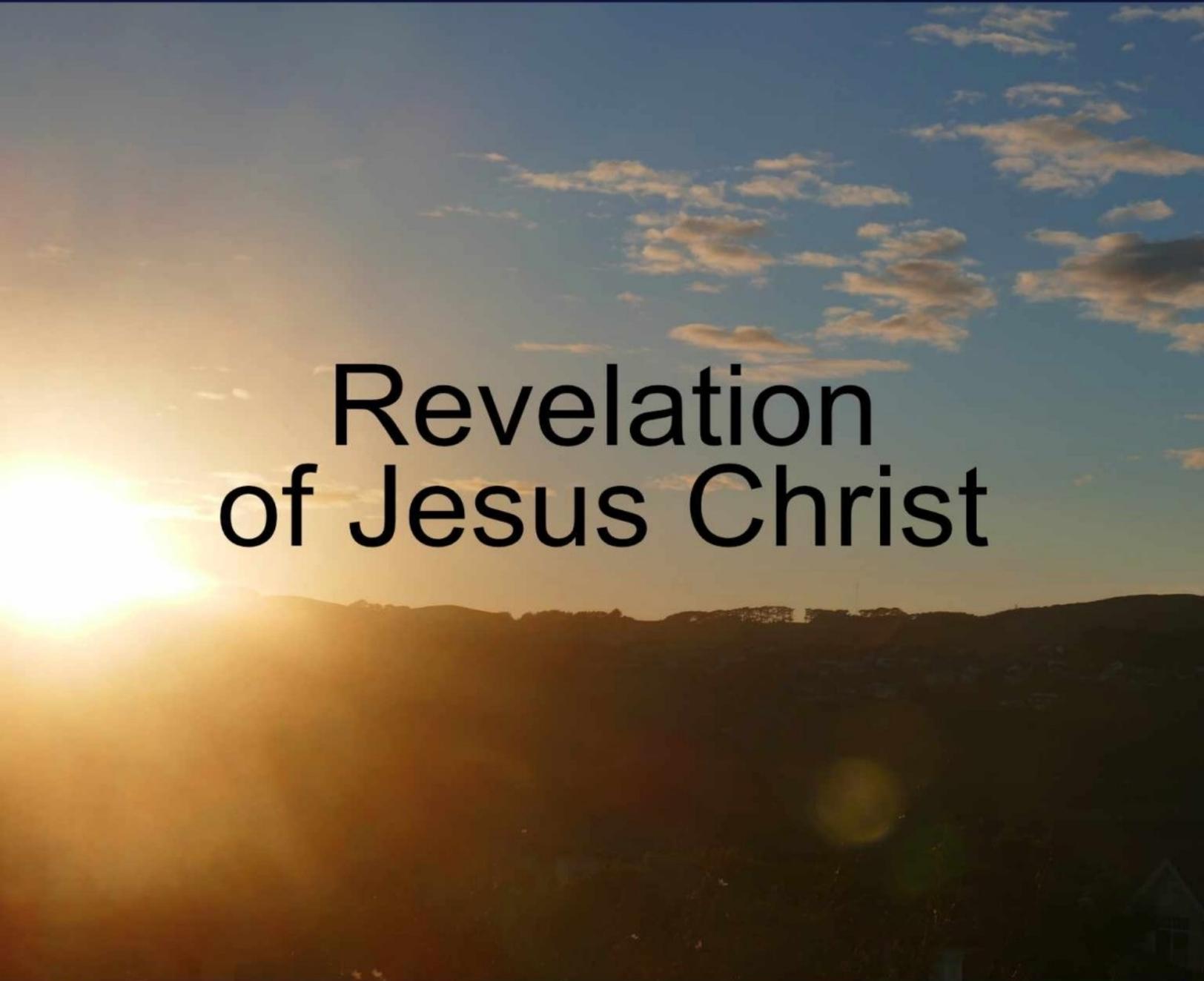


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**Revelation
of Jesus Christ**

T. Austin-Sparks



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Revelation of Jesus Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from conference messages given in April 1958. The spoken form has been retained verbatim. Words which were not clear have been enclosed in [square] brackets.

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Chapter 1 - The Inheritance of Jesus Christ

Revelation of Jesus Christ. That is to be the object of our occupation at this time. And while it will come to us through the book which bears that name, it is not the book, as such, that we are to study, but that central, inclusive, underlying theme: revelation of Jesus Christ. We can drop out the article and say 'revelation of Jesus Christ'.

A subtitle might be:

The Nature, the Battle, and the Victory of the Inheritance of Jesus Christ.

The one, great, triumphant cry which arises at a certain point in the procedure recorded here is: 'now is come the Kingdom'. And in that phrase everything that is in this book is governed: His inheritance, His kingdom, His reign, His rights; His everything. That is the governing thing in the whole book. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ in that sense.

We hardly begin to read the book without the consciousness breaking upon us that we are moving into battle - terrific battle - a battle with many aspects. But with all the aspects of the battle, one issue: His Kingdom.

We are not, let me say here, going to try to go through this book. I think at most we shall be occupied, and that quite imperfectly, with the first chapters. But I do want to indicate that inasmuch as those chapters particularly concern the people of God, the Church, at this time, that is but one phase of this great question.

His inheritance - His Kingdom

We shall have to say some things about the book in general before we can come to the particular message which I feel the Lord has given for this time together. And as to this book there are these things to be said. Of course it is a most bewildering book; and because it is so bewildering, many have given it up. And after perhaps chapter five, they can't find their way any further and it is not, therefore, a book that is greatly beloved of the Lord's people. It might be necessary to qualify that statement, but I repeat, it is certainly a bewildering book.

Someone said (I don't know that I agree with them) if you're not mad before you start reading the book, you will be when you get to the end! That is only a way of saying it is not an easy book to understand. And there are reasons for that, but I want you to remember that right at the commencement it is stated that there is a particular blessing attached to this book. Indeed, this is the only book in the Bible where it is so stated that there is a *blessing*. I don't mean that it's the only book that has a blessing; it is definitely stated that there is a blessing to those who read and those who keep what is written therein. This is a blessing that is promised to the servants of the Lord. May the Lord give us that blessing; bring that blessing to us as we dwell in it.

Now, there are two main reasons for the difficulty which is found in reading and studying this book; that is, the difficulty is due to two main things. First of all its method, that is, its symbolism. There are books in the Bible which have a lot of symbolism in them but there is no book to compare with this, it is one vast system of symbols.

If you want to do some close study you can go through from beginning to end and see how many symbols you can find. What you will find is that every thing in this created universe is taken hold of in some way or another symbolically; that is - and used to symbolize some other thing, some spiritual thing. Heaven, earth, sea. All parts and departments of the creation. Every phenomenon - far too vast to comprehend in a few sentences. A book full of symbols. It's not easy to understand always the symbolism. I am not even referring to some of them.

The numbers themselves, if we should touch any one symbolic aspect, are tremendously significant and comprehensive from one through many particular numbers until you get to two hundred million; ten thousand times ten thousand. And all is symbolic and significant.

We pick out number seven. Fifty four times the number seven occurs, which must mean something. You see what I mean? But all that constitutes a difficulty; you wonder why that was necessary. Well, for one or two reasons, but for this particular reason, it was a *necessity* in a time of persecution. You will notice that when the hostile world rulers were in the ascendant over the people of God, symbolism was a particular feature of ministry. Take Ezekiel and Daniel; crammed with symbolism, but nothing to compare with this. For here you have this time of unspeakable suffering for the people of God in which this book was written. And because it was so dangerous to speak in plain language that the enemy could recognize and understand, symbolism was resorted to and only the instructed *would* understand. That is significant in itself. You see, Rome was the great hostile power. The people of God were suffering at this time as they had never suffered before, at the hands of Rome, but you don't find the word 'Rome' mentioned. Rome has to be covered up with another name; Babylon. You see, it was necessary to speak amongst themselves in a way in which *they* would understand and the world would not. And that should bring a sympathetic note in our approach to the Word. There is a language amongst the Lord's people which only they understand, but they *do* understand. The world does not understand.

But then, another difficulty which has arisen since then and is with us today in relation to this book, is the many schools of interpretation. There are at least six different schools of interpretation of this book. I'm not even going to name them; it would only confuse many of you and would not be at all helpful at this time. But there they are, six, at least, different schools of interpretation and very few of them agreeing with each other on more than a point or two. Volumes upon volumes having been written saying 'And *this* is the meaning' or '*this* is the meaning' and all in conflict with one another. We find ourselves in these days in the midst of that kind of thing and it's exceedingly bewildering. We might well give it up as Martin Luther did; he said, "This book is all rubbish, nonsense; no one will ever be able to understand it!" Well, alright, throw the blessing away! There's a blessing.

However, that is one of the difficulties in our taking up this book and not pursuing it. You will not imagine that I am going to adopt any one of the six and I do trust that you will not think for a moment that I am going to give you an improvement upon them all or think that I can. You will have to go on patiently with me and see whether the way in which we approach it is a way of blessing, a way of spiritual helpfulness. And I would ask you this one thing, that you will believe that I am not seeking to give some private interpretation, but seeking to get right through *all* this to the real blessing that is in this book. If we can come out at the end with that, then we shall have been justified in tackling it.

Well now, what about the nature and the purpose of the whole book? It is quite clear that this book contains or presents the consummation of all the ages and the consummation of this age. I use that word carefully. The summation of the ages and the summation of *this* age. This book comprehends the *whole* Bible and bounds *all* history. It compasses creation, redemption, and perdition. It embraces

God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. It embraces man and his history, and the purpose of his being. It embraces the history, work, and doom of Satan.

It will impress you I am sure, when I tell you that there are no less than four hundred allusions to the Old Testament in this book. There's a bit of study for you. I mention it in order to bear out what I've said, this is a summation, this book. This is a gathering up of everything unto the end. But when we have said that and all such things, and have recognized it all as true, one question arises; *is there, is there one thing that interprets and explains everything in this book?* And the answer is: yes. There is one all-inclusive issue running from beginning to end. It is the Purpose of God as to the eternal government of this universe, and this earth in particular - the issue and question of the government of God's creation through eternal ages.

That explains everything that is here. You have to read backward of course, from the end of the book, for all has moved toward that. Steady movement through every phase and aspect unto that one end, "I saw the holy City, new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven". Here you have the metropolis, the centre of government; that is the end - the government of everything established. Again, in a symbolic representation, the holy City. Well, that implies government, I say everything in the book moves toward that and you have to read everything from beginning onward in the light of that final, wonderful issue. *Who is going to govern God's created universe through all ages of eternity? How is that government going to be reached? And what is the nature of that government?* Those are the questions that are answered in this book.

How great it is that when you come to the City, that is the realization of this great Divine object: the government of all things as from heaven. You find that that government is just as much a matter of character or nature as it is of power. That is a *very* important thing to remember. It is not only official authority established at last, the iron hand of government in control. It is a government of a certain *kind* of nature.

The City is the embodiment not only of strength, but of character and nature; everything that is precious in the sight of God. And those two things are brought together and they run through this whole book. Those two things are implicit in the first chapters, as we shall see in the presentation of the Son of Man Himself and then in the messages to the churches. So they run on. It's a reaching of the place of ascendancy by conformity to a certain nature. It's a tremendous thing to come to that nature, to that character.

There is no less a question, an issue, in the nature of things than the government of this universe. What *kind* of thing will it be that governs at last? That's the big question. And so page after page is dealing with that. Page after page, phrase after phrase. It is not just the crashing of something against the mastery, it is the getting rid of a certain character and nature and kind, to put in its place another kind. From centre to circumference.

Remember it is a law always of God and of the Word of God, that power is by character and not by office. And so it is here, it is a tremendous question this matter of ascendancy, the throne, the government, the dominion. I say again, it governs everything through this book. In a word, it is the nature of God's Son as Son of Man, standing over everything - He, in Person, and Divinely appointed destiny, but He particularly in character. That brings everything under it.

Now this great issue of government. And is it necessary for me to say here that if ever there was a time in the history of this cosmos when the conflict, the battle for the government of this universe was raging; that time is now. We are all very conscious of mighty forces at work to get the control of

this world and all that has to do with it; of a tremendous battle raging as to who and what is going to have the dominion here. That only needs to be said to draw out a response and assent of recognition; it's on. And the point of the concentration of this conflict is the Church, the people of God! In some parts from without, in an outward way they're in it, but if it is not by outward persecution, spiritual people are conscious of *tremendous* spiritual pressure and conflict in these days which is increasing. Yes, it's quite patent that this is the issue. What is going to emerge on top at last, what kind of a thing will it be, that is the question to be answered.

For this issue take up the whole book again, this issue is shown to be related to five things, first of all to the very purpose of God *in* creation.

The Purpose of God in Creation

That there should be something answering to His heart and to His mind, to His thought for His full satisfaction in the works of His hands. Chapter four takes up (as you know) that creational aspect and the great song in heaven which bursts forth in that connection is, "for thou createst or didst create all things for Thyself, for Thy pleasure". It is the song of a redeemed creation showing that it's all centred in the throne now. That chapter brings you right up into heaven, everything is up there and the throne is set, and everything is around that throne and the song, in the first instance, is the song of a redeemed creation. Centred in the throne - that's the meaning of the creation! A kind of creation absolutely grown united, with the Throne at its centre. That's the purpose of creation and then the book moves to show that this, this issue, this great issue: government, is God's purpose in redemption.

Of course chapter five carries the theme further, it is still the theme in heaven but here the emphasis is upon redemption and the second great song breaks out: "Thou hast redeemed... Thou hast redeemed!" And the throne is at the centre of redemption. Redemption has brought the throne to its place, government by redemption. We'll have more to say about this as we go on.

In the third place this great purpose of world and universal government is shown to be God's purpose concerning His Son. The place that *He* occupies throughout is supreme and everything is working toward that end where *He*, *He* is Lord of all and in all things has the pre-eminence and the book is seeing *Him* riding forth in majesty, ruling! As we shall see His very titles indicate universal lordship. God's purpose concerning His Son, the government of this world and of this universe.

In the fourth place this great purpose of dominion is shown to be God's purpose in choosing and raising up Israel as a nation, that in an earthly way Israel should set forth the principles of *heavenly government*, and all that focused in God's Son. That is why Israel was raised up. And that is touched upon here, but Israel put the Son out! And Israel in turn was put out. The place that Israel occupies today, the most tragic place you could think of, is simply this: they failed in the purpose of God concerning His Son: His absolute Kingship and Lordship.

And then in the fifth connection the book shows that this great issue of dominion is bound up with the Church. The Church! The Church comes in here; it is not Christ in solitary isolation, the Church is with Him in government eventually.

Well, you see how comprehensive the issue is, this book gathering all that up is the book of the final recovery of God's eternal intention and it shows that it *will* be, it will be done. A large place, as you know, is given to prophecy in this book and right at the end, right at the end, it's gathered up in this way, "The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets hath sent His angel and signified these things."

The God of the spirits of the prophets! Then there is this: the keeping of the prophecy of this book. And most of you know that prophetic ministry always had one thing in view: recovery of God's thought.

Recovery

And inasmuch as this book has so much of the prophetic aspect in it, it indicates that that's what is in view, it's recovery! Something has been lost. Something has been lost and that is going to be recovered. Something of Divine purpose and intention has been lost and God in this book is seen as set and giving Himself to the recovery of that which has been lost of His intention and will concerning this creation *and* the Church. It's a mighty, mighty issue that is being fought out, shall we say, through the pages of this book.

Just to take a few minutes on that point alone and we'll leave it for the morning.

A revelation had been given. A revelation had been given by God in the old dispensation, in the Old Testament, and it does not need that anyone be very well instructed to see that as you read the Old Testament, from the beginning of Genesis right to the last chapter of the book of Malachi, there is one thing that is involved in the whole story. It's this question of government! Dominion! Rulership! Sovereignty! Control of this world! Isn't that clear? Everywhere it's there. It is one continuous battle raging, the ups and downs, the fluctuations, sometimes it's one power in the ascendant and sometimes another. Sometimes the Lord's people are in their right place of dominion and other times they're in subjugation and antagonistic powers are in the ascendant, but this battle rages and sways through all those Old Testament generations. But God had left no one in doubt as to what *His* mind about it was and *His* purpose. It's all there!

The revelation had been given. It had been given in the New Testament. Mark you, when we come to the book of the Revelation we're at the end of the first Christian century. The book, in all probability, was written in the nineties of the first century. And the revelation had been given in the New Testament. What a revelation of God's intention, God's purpose, God's thought for the government of this world.

And that revelation had been in a particular and peculiar way concentrated in the ministry of the apostle Paul, had come through Paul in a full and shall we say, a consummate way. For if you want to know about the ages of the ages and God's thought concerning Jesus Christ therein and the Church, it's to Paul you go. It's been given! It's been given; and significantly enough, it was given in the main to the churches in Asia. To the churches in Asia - we have Ephesians, Colossians - it had been given! It had been lost. It had been let go. Said Paul, "All they which be in Asia be turned from me". It had been let go.

God had *given* the deposit of a *full* revelation of His intention from eternity concerning His Son, concerning the Church in the government, the ultimate government of this universe. It's there! It's been let go; now the book of Revelation comes in to show God's reaction to that, to recover. And significantly enough, He will begin with the churches in Asia where the greatest responsibility rests; where the greatest light has been given, where the knowledge of God's will has been most fully revealed. There God will begin. He always does, He always does begin there, at the point of the greatest responsibility, to recover! To recover!

And while I anticipate a little, let me point out to you at this point that He's *going* to have that which does represent His recovery. In the churches He may not find a full, complete response by all the

people of God, but He will have there that which *does* answer - "to him that overcometh...". What God may not have in the whole, He will have in a part.

I'm reading a book by a New Testament scholar this week, not one we would call a spiritually minded person, but one of profound knowledge of things as to the Bible and I came on this, I think it's worth reading at this point. He says: "*We have made reference to the thought of a remnant*" (he's speaking about the faith of Israel, the history of Israel) "*The community as a whole could be narrowed down to a part which could represent the whole and continue its inheritance. This idea of a remnant is found throughout the whole Bible, it is not confined to the prophets, though they say much about it. In the story of the flood, Noah and his family constitute a remnant in whom the Divine creative purpose is concentrated and preserved. The blessing promised to Abraham and his seed was limited to one of his sons, Isaac. In the time of Elijah we read of a righteous remnant of seven thousand which had not bowed the knee to Baal. This idea is found in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, in Ezekiel, in Amos, in Micah. Sometimes the remnant is thought of as bringing about the sparing of the whole community.*" Note that: that's tremendous!

"Sometimes the remnant is thought of as bringing about the sparing of the whole community. If God could have found ten righteous in Sodom the whole community would have been saved. Sometimes the remnant itself is spared to convey to a future generation the knowledge of God's will. It is always thought of as a corporate body and not just so many individuals. Wherever it appears, the remnant is, for that moment, THE people of God: heirs of the promises and heirs of the revelation of God's purpose." I believe that's magnificent!

Carry that over here and see it gathered into the overcomers at the end. See on one side what a responsibility rests upon them, what a need the Lord has for such! What a tremendous thing is bound up with them: no less an issue than God's eternal intention concerning His Son, concerning the Church, in the government of this universe.

It seems, perhaps, presumption to think that we here, a little company of insignificant people in this world, might, as a *part* of others in the larger, be in *that* line of Divine purpose. It might be, dear friends, I put it this way: it might be that that is why we are here at this very time. If we were to speak of the conflict that has preceded this time, the raging of the forces of evil, and all the determination as are seen to make the continuance of this testimony and ministry possible, we are driven to ask one question: what can it mean? What can it mean? What are we? What do we amount to?

And the answer must be this: has God abandoned His intention? And if not, He will *still* seek to have those who know what that is and who come into line with it. And, forgive me (and I know that I'll need a lot of forgiveness in some realms for saying it) but it is just possible that the gathering of just a handful here in these days has no less a significance in it than God's desire to make known to His people that He has not given up His original purpose concerning His Son and the Church.

If I should be right, may the Lord give to us a due sense of the *tremendous* significance of any time like this when He chooses to speak to us again about this matter of supreme and paramount importance: His inheritance in His Son, the Kingdom of His Son, His Son's place in this universe for all eternal ages and of an instrument to His hand for the expression of His government and the administering of His kingdom.

Now, I have not said and am not thinking or saying that *we*, we are the people for that. But that is the Lord's thought for as *many* of the Church universal as will give Him the response that He seeks when

He says: "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches". Well, I venture to say to you dear friends, that we are gathered in no small matter.

May the Lord give us eyes to see as we go on, how this is to be, how He works it out, on what ground, in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2 - The Victory of Jesus Christ

Quite a large number of you were not with us this morning. The word then was foundational to what the Lord has given me for this conference. I will do my best, without wearying those who were present with a repetition, to help you all into the message.

