

Pioneers of the Heavenly Way

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Chapter 1 - The Fact and Nature of the Heavenly Way

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Some time before these messages were given, desiring to be quiet and away from many things, I went down into the country with my heart very much to the Lord for His word. In the early hours of the morning it seemed as though the heavens opened and everything became alive: it all opened up wonderfully, and centered in one phrase – "Pioneers of the Heavenly Way." That really does sum up the verses that we have just read, and, while we are going to think and perhaps say much about the heavenly way, it is this matter of pioneering the heavenly way that will be our main concern. It is necessary, to begin with, for us to consider to some extent the heavenly way itself, but I repeat that it is this whole tremendous business of *pioneering* that way that I believe to be the main concern of the Lord, and hence of ourselves, at this time.

The Earth Related to Heaven

The Bible begins with the heavens: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" - not 'the earth and the heavens'; the heavens come first. The Bible closes with the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven (Rev. 21:2); and, just as heaven stands at the beginning and at the end, so everything in between, in the Word of God, from the beginning to the end, is from heaven and to heaven. As it is in the natural realm, so it is in the spiritual. The heavens govern the earth and the earthly, and the earthly has to answer to the heavenly. It is the heavens, it is heaven, that is ultimate: everything has to be in the light of heaven, to answer to heaven, to come out from heaven. That is the sum of the Word of God, the whole content of the Scriptures.

This world, this earth, is not unrelated and alone. However important it may be in the Divine scheme of things - and certainly it is an object of great heavenly concern; perhaps the greatest things in the universe have taken place on this earth: God has come here in flesh, has lived here, has given Himself for this world; the great drama of eternal counsels has to do with this earth - nevertheless it is not apart, alone, it is related to heaven, and all its significance is by reason of that relationship. It takes its significance and importance from being related to something greater than itself - to heaven.

The Bible teaches that God is located in heaven. "God is in heaven" (Eccles. 5:2): that is the declaration. It teaches that there is a system, an order, in heaven, which is the true one and which is the ultimate one. In the end, it will be the reproduction of a heavenly order upon this earth which will be the consummation of all the counsels of God. Christ came down from heaven and returned to heaven. The Christian, as a child of God, is born from heaven and has his life centered in heaven, and the life of the child of God will be consummated in heaven. The Church, that masterpiece of God, is of heavenly origin, of heavenly calling, and of heavenly destiny. In all these things, and in many others, "the heavens do rule" (Dan. 4:26). This great factor of heaven governs everything.

Children of God Related to Heaven

As for ourselves, if we are children of God our whole education and history is related to heaven. That is one of the matters we must follow out presently in greater detail; but let it

be said, and let it at once be recognized, that our whole history and education as children of God is related to heaven - and by that I do not mean simply that we are going to heaven. We are *related* to the kingdom of the heavens, by birth, by sustenance and by eternal vocation. All our education, I have said, is related to heaven. All that you and I have to learn is as to how it is done in heaven; as to what the Lord meant when He said, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (Matt. 6:10) - a great comprehensive fragment covering all the education of the child of God, for that prayer begins with "Our Father who art in heaven." For as things are in heaven, so they must be here; but a whole lifetime of education, deep and drastic training, is involved in conformity to heaven.

The Bible of the Christians in New Testament times was the Old Testament. When we read in the New Testament, as we so often do, about the Scriptures - "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled," "as it is written in the Scriptures," and so on - it was the Old Testament that was referred to. The Old Testament was the only Scripture, the only Bible, of the first Christians, the Christians of the first decades. They had not got our New Testament. For them the Old Testament was the Bible, and it was continuously drawn upon, referred to, taken up and used in order to exemplify the spiritual experience of Christians. This letter to the Hebrews, from which we quoted at the outset, is just that. From beginning to end it is packed with the Old Testament; the Old Testament is being unceasingly used to illustrate and set forth the meaning of the spiritual life of the New Testament Christian.

A Pilgrimage Related to Heaven

And what we find in the Old Testament is a pilgrimage, all the way through: a pilgrimage in relation to heaven. Let us step right back to the beginning. You see, the Divine intention in creation was that such a harmony should obtain between heaven and earth that God could be here in this world in pleasure, in happiness, in rest, just as much as He could be in His heaven. He made it for His pleasure, He made it for Himself, He made it that He might come and go in perfect satisfaction and rest and joy. The first picture is of God being pleased to come to the world which He had created. He made it, it was His work, and we are told that when He had made it He entered into His rest. His rest was found in being here in His creation.

Ah, but since the tragedy of the fall, heaven and earth have lost their harmony; they are now at variance. This world is in conflict with heaven. Everything here on this earth has been changed. So far as the world is concerned, God has no pleasure in being in it or coming to it. *His presence here is in testimony, not in fullness* - in testimony that this is His rightful place, in testimony to the fact that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1), in testimony that He made it for His own pleasure. But God is here *only* in testimony, in token. He must have that testimony, but He is not now here in fullness. In a very real sense and in a very large degree, God is outside of this world, and there is conflict between heaven and the world; and even while there is testimony here, that very testimony is here and not here. It is outside. The very vessel of the testimony of God's presence is something that does not belong here. Here it has no dwelling; here it has no city. It is 'in', but not 'of'. It is a stranger in this world. So it has been since the fall.

Now the whole history of Divinely apprehended instruments for that testimony, whether they be individual or whether they be corporate, is the history of spiritual pioneering in relation to heaven. Have you grasped that? Let me repeat it. The whole history of vessels Divinely chosen and apprehended for the testimony of God, whether they be individual or corporate, is the history of pioneers breaking a way, cleaving a way through, doing something which was new so far as this world was concerned, breaking fresh ground, making fresh discoveries in relation to heaven; pioneers of a heavenly realm. How much history is gathered into a statement like that!

For Pilgrims - The Center of Gravity is in Heaven

Let us look at one or two of the features of this pioneering vocation. First of all, those who are called from heaven, apprehended by heaven, to serve the heavenly purpose, find that their center of gravity has been inwardly and spiritually changed and transferred from this world to heaven. Inside there is a deep-seated sense that we do not belong here, that this world is not our resting-place, that this is not our home and this is not our center of gravity; we are not drawn to it inwardly. Within the spirit of the pioneer there is this sense of conflict with what is here, of being at variance with it and unable to accept it. I repeat: inwardly and spiritually, the center of gravity has been transferred from this world to heaven. It is an inborn consciousness, and it is the first thing in this heavenly calling, the first effect, the first result of our calling from on high. We are going to come back to that again later on.

And we can test by this. Of course, it is true of the simplest child of God. The first consciousness of one born, truly born, from above, is that the center of gravity has changed. Somehow or other, inwardly, we have moved from one world to another. Somehow or other, that to which we have hitherto been related by nature no longer holds us: it is no longer our world. Put it how we will, that is the consciousness, and unless it is so there is something very doubtful about any profession of faith in the Lord Jesus. And this inborn sense of a new center of gravity has to grow and grow and grow and make it more and more impossible for us to accept this world in any way. Again I say, it is a test of our spiritual progress, of our pilgrimage and our advance in it. But that is elementary after all.

The Heavenly Realm Unknown to us by Nature

Again, that other realm, the consciousness of which has come into our hearts, the gravitation toward which has commenced in our spirits, is an entirely unknown world to us by nature. To nature it is another realm altogether - different, unfamiliar, unexplored. It does not matter how many have gone on before us, it does not matter how many there are who have started on this way and gone a long way in it: for every individual it is an altogether new world and it can only be known by experience. We may derive values from the experience of others, and thank God for all those values, but with all their experiences they cannot get *us* one step further on that way. For us it is new, utterly new, and strange. We have to learn everything about it from the beginning.

That makes pioneering - what pioneering always is - a lonely way. No one can hand down to us a heritage. We have to obtain our own in that world, strange and unknown as it is; demanding basically a new constitution according to that world, with capacities that are not possessed by nature. No man by searching can find out God (Job 11:7); we have not the capacity. It must be born in us from heaven. We have got to make the discovery for ourselves of everything. We have to discover God for ourselves, in every detail of His willing relationship to the human heart.

Light may come through testimony, light may come through the Scriptures, help may come through counsel, inspiration may come to us from those who have ploughed through and gone ahead, but in the last analysis we have got to possess our own spiritual plot in the heavenly country, subdue it, cultivate it and exploit it. You know that is true; that you are going that way in the spiritual life. You are having to find out for yourself. Oh, how we long for somebody to be able to pick us up and put us through on the good of their experience! The Lord never allows that. If really and truly we are on the heavenly road - if we have not just started and sat down or given up: if we are moving on the heavenly road, we are all pioneers. There will be values in it which others will come into because we have pioneered, but there is a sense in which every one, no matter how far behind, has got to make discoveries for himself, and it is best so. Ultimately, there is nothing second-hand in the spiritual life.

Pioneering Fraught with Cost and Conflict

So we come to the third feature of this pioneering. All pioneering is fraught with great cost and suffering, and, this being a spiritual course or way, the cost of this pioneering is mainly inward.

Perplexity; yes, perplexity. I have been reading a translation of a message by our brother Watchman Nee. In it he says, in effect, "There was a time when I had such a high idea of the Christian life that I thought for a Christian to be perplexed was all wrong; a Christian to be cast down - that is all wrong; a Christian to despair - that must be all wrong; what kind of Christian is that? And when I read Paul saying he was perplexed and in distress and in despair it constituted a real problem for me, in the light of what I had taught myself a Christian ought to be; but I had to see there was nothing wrong with it, after all."

Yes: a Christian, and such a Christian as the Apostle Paul, perplexed, and cast down, and in despair. That is the way of pioneers.

Perplexed. What does perplexity imply? It implies a need for capacity or comprehension in some realm in which at present there is none. There is a realm that is beyond you. It does not mean that you will always be perplexed in the same measure over the same thing. You will grow out of your perplexity on this matter, and you will understand; but there will be to the end perplexity, in some measure, simply because heaven is bigger than this world, vaster than this natural life, and we have to grow and grow. Perplexity is the lot of pioneers.

Weakness. Brother Nee asks, "A Christian in weakness and confessing to being weak? What kind of a Christian is that?" Paul speaks much about weakness, and about his own weakness - meaning, of course, that there is another kind of *strength* which is not our own, which has to be discovered; something that we do not know naturally. It is the way of pioneers: to come to a wisdom which is beyond us and which for the time being means perplexity; to a strength which is beyond us and which for the time being means weakness in ourselves. We are learning, that is all. It is the way of the pioneer, but it is costly. The cost is inward, like that, in so many ways.

But while it is inward, it is also outward. This letter to the Hebrews is just full of these two aspects of the pilgrimage. "*These all... confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*" (Heb. 11:13). It was a spiritual journey, a transition from the earthly to the heavenly, that the Apostle was writing about. There was an inward aspect. But there was the outward aspect for them, and it is the same for us. The whole trend of nature, if left to itself, is downward. Leave things to themselves, and down they go, in all nature. Is that not true? A beautiful garden will become a wild desolation, a riot and a chaos, in no time, if you take the upward-ordering hand from it. And that is true of us in a spiritual way - gravitation earthward, always wanting to settle down, always wanting to end the conflict and the fight, always wanting to get out of the atmosphere of stress in the spiritual life. The whole history of the Church is one long story of this tendency to settle down on this earth and to become conformed to this world, to find acceptance and popularity here and to eliminate the element of conflict and of pilgrimage. That is the trend and the tendency of everything. Therefore outwardly, as well as inwardly, the pioneering is a costly thing.

You are up against the trend of things religiously. See again this letter to the Hebrews. The trend was backward and downward to the earth, to make of Christianity an earthly religious system, with all its externalities, its forms, its rites, its ritual, its vestments; something here to be seen and to answer to the senses. It was a great pull on these Christians; it made a great appeal to their souls, to their natures, and the letter is written to say, "Let us leave these things and go on." We are pilgrims, we are strangers, it is the heavenly that matters - you recall that great paragraph about our coming to the heavenly Jerusalem (chapter 12:18-24).

But it is a costly and a suffering thing to come up against the religious system that has "settled down" here. It is, I sometimes feel, far more costly than coming up against the naked world itself. The religious system can be more ruthless and cruel and bitter; it can be actuated by all those mean things, contemptible things, prejudices and suspicions that you will not even find in decent people in the world. It is costly to go on to the heavenlies, it is painful; but it is the way of the pioneer, and it has to be settled that that is how it is. The phrase in this letter is, "Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp" (Heb. 13:13) - and I leave you to decide what is the camp referred to there; it is not the world. "Unto him without the camp" means ostracism, suspicion.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar" - is that not the vision of the pioneer - always seeing and greeting from afar; hailing the day, though it might be beyond this life's little day; greeting the day of realization? - "and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them" - God is not ashamed of the people who are on the pilgrimage with Himself to His end; He calls them His own and He is "called their God" - and "he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

That is a marvelous summary, when you come to think about it. "These all" - what a comprehensive "all!" And covering them all, it says of them that they had seen something - and having seen they could never rest, to their last day and their last breath on this earth. They were still pilgrims, they could never rest, this was in them the call of the unseen. It is something that must come into us from heaven in order to get us to heaven. Have you got it?

Well, as we shall see, that is the key to everything, it explains everything. It is the guarantee - oh, blessed be God for this, would that more of the Lord's people knew it in greater power! - it is the guarantee that all that is in us of longing and of craving and of quest, born of the Spirit of God, is going to be realized.

Are you hungry? Are you longing? Are you dissatisfied? That is itself a prophecy of more to come. Are you contented? Have you settled down? Is your vision short and narrow? Can you just go on here? Can you accept things as they are? Very well, you will be left to it, you will not get very far. God calls Himself the God of those who are pilgrims. He is the God of pilgrims, and, divesting ourselves of all the mentality of a literal pilgrimage - if you like, of a literal heaven, for I do not know where heaven is, but I know that there is a heavenly order of things and that I am being dealt with in relation thereto every day of my life - let us leave out the literal side, and see the spiritual, which is so real; and let us ask the Lord to put this spirit of pilgrimage in us mightily.

You will find as you go on that, whereas at one point in your spiritual life everything was so wonderful and so full that you felt you had reached the end of everything, there will come a time when that will be as nothing, and you look back upon it as mere infancy. Things that you were able to read then and feed upon: you say, "How was I able to find anything in this at all?" Do not mistake me: there is nothing wrong with that; that is all right for people at that point - but you have gone on, you must have something more. We ought to be growing out of things all the time, going beyond. We ought to be people of the beyond. That is probably the meaning of the word "Hebrew." This letter is called the letter to the Hebrews, and it speaks about pilgrims and strangers, and if the word "Hebrew" means a person from beyond, well, we are people from beyond, our home and our gravitation is beyond. We are pilgrims here, pilgrims of the beyond.

May the Lord make this helpful, and on the one hand move us out of any lethargy or false contentedness, or undue longing to reach an end here, and, on the other, keep our eyes and our hearts with those who have pioneered before, seeing and greeting, and, if needs be, dying, in faith.

Chapter 2 - The Crisis as to the Earthly and the Heavenly

Reading: *Numbers 13:1-3, 17-23, 27-33; 14:1-3.*

We have been considering the fact and nature of the heavenly way. The Bible begins with the creation of the heavens and the government of the heavens. It ends with the emergence from heaven of that which has been formed by heaven, according to heavenly principles: the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, fulfilling this word which we have read in Hebrews 11:16 - "God hath prepared for them a city."

The Clash between the Earthly and the Heavenly

We remind ourselves here that a characteristic of the Old Testament at every stage is the clash and contrast of two worlds, of two orders: the heavenly and the earthly. All the way through the Old Testament we have this element - of heaven challenging this world, and apprehending, in this world, that which it will take out and constitute according to its own, heavenly, order and nature. It does not require a very profound knowledge of the Old Testament to confirm that. Your minds run quickly over its story and you recognize that you are in the presence of a clash all the time, a conflict. It is this conflict between heaven and earth. Heaven is not satisfied with this world - very much to the contrary. Heaven is against what is here in this world; but heaven is seeking to take what it can out of this world to reconstitute according to its own standards: and so, while you find the opposition of heaven, the challenge of heaven, you at the same time find heaven, right from the beginning, as it were laying hold of people - a line of individuals and a nation - in order to detach them from the world, even while here in it, and by a deep process to make them a completely different type and kind of people from everyone else; apprehending them, in other words, for heavenly purposes.

