty sense that God is after something. He's after something, and that we are related to that. It's relatedness, you see, that is essential to this motive, to this purpose.

If we get out of a right relatedness, a right spiritual relatedness, a full spiritual related ness, with that which really is chosen of God, formed of God, called of God in fellowship with His Son concerning the eternal purpose that is centred in His Son, if we get out of a full and right relationship with that, then life becomes limited and we may get off the track altogether. Weakness will set in, and it will not be long, it will not be long before we begin to ask the question whether after all we have been mistaken, whether all this wonderful truth about being called and chosen really relates to us....

Now, you see, that's exactly what happened when Israel got away from Zion. While they were in Zion: all right, no questions, all is strength, all is life, all is fulness, things are happening. But when, through their spiritual decline they were moved away from Zion, they were out of immediate touch with Zion you see, and became a scattered people. Then big questions arose whether, after all, they were the elect people, whether they really were God's people, whether this was not all some wonderful beautiful illusion that they were called to a special purpose. The whole thing came into question and they lost their vision. And where there is no vision the people go to pieces, and that is only another way of putting this: where there is a loss of a sense of destiny and calling.

Now, Zion then means:

Relatedness.

Get away from true spiritual relatedness, and you expose yourself to terrible deprivations and losses. And perhaps to, sooner or later, to the major question as to whether it is all true or not, whether all this teaching really holds good and works. You'll find that it does hold good and it does work if you're in right relationship, in the right position. It does! And it works gloriously, and it works terribly! It works for you and it works against that which is against it.

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Now, I know that so many people have this difficulty, "You speak about being called, chosen for a great purpose, but what is the purpose of my life? Where do I fit into this and what is my function?" And you're always making an individual and personal matter of this in a wrong way. Get focused again about this, get focused again. If an Israelite should have asked that question, "What is my place? What is my function? What is my vocation, for what am I called?" the answer would have been: "Zion"! Zion. On every point, the answer is Zion. Do you see what I mean? It doesn't relate to you out there as so many individuals, it relates to a collective thing that God is doing. And you will find your place and your function in a related position. You must not go and take the whole purpose of God and pull it out to you in some detached position, you have got to come right into it.

It's a tremendous factor in vocation, in fellowship, in strength, in purpose, in fellowship... and the enemy spoils the work and spoils the purpose - brings in weakness and disintegration immediately he gets us out of fellowship, and that's why he is so concerned to do it, to do it. But listen to your own heart, listen to your own new nature. What was it that was in every Israelite in those days when things were right? They were distributed over the land from Dan to Beersheba, from the utmost frontiers; scattered. But this was true of them all: there was an inward gravitation toward Zion. They longed for Zion, their thoughts were turning to Zion. "If only, if only we could get to Zion... it is difficult to wait for the day to go up to Zion!" Their inner being was all the time gravitating in that direction. Listen, dear friends, to your new nature and dis position. Is it not a very part of you to long for the fellowship of God's people? Is that not true of us? We just must have it, our life seems to depend upon it. The one, one great difficulty is when we can't have it.

It is so much more difficult to live an unrelated life. Yes, in our very being there is this gravitation toward fellowship and relatedness. It's a part, you see, of the Spirit's work in us, and therefore it is a violation of our Life, a violation of the Spirit, the work of the Spirit of God in us to be out of fellow ship, to be unrelated, to be independent, to be what we call "freelances". You know where that phrase comes from, I suppose. It comes from the world of journalism. "Freelance" literally is one who runs about all over the place picking up little bits here and there without any specific relationship. He is not related to any one journal, he rushes all over the place picking up everything like that. His whole life is distributed and scattered. There is nothing central, nothing cohesive, about it. He is just a freelance! Well, he may make a living, but he may maintain an existence or make something good out of it in a way, but you can't have that sort of thing in Zion. You can't have that sort of thing in Zion!

Zion means that we are bound together with the people of God wherever they are, whoever they are. Yes, the people of God, because they are the people of God, not because they belong to our society and come along our line of things, but they are the people of God; we are one with them on the basis of Christ. Mark you, if that is true, if that is true, God is able to do things; God will stand by us.