We are occupied with the revelation of Jesus Christ, or the word can be changed and retain the same meaning: the *unveiling* of Jesus Christ. I think it is impossible to take up this book which has that as its title and begin to read, without very early in our reading becoming aware that a tremendous piece of business is on hand. The impression that very quickly begins to take hold of us is: we're in the settling of some big issue. We are faced with some tremendous and momentous decision.

Everything here says: now a long outstanding question is going to be answered. A long standing issue is going to be settled. The time has come when what has been a matter of controversy and conflict for a very long time, is going to be headed up and settled. Surely that is what ought to be the impression as we begin to read.

Anybody who can take up this book and begin at the first chapter and even in the first words and just read it as something printed, without becoming aware that there is something tremendous involved and in view, surely has missed the whole meaning and value of the book.

And that is just what the book is all about. It is the settling of this controversy which has gone on through the ages, this answering of the question, this concluding of the whole matter and writing forever and ever: "FINISHED" to one phase. And that matter, that issue, that controversy, that question, is just: Who is going to govern this universe throughout the ages of the ages? Who is going to govern? That has been a matter of contention through thousands of years from the creation. All history has circled round *that* matter, *that* question. Now, says this book, we're going to settle it once and for all. And when you have really got hold of that, you've got the key to the book and to *everything* that is in it. It will interpret all that is in this book, much, as we said this morning, that is difficult to understand in itself, almost bewildering in its detail and the manner and form of its presentation.

But I should go on and say: well, what does that mean? Well, in some way that relates to this ultimate and consummate issue: the government of this universe as God intended when He created it. The issue is *now* is come the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ - the climax of history.

Well now, that helps you right into where we were this morning with a great deal of detail, and we proceed. From that and with that, we're going to look into the part of the first chapter we read earlier and work right to this very matter we have mentioned.

Notice it begins with the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's grand! That's fine! All that is coming subsequently, the warfare and the welfare of kingdoms and nations, all the manifold movements, comes back to this. Alright, the revelation of Jesus Christ. That stands over it all, and is the answer of it all: the unveiling of Jesus Christ. How *He* stands related to *everything* in this universe.

It is a *revelation* of Jesus Christ. The same word is here as Paul used in his prayer in the letter to the Ephesians: "That He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ". A spirit of revelation; *unveiling* in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. That's what it is. And this

unveiling or revelation is here said to have been something that God *gave* to His Son. It needs a good deal, perhaps of imagination and quiet thought, to grasp the significance of these statements, but here in the language of men it is said that God let His Son see *His* place in relation to all the consummatory movements and activities of the ages, where *He* stands as the ages are brought to their culmination and their consummation. Father God gives to His Son to see His place in it all; "Which He showed or gave to His Son".

And then it goes on, "...to show to His bondservants". That is general, not particular, not just to apostles, not to some special people, just to His bondservants. You and I come into that category: the bondservants or bondslaves of Jesus Christ. This unveiling is given by God to the Son, through an angel, to John, for us. The point is that any true servant of God ought to be acquainted with all that appertains to the purpose of God in Christ Jesus. And He sent and signified it to His bondservant John.

Notice the title John gives to himself; he does not say: "John the apostle of Jesus Christ. He calls himself, "the bondservant" and then in verse 9 he says "I, John, your brother". John always speaks on the Family basis and level, and brings himself into very close relationship with those to whom he writes, as a member of the Family. He brings them right in, not on official ground, but on the ground of Life. We're in this with John, that is what John is saying, we're in this with him on the very basis of family life: "I, John, your brother". Your brother!

"In the isle that's called Patmos, for the testimony of Jesus", he says, for the testimony of Jesus, and being there, "I am your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus". Be patient as we work on through these details. On the isle Patmos... for the testimony of Jesus... partaker with you in the tribulation, kingdom and patience in Jesus. Now the question at once arises (and this gets us very near to the heart of the whole matter) why was John in Patmos? Because he says, "for the testimony of Jesus", but that is not very enlightening. The question is a bigger one than that, why was John in Patmos and being in Patmos in the tribulation that is in Jesus? And the answer to that question is in this whole book. It takes the whole book really, to answer that question.

(And may I say here by way of parenthesis, incidentally, the answer may account for the tremendous battle that has raged over this book. You know, or you may not know, the very great battle raged over the admission of this book into the canon of the Scriptures. Oh, what a battle to have it bound up in the Divine library! To allow it to be included in the Bible! A real big battle raged over that, but at last the battle was won for its inclusion. I take that as having some significance. But then what a battle over the book since it's been in! We pointed out this morning the many diverse schools of interpretation, the controversy that has raged over this book through the centuries; the *confusion* that has been brought about by the way in which the book has been handled, all the divisions that have sprung up and there's no end to them. Only about a year or so, a year, eighteen months ago a new division sprang up in America over this very book, a fresh split on its interpretation and they're fighting, they're at one another's throats about this quite minor point of interpretation; but there it is. What does it mean? I say, that there is an explanation to all that, it's not just hap.)

The answer to our question, I think, may be the explanation of that long, drawn-out controversy around this book. The answer, then, as to why was John in Patmos is, in the first place, found in that which obtained in the world at that time in the form of emperor worship. You, some of you, will know that the ruling Caesars claimed to be divine and therefore they claimed human worship. They, somebody has said, they posed as gods and did the work of the devil. That's significant. Julius Caesar was worshiped. Octavius was called Augustus - revered. Caligula demanded that his image should be put up in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem; he was killed before he was able to

do it. That carries some significance. And this emperor under whom we believe John was exiled to Patmos, Domitian, was called - actually called - 'our lord and god'. They usurped the place of God! They claimed the worship of man. They took to themselves deity.

So, the issue is clear-cut. There's no mistaking it: it is Caesar, or Christ! For *the* apostolic proclamation everywhere was, without any mistaking it, "*Jesus Christ is Lord!*" That's the testimony of Jesus for which John was sent to Patmos. The issue is clear-cut, quite clear-cut.

It's a very significant thing that the Jews were dealt with comparatively leniently. Were the Christians? They did suffer under Rome, but they suffered nothing like the sufferings of the Christians; I say that's significant! *They* had crucified the Lord of glory; therefore the devil is not so much concerned about *them*, but *these* people, *these* people who will have no compromise on this matter: the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ as God, as the Son of God! There can be no reconciling Caesar and Christ, Christ and Caesar. That's the issue.

And, dear friends, when John says 'in the tribulation in Christ' the implication is that the tribulation or the suffering is *always* proportionate to the place that you give the Lord Jesus. If you give Him a second or a third place, well, you will have a kind of comparatively easy time. Put Him where God has put Him, make Him Lord of all and of everything, and you're in for tribulation. In for tribulation! So it was with John.

All this surely is gathered up into the very titles: Jesus Christ the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Say that in the face of the Caesars, "The Ruler of the kings of the earth!" You're in for it! You're in for it when you realize what store the Caesars set by their divine prerogative. The Ruler of the kings of the earth - Jesus! Jesus Christ! You and I, dear friends, never realize the implication of that title. You know that "Christ" is only the Greek for the Hebrew "Messiah". The whole conception both of the Hebrew and the Greek Messiah and Christ, was His Kingship: anointed! Anointed. The Kristus! The Anointed of God. And that "Anointed" meant nothing less than absolute Rulership, Supremacy. To speak that Name: "Jesus the Anointed, Jesus the Messiah", is at once to throw a challenge at that whole empire of the Caesars.

No wonder the apostle said, "No man can call Jesus Christ but by the Holy Ghost". They knew it. You wondered what that means, because you can all call Jesus "Christ", glibly, easily and say, "Jesus is Christ". Ah, but go into that realm, live in *that* day and it would be the most terrifying thing to publicly say: "Jesus of Nazareth is the Anointed of God to be the Ruler of the kings of the earth". You need the Holy Ghost to make you bold enough to say that.

And dear friends, that is not so remote, and in the past. There are many, many today who are afraid so to speak of Him, and afraid for their lives. You can go into fanatical Mohammedan countries and proclaim Jesus the Christ, the Son of God; you do it with your life in your hand. You need the Holy Ghost for that boldness. Well, you see, here we are right at the heart of this thing.

Jesus Christ - the Faithful and True Witness

That word 'witness' as you probably know, is the same word as 'martyr'. Martyr: the Faithful Martyr. Alright, John's in good company. Jesus Christ - the Faithful Martyr, the Faithful and True Witness. It cost *Him* His life to stand for His Kingdom. It cost *Him* His life at the hands of every devil-inspired instrument that *knew* the issue. Knew the issue! The issue of that Man was nothing less than the dominion of this world and the devil knew it. So He would say: 'you are of your father the devil, he was a murderer from the beginning'. They murdered the Prince of Life on this one matter: His place

in the eternal counsels of God as Lord, as King, Firstborn from the dead, I'll have something more to say about that shortly, the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

Well, these titles just set forth the stages of His progress to the throne:-

Faithful Martyr; that was the Way of the Cross.

Firstborn from the dead; the Way of the divine Vindication.

Ruler of the kings of the earth; that is the glorious End of the Cross and the Resurrection.

Ruler! Ruler of the kings of the earth! Satan, who knew Him, yes satan's agents and powers betrayed their knowledge of Him when they, the demons, said "I know Thee Whom Thou art, the holy One of God, I know Thee!" Satan knew Him, and knew His divine destiny, and so he took Him up into a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory thereof, and said, "All this will I give Thee if Thou wilt...". Now here we are, back on this thing: "Worship me!" Worship, where worship is to be. You see, here is the Caesars again. Worship me! Jesus *refused* that dominion at the hand of satan and took it by the Cross! And here, this book sees Him in possession of it: the Ruler of the kings of the earth! If you have any question about that by reason of the seeming power of world rulers in our time; power, world systems, how they do afflict the Church and the saints... read the book of the Acts again and you will see in that book the Ruler of the kings of the earth wielding His power and Herod learned something of that, and others.

We know now, we know now that this wonderful book of the revelation of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled in a very large degree. The very empire that denied Him His place and Lordship and set itself to *destroy* every trace of His Kingship, has gone to dust.

Daniel has a very, very real place here, hasn't he? We remember then the vision and the fourth kingdom of iron, which undoubtedly was the Roman empire, and in the days when that kingdom has been reached, from Babylon onward, in the days when the Roman empire has come into being, the vision goes on. And I think we've lost a good deal of the real point of that vision - the God of heaven, the God of heaven produces a Kingdom. "I saw, I saw in a vision, a stone, cut without hands". Oh, I would like to dwell upon that for half an hour - a Stone cut without hands! And it smote the image and the image, by that smiting, crumbled to dust, but the Stone itself rolled on and as it rolled, gathering momentum, it gathered volume until it filled the whole earth! We're [really] *in* that, we're in that!

This empire which set itself up against the Lord and His Christ was smitten by that Stone cut without hands, and it has crumbled to dust. There's no doubt about it, it's literally fulfilled! But the Stone... the Stone of this other Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, has gone on, gathering momentum and gathering volume as it has gone on, reaching to all the nations. Well, that perhaps doesn't stir you very much, it's so commonplace, you know it. But here we are: the Ruler of the kings of the earth, He came to that position through the suffering of death.

For the time being, as I have said, I am leaving out that section which gives us the revelation of Jesus Christ in person; we come to that again, perhaps. Here let us note that we are now introduced at this point to two things - firstly His victory.

His Victory

And that can be summed up in two or three verses: "I am the First and the Last, the Living One, I became dead, behold I am alive forevermore and have the keys of death and of Hades". That's His victory. The other is His character, which we shall reserve for another time. Just a few minutes on

this: His victory.

"I am the First and the Last". That's victory in a statement by itself! And it's important to recognize the significance, the particular significance, of the use of that title in relation to this book.

Here we are at the end, at the consummation of everything. Now we have come to the culmination of all things and He declares, "I was the beginning of all things". Go back to Paul's letter to the Colossians and read, for that, "In Him, through Him, unto Him, were all things created, things in heaven, things in earth", He was before all things. "I am the First. As I was at the beginning and as I was the Beginning of all things, I am the Last, I am the End". The end corresponds to the beginning, it is no other, it's no other than Himself: "I am the First and the Last". That's a *tremendous* statement! "I am simply gathering up all things into My hands, all things in the end are with Me. Everything has got to answer to Me at the end". In all things He has the pre-eminence. "I am the Living One, I became dead...". Now, I want to say a word about that way of expressing in a minute. But [we'll start] again, "I am the Living one, I became dead. I am alive unto the ages of the ages". There was a reason why the Lord Jesus said that.

You know, Nero, under whom the apostle Paul suffered and was executed, was regarded as perhaps the most ferocious of all the caesars up to his time. But there was one who exceeded him and that was the one under whom John suffered, this Caesar Domitian. Do you know what was said about him? This Caesar was said to be Nero come back from the dead. He was called Nero, "Nero Survived", raised from the dead, back again to carry on his nefarious work. John is suffering under the one who is said to have died and risen again. Jesus takes hold of that, right hold of that and says "*I am* the Living One, I became dead, *I am* alive, not for a human tenure, but unto the ages of the ages". So we can accumulate all this data, material, on this one great issue: the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus.

"I am the Living One, I became dead". Note, that's really the correct translation, and He did not say, "I was killed, I was murdered, I was slain, I was put to death". He had already in His lifetime said: "No man taketh it from Me, I lay it down of Myself, Mine own Self, this, this authority that I have received from My Father". Today as we think of all those movements toward the cross, we can so clearly see through men and their counsels and decisions, and we can see that the thing is in His hand. He is dictating how it shall be and when it shall be. They are saying, "Not this..." and He is saying "Yes this!" - "Not on the Passover..." He says "Yes on the Passover!" He is dictating His own death - its time and its manner - in His hands. *Not* "They took away My life" - "I laid it down of My own accord. I became dead. I became dead." Why? There's another great question that arises at once; *why* did He Himself, deliberately, of His own accord, of His own decision, go into death? Well, the letter to the Hebrews throws a lot of light upon it doesn't it? That *through death*, "He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil"! That He might deliver those who all their lifetime were in bondage through fear of death. He tasted *death* in the behalf of every man. That's why He became dead.

But here it is, here it is in this beautiful statement here: "Unto Him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins in His blood and made us a kingdom and priests unto His God and Father". That's why He became dead; this mighty *us* - this mighty *us* - Who loveth *us*! Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for it. Who loveth us, Who *loosed* us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, Who *made* us a kingdom and priests unto His God and Father. That's why He became dead of His own choice: for *us*! For you, for me, for His Church. What a mighty *us* that is. That's the answer: Christ loved! Christ loosed! From death... and alive! Became dead and alive to deliver us from death.

Death is the sum total of all human sin. Death is the sum of all satan's power. Death is the sum of satan's kingdom. "He plunged in His imperial strength, to gulfs of darkness down. He brought His trophy up at length; the foiled usurper's crown." That's why He became dead: to do that. That's the answer. "And I have the keys of death and of Hades". Of course keys are authority, we know that - authority over death and of Hades. Jesus has said, "Upon this rock I will build My Church, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I have the keys of Hades". What is that? For all their lifetime in bondage through fear of death - bondage through fear of death - that's the prison of Hades. He has plundered Hades, He has broken its gates and its bars. He has snatched the keys from the usurper, and wears them at His own girdle and His Church is *delivered* from that bondage of *fear!* The gates of Hades shall *not* prevail against it.

It is all tremendous, but you see, you've got to place the Cross over this whole book. The Cross stands over everything in this book because it's the book of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every realm and therefore it is the book of the Lamb in the throne. In the throne! The Cross is the explanation of everything.

Well, I trust you catch a vision, the revelation of Jesus Christ in this which comprehends all that follows and all that with which you and I have to do, dear friends. I said this morning, that this is the book which is introduced, or in its very introduction, tells us that there's a blessing attached to it. What blessing do you want and do I want? What is the greatest blessing that could come to our hearts? It would be to realize the glorious, triumphant issue of this long, long drawn-out battle in which we are, how it's going to end and to realize it's going to end in glory. In glory! It's going to end with us with Christ in the throne. To realize it, not just to be informed. It doesn't have enough wit with us to be told about it, but oh, if it could come as a revelation to us as it came to John in Patmos, in tribulation, in patience. Suffering... because of this same issue. We have made Jesus Lord, we have put Him in His place, we have no other Lord. All things for us are subject to Him. He is over all. And that brings, whether world persecution or not, it brings spiritual conflict, it brings tribulation into the life. It touches us everywhere, in our families, in our homes, in our businesses, and everywhere this thing is touching us; if only, if only we would let go something, make some compromise, let down our standard, not be so utter for Christ, we'd have an easier time. It is possible, you can, *can* for the time being, but you cast away your crown.

That is it, to realize that in the tribulation and the patience, the suffering, and the conflict, and the pressure; the issue, the issue is absolutely certain: Jesus is coming out on top and we're coming out with Him. If that could really come into our hearts, the greatest blessing that could come to us... it would explain so much, it really would explain so much. All the problems and enigmas of our lives, all those things which come because of our relationship to this One Who is God's destined Heir of the universe. That provokes quite a lot. I say this is the blessing of this book, to know that. Not just to understand all its mysteries and symbols, but to know that, that He is Lord and that nothing can alter that. The Lord give us that blessing in our hearts.

Chapter 3 - The Character of Jesus Christ

We read four verses from the first chapter of the book of the Revelation. The Revelation chapter 1, verse 12:

"I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the midst of the lampstands one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white, as white as wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength".

Revelation of Jesus Christ - we have already indicated that this whole book, which bears those words as its title, is gathered into one tremendous consummate issue, that of the government of this universe (heaven and earth) as determined by God, centred in His Son Jesus Christ. This book is the revelation of the processes and progress in the culmination of this world's history unto the final establishment of that government.

In that setting, this afternoon we were occupied with the victory of God's Son, as in this first chapter. This evening we take this short section, these four verses, which set forth:

The Character Which Lies Behind That Victory.

It's a mighty victory, as we have seen. His declaration of Himself as the Living One - Who became dead but is now alive unto the ages of the ages - sets forth the greatness of His victory. We have seen it was no small power that was exercised and exerted by the great Roman Empire for the destruction of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. In the vision of that empire in the book of Daniel, it is rightly symbolised by iron; a symbol of great strength and power to break everything. And the great strength of that, the mightiest of the empires, was directed toward and concentrated upon the extermination of the testimony of Jesus, which testimony was that He is Lord. That Jesus survived the exhausting of that mighty power and triumphed over death and is alive unto the ages of the ages, is no small testimony to the greatness of His victory.

Combined with the Roman Empire was the Jewish nation. It would take a lot of time to tell and describe conditions of the Jewish nation in the times of the New Testament. I myself have been very deeply impressed as I have read anew during the past week the account given by the great Jewish historian Josephus about the wickedness of the Jews at this time. He's a Jewish historian, he says that there never was anything so utterly wicked as the condition of the Jewish people in New Testament times. A terrible thing to say, and he shows how that was. And it is only an exposition of what the Lord Jesus meant when He said "*this wicked generation*" - *this wicked generation* of downright wickedness, of those people. Not only in their crucifying the Lord Jesus, but their condition behind all their religion; their *moral* condition - using that word in its most general sense. And *they*, as we know, exhausted their malice to destroy the Lord Jesus and all that He represented.

If Saul of Tarsus was really their representative and agent, he himself tells us in many words how utter he was in his determination that there should not be left a relic of Jesus of Nazareth. He persecuted this Way unto the death, both men and women he cast into prison. All that vicious,

vehement hatred, malice, concentrated upon Jesus Christ as Lord. All that and what more? Behind it, around it and over it, satan and his vast kingdom drawing upon all their resources to quench this Light, to finish this Testimony, to blot out this Name, and obliterate this Way. And He says "I am He that liveth, I became dead but I am alive unto the ages of the ages".

What a victory, what a victory! We could almost say, "Is there anything left over which He can triumph?" If He *has* done that, if our Christian faith is true, if what we declare as to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ is true at all, it's a far, far greater and vaster thing than we have comprehended. And that is the message here, and as we said before, that is the blessing of this book: if He can do all that, what cannot He do? That's hope for the end. But when we have said all that about His victory, and the much more that we could add to it of truth, this fact remains: the victory, the throne, the government of Christ, and the Church, is based upon His essential character. It is not just objective and official. That is, it is not just something that is done by the exercise of superior might - as might. It is something that is accomplished in virtue of His glorious character; it rests upon that.

Here is a combination of two things which, mark you, always go together with God: the combination of power and character, nature and strength. With God character is power and power is character. He seems to have written this large in the universe, in nature. It almost appears that He has established it as a law that these two things go together. You see all that God does combines these two things.