The Old Testament men were *pioneers* of the heavenly way. We have already seen a little of what that involves, but it is upon that particular point that we want to focus all our emphasis just now. It is not only that there *is* a heavenly way which is different - we know that, we know it in our hearts if we have been born from above, we are learning as we go on how different the heavenly way is from every other way - but the focal point at this time is this: that there is such a thing as *pioneering* that heavenly way, *being called into a relationship with heaven* in order to cleave a way, to take possession, to make it possible for God's full meaning to be understood, interpreted; a ministry to others who shall follow on. We said earlier that there is a sense in which everyone born from above is a pioneer, because for every such one the way is a new way, which they and they alone can follow: no one can do it for them; it is a new way for everyone. Our present occupation is with the vocational aspect of this.

There is no doubt about it that the majority of the Lord's children know little, very little, about the heavenly way. Organized Christianity has become very largely an earthly thing, with earthly standards and conceptions and resources: therefore it has become spiritually very limited. In comparison with the heavens, this world is a very, very small thing. I mean that spiritually as well as illustratively. The kingdom of the heavens is a vast thing, far greater than any conception of man. God's thoughts are as the heavens are high above the earth in range, outbidding all earthly conceptions, and not until we get well away from this earth do we realize on the one hand how miserably small we are and on the other hand in what a very much greater realm it is possible to move than that in which we do move - I mean spiritually. The great, great need of this time is that the people of God, the Church of God, should come into its true heavenly position, with its heavenly vision and vocation.

Now there is a great deal in that statement, but it all means that someone, some people, have got to pioneer the way for the Church back again to the realm where it once was at

the beginning, the realm which it has lost in succumbing to that persistent tendency earthward. I say, a pioneering instrument is needed, and the way is a costly way.

Now let me repeat, the Old Testament men were pioneers of the heavenly way. That is what is explicitly stated by the writer in this letter to the Hebrews, particularly in the passage which we have read. Heaven has its own standard and basis, and earth cannot provide that. One of the great key-words of the Old Testament is "*sanctify*," and sanctify means to separate, make holy, consecrate, set apart, and in the main that is a spiritual and inward thing, dividing between heaven and earth. God has divided those two things, put them apart, and there is to be this putting apart in a spiritual way, inwardly, also. So you find that these men of the Old Testament were men who were set apart in this sense: something was done right at the very center of their being which separated them from this world and committed them to a course which was altogether different from and contrary to the course of this world; and if, under pressure, under strain, by deception inadvertently, consciously or unconsciously, they touched this earth, they were at once in confusion - they knew at once in their inner being that they were out of the way, and the only thing was somehow to get back. You see that again and again. Heaven witnessed against their position; they were in trouble. Not until they got back could they go on. They were being ruled by another standard, but oh, how different was that standard, and how difficult to understand!

Consider Cain and Abel. From this world's standpoint, Cain's was a very worthy procedure. Looked at from the standpoint of the religious man of this world, it is difficult to see what was wrong with Cain, or how much more right was Abel, or how absolutely right and absolutely wrong these two were. Yet how utterly right Abel was is shown by the issue. One got through to heaven. That is the fact. He got through to God and he got through to heaven, and the other one had a closed heaven and a rejecting God.

You say, What is the standard? Just the difference between heaven and earth, that is all. Heaven's basis and standard of access is altogether different from earth's - even religious earth's. The religious man may have the same God, worship the same God, bring his offering to the same God, and yet get no way to heaven, no way at all on the heavenly road. Heaven has its own basis and standards and provision, and earth can neither find nor provide that. It is different. That is the fact that we are up against when it is a case of getting to heaven. I am not talking about geographical location, but about getting through to God, finding an open way with heaven. You can only come on heaven's own provision, and that will entirely and utterly upset all your own natural calculations. You have to find something that nature cannot provide. If you, like Cain, reason this thing out according to religious reason, and come on that ground, you do not get anywhere. "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts*" (Heb. 11:4). Heaven attested.

I am not dealing with all the nature and detail of these things. I am pointing out a fact - that heaven's standards and judgments are altogether different, and they are going to throw us completely into confusion when we try to come, even in a religious way, into heaven. Nicodemus may be the most perfect representation of the religious system, but he cannot get anywhere where heaven is concerned. Heaven makes its own provision for access, and you have to have heaven's provision. You may ask a thousand Why's. There is the fact.

Pioneers are Leaders

Let us now turn to our reading from the book of Numbers. It is at the point of the sending over of the spies, and the focus of the whole incident is upon two men: Joshua and Caleb. Now, mark you, all the twelve heads of fathers' houses - princes in Israel (a significant

term), typically representative men - were called to be pioneers of the heavenly way. The principle of their headship and princeliness was that they were to be pioneers. That is the pioneer principle. If you are a true pioneer, you are a leader, you are a prince in character. But only two of them justified their calling; only two of them became what all the rest were supposed to be - pioneers. Very often it just works out like that. It is the minority, the very, very clear minority, that does the work. The others have the name, but they are not doing it; the others have the official position, but they are not doing it. The point is - where is it being done? Here it was Joshua and Caleb.

A Link with the Past

Now let us spend some time in taking account of the significance of these two men, Joshua and Caleb. To begin with, we will look at them as a link with the past. The intention of God which was taken up by them harked back to His covenant with Abraham, so that with Joshua and Caleb Abraham comes very much into evidence. You are at once compelled to look back and take fresh stock of the significance of Abraham, as taken up by these two: because, you see, the point at which Joshua and Caleb came into view was a critical point, an hour of very great crisis. The whole question now is - Is God's purpose going to be realized in this people, or is it not? That is no small issue; a real crisis has arisen. And *they* are the deciding factor.

There are three features of the place of Abraham as it comes in here.

A Spiritual and Heavenly Seed

First of all, there is the feature of a spiritual and heavenly seed. Do get that - a spiritual and a heavenly seed. We, today, are in a position of very great advantage. We have now, through the Holy Spirit, the full significance of Abraham. We have our New Testament and all that the New Testament says about Abraham. We have the full revelation through the Apostle Paul, and we are now able to see from our New Testament - we have not to go back to the Old Testament for all our knowledge - we can see now, with our New Testament in our hand, the full significance of Abraham; on this point we have much extra light.

A spiritual and heavenly seed. You see how that bears upon Joshua and Caleb, and how they take it up. But this other seed of Abraham is not spiritual and it is not heavenly. It has come down to earth. In these thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Numbers that we have read, the reactions of this people - how gross they are, how earthly, how lacking in spiritual vision and life and aspiration! They are swayed entirely by the earthly - by the sight of the eyes, by things here, the difficulties, the people, the mountains. For them there is no way. For Joshua and Caleb the mountains were a way, not a hindrance. There was a heavenly way. But these others see nothing of that, they are earthly.

A heavenly and spiritual seed - that is the thought of God in Abraham made clear to us in the New Testament.

An Exclusive Seed

But what more light have we got on this? That it was something exclusive. Paul argues that out in his letter to the Galatians. *"Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one" (Gal. 3:16)*. It was exclusive. We will see in a minute where that led to; but note that this, so far as Abraham was concerned, was tied up inseparably and exclusively with Sarah. It was permissible in those times for a man to have more than one wife, but God was shutting this thing up to Sarah. Abraham, under stress and pressure, tried it along another line, by another means - with Hagar; but here was one of these points of which I was speaking a little earlier: a failure, a

slip, a mistake, a blunder, under trial, under pressure, under duress; getting off the heavenly line and rueing it - and history has rued it to this day. He had to get back to Sarah. God has shut this thing up, it is an exclusive matter. Not Hagar, and not others, but *this one*.

Supernatural in Birth and Maintenance

And this seed carries all the marks of the heavenly. It is supernatural in birth; impossible along the line of nature. That is Isaac: and Abraham was shut up to that, shut up to an intervention of heaven. This cannot have an existence, let alone a history, unless heaven sees to it. God was very particular about that. Sometimes God shows how particular He is about the right thing by letting us see the awfulness of the wrong thing. God does not just let a wrong thing go; a mistake, a slip, go as such. We are plagued sometimes to the end of our lives by a wrong step. God will keep that, so that we may see - No, the right way is an important way; it is not just an option. The heavenly is *the way*, and any alternative to that is not just allowed to pass as though it did not matter. We discover that it does matter; and so it was here. Heaven must do this, or it will never be done, because it is in the heavenly way. What a lot we have to learn, and are learning, about that principle! It explains a great deal that is happening in our lives. God has us in hand.

The Principle of Death and Resurrection

Yes, but not only was Isaac a heavenly product by the intervention of heaven, by a miracle, but you see God is going to press that right through to the ultimate in demanding the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice. Isaac was born by a miracle, by the intervention of heaven, but something still further had to be done: he had to die and be raised from the dead. This mighty thing of God must come in and ratify that. What Paul says in Romans 1:4, "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead," could well be rendered "ratified the Son of God... by resurrection"; and that is Isaac, ratified heavenly.

That has very much of our own spiritual history in it. We have not only been born again by a miracle and heaven's intervention; this has been ratified all the way along. God is demanding the maintenance of that by resurrection life, and resurrection life has no meaning unless we know something of death. God is keeping us on heavenly ground. That is the meaning of Isaac: not only putting us on heavenly ground, but keeping us on heavenly ground by constant expressions of resurrection, when only resurrection will save the situation.

After all, no matter what it was at the beginning of our Christian life - that we had a wonderful experience of conversion and can put down in a notebook when it happened and where - that may be good, but it has to be ratified continually by the expression of resurrection. We have got to be kept on that ground. And that is the pioneer way. The way of pioneering the heavenly way is knowing again and again the meaning of death and its direness, in order to know the meaning of resurrection and its greatness. It is the pioneer way. The Church has gone that way; many a revelation of God has gone that way; many a child of God has gone that way - in order to keep the heavenly way alive and stop this "dry-rot" of earthliness which is always seeking to sap the Christian life. We know how true that is.

Abraham came to know that his real inheritance was in heaven. I always think it is a very wonderful thing, this aspect of Abraham's life and experience, under the hand of God: that no doubt when he first set out, at the command of God, he interpreted those promises in a very earthly and limited way. No doubt to begin with his expectation was that they would be fulfilled and realized in this way and in that; but the longer he lived the more he became

aware that it was not this way or that, it was something more than he had thought when he started, something very much more and very much other. He went on, and he is one of those here included in this word - *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.... But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly."* When God said, "I will bring you to a country" (Gen. 12:1), Abraham in the first place thought that that was earthly; in the end he saw it was not. He came to see, to have perception: for the Lord Jesus said, *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). "Having seen them and greeted them from afar."* And so Paul brings us back here, in his letter to the Galatians - *"to thy seed, which is Christ."* *"He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).* Christ was the answer to everything of inheritance for Abraham.

But Christ, the heavenly Christ, is the very embodiment of all that is heavenly. We know not Christ after the flesh. Christ is essentially heavenly. You see the heavenly nature of this seed. You can crowd all that into Joshua and Caleb. Who will be the people that will inherit, go over and possess? Not this earthbound, earth-minded crowd. They will perish in their earth, their earth will be their prison and their tomb. They will be replaced by another generation with a different constitution - represented by Joshua and Caleb, the first of a new generation - who will possess. They are the pioneers of the heavenly way and the heavenly fullness. But how deeply they had to suffer for it. *"All the congregation bade stone them with stones" (Num. 14:10).* Pioneering is always a way of suffering and cost, even amongst - not the worldlings - but those who go by the name of the people of God.

Well, the pioneer of the heavenly way will always be like this: heavenly as a seed, and constantly ratified as heavenly by the necessity for repeated interventions of heaven to extricate, to deliver, to keep going. It is true to the spiritual life. We would not have gone on more than a little way, we would have stopped, it would have been again and again the end of us, if heaven had not intervened, if it had not been that God had ratified the fact that we belong to heaven. And He is doing it.

Well, all this is so clearly seen to be fulfilled in Christ, this Heavenly Seed. His birth was by heaven's intervention, a miracle. At His baptism heaven broke in again and ratified, "This is my beloved Son." His Cross? - that does not look very much like an intervention of heaven. But wait a minute: do not forget that the New Testament never talks about the Cross of Christ on the death side alone. In the New Testament the Cross has twin sides - death, resurrection. *"Ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised up" (Acts 2:23-24).* The world has done all that it can do, has exhausted itself upon Him. The powers of evil have exhausted themselves. What more can be done? Ah, now heaven comes in and spoils it all and raises Him: ratifies that He belongs to heaven and not to this world. He is not the property, the plaything, either of this world or of the evil powers that govern this world. He belongs to heaven: and heaven intervenes, and not only raises Him, but takes Him up and out and sets Him over.

His spiritual history is the spiritual history of the pioneer of the heavenly way. He is *the* Pioneer. "Within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us" (Heb. 6:19-20), says this letter to the Hebrews.

A Link between Failure and Realization

One other thing with which to close this present phase as to the backward aspect of Joshua and Caleb to Abraham. They, like Abraham and all the pioneers, were a link between failure and realization. You look at the world at the time when "the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2) in Ur of the Chaldees. You look at the world and you look for that which is of heaven, and where will you find it? Where is all God's thought for something heavenly? It seems that once more it has disappeared. There seems to be no testimony at

all to this heavenly thought of God - a heavenly people, a heavenly testimony, something that represents and expresses heaven's thought. Where is it? "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham," and he became the link between the failure and the realization.

Joshua and Caleb took that up. Here is the story of the failure in the wilderness. But for them, where is the heavenliness? But for them, where is God's thought? Yet God has not given it up. It may seem to have well-nigh disappeared; it has been like that again and again. But heaven intervenes, and secures a link between the failure and heaven's triumph. That link is the pioneer. The Lord must have an instrument like that to set over against the failure and to open the heavenly way again to realization.

You are probably wondering, "What has this to do with me?" You are saying, "Yes, these are all wonderful ideas: it is quite true, it is quite clear that it is true in the Bible: but how does it affect us?" Well, it just does. One does not like dwelling in a critical way upon a situation, and whatever is said in this direction always leaves room for something very precious of the Lord still in the earth. It is to speak quite broadly. We will put it this way. The great need of Christians today is to be recovered for the full heavenly thought of God. They have settled down to something less. They have become involved in something less and largely other.

It has always been like that. The New Testament was written almost entirely because of it. The Lord's people are always at least in peril of doing that - at least in peril. They do gravitate spiritually toward this world and lose their heavenly testimony in one way or another. The pressure is always there to bring down, and the Lord needs lives that have seen - that have become like those of whom we were thinking in our last meditation, for whom the center of gravity of life has been transferred from this world to heaven, within whom there is this sense - whether they can interpret it or not, whether they can put it into a system of truth, doctrine, Bible teaching, or not - there is this sense that they are in the line of some great destiny which is beyond what this world can provide, that they have been gripped by something that they can only say is the heavenly calling, which has held them. I am going to say more about that later on; but the Lord needs a people like that, who just cannot be satisfied with things as they are: it is not just a matter of the mind, of the reason at all. It is inside of them; they know that God has done something. Because God has done something, they are committed to something far greater than the poor limits of this life and this world. They have been inwardly linked on with something tremendous. I say again, they may not be able to preach it, but they know it. We shall never be useful to God beyond our vision, our true God-inwrought vision, beyond our own reach of heart. Our measure of vision will determine the measure of our usefulness. Oh, for the immeasurable measure of heaven in the heart of a people! That is the need today.

Let me close by saying again that, while that is the heavenly calling of which the Apostle speaks so much, it is the most difficult way - it is fraught with every kind of difficulty; but it is the real, it is the true, and it is the ultimate, for heaven is a nature, a power, a life, an order, which is destined to fill this world and this universe.