Well, with Israel this whole matter depended so much upon the fulness of their spiritual life and their allowing that Life to govern, that inner Life to govern and respond. If ever anybody should have resisted the gravitation of their Life, they would have found themselves in a very difficult position. Sometimes a tribe did that, and disaster followed. And in the case of the Lord's disciples after His resurrection, there was one man at least who tried it on and had a very miserable time - poor Thomas - he stayed outside. He stayed outside, when they were

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having a grand time inside, he stayed out, he kept himself apart, and I can imagine that there was no more miserable man on the earth than Thomas during those days while he was staying out. It was when he came in that he found everything, the answer to all his questions and a new flow of Life. He bowed and worshipped: "My Lord, and my God".

So much for the value of Zion in terms of relatedness and fellowship. Remember, this will only be on a twofold basis. On the one side, the Cross will have to do a very thorough-going work in us in order to get us in ourselves out of the way. We are really the difficulty. I will not stay with that, but it is very necessary to get ourselves, our interests, our ambitions, our fancies, our likes, our preferences and all that is just ours personally, to get it all out of the way: thoroughly crucified and buried. And, on the other side, the positive side, to be entirely under the Lordship of the Holy Spirit, the Lordship of the Holy Spirit where the Holy Spirit does dictate everything, and we answer to His dictates.

Now I want to pass to another point. Zion was, and is:

The Motive of Revival.

What is popularly termed revival is that which is related to one thing as an objective or an object: it is related to souls being saved or converted. I think that sums up, almost entirely, the general conception of the meaning of the word "revival" - people are being saved on a large scale. Well, we have nothing to say against that, may the Lord grant it. But this whole matter of revival is so largely unrelated to spiritual conditions in the church. It is objective. It is some thing which is bound up with a certain kind of activity - objective activity, with certain objective results - unrelated to or out of relationship with internal spiritual conditions. And, mark you, this matter of revival can be (and I fear often is) a blind, a blind to the real need.

A visitation of God in grace by which many are saved, is a sovereign act. It is an act of sovereign grace, but acts of Divine sovereignty, of sovereign grace, are one thing, that is the thing with which there is so much occupation and concern: a sovereign act of visitation of God in grace for the salvation of souls. That is right, good, has been, and God grant that it may be again. Man is concerned mainly with what he calls "revival" in these terms, meaning outward happenings. God and the Bible think of revival in terms of the recovery of something. It is re-vival. It is the recovery of something that has been lost. Now, the whole of the prophetic or prophet section of the Bible, was occupied with revival in that sense: the recovery of Zion, the recovery of Zion. Look through the prophets and see if that is not the burden, the burden of their message, the burden of their cry, the burden of their prayer. It's all that Zion may be recovered, restored, may come again; the recovery of the glories of Zion, that Zion should come into the place that it once held. That runs right through the prophets! So that the prophetic ministry has to do, not just with the sovereign acts of God's grace externally and objectively, but with the recovery of something in the people of God themselves. And that really is God's way of touching the nations.

It was not until that was true of Israel, that the nations were touched. God made that state of things internally, basic and contingent for the touching of the nations, and the other will follow. Yes, the other will follow as day follows night spontaneously, when God has in His people what He wants. You will not need to have special efforts to get souls saved. They will be quietly being saved all the time. There will be something going out that is touching, touching

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lives on an ever widening circle when God gets what He wants amongst His people. It must be! It is like that. It is spontaneous, it is in evitable.

So, the prophets did not cry and pray that the nations in the first place should be saved, they prayed that Israel should be saved, and then they saw that the nations would be touched. We shall see something of that probably this evening, but there's the statement of fact: that revival from the Bible standpoint is internal before it is external. It is recovered, it is recovery. And for that a prophetic ministry, a ministry concerning Zion is needed to see what Zion really means spiritually, stands for, its heavenly aspect, to have that burden, that vision and that burden, and a ministry - that doesn't mean only a preach ing ministry, it means as much a praying ministry. It means a burden on your heart; that's a ministry sometimes which doesn't get on the platform, it's a burden on your heart which finds ex pression: "Oh, oh, that the Lord's people... I with them, were as the Lord would have them be in the full meaning of Zion recovered!

And the last word follows on that, Zion is:-

A Means to God's Larger, Greater Ends.