You go into the alpine country; you are on the one side impressed at the massive and awesome strength of the mountains, the terrific force, volcanic force which *heaved* them up and the mighty strength that they represent as they tower over you. It's awesome! And yet as you stay to climb their massive slopes, in their crevices and on those slopes you'll find the beautiful edelweiss. The beautiful flower. The combination of strength... and beauty. Nature has done it - balanced these two things.

Come to the English countryside, you see the massive towering oak tree and nestling at its roots: the beautiful violet. Just nature, not arranged, quite spontaneous - strength and beauty, power and character - in balance and combination. And we could go on like that, drawing upon creation for illustration. But you go back through your Old Testament, and you find in the typology and the symbolism of all that comes from heaven this wonderful balance of strength and character. And here it is! In all this, and particularly in this passage before us, we have God saying, "If there is to be power, dominion, victory, ascendancy, might; there has got to be goodness and if there is goodness, that is the greatest might!" It's the nature of Christ that is set forth here which is the foundation of His Kingdom, of His Throne.

So you turn to this description or portraiture of Him. You notice the power lying in His eyes as a flame of fire; His voice, the voice of many waters, it's the sound of many waters; His mouth, out of which proceeds a sharp, two-edged sword; His countenance, as the sun shineth in its strength. All that is the symbolism of power! We go back again to character: His garment down to the foot, the girdle about His breasts, the whiteness of His hair, and the purity represented by the refined brass of His feet. All that speaks of the other side, it speaks of His nature, His character.

Now it is that that we are going to be occupied with for the time at our command tonight. But may I remind you that we are here in the presence of One Who is called "*The Son of Man*". We ought to be duly impressed with that. He is not here, in this book, called the Son of God. He is that, but for the purposes of this book, His title is that of "The Son of Man". We are familiar with that title in the Old Testament, in the prophets: in Ezekiel, in Daniel. And we are familiar with it in the gospels. In the gospels only, the title is used of Him eighty-five times; no fewer. In the Old Testament as applied to

the prophets, it is 'son of man', in the New Testament as applied to Him it is *the* Son of Man. What they were partially, He is absolutely. And we know that the very title itself, 'Son of Man' or 'The Son of Man', is related to God's full thought for His people.

In the prophets (as we have pointed out already today) their business was the recovering of God's full thought for His people and so they were representative of that thought - son of man. And that very thought of God, or those thoughts of God, had to be wrought into their very experience and life and history and they became the embodiment of those thoughts. Hence they were made a sign unto the people of God. And that is the essence of this very title: Son of Man - a *sign* of God's thought for His people. When you come to the Lord Jesus you find that in the full, and utter, and final way, He is *the* Son of Man in this sense: that He embodies to the *full* God's primal conception for man. What God ever had in His mind in *conceiving* the humanity idea, the manhood conception as a special and peculiar creation, that is realised and expressed *in* this One Whose title here just means that: *the* Son of Man. *The* One in Whom *all* God's thought *as to man* is realised.

We're in His presence here, as you'll notice: "I saw one like unto the Son of Man", then the portrayal. We look, all so briefly, inadequately, at:

The Features of This Son of Man.

"I turned to see and having turned I saw one like unto the son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot."

Now, of course there has been a division of opinion as to what that garment was. Dr Campbell-Morgan said it was the garment of the Governor. Other equally able expositors have said it's the garment of the Priest. I'm not at all concerned to take sides in that matter - it doesn't trouble us which it was. What we want to get at is the meaning of a garment at all; not what kind of a garment it was exactly, but why a garment at all, down to His feet.

Whatever the robe was, whether of governor or of priest, it speaks of character; for garments always did from the beginning speak of character; they were the symbol of the man. That's true right up to date. The garments, the dress, betray the person. I won't dwell upon that too much, it's dangerous ground! But nevertheless, it's true. Right from the first garments that ever man wore, made by God Himself, garments have always been the symbol of the person, indicating what kind of a person, or sometimes, what the person thinks of himself or herself. That is character. I mean, in the days of the Lord Jesus they loved to wear long garments, and make broad their phylacteries, they *pretended* to be something that they were not, but that was their character: their character was a pretence. But that was the people - revealed in the way they dressed. You see the point.

Here, whatever the garment was officially, undoubtedly it was symbolic of the Person. It does not say so, but I have no doubt that in the light of things which follow in this book, that it was a white robe... it was the white linen. That would be true of priest or of governor. And we know from this very book that the white linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And we know from the Old Testament typology, the white linen garments always spoke of the character of righteousness in the presence of God; covering the unrighteousness of man that no flesh should appear before Him. And here, right in the very first thing, describing this Person, the Son of Man, you have Him enfolded and enwrapped in a character of spotless purity. And it is *that* that gives Him His regal position, it is His holiness, His purity. It is enough to say that and leave it.

But this robe is girt up with a golden girdle around His breasts. How full of significance! Well, a

girdle is always the symbol of strength. Gold in the Bible is always the symbol of what is precious among minerals or metals; precious. And the breasts are always the symbols of devotion. And if you put those three things together, what a wealth they contain. Here this One is characterised by a passionate devotion to that which is precious to God, of pure gold.

The strength of this One, the *strength* of this One is that He is girded with this passion for what is precious to God. That runs right through this book, it comes right out at the other end with the City, it is an underlying, fundamental thing, and as I repeatedly say, it is the key to the throne. His throne is established in His character, by His character and all, *all* victory is that, where God is concerned. This is going to be a very searching thing through this book, it's going to be a very deciding thing everywhere in the churches. We shall meet it again when we come to the churches, in the will of God. It's a deciding thing as to the rise and the fall of the church and the rise and the fall of individual Christians, and the rise and the fall of nations - their character. How much of the character and nature of Christ is there, is going to be the deciding thing. We'll come back to that again. Well, there it is: the strength of devotion to what is precious unto God. Remember that; that is the secret of spiritual victory in any life.

"His head, and His hair, were as wool, white wool, as white as wool". What is it? Well, here we have another combination, purely of age. We get this figure in the book of Daniel and it's the "Ancient of Days" that describes this one. You get age - if you like - eternity. It's not always true that white hair is the mark of age, but usually it is. The symbolism is a very common one, it speaks of that which outlasts time, that which transcends time, that which is not of time but which is of eternity. And it speaks of purity. And seeing that this is His head and His hair, the strict and exact interpretation of the symbolism, we have the permanence, the endurance, the time outlasting power of truth, of purity. Here are His judgments, His thoughts, His mind, and there is nothing impure in His thoughts, nothing unclean. How exact the word is; "White, as white wool", as though to doubly emphasise the utterness of this purity and cleanness.

Dear friends, though we may not be very much enamoured of the symbolism, the truth behind all this is *tremendously* important. The fact is again, that His kingdom which is an everlasting kingdom, is that because His judgments are right and because it is founded upon absolute truth. This is a mind that is freed of everything of mixture and duplicity; what is contrary to God.

The apostle Paul writing to the Philippians said, "Whatsoever things are *pure*, think on these things..." that's the mind of Christ. That's the mind of a character of Christ. "Let this mind be in you... whatsoever things are pure, think on these things... whatsoever things are lovely" for here it is, that is what He is like! A mind (that is, the mind of Christ, not our mind) is something that is a very strong thing where God is concerned. If we can only get the viewpoint of the Lord, if we can only see as the Lord sees, if only we can get the mind of the Lord about a person or a situation; we're in a *tremendously* strong position. Let me put that the other way. So much of our weakness and our failure and our breakdown is our *wrong* mindedness, isn't it? It's like that. We've got the wrong attitude of mind, we haven't the singleness of mind for the glory of God, we're affected by how things touch us. Well, He was never like that, He was never like that. And that character of right judgment, of absolute truth, absolute truth - was the strength, and is the strength of His government, of His kingdom.

Let these things come out of the Bible and out of this high symbolism to us as spiritual lessons, spiritual instruction. Do you want to go on and go through and endure and abide? Do you want spiritual strength? For that is not something that He can give you, that He can give you as from the outside. Oh, how we ask for power, how we ask for strength. It is only something that He can do *in*

us; He will make us strong by making us good. What a lot that explains of His dealings with us! So often when we ask for strength He puts us through an experience that is going to change something in us, of our character, our attitude, our mentality; that's His way.

"His eyes were as a flame of fire". Well, all we need to say here is that these eyes, symbolising His discernment, His discernment, His real discernment and perception and grasp of things, and seeing into things and seeing through things, and arriving at *right* conclusions, was due to the fact that His mind was what we have said it is, like that. You know dear friends, discernment is a tremendous thing in the Christian life. Oh, what a lot of mistakes we make, for want of real spiritual discernment. If only, if only we had this spiritual discernment, if we were able to perceive, to recognise, to discern, to understand the meaning of things, what a lot we would be saved. There is a great deal of strength in spiritual discernment. There is!

People who are always making confusion and messes because they lack real discernment, they are in a state of weakness, unable to see the meaning of things, to see through, beyond appearances of what is on the outside. Because His Spirit is what it is, His mind is what it is, He is able to rightly discern everything. Oh, we are going to come onto this when we come to the churches, seeing through and seeing things as they are truly. No deception can come through those eyes. No, He is in the mighty strength of clear discernment. His eyes are as a flame of fire, there is nothing but truth there, no falsehood, no 'carnal-mindedness' (to use Paul's phrase) therefore, He can see. The pure in heart shall see God. Shall see! See... what we see depends on the state of our heart; His eyes as a flame of fire were that, because of the purity of His heart.

"His feet were as burnished brass as though it had been refined in a fire". How meticulous is the description. Well, feet simply, we know, represent a man's ways, a man's goings and a man's quests - what he's after, what he's aiming at, that toward which he's moving - the object of his movements. That's just the symbolism of feet everywhere in the Bible; the goings of a man. Here we have brass, burnished brass refined in a fire. Brass is always in the Bible, as you know, the symbol of strength and the fire is always the symbol of purging.

Then brass becomes righteousness, the strength of righteousness which has come out of the fire. Righteousness, the Old Testament says, is the girdle of His loins and the foundation of His throne. Here again, the quest, the objects, the interests, the movements, the ways, the goings of the Lord Jesus are always *purged* ways, *cleansed* goings, no self-interest in this - nothing but the pleasure of God, "I come to do *Thy* will, oh My God". His ways are all tested in the fire; purged of all unworthy motives.

"His voice was as the sound of many waters". This is very beautiful. The sound of many waters! What is the sound of many waters? Not of much water, but many waters; all coming from all directions, and this way and that way, and the other way, the rivers and the rivulets are all coming, converging and blending and harmonising. And this one has its note, and that one has its note, the other one has another note, and yet in their converging and coming together they form a beautiful harmony like a choir of many notes. The sound of many waters. Diversity in unity, and unity in diversity.

Now, you say that's all a beautiful picture and it sounds all very nice; what do you mean? Well, go back to your gospels and sit and listen to the Lord Jesus or follow Him with open ears. Listen to His voice and you will hear sometimes the note of deepest sympathy and tenderness... His kindness. Where a situation calls for that note, it comes - gentleness and kindness, and sympathy and understanding, "Leave her alone, for my burial she's done this", and many other instances of the

sympathetic, understanding, kindly voice. But we dare not take the time for it all. But you will find sometimes there's a sharp rebuke, like a clap of thunder and out they go, convicted, from the oldest to the youngest. They've been smitten as with a flash of lightning from His mouth.

There's sympathy, there's judgment, there's condemnation. Oh, there's every note in His voice, and He's a combination of them all. His voice is the sound of many waters. You and I have heard that, sometimes we have heard His voice of sympathy and consolation. Sometimes we've heard His voice of rebuke, sometimes of exhortation and encouragement. It varies but His is the voice as of the sound of many waters. You're going to come up against that when you come to the seven churches, you will find there are seven notes in His octave. For the churches, a wonderful harmony, as the voice, as the sound of many waters.

"And out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword". Our letter to the Hebrews, chapter four verse twelve, interprets that for us: "The word of God is quick, powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, laying bare the thoughts and intents of the heart". Two-edged sword - discriminating, dividing, putting things in the place to which they belong - that belongs there, and that belongs there, and you're to put those things in their right place and don't confuse things and call something by a name that does not belong to it. Dividing asunder - a sharp two edged sword. This is His character, that He cannot have confusion and mixture and contradiction; two things that do not agree. That is the character of the Lord Jesus, and mark you, there's a great deal of spiritual strength in that. One thing that God has always hated is mixture, is mixture, is contradiction in the same place, speaking with two voices at the same time. God hates it. If there's one thing about God that is true it is that He is of *one mind*. He is perfectly clear as to what He means and what He wants. A two-edged sword divides, puts things where they belong, and there's a good deal of strength in doing that, dear friends.

"And His countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength". Of course the countenance is the sum of all the features, isn't it? It is the expression of the person. It is possible, of course, to hide yourself behind an expressionless countenance, but in the main, generally, the countenance is the betrayal of the person behind it; the expression of the life within. And so the countenance here is the sum of all His features. And when you sum up everything, what do you have to say? There is no darkness at all. There are no shadows here; it is "as the sun shineth in His strength". In Him was light - in Him was light! In Him is no darkness at all, there is no variableness with Him, neither shadow cast by turning, by changing, by being of two minds. He is all Light, no darkness, no shadows.

Now, dear friends, we've said all this, but we've got to sum it up. We have set out to show that the end of it all is not only Christ in the place of absolute sovereignty and Lordship and Kingship and dominion, but His Church with Him, His Church with Him. If the City means anything, it is the Church with Christ enthroned! If we are to come there, let us not make it too objective and far off, belonging to some remote or near future time, let us see that He's at work upon this thing in us now. Paul has given it in the revelation, entrusted to him, and told us that we were foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son. The Holy Spirit had this in view when He first drew you and me to the Lord Jesus.

And if He has meant anything in our lives at all, this is the thing that He has been engaged upon and is engaged upon: to conform us to the image of God's Son, working into us the character of Christ, with a view! With a view. Oh, I wish I could remember this always, I wish you could remember it always, that when He's trying to do something inside in the life, in the nature, in the character to

change it, when He's dealing with something that is not Christ and hammering it and battering it and shattering it; giving us an awful time because of what we are in ourselves, it is not just for destruction. He is seeking to make room and way for the Lord Jesus in our characters! That out of this shall come something that is more like the Lord, of patience, of love, of thoughtfulness and generous impulse and all that that is Christ-like; to bring that in. Ah, but not that *that* is an end in itself... because it's that kind of person and that kind of Church that is going to be His instrument of government in the ages to come.

"Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it *that He might present the Church to Himself, a glorious Church* not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing". That's the governmental vessel and instrument at the end, it's a thing of character and its character is taken from the Lord Jesus. The whole thing begins with the Church. When we have said that, we have just got to the end of the contemplation of Himself personally. As the Lord leads us on in this, we shall see how all this is brought down to the seven churches and that everything there is tried, tested, and dealt with on the basis of this personal portraiture of the Lord Jesus.

Now does this throw some light upon what He's doing? All that He is allowing in our lives, and all that He is working at in us... why is it? If we suffer, we shall reign, and it is through the suffering, the tribulation, that we're going to come to the throne and through much tribulation we shall enter the kingdom, and come to reign together with Him. It is necessary for us to see the Lord Jesus - the revelation of Jesus Christ - that we should see Him.

I suggest to you, I urge upon you, dear friends, that your constant and earnest prayer shall be: "Show me Christ. Let me see the Lord Jesus, not objectively in some vision, but by the Holy Spirit let me see what Christ is. May He make me more and more uncomfortable as to myself, but then ever remind me that the work of the Holy Spirit is to *reveal Him* and *then* make me like Him. For we shall be like Him as we see Him as He is." That must be our prayer.

May the vision of Christ break upon our hearts, and see His glory and His beauty; see what God desires and is working at where we are concerned, and all again, all again, with the Throne in view. For whether it be a literal throne, whatever the reigning means, I think we are learning just now that government and ascendancy is a spiritual thing, it's a spiritual thing. This Stone that wrecked the Roman Empire was cut out without hands. That simply means that the kingdom of Christ is a *spiritual* kingdom, not made by man. It's a much more powerful thing than all the kingdoms and dominions that man made, whether they be Nebuchadnezzar or the Caesars; a spiritual kingdom is a *far* more powerful thing than all temporal systems. That is the truth that you and I have got to learn: *the transcendent importance and power of spiritual life and spiritual character.*

Chapter 4 - The Testimony of Jesus Christ

The book of the Revelation, chapter 1 verse 1: "Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him..."

Verse 4: "John, to the seven churches which are in Asia..."

Verse 10: "What thou seest write in a book and send it to the seven churches, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia and unto Laodicea."

Chapter 2: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God."

We have been led at this time to be occupied with Revelation or the Unveiling of Jesus Christ. We began by taking note of the fact that this book which has that as its title, and which has that as its very comprehensive content, is the book which reveals Him inclusively, comprehensively as coming forth at last to settle all those issues which have been underlying the spiritual conflict of this universe.

All through the ages there has been a mighty conflict in process. This earth has felt its repercussions; all that has been taking place here has been related to a great conflict in heaven. And the issue which has been in all that long, drawn-out and many-sided conflict is none other than the issue of God's intention as to the government of this earth from heaven. His purpose, in the first place, concerning His Son as the appointed Lord of lords, King of kings, supreme Ruler in heaven and earth. And in the second place, the eternally chosen or elected vehicle of that government, what we now know as the Church. These two things, as two parts of one, have been back of and the occasion of, all this tremendous swirl and welter of conflict through the ages. And this book is the revelation of Jesus Christ coming out to settle that issue once and for all and finally. And in this book we see the processes of that settlement - how it is headed up in different connections and relationships - a steady, progressive movement until at last... the kingdoms of this world are the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. The settlement: the issue is settled and He is established with His Church as forever in an unchallengeable supremacy. Well, that is the Revelation of Jesus Christ in very few words.

In our former three sessions we have been considering the introduction to that. First, in noting how everything in this book is consummatory. It gathers up everything from the beginning of the Bible all the way through. In its some four hundred allusions to the Old Testament, it is very comprehensive. And quite clearly it is the bringing of all that to consummation.

And then we went on to contemplate the two aspects of the Lord Jesus as presented in chapter one, as foundational to all that is to follow. First of all, His personal victory: "I am He that liveth, I became

dead, behold I am alive unto the ages of the ages, I have the keys of death and of Hades". His victory... and we spent quite a lot of time seeing what that victory was and how it was. And then we went to the second aspect of this foundation: His person, that is, His character, this matchless description of Himself which we have in chapter one. And we saw that it is upon the basis not only of what He has done, but of what He is in His intrinsic character, nature and worth, that He has the right to decide anything - to judge either church, or nations, or the devil himself. His authority is based upon what He is, His real character. And that is always a law with God; the power rests upon what a person is more than what a person does. With God the matter of authority, of dominion, of government, or of any kind of trust and responsibility, always depends upon the character of the person or the persons in view. With the Lord Jesus that is perfectly evident that He triumphed because of what He was and therefore He is in the right of judgment of all others because no one can ever point at anything in Him that satan could encamp upon and say, 'That's a contradiction'.

Well, again, we spent a long session on the character of the Lord Jesus and the challenge of that character to everything. But when we have said all that we can say (and a great deal more could be said about chapter one) all that is but preparatory to what follows. It is as though the Spirit of God had laid down a foundation for everything now that is going to transpire. As though He had said, "Now this is our ground for everything and of everything; it is upon that and from that that we move to everything else".

You notice that the first movement of the Spirit, here described symbolically as the seven spirits of God (the meaning for that which we may consider at some time) is the Holy Spirit undoubtedly in sevenfold expression. It is the Holy Spirit moving in the first place toward the Church, to deal with the Church inclusively and comprehensively upon the basis that He Himself has laid down. That is a thing that we must bear in mind and which will become more and more apparent as we go on.

Now, if chapters 2 and 3 - which contain this first movement to the Church - if these chapters have any relation to our own time, then, dear friends, surely with them we are in the presence of the most solemn and the most momentous issues. What is taken up in the first place where the Church is concerned is nothing less than the very testimony of Jesus Himself in this universe.

The Testimony of Jesus

That is the supreme and the ultimate thing for all history and for all realms. We've seen what that testimony is: the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ in every realm. That is the Testimony of Jesus. And that matter is the first thing that governs the Spirit in moving toward the Church. We see that more fully as we go on.