Chapter 3 - Abraham - A Great Pioneer

Reading: *Hebrews 11:13-16*

We return now to Abraham as one of the representative pioneers of the heavenly way. We begin by reiterating one thing which was so true of Abraham, but which must be true, and is always true, of every spiritual pioneer, of every one who is moving on to explore and exploit the heavenly kingdom: that is, his sense, his deep, inborn sense, of *destiny*. Stephen has told us, concerning Abraham, that "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2) when he was in Ur of the Chaldees. We do not know how the God of glory appeared unto him. It may have been in one of those theophanies common to the Old Testament and common to Abraham's later life when God came to him in man-form. We do not know. But we do know from his whole life that the effect of it was to bring to birth in him this tremendous sense of destiny - the sense of destiny which uprooted him from the whole of his past life, and which created in him a deep unrest, unrest of a right kind, a deep and a holy discontent.

Discontent may be all wrong, but there is a right kind of discontent. Would to God many more Christians had it! There was started in Abraham an urge which grew and grew through the years and made it impossible for him to settle down and accept anything less than the full meaning of God. He could not accept a second-best in relation to God. Of course, the consciousness of that had to grow. He had to come progressively to realize what it meant. It came in this way: that he arrived at a certain place, and perhaps thought that here was it, and then he found it was not, and he had to move; and then perhaps he thought, "Now, this is it - but no, it is not. There is still - I do not know what it is, I cannot define, explain, but I know within me there is still something more that God has." "*Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on*" (Phil 3:12); it was this urge through the ages - so very real in the case of the man whose words I have just quoted. He was never able to accept God's second-best. God has a second-best. Again and again in history God has found it impossible to realize His "first best," His very best. People would not go on. He said, "All right, you shall have My second-best," and they had it; but pioneers never do that. Abraham could not do it.

Now, do not misunderstand or misinterpret this. This was not natural or temperamental instability. Do not think that, if you are a person who is never contented, that is a Divine discontent. It may be temperamental. You may be one of those people who can never stick at a thing for very long, who are always jumping from one thing to another. You will be an entire misfit, both in the world and in the kingdom of God. It was not that sort of thing with Abraham. There was something of heaven working in him, the proof of it being that he was always on the upward move; he was not on the horizontal, he was on the upward move. He was making progress, not only on the earth level, but spiritually, all the time.

Now you see, alongside of Abraham there was Lot, and Lot was a man who was always seeking security *here*. He sought the city; he sought a house. He disliked this tent life. He wanted to be settled in this world, and he sought to be settled. But Lot was the weak man with all that. Abraham who was always moving in a tent was the strong man. This was not natural at all, it was spiritual. This urge from heaven, this mighty working of a spiritual force in Abraham brought him into the very hard school of the heavenly. To the natural, to the earthly, to the flesh, the heavenly is a very hard school, and Abraham was brought into it by this urge from heaven.

Conflict between the Spiritual and Temporal

In the first place, there was the conflict between the spiritual and the temporal, the conflict between the seen and the unseen - and that is a very fierce conflict. In Abraham's life it was sometimes pressed to a very fine issue. You see, on the one hand Abraham was blessed of the Lord, he prospered of the Lord, there were the signs that the Lord was with him. There was increase, enlargement, great enlargement, yes, embarrassing enlargement. His flocks and his herds multiplied; he was a very prince in the land - and yet, and yet, that very blessing of the Lord was at times brought to the point where the whole thing could in a moment be wiped out - by famine, acute, devastating famine. Why had God blessed and increased and enlarged, and then allowed something that could wipe it all out in no time? That is rather a difficult problem, is it not? Would it not have been better to have been kept small and limited than to see all this threatened? Abraham found the problem very acute. It was that that brought about one of his failures. He went down to Egypt.

It was a hard school.

What does it mean? It seems that God gives with one hand and takes away with the other: prospers and blesses - and then throws in something that threatens to destroy the blessing. Is God a contradiction? Is He denying Himself? You know the temptations at such times to try to interpret. Are we, after all, but the pawns in a game? Are we, after all, but the children of chance, of fortune or misfortune? After all, is the Lord in this? Can this really explain the Lord, a consistent God?

It is a hard school. But, you see, it is wholly in keeping with what God is doing.

What is He doing?

Well, if He blesses, there are two things bound up with it. In the first place, Abraham's blessing and prosperity and increase and enlargement had to find its support from heaven and not from earth. God is introducing the great heavenly principle. Oh, the Lord may bless and enlarge, but God forbid that ever we should assume that now we can support ourselves, now we can carry on, now we have got going and can maintain our going by our own momentum. He will see to it that, however He may bless, if a thing is of Himself - however great, however enlarged, however increased it may be - it can perish at any moment if heaven does not look after it. That is a lesson. Do not presume; do not take anything for granted. Live every moment out from heaven. As truly in the day of blessing as in the day of adversity, cling to heaven.

And then there is this other factor. God was so training Abraham that he could be safe for blessing, and that is something - to be safe for blessing. Such discipline, such trial of faith, such testing! And yet it does not matter to Abraham how much God blesses him, he does not allow the blessings to obscure the heavenly vision and halt him on the way. That is a tremendous triumph. Oh, the devastating perils of blessing! Perhaps you may feel that you do not know much about those perils as yet. But God wants to make us safe for His heavenly kingdom, safe for spiritual enlargement, safe for being used mightily; and we are never safe if things less than God's ultimate can hold us up, never safe if the good is the enemy of the best. With Abraham it is perfectly clear, that, whether in prosperity or adversity he was never allowed to settle and never allowed to seem to have arrived. If at any time he did feel he had now arrived, that was very quickly exploded. "*These all died in faith, not having received... but having seen... and greeted... from afar.*"

Another thing about Abraham is this: that he never allowed the apparent difficulties, however great they were, ultimately to stay his spiritual onward and upward march. We will come back to that again in a moment. Do you not see how all that was taken up by Joshua and Caleb? Think again about Joshua and Caleb. These were most certainly men who had been in that school. If they had not been, they would never have taken the next generation

into the land. God only knows what those men went through. You see, the story is told in so few verses, about the spies going out, and the minority report, and the taking up, or proposal to take up, stones, to stone these men and kill them. But you have got to add to that the long, long years while that whole generation was dying out, with only two men holding on to the heavenly vision. That is a hard school. They might easily have lost heart and given up and said, "It is a hopeless outlook"; but they did not: the heavenly had got a grip upon them in their innermost being and held them. It held them, even in the greatest adversity, and they came through; they "overcame the world."

The Conflict between the Spiritual and Carnal

Then, again, with Abraham there was the conflict between the spiritual and the carnal: not only between the spiritual and the temporal, but between the spiritual and the carnal. This conflict came right inside what we may call the domestic circle. It was in the family, in the blood. It was in Lot. I am speaking spiritually. I interpret Lot as representing something that is not only objectively in the Christian family (which is of course quite true) but is in our own natures, subjectively, the carnal setting up conflict with the spiritual, the earthly with the heavenly.

Here, you see, is Lot, and he is of the same blood as Abraham; but right in the blood, right in the family - if you like, right in the Christian family - there is this streak of carnality: Lot and his worldliness, his worldly-mindedness, his worldly vision, his worldly ambition, his worldly longings. There is no heavenly vision with Lot; and he is right alongside, so closely alongside, Abraham. Abraham finds this menace of an argument against his spiritual course right in his blood. It is there; it is in us, and it is in the Christian family. It is right alongside, very near all the time - this craving to settle down, to have things here and now - quick returns - things seen - the gratification of the soul; that rest which is not rest, but which we think of as rest.

Many of you know what I am talking about. You know how sometimes naturally we crave for rest, and we try to get it - and we do not get it until we get to the Lord. We find our real rest in the things of heaven, not in having holidays. But there it is, and it is always trying to draw us away, get us away, make us run away. "Oh, to get out of it! If only we could live on some island alone - how restful, how peaceful! To get away from it all!" And it never happens. Our rest is in heavenly things. We only find our real satisfaction in the things of the Lord. You Christians go and have a surfeit of the world: you know you will come back and say, "No more of that!" You know you cannot do it. But that craving is with us all the time. The carnal influence is in our blood. And it is in the whole Christian family - the Lot side, that wants to have a Christianity of this world, always dragging and pulling downward and away from the heavenly. Abraham knew all about that.

That constitutes the very ground of this pioneer work, pioneering for the things of the Spirit. It is this warring the things of the flesh, as though we were always carrying about a corpse, some lifeless thing to be dragged about and subdued every day. We have to say to ourselves "Come on, none of that!" It is the way of the pioneer. You can settle down, but you will lose your heavenly inheritance. The carnal has very, very subtle ways - very "spiritual" ways.

Is that a contradiction? It is a spurious spirituality, but what is interpreted as spirituality. I think of the great battle that Paul, the heavenly man, had with the Corinthians, the earthly church. And yet the Corinthians were supposed to be spiritual. They had all the spiritual gifts; they had the miracles, the healing, the tongues. But Paul said "I... could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal" (I Cor. 3:1). The carnal can have very "spiritual" ways, apparently. The fact is that their carnality was taking hold of spiritualities, and making the spiritualities serve their carnality; giving them soulish gratification, in

display, in show, in demonstrations; pulling the heavenlies down to the earth. Do not let us blame the Corinthians. How we long to see, how we long for evidences and proofs! Why do these things gather such a following? Because there is something in human nature that is gratified, and it is so infinitely more difficult to walk the heavenly way where you do not see and you do not know; but that is the way of the spiritual pioneer who is going to inherit for others.

The Proof of the Reality of Heavenly Vision

Finally, the proof of Abraham's vision: the proof of this sense of destiny being real, true, genuine, being really of God, and not just his imagination: how is that proof given in his case?

(a) Faith in the God of the Impossible

First of all, Abraham's attitude toward the impossible. As we said in the last chapter, the New Testament gives us the full story. In the Old Testament it looks as though he gave way, broke down in the presence of the impossible.

We shall come to that in a minute. The New Testament tells us quite emphatically that Abraham looked the impossible squarely and straightly in the face and believed that it was possible. His attitude to the impossible over Isaac proved that there was something more than just imagination; there was something mighty in his sense and consciousness of destiny. If we give up when a situation begins to appear to be impossible - that is the ultimate test of whether we really have had registered in us a sense of heavenly vocation. The fact is that, although you feel you want to give up, you are not allowed to give up. Something in you just does not let you give up. You have been on the point of writing your resignation a hundred times. Again and again you have said "I am going to get out of this; I cannot go on any longer or any further; I am finished"; but you have gone on, and you are going on, and you know quite well that there is something in you stronger than all your resolutions to resign. How necessary is that sense in us - and it is proved to be something, not of ourselves, but of God. "According to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20) - it is that.

(b) Capacity for Adjustment when Mistakes are Made

Then consider Abraham's capacity for adjustment when he made mistakes. This man, this pioneer, made mistakes, and they were big mistakes. What is the temptation of a servant of God who makes a glaring blunder; of one carrying responsibility who makes a terrible mistake? What is the immediate reaction? "Oh, I am evidently not fit for this, I am not called to this; God has got hold of the wrong person, I was never meant for this; I had better find another job, I had better get out." But although Abraham made the mistakes - and they were very bad ones, grievous lapses and failures not excused in the Bible, shown to be what they were, never rubbed out by God; there they are on record - and not only on record in the written Word, but on record in history: look at Ishmael today! - although they were seen for what they were, there was that in Abraham which reacted to adjust. "I have made a mistake in going down to Egypt; but I will not give up in self-despair and refuse to go back again; I will get back. I have made this mistake over Ishmael - I must get back and recover my ground." He was a great man for recovery and adjustment in the presence of heart-breaking disappointment with himself.

(c) The Working of a Heavenly Power Within

What does all this say? There is a working of a heavenly power in this man. This is not natural, this is not the way of nature. If only we knew the tension and the stress, if only we knew all the hardness of that school that Abraham was in - I never fail to marvel when I read Paul on Abraham. "*Without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now*

as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old)... yea, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:19-21). "... the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all... before him whom he believed, even God, who giveth life to the dead" (Romans 4:17). He proved his faith by binding his only son and taking the knife to slay him. In an instant more the son, in whom all the promises were centered, would have been dead. I say, I marvel. It is one thing even for God to do a thing like that - to take away; it is another thing for us to have to do it, to give it up to God: but Abraham did it. There is something not natural here. This is not the way of the world, the earth. It is the heavenly way. Abraham is pioneering the heavenly way. And so he occupies that tremendous place, not only in the old dispensation, but in this, and forever. A great pioneer of things heavenly - that is what it means.

That may explain a great deal in our own experience. God needs people like that in this day of terrible downward, down-grade spiritual movement to the world on the part of His Church. With all its good intentions, perhaps even its pure motive, it is nevertheless adopting the framework and form of this world in order to do the work of heaven. There must be a reaction to that, and there must be vessels who can prove that it is not necessary to go to this world. Heaven is sufficient for all things.

Chapter 4 - Moses

Reading: *Hebrews 11:24-27, 13, 16.*

God has one great desire - to have what may be termed a "a people of His best." Until He has such a people, He will never be wholly satisfied. There may be those who will accept His "second-best" - for He surely often allows a second-best - but only a people set on His *very* best will truly satisfy His own heart. But since the attainment unto His best is a matter fraught with conflict and cost and discipline, and much that is utterly contrary to the whole course of nature, it is not everybody - indeed, it is but a comparative few - who will go on with Him to His best. This is seen in all the Scriptures, and there are some out-standing illustrations of it. They are found in every dispensation.

For example, whilst we are not to say that the generation which perished in the wilderness, which had been brought out in virtue of precious blood and by initial faith - for "by faith they passed through the Red Sea" (Hebrews 11:29) - whilst we are not to say that that generation represents ultimate and final loss of salvation, it is nevertheless clear that they lost God's full thought for them, and it was a great and grievous loss, always held up in the Scriptures as an example of tragedy, failure and disappointment. We are not to say that the greater number of those who went into exile in Babylon, in Chaldea, and never returned, were lost eternally to God's salvation. But we do know that the minority came back, and in coming back fulfilled the true intention of God, and are represented as those of whom particularly He is not ashamed. For the others, in the wilderness and in Babylon, there is sense in which God is ashamed; for these, not so. And thus it is in every dispensation. The call continues, and it is being sounded here to the people of God to be satisfied with no second-best.

But, as we have said, this is not only a call to us to attain. This is a call to a people to pioneer this way for others - for so many of the Lord's people do not know the heavenly way. Strangely enough, though born from above, they do not know the heavenly way. We will not bring in all the proofs of this, but it is true, and perhaps many of us have been like that for a period of our Christian life. It was very largely an earthly thing. Our activities were very earthbound, in a Christian way. Then there came a time of crisis, when we entered into the meaning of an open heaven and were lifted on to an entirely new level of spiritual life and began to learn heavenly things in a new way. These are facts, and all those who are called of God into this heavenly way are not only moving in it with regard to their own spiritual measure, but are called to pioneer the way for those who do not know, even of the Lord's people. That does not mean to preach to them about a heavenly way, to have a special interpretation of Scripture, some doctrine or phraseology. It means that they are called to be in the good of it, to be *there*, and by what they themselves know and experience to be able to help others up from the lower levels of spiritual life.

So we are going to look again at this matter of pioneering the heavenly way, centering our thoughts upon another great pioneer - Moses. There are, of course, many other features of his life besides pioneering, but I think that this really goes to the very center of the significance of Moses - this fact that he was the pioneer of a heavenly way.

If we look at the life of Moses from an earthly standpoint, we see very much that speaks of disappointment and of failure and of tragedy: for, although, for eighty years - eighty long, trying, testing years of discipline and suffering - he walked the heavenly way or learned the heavenly way, neither he nor the people that he brought out of Egypt entered into the land. That sounds like disappointment, and indeed tragedy. I can never read that record of Moses pleading with God to let him go in, and God's full, final, conclusive refusal, without being deeply stirred. It is a touching thing.