Therefore that which it represents, that testimony, that full testimony to the Lord Jesus in Person, and work, and place in the Divine appointment, that as a revelation to the heart, to the hearts of God's people, has to be planted, planted in the nations. It has to be there. The strategy of God is just this: that He plants a testimony, a testimony which is so according to His mind, answering to His thought, that He finds it perfectly safe to add to that. That's God's way. That's what we have in the New Testament, just what He did. He planted a testimony in a nucleus here and a group there. And there they lived in the good of Christ: His work, His place. And what happened? God added, God added, added daily to the church, those who were being saved. God added. But God must have something to which He can add with a sense of confidence.

God is not going to add to our institutions. God is not just going to add to and build up our particular, private interests in Christianity. God is going to add to His Son, and His Son as represented in His people. He will add according to the measure of His Son. Believe me, this is the key, this is the key to the growth of the church. This is a remarkable thing, a remarkable thing true to history, that where there is something that answers to God's thought in greater fulness, and Christ is there, Christ is the basis and Christ is there in expression, God adds to that. God adds to that. The solution to empty churches, the problem of empty churches and all that, is along that line. If it is going to be solved at all, that is the only true way of solving it. God adds when He has got that to which He can confidently add.

So He must have Zion that He may build up Zion. He is not going to build up things, He builds up Zion, and Zion is the testimony, living testimony to, and expression of, His Son in fulness. God plants in order to add. He plants in order that He may have a ground of argument with everything else. Remarkable; it opens another field which we have no time to explore, but Zion was God's instrument of argument with everybody else. He argued with the nations concerning Zion. He argued with all the enemies about Zion. He had there an instrument of argument. If the question were raised, "Where is God and what is God doing?" Here is the answer. Is this whole thing true? Here it is, here's the answer. "Does God indeed dwell with men in these days?" Here is the answer, you see. No matter what question, what attitude, God argues by

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having some concrete thing in hand. "Does it work?" Does this, this (call it "teaching" if you like) work? Well, here's the answer. God must have something with which to argue, to argue back and answer.

It's pathetically tragic that God has so little by which He can argue with other things and other realms. He hasn't got an answer concretely or adequately. He hasn't got it. But Zion was God's ground of argument. As we saw this morning, nations, nations came into God's controversy over Zion. Yes, controversy. God had, said the prophet, a controversy with the nations, and it was over Zion. "For your sakes I have sent to Babylon and will bring down all their nobles as fugitives. I will give Egypt for thee..." see? The ground of argument is Zion. Oh, that God could have a ground of argument and answer something which is in His hand... the means of saying, "Well, here it is, you see! Here is the thing".

And finally, Zion is that which will be the occasion of the overthrow of the whole kingdom of satan. That is what is revealed in the Word. Zion was the occasion of the overthrow of Egypt, of Babylon, of Assyria, of Rome. Rome lifted up its head against Zion (I speak in spiritual language now of Zion) and what happened to Rome? Where is that mighty iron empire? Broken, shattered, scattered... in dust. God argued on the ground of Zion, you see, with the nations, with the empires. He does, and all that lies behind them is the mighty kingdom of satan, and Zion will be the occasion of the entire overthrow of satan's kingdom and satan's system. How important, then, how important it is that God should have that which corresponds to Zion.

Does not this throw a lot of light upon the enemy's ceaseless, ceaseless and unwaning activity to destroy a full testimony? To prevent it or destroy it, to mar a vessel that represents any greater fulness of Christ, to break it up, to scatter it, to bring reproach upon it, to bring into it that which is a cause of scandal? Oh, anything, everything to spoil that instrument for God. To argue back to satan God cannot answer satan, only by some means here. That's the whole story of the book of Job isn't it? Satan challenges God and the throne of God, and God answers him in a man, exhausts him in a man. There is a point in that story where satan disappears from the scene and is heard of no more. He's out of court, God has answered him in that man. God must have a ground of argument with satan, Zion is that.

I trust that you are not thinking in objective terms of Zion, but saying, "Well, I was born there, my name is in the roll of the citizens of Zion, and all this then refers to me and relates to me". Take it, dear friends, like that.

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# Chapter 8 - The Burden of the Lord

"Ye are come to Zion..." we take one more look into the rich, full content of that statement. And we shall this evening find this, for the present final message concerning Zion, in the prophecies of Isaiah chapter 62, first seven verses: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth. And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah; for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. I have set watchmen upon thy walls, oh Jerusalem, they shall never hold their peace day nor night; ye that are the Lord's remembrances take ye no rest and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth".