Then, of course, there follows quite clearly by the patent conclusion that has to be drawn, the Church's responsibility for that Testimony. It is not some thing that is detached and unrelated, abstract and apart *in itself*. The Church was chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world to be the vessel and the vehicle of the Testimony of Jesus. And so, what is here in the second place is the great and honourable responsibility of the Church in relation to the greatest issue in this universe: the divinely appointed place for Jesus Christ in the whole system of things. And these two things lead on, as is made perfectly clear, to the ultimate government of the world *from* heaven, *by* Christ, *through* the Church. Those three things are not small things. If that is what is here, then I am justified in saying that when we begin with this first movement of the Spirit to the Church, we are faced with the most solemn and momentous matters. And taking it (and with all our human insignificance, smallness, and weakness, all that we are that we would not be and are not that we would be, we are a few of the Church, therefore we must not think too objectively at this time) but when it says "the

Spirit saith to the churches", the Spirit is speaking to us, here in this place, concerning these very matters in this time.

Well, what is here then, is for the enlightenment of the Church as to the meaning of things that happen. Dear friends, things *are* happening. And things are *going* to happen. That's what it says right at the beginning. Things are happening and things are going to happen, we are in the midst of these happenings now. There are movements of tremendous significance, very portentous in this creation with an impact of spiritual forces upon this earth, and a lot of things are happening and a lot of developments are in process. We shall see more and more of these things happening. The important thing is that we understand the *meaning* of these happenings.

It is a *tremendous* thing to understand what is happening to us, conscious that things are happening to us, they are happening to us spiritually, in our own spiritual experience and life; conscious of being taken into and through things that are difficult to bear and to understand. We don't know what is it that's happening to us; why are we involved in this... this stress, this pressure, this strain, this tension, this conflict? If we are really God's people going on with God, putting Christ in His place, we're involved in something; every one of us personally. It strikes upon us individually in some way or ways. It strikes upon every relationship of our lives, it strikes upon our families, and upon our homes, upon our businesses, it strikes upon our relationships with other believers, it strikes upon the whole question of spiritual fellowship, it strikes upon the work of the Lord, it strikes upon the local companies. Yes, things are happening, it's like that, we're *involved* in something.

There are big spiritual movements afoot and I repeat it is of *tremendous* importance that the people of God know the *meaning* of what is happening; *why* we are passing this way, *what* the Lord is trying to do with us, what the Lord *means* by what is taking place. Yes, it's tremendously important that we have understanding of these things. These things will happen. That is what is here in these messages. The Lord is moving in, so to speak, and is bringing every thing to some particular issue. That's a very impressive thing, you know, that the Lord seems to be concentrating upon one specific issue!

I don't know how you felt when I read again that first message to the Church at Ephesus. I'll tell you how I have felt as I have read it, I've read it: "*I know thy works, thy toil, thy toil and thy patience, that thou canst not bear evil men, didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, thou didst find them false...*" Remember, this same writer John who had the responsibility in the church at Ephesus, had written in his letter "*Beloved, try the spirits, for there are many false prophets gone abroad*". Try them! They had done it. "Thou hast tried them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, thou didst find them false. Thou hast patience and didst bear for My Name's sake and hast not grown weary...". What more do You want Lord? What more can You ask for? If You want more than that, You're very exacting. What can You expect of any people more than that, what are You asking for? Is that how you feel? You have to, you have to react like that in order to get to the heart of things. "All that Lord! All that! We've given You all that, You've got all that, and that means a lot, you know!" It means a lot for any church in a day of persecution especially, as in this case. "You've got all that; what more do You want, what more can You have? And with all that, You come back and say, with all that, I'm on the point of removing your lampstand out of its place, there's something, with all that, which, not being present, does not justify My preserving you as a vessel." That's terrible isn't it, in one way? That's searching, that would drive us to our knees. *What is it*, that, with *all* that, is essential to our continuation as a vessel of the Lord?

We'll have to come back to that before we are finished. I say it's important that we understand why such people can be dealt with by the Lord in condemnation yet in correction, with an effort by encouragement and confirmation to get that something else; that essential. Dear friends, there is one

thing that surely is such a contemplation and consideration will bring home to you and to me and that is that the Lord is *never satisfied with the comparative*. He must have the *absolute*. The Lord will never ultimately, ultimately settle down to accept something good, *something good*; He's going to have the best.

A church may be good in many respects, a group of the Lord's people may have many commendable things, that even the Lord commends, but in the final analysis, His attitude is, "A good thing, with many good things is not what I set out to have. At the beginning I set out to have something not good, but the best. Not comparative, but absolute. Not partial, but complete." That, I say, is the conclusion to which we are driven if we read this right; we have to decide that.

Now then, here we have to answer one question.

Do These Messages to the Seven Churches in Asia Have an Application to the Church Today?

Of course there are these schools of interpretation to which I have referred earlier. I'll not even mention their technical names, but there is the one school that holds and concludes that what is here in this book was confined to the time of its being written; it was just a matter of contemporary history, it had to do wholly with the churches in Asia as they were at that time, and all this was contemporary history. Very well, if so, it may be interesting to read it, to know what happened and how things happened; but you don't get over all your difficulties that way.

There is the next school that interprets all this as having commenced in apostolic times, in late apostolic times, and been spread over to the time of the coming of the Lord. That is, that all these seven churches are like seven phases of history which fill up the big gap between the two comings of the Lord. Alright, we are not going to argue about that.

And then there is the third school which holds that it all belongs to the end, to the end of the age and afterward, all this is going to come up as the day of the Lord draws near, and going to be all cleared up and settled in the last phase of this age and then what follows afterward.

I would say here that, not by way of convenience or compromise, I'm thinking that they all hold truth, they all hold truth and they all hold error - or, if that is too strong a word, they all hold weaknesses and flaws. But I'm not going to discuss them, that is not the point at all. What I'm after is this: if this is the word of the Lord, if this has come from God, if this is *the word of the Holy Spirit*, you can confine it to no particular time. It ranges *all* time in the principles which it embodies.

You are not dealing here finally, and ultimately, and conclusively with anything that belongs to any one fragment of time. You're dealing with the thoughts of God which govern *all* times. And wherever and *whenever* you have those things that are found in these churches which are condemned by the Lord at any time in history they're still condemned - condemnation does not belong to any one place or one time. They are principles of universal application.

And where you find, and whenever you find that which the Lord here commends and is seeking to have, that is an eternal something which compasses all time! And I hold that as the answer to all interpretations, that we are not dealing with mere history, and localities, and phases in time; we are dealing with eternal principles. And I am certain that that is the sum of the significance of this book. As we have pointed out, it goes *right* back to the eternal counsels of God and what took place *then* and He decided. And what has been disputed and challenged and fought over through all the ages and now on the threshold of the ages of the ages - it's *that* that is being settled as much in Ephesus as anywhere else, and the same everywhere else as in Ephesus. These are no issues for some period or

some place; we are in it as much as ever Ephesus in apostolic times was in it. *This is to us*, because the word of the Lord is forever! He speaks and when He speaks He expresses an *eternal* mind and a universal mind.

Well now, this book clearly compasses all time - past, present and what there remains of the future. And it does so in one inclusive respect: this issue of the *utterness*, the *utterness* - not the comparativeness, not the partialness - the utterness of the place of the Lord Jesus. That's the issue, and that was the issue for Ephesus, there's no doubt about it. We'll see that as we look into this message.

You see, it is the full revelation of Jesus. The *full* revelation of Jesus. This is no partial revelation of Him, He's here in fullness and *that's* the challenge. Churches, times, are not being challenged upon something about Jesus, some even *true* part of Jesus; the challenge is upon the *fullness of Christ*, the *fullness* of Christ - that's the issue. And that is where we are in this book. And so I repeat, if you'll suffer me, that this book holds principles for all time.

Now then, to Ephesus. He is heading up, we have said, to a final conclusion. All these outstanding questions and controversies through the ages, He's heading them up at last, saying, "Now we are going to settle this and settle it forever." And where does He begin? He begins with:

The Church.

Rightly so! It's in the right order of God to begin this with the Church. He cannot pass to the nations and call them to account until He has dealt with the Church. He cannot even dispossess the evil powers of their place and cast them out until He has dealt with the Church. There's a tremendous principle involved in that. Without giving mystical interpretation to this (and this is not my intention at all because I believe this is historic and of [wide assent]) nevertheless the principle does apply in this way: that you and I will never see the evil powers and the evil one cast out of our realm while there is something wrong with us before the Lord. Isn't it true? If he has some rightful foothold in us, there's no hope of his being cast out. You've got to take the ground from him before you can do that. That is true in principle. In dealing with any life where satan has really got power, you've got to get down to know *why* he's got the power in that life, that there is something there that is of himself. It's got to be removed before that life can be saved. That is the meaning of our Lord's own words, "The prince of this world cometh to me and hath nothing in me; hence the prince of this world is cast out". See the basis. It's like that.

And that is what is here: how can you deal with the world in judgment or with the great kingdom of satan, which will be dealt with in the third place, until the Church is put right? Because presently, it will be the accuser of the brethren who is cast down, but that will *not* happen until the ground of his accusation has been dealt with *in* the brethren. Have you got that? His is not official power, his is not just objective power, his is spiritual power. His strength and his hold rests upon a condition, a *condition*. "Simon, Simon, satan hath obtained thee by asking that he may sift thee as wheat but I have prayed for thee, when thou art turned again strengthen thy brethren." *Why* did Satan have his request granted, to sift Simon Peter as wheat... and he did it, mark you, he did it very thoroughly. Why? Because the Lord saw there was something in Simon Peter that had got to *be* sifted that Satan had a right over. And so the Lord dealt with that, and you have an authoritative Simon Peter after that, a man in spiritual ascendancy indeed, who cares for neither men nor devils. That was not the original Simon. You see the working of this law, that power rests upon character.

And so, if the Church is God's eternally chosen vessel for the administration of the kingdom of God

by Jesus Christ, it's got to come to a spiritual position which justifies that government, that control. Hence the Lord *must* begin with, and be thorough and exact with the Church and not just accept good things, but sift down and sift down.

So the ultimate issue is bound up with these messages, no less an issue than that that we are called, dear friends, we are called (the wonder and amazement of it, it has perhaps by familiarity lost some of its impress upon us) called into fellowship with Jesus Christ, to take the place that the prince and principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness now hold. It's not so difficult to understand if you think about it... this, this world is governed spiritually. There's no doubt about that. It's a spiritual government that's behind all that's happening here. Even men who make no profession whatever of being spiritual, even in any particular sense Christian; they never give us anything to indicate that they are born again people and know the Lord... nevertheless they see. They see through, and they know that there are forces of evil behind the movements in this world. They say, they speak of it as "that evil thing, that evil thing"; they know. And so it is. Back of all this there is *spiritual* government of this world, "the world rulers of this darkness", what a rich, full phrase that is. Where's it coming from? "Principalities and powers and hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies."

The ultimate vision of God's purpose realised is the *Church* in the symbolic presentation of the new Jerusalem, the heavenly City, taking that place, occupying *that* place. It's so difficult to move in our minds from a literal symbolism to a spiritual meaning... That's what it means! Church is a *heavenly* body, with a *heavenly* calling, to occupy a *heavenly* position for *heavenly* government with Christ in the ages to come. And if I have not misread my Bible, that is what the Church is called to and that is what we are called to. Now, you cannot have *such* a calling, and *such* a vocation, *such* a Divine intention, without the Lord being very exact. *Very* exact! And, as I say again: being unprepared to accept what is comparative.

Well, here we have the seven messages and I haven't got to Ephesus yet, but here we have then, the sevenfold symbolism and representation and it's that we must note first of all.

Seven Churches in Asia

Yes, but there were plenty *more* churches in Asia besides these seven! *All* the churches in Asia are not mentioned when you've mentioned these seven. Are the others alright, they did not need to be mentioned, nothing wrong with them, they're alright; is that what it means? Why select these? Why select just seven? Well, because seven is always a representative number, that's all.

Seven is the number which symbolises spiritual completeness. It represents spiritual completeness or fullness. And so seven here selected are just lifted out, so to speak, to be representative of all others and the whole Church. And what the Lord says to the seven, He says to the whole. It is here a representation of the whole Church - that is all that is meant by selecting seven, to embody a complete expression of spiritual principles. Is that clear? If that is true, then it's more than for Asia, it *is* the whole Church and what was in Asia, inside of Asia in these seven, is only taken as a kind of sounding board or platform for the Church universal at all times.

These are united in the right hand of Him that walks up and down in the midst of the golden lampstands. United in His right hand, "Who holdeth in His *right hand*", you notice, "Who *holdeth* in His right hand the seven...". Well, the right hand is another symbolic idea, it's the place, firstly, of honour, and then of authority, and then of strength. He holds... all there in His right hand, in His authority, in His strength. The word 'hold' as used here, or 'holdeth', is a very strong word in the Greek; different from other words which mean just 'to have'. Here it's what we might call 'to have a

grip' on this; He's got a grip on this. He is in charge, in possession. *He* has not let go what He intended here. He is not regarding this loosely, carelessly, indifferently, weakly. This whole matter of the Testimony of the Church and the churches is with Him something very definite, very positive. He holds in His right hand for His honour.

The Golden Lampstands

The golden lampstands; that is essentially a Divine idea. And as we, I think earlier said, gold in the Old Testament is always the symbol of that which is most precious amongst metals. You speak of gold there, you always have the idea of value, of preciousness, of something that counts. And here it's in the churches that which is precious to Him. That which is precious to God. That which is of *intrinsic value*. That which is incorruptible. We've tried to set this forth in a fuller way in a book, "The Gold of the Sanctuary", but that, this is it. What is He after? What is His thought about the Church and the churches? What is His thought about us as companies of the Lord's people; what is it? His thought is that there is, where we are (or there *ought* to be where we are) something of transcendent preciousness to Himself and to the Father. Something of *real value*; real value. It's that that He's after.

These symbolic representations of lampstands of gold is simply this: here and there in the intention of God shall be a representation and an embodiment of that which is *supremely precious to God*. If it's like that, if it's like that, well, of course that will explain a very great deal why the enemy would like the fine gold to become dim, why the tremendous conflict for the *purity* of any corporate expression of the Church. Its purity - to corrupt, to corrupt - it's one of the things the Lord is dealing with in the churches - to corrupt, to spoil and mar the fine gold, and to rob the Lord of the preciousness.

Oh, let us be very much given to this, brethren and sisters, see to it that, so far as we are concerned, we take this responsibility. I am not one of those who can conclude that the angels of the churches are the single ministers of the church. I don't believe that because it contradicts so much that is in the New Testament. But I believe that the angel of the church is simply the principle or the focal point of responsibility. And we are *all* responsible people in the Church and we're all called to take responsibility for the Church. And so I say, the Lord help us every one to take responsibility where we are and where we are concerned, to see that there is something precious for the Lord, that our gatherings and our companies are not just preaching places, teaching places with a lot of truth and head knowledge of Divine things, but really in character there is something very precious to the Lord - that it could be said that there is something there that is very precious to the Lord. If that were spoiled, if that were lost, something of real value to the Lord would go. It *must* be like that dear friends, very practical, but you see, this is what the Lord is after: the *intrinsic value*, not the comparative value, not the size of things at all, not what is external but the *intrinsic* value, the gold... refined in the fire. That which is *precious to the Lord*.

Seven golden lampstands. Lampstands, that is a better translation than candlesticks, because a candlestick burns itself away or the candle burns itself away. The lamp, it burns by a supply, an endless supply from outside of itself. However, that by the way, the function of the lampstand, that's the point; what is it? Of course, obviously, it is *light*, by the Holy Spirit. Let's qualify that. It is light, but it is light by the power, the illumination, the energy, the resource of the Holy Spirit. A Holy Spirit *testimony* in every place where there is a company, small or large, of the Lord's people. *Light* in that place!

I cannot emphasise the importance of this enough, although it seems so obvious, but this ought to

really concern our hearts, really be a burden on our hearts, that where we are, as the Lord's people together, however few, people can see Christ! People can really *see* Christ because we are there. Isn't that searching and challenging? Just the matter of *seeing* the Lord Jesus.

I've seen a lot of people going to meetings in a certain place, hearing them sing and wondering what's happening amongst them, but you meet those people and you meet more than those people. If you have any idea of God at all, or what God ought to be like, if you have any information as to God's character and nature, you see it in those people. You meet it with those people, you've got it right in your very presence, that's where it is. That is the essential function of the Lamp; it is not an ornament, it is not a cold, dead something. It is not a form and a shape, it's a living Life, a living History. That is what the Church is here for, and the churches are but local representations of the Church. It is that there, where the Lord's people are, that is where what is Christ is found. Just what is Christ! Yes, these are the seven golden lampstands.

I must stop there I think, before we come to Ephesus after all, but that is enough to search our hearts. It begins to show us, it begins to lead us to this thing that the Lord cannot do without, He cannot do without. With all the works, the labour, the patience, and all the conscientiousness, and integrity and all the hatred of evil men, and all the testing of people's professions and judging whether things are right and wrong, with *all* that, there's some intrinsic value which is more than all and without which the Lord cannot be satisfied and the vessel is not justified in its continuing. Very solemn thought, that is. May the Word this afternoon provoke us to this.

And I would close here, this part, by saying again that as with Ephesus, so with us all, there can be no *substituting* of something good for the best. I'm sure that searches us here in this place. There may be a lot of good things, we may be wanting a lot of good things and doing a lot of good things, but remember, there is a *full* thing for which God brought us into being. A full thing for which He brought us into being, and He will never, never allow anything less than that to pass with Him. He'll hold to that and ask: "Why did I bring you into being? This or that, something else... quite good, yes, nothing wrong with that at all... quite good, *but*... is that all? *Is* that all?" That's His interrogation here. "Repent and do the first works". And we shall have more light on this as we actually look into this message to the Church in Ephesus. The Lord hold our hearts.

Chapter 5 - Christ's Message to Ephesus

Now I think we can tackle this matter of Ephesus. We've been marching round Ephesus so far, now we try to get inside. I'll just read a part of the message. The second chapter, the book of the Revelation: "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I will come to thee, and move thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent."

So what we have to do, seek the Lord's help to do, is to get right to the heart of that message and find out what that thing was and is, upon which everything turned. For, as we have seen, the continuance of this vessel as serving the Lord's purpose did not rest upon a number of quite good and commendable things, but it hung upon one thing. And that is called 'the first love' - "thy first love". And we are going to ask the question and seek in some degree to answer it:

What is First Love?

May I say here before I go on with that, that it is not my thought or expectation to make anything like an exhaustive study of these messages. Indeed I do not know whether I shall deal with all of them. But whatever we do, we shall seek to get right to the heart of the message and find out exactly what it is that is *that* expression of Christ which is so vital and so full of consequence as to make this whole matter of continued ministry into a crisis. For there's no doubt about it, that we're in the presence of crisis when we are here with these messages. There's a real upshot of a very ultimate and utter character bound up with these messages. We want to find out what it is that carries so much with it and means so much to the Church and to the Lord.

I have said, *that* expression of Christ; here I ought to spend time in again approaching this, but I'll do no more, for I've had a hint that I'm putting too much in, or trying to. But it is perfectly clear to the simplest reader that it is that portrait of the Lord Jesus in chapter one that is spread over these seven messages. You probably have noticed that something out of that description of the Lord Jesus is *used* in the introduction to every message. There is only one slight change, and that is to Philadelphia, where instead of, "who hath the keys of death and of Hades", the change is: "who hath the keys of David". With that exception or change, every message contains something taken out of the description of the Lord Jesus, "He that..." and then you have something from the full portrait and presentation of Christ, *clearly* implying that it is *that which is of Christ* which is governing in every case, all round, and everywhere, every time. It's something vital of Christ that's at issue. That is the important thing to note.

Now come to Ephesus. Of course Ephesus was the mother church of Asia. We know that to be so because it is said by Paul's three years there in Ephesus, "*All* Asia heard the word, both Jew and Greek", and it was the mother church. And in the introduction of the message to Ephesus, the Lord describes Himself as, "He that holdeth the seven stars... and walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...". Ephesus is inclusive of all. Ephesus is comprehensive. And so what is said to Ephesus is not just said to Ephesus alone, it's to Asia.

It is quite comprehensive this message. And as we are able to put our finger upon this vital matter right at the heart of things, I'm sure without my pointing it out, we shall see that it is a matter that is in no sense exclusively local or of a particular period. It is something that is ever the peril of the people of God.

So we return and say, what *is* this thing called 'thy first love'? For the answer of course, we have to or should go back to the great letter of Paul which now bears the name "the letter to the Ephesians". We know it was a letter to more churches than Ephesus, but that was one of the churches, perhaps the first one which had a name put on it in its circulation. We can, for our purpose, speak of it as the letter to the Ephesians. And if you call to mind the content of that letter, you will remember that it has a very great deal in it about love. Chapter 2, verse 4: "For His great love wherewith He loved us". Chapter 5 verse 2: "Walk in love as Christ also loved us". Chapter 5:25: "As Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Chapter 3:17: "Rooted and grounded in love". Chapter 3:19: "The breadth and the length and the height and the depth, the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ". It's not a long letter so far as compass of words is concerned, but what *immense* statements those are! What a tremendous love is represented there!