You see, of these people who were constituted a nation by the hand of Moses, who instrumentally owed their existence as a nation to him, not only did that first generation not go into the land and inherit, but their whole history ever since has been one of tragedy. There have been bright spots and periods in that history; there have been times of glory; but, taking their history as a whole up to this day, remembering how much they talk about Moses, what they attribute to Moses, how they are always appealing to Moses, it has been a most disappointing history. I repeat: from certain standpoints, the life of Moses bears much that speaks of failure and disappointment and tragedy. But the very fact of his own life and the nature of its termination, the very fact of the generation that perished in the wilderness, the very fact of the nation all through the ages failing and disappointing, is the one most conclusive argument for another aspect, namely, the Divine truth of the heavenly. They are asserting in a most emphatic way that, if this is all, down here, then it is a poor thing: that there must be some other way than this, there must be some other sequel to this, this is not all. No, there is another standpoint from which to view it - there is the heavenly standpoint, where heaven interprets and governs everything.

Well, let us look at Moses: firstly, Moses himself and his training; secondly, Israel under his leadership.

(1) Moses' Training

(a) Sovereign Apprehending

We begin with himself and his training. We are not beginning with his birth. We begin where we read of him in the letter to the Hebrews - Moses in Egypt; and here we are once more met by something that has come up repeatedly in these meditations - that inborn sense of destiny. You cannot get away from it. When you are dealing with God's full purpose and when you are dealing with the work, the service, the ministry, the pioneering in relation thereto, that is always the point at which you have to begin; and it is always there - this deep-down sense of a Divine, sovereign apprehending for something.

Here is this man in Egypt. He is surrounded by all that Egypt has, and students of history know that the glory and the glamour of Egypt were no small thing in Moses' day. He was surrounded by it all. The writer here speaks of "the pleasures of Egypt." Its pleasures, its amenities, its scholarship, its education: all its privileges, right up to the very house of the king - everything was at the command and disposal of Moses. He was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), and he had all the "pleasures" of Egypt to his hand. That was no small thing. Do you say that was nothing to throw away? It was a mighty "all" of this world - but this sense of destiny made it as nothing. Although enjoying it all, as far as he could enjoy it, there was a shadow over his enjoyment all the time; there was a something inside that withheld him from becoming finally content with it. There was within him a sense of restless discontent and dissatisfaction, which really was a working in him of God's unwillingness to be satisfied with anything short of His full purpose. Moses may not have been able to explain or define this strange urge, but it made him know that the "all" of Egypt was by no means God's all, and that Egypt could never answer to this call and pull from above and beyond.

Now, that is not exaggeration, and those are not just words. That is Scripture, and that is very testing. For such as are called into the way of God's full thought, His highest and His best, it will be like that. It does not matter what there may be of popularity, worldly position, success, means and resources - everything to hand: if we are truly called according to His purpose, we shall be restless in it all, dissatisfied, and feel, "After all, is it worth it? There is something more than this." Test your hearts by that. That is no fiction; that is fact.

It may be that that fact lies behind your very reading of these words today. You could have much in this world if you liked to lay yourself out for it. You could have a way in the world and its pleasures, and other things, if you really went for it. Yes, and perhaps you could get acceptance and position even in the religious world, but to you it has become second-rate. There is something in you - you may not be defining it, perhaps you could not write down what it is - but you know there is something, and unless you discover that something, arrive at that something, life will be a disappointment, for there is a mockery in everything else. If that is true in your case, it is a very hopeful thing, it is a marvelous thing: heaven has come down to lay hold of you in relation to all its meaning. Of course, if you have not got this sense, you will be pleased with all sorts of things less than that, and you will be out for them. But, mark you; if you can be like that, it is a very terrible indictment, for it means that somehow, where you are concerned, that mighty heavenly apprehending has failed.

(b) A Crisis

So the thing began with Moses inwardly, and that inward thing led to a definite crisis, the crisis of the earthly and the heavenly. The Lord has wonderful ways of producing this crisis. You know it is not always produced and precipitated by some ecstasy - if that is what you are after - the glory of a great light and vision, the enrapturing of your soul, some tremendously wonderful heavenly experience. It does not always happen like that. It did not happen like that with Moses, nor with others. How did it happen? He went out one day and saw an Egyptian persecuting a Hebrew, and this sense of destiny took possession of him and overmastered him, and so, being evidently of powerful physique, he laid on to the Egyptian and slew him there and then. That was the crisis that precipitated this whole thing. Sometimes we only wake up to the heavenly or are brought face to face with the heavenly by some ghastly misdemeanor or failure; for, almost immediately after this, things were made untenable for Moses in that realm in Egypt, and he had to quit.

But what was inside the crisis, what was the meaning of it, why did God allow it? Moses might have said, "Why did the Lord allow me to do that? Why did the Lord, who had foreknown me and had in His own foreknowledge called me to His great service, let me make a mess of things like that? Why did He let me become involved by my own act in a thing like murder, to have the stain of murder on my hands? - I who am called to be the emancipator of God's people! Why has the Lord allowed it?" And the answer would have been: "That is not the way in which heaven does things, Moses. That is the way the world does things; it is the way the flesh does things. It is not heaven's way of doing things. You, Moses, can never bring out a heavenly people into a heavenly place by earthly methods and means. Learn that once and for all. It may seem a terrible way of dealing with the situation, but there it is, clear and plain. This people, that you are chosen in the foreknowledge of God and by the sovereign act of God and by this sense of destiny in yourself to lead out: this people, chosen to be a heavenly people - how can you get them on to a heavenly level of life if that is your level of life?" We will come back to that again in a minute. Heaven breaks in and says with terrible emphasis, "No, Moses. Carnal weapons for carnal ends, but not carnal weapons for spiritual ends; earthly ways for earthly ends, but not earthly ways for heavenly ends. Heaven is governing here and must register itself like this." What a lesson for a life! What a foundation!

Now you may never have been a murderer, but I have no doubt that some at least who read these lines have learned very deep lessons of this kind: that you just cannot go on with God on that level, you cannot get through with God along that line, you cannot serve God in His heavenly purpose in such ways, in the strength of the flesh. It is so true to principle. Heaven will have none of them; it demands its own life, its own nature. That was the crisis of the heavenly and the earthly in the training of Moses.

(c) Forty Years in the Wilderness

And the next phase - to the wilderness, to the "back-desert" for the next forty years. Oh, surely this has no place in the economy of God! Yes, wildernesses always represent and signify one thing wherever you find them. They signify self-emptying. Think about that. You cannot be a very important person in a wilderness. You cannot be a very self-sufficient person in a wilderness. You cannot be a self-confident person in a wilderness. A wilderness empties all that out. You are not only in the wilderness: the wilderness gets into you, barren, desolate, unprofitable, useless. And do you not think that that got into Moses in forty years? What is happening?

It is the negative side of training. It is the cancellation of Egypt and of the world. Egypt stood for self-sufficiency, Egypt was always the synonym for independence - and Egypt had to be emptied out of Moses; he had to be emptied of the spirit and principle of the world. It had got inside, and now it was being put out, and just the contrary to Egypt was coming in. This negative side, as we have called it, is an integral part of the school of the heavenly way. It brings us inwardly and spiritually to the place where we see clearly that there is no profit whatever in us; where of ourselves we can produce and accomplish nothing. That is the wilderness. Do not misunderstand or fail to recognize that. It is true to life, true to experience, and true to heavenly principle. Room has to be made in us for heaven - for there is no room for heaven in us by nature.

(d) The Ordeal of Emancipation

Then the next thing after that - Moses is brought back to Egypt for the ordeal of emancipation. Now it is the Lord, not Moses. It is going to be all the Lord now, or nothing at all. But it is going to be the Lord. *"Now shalt thou see what I will do" (Exodus 6:1)*. There was a day when Moses said, "Now you shalt see what I will do," and the Egyptian felt the weight of that, and the next day the Hebrew. But that has gone, and the Lord says, "Now shalt thou see what I will do." "I will do, now you have stopped." The position is altered; everything now becomes possible. There has been a transition from the negative to the positive. The great ordeal of the emancipation of this people begins.

The first stage relates to the rod and the hand. Exodus 4 - "What is that in thy hand?" "A rod." "Very well; by that rod things are going to be done." "Put now thine hand into thy bosom." "Take it Out" - white and leprous. "Put thine hand into thy bosom again." "Take it out" - clean and whole.

THE ROD

What is the rod? You know that the rod that Moses used was later Aaron's rod, the rod that budded when the test of priesthood was made (Numbers 17). Twelve rods were put up overnight, representing the tribes. In the morning there were eleven dead rods and one living - the insignia of a living priesthood. And do not forget: priesthood has to do with the spiritual. They are going to have to deal with all the gods of the Egyptians. They are unclean, they are corrupt, they are evil, they are of the devil's company. It needs the mighty power of a holy priesthood to deal with that unclean situation. It is the rod of the word of the Cross. The word of the Cross is a mighty rod.

What is the issue here - the issue that is bound up with this whole ordeal? This is it. The Lord had said, *"The Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ex. 7:5)*. That is the issue. Very well then; begin to apply that in practical ways by the word of the Cross, the word of living priesthood.

Apply it first to the whole realm of nature, of creation. *"I, the Lord, have created" (Isaiah 64:8)*. The Lord of Calvary is the Lord of creation, and the first application of the word of the Cross is in that realm in Egypt. At the touch of the Lord of creation the world of living things is brought under judgment; the issue - "I am the Lord."

The second application is to the heavens - for the Lord made the heavens as well as the earth - and the elements, under the word, are touched. If you look on to Calvary, you will see all these features. When He, the great Pioneer of the heavenly way, went to the Cross, the whole creation was affected. Heaven and earth were involved. There was a great earthquake, and there was "darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." Creation and the very elements were coming under the impact of Him who is the Word in the Cross. That happened in Egypt, in type.

Then thirdly, there came the application to hell. What is hell's greatest weapon? Death, "the last enemy" (I Cor. 15:26) Death is no friend, death is the last enemy, and that was the last judgment of Egypt. Hell's stronghold was broken into; the power of death was taken hold of for the emancipation of a people. That is what Christ did in the Cross. The word of the Cross is this: that hell has been broken into and death has been apprehended and made to serve the ends of God rather than frustrate them. In Egypt the word by the rod touched the firstborn with death, and hell was stung with its own sting to the very core of its being. But that is not all. That self-same rod led the people out, worked redemption from Egypt and through the Red Sea. "*Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea*" (Ex. 14:16). The word of the Cross is the word of life triumphant over death. Death is vanquished and life and incorruption are brought to light. By means of the rod of the word of the Cross, through this wonderful ordeal of emancipation, Moses is learning one thing - that *heaven rules*: heaven rules in this creation, heaven rules in heaven, heaven rules in hell; and in the kingdoms of men heaven rules for the emancipation of the elect. All this is the story of the intervention of heaven.

You wonder why this was graduated as it was. It did not happen all at once. The effect of the rod was only partial to begin with, but gained in strength and power as it went along.

There are two sides to this. On the one hand, there is the progressive nature of this education: it is gradual. We do not come all at once to see and to know the full power of heaven. We learn it a bit at a time. It is graduated. It goes so far at one time; it will go farther later on. Are we not learning that? We learn it in simple ways - how heaven is greater than earth, than man, than nature, than the enemy. We are learning, step by step, more and more of the meaning of that tremendous, infinite ascendancy of heaven.

But there is the other side. God, by this gradual means, is drawing out the opposing forces, gradually extending them. "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." "Pharaoh shall harden his heart." God could have wiped him out in one stroke, but He is going to extend him to his utmost limit. The power of this world is going to be drawn out to its full extent to meet the infinite power of heaven, and then heaven's superiority will be a very simple thing, after all.

We have so often said this, and it is true. Though we cannot grasp it or see it or calculate it, the truth is that "the power that worketh in us" is "the exceeding greatness of His power" (Eph. 3:20; 1:19). We do not know, we are not able to measure, the immensity of the forces that are against a soul being saved, the immensity of the forces that are set against God's full purpose for His people. We know a little and we shall know more and more as we go on; but when it says "the *exceeding* greatness of his power," that is not just language: that is an attempt - only an attempt - by means of language, by superlatives, by all that human language can do - to arrive at the reality. "*The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead*" (Eph. 1:19, 20). And that is to us-ward.

There is something tremendous here. It is heaven's superiority over this whole situation to bring a people out and to bring a people through. We are in that school. Moses was in that school. He was put through that ordeal in order that he might progressively, but quite

steadily and definitely, recognize that all that is here in Egypt, all that Pharaoh represents, is going to be drained to the last drop of its vitality and be laid in death at last - all of it. Moses was sometimes apprehensive. Sometimes he came back from the challenge disappointed. He felt, "We have not got there yet, something more is needed yet." "All right," says the Lord, "we will have something more." The Lord was leading him on in his education; he was coming progressively to see more and more. Do you not think that, if God did everything all at once, in one act, we should miss something, we should take it all for granted, it would not mean so much to us, it would be just a miracle of the past? And yet throughout our lifetime God is extending the forces against us in order to prove that His forces are superior. It is a long schooling, but that is the way of the heavenly purpose.

THE HAND

From the rod to the hand. "Put now thy hand into thy bosom." What hand? That hand that had murdered the Egyptian, that hand stained with blood, that hand of natural strength, that hand of self-sufficiency, that hand which represented the old Moses and his failure, failure under the energy and drive of his own will. "Put that hand in. What is in your bosom, Moses? *That* is what is yours. Do you think *that* can wield the rod of God? Do you think *that* can bring in the heavenly authority? Oh no, that hand has to be cleansed before you can wield that rod. That bosom must be cleansed, that stain must be removed, all that self-energy and self-sufficiency has to be undercut. Moses, *that leprous hand is what you are like in yourself.*"

Are we not discovering that? What is my heart like? What are we like? Just like that. The more we know and see of ourselves, the more it is like leprosy. But, blessed be God, there is a cleansing. For Moses there was a Divine act of cleansing. In that instant, all the meaning of the Cross, the word of the Cross, took effect in Moses' life - of course in type, in figure. And now that there is a hand that cleansed, that is, a heart circumcised, the inner life separated from the fleshly strength and sufficiency, all that can take the word of the Cross, the word of authority. It must be like that. We have no power in the realm of the gods of the Egyptians, those spiritual forces that are actuating this world, no authority at all in that court, no hope of overpowering that strength, unless something has happened for the deliverance of ourselves from our own strength, our own sufficiency, our own hearts.

(2) Israel under the Leadership of Moses

Then there is that phase, so large that I hardly dare touch on it at the moment - Israel under the leadership of Moses. It was one long drawn-out issue of the heavenly and the earthly. All those forty years of the nation in the wilderness were just that - the issue of the heavenly and the earthly being fought out. They had been brought out to be a heavenly people; to have all their resources, all their support and succor, from heaven; to be in this world and not of it. If ever that is true - to be in the world and not of it - it is true in a wilderness.

The Divine thought was the making of a large place for heaven. There was a large place for heaven in that wilderness. Everything from the Divine side was to be heavenly. The people were constituted on heavenly principles. Moses up in the mount was securing those heavenly principles for the constituting of the nation. It was all coming from heaven. Their whole relationship to God in the wilderness, as centered in the tabernacle, came out of heaven: it was the pattern shown in the mount. It was heavenly; nothing was left to man and his judgment at all. Their going from day to day was out from heavenly means of the pillar of cloud and fire. It was all heavenly. What warfare there was, was heavenly: Moses on the top of the hill, with hands uplifted, the battle going on in the valley. Heaven is directing this warfare: it is heavenly warfare. It was all learning the meaning of the heavenly way, in every aspect.