The Lord's Burden Concerning Zion

At this point it is not necessary for me to repeat what has been said again and again regarding the spiritual counterpart of the Zion of the Old Testament; that is, that heavenly people of God called into fellow ship with His Son to be the vessel of the fulfilment of His supreme purpose. When it says, "Ye are come to Zion", it is only a manner of speaking; literally, actually, the statement would be: "Ye are Zion", ye are Zion. Zion is now present in all the spiritual meanings of the old symbolisms. That is all I am going to say as to what Zion means and stands for.

We come immediately to this portion of Isaiah's prophecies, which brings very strongly into view the Lord's own burden concerning Zion. There is a change here from the earlier chapters of these prophecies. In the earlier chapters we have that with which the prophet was charged as the message of the Lord. Repeatedly, back there, the prophet said, "The Lord spake to me", "The Lord said unto me", and then what the Lord said unto him became his burden. That word is used in those earlier chapters, "The burden, the burden of the word of the Lord", the burden concerning this and that. If you look at the margin, it says "the oracle or the word of the oracle concerning..." - it was what the Lord told the prophet to say. But here there is a change: it is what the Lord Himself is represented as saying directly and personally. Who is this? "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace". Who is the "I"? It is none other than the Messiah Himself.

The chapter break is a little misleading. You notice chapter 61 is: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek". Who is it speaking? We know quite well; prophetically it is the Messiah speaking - the Christ, the Lord Jesus who said in the days of His flesh that those very words related to Him, were fulfilled in Him, by Him. It is He who is speaking, the same "I" is in chapter 2 as in chapter 1. The statement that He makes here is that He will not hold His peace, nor take rest, until, until... and

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that's a long way ahead, and certainly outstripping the life of the prophet Isaiah. Here is someone who is committing himself to an extended intercession. Who is this "someone" making this intercession for Zion? It is the One who speaks, or of whom is spoken, in Isaiah, the 53rd chapter, twelfth verse: "He shall make inter cession for the transgressors", and here is His intercession - the same One, it is the Lord Jesus who is directly here represented as saying that Zion is His personal burden. It is true that this burden is transmitted through either the lips or the pen of the prophet, but the prophet takes a secondary place here to the Lord Himself. He does come into fellowship with the Lord in this matter, and of course that's an important part of our message, but the point, the main point is this: that this is the Lord's own personal concern. It is not something, which is detached from the Lord and just given out as something for someone else to take up and make their business alone. It has become theirs, but it is important to realise that the Lord Himself is involved in this, committed to this; this is His primary matter.

The burden of the Lord. What is His burden? What is the Lord concerned with and about? What is it that draws the Lord out in this way? You ask the question: "What really is the Lord after? What is it that concerns the Lord? What is really on the heart of the Lord?" That's important for us to know. What is the thing that is nearest to His heart? We must know that. We must be in the knowledge of that, in touch with that, in association with that. What is it? The answer is: Zion. Zion... what about Zion? Well, the rest of the paragraph tells us. What about Zion? And in a few brief words on each clause, let us look at it.

What about Zion? "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goeth forth as brightness".

"Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness."

The Lord always begins there. It is important, most important, to know where the Lord always begins. We have a way of beginning a little further on. The Lord always begins with the inward condition of His people. Everything is contingent upon that, everything follows. We shant get anywhere until we face that - the inward condition of the people with whom He is concerned. Her righteousness, her inward state - until that inward state goes forth "as brightness, and as a lamp that burneth". You must remember that it has been darkness; the darkness of the seventy years' exile and captivity. Darkness has been over Zion. Zion has been in eclipse, a dark, dark day, because of the spiritual condition of the Lord's people.

We remember that incident in the life of Abraham, that day when the Lord gave him the vision of the extrication and emancipation of the nation from Egypt after four hundred years. And when the Lord gave Abraham that vision, you remember there descended upon him a horror of great darkness. And then in the midst of the darkness a lamp appeared, a burning lamp appeared in the midst of the darkness. The thing is repeated here. What was true with regard to Egypt and the dark years in Egypt, in Egypt's captivity, and the lamp of hope, the lamp of deliverance, the lamp of redemption, is repeated here as to Babylon. The darkness that had over taken the people is symbolic of their spiritual state.