Yes, Ephesus was the church which had been given a ministry and revelation of love; the knowledge-surpassing love. And Ephesus had responded to it! Ephesus had responded to it, there's no doubt about it. Read chapters 19 and 20 of the book of the Acts and see the response that they made to that love and to the man who had brought the knowledge of that love to them. As he bade them farewell, they knelt down together, he prayed, and they wept much at his departure. It's all a scene of Divine love reciprocated.

Ephesus, in a very real sense, embodied love from God and returning to God; from Christ, to Christ. Yes, that's all very true. But you've got to add another word alongside of that to be able to arrive at the meaning of this: 'their first love' and it's the other word which has the largest place in that letter to the Ephesians and it's the word 'grace'.

Grace

I'll not take the time to give you all the nine references or mentions of grace in that letter, but grace, grace is everywhere. Grace is running through it all, it's all grace! *Why* was there such a response to the love of God? Because they recognised and were fully alive to the fact of how *great grace* there *must* be for *such* people to be loved in such a way!

This first love is no sentimental thing. We talk about first love... a good deal of sentiment is bound up with that phrase as often used. No, this is not something sentimental. This is a *quality* of love. The Lord help me to show you that quality of this love.

The Lord loved Israel of old. Oh, how the prophets declared that love, how the Lord made known His love for that people, there's no doubt about it; the Lord loved Israel. But Israel all too soon lost the sense of the *infinite condescension* of God to love them. The infinite condescension of God in *choosing* them from amongst all peoples of the earth. And all too soon Israel allowed themselves to feel that *they* were something, and worthy of that love! And they became proud and they took the love for granted. *The sin* of Israel was just that. In the end, well, it was just that, *that; they* were the people, *they* were the people! Yes! *They* merited this, *they* were worthy of this, *they* were something to take account of, *they were* the people. God [above] loved them. That's how it came to be, that's how it came to be with Israel, and for *that* very reason, the covenant was broken and the Gentiles were brought in their place.

And do you notice about the Gentiles... when the apostle turned to the Gentiles, *when* the message went to the Gentiles, you always, you invariably have this most wonderful thing that you can think of - that we should be allowed into this! Never was anything heard of like this, that Gentiles, the heathen, the people whom Israel called 'the dogs', brought right in! Right into the family and given all the privilege of sons - a most marvellous thing! It was the *tremendous appreciation* of Divine love. Did you hear our brother's prayer tonight, he might have known what I was going to say!

First Love

First love, first love, well, in this case you see, it was like this, it was like this: here is a wife. Here is a bride. The Church is the bride of Christ not saying, "He's lucky to have *me* for a wife, I'm quite worthy of Him, He ought to be very thankful to have such a wife as I am". But no, "It is the most amazing thing that He *ever* looked at me at all! That *ever* He should have given me a *first* thought let alone a second thought. I can *never* explain it, *never* understand that! I'll never be able for all eternity to know why He thought of *me*, let alone loved me and gave Himself for me". You see, that's the spirit of the Church, and that was the spirit of the Gentiles when the Jews just took everything for granted. It all became so commonplace with them... all that God had given to them and shown to them, well, there was nothing now very wonderful about that. It lost its lustre, its glory, its wonder, its amazement; so commonplace now. They could do as they liked with it, take it or leave it.

But not so with the Gentiles. See them in the house of Cornelius, my word what openness of heart! See them in Philippi, what openness of heart, how they just drink it in there. See them in Thessalonica, as Paul said, "You received the word not as the word of man but as the word of God". Received it! Whenever you move outside of Israel you've got an *intense appreciation*, a *tremendous wonder*!

And coming back to Ephesus, coming back to Ephesus what have you got here in Ephesus? You have this: "*Not a few of them that practiced curious arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all and they counted the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver*". That's appreciation, that's appreciation! There's nothing commonplace there. That's first love, dear friends, that's first love.

The peril is, even in your labour and in your patience and in your conscientiousness and your sincerity and all these works... and lose the *glory, the wonder, the amazement* of being saved at all, it has been lost. And all this *marvellous revelation* that God has given as to the Church's election, calling, vocation, destiny - what is called the eternal purpose - you can hear it without a thrill. You can have it all and it does not stir you to the profoundest gratitude and worship. It's all so commonplace... so familiar with it... it's lost its wonder. *That's* the heart of the message, that's the heart of the message! I say that's the peril of the Church at all times. God has given so much, we begin to make it or allow it to be commonplace - "Oh, we've heard that before, we know all about that, you can't tell us anything that we don't know in that matter, we've got it all, we've got it all!" And we are not on our faces before God in the presence of it saying, "*Amazing wonder, amazing wonder, that ever I should have a place in that!*"

"Consider from whence thou art fallen..." The mighty price of their earthly things became as nothing, *nothing*, when they saw the Lord Jesus! They brought all those things of value to men and in this world by which they had laid so great a store, yes a great price, as things of this world go. And they *burnt* them in the sight of all, "*That's rubbish! We've seen Jesus!*" And not until you've seen Jesus does everything else become tawdry and worthless and of no greater value than to go up in smoke.

To see Him... oh, the revelation of Jesus Christ ought not to be a teaching, a truth, an interpretation, a book. It ought to be a *worship*. "*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead*". Have you ever seen Jesus, to bring you down like that? Have you ever seen what He has given to you to the point of making you say, "It's the most wonderful thing man could ever think of that *I, I*, should be given that, that I should have a place in that"? Do you see how we need to be recovered?

Don't let us blame Ephesus, this is *our* constant enemy, it's my constant enemy. My continuous handling of these things through the years... always, always dealing with these matters and ministering them. My abiding enemy is familiarity and association with it all as with truth, as with truth! To lose the wonder. And it *is* wonderful! And dear friends, that's your peril, when you continuously and repeatedly hear it, it would be as a song that has lost its enchantment, this tale that is true, a familiar story; yes, a wonderful story, but never bowing us before God in worship. That is our peril. *That is first love*.

And now you can see that you may have a lot of things and not that; a lot of good things. Oh, it isn't that you're all bad, or we're all bad, and there's nothing good to be said about us at all... there is a lot of devotion and there's a lot of labour, a lot. Yes, but, but what He is looking for is that *true* heart appreciation of *Himself*, what He has done, and what He has given.

You move into this book and you find that you move into a realm of worship: "Unto Him that loveth us, loosed us from our sins with His own blood, made us, made *us*, a kingdom and priests unto His God". *What* can you say? Only: to *Him* be the glory, to Him be the glory! You move into chapters 4 and 5 and that's where you are - the Church in heaven, a worshipping Church, in the true and full appreciation of the Lord.

Now, that's not overloading you in matter, but it is putting upon us a very great responsibility.

I believe, dear friends, that this is just the word the Lord would say to us all at this time. And I'm quite content to leave it there tonight. Having conference after conference, conference after conference... if you saw my office you would see a stack halfway up my own stature of reports of conferences over the years. We have to ask: with all that has been given, the volumes... the volumes that have been given through the years; how much worship has it produced? How much of all that are we *alive* to, as to what the Lord has given? But please don't think that I'm making this personal, I'm only illustrating what I mean.

What we, who are so privileged, not here only, but we, the Church in our time, who have *all* this... so privileged to have the revelation of Jesus Christ. All the cost to those first servants of the Lord to give us this, all the cost to the Lord Himself that we should have it. Oh yes, what a price lies behind it all! How much do we value it? How much do we worship in the presence of it? How much does it *really* mean to us? How much is teaching, and truth, and the Bible? How much does it *really* touch our hearts? That's the question and that is the meaning of first love, first love. Oh, the appreciation that ever the Lord should have looked our way... to say nothing of just lavished upon us all that He's got to give! Well, there's the message.

See, we can understand now why it was the Lord could not be satisfied with a number of quite good things if that one thing - the essence of all the cost - was left behind. No wonder He says do the first works, go back again... first works; there they are. Oh yes, there's no doubt about it that they made a marvellous and costly, as this world would think, response to the Lord.

I love to read that story in Acts 19 and 20 of Paul in Ephesus; a tremendous riot where they would

fain tear that apostle limb from limb. And some of these Ephesians said - ah, not only said but acted for his preservation, "Don't you go out there, you stay in here. We come between you and them", and would not allow him to go out to them in their wild rage. They wanted this man kept because for them he was God's channel of so much. It's all such a wonderful picture of how they *appreciated* what had come to them. Now the Lord says, "You've fallen from that, you've fallen from that, you've left that. You haven't given up Christian work, you haven't given up all Christian virtues, there's lots of good things about you, but that's the thing that matters."

I need not add more words to this. You see, it's all the appreciation of the grace of God. The *grace* of God! Where should we be but for the grace of God? Oh, grace had no meaning for Israel; they didn't feel the need of it, they were self-sufficient... and they lost it all. The people who really put supreme value upon grace were the people who got it all. Who got it all! The Lord make us people like that, and stir our hearts and challenge us and recover in us *this* first love.

Chapter 6 - Christ's Message to Laodicea

The letter of Paul to the Colossians, chapter 2, first verse: "I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea."

Chapter 4 verse 13: "I bear him witness, that he hath much labor for you, and for them in Laodicea..."
Verse 15: "Salute the brethren that are in Laodicea..." 16: "And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans."

The letter to the Philippians, chapter 3, verse 12: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended: but *one thing* I do, forgetting the things which are behind, stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the *on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."

We will hold those Scriptures in mind while we sing another hymn.

In these closing verses of the third chapter of the book of Revelation, we reach the concluding phase of the first movement of the risen Lord toward the consummation of Divine purpose in this age. Throughout this time we have sought to have the great end of God for His Church overshadowing everything and kept clearly in view, because what we have here, in the first part of this great book and in the last chapters, is the great purpose of God in our salvation.

Paul, as we have read this evening, said that he was on full stretch to apprehend that for which he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus. And then, without defining exactly what that was, that object, that purpose, he did add "*The prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus*". It was unto that that he conceived himself as having been apprehended by Christ Jesus. Not only to be saved, but to be brought to a great and glorious destiny in and by Christ Jesus. He calls it 'the prize of the on-high calling'.

The end of this present part of the book of the Revelation, which book is bringing us very near to the goal, the intention of the book is to get the Church ready for the end, for the great time of crisis in view. At the end of this first part of this book which has to do with the Church, we are told what it was that Paul meant by the prize of the on-high calling. This is it: "To him that overcometh I will give to him to sit with Me in My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father in His throne". That is the great object and goal for which people are saved and apprehended by Christ Jesus, to a place of sharing with Him, their Lord, the throne of government of this universe. That is the meaning of Christianity. That is in the heart of the Lord in giving the gospel, in appealing to men. It is that, dear friends, that is in view in our Christian lives. Nothing less than that. A great calling, an on-high calling, a wonderful prize: throne-sharing with Christ in government.

Well, it is of course, quite significant, is it not, that that is the last note in this phase in this section of the book. And we can say, because it is quite true, that it has *been* that, that has governed all that has gone before. The wonderful presentation of the Lord Jesus in person in chapter 1 was in order that by showing His victory, the glory of His risen person, the standard should be set. And then through all these seven messages to the seven churches (as representing by their very number the whole Church in all ages) in all that is said through these, this thing is governing, this end is overshadowing. It is to

this that everything is moving, the very judging, and the condemning, and the demand to put away everything that would thwart that end, and the encouraging, and the confirming, and the exhorting in relation to other things that will help toward that end. The End governs everything - the on-high calling, the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus. That is in view. That explains everything. It explains all the Lord's dealings with His people.

If, at all times when the Lord is dealing with us, we could but pause and be quiet and think, "What's the meaning of this, why this?" and allow ourselves to entertain this great governing truth: He's getting us ready for the throne. He's doing something now that relates to that glorious end. He's paving the way, He's preparing us, He is cancelling out things in us that would hinder our progress toward that end. He is seeking to inculcate and develop in us the things that will hasten us toward that end. If only we could be convinced that that is exactly what it all means, it would be a tremendous help.

Now, you'll notice that the Lord in these letters says that quite clearly to His people. We were thinking earlier in the day about that suffering church, that suffering church called to be faithful unto death. The Lord simply told them in plain language that their tribulation was all with a spiritual and Divine purpose, and quite clearly to prepare them, to qualify them for their great eternal destiny. And that's how it is.

I think, dear friends, perhaps our obsession with the importance of this life is often a great limitation upon our appreciation of the heavenly calling. We make *far* too much of this life from one standpoint, from another perhaps we don't make enough of it. From one standpoint we make far too much of it, that if we don't see everything accomplished here and now in this lifetime, and all our hopes and expectations realised, then we're disappointed beings. The Lord never looks at it like that at all.

Never has anything been made perfect in the lifetime of any one believer except the Lord Jesus. It's like that. On the other hand perhaps we do not make enough of the *tremendous* importance of what the Lord is trying to do with us *in* this lifetime. However, be that as it may, there is this that stands over our lives now, these lives here, it's this tremendous heavenly calling unto which we have been apprehended by Christ Jesus. But unto the realisation of that, or what Paul calls the 'attaining' unto that, certain things are necessary. And in this message to the church in Laodicea the Lord makes perfectly clear what is essential in the final issue: this Man. And He does that in the first place by presenting Himself in certain terms.

You notice how He introduces Himself here: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God". That may not be very clear as to what it really means. Well, I suppose everybody is quite clear on the first, if you aren't, then you're terrible hypocrites for I've been hearing a lot of 'amens' tonight! That prayer drew out many 'amens' tonight. And we're accustomed to using that word. Is it just a word? Is it just something we tack on at the end, or at a certain point? Is it a habit, a custom? What do we mean? No, we understand that the meaning of that word 'amen' is: verily, truly, positively, yes! We mean it!

"These Things Saith the Amen"

The Amen, the One in Whom and about Whom there is no uncertainty or indefiniteness.

My dear friends, if you and I at all value our salvation, we owe it to Him Who was so *thorough* in the work that He did for our salvation. Where should we be if He had been indifferent about our

salvation? If it had been a willy-nilly matter with Him whether we were saved, whether He was neither cold nor hot about this, where should we be? No, everything about that work of redemption sees Him as One Who, without any reserve whatsoever, or two minds, divided heart, *gave* Himself for our sin that He might redeem us unto God and from all iniquity. He did not stop half way, thank God. He did not suffer Himself to be turned aside or to be influenced by secondary interests; not at all. He is the girded Servant of the Lord. He came, as we have sung, from the mansions of glory having laid aside His robes of comfort and ease... girding Himself as a servant He's come forth, on business and thorough-going business. He's finished the work. These things saith such a One.

"The Faithful and True Witness"

The faithful and true Witness, you see, these are strong, emphatic words. He has been *faithful*, absolutely faithful.

The apostle Paul called upon Timothy to remember Jesus Christ who before Pontius Pilate gave His testimony faithfully. Yes, He was a faithful witness and a true... the point is, and the underlining is that everything here is *emphatic*, is positive, is definite, is real, is utter! It is unreserved.

"The Beginning of the Creation of God"

How does that come into this? Well, first of all we've got to get that word 'beginning'. It is not the word that means the first of the creation, that He was the first one created and then there were a lot more after Him created. It is not that word at all, [it is] the Greek word "arche" which means the source of everything, the fountain head of everything, the One in whom and from whom everything has come and Who is Himself the Standard and Model of everything. That is what we mean when we speak of an 'archi-itect' - one who produces the model, out of whom comes that which is to be; the source of everything. And that's the word here, the beginning of the creation of God.

How? See Him coming forth - for it says that, "In Him and through Him and unto Him were all things created, *all* things were made by Him", that's the Scripture. Was He lackadaisical in the creation? Was He careless in it? When the thing was completed, the evening of the sixth day, was there a lot left to be desired and a lot that needed improving upon? No, the verdict is, "It is *very* good", it is very good. The Divine verdict. He had done His work thoroughly and well, He had applied Himself to it.

What we now, even in a wrecked creation, a ruined creation, can trace of His creative fingers, impresses us with the wonder of it, the wonder of the Mind there, the wonder of the Power there, all there. My point is, dear friends, that this is only one further, it's the third phrase that bears upon this one thing: you're dealing with Somebody Who is very thorough! Thorough in creation, thorough in redemption, and thorough in His own person and His own witness. And that is how He is introduced to Laodicea, as though He would say, "This, this, and this alone will bring you to the end: such a spirit, such a mind, such a devotion, such a thoroughness, such an amen disposition is *essential* if you're going to reach the end. You have got to mean business! You've got to mean business to reach that goal and obtain that prize." That's perfectly clear as the basis of His speaking to Laodicea.

And He goes on then to show the Laodicean's attitude of mind and heart will never get *them* there, never get *them* there. "I have this against thee, thou art neither hot nor cold". There's *all* the difference between sitting with Him in His throne and being spewed out of His mouth and those are the alternatives resting upon this matter of downright and utter committal, devotion, and *persistence* unto God's great End. It's like that.

Then He analyses this thing and in so doing indicates some things, other things, more things, essential to the attaining. Notice: "Because thou sayest I am rich and have gotten riches and have need of nothing". We know Laodicea was a very wealthy city, it was the great banking centre of Asia minor, and which, and out from which, all the wealth of the province flowed. And the Lord took hold of that. They were proud of their wealth in Laodicea, the world was, but in the church at Laodicea there was a complacency, a satisfaction, a sense of being quite sufficient, of having got there and there was not much more to do about it.

"Rich and Increased in Goods and Have Need of Nothing"

The Lord says, "That will never get you to the prize, that will never get you to the prize! One *essential* if you are to come to that for which I have apprehended and chosen you, one essential is and must remain, a sense, a deep sense of your own insufficiency, of your own *need*, of there still being *far more* in Christ than ever *you* have discovered or possessed." It's this sense, deep sense, of spiritual need which is essential! *Any* kind of gratification or satisfaction that you haven't much further to go or to gain... you're content with the little, the little that you've got or perhaps you want a little more. But here is the spirit of the great apostle, and we've discerned it over Laodicea: "And I would have you know, I would have you know of my travail, my conflict for them of Laodicea".

Dear friends, anything in the nature of settling down with less than God's *full* content of Christ as our calling, will rob us of the prize - will rob us of the prize. It will just be the people who are deeply, *deeply* conscious that they have not attained, neither are they already complete, but who have *yet* everything to gain in Christ, however much they may have. That is the spirit, the mind, the disposition that is here demanded of Laodicea.

Then: "So I counsel thee because thou knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked: I counsel thee, first of all, to buy of Me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich". This is not buying salvation. Salvation is without money and without price. If there is something to be secured, it is not salvation by our effort or our works or even our earnestness. Not that, that's of grace. But *being* saved, we are saved unto something that will draw us out and extend us to the full in the matter of *faith*. And it is in the fire, in the *fire* that faith is refined and will be the currency by which the crown is won. I'm not going to dwell upon all the details here; I just want you to catch the *spirit* of this without an exhaustive exposition.

"Thou knowest not that thou art poor, thou knowest not that thou art blind... I counsel thee buy of Me eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see."

"Thou Knowest Not That Thou Art Blind"

Here again is a local touch taken up. In connection with one of the temples in Laodicea there was a famous medical school. And from that medical school, all over the Greek and Roman world an eyesalve went. It was famed for this ointment for eye trouble. Everybody knew what this meant in Laodicea and yet, and yet, right there in the precincts of the place where the world was getting its natural eyes healed, the church was blind. Spiritual blindness was there. "Knowest not that thou art blind?"

Let us say right away without too many words, an absolute *essential* of reaching that end of God is to *have a vision*, to have a spiritual vision. I ask you, my dear friends, every one of you personally, now to challenge your own hearts: have you got a spiritual vision? Are you drifting on from day to day? Are you going on without a mighty incentive for the Divine eternal purpose? Are you in the shadows

or in the dark as to what it all means, and what the end is intended to be? Or is there before you, before your enlightened spirit, a clear vision of what God has *determined* as the issue of all things *and* has called you into in fellowship with His Son? Are you *clear* about it?

You know quite well that no one ever gets anywhere without a vision. An artisan will never get anywhere without a vision. No one will ever make any progress unless they clearly see what they are after, what they are aiming at. In any realm of life, in order to get somewhere, you want to know where it is and what it is you're going to. And here, an *essential* is that you should see! The whole force of these letters and the presentation of the Lord Jesus is a *revelation* that is going to *master* our being; a revelation of Jesus Christ that shall capture us and draw us on and make us *people of a purpose*, people who *know* where we are going and what we are going after.