But they failed to learn those lessons. They would come down to earth, they would reject the heavenly. It was too hard, it was too difficult for the flesh, it was too uncertain. It was such dependence; it was such helplessness so far as self was concerned. They could not help themselves - and we do want to help ourselves in this business. It was all so heavenly. But it was most real. Those who know anything about it know that heavenly things are the most real, spiritual things are far more real than other things. But they would not have the heavenly way, they would have the earthly; and they repudiated it all and perished, on the earth, in the wilderness.

Joshua and Caleb took up all those lessons of the schooling of Moses and Israel, in themselves. They learned the lessons, they apprehended the heavenly truth, and they took the next generation over - a heavenly generation.

Well, all that may be regarded as history, as what is in the Bible: but I am sure that many of you are reading your own history. Is it not so true in principle to what we are going through; to what God is doing with us - defeating us, bewildering us, bringing us to an end, to an emptiness and helplessness? - and yet, by some mighty power that we do not feel, of which we are not conscious, we are going on" we are being drawn out and drawn up. It is the story of so many survivals, when it would seem that all has gone: that we are lost, we have failed, broken down, disappointed the Lord; there can be no future.

But there is a future. We have continued. There is something from beyond that is all the time holding us on, and it may be that today our hearts are more set upon what is of God than ever they were. And why is that? Not because we have been more successful, not because we have been less full of failure and weakness. No; rather we have learnt the lesson of our own weakness. We know today, better than ever we knew it, that "in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18) - and yet today the Lord has a stronger purchase upon us than ever. What is this? This is a mystery. Oh, thank God it is true! Thank God for His sovereign grace! These are the evidences that He has called us with a great calling and that He will not be satisfied until He has brought us right through to His own full end. May we follow on whatever the cost.

Chapter 5 - Jordan - A Change of Situation

Reading: *Joshua 3; 4:1-9.*

The passage of Jordan, about which we read in these verses, is a consummate presentation of what the Lord is saying to us in this series of studies. It must be quite clear to us, as we read it, that it represents a profoundly critical point in the history of the people involved, the culmination of a long process of preparation, the initiation of a new and wonderful phase of their life. Moreover, from abundant New Testament support, we see that this is a representation of the life of the children of God and of the would-be children of God in our own time: that is, the New Testament takes up this incident in the life of Israel and declares that it was a type, or figure; that its real meaning, its abiding meaning, its spiritual significance relates to the Christian or the would-be Christian.

So that we to-day, at this present time and in our present situation, really stand right into this part of the book of Joshua. It applies to us. We are not reading ourselves back so many centuries ago, merely with the idea that something happened then in Israel's life - that they passed out of the wilderness into the land of Canaan. We are reading from there on into this present day. We are bringing that right forward and saying, "That is not then, it is now; and this is that, or that is how it should be." The wonderful thing is that that could be now, at this very moment, in experience. When Joshua said, "Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you" - that is possible now, that can be brought right up to date. So let us look at it, for we are keeping closely to all that we have been considering in these past chapters - the pioneering of the heavenly way.

The Objective in View in the Transition

First of all, let us recall the objective, the object in view in this transition, this passage of the Jordan. We are given the spiritual interpretation. It is shown to be an illustration of life in resurrection and heavenly union with Christ. That is the objective to which God has called His people. That is precisely the thing for which the Lord calls us at all, by His grace - resurrection union with Christ: union with Christ on the ground of resurrection life. And not only that, but union with Christ in His heavenly life, by the Holy Spirit; oneness with Him as in heaven, and all that that means.

That is the objective; that is the irreducible minimum of God's will for His people. If we do not come to resurrection union with the Lord Jesus, we have not come to any union at all. That is to say, that, for all practical purposes and values, we know nothing really of the meaning of being "joined to the Lord." There are many who know something of what it is to be in union with a living Christ, but who know perhaps very little, at most not enough, of heavenly union with Him and all that that means. Until we come to that, we have not come to the very object of our salvation, neither have we come to God's satisfaction in saving us. We must see what that means.

Transition

(a) Into the Authority of Christ

Getting the objective clear before us, let us look more closely at the transition. This transition had two aspects. In the first place, it represented a transition from the authority of darkness into the authority of Christ. Up to this point these people had still been under the authority of darkness, notwithstanding that they had been out of Egypt for a good many years. The fact is that, while they had long ago come out of Egypt, Egypt had only just come out of them. It is possible for us to be saved from the world in an outward way and not to be saved from it in an inward way. Egypt had retained a strength inside of them

through the years of the wilderness. That generation had constantly been found harking back to Egypt. "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt" (Exodus 16:3). "Oh, that we had stayed in Egypt!" It was still inside, it still had a grip upon them, they still had dreams and imaginations of satisfaction there. They had not come completely and utterly to that emancipation which settles once and for all that there is absolutely nothing back there in that world, nothing at all; the very thought of it is repugnant, is hateful; the very thought of it means desolation: they had not come there. There is that, even in Christians, which sometimes, under strain and pressure, makes them begin to think that they would be better if they were back in the world - they would have a better time. But this Jordan was the settlement of that. Whatever had lingered and lurked through all the wilderness years was finished with at the Jordan. That authority, that inward control, was finally broken at the Jordan. It was transition, utter transition, from the authority of darkness into, typically speaking, the authority of Christ.

Again I am going to say something that I have often said before. There is such a thing as having and knowing Christ as your Saviour without knowing Him as your Lord - that is to say, only for salvation: as Saviour from condemnation, from pending judgment, from hell; perhaps Saviour into some of the positive blessings of that position: and yet - oh, how much more is possible and real for our knowledge! It is all too long a gap from the exodus to the "*eisodus*," the entry; far too big a space between these two things. How many, many Christians, after having been saved for a long time, go to a convention and make Jesus Christ Lord, discovering that that space between the two things has been far too long, that this might have been long ago. Jordan speaks not only of our finding Christ as our Saviour from judgment and death, but of our finding Him as Lord - with all that it means that He should be Lord. It is not until He is Lord that we begin to discover the riches, the unsearchable riches, that are in Him, like the wealth of the land.

(b) Into the Fruitfulness of Life in the Spirit

The Jordan again represented the transition from the desolation and barrenness of nature into the fruitfulness of life in the Spirit. They had lived so much in themselves; the self-life, the natural life, had been so much asserting itself; their own personal interests, advantages or disadvantages had occupied such a large place on their horizon. If things in the line of God's purpose were not easy, but going contrary to nature, they were full of murmurings. If things went well, of course it was quite natural to be full of rejoicing. It was nature either way. It was nature rejoicing because things were easy. It was nature grumbling because things were difficult. It was the life of nature - and what a barren wilderness that was for them, a wilderness outside and inside. And now the Jordan puts a finish to that and represents a transition from that barren, desolate life in the flesh, in nature, to a life in the Spirit.

For that Man, who presently confronted Joshua as representative of God, was, I believe, no other than the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Captain of the Lord's host. He is that - "Prince of the host of the Lord" (Joshua 5:14), He called Himself. When those words which we so often quote, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6), were used by the prophet, you know that the literal wording there is, "Not an army... but by my Spirit." And here is the Captain of the host of the Lord, the Spirit, and from this time He is going to take charge - and what a different situation will obtain! It will be life in the Spirit. Yes, there will be fruitfulness now; not a life without slips and mistakes - they happen - but a life adjusted to the Spirit. It was to be a life of progress, a life of enlargement, a life of constant enrichment, a life of entry upon their inheritance. "Every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ..." (Ephesians 1:3). From the barrenness of nature to the fruitfulness of life in the Spirit: that was the meaning of the transition of Jordan.

The Great Pioneer Going Before

But then we come to the central focal point of it all: the great Pioneer - this time written with a very big capital - the great Pioneer as represented by the ark of the Lord of the whole earth. Once again, this is not imaginary interpretation. The New Testament warrants, by definite statement, the interpretation that that ark was a type of the Lord Jesus. We will not stay to prove it from the Scripture, but it is so. The ark then typifies Christ. The great transition was going to be made. How would it be made? "*The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you*" (Joshua 3:11). "*There shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits*" (Joshua 3:4). It is not possible to estimate exactly what that measurement was, because there are three cubits in the Bible, and we do not know which of them this was (and even if we did, we do not know precisely what the measurement was); but the very smallest measurement here of the cubit would make this over - well over - one thousand feet between the ark and the people.

Why that? "Keep that space, come not near, keep that mighty space between you and it" - shall we say, "between you and Him?" Why that great space?

(a) The Greatness of Christ in Death

Does it not speak, in the first place, of the greatness of Christ in death? - for it says here in parenthesis "Jordan overfloweth all its banks all the time of harvest" (Joshua 3:15), and this was the time. "Jordan overfloweth all its banks": a wide inundation beyond its channel, spreading itself out in all directions; and we know so well that that speaks of the waters of death and judgment. It speaks of the Cross of the Lord Jesus. And He stands right in the flood, in the overwhelming inundation of death's power: stands right in it, right in the center of it, right in its full depth and length and breadth; stems it all.

How great is Christ in death! Death is no small thing. Death is a mighty overwhelming flood. He has plumbed its depths, He has taken its measure, and by dying He has destroyed death. There He is. He stands right into death: death has lost its power: death is thrown back: death is forbidden to move on. The description of that is wonderful. While on the one side there was the mighty wall of water standing up, on the other side, right down to the Dead Sea, all that spoke of death was dried up. How great is Christ in death! Incomparable! He is alone in that. No one else could do it.

(b) The Exclusiveness of Christ in Death

Then it speaks of the exclusiveness of Christ: not only the greatness but the exclusiveness of Christ in death. "There was no other good enough." Oh, the blasphemy of talking about the death, even the most heroic death, of a soldier, giving his life for his country, being comparable to the death of Jesus! No. Whatever heroism there may be - and there may be a great deal which can be honoured, valued and appreciated - but however great may be the heroism and sacrifice of men, it "comes not nigh unto" this by two thousand cubits. There is a space between. God has placed that space, and He says, "This is inviolate: He is apart, nothing can come near to this mighty work of Jesus Christ; no one else has done it, and no one can do it; it must be done by Him alone."

(c) The Loneliness of Christ in Death

Alone. Look at the loneliness of that figure - forgetting for the moment that there were Levites bearing the ark on their shoulders: the description is intended not to bring them into view at all, but to have this ark only in view - to behold it, as it were, afar off. It is a great space. If it were only one thousand feet, that is quite a distance from which to look on a little object like that, a lonely little object right out there. How alone He was in death. "All the disciples left him, and fled" (Matt. 26:56). He said, "Ye... shall leave me alone" (John 16:32), and they did. And then the deepest pang of all - "My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). His aloneness in death is portrayed by the ark out there. Behold Him: "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Why this aloneness? Well, you see, "there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin": there was no other great enough, big enough, to bear the sin of the world. He being the only one who could do it, it involved Him in this utterness of loneliness. Who could bear to know in full consciousness their utter abandonment by God? Thank God, we need never know that. We need never for a moment have the consciousness that God has forsaken us. That is not necessary, and indeed we could not survive it. But He knew it. It took Him, the Son of God, to come through that. It is the price He paid as the Pioneer - the Pioneer of our salvation, the Pioneer of our inheritance, the Pioneer of our possession of all that unto which God has called us by union with Christ. The Pioneer had to pay the price of this utter and final aloneness. Is that not something of the sigh, the cry, in Isaiah 53? Yes, He is the alone One there, wounded for our transgressions, smitten of God and stricken, His soul made by God an offering for sin; but "He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days," and out of that loneliness shall come, in a mighty multitude, the children of His bereavement (Isa. 49:20).

Identification with Christ by Faith and Testimony

The next thing, and the final word for the moment, is identification with Him by faith and testimony. No, we cannot literally and actually come into this. Thank God, it is not necessary. I mean that we are not called to go through all that He went through, but we are called to take a faith position, to give attestation to it in a very practical way. Not just walk in and through and take it as ours, but to recognize that it is only ours because of Him, only ours in Him. There is an identification of life with Him.

And so this identification by faith and testimony is seen in the commandment of God as to what was to be done. Out of the bed of the Jordan, out of the place where all this was transacted by the great Pioneer of redemption, stones were to be taken, and - notice - by twelve men: "out of every tribe a man" (Joshua 4:2). In effect, every man of every tribe is here represented. It is a personal matter for everyone. "Every man... a stone." It has to be a personal transaction, a personal testimony, a personal appropriation of it all, a taking of it upon our shoulders as bringing us under all that it means; our committal to it, our committal to the death of the Lord Jesus, to the fact that in Him we died; our committal to His burial. "We were buried... with him" (Romans 6:4). Then our committal to His resurrection. The stones in the Jordan signify our union with Him in death and burial; the stones taken out of the Jordan and built up for a memorial on the other side, our union with Him in resurrection.

But there has to be a practical, personal, individual transaction. "Every man... a stone." Have you taken the stone on your shoulder personally? Have you definitely done this? You know how the Apostle Paul tells you that the testimony is borne, it is so familiar. "*We were buried... with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life*" (Romans 6:4). That is this story quite clearly, so simply. Yes, by baptism we declare that we have taken the stone on our shoulders, we have made this our responsibility, we have definitely committed ourselves to all this.

Let me say again - it is not just to be saved from judgment, death and hell, but to be saved unto - not only from, but *unto* - all that which is in the heart of God; that it is no longer what we are going to get, how it is going to affect *us*: that is the old tyranny; no longer personal circumstances at all. It is what the Lord wants; it is what will satisfy and glorify Him. That is the passion of the heart that is so committed; and when He gets us through on

that matter, gets us over the fence of self-interest, worldly interest, fleshly government, on to the ground where it is all the Lord and what He wants, we shall have found the land flowing with milk and honey, we shall have found the riches of Christ, we shall have come into an opened heaven. So much of our Christian life and work is self-ward. Until it is changed from self to the Lord, fully and utterly, we shall know nothing of the heavenly life of spiritual fullness. But that is what is here represented.

May the Lord find us all making this great transition, this declaration - "Every man... a stone": that Jordan, with all that it means, has got to rest upon our shoulders.

Chapter 6 - The Way to God's End

We are not going to read at the moment, but we shall have the book of Joshua open before us, for reference as we go along.

The End of the Way

It is necessary for us at the outset, before considering the way to the end, to bring the end of the way right into view. We commenced by noting that God began with the heavens and then proceeded to the earth, and at the end of the Bible it is that which comes down out of heaven which consummates the whole process of His activities through the ages, so that the end is a full expression of what is heavenly, or an expression of what is heavenly in fullness. That is the end. We said to begin with that the heavens govern everything. As it is in nature, so it is in the things of the Spirit. Everything is governed by the heavens, and the earth and all that is earthly has to reckon with and answer to what is heavenly.

Get that as a spiritual truth. What is true in the realm of the natural creation is but an expression of the spiritual mind of God: and that means that, just as this world, this earth, is so governed and controlled by heavenly forces and heavenly bodies that if it should get out of right adjustment or relationship with those bodies it would disintegrate, it would cease, it would freeze up or burn up, it would cease to function as an organic whole: the same thing is spiritually true. The whole Bible is taken up with this fact, that what is here is related to what is in heaven, and everything comes out from heaven and has to answer to heaven and keep adjustment to heaven - everything in our lives: because the Holy Spirit, having come down from heaven, is the link between what is here and what is there.

These things are not just abstract ideas. They are the factors which lie right behind everything we have of Divine revelation in the Scriptures. The whole of the Bible from the first verse to the last can be summed up in that one thing - that heaven is challenging this earth, and this earth has got to make an answer to heaven. There are countless details covered by that, but it is a fact; so that the end of all things will just be that heaven is fully realized in the creation and, especially in a spiritual way, in the people of God. That is the end which we bring into view at once.

Now, in relation to that end, we must note another governing truth. But let me first say something in parenthesis. Some of these phrases are very familiar, and I am always a little afraid that familiarity with phraseology may take something of their edge away. When we use that phrase "a governing thing," let us stop to get the force of it. It means that, if we are under the *government* of a law, we cannot escape that law. There are laws of nature, in our bodies, in this world. They are there, and if you disregard those laws it does not put them out of operation. You find that in the long run they will break you; in the long run they find you out. But come into line with them, and they will mean your salvation, your life. They are "governing," whether you like it or not. Thus, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). That is a law; you cannot escape it. There are numerous laws like that. So when we speak of a "governing" law or truth, it is something established by God in His universe, and it is best discovered and obeyed.