And then:-

The Lamp of Recovery, of Redemption.

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What is it? It is the lamp of their recovered righteousness. That's the hope. See, there is no hope at all, no future, no prospect, only in so far as the internal spiritual state is as the Lord would have it. There is no deliverance, no salvation, there is no testimony, there's nothing; all that follows is in abeyance until... until the Lord has a people corresponding to His mind: what Zion really means spiritually. So let us take note of that, for that's the Lord's burden. The Lord's burden... we could spend all our time on that quite profitably, dear friends.

We're very, very much concerned about the work of the Lord, very much concerned about effectiveness and such like matters - power, testimony, all those things. Yes, we are greatly concerned about that, but do we realise that it all just hangs upon spiritual conditions? If the internal state is not right, then nothing is right, and nothing can be. And weakness, defectiveness, ineffectiveness, and all that sort of thing is traceable to something wrong inside. Something wrong inside... something that does not answer to the nature of God, for He is a righteous God. I say that, and it has to be said, because, unpleasant as it is, we have to be very faithful about this: that all hopes for Zion begin with Zion's internal condition spiritually. So righteousness stands at the head of the whole list. "Until her righteousness..." until. But the Redeemer has come, "Saith the Lord, thy Redeemer..." that's the great phrase of Isaiah isn't it? "The Lord thy Redeemer".

And do we not somehow hear and detect an allusion? Do you remember in the little book of Ruth the whole question of the redemption, the redemption of the inheritance was in the balances? Whether Boaz would take the responsibility of redeeming the inheritance, of acting as the redeeming kinsman. The word that Naomi said to Ruth was this, "Sit still, my daughter, for he will not rest until the matter is settled". He will not rest until the matter is settled, the redeeming kinsman will not rest, "I will take no rest, until...". Here's the redeeming kinsman back to see to this matter of righteous ness. He is committed to it, and He will see it through, "Until... her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and as a lamp..." ah yes, and that this goes so closely with it: "and her salvation as a lamp that burneth". Her salvation goes forth as a lamp that burneth - the salvation linked with the righteous ness.

Now, what is this salvation? Well, it is simply, simply this: what the Lord has done for Zion, what the Lord has done for her: her salvation. Zion needed the Lord to do something for her salvation. Now this Prophet of all prophets, the Christ, is saying that He will not be silent, and He will take no rest, until it is manifest to all what the Lord has done for His people. Her salvation - the Lord has saved Zion from her terrible state, from this, this, this darkness of her own sickness, for the word "salvation" there could be translated "health". And what it means is "until it is perfectly clear that health has returned to Zion", she is in good health. That's salvation; salvation is good health. Good health... and that seems to signify that some awful disease, some awful malady, had overtaken Israel. She was suffering from the invasion of some foreign element into her system and it produced this state of things, and the Healer had returned to Zion, and He is saying, "I will not rest until this healing, this good health goes forth as a lamp that burneth". You see what the Lord is concerned about, what He is after? To have a people in spiritual good health, whole, and sound, and vigorous, and free from these maladies that put her out of condition.

And then:-

"And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory".

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What does that mean? "I will not be silent. I will take no rest until Zion's influence and testimony is re-established in the world; that she has recovered her position and her influence and her testimony is recognised and felt in the nations". The Lord's burden is to have a people whose influence and whose testimony is felt, really felt, in the world - something that the world feels about her.

It is no unfair criticism to say that very largely that is not true of what is called the Church and Christianity. It is not regarded as something really to be reckoned with and taken account of. All too easily it can be despised, it can be considered as some thing that really doesn't matter, doesn't count at all, there is no real challenge about it. Isn't that true, speaking quite generally of Christianity in this world? The world doesn't feel that there is much to bother about over this thing. The Lord is concerned, and terribly concerned, that it should not be like that, but that there should be in this world that people whose influence is such that the world has to take account of that; the world has to say, "That amounts to something, that means something".

We are not here in this world as something that doesn't make any difference. Oh, the Lord wants that, dear friends. "And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory". They'll have to admit and acknowledge that this people have something that is different, mightily different, and is potent, mightily potent.

We go on.

"Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name".