Are you like that? Have you got the vision of God's eternal purpose in Christ for the Church, into which you have been called by His grace? Have you got the vision? Is that something that is coming down into your life continually? Are you tired of hearing that phrase: "the eternal purpose... the eternal purpose"? Has it lost its music, its charm, its captivating power? Ah, that's Laodicea, you see: lost vision. Lost vision. That is *essential* to our eyes.

"I counsel thee to buy of Me eyesalve that thou mayest anoint thine eyes that thou mayest *see*." What do you mean when you talk like that figuratively and symbolically, "Buy of Me eyesalve"? Well, again, I've only to take you back to such familiar words in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "That He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened that you may *know* what is the hope of His calling". There it is! Buy eyesalve? That means lay yourself out with all your being before God that the Holy Spirit will open the eyes of your heart, give you to see what God means for *you* as a part of His Church. Buy eyesalve.

"Knowest Not That Thou Art Naked?"

"I counsel thee to buy of Me white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest". Again, Laodicea was famed as a manufacturing centre for a beautiful fleece which they cultivated in their surrounding fields and made wonderful garments which were world famed. A glistening fleece of Laodicean manufacture. They knew what it meant. Here, in a place where everybody knew of this beautiful garment's material, that people were proud of wearing those Laodicean garments, right in the presence of it all, as the Lord looked at them, He saw them naked. But they didn't know it, they didn't know it: "Knowest not that thou art naked?" He saw them as they were by nature.

And you know, dear friends, when our eyes are opened about ourselves, the one thing we want is to get covered up somehow. As soon as Adam's eyes were opened, the one thing he wanted was to get covered up, he went and hid himself. And we know ourselves, and of course you know what I'm talking about, when we begin to know ourselves in the light of God, one thing we feel to need is "Oh, for a covering. Oh, for a hiding... oh, to get out of the way, out of the scanning of those eyes, if only we could hide ourselves from ourselves!" This is no pleasant view when we begin to see ourselves... but they didn't know it! That's how they were, that's how God saw them, but they had no sense of nakedness. They were priding themselves in the garments of their own flesh, their own making.

Again, the Lord says quite clearly, if you are going to reach the end, you must have a very, very poor opinion of yourself and realise your *absolute need* of a clothing that you can't make for yourself: the white raiment of Christ's own righteousness. That's your only way to the end. So Paul says "That I

may gain Christ, not having a righteousness of mine own, but the righteousness which is of God through faith" - that's the white raiment. We've got to sense our *need* of that because of our deep and overwhelming sense of our own unrighteousness. These are the people that are on the way to the throne! Any sense whatever, or degree of self-righteousness, of being at all fit, will put us out of the running for the prize. This may be comforting for most of us. But this is, after all, the gospel, isn't it? And it all just amounts to this: that on the one side of this great argument, the Lord is saying you've got to be a people who are characterised by such a strong sense of *need*, which only the Lord Jesus can supply. You've got to be a people like that if you're going to get there to the place where you're called. How different this is from the whole world's attitude! Why, the world's attitude is *always* certain fitness, certain ability, certain self-sufficiency and self-importance to receive the prizes.

It's not the spirit of the world to feel absolutely unfit and unworthy and worthless! That's not the spirit of the world, but this is the spirit of Christ and this is the spirit called for. "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten". These people are a chastened people. Well, some of us know a little about that... what it is to be chastened. "But as many as I love, I reprove and chasten". Then the appeal:

"Be zealous"

Be zealous! That word simply means: be on fire, be burning. Be not like that stream that runs alongside of Laodicea, which is not a hot stream nor a cold stream. It was well known what He meant. There it was, a river just by the city, of tepid water - neither one thing nor the other. "Be not like that, but be zealous, be hot therefore and repent, behold I stand at the door and knock." We could dwell much upon that, but it has been dwelt upon so much, it just means this: that where conditions obtain such as these: no sense of the need of Him, no sense of our own undone condition and helpless condition, well, the Lord is outside of that, He's not inside that at all. He's outside of that. But He says:

"I Stand at the Door and Knock"

That knocking may mean many things, many things. The Lord is trying to get on the inside by many a form of knocking. And then this: "If any man open the door... I will come in... will sup with him, and he with Me." Looking at that word 'sup', I find there are three words, one that applies to the Greek breakfast which was but a bit of bread and a drink and that sufficed. Another was another a little larger meal that they had during the day; but there's another word which is used for the *full* meal of the day, and that is the one here. "I will come in and there will be a *full* meal." You see, everything that you look at in this part of the Word is something positive isn't it? Something full that the Lord is after, not something partial, not just the early morning scrap with which you start the day, but the *full* meal! He's after fullness. "I have come in and there will be fullness." It's all that!

Well, He calls for us to be of *that* mind, of *that* spirit, of *that* disposition, for again, he says it's just the people who have but One Thing: "This *one* thing I do..." leaving the things which are behind, all the things, and having only One Thing, "This one thing I do, leaving the things which are behind I press toward the mark of the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus".

Oh, dear friends, *don't be satisfied with less than God meant for you when He saved you*. Don't settle down to something that is not His *full* thought for you. Don't you be robbed of your prize by any compromises of any kind or any carelessness. Be you an "amen" man, an "amen" woman. May our churches be like that, be like that, that everybody can say, "Those people know where they're going, what they're after, there is no doubt about them, they're on business bent! They're not just a people either drifting or just having meetings, they're people who are marked and characterised by a sense of

a great Meaning, a great Purpose." The Lord make us like that.

Chapter 7 - Christ Revealed as God's Purpose

The Lord has led us in these days to be occupied with the revelation of Jesus Christ. So far, John the apostle has been our interpreter. We are going now to allow Paul to say something to us about this matter.

I turn you, therefore, to his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4 at verse 6: "Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Place alongside of that the words from his letter to the Galatians, chapter 1 at verse 15: "When it was the good pleasure of God, to reveal His son in me." It was the good pleasure of God, to reveal His Son in me - shined into our hearts in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is Paul's way of describing his great life revolution. This is his personal testimony as to what happened when he saw the face of Jesus Christ. And as you see, he likened that to the Divine fiat in creation: "God who said, 'Let light be', has repeated that in a spiritual way in my heart". The implication clearly is that what happened in creation when God commanded light to shine, had happened *in* Paul when he saw the face of Jesus. And when you apply that to such a man as Saul of Tarsus (later Paul) the implications are indeed tremendous.

It's a tremendous confession on his part because when God said at the beginning in creation, "Let light be" - there was *no* light. All was dark. "Darkness was over the face of the deep". And here is this man, *such* a man as we know him to have been, with all his claimed enlightenment, here is this man saying: "Until I saw the face of Jesus, that's how it was with me". He would never have admitted that before, that he was in the dark, and all was darkness to him; he would have claimed to be one of the most enlightened of men! Here, when he saw the face of Jesus, he said, "Until then, I realise now that the primal darkness at creation was *my* condition spiritually". More than that, when God first said, "Let light be" everything was in chaos, a state of disruption, disorder - yes, chaos. "The earth was without form and empty." And Paul dares here to say, "After all, with all that I had, and had learned and knew, and claimed to be, until I saw the face of Jesus, that's how it was for me: chaos, chaos!" And still again, until God said 'let light be' there was utter desolation and barrenness - really nothing there at all! Paul means what he's saying as he realised.

Oh yes, you will find plenty in his writings afterward and utterances to bear it out, that for him the face of Jesus meant Light as over against darkness. Not just some more light, but the mighty *contrast* between Light and darkness. Seeing the face of Jesus meant for him order out of chaos, meaning out of meaninglessness, and still, seeing the face of Jesus meant for him fruitfulness out of barrenness and desolation.

I say the implications are tremendous, but Paul quite agreed with all that, indeed he does. And dear friends, although the method and the manner of the beginning of our Christian life and experience may differ (indeed there may be many different ways in which we come into new life in Christ) however many may be the ways, those should be *the* features and characteristics of everyone's coming into that relationship with the Lord Jesus. It should be as passing truly from darkness to Light. Not just getting some light, but the difference between day and night, and the darkest night and the brightest day; between chaos, confusion, disruption, and order - beautiful order and meaning.

Between emptiness, hollowness, a void, and fullness and fruitfulness and plenty. It should be like that in every case.

But note: the main and the great point in all this is that it was all in the *face* of Jesus Christ.

In the Face of Jesus Christ

When it happened and Saul questioned, "Who art thou?" the answer came clear: "I am Jesus, I am Jesus". We can never, never grasp the *tremendous* (and we do not use exaggerated language when we say the *terrific*) implication for that man of that word 'Jesus' at that time. All this, *all this* in the face of Jesus! It's there that I want to spend a few moments because that is really the focal point, and very much can be said, but we want really to feel the force of this message.

Of course we know that the use of the term or word 'face' is metaphorical. In the original language the word means more than just 'countenance', it carries with it also the idea of the person or personality. We understand that, that metaphorically the face is the expression of the person. And so everything was in the Person of Jesus Christ that Paul saw and came into.

Now this is the thing that I want to stress right at the outset, that if you and I, dear friends, are going to make anything like the progress that Paul made as a young convert and as a growing Christian, and if we are going to have anything of the weight that he has had in spiritual impress and impact, and if we are going to count in any degree as he counted in the work of the Lord, one thing is absolutely essential. And do get hold of this. The youngest Christian get hold of this and everybody else, that if we take our salvation, our conversion, or anything that has to do with it as something in itself, there's going to be limitation.

We have got to see every thing in the light of the *Person*, Jesus Christ! That is, we have not to take this as a gift - salvation as a gift - or anything else of the Christian life as a gift in itself. We have got to look at that and say: "What does that signify as to the Giver? What does *that* signify as to Christ? What does that mean as to the Source of my salvation?" You may not grasp the point, but it is of infinite importance, because *all* progress in the Christian life and *all* power in Christian service comes from *not* the grasping, the apprehending, and the enjoyment of salvation as such, but *seeing Jesus!* Because, you see, Jesus is the sum total of *all* Divine fullness.

In a long experience in Christian ministry and work, I have moved much amongst Christians and I have had a lot to do with what we may call "mission centres", "mission halls". Larger or smaller, in some cases a very large number of Christians meeting there, and listening either to their prayers or to their singing, taking note of their Christian life... There they are, they've been Christians for *years*, *decades*; and all they've got to talk about is the day when they were saved, all about when they came to the Lord, when the Lord found them - they're back there. And when you come to these people - who have *years* of Christian life - with anything beyond the most elementary, they don't know what you're talking about - it's another language, they just can't follow it - you've got nothing to work on! They've not grown up, they cannot take solid meat. All they want, as they say, is the 'simple gospel', "Let's have the simple gospel".

Now, that is not meant to be a criticism or a judgment, but an illustration. What have they done? They've taken salvation in itself and not seen salvation as only a *part* of something *far*, far greater, and more immense; and that greater fullness is *Christ!* It is the thing and not the Person! And it makes all the difference. See, I come back here: what does explain Paul's *bounding* onward in the Christian life, his *rapid* spiritual progress, his stature spiritually and his tremendous impress upon the

dispensation? The answer is: he saw in the face of Jesus everything. Everything!

For, you see, Paul was a Jew and both personally and nationally, the quest of the Jews was for light, light! They were always in quest of light, they were trained to be the most enlightened, but light was what they were after all the time. Light in relation to God, and God and man, and man and God. And Paul says of himself that although that was true of him as of all Jews, perhaps more so in his own case than many of his own countrymen; all that quest for Light did not begin to be answered until he saw the face of Jesus Christ. This was such a *tremendous* thing, such an *overwhelming* thing for him!

The Christian life and everything to do with it is inclusively and fundamentally *a revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart*. It *may* be there in the Word. Now note: Paul probably knew the Old Testament as well as anyone and better than most - it was all there! But not until this happened did he see his Old Testament; when he saw it in the face of Jesus Christ. You will never know your Bible truly, as it needs to be known for *spiritual* effect, until by the Holy Spirit you see Jesus Christ everywhere. Not the Bible, not books of the Bible, not the analysis of the books of the Bible, not the themes and the subjects of the Bible, but in and through them all: the face of Jesus. That is, *how He* is signified here, *how He* is implied here, what this means where *He* is concerned. That is the key. Paul never had that key until he saw the face of Jesus and then wherever he looked after that, *anywhere* in this universe - Bible or outside the Bible - he saw the face of Jesus. That face was clear to him wherever he looked.

Now, that is not exaggeration. You know sometimes if you look right into the sun, right into the sun, for some while afterward wherever you look you don't see the things that are there, you only see the sun. You're blinded to everything else. That is *exactly* what happened with Paul; he was blinded in a sense, to everything else, having seen the face of Jesus.

Everything in life, everything in character, everything in endurance, through trials and opposition and suffering, everything in victory over opposition and adversity, everything in service will depend entirely upon how much we have seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Make no mistake about it.

Dear friends, this, as we have said and as we've said in prayer here again this morning, is a very critical time in the history of the people of God, as it is in the history of this world. And if I'm not mistaken, this conference is set *in* a very critical time. We are *fast* moving into and more deeply into, the final testing of everything. Oh, how true that is literally, in some parts of this world. What an ultimate testing is taking place in the life of many of the Lord's people and the Lord's servants. And think not that we shall escape that, in some form or another, we are really going to be put to it. The world is going to move into a situation where every Christian will have their foundations most certainly and severely tested. You may be tasting that in a spiritual way now. How many people have said to me about this very time, "Why, what a battle it's been to get here!" All the unusual things happening... wouldn't happen otherwise; strange things. It all just happens when you've got something of the Lord in view. Oh yes, and those happenings are very often, very, very testing happenings; they could shake you.

Well, it's like that toward the end. I don't want to discourage you... but it's going to increase in that way. But you see, the point is this: even, even our salvation as such is going to be put to the test. Even all that we have really got is going to be put to the test. And it will not be too difficult for us to question our salvation, to question the Lord Himself if our Christian life is a kind of objective thing that it is made up of *things*: made up of meetings, made up of teachings, made up of fellowship, made up of beliefs. If it is made up like that, it will not be difficult for us to question the reality of the whole thing. The *reality* of the whole thing - does that sound a terrible thing to say? The *reality* of Christianity... it's not difficult to allow that question.

The issue? The issue is going to be only one thing: *how much this thing is a matter of God having shined into our hearts!* I've put it in a way which has caused a good deal of trouble, but nevertheless perhaps that itself is significant; that God has *revealed* it in us, what we have has come to us by *revelation* of Jesus Christ. I emphasize that does not mean something *extra* to the Bible, but that what is there in the Bible has, by the Holy Spirit, been *illuminated* in our own hearts. That this has come out of the Bible into us by an *act* of God, a *fiat* of God; we have *seen* that in our hearts. That that has become a *heart* matter with us when it's like that.

Well, I referred, I think yesterday, to the saintly Polycarp who was burned for the faith there in those days of the early persecutions. And, as an old man with his white hair and his saintly face, was being forced along by those cruel and wicked Jews to be burned on that day, an official standing by looked and was tremendously moved to see *such* a man being carried to such a fate. And he stepped up and he said, "Curse! Just curse Jesus and I will save you. I'll save you!" Said Polycarp, "Forty and six years have I served my Master and He has never done me a single injury. Do you think I would say something against Him to save my life? No." And so he went to the martyr's death. That's a heart relationship isn't it? That is something more than life, more than anything else. I say, it was that that carried Paul through all his sufferings; he'd seen the face of Jesus. It was *that* that was the strength and the substance of his great ministry, he'd seen the face of Jesus. It was that that made him the Christian that he was.

And please do not get mentalities about objective visions of the face of Jesus, that's not what I'm talking about at all - seeing a face. I'm simply meaning that there has come to you by the Holy Spirit in your heart, a knowledge of the significance of Jesus Christ in this whole universe in the counsels of God: the *revelation of Jesus Christ*. That's the light, the knowledge, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What strength that brings, what strength that brings!

I'm quite sure that there are some here today who have gone on for many years with the Lord and who could say with me, that if what we have and hold and teach had only been theory, we'd have been out of the fight long ago. We'd have been out of the fight long ago, no doubt about it. It is because, may I put it this way, we've *seen* something... where something is in the Someone. When you've seen, when you've seen, something is done. Oh, what effect it had with Paul, first of all look what a man it made of him.

Do you notice the context of those words that we read in Galatians, "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me, what did I do? Go and consult those who were apostles before me as to whether I was right? Wonder whether I was mistaken, whether this was according to tradition? No, not at all. I didn't go up to Jerusalem to confer with flesh and blood and talk it over and see whether I was right; this thing put me on my feet in such a way that there was no question for me about it. No one could add anything to this for me by way of confirmation as to the reality and the rightness of it!" So many dear Christians are all the time running around to others for advice for their Christian life and on this and that.

Now, please don't misunderstand me, get all the help that you can, but somehow it seems that some people can never stand on their own feet for any time together. They're not sure at all. They're not sure about anything, anything that arises they've got a question, they must get some opinion on this matter. Now, while you must have help and seek it, there is, after all, a fundamental, root thing that makes you *know*: where you stand - you stand in Christ by a work of God. Something's been *done*. And you can never question that. It put Paul in that position where, while he was not independent and he did later on go up and have a nice time of conference with Peter in Jerusalem for several days, and I suppose they talked over much, but that didn't happen until Paul had faced this whole issue for

himself and got it settled with him between himself and the Lord. It's like that. And all these other effects of a new creation started on their wonderful movement after he had seen the face of Jesus. It's like that.

The certainty and the assurance that was right at the root of his Christian life and service came because of this one thing: he'd seen everything in Jesus. *Everything...* in Jesus. What liberation that brought to him! What emancipation! We have often said here that there was no *power in this world* that could have turned that *rabid, fanatical Jew*, Saul of Tarsus, into a Christian and a lover of Jesus of Nazareth. No power in this world that could have done that, but just *seeing* Jesus himself in this way and that did it, that did it! He was emancipated, he was free! No wonder of all his writings the fiercest, the fieriest is his letter to the Galatians, the letter of our *liberty* in Christ and it begins with this: "God revealed His Son in me and that set me free from all other things."

There's no use telling people that this and that, and the other thing is a limitation and that they should seek enlargement by getting out of it. That is an unfruitful, unprofitable, indeed, that's a dangerous line to take with anybody. But again, if only we can bring *Christ...* with all His Divine significance and meaning and comprehensiveness to them, and the Holy Spirit can reveal Him in their hearts... oh, that will do it! That will do it! They will never again be content with anything that limits them to the grave clothes of religion. It delivered Paul from Judaism as nothing else would have done.

The way of an escape, the way of enlargement, the way of endurance is to see Jesus. It is not by learning, that is, it is not by the schools. Paul had all of the schools, he did... of religion. He didn't get it through the schools and we'll never get it through the schools, along that line of the technical instruction of things Christian or religious. This is not a merely mental, or academic, or intellectual thing at all. It's a work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, that's the foundation and may the Lord even now begin to shine into our hearts. I want to go on just for a little while in answering the question: what did Paul see in the face of Jesus Christ?

Yes, he saw the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ - a comprehensive statement. What *did* Paul see in Christ? If you like to drop out the word 'face' you can. What did he see when he saw Jesus Christ by Divine illumination? And I suggest to you that the first thing that he saw was Christ as the Purpose of God.

Christ as the Purpose of God

If there was one thing that was true about Saul of Tarsus, it was that he was a man of purpose. He was a *purposeful* man, there's no doubt about that. He was bent upon something, he was after something, he was in quest of something, he was on full stretch for something. That is, he was characterised by this spirit or sense of purpose. Now, as a Jew, and a member of the Jewish nation, his whole horizon was *Israel*. For him, all Divine purpose was centred in Israel. It was the nation that stood at the heart of the purpose of God, for him, that nation as in ascendancy over all the nations, superior to all the nations, ruling all the nations, having that central place in the midst of the nations, to make all the nations serve it, and well, yes, to serve all the nations. This was what Divine purpose meant to Saul of Tarsus, as it meant to every Jew, every member of the Jewish nation. That was the horizon.

That was all temporal, that was all earthly, albeit it was religious. But that was the horizon. That spelt purpose for every Jew. And inasmuch as Saul of Tarsus was a Jew plus, you can see how that idea of Divine purpose for his own nation was *intensely* strong for him. Let anybody call that into question!

That really was the cause and the reason for his *vehement* antagonism to Jesus. You know quite well that that was why the Jews crucified Jesus. They said, "If we let this man go on, the Romans will come and take away power, our nation, our kingdom." And Saul was one of them. He saw that Jesus setting up another kingdom was a *menace* to Israel and all Israel's heritage. That, for him, was the meaning of Divine purpose. When he *saw* the face of Jesus Christ, all that was changed! All that was changed: his horizon expanded to the universe and what a universe it is that is presented to us in his letter to the Ephesians! What an immense expanse and *range* of Divine purpose that comes out - "Called according to His purpose Who worketh all things out to the counsel of His own will from eternity to eternity". Divine purpose!