God's Sovereign Choice of Vessels

Let us come, then, to this further governing truth, in relation to God's end: that God chooses vessels, individual and collective or corporate, and brings them in a peculiar way sovereignly into relationship with His full end, and then does that in them which He means for a much larger company than themselves. He sovereignly chooses vessels - whether individuals or companies - the Bible is just full of that - and then sets to work with those vessels to do something in an extraordinary way, in a very much fuller way, in order that,

by means of what He is doing in such elect vessels, He may reach out to many others beyond them. That is a governing truth. He does something in an elect vessel which is meant for many more than itself or its members.

Representative Values

Now let us stop with that for a moment, because our mentality always needs helping. It might very well be that many of you, reading these lines, would say, "Well, I cannot see that I am an elect vessel, in that specific way." You are thinking of the men to whom we have been referring as the pioneers of this heavenly way - Abraham and Moses and so on. You say, "I am not a Moses or an Abraham; I do not see how I come into that category at all."

Well, while it may be that there are individuals among you who are chosen of God for something of this nature beyond the ordinary rank and file, as we say: while that may be true, there is this other side - that you may be a part of a collective or corporate vessel, just a part of it; and if you are - and most probably you are; I think I would go as far as to say, "and you are " - if the Lord has laid His hand upon you and put in you this sense of destiny, of having been called to something more than just "being a Christian," a strong sense of calling - if that is in you, you may take it that you are related to a larger purpose. If that is true, you must not just regard yourself, as an individual, and therefore your experiences and God's dealings with you, as though you were the only person, as though you were something very special.

Let me put it the other way round. You may be going through what God is doing with a collective vessel and you may not see, so far as your own individual and personal life is concerned, any meaning for what you are going through. "Why am I going through this?" Well, because you are a part of a larger whole - that is the answer. So often we find that great pressure upon us individually. When we begin to compare notes, we find that other people spiritually related to us are having the same experience. It is the great law of the Body. "Whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it" (I Cor. 12:26). What is it all about?

Well, you see, it is collective, it is corporate; and although we cannot follow it all, to see how it is working out, God is doing something in a related way, and we are part of that. We are bearing the brunt of something very much bigger than ourselves. That spiritual relatedness is involving us in this larger purpose of God, which has to do with the heavenlies, much bigger than this earth. It is that that makes us one. It is not that we join something, that we have our name on a membership roll, or that something is done to recognize us publicly as a member of a certain company. It is not that. You may be many miles, hundreds or thousands of miles, apart, and yet, because you are bound up with this heavenly thing that God is doing, you may be feeling the repercussions thousands of miles away. Because when you get into heaven all these earthly things disappear; geography and distances and time all go; they do not obtain up there.

If only we could get the heavenly conception of the Church! Oh, how foolish our earthly conceptions of the Church are! We must get off this earth, and all that is here, as to what is called the Church. You find it is just one unit in heaven. All this does not obtain there. That is where we were when we were speaking about the passage of Jordan in our last chapter. In that Jordan something was left behind. The people moved off earthly ground on to heavenly. We shall come back to that again presently. But that is to be a spiritual reality, a consciousness into which we enter. While we ourselves cannot explain and understand why we may be having such a bad time, the heavenly explanation is that we are involved in something related to God's fuller purpose, and we are suffering, or we are going through this experience, in a *related* way; and it is very wonderful, as from time to time we meet

others with whom we know spiritual fellowship, how we find they have been going through exactly the same thing as we have. The Lord has been saying something to them, and doing something with them, which is not the ordinary or the usual thing, but something quite extra.

Intrinsic Values

Now that is all connected with the fact, mentioned earlier, that God chooses individual or collective vessels, and does in them that which is meant for a very much larger company. Those vessels, be they individual or be they collective, are representative of something that God is after on a larger scale, in a larger sphere. It begins in them. I think that is what Paul meant when he said, "in me as chief [first one]... for an example" (I Timothy 1:16). I think he meant by that that he was representative of what God was going to do through him. All the Lord was going to do through him in the larger realm, in the churches, the provinces and the nations, was representative, was in token. God was going to operate in the wider scale through this man - not by giving him something to say, but by doing something in him.

That is where we have gone astray. God *does* something first. He brings into being a living representation of His fuller thought, by means of peculiar, unusual and extraordinary dealings with a vessel. There is very little that is ordinary in the life and experience of such a vessel. It is all extraordinary, unusual. Such representative vessels, individual or collective, are chosen that in them there shall be established the *essential, intrinsic values* intended for the larger sphere and realm; something which can be expanded, which is capable of going far beyond itself, capable of great enlargement and expansion.

In chemistry we speak of the "mother-tincture." We mean, by that, something you can enlarge upon and distribute. It is of the very essence, the concentrated essence. But the effecting of this kind of thing in any vessel, in order to produce intrinsic values, concentrated essence, is terrific work. There is nothing ordinary about it. Some of you may be able to understand this from experience. God's dealings with you are by no means ordinary dealings. Sometimes you feel that the concentration in your experience is far too concentrated! You wonder how you are going to get through at all under this kind of handling from the Lord.

I am keeping very near to the Bible. Do not think that I am talking outside the Bible. I am talking with the background: this is what the Word of God reveals. This is the experience of Abraham - no ordinary experience; a concentration of God upon that man. Think of the vast host who have derived the values from that. Abraham more than once got to breaking point, where he could not support it. God had to intervene to get him through. The intrinsic value of heavenliness is the most testing thing that anybody can ever have to do with.

In our nature we are so utterly earthly and earthy in every way. We must see things - that is earth; we must *feel* things - that is earth. We must have all the evidences - we must have so much that is earthly. But God takes us off the earth, right off the earth - I mean in a spiritual way - and dangles us, so to speak, in mid-air. It is a most precarious kind of existence, exceedingly trying. You do not know where you are; you cannot explain things; you cannot put your foot down solidly and feel that you are sure about anything. God is upsetting all your powers of reckoning and calculation and interpretation, and making it utterly necessary to have another kind of wisdom and understanding, which does not belong to this earth or world or man at all. It is heavenly. That is the experience of these pioneers of the heavenly way. Hear them crying out of their earthliness, sometimes even complaining to the Lord. Listen to Jeremiah - he is out of his depth. It was the intensive, intrinsic values that God was after.

Spontaneous Ministry

Then further: spontaneous ministry. I underline that word "*spontaneous*" - not organized ministry but *spontaneous* ministry. When it is like that, you have only got to *be* and it happens. Do you understand that? You only have to be like that and it happens. You can no more shut that up than you can shut up the sun.

You notice that that is what the Lord was after at the beginning of His ministry. He first of all got hold of a set of men, individuals, and He put them through it. It was not all so simple as the reading of the story. You may read the Gospels covering the story of three years' companionship between those disciples and the Lord, and you may read the record of those last days on the earth, and then the Cross. Well, it is a tremendous story in itself; but we have not recorded, because it was not possible to record, all that went on inside those men. Even during those three years, I venture to say that they were again and again at the end of their tether: they did not know where they were, what this meant, what it was leading to. They were all the time trying to bring things within the compass of their own ideas, their own mentality; to interpret in the light of prophecy, and so on; to bring it down and have it according to the text-book. He was beating them all the time, He was a continuous enigma. They could not fathom this Man. He never did things according to the text-book, not even according to Moses. He is upsetting the whole thing. What is He doing? What does He mean?

And then the Cross: you cannot read the depths of their soul-anguish and perplexity in those days. You can only understand it out of your own experience of when the Lord begins to do things like that - getting you out of your depth and contradicting all your expectations, seeming to go entirely the opposite way from what you felt you had a right to expect of Him. He does not do what you expect. Sometimes you are altogether with your back to the wall because of the Lord's dealings with you. He got hold of men who went through that with a very deep experience.

Then through those men He got churches, He got companies of believers, and the business started. There is a peculiar kind of discipline and training which belongs to corporate life, when you cease to be just a separate unit, even as a Christian, and you have to live a related life, come into relationship with other believers and live this corporate life, a heavenly life on earth. The New Testament shows that that is anything but an easy thing. You may think, viewing it objectively, that it is a very lovely thing to be in an assembly; but it is not always lovely. That assembly may be going through it. There is something happening, there is a handling of God there, which is sometimes so deep and terrible that you do not know what the Lord means by it; you are all registering this. It is a deep way, a suffering way. We suffer together as an assembly; this is corporate suffering, corporate travail. So these churches were brought into being, and they went through it. They were instructed, too; but, whatever happened to them in the way of instruction and teaching, there was always the parallel and the corresponding discipline of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had His hand upon them and was dealing with them in a drastic way. Things were happening.

You say, "Well, instance that." Look at all the happenings in Corinth. What was it Paul said to them? "For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep [have died]" (I Cor. 11:30). There is a secret spiritual history there. The Holy Ghost has got hold of the situation. They might have looked at it in a natural way. "Somebody is ill - send for the doctor." But wait a minute. May there not be some spiritual factor bound up with it? May not the Holy Spirit have something to do with this? Paul says, Yes! It does not mean that everybody who is sick is a spiritual delinquent, but the principle is there. The Church is being dealt with by the Holy Ghost in relation to God's fuller purpose.

The point is quite clear, then, that God gets hold first of individuals and then of companies, and He deals with them in this way: so that, not because they have been given a message or a truth, but because of what God has done in them, they have a spontaneous ministry. It just happens, that is all; somehow or other, it happens, without our being able to explain it - except thus: that the Holy Spirit has taken account of something and He is using it; He is seeing that what He has done there is expanded, is reaching out. It just happens. Paul said about the church in Thessalonica, "From you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place..." (I Thess. 1:8). Do you think that that necessarily meant that they sent out evangelists? They may have done, but it does not say so. Look at the context. You will see that Paul is saying, "All over the place in other churches they are talking about you; I need not speak of you - it is known." It is spontaneous ministry out of what God does. God takes in hand to get these intrinsic values, and He is not going to waste them.

So the end that God has in view is governing all His dealings with His instruments. Heavenly fullness is His end, and it motivates all His dealings with the instruments that He has chosen in relation to that end. He is bringing to heavenly fullness.

We must realize that nothing with God is an end in itself. Conversion is not an end in itself. It is an awful tragedy to regard conversion as an end in itself and leave it there, feeling quite satisfied. You stop with conversion, and see what happens, with your own or anybody else's. What happens? All the sense of purpose is quenched, all that vitality in the conversion subsides, and you get simply a lot of converted people. They are converted - they have believed on the Lord Jesus; but they are just a lot of converted people, and probably the greatest problem today is a lot of converted people over this earth. They have stopped; their conversion has become an end in itself.

Assembly life is no end in itself. Gather a company of the Lord's people in a corporate expression, and let them put their own hedge around and be something to themselves, having a nice time on their own and the same thing happens. The work of the Lord: if the work of the Lord is an end in itself - that is, so that it becomes some *thing* - oh, here again is a tragedy. We take up the work of the Lord in some way, perhaps missionary work as it is called, or some other kind of specified work, and then that particular thing closes down in itself, that sphere is shut up or that line of things is brought to an end - and you have to start all over again and you have lost everything. The work was something in itself.

Now come back to this - if the Lord has done something in you, in me, or in a company, after this character, with this concentrated essence of heavenliness, nothing is an end in itself. The sphere may change, the form may change, but the thing is there. God has got what He wants and He will find a way for it, if it is there, if it is truly heavenly. We only cut off our own usefulness and ministry when we bring it down to earth. That is a true saying. Make it *your* ministry, *my* ministry, and you have narrowed it right down to earth. It will not move out, it will not realize God's end.

Oh, this possessing of things in the realm of God and making them ours! I want to say here that, if you have a mandate from God, if you have an anointing from heaven, if you have a ministry God-given, and you are not holding it as yours or stickling for its realization as yours, it will be fulfilled, and neither earth nor hell can stop it. Heaven will see to it. But it must be held in relation to heaven. The anointing is from heaven and everything that the anointing means has to be held in relation to heaven, and then heaven will see to it. Put Paul in prison and his ministry will be fulfilled. It is related to heaven. "The heavens do rule" (Daniel 4:26). But if we have brought it down to earth somewhere, then heaven is not going to sponsor it. There is a lot of history behind that.

Now, seeing that God's end is heavenly and spiritual fullness, and that it is by the way of progressive enlargement, we should be very concerned as to what that way is. It should

really concern us as to what heaven's way is, what is the heavenly way to God's end. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4), and this book of Joshua is among the things written aforetime for our learning, and gives us a very great deal of light on this matter of the heavenly way. But the heavenly way is so contrary to the earthly way. I do not know what you are expecting to happen, or to experience, when we talk of God's end being spiritual fullness, and this being something God is working at. What do you expect to happen? I think the first phase of this book contains quite a lot of light upon that.

The Servant Spirit

Just look at Joshua himself. Remember that Joshua here is representative in the thought of God of all God's saints and all God's servants, and what God did in Joshua is what God is going to do in all those to whom he is to minister. God did it in him in relation to the larger company. Well, how does it begin? The book begins like this: *"Now it came to pass after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son Nun, Moses' minister..."* - that word is really "attendant." With all that is in view in this book, you would think that he would get a better start than that. Moses the servant of the Lord, and Joshua just his attendant. He is not brought in with some official title, such as "the servant of the Lord." He is not brought in on that official ground at all. All that he is is an attendant. Follow that word through and see where it will lead you. The same word is used of John Mark - "they had also John as their attendant" (Acts 13:5). What is an attendant? Well, if there is one thing about an attendant, surely it is that he knows that kind of subjection that makes it possible for him to do as he is told. That is the mighty Joshua that is to be, and that is where he begins.

We are well aware of the great significance of Elisha. What a tremendous place Elisha came to have, with a double portion of Elijah's spirit and greater works than Elijah did! You remember what was said about Elisha. "Elisha... poured water on the hands of Elijah" (II Kings 3:11). He was his attendant. That is where he began.

In Joshua chapter 10, when Joshua commanded the sun, "Stand thou still," it says, "there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man." This man is touching heavenly things. That is tremendous. Where does it begin? With Moses' attendant! He has learned subjection: to do as he is told, to do trivial things, to be obedient, to take a humble position. And do not think it was easy for Joshua. Joshua had as much soul as anybody else. There was a time when there were others in the camp prophesying, and it was Joshua who went to Moses and said, "My lord Moses, forbid them." And Moses said, "Art thou jealous for my sake? would that all the Lord's people were prophets...!" (Numbers 11:26-30). Joshua had a soul; Joshua could assert his own ideas. He was a young man then. But here at last he comes out at the commencement of his great life work; now he is emerging into the real purpose of the sovereign calling of God: and the narrative begins - "Moses the servant of the Lord... Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister." Is that not a principle? There is something in that. We must always remember that the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible - and the Holy Spirit, if He is anything at all, is consistent with spiritual principles. It does not matter in what guise they are found; it does not matter when, where or how: the principle remains exactly the same.

The Levites commenced this ministry at the age of 25, but they were not allowed to assume full responsibility until they were 30. They were understudies of fully-fledged Levites for five years. This principle of the Attendant is maintained all through the Scriptures. A probationary period or phase always precedes full approval. Fullness is suspended until the particular purpose of that period as an Attendant is learned. It is the inculcating of ability to obey, to take orders, to be in subjection, to serve. We must not assume that we are anything. What we may be has to come naturally out of what we have been made. Do not

expect that, if God calls you to serve Him, there will immediately and inevitably be some great demonstration of His power and fullness. Joshua was the Attendant of Moses long before he was his successor and before the *manifestation* of the spirit of Moses was seen in Joshua. God digs deep, He has no pleasure in superficiality, and the measure of our usefulness in relation to His *full* purpose will be the measure of our discipline by testing. We shall never be *spiritual* leaders until we have learned meekness as faithful Attendants.