A new name. A new name. What is a name? A name implies reputation: what you are called, what people call you, which usually is their way of describing you. The name of Israel had become something without honour. The nations could call Israel names which were not very complimentary. And the Lord is here saying, "Now, no silence for Me and no rest for Me until your reputation in the world is recovered, is redeemed; until you are called by another name, a new name. The whole thing is changed, people are saying something different about you. It is something which the Lord shall name, by which the Lord shall call you". What was the name by which they were going to be known? Some have thought that what immediately follows, "You shall be called Hephzibah and Beulah" was the answer to that, but it isn't. That's something more, we will see about that in a minute, that's a part of a fuller description of Zion.

What was the name by which they were going to be called? The answer is found quite definitely in Scripture, "They shall be called by the name of the Lord, they shall be called the people of God". That's the name to have: called the people of God. These are God's people! It's something when the world begins to say that about Christians, isn't it? Individually and collectively these are God's people; associating these people with God. There's not too much of that is there, today. And that's the name and the Lord is saying, "What I am concerned with, deeply and terribly concerned with and committed to, is that My people shall be called the people of God - recognised as the people of God". That they may truly and rightly be associated with God and God with them, that His Name may rightly rest upon them. Called by His name, the Lord's people, the people of God. Yes, that is the thing which the Lord says He will have, He will not rest until He has that.

Further:

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"Thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the

hand of thy God".

What does that mean? Of course, there's much here in the figure of real interest and value if we were staying to study it and consider it, draw it out, but we are condensing as far as possible every sentence into one implication. And that just means this: something that is of tremendous value to the Lord: "a royal diadem in the hand of thy God". Get the picture? Something valuable, something precious, something that the Lord admires. Something that the Lord delights to have, something upon which He dwells with admiration. "I will not hold My peace, I will not rest until there is something in the earth like that, a people like that..." precious to God, valuable to the Lord, appreciated by Him, which He looks at with pleasure and delight and says, "Oh, that, that's grand! That's grand!" "A royal diadem in the hand of thy God, a crown of beauty". A crown of beauty. That's Zion.

Let us go on.

"Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed

Desolate, but thou shalt be called Hephzibah and thy land Beulah".

What is Hephzibah? Well, it's just the following out of what has just been said: Hephzibah is "My delight is in her". My delight is in her. Oh, is this too much to expect? Is this too high a standard? What is the hope of there ever being anything like this? Just this: that He said, "I won't rest until I have got it... until! I am going to pursue this thing until it is a realised fact". And if the Lord is set upon that, bent upon that, committed to that, then it can be. The Lord never commits Himself to anything that is impossible of realisation. That is our hope! Very well, then, very well... if the Lord is really after something like that, let us get into line with it: something that is a delight to the Lord.

"And thy land Beulah"

You notice what follows is really an explanation of that, "Thy land shall be married". Literally the words here mean: "taken over". I don't know whether you always think of marriage like that, someone being taken over, but it is exactly what we mean. Now, you must leave the marriage out of it or I shall be in trouble... (laughter) but it's exactly what we mean. When something has fallen on evil days, is not doing very well - some business perhaps, some property has fallen into depreciation, it is all under arrest... the thing is not in a good state, it's not productive, it is under bad management or no management at all. And then we say, "It's been taken over..." it's been taken over perhaps by another firm or by another company or manager, and the whole thing, by being taken over, is changed, becomes fruitful where it was unfruitful, prosperous where it was not prosperous; the whole complexion is changed because it is taken over. "Thy land shall be taken over". That's Beulah, married. A new idea of marriage isn't it? Taken over for the satisfaction of the Lord, to be brought up to the Lord's standard: taken over. That's Zion. That is what the Lord is set upon: just to take us over and to change the whole prospect, and outlook, and situation by attaching us to Himself. "Thy land shall be married". Beulah.

Now we pass on.

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"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, oh Jerusalem, they shall never hold their peace day

nor night".