Poor little Israel, shrinking, and shrinking, and shrinking, until for him, while he would that they would be saved and give anything to have them saved, they no longer occupy that place. His horizon has become universal. And again, the temporal, the temporal has given place to the spiritual and the eternal. He's talking about every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies unto the ages of the ages. These, you see, are all terms which *explain what happened* in this tremendous revolution in which Paul's horizon was pressed out to the uttermost bounds. He saw *all* this in the face of Jesus, *Jesus* signifies *this!* *Jesus* is the embodiment and the sum of Purpose from eternity to eternity! It is the purpose *in* Christ Jesus; that is his language. *HE* is the Purpose of God and it's not of this earth, temporal or temporary, material and transient; but of heaven, of eternity and it's *all in Him!* Summed up in Christ - the fullness of all things.

If only we could, what a tremendous amount we could draw in of quotations from Paul about this, God's purpose concerning His Son that He should fill all things and that He should be the fullness of all things; all things should in Him dwell, all things should be gathered together into Him! Indeed, his world has enlarged and all the barriers have broken down. Dear friends what does this *mean* to us?

This is not just a beautiful story or description of what happened to a man. I'm speaking of spiritual principles! If you and I really *did* get a sight of the significance of Jesus Christ, we really *did* see the glory of God in His face, we can *never* be little! We can *never* be just tied up in our little local things. We can never be sectarian or anything like that at all, we should be all-embracing. We could not (we get into a lot of trouble because we could not and would not) *accept* the confines of human systems and Christian departmentalisms and all that. You're emancipated right out when once you've seen the Lord Jesus and all that is silly nonsense - churches and chapels and playing at things - no! Christ is *far*, far greater and vaster than all this. For enlargement you just need to see Him! For deliverance you need to see Him!

What happened to Paul, and Paul's universality of vision and ministry, Paul's spiritual and heavenly impact upon this earth through the centuries, is due to this: he saw in the face of Jesus Christ the greatness of God's purpose for this universe - that the universe was Christocentric. Not Israel-centric but Christocentric.

He saw then that Divine purpose is centred in Christ. And that revelation, that seeing, that apprehending, brought with it certain other things. First, it brought with it the understanding and recognition of God's energy in relation to Christ. God's *energy* in relation to Christ.

He came to see that the creation was for, through, and unto Christ. And all the energies of the Godhead called forth in creation (and they're tremendous energies, tremendous energies) called forth in the creation of this universe, those energies in creation were working toward *Christ's inheritance*. The tremendous energies in creation again were unto Christ for, "Unto *Him* were all things created,

things in the heavens, things in the earth". Unto Him! The mighty energy of God in creation, in changing chaos to order, light to darkness, the darkness to light, and emptiness to fullness; all that was the mighty, mighty power of God, but it was unto His Son. The end is that He should be the Heir of all things, for He was appointed Heir of all things and He was to come into His heritage at last.

We've been dwelling in the book of the Revelation and these are the final movements to the kingdom becoming the kingdom of our God and His Christ - the inheritance of His Son. But that's only a mere fragment of the whole story of Divine energies. *After* that creation we see the fall of man and the fall of this earth. And it's a tremendous fall, it's not just a moral fall, a moral collapse. We dare not stay to contemplate the *immensity* of the thing that happened when Adam disobeyed God and what he dragged with him, and all the *tremendous* forces that were focused upon him from the outside spiritual world to make him do it. Yes, it was a fall indeed, involving *tremendous and far reaching things*, as we very well know, [has passed].

But does God abandon, does He give up? He at once reacts, reacts to that, and with new application and new energy proceeds along His line - the same line - toward His Son. And He immediately gives intimation that all this that has happened, which has come from the great usurper, the serpent, the devil, will one day *in His Son* come [under His heel] and be crushed forever. Immediately He reacts! And you and I, dear friends, know what power is called for to bring that about - the energy of God concerning His Son. God said that the Seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. That's not a fanciful statement, that's a *terrific* cosmic conflict! The battle of the ages, but at last we see it: forces in the heavens hurled down, no more place found for them, and cast into the abyss. It's done! But this is the energy concerning His Son. And that again is but a fragment.

The people in whom all this was to have its illustration and display as a kind and token - Israel - we find them, because, because of their failure, spiritual failure, follow on in the way of the covenant in the bondage of Egypt and what bondage! You see, God has taken pains to let us know that *this* thing was a thing of *tremendous* spiritual power. We are impressed aren't we, with how Pharaoh could stand up to it! Why, surely he'll let them go after that, even the first judgment, and the second, and the third! No, not a bit of it. We're amazed! I venture to say that *you* wouldn't hold onto anything if you had a little bit of that. Here it is, and God is *drawing out* this thing, extending it to show what terrific force there is behind this whole matter. And then finally with one blow He smashes the whole thing and delivers those people and forever their deliverance from Egypt becomes the Old Testament illustration of the *exceeding* greatness of His power! Always refer back to that as the example of God's exceeding power: deliverance from Egypt. But it's all in line of His Son, the Son's in view. It's the energy of God, you see, moving on.

I've missed the flood, another thing: God's reaction to a departure [of the world]. And so you must go on pursuing this through the Old Testament - Israel coming through the wilderness to the border of the land and then again the whole thing breaking down by unbelief. Did God give it up? No, that land forever stands as a type of His Son and it's His fullness into which He's going to bring a people and therefore He cannot give it up in light of the spiritual meaning. He cannot give it up and say, "Well, I must abandon My purpose". Not at all. Let *that*, that generation fail, He'll have another, and He'll bring them in. And see the mighty energies of God in that new people as they take possession and overcome in the land.

Failure again and you have exile in Babylon, Chaldea. Surely God's purposes are defeated now... the land lies desolate, the city is waste, and the people are gone. No! "For your sake have I sent to Babylon and have *brought down* all their mighty ones". The remnant shall return! But this is not something in itself, it is still with the object, the ultimate object in view: the kingdom of His Son

moving on. So we go on, it's like that.

We come, as we have been in this book of the Revelation, where His Church is suffering untold agonies, persecutions and martyrdoms... but how does it end? Well, it just ends in God's victory, God's power, God's energy. Does it? How? His Son is at last on the throne! That's the point. The purpose of God, calling out the energies of God; all in relation to His Son!

And what I have said to you is only what is contained in Paul's writings, I haven't added or imagined, I've given it to you and I've given it to you imperfectly, it's all there. This is what Paul saw! The Purpose of God, drawing out the *energies* of God, he puts it in one so familiar phrase, "The exceeding greatness of His power which is to usward who believe according to that working of the strength of His *might* which He wrought in Christ in raising Him from the dead and setting Him at His own right hand far above all rule and authority and every name that is named". The exceeding greatness! The energy of God in relation to His purpose concerning His Son... Paul saw that in the face of Jesus Christ. May I repeat, if we see something of that, it's going to be a tremendous strength to us. It's going to mean tremendous enlargement, enrichment and strengthening to see us through at last.

Now, because of my warning not to put too much on you at one time, I'll stop there, although there is so much more of what Paul saw as to that very matter - God's thought concerning His Son, the Purpose. We'll have another session yet perhaps.

Chapter 8 - Christ Revealed as God's Pattern

For the many friends who have not been with us through the earlier gatherings, let me say the very briefest possible word by way of retrospect. We have been led at this time to be occupied with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We feel that the Lord has led us in this way with more than the object of just studying some *thing*, but as related to the movements toward the consummation of this age, which we feel are so evidently taking place. And that therefore, in the final scenes, the Lord is culminating and consummating His Testimony on this earth, it is very necessary for His Church to be very clear as to their position. And that position is essentially and inseparably a matter of understanding exactly what the Christian life and the Christian Church is and the testimony which is entrusted to them.

So we have spent nearly three days with the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation, particularly noting that as that book does bring to this culmination and consummation of everything in the age, the Lord takes very careful pains to give a full-orbed, clearly-defined presentation of His Son. The significance of the very first chapter of that book is that Christ overshadows everything. Christ encompasses everything. Christ stands before everything as the Standard of God. And then all that follows - firstly in the dealing with the Church, and then with the nations, and then with the kingdom of satan, and then the bringing in of the eternal kingdom; all that is governed by what Christ *is*, by that matchless presentation of Himself. I go over that again in order that we may see where we are, the setting of what we are saying today.

It has been there that the main part of our time has found us. And this morning we went back, or over to the apostle Paul in this connection and began to consider the content of his words in the second of his Corinthian letters, chapter 4, verses 5 and 6: "We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, seeing it is God who said, Let light be, who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ*." This morning we spent our time with the *beginning* of what Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. We did note right at the outset that what he saw, or in seeing the face of Jesus Christ (which simply means that the Spirit of God gave him an inward illumination or revelation of Christ) what he saw in the face of Jesus Christ brought about a tremendous revolution both in his being and in his whole outlook. And the first thing that he saw in the face of Jesus Christ or in the Person of Jesus Christ, was God's Purpose.

Well, we spent our morning time on Christ as the Purpose of God. This afternoon we are going to be occupied with the second thing that Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ, that is, he saw:

Christ as God's Pattern.

I'm going to be quite simple in the way I speak and in what I say this afternoon, because there are many young Christians here. What I say, or the way in which I say it, I trust will help them particularly; but I trust it will be, if necessary, a corrective for us all.

It is exceedingly difficult to convey the impression that must have come upon Paul when he saw the Lord Jesus - that time of which he speaks when he said, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me" - the tremendous effect that it had upon that man. I wish it were possible to convey to you something of that, because it is not in the terms, the language, or even in the teaching; it is in the *impact* that we shall have the value. You may hear all that I have to say and missing that impact, it will be of very

little value. I want you, therefore, to try to enter into this in spirit.

You see, when Paul saw Jesus Christ by revelation of the Holy Spirit, a *whole system* collapsed for him. It *completely* collapsed! A whole mentality and way of thinking was *shattered* and turned upside down, inside out. He had to go right away into the desert. He spent two or three years there to think this thing out, to reconstruct everything in the light of *this*. It was indeed a *revolution* in that man.

And although we are Christians and although we have all the teaching of Paul and the other apostles, and we've got all the Christian tradition of the centuries, I do feel, dear friends, that there's the need of something like that with us. That we can have a system, a *Christian* system, just as thorough, just as complete, just as strong, with *all* its ramifications and paraphernalia as the Jews had - without the *tremendous impact* of it all. We can have it all... Christianity has become very largely only another Judaism in that sense; another system. I know it means much to you... I would take nothing from all the blessedness and reality that Christ is to you, but still I hold to this: that there's a great need of a revolution even in the Church and in Christianity at this time and the same kind of revolution caused by the *same kind of revelation* as came to the apostle Paul. I trust that you will at least *begin* to see something of this as I go on on simple lines this afternoon.

We have got to *see* as Paul saw Jesus as God's Pattern, Jesus as God's Model. What Paul has shown us in his writings is that he came to see that before ever this world was created, before any of this cosmic system was set up, God had in view the constituting of a universe on the basis of sonship: His Son. *He* was before all things. *He* was God's appointed *mind* concerning all things. And all things were to be made with the embodiment of the spiritual and eternal features of Christ. And when God reaches His End, and we come out with the work completed, finally, the thing that will obtain will be that in *everything perceptible*, everything in the creation revealing something of Jesus Christ. And oh, what a wonderful universe that will be!

If we meet a little bit of Jesus Christ anywhere in anyone today, what a blessed thing it is. But think of that being universal and nothing else to it! Now, that is what was in God's eye and mind right back there in the eternity past. And so God set in motion all the creative processes and, by reason of necessity, all the redemptive processes, all the elective processes, all the sovereign and providential processes of history to work out this Pattern, to perfect this design: all things according to Christ. That's Paul's great phrase: "*According to Christ!*" According to Christ - that *controls everything*. Now, Paul came to see that, and that vision, that perception and apprehension, or revelation, was the governing motive, power and object of *everything* for him, "For me to *live*", said he, "is Christ".

Now then, we can break that up into very simple questions and answers. What is a Christian? What is a Christian? How interesting it would be if you were handed out a half a sheet of note paper, all of you, and asked to put down your answer.

What is a Christian?

What is Paul's answer? What would your answer be? A person who believes certain things about the Lord Jesus? A person who has come to make Jesus their Saviour, who has given himself or herself to Christ? How would you put it? But what is Paul's answer? Now, that's the true one: a Christian is *a bit of Christ*, a bit of Christ! Every true Christian is *a bit of Christ*. We will bear that out more fully as we go along. From God's standpoint now (and He has laid the foundation for that) from God's standpoint *now*, the only thing that concerns Him, is of interest to Him in you, in me, as Christians, as believers, is that bit of Christ which we represent. That's all He's concerned with where we are

concerned; *the bit of Christ that we are*. He's concerned, first of all, to have it as a bit of Christ, and then He is concerned to *enlarge it* to something more of Christ, and to bring it to as *full a measure* of Christ as He can. And God's focus is upon the bit of Christ that has been made a part of us, that has been *deposited in us* by new birth.

By new birth God has deposited something of Christ in us. It may be a very much smaller thing than all its surroundings - and *we* are the surroundings, what we are - to begin with it may be, but it is of transcendently greater *intrinsic* value than all the rest. To God it is *the* value. He is prepared to do anything in relation to *that*. And so every true Christian from God's standpoint is just a bit of His Son. "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

Now I cannot gather up all the Scriptures that proves that, shows how that is, but that is the simple beginning. What *are you* when you become a Christian? What are you as a Christian? What is it that makes you a Christian? What is the Christian and the Christian life, what is it?

Well now, strip it of everything that has been gathered around it - men say, "This is what makes a Christian", this and that and the other thing comprises a Christian. Strip it of all that, that has become the *accretion* of Christianity and come right down to this: a Christian is a bit of Christ. Go about this world, get that mentality, realise that, I am - not when I'm in the meetings only, not when I'm with other Christians only, but wherever I am - I am a bit of Christ. In that measure, in that measure, where I am, Christ is. And people have got to know it, that it is not I, a professing Christian, a religious person, a person who belongs to Christianity, but *I in very reality as a bit of Christ Himself* I am there in this world. For me to live is Christ! Let's go on.

What is a Church?

What is a church? Now then, what was Paul's idea and mentality about churches? Do you really think that Paul set out on a campaign to set up churches? To bring churches into being? To build churches? Do you think that? Do you think that his vision, and his mission in his mind was to see churches set up all over the world? Think about that again, this is where we've got to rethink things.

When you use the word 'church' or 'churches' you're only meaning companies of Christians, you're only meaning groups living together, gathering together in certain places on a basis of corporate life. I believe most strongly that the apostle Paul would *repudiate the whole idea or suggestion* that he felt himself chosen of God to go about this world setting up churches. If you asked him what his business was in this matter, why, after having got the individual parts of Christ, in gathering them together and constituting them local companies, fellowships (churches if you like), if you'd asked him why... he would simply answer you in the simplest terms, I believe, and yet with very *strong* feeling and conviction: that there should be a larger expression of Christ in that place. And by as many bits of Christ brought together as possible, the measure of Christ should be as strong in that place as possible. In other words, just that *Christ* should be all the more there! He's governed by this whole Pattern of God - that *Christ* should fill all things! And he saw that two is better than one, and three is better than two in this matter and the more bits of Christ brought together (forgive me putting it like that, I must put it in simplest language) the more bits of Christ there are really brought together, so the stronger the *impact* of Christ in any place.

No, dear friends, it is not God's idea to set up churches or Christian fellowship centres or that sort of thing - institutions and what not - that's not His idea at all. Let's clear the whole mind on this matter. If any company of Christians fails in *this* respect: to be, there, a corporate and an adequate expression of the Lord Jesus, the *presence of Christ commensurate* with their numbers or their being there;

they've *failed in the purpose of their existence in that place!* There's no justification. I believe that that is *exactly* why the Lord said to Ephesus as the representative church in which *all* were included: "Repent or I will remove thy lampstand out of its place". *Although* there were so many commendable things, they were *things*: works, labours, yes toil, *things*... but evidently *the* Thing was lost sight of in the things. And *the* Thing which, and which alone justifies, and gives meaning to any local company of the Lord's people, is that not the people and not their procedure, and not their forms, but *Christ*, *Christ* is met, *Christ* is found. Anybody who is seeking Christ will find *Him* there and whether they are seeking Him or not they will meet Him if they go there. It is Christ!

So Paul would say, "Ephesus, Laodicea, Thyatira, Sardis, Corinth, anywhere; I'm not out to set up a Christian church there! I'm out to bring *Christ* there, to have Christ there!" And the bringing together of these, may I use the word again: bits of Christ, is only to increase the measure of Christ.

And if you want evidence from the other side that this is so, remember that the great enemy knows the implications of Christ; he knows the implications of the presence of Christ, and especially the presence of Christ corporately expressed. And if there's one thing that the enemy has set himself to do, it is to *destroy* the fellowship of the Spirit of Christ - to scatter the believers, to divide them, to *break up* this unity of Christ because he knows *that*, on the one side, weakens Christ, on the other side it strengthens his kingdom. Well, there's no argument there at all, there's no answer for that, that's a fact beyond any, any question at all that this matter of the *relatedness* of Christians is the most *contended thing* in this universe. What are churches? Why meet together? Just that. Just that. There's nothing other in the mind of God; Christ is God's Pattern.

Then what about those two great things that belong to the Church and the churches: baptism and the Lord's table? What are we? Well, ask everywhere what kind of a church are you, and what do you do, and, "Well, we believe in baptism", various forms given to the name in different times. "We believe in and practice baptism." Do you? You believe in and practice baptism of infants, as you call it. You, there, believe in and practice baptism of adults and believers. You believe a little water will do, you believe that a lot of water is necessary. However, baptism is a part of our order and system because, we believe, that it's a New Testament part of the Christian church and order. Is that all? Is that all?

See, you can never, never reach any conclusion of the whole matter by arguing about the right and the wrong of *this* method, or *this* time. Don't you try. The only way in which to settle this whole matter is to stand right back and say, "What, according to the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, does this thing *really* indicate?" And Paul will give us undoubted light on this matter. And he will tell us in his cumulation of statements by him in this. Why baptism? Do you want to know what it is? Yes, it's right, it's right, but it's not an ordinance, it's not a ceremony, it is not a rite, it is not a bit of ritual. Baptism is just the way in which Christians say: one whole thing has gone and Christ has taken its place. It's something that testifies to the fact that now all the ground is Christ's, we've died to all other ground. Everything else has died and been buried, and now on this ground of resurrection, it is only Christ! And if baptism doesn't mean that, it has no New Testament meaning. You see, it's related to this One Thing! It is not something to be just perpetuated and carried out because it's something that they did at the beginning. It is something which has got to be brought right up to date with every new believer, that they have definitely died and been buried to *all* that is not Christ! It is a position taken. And now they live, and they live *only* for Christ - it is Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ, it is *no longer I*... but Christ". That's utter isn't it? So it's not the thing, it's the meaning.

What about the Lord's table? Here again, we believe in the Lord's supper, the holy communion, or

the Lord's table; whatever phrase applies to the different [sectors]. And we have it, some once a quarter, and some once a month, and some once a week, and that's our order and our procedure, and that's what we believe is the way. Is that all? Is that all? "We must have, we must have the Lord's table, we must have the Lord's supper, because... because, well, they did it in New Testament times and it's quite clearly the Lord's will that *it* should be had..." *It, it, it!* See? That's where the whole thing breaks down. It's an *it*, it's some *thing!* What *is* the Lord's table? What *is* the loaf and the cup? It is the Church's and the believer's *continuous* declaration that *Christ* is their Life - that they have *no* life but Christ! It is all Christ. That's not going to communion service! You see the emptiness and hollowness of so much.

The meaning is good, all well meant... but oh, oh, the *power and presence of Christ* - that's the thing that matters; not the ordinance, not the maintenance of the order, but the *living* Christ. Christ is our Life; and that, not only individually and personally, He is that, He is *my* Life and my only Life - Bread and Wine - but He is the Life of the Church. He is Corporate Life.

Corporate Life

I earlier used that word 'bits' of Christ. It's an awkward word: pieces of Christ, fragments of Christ, for when you take the Loaf and break it and you all, twenty, thirty, fifty, hundred, two hundred, have that piece of the Loaf, is that a piece in itself? No, it's the Loaf in representation. "Seeing that we who are many are *one loaf*." One Loaf! One Loaf, one Body. The Lord's table is the declaration of that Life which finds us, joins us, and binds us and holds us together, so that divisions in the Church *nullify* the very meaning of the Lord's table. Divisions amongst believers rule out the very significance of the Loaf and the Cup; are a denial of it. It *cannot be* when you come to the Lord's table. It's a contradiction because it is Christ and Christ is not divided! Christ is not divided, Paul says that doesn't he? Is Christ divided? No.