Remember, then - succession is never official in the things of heaven. It is never by human selection. It is never assumed by the persons concerned. You cannot assume that you are the successor of what God has been doing. You cannot assume that you come in and have place there, and certainly no one can put you into it. If it is heavenly, succession is sovereign and spiritual. You never know how the Divine sovereignty is going to work, but you can be fairly sure that the Divine purpose is going to work contrary to your expectation, your ideas.

Sovereign Grace

The next movement was to send spies. Joshua sent out the spies. What was the upshot? "All the land lies before you: I have given it to you." "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel." There is immense fullness in view. Well, then, surely there must be something very dignified about this? No. Rahab, a harlot, is the key to the whole situation. A woman without reputation, or with a bad reputation, who has no status or standing at all in the world of repute: everything is bound up with that. That is sovereign, and that is grace: and you are not going to get into the land of heavenly fullness except through those two things. Even the great Joshua-to-be finds that everything becomes dependent upon a woman of ill-fame.

God has strange ways of humbling us. How often we look for something wonderful and big and glorious and noble, something of repute, in relation to the great things of God: and then God brings us down to having to accept something that has no recognition at all, no acceptance at all; puts us in a position where, if we want commendation, that will not commend us; if we want something that will introduce us as an influence in the realm of usefulness, well, this will not do it. There is no chance of getting anywhere along that line in this world. See what influence that woman had in Jericho. Do you think her word would have carried any weight? Not at all. There was no introduction from high quarters. If this is not of heaven, then everything is against it. We are getting no help. No; rather are we out of court here, we have no way, no ground here, if it is not of heaven. He has not got people with influence at court in this matter. It is all of heaven; it is sovereign or not at all.

And it is of grace, for Rahab is in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Wonderful! When you come to that New Testament genealogy - Rahab! Oh, grace! What can recommend Rahab? What can put her on the inspired record, into Holy Scripture, in the line of Jesus Christ? Nothing but grace, and that is of heaven. It is all like that. If there is going to be anything of real value, it will be because of sovereign grace, and nothing else; no commendation. We are out of court; we have nothing to support our claim, nothing to go upon naturally. It is right down on the level of Rahab. Think of a great Joshua having to come there. But it is the principle all the time through the Word of God. If only I could show you how again and again it *is* that. You would say, "Why, God seems to go out of His way to prejudice His own interests, to prejudice the success of His purposes, really to make it difficult. He might at least have chosen a respectable person, even if they were not important or prominent." But He takes a disreputable person; He goes out of His way to keep this thing true to principle. It is of heaven or it is nothing, and less and worse than nothing. That woman is the key to Jericho and Jericho is the key to the land. That is the kind of key He uses.

The Natural Man Ruled Out

When you come to the passage of Jordan and when they are over, Joshua commands that there shall be taken a man representing every tribe of Israel and that they shall take twelve stones and put them in the bed of the Jordan and leave them there. All Israel has been left in the bed of Jordan, every man. That is what he is in God's sight - right down there, and left there. Something is left behind in Jordan. That which goes through and comes out on the other side is a testimony to the fact that something has been left behind, because Gilgal follows immediately. Something has been left behind. We cannot bring that over here; that has to be left in Jordan. This has no standing over here in heaven. This natural man, this Corinthian idea of man - he is down there, and God has left him there. The waters cover him and flow on, and he is underneath, buried forever. "They are there, unto this day" (Joshua 4:9). It is the way of enlargement.

But God has to bring that home to us, and it seems to me that Gilgal was the practical application of the principle implicit in the stones in the river-bed. Those stones represented the union of God's people with Christ in death and burial - the natural man who was so in evidence in the wilderness being put out of sight. Gilgal takes up that truth and applies it perpetually. Colossians 2:11-12 confirms this. We have to experience in our souls - our flesh - the severing work of the Cross - the death of Christ. We can believe all the doctrine of Romans 6, and yet there may be great contradiction of it in ourselves. Heaven will not commit itself to the flesh or natural life. If we are occupied with ourselves; talking about ourselves, our work, our having been used, and so on, we are not in the full values of an open heaven. It is so easy to slip all unconsciously from giving glory to God to glorifying a piece of work or glorying in the work itself; and when this happens the atmosphere changes and spiritually sensitive people know that something has happened, a cloud has descended. Heaven is so transparent that no earth-vapor can come there, and heavenly fullness demands transparency in our spirit.

Chapter 7 - Taking Possession of the Heavenly Land

"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as prince of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the prince of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." (Joshua 5:13-15).

..".having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

I would make it clear at the outset that it is not my purpose to deal with the correspondence between the book of Joshua and the letter to the Ephesians. We are occupied in these studies with one particular thought, around which all this gathers, in which it centers: that is, that God's end is to have heavenly fullness expressed in this earth through and by a people. The whole course of His dealings through the ages, from the time when He established the heavens over the earth, has been, and still is, from man's point of view, like a spiritual pilgrimage, a moving spiritually heavenward: and that means, not to some place, necessarily, but to some order of things according to God's mind - that order to which the Lord Jesus referred when, speaking of the will of God, He said, "as in heaven" (Matt. 6:10); to have everything as it is in heaven. Toward this there is a heavenly way, a heavenly course, a heavenly journey, and we are seeking to see, amongst other things, the nature of that heavenly way. And then we have seen that, since so many do not know more than the very beginning of that way in conversion, the Lord raises up instrumentalities in whom He does His very deep work in relation to heaven to pioneer the way for others.

Now we pursue this a little further. With the two passages which we have just read, we arrive at a particular point in this matter of coming to heavenly fullness. The second half of the book of Joshua, of course, is occupied with the people coming into the inheritance, the inheritance being divided and apportioned and possessed. Strangely, in the letter to the Ephesians - which corresponds to this - it is put round the other way. It is spoken of as God's inheritance in His people, "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (1:18); and I would like to drop a word on that before we pass on, because it is not different, it is not something else. It is the same thing viewed from the other side.

The Lord comes into His inheritance when, and only when, His people really become a heavenly people. For the Lord to have His inheritance, they must be where they are seen to be in the letter to the Ephesians. When they really take position and possession and truly become a heavenly people, then the Lord has got His inheritance. To see "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" means, from the other side, that we come to the place where He can see it in us. He cannot see His inheritance in the saints until He sees them in the place where He would have them, until He sees them really the people that answer to His mind as a heavenly people. I am saying this in order to clear up any possible mental difficulty over talking about the people possessing the inheritance, and this word about the Lord possessing His inheritance.

Now, our point is not just the truth of there being an inheritance in Christ, either for us or for the Lord; not just the truth, set forth in the Word, that, when we are in union with Christ through death, burial and resurrection, and on the other side, we come into the realm of Divine fullness. The point that we are underlining is the point of actually becoming a heavenly people, actually taking possession - not doctrinally, not theoretically, not Biblically, but *actually*. I am quite sure that you behold the truth, you contemplate it, you recognize that it is a wonderful presentation; I am quite sure that you, in your hearts, embrace the

idea; but the trouble is that all this is known so well - it has been taught to so many, but they are not there. They have not actually come to that position where they *are* this - and what is the use or good of all our doctrine, teaching, interpretation, contemplation and all the rest, if we are not there? So we have to look at the way to, shall I say, *get there*, so that it shall become an actuality.

The Lordship of the Holy Spirit

And the very first thing after that preparatory work of which we were speaking a few pages earlier: the Jordan, the leaving something in the bed of Jordan, our old man crucified and left there; after leaving him there and letting him be covered over and going away from him: after that and after Gilgal - that is, the negative side, the putting off - now comes the positive side, the putting on, the real, the actual taking possession or entering; the becoming the thing that has always been in view. For this has always been in view, or it has been ever since coming out of Egypt. It was mentioned in the song of Moses. Yes, it was pre-visionsed in that great prophetic song on the deliverance side of the Red Sea. It has always been there as a notion, but it has been remote, somewhere out there, more or less vivid, as the days have gone on: sometimes strong and clear and positive and gripping; at other times fading, weak and far off, an abstract.

But now the whole thing has come right up as a positive present issue, preparation having been made. We come to this passage which we have just read in Joshua 5:13-15. Joshua, standing over against Jericho, "lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand." The warrior spirit in Joshua evidently rose, and he went to challenge him: "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" - probably meaning that if he got Yes to the latter part of his interrogation it was going to be the worse for the man - for at this point he only saw a man. The answer revealed that He was more than a man. Joshua capitulated, dropped his attitude of challenge, bowed, worshipped, confessed himself the servant of this One, and asked for instructions.

Who is this One? As I said in a previous chapter, it is my own conviction that this One, in this particular part of the Bible, represents the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. That, I think, could be borne out by quite a lot of evidence, but, without arguing it from the Scriptures, let us see how it works out - if it is that - in effect.

There are a number of changes which have taken place at this point. Up to this point, the course, the way, the government of the people, had been by the pillar of cloud and fire. Everybody will accept that that is the Holy Spirit. That is objective, that is in evidence to the senses, that is characteristic of the wilderness. When you get over into the heavenlies, it is all the Spirit; but, although at this point He was seen, He was never seen again. He disappears from sensual perception, but He is there all through what happens, very much there, the unseen Prince of the host of the Lord. That is one change. There are many other changes. No longer the manna - now the old corn of the land; the bread of life, the heavenly food, in another sense; that which belongs to another realm: Christ in resurrection, not Christ in humiliation, the broken bread. This is Christ in resurrection, the food of a heavenly people. The one belonged to the wilderness; this belongs to the land. And so we might go on with the differences. You see, here, in this realm, everything is essentially heavenly, in a new sense; in other words, it is essentially spiritual; not sentient, not temporal, but essentially spiritual.

Now Paul says that the Holy Spirit is "an earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14): so that the Holy Spirit coming here at this point is the guarantee that this purpose of God is going to be realized. He, although from this point unseen, is the absolute security of all the rest. We said in our last study that the presence of the Holy Spirit in anointing for Divine purpose positively guarantees the realization of that purpose, not only making it possible,

but being the ground of the actuality. How does it become an actuality, as more than a doctrine, a truth, a precept - a present actuality?

God has given us the Spirit as an earnest: the guarantee, the security. The positive side begins with this first - the Holy Spirit presented as Lord. You notice that the American Revised Version (as English A.V.M. and R.V.M.) here says "as prince," and perhaps it is more true to the original than "captain." "As Prince of the host of the Lord": He is presented in Lordship. The positive side of things begins there - with the absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit amongst the people of God. He is presented and recognized, and something is done in relation to it. It is not an objective truth, but something that is done positively in relation to it. Joshua went down in absolute surrender and capitulation.

The Cross has led to that. The Cross always does lead to the Lordship of the Holy Spirit. So it is from the Jordan to His Lordship. The Cross demands that. If He is not in His place as Lord, and if there is no capitulation, you had better get back to the Cross - go back and have another look through the waters at those stones which are supposed to represent you. Something has gone wrong, you are not true to the fact of the Cross, if He is not Lord.

But here, in spiritual interpretation, it is taken for granted that the Cross really is an established fact. While there are the faults and the weaknesses of the human life - they come out in Joshua - while there are faults and weaknesses and flaws still there in our humanity, nevertheless, so far as our hearts and our wills and our minds are concerned, the Cross has broken us and made a way for the Holy Spirit. That is what the Cross means: the way of the Lordship of the Spirit is open, and through the Lordship of the Spirit the way to heavenly fullness is open.

What a profound difference there is between man-made "conquests" (?) - shall I say, man-made revivals - and the work of the Holy Spirit! What a difference! This book of Joshua is the book of mighty differences. The difference here is such that it just leads man right out of it. He cannot reckon with this thing, he has no place in it, it is simply beyond his powers of calculation. The Lord has precipitated His people into a realm where it is altogether different from man's way of doing things. When the Holy Spirit is Lord you have not got to organize something to get it going. You have not got to plan and devise and scheme, in order to get something going, to make a work of God, to make a revival. It just goes. It is the going of heaven. And it requires you in that position - it requires this absolute government of the Holy Spirit. In every man-made activity there is always the "earth touch" - means or methods or people, or all that paraphernalia, to guarantee its success - and the thing goes with a lot of noise and a lot of creaking, and it has to have a tremendous amount of human support, and at any moment it may fade out, if you do not prop it up with something more; it will collapse if you do not.

Never is it like that in a work of the Spirit. But that earth touch - that is the point. The earth touch always means death, always means arrest. The absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit demands that the earth touch be finished with - and that is what is meant by Joshua being commanded to take the shoes from off his feet. "What saith my lord unto his servant?" "Go and conquer the land, go and take possession, go and lead the people in?" Not at all. "Take your shoes off." You get your shoes off, Joshua, and all the rest will follow. You destroy the earth touch, and see what will happen. You will only have to walk round Jericho. That is not how men would do it. Think of the tremendous campaign that would have been organized to capture Jericho if left to men! No, get your shoes off and see what happens.

If you question that interpretation, you have only to see what happened where he put his shoes on, or where Israel put their shoes on, a little later. What happened at Ai? What happened with the Gibeonites? They had got their shoes on, they touched earth: the result - arrest, compromise, limitation. Get your shoes off and keep them off. The principle of the heavenly is the principle of the Holy Ghost's moving on, is the principle of spiritual fullness.

"Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is heavenly ground." You have no standing here; the earth has no place here, the world has no place here, men have no place here. This is sacred and sanctified to heaven. From this point heaven takes over. Yes, even from the great instrument raised up to serve the Lord, heaven has taken over. Sovereignty in choice of an instrument never means that sovereignty gives place to human strength. It never condones wrong in the instrument. That works out even with Joshua and Israel, for Joshua, as we said earlier, is representative of all the saints and all the servants of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit Committed to God's Purpose

But notice this answer that came to his enquiry - "*Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?*" Which? For us? For them? For this? For that? "Nay; I am not for this or for that, I am not for you or for them: I am for the Lord's purpose." That is the real content of the answer. "I am not for people, whoever they are: I am for the Lord's purpose. I am not for this work or that work that you are trying to do for the Lord. I am for the Lord's purpose, I am committed to the purpose of God - the eternal purpose." "*Nay; but...*" Oh, if only we could get the force of that in everything! We are wanting the Holy Spirit to sponsor our movements, our work, our ministry. We are asking the Holy Spirit if He is "for us." He will never say He is. There is a sense in which the Lord is for His people. "If God be for us..." But there is another sense in which the Lord says, "I am not for you but for My purpose in you and through you; not for you, as you, in behalf of Israel, or Joshua the sovereignly chosen and anointed; I am not for you, I am committed to the purpose of God."

My point is that we must identify the ground and object of the Holy Spirit's committal. We must know what the Holy Spirit is committed to. There is so much planning and arranging for the Lord, and so much failure on the part of the Lord to come and take it up and fulfill it. How much there is today in the world that is being arranged, planned and programmed for the Lord. It does not seem to go. The Lord does not seem to be committing Himself to it. That is just the point. We must identify the object of the Holy Spirit. The object of the Holy Spirit is not to do something and make something on the earth, not to set up something upon, and linked with, this earth, which has "shoes" on it. To establish something here is not His object at all. The Holy Spirit is committed to something that is absolutely heavenly, and His whole object is to detach everything, in a spiritual and inward way, from this world. That must be shown more fully, perhaps, presently; but note that it is most important to know what it is that God will commit Himself to. He will not commit Himself to anything that is attached to this earth. He will only commit Himself to that which is attached to heaven.

The Holy Spirit with a Drawn Sword

Well, now, that being established, the next thing follows - again an extraordinary thing. This One, as Prince of the host of the Lord, is standing with His sword drawn in His hand. Oh, this is battle, is it? This is warfare, is it? And so immediately the Holy Spirit takes charge and there is complete capitulation to Him. The battle is on. Make no mistake about it. Whatever you think about being baptized with the Holy Spirit, and all that that may imply - whatever else it is going to mean, it means immediate and unceasing conflict. It may mean other things, but it means that - a warfare from which there is no discharge, an army from which there is no retiring. Here you will never be pensioned off. You are in it to the end.