"I have set watchmen on thy walls..." what does that mean? What are the watchmen there for? They are there in this vigilant jealousy for the safeguarding of this thing from any encroachment or breaking in of foreign elements, evil elements. The watchmen vigilant, and vigilant because they're so jealous for this thing: that it shall not in any way be interfered with. Oh dear friends, this is a challenge to us. You see, if the Lord's burden is to become our burden, if we are to be drawn into His concern, and we are really to be with Him in this matter, all these things have got to become our concern as they are His; every one of them. And we have got to get to this position where there's a jealous vigilance against the encroachment and the breaking in of any disruptive element. Oh, if I underlined any part of this message more than another, I would that. Instead of being vigilant and jealous watchmen upon the walls, we are so often those who let the thing in! Criticisms... criticism and all that kind of thing, instead of being like these watchmen at the first sign, the first sign of anything that is going to hurt this testimony, we are for it. "Now, look here, none of that! Hands off! Lips off!" instead of that we so often just let it in, almost become a party to it.

Oh, that this jealousy of the Lord for His Zion testimony might so enter into our bones that we are like jealous watchmen, poised and alert to detect anything that is going to injure that testimony, and to smite it forthwith. That is a very important issue from this conference. That ought to come to us as a real message from the Lord, "I have set watchmen". Are you a watchman set by the Lord upon the walls of Zion, day and night, alert, poised, not going to allow anything that would damage this vessel of the Lord, this testimony of the Lord, this that is so precious to the Lord?

Oh God, make us faithful watchmen, vigilant watchmen, jealous watchmen.

"Ye that are the Lord's remembrances, take no rest, and give Him no rest, till He

establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth".

"The Lord's remembrances..." what is that? You've got to know, first of all, what the Lord wants before you can remind Him of it. You've got to be informed, you've got to be intelligent. You've got to know before you can bring anything to the Lord and say, "Now Lord, now Lord remember..." you've got to know what to remind Him of, and then take no rest, give Him no rest. This is God's intentions, God's purposes, God's thoughts, known by us and made a matter of constant prayer, constant prayer, constant intercession. It's keeping things right up to date: "Now, Lord, You have said that this is what You want, You have said this is what You are going to have. You have made this promise, You have committed Yourself to this; now Lord, You allow me to hold You to it". The Lord wants people like that.

Now, I have given you the message, but summing it all up, it amounts to this: that the Lord wants a people who share with Him this tremendous con cern for a vessel in this earth, which rightly re presents Him, that is a real testimony in itself to the Lord. And oh, I do long for that day when this thing will be the real burden of intercession.

We have our prayer meetings, and thank God for them, and there is much prayer, and we praise Him for a praying people, but our prayer gatherings (and no doubt those of you who don't meet

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here, but meet in other places) you have a lot of matters put before you for prayer - somebody, or some people, some specific needs temporally or spiritually, there's some place, some piece of work - it's right to pray about them, we must, but oh... we long to hear the people of God sometimes over and above these details, going right out in a passion of concern for a vessel of testimony in this earth: a people for God's glory, a Zion lamp that burneth! It doesn't matter so much as that matters; about our personal connections, they may be important, connections with pieces of work and people here and there, we won't neglect them, we'll pray for them - all these things and places and persons, yes, pray for them - but oh, when you've done that and included that, God give us a vision that is larger than the frag ments and the parts, this whole great thing of God outside of our particular interests and connections and institutions. God having something in the earth in a people that answers to His heart, having a people in right condition, in good health, concern ing which people the world is having to say, "They're the people of God! They've got something. They count for something".

Will you take that as the message of this conference ultimately? Ask the Lord to lay His burden upon your heart... show you that this is His concern, it is the Lord speaking, you see. And yet the Lord is not going to do it independent of His people, of His servants, and their intercession. When the Lord begins and says, "I, I, will not be silent, I will not rest", He ends by saying, "Ye that are the Lord's remembrances". It begins with Him and ends with us in that sense, "I will not... ye do not give Him rest, I will not rest... don't you rest. I will not be silent... don't you be silent". It's impressive isn't it, how the Lord takes the initiative, the Lord commits Himself to this, before He is through, He brings us in and says, "Ye... ye".

The Lord lay this, His own burden, really upon our hearts. Do try to remember this word will you, in its parts, for every fragment of it is really important: spiritual standards, spiritual reputation, spiritual influence and testimony, spiritual preciousness and value to the Lord, spiritual honour and glory and fruitfulness, because taken over by the Lord. And jealous... so jealous, a watchmanship to safeguard the Lord's interests, and that which is precious to Him; to be vigilant and to bear this burden in constant intercession, giving Him no rest. The Lord says of Himself "I will not, until...", and then He says, "Do not you, until...".

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