The Lord's table is then a representation of Christ as the *abiding* Life of the Church, until He comes, until He comes - that Testimony to Christ. Just Christ, that's all. Oh, when you come to the Lord's table, do remember that. What are you doing? Just going through some thing that is a part of the church form and order, of Christian procedure? Oh no, I am here declaring one thing in two ways: firstly that Christ is my very subsistence. I have no life, I have no constitution, I have no maintenance, I have no continuance apart from Christ. He is my Existence. I declare that for myself, but here is a very searching thing: I declare that my fellowship with other believers in Christ is also my Life, that Christ is my Life collectively by fellowship, by oneness, by the unity of the Spirit and that if I break that, if I break that or allow that to be broken, if I fail to try and repair any breach between me and another child of God, I am simply saying that the Lord's table is a mere form - it's robbed of all its meaning, its real meaning, and I am strangling my own spiritual life. I am doing injury to my own spiritual life because my Life is not only an individual life, it's a collective or corporate Life. We depend for our Life upon one another, brethren. Satan will rob us of our Life by interfering with our relationships. Let there be no mistake about it, that can be very easily proved.

We go on... what is ministry?

What is Ministry?

Now, this doesn't only apply to those who minister. Any who minister can listen with all your ears, but those who are ministered to, what is ministry? Is it to make people know what the Bible contains as its subject matter from Genesis to Revelation? Well, that's important, and very good, and in some senses it may be necessary as a foundation. Is it to get up addresses by research and study and get it

off onto a company of Christians? Oh, I could go on like that, it's not pleasant.

What is ministry? Any ministry and all ministry that does not make possible and provide for an *immediate increase of the Lord Jesus*, is not the ministry of the Holy Ghost; is *not* the ministry of Christ. *All* ministry must have as its *immediate* object, the increase and the building up of Christ, in His people. That is the test; not that it is interesting, informative, or anything else, but that here Christ is being ministered, that I'm being brought right into touch with Christ. Christ is being brought into touch with me. Not a lot of words... no. I'm having to face up to the Lord Jesus in some way today, the whole issue of this word is: Christ! The living Christ! That is ministry. That is ministry, you see, it's like that, you can take all that I'm saying back to Paul. Take it all back, and take it back into this second letter to the Corinthians alone and you'll find that's it.

And then, for the present, because of the time, this final question: what is evangelism?

What is Evangelism?

You say evangelisation is the business of the church. True. What is evangelism? Try not to misunderstand me when I say that the end that God has in view is not just to get people saved - He wants them saved, He sent His Son that they should be saved - we cannot be too much concerned for their salvation, but that is not the end upon which the eye of God is resting. Evangelism, the salvation of men's souls, with God is a related matter. It is to people, the Kingdom of heaven with Christ, Christ-people; *more and more* in whom He may have His dwelling to be an out-shining of Himself. Listen: "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me that I might proclaim *Him* among the nations".

Evangelism is *not* to get so many people converted. Evangelism is *through* their being saved, to *increase* the measure of Christ in this universe! That's a sufficient and a much greater motive, I think, than to be able to count heads and say, "We've had so many conversions". Oh no, let us say rather, "Christ is getting more and more ground in this way!" A different mentality!

And I am not quite certain that the Lord is not very much reserved and straitened because of this wrong idea. We put it the other way. I believe that if really the whole concern in evangelism was *not* to be able to count heads and say so many converts and so many have signed the cards and so on and so on, but to say: "My, Christ is gaining ground!" I believe that if that were more the object and the motive, God would come into it more. Because I do believe, dear friends (and forgive me for putting it as my belief, that doesn't matter at all what I believe, but test it by the Word of God) that where Christ is the *One*, the *only*, the *full* Object in view, God's *interest* is the greater. God commits Himself. So it must be in all this, the individual, fragment of Christ.

Oh, to be here as Christ here, then the Father will be with you. For the local companies to be here in this neighbourhood as Christ, as Christ... God will commit Himself to that. So in everything else, everything else that we have mentioned: Christ, only Christ! *Christ* the Beginning, *Christ* the End, *Christ* All in all.

Chapter 9 - Christ Revealed as God's Provision

Now as we come to the close of this time together in which the Lord has been bringing anew into view the great end for which we, with all the saved, have been called - the great end of our salvation in the purpose of God, a very wonderful end, nothing other than union with Christ in His Throne in the government of this universe.

I'm sure that you have, as we've proceeded, become conscious of great need. Perhaps at times your hearts have trembled in the presence of the tremendous demands that all this makes. The question may have been with you: is it possible, *can* we ever reach that? The demands, requirements are so great in various ways if we are to attain unto that high and holy calling. It all perhaps seems too much for us. We might fear that we should fail, that we should come short, that we should not be able to go through. And our fear would probably have certain factors in it, for it is not just an abstract kind of feeling, there's certain things that we feel that we need. We know something of what those things are.

Now, today we have been with Paul in his words in 2 Corinthians 4:6 "It is God that said light shall shine out of darkness who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". We have been looking to see what it was that Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. And firstly, it was Christ as the Purpose of God and then secondly, Christ as the Pattern of God.

Now for a little while, in the third place, Paul saw in the face of Jesus, Christ as the Provision of God.

Christ as the Provision of God

And he saw that provision in various ways. The one thing that I'm quite sure happened to Saul of Tarsus when the Lord met him on that road on that day and he saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, I am perfectly certain that that was *the final blow to all his own self-righteousness*. I am certain that that day the bottom was knocked out of all his self-assurance.

Whatever he had thought of himself - and he tells it, what he thought of himself, he tells us in his letter to the Philippians what he thought of himself; he included the whole sum of his former assets with "concerning the righteousness which was of the law: *blameless*" the bottom was knocked out of that on the Damascus road. He'd had a very great sense of his own righteousness and the righteousness which was of the law. And from that moment when he saw the face of Jesus, there was no man on this earth more uncertain about his righteousness. And from that time onward this whole question of righteousness took a new, new turn for him. What a lot he writes about it!

Have you ever tried to gather up all that Paul wrote about this matter of righteousness, justification? [It was] one big question with him, one big matter, it seemed in a sense to overshadow everything else. If ever he, as Saul of Tarsus and as a traditional Jew had thought that he had a standing with God that was quite acceptable and quite good and quite unquestioned; all *that* went on the Damascus road. Why, right at the end, right at the end of his life, when he's writing his last letters before going to be with the Lord he said that, "My aim, my one aim is that I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness that is of mine own but the righteousness which is of God by faith".

It is a *tremendous* thing, this matter of *standing with God, acceptance with God, being able to have fellowship with a holy God*. What an undoing of the past, an emptying out of everything upon which he had rested! A starting all over again with one big question, one big issue, one big quest: how shall a simple man dwell with a holy God? But the answer he found in the face of Jesus. Yes, looking into the face of Jesus he saw that *all the righteousness* that he needed, all the righteousness that ever God needed for him and in him, Jesus was, for Paul, the Righteousness of God.

Now, dear friends, I know that is very elementary Christian teaching, but you know what I have been repeatedly emphasizing during these days, that it is *not* sufficient for us to have our Christian doctrine. When it comes to the end, the theories of Christianity, the doctrines, and the teachings, and the interpretations, and all the systems of Christian truth are not going to get us through. They are not going to get us through. It is only as these matters in Christ really are rock under our feet in the day of the tempest that we'll get through, and this is such a matter. It's always arising. This evil one in this universe, called the Accuser of the brethren, is ever and always on our track to undercut this whole matter of our *standing* with God, our *position* with a holy God. And we perhaps find this one of the biggest battlegrounds in our Christian experience.

Let me put it like this - perhaps I'm only suggesting things to you that you've never thought of, but whether you have put it in this way or not (and I'm only putting into language perhaps what has troubled your hearts without defining the trouble) let me put it like this. If we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, if He atoned for our sin, if we are no longer seen by God in ourselves by nature but in Christ, if we have received by faith in Him remission of our sins; then why are we dealt with by the Lord as though we were sinful creatures? Why do we suffer for our wrongdoing, our mistakes, our faults, our errors, our breakdowns? Why do we suffer if He suffered for it all? Why does it seem that we have to atone for the things that we do wrong if He atoned for it all? Now, I'm perhaps suggesting to you something you've never thought of, but isn't it just like that? That when we're in suffering, in adversity, in affliction, there sometimes comes a cloud between us and the Lord and immediately there's an accusation: "*This is judgment on you, this is punishment! This is because, because of this or that*". Have you never met that? It's like that always. There's always present this voice of accusation in the presence of adversity and suffering and difficulty, laying at our door because of, "Well, you see, we were wrong in this and in that...". Isn't that a problem? We have got to get *very* clear on this matter of our standing and of the provision of righteousness in Christ to undercut the work and the power of satan and for our own salvation in the day of adversity.

If trouble is coming, if suffering is coming, if we are going to have difficulties and adversities; there's going to be plenty of room for accusations and condemnation, plenty of ground for the enemy to work on. But we have got to be absolutely clear on this matter of the provision of *righteousness in Christ* in order to get through. There are two things to say about this. One is we must understand the meaning of righteousness. What is righteousness and what is unrighteousness? It's an important thing for us to understand that. And the other thing is, we have got to be able to cut clean in between the matter of our training and discipline and transformation, and the judgment of God. There's a great difference. Those are two different realms altogether. Let's look for a moment at this matter of righteousness.

What is Righteousness?

Or, what is unrighteousness? Our translation of the word is rather unfortunate; especially the Authorized Version is very misleading. In 1 John 3 in the old version it is stated, "Sin is the transgression of the law". Well, of course, the transgression of the law is sin, but it doesn't say that, and it doesn't *mean* that. If you look at a better translation (the Revised will help you) a more correct,

accurate translation is, "Sin is *lawlessness*". Lawlessness! That is unrighteousness. Now we can take an illustration from the Old Testament because John takes this illustration there, in that very chapter. He brings in, he introduces Cain and Abel. And he says, "Cain was of that *lawless one*". Now, if you look back in the Old Testament to Genesis 4 you find this: "Now, now in the process of time, Cain brought his offering..." and then you have the story of what happened: he brought his offering, built his altar, presented it to the Lord and got no acceptance whatever. No standing with God. God absolutely ignored the whole thing. And then that tremendous controversy between Cain and the Lord. But Abel brought his offering, built his altar, presented it, and the Lord signalled his acceptance by the fire. Abel got through.

John says, "He was of that lawless one", Cain. "In the process of time..." and the context will show you that there had been plenty of time for light to be given, and the light was that standing before God, acceptance with God, was on the basis of another life given to God, symbolised in the blood. That was the light, the light had come. But here is a man who is a lawless one of the evil one, you see? The evil one is called by Paul "that *lawless one*". That lawless one would *not* accept the light, be obedient to the light, refused to come under the law of any kind, especially the law of the blood of the Lamb. No standing; that's unrighteousness.

And the very essence and core of unrighteousness is *not* that you are an imperfect or sinful man or woman, it's a matter of your will in the presence of Light. Now, that's what Paul teaches, it's the reaction of our will when light has been given! Unrighteousness is *lawlessness* - refusing light. Don't you see that with all their pretended, assumed, claimed, proclaimed righteousness, the whole nation of Israel was set aside and rejected. Why? *Lawless!* They refused the Light. "*This is the condemnation, that Light is come, and man loved darkness rather than light.*" Because they are of that *lawless one*. That's unrighteousness.

Now, in the face of Jesus Christ what have you got? Ah, just the most perfect and utter opposite to the lawless one. The One yielding... it's the Lamb, you see, it's the Lamb: submissive, and yielding, and meek, and lowly, amenable to the will of God. "Not My will but Thine". One who is wholly and utterly under the will of God. No lawlessness. No rebellion. No independence. No superiority. Nothing whatever that came across His submission to the will of God. "He became obedient unto death, yea the death of the cross." There is your great Abel.

Now note: the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, as you well know, said: "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain *whereby* witness was borne unto him that he was righteous". The whole matter of righteousness for standing, dear friends, is *not* what we are as big or little sinners, for remember by nature Abel was no better man than Cain, no better man than Cain. He was of the sinful fallen race just as his brother. And it is not that we in ourselves are better, are good, are an improvement on someone else whom we would call Cain. No! We're all on the same ground. You know it as well as I do that there is just as much lawlessness in us by *nature* as there is in anybody by nature. But! Light is given! And we act toward the Light with our wills and are submissive and surrendered to the will of God. And that is righteousness. That is righteousness. No lawlessness. That brings us into a standing with God because that is Christ. That *is* Christ! The whole matter of righteousness in the case of Christ in His acceptance with God as our representative, was not that He was not made sin, for He was; it was that He so *utterly and completely* yielded Himself to the known will of God by faith in God, whatever that meant, whatever that meant; faith in God. He did the will of God and He stands.

You see, that is the meaning of baptism. In baptism, a figure of the cross, where He, humbling Himself and being obedient unto death can... what does He say about it? "Thus it becometh us to

fulfil all righteousness". How? Obedient unto death! Humbling ourselves, *then* the heavens are opened. "This is My beloved Son". See? Justified, accepted, standing with the Father. It's an attitude of will. If you are stubborn, rebellious, you will not, you just *will* not - then you are out of the running, you are out of court. For no matter what we may be as faulty, sinful creatures, in this matter of *standing* (mark you, I'm talking about standing now) we stand on the ground of a righteousness that is not our own at all. It's that righteousness perfected in *Christ* which God accepts for us. He is made unto us from God, *righteousness*.

Now, let me say this in passing on: *I doubt whether there will be a more fierce battleground for the Lord's people at the end than this one*. It's an amazing thing. I recently read again the life of such men, two men, Dr A. J. Gordon, one of the most saintly men, certainly one of the men most greatly used in his time, one of a few men who walked with God in those days. And then the other, A. T. Pierson, another one of the same kind, men who walked with God. And a third one, A. B. Simpson. Here you have three spiritual giants. Well, out of the three, at any rate two of them, right at the end of their course here on this earth, had the most terrible battle of all their lives on the question of their acceptance by God, their standing with God!

They passed into a time of such awful darkness as though all the forces of evil gathered around them and quenched the light and raised this question of their acceptance. Thank God that in both cases before they went, they got through and the light returned. But it's significant! It's significant that this is *the* battleground. And dear friends, whether it comes like that to us or in any other form, and in any other way, you and I need to be *absolutely assured* of this matter: that our *standing* is not on the ground of what *we* are, but on the ground of what *Christ* is.

It is so easy for us to sing, "Not what I am O Lord, but what Thou art", but when it comes to the test we forget all about that and we go down under what we are. We know what we are.

Now let me finish this bit for the moment by saying, that in the end, in the end we are just going to be forced back upon Christ, without any alternative. The Church will be forced back on Christ. You and I will be forced back on Christ! We will have no other ground on which to stand. And if, if then, we are not sure about Him and what He is for us to God, it's going to be a sorry lookout for us. But Paul looked into the face of Jesus Christ when all his mighty structure of self-righteousness had collapsed, the bottom had fallen out of that whole system of righteousness by works, he looked into the face of Jesus and saw a Righteousness that would carry him right through. He saw all the righteousness that he needed and one that would never collapse. Yes, Christ is God's Provision in the matter of righteousness.

But then there's another phase, and I know what you're all thinking about this, "Yes, but what about this other phase of what we are, after all, and our failures, and all this? 'We are that we ought not to be and are not that we ought to be...' are we to ignore that?" Not a bit, not a bit. You see that was one of the charges that the Lord brought against two churches in Asia: "Thou hast there those that hath the doctrine of the Nicolaitans". And that doctrine was, "Well, you're saved! You're saved, by grace... do as you like, live as you like, doesn't matter what you do, you'll be saved alright. Once in grace always in grace, it doesn't matter what kind of life you live! You can be worldly, you can sin, do anything, you're saved alright, nothing can alter that. None will pluck you out of the Father's hand." And He said, "Which thing I hate!" Which thing I hate: condoning wrong, not reckoning with evil in your life. Oh yes, it doesn't mean *that*, but there's all the difference, dear friends, between judgment, condemnation as out of Christ, without His righteousness, and the work of God in what the writer calls 'chastening', that is, child training... child training. Now here you have it: "But we all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from

glory to glory as from the Lord the Spirit".

When the Lord disciplines us - and He does - that does not mean that He has put us under judgment, under condemnation. It means that He is just going to make good *in* us by this discipline, what is true *about* us in Christ. All His disciplines are transformatory. You may not think so, sometimes you think they're making you worse; it does seem like that, but wait a bit, wait a bit... there's something gracious coming out of it, something beautiful.

You meet more of Christ in those who have the hardest time. Saints, I mean, real saints are the people who seem to have had the hardest handling by the Lord. It's like that. He is developing the character of Christ by what seems to be hard dealings; hard dealings. He's very faithful, very faithful. He knows... *He* knows what we perhaps would not believe, and His dealings with us are really going to be in the direction of *transformation*. This is what happens with *true* believers. It doesn't happen with unbelievers, if they are dealt with hardly they go from bad to worse and Paul says here when we are dealt with hardly we go from glory to glory! And though it may not seem like it or appear like it, it is true, it is true.

We cannot speak very much about ourselves, and our goodness, and the grace of God in us, but we do know just a little, that something has happened to us through our sufferings and our afflictions to change us a bit from what we were. At any rate we say this: *where would we be today*, where would we be today if the Lord hadn't dealt with us very faithfully? Very faithfully. But, you see, you must keep this line between the two things, that of judgment and condemnation, and that of child training, discipline and transforming.

Now then, what is the provision here for the standing? He's made the provision in the face of Jesus Christ, of Righteousness. Do you notice the last clause of the verse just quoted: "As by the Lord the Spirit". Thank the Lord for that, the Spirit has got this matter in hand; the Holy Spirit is the Custodian of Glory! The Holy Spirit is the Divine Provision to *change* us; He's at work upon it, it's in His hands. If we wonder however we are going to be reconstituted according to Christ, not only justified in Christ, but *reconstituted* and conformed to His image; leave it with the Holy Spirit. He's taken it in hand and He's going to do it and He will do it. Don't get back onto the ground of rebellion. While, while you hold your ground of faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will do it alright; make no mistake about it. "As by the Lord the Spirit".

Now I want to hurry to a close. The third question that arises, it arose for Paul and it arose very quickly for Paul, he was hardly off the Damascus road before the question of endurance began to be raised. Ah, well, you see, to begin with he had been the official envoy of the Jewish rulers and their commissioned agent to persecute the church and blot out everything to do with Jesus of Nazareth. And he was about his business very thoroughly and he represented the attitude and the spirit of those in Jerusalem who had sent him on this business. He was the very embodiment of them. He turned right round. On the side of the Christians what does he meet? Well, of course, he's got to meet what he'd been giving the others! He got to meet *all that* of which he'd been a part, as now against him and that pursued him down the years wherever he went. Oh, the wickedness of it, the suffering those Jews caused him everywhere... and there were other kinds of suffering. The enemy, the great enemy, was ever on his track.

He knew physical suffering, yes, very much physical suffering. He knew treachery, oh yes, every kind it's certain, he gives us the catalogue. Questions, a very, very real one: *how shall we get through?* In the presence of persecution, in the presence of affliction, and suffering, and adversity, and trial of every kind; how *shall* we get through? "And He said unto me: My grace is sufficient for

thee and My strength is made perfect in weakness". Jesus - the Provision of God to get through. "Christ in you the hope of glory". He looked into the face of Jesus and was ever looking into the face of Jesus with this question: Can I go through? Shall I get through? Shall I fail? Shall I breakdown? And ever came back from that Face: "My grace is sufficient for thee". I remember how Mr Spurgeon put that, he said, "The little fish, the little fish in the mighty ocean... wondering how he's going to cope and the mighty ocean says: 'Little fish, my waters are enough for you'". Little, little fish, be he Paul the apostle or anyone else: "My grace is sufficient for thee, My strength is made perfect in weakness". The answer of the face of Jesus to every need; Paul saw it all.

You see how I've had to hurry through it and merely skim the surface, but go away not with the exposition, not with the buildup of evidence, but just with the glorious fact: in each, in each case, each respect which proved, *proved* to be sufficient for *that* man, and if it could be sufficient for *him*, it can be sufficient for us. Righteousness? Yes, not our own but Christ's, that we may stand before God.

And in the daily need of being changed, the Holy Spirit given to us and ever present with us to work through our difficulties and trials to change us into the same image. And in our sufferings and afflictions, the Holy Spirit ministering grace to us. The grace of the Lord Jesus, all sufficient grace.

May we see the face of Jesus, may we see the Answer that comes back to all our need as we look into that face. May the Lord make this time together really to prove to be a time of looking into His face and being changed.