Was it not like that with the Lord Jesus? It begins there - Jordan, the open heaven, the Holy Spirit, the wilderness, the devil. Immediately - "Then was Jesus led up" (Mark says "driven," or "impelled") "of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1). No sooner had the heavens been cleft for the advent of the Spirit, on that day called Pentecost, than the war was on. The Church was precipitated into it, and has never been

out of it since. If it has, it has been to its own spiritual loss. Somehow this Lordship of the Holy Spirit immediately issues in that. The sword is in hand, and it will never be sheathed until the day's task is done.

Yes, but that is language. The Holy Spirit is not very interested in carnal and physical warfare. The warfare, the conflict, will be after His own kind. It will be spiritual, it will be after the spirit - because spiritual forces are in possession; and therefore it is spiritual warfare that is going to dispossess. That is one reason why it is so actually and truly a battle. The point hardly needs laboring. We know it. We know that there is not one step, one foot, of spiritual attainment that is not contested; not one movement or even gesture in the direction of spiritual increase but that there is conflict. It is true. It is spiritual warfare, and the nature of it is altogether beyond our power to comprehend. We think it will come one way - it comes another. It never comes where we expect and in the forms which we think we would recognize. The fact is that we rarely recognize the devil in his assaults. They seem to be so covered in either accident or mishap, or something going wrong - but you have only got to judge of the effect in relation to spiritual life, and you know there is something more of design and intelligence in it than mere circumstances of life. It is spiritual warfare. The Holy Spirit has precipitated this.

Do understand that; it explains so much. How constantly the enemy works by the "blind spot!" I think that probably by far the greater proportion of his success today is by blind spots amongst the Lord's people. Prejudice is called "caution," suspicion is "being watchful" - good names for bad things. The enemy is a past master at that. Your prejudice may be your blind spot which the devil has created. He has found the possibility of creating that, and it is standing right in the way of your own spiritual and heavenly fullness. The Lord's people are caught in that snare today, the world over. Enlargement and increase spiritually, in a heavenly way, is being withstood and frustrated by the prejudices and suspicions of God's people. "An enemy hath done this."

Why is it that in the letter to the Ephesians, with all the heavenly fullness presented and in view, and the spiritual conflict in relation to it shown, the Apostle prays that the "eyes of their hearts may be enlightened" to see? Why is that necessary? Because of this blinding work and these blind spots; because all can be lost by a prejudice, a bit of closed mind, a bit of suspicion, a bit of false fear, instead of trusting the Holy Spirit and knowing the anointing within which will "teach you concerning all things" (I John 2:27) and show you what is right and what is wrong. You feel you must fortify yourself "in case," and you may be fortifying yourself against the Holy Ghost. That is what so many are doing. That is the realm of the conflict. Spiritually it is like that. It is very sinister and subtle.

But there is another aspect to this spiritual conflict. Why does the *Holy Spirit* bring this about? Why does the *Holy Spirit* precipitate it? You would think that it would come from the enemy quite naturally, but why does the Holy Spirit start it up, or make Himself the occasion of it, every time? We have seen it in the case of the Lord Jesus. Deliberately - for it is a definite and positive and precise statement: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" - the Holy Spirit takes the matter in hand to precipitate it, to bring it about. He did it with the Church - deliberately, knowing what He was doing. The effect of it is as though the Holy Spirit said, "Now I am going to lead them into battle forthwith, straightway." Why?

Well, for one thing, because this is a spiritual matter, a spiritual inheritance, because there are spiritual forces in possession and they have to be ousted; but also because we only grow spiritually by conflict. The Lord is interested in us. It is perhaps rather difficult for us, if a speaker stands on a platform and says, "You are having a bad time because the Lord is interested in you; the devil is being allowed a lot of leash to assail you because the Lord has His highest interests in your well-being" - it is perhaps difficult for us to accept such a

statement. The next time the enemy comes and begins to do his terrible work, you will be the last to say, "Oh, the Lord loves me today!" We do not do that. But is it not a fact, is it not true to experience, true to history, and therefore true to principle, that we never make any progress spiritually, never increase at all, never grow at all, never go on at all, except by conflict? It is true. The only way we grow is by having something to overcome, where our spiritual life has somehow to get on top of something. It is a law in nature and in grace. There is no progress without contest. Would to God that we should be able to look at it like that every time! We believe it may be true as a fact - but, oh, save us from being involved in that truth!

That will not do. The Lord is concerned with these people coming *actually* into possession; not theoretically, not doctrinally, not on the ground of a Bible reading, but *actually* into possession; and when you really come under the mastery of the Holy Spirit, then you are in the way of the actuality, and the Lord believes in it being actual and very practical.

Jericho is representative: the great example of how it will always be in principle. You have first of all to have a heavenly position, as we have said; not an earthly position, not man's way of doing things. This is the outworking of that principle which we saw first of all with Abraham, where man tried to act and made an awful mess, because he touched earth; and again with Moses, where he took things into his own hands, and assailed the Egyptian and the Hebrew, and made an awful mess. Here is the outworking of the discipline, and Joshua takes up all that spiritual history, and at Jericho we find there are no carnal weapons - no human reason here, nothing left to man here. If this is not heavenly, it is nothing. Things do not happen like this on the earth. We can walk round, not only seven days, but all our lives, and nothing will happen unless we are in a heavenly position, unless heaven is coming in. Jericho is man set aside, altogether excluded. It is heavenly.

Well, that is the basis. And then immediately afterward you find this - that, if the enemy cannot succeed by open resistance, he will try more subtle tactics. He cannot succeed by open resistance if you and I are in our heavenly position and *keep it* - and *keep it*, for that is what Jericho means. They not only took it on the first day but they held it and kept it and ratified it, and seven times on the last day they confirmed it, holding their heavenly position; they did not give up. We do not always get through with the first or second day. There has to be a holding to that position in faith, and the enemy is completely worsted when that position is really held like that. When he is worsted along that line, he must somehow turn it to defeat, if he possibly can, and so he will work subtly.

Is that not the word about the Gibeonites? They worked subtly to make an "earth touch" somewhere. It was the same with Achan and Ai, the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold - an earth touch. The Gibeonites and the covenant made with them constituted another earth touch. We must not think that it is always going to be just open, clear, straightforward spiritual warfare. There is that aspect where we must see where the earth touch is being maneuvered by the enemy - where there is the introduction of something that will make a contact with that which is cursed, and with which God cannot go on.

How is that done? You know, of course, that Gilgal was the place from which they moved out - Gilgal, the place of the rolling away, the place of the flesh set aside. But they did not go back to Gilgal after Jericho. They went straight on to Ai: whereas it was the custom always to go back to Gilgal after any advance or conquest - back to Gilgal and out again from Gilgal. This time they did not go back to Gilgal. They went on.

Let us keep near the Cross, and never assume that because the Lord has blessed and prospered and given success we can go on. Never for a moment must we get away from the Cross. The Cross is not something that lies back there, to be left. It is something to be with us all the time. It is our safety.

This is the heavenly way, the whole nature of the heavenly way, the way to God's end. The Lord keep us in it.

Chapter 8 - The Significance of Levites in Relation to Heavenly Fullness

"And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it." (Joshua 3:3).

First of all, it is this fragment - "the priests, the Levites, bearing it," bearing the ark - that is the key to our present consideration.

In this book of Joshua, the Levites have a large place. They are referred to quite a number of times. Indeed, at one point the whole chapter circles round them, and it is the significance of the Levites in relation to heavenly fullness that I want by the Holy Spirit's help to try to bring to you. Many of us are quite familiar with the history of the Levites, but it is necessary for us just to go over that ground hurriedly to begin with.

In this book of Joshua the Levites are presented in three ways. Firstly, as we have just seen, as bearing the ark of the covenant into the bed of the Jordan and standing there with it, with a two-thousand-cubit space between them and it and the people - a very great distance, as we saw in chapter five. Then, secondly, in Joshua 14 it is stated that the Levites were given no inheritance. That is, in the dividing up of the land, unlike the other tribes they were not apportioned a particular area, they were given no inheritance in the land. But, thirdly, in chapter 21, the chapter which circles round the Levites, you find that all the tribes had to give something of a plot, a place, to the Levites. The Levites were distributed among all the tribes, and their place and their portion was not all together in one place, but in relation to the whole country, so that you might say the Levites were just scattered all over the land, everywhere, in relation to the rest of the people. Those are the three things about the Levites, in this book, full of wonderful significance.

Levites Represent the Heavenly Thought

What do they signify? Let us go back. You remember how the Levites came into being as a tribe. It was on the occasion when Israel departed, when the calf was made, and they cried, "These be thy gods, O Israel" (Ex. 32:4), and they left the Lord. And Moses came down, heard and saw, destroyed the calf, stood in the gate and cried, *"Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Put ye every man his sword upon his thigh, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses"* (Exodus 32:26-28). All earthly considerations were sacrificed to the heavenly interest, all earthly relationships severed for the heavenly thought; everything of natural sentiment and emotion, all that was of the mere soul, was slain in the interests of that which governed the very coming out of the people of God. For it was in the thought of God that they should be a heavenly people, and not thus involved in the spiritual system governing this world. In that alone the Levites are seen to represent the heavenly thought of God. A very drastic and utter thing, was it not, that they should do that.

And you remember the Lord never forgot it. Right at the end of the Old Testament, in the last book, Malachi, referring to the matter of Baal-Peor, where Phineas maintained the stand for heavenly interests originally taken on the occasion of the making of the golden calf (Num. 14), the Lord said, "My covenant was with him {Levi} of life and peace" (Malachi 2:5). "He did not acknowledge his brethren" (Deuteronomy 33:9): that is, he did not look with sympathy even upon his own flesh when that moved away from God's high thoughts.

God made His covenant with Levi. So at the very outset the Levites were selected, and separated from all the rest of Israel, as taking the place of the firstborn in Israel, and they became the tribe of the firstborn ones; and from that many of you will at once in your minds leap over to the letter to the Hebrews - "Ye are come unto... the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb. 12:22, 23). Here is the heavenly thing coming in again: the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven - the Levites, the heavenly thought.

Now we said in chapter five that there was this space of two thousand cubits at the very least - for we cannot determine at this time which cubit it was of the three: the distance was over one thousand feet at the very least, and could easily have been more than three thousand feet; a great space between the ark and the people, indicating the immense distance between Christ and all others in this work of salvation, of redemption, of deliverance; - but the Levites were bearing the ark. You say, "Is not that a contradiction? Christ stands in solitary isolation from all." But you see the principle of the Levite. He represents the heavenly thing. This is the heavenly Christ. That is the principle of the Levites bearing the ark there. This is not just the earthly Christ, the Jesus of history, a man amongst men, though greatly better. This is the Heavenly One.

If you want that principle proved, you remember the incident in the days of David, when he consulted with the elders of Israel to bring up the ark, and made a cart to do it. He got his idea from the land of the Philistines, where he had been during the reign of Saul, and where he had seen them make a cart. They put the ark on a cart, and tragedy followed. Uzzah died before the Lord. David was very grieved with the Lord because He had made a breach that day; but, being the man he was, always adjustable to the Lord - one of the glorious things about David was his adjustability - he did not have a long controversy with the Lord, or the Lord with David. David got back to the Lord, and probably tried to argue it out - but the Lord won the argument. The Lord took him back to the Scriptures and showed him that the Levites were to bear the ark - it is not machines, not organizations, but a heavenly people, that is to carry the testimony of Jesus.

So the Levites are carrying the ark. This heavenliness of things is the principle of the Levite function, and that of course goes to the root of their not having an inheritance in the earth. They do not belong to the earth: they belong to heaven. They are not going to be rooted down here; but even so, as men representing the heavenly things, they are going to be distributed amongst all the people of God to keep the people of God in touch with heaven. The people of God are always so prone to become earthly. That has been the peril and the tragedy of the Church through the centuries, always gravitating toward this earth, becoming something here after the fashion of man, after the ideas of this world.

The Lord's Need of Levites among His People

Now we come to our point. The Lord must have those who have been through the suffering, through the Cross, through the sacrifice, through the deep work of separation; who have not compromised on any considerations of sentiment or earthly interest: those who have stood and are standing wholly, utterly, at all costs, for His full heavenly thought concerning His Son and concerning the Church. He must have them, and He must distribute them everywhere and bring them into vital relationship with His people, in order to keep those people from succumbing to that tendency earthward - from becoming world-bound.

Headquarters in Heaven

And do you not see that this is exactly what happened in the New Testament? It is quite fascinating to see it. When you come into the New Testament, you have left types and figures - I expect some of you are rather tired of types and figures; you get a surfeit of that. It is a grand thing to see the actuality. When you come into Acts, you find this whole

thing repeated. What has happened? You begin with the Lord Jesus placed in heaven: headquarters in heaven, every bit of government now in heaven; and then the Holy Spirit coming to make everything heavenly, to govern everything in relation to heaven. That is what we were speaking about in our last chapter: the Captain of the host of the Lord coming to take everything up in relation to heaven, and then everything moving from heaven.

It moved from heaven first of all in Jerusalem, a mighty movement from heaven, and things were happening. But note the tendency after a time (of course the story is told in a few phrases, but it covers a very considerable period). After a time Jerusalem gravitated earthward, and tended - and not only tended, but actually began - to become an earthly headquarters of the Church. It was only to be, in the Lord's command, the beginning, the commencement spot: "beginning at Jerusalem." Jerusalem was never intended to be the inclusive and final thing, but it constituted itself a kind of headquarters to govern the Church, and you will find that sort of thing developing as you go on in the book of the Acts. Look on a bit to Paul the heavenly man, and see how he repudiates Jerusalem.

However, you come to the seventh chapter of the book of the Acts, the stoning of Stephen, and that is the end of Jerusalem. From that point heaven re-asserts itself to say, "No; no earthly center or headquarters; headquarters is in heaven"; and at that point they are all scattered from Jerusalem. They are stirred up and thrown out of the nest and go in all directions. Wherever they go, whether it is Philip or whoever it is, they are testifying everywhere to the heavenly Lord, bringing in the heavenly side of things. Yes: everywhere these Levites are placed in relation to the whole world, to keep things in a heavenly way. So it develops like that.

You move on to chapter 9, and it is one of heaven's tremendous movements. Saul has come from Jerusalem, on his way to Damascus - and Jerusalem is his headquarters, right enough. He has authority from the High Priest, from the rulers. Jerusalem governs where he is concerned. But he discovers before he gets to the end of the journey that the government is in heaven, not in Jerusalem. The heavens are cleft; there comes a light from heaven and a voice from heaven; and that is the end of earthliness for Saul of Tarsus. From that moment he is a heavenly man - and see how, forever afterwards, that man is moving in relation to heaven. That could bear following out in detail; but here is a mighty Levite. And so it was no more at Jerusalem, but Antioch. The Lord has moved from Jerusalem. Antioch is a very pure spiritual thing. Jerusalem has become the center of Christian officialdom - but there is nothing official at Antioch. What you have at Antioch, which now supplants Jerusalem, is a company of men who are fasting and praying: and heaven breaks in, and the Holy Ghost says, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:2). This is something in relation to heaven, you see. It is wonderful.

So we could go on giving the evidence. But what is the point? Is it not very clear that from God's standpoint, in God's mind, everything is intended to be related to heaven and governed from heaven? Heavenly fullness is His objective with His people: to make them a heavenly people and to fill with His heavenly fullness. And right at the end we see the new Jerusalem - not the old one, but the new Jerusalem - coming down from God out of heaven, in great heavenly fullness. It is something immense, is that Jerusalem - twelve thousand furlongs in every direction (Revelation 21:16). There is great fullness here. All the nations are going to derive their resource from it. The fruit of its tree of life, the waters of its river of life, are for all the nations. Its light is for all the nations. "The nations shall walk amidst the light thereof" (Rev. 21:24). This is heavenly fullness, the thing to which the lord has been working all the time.

He is working now in you and me. I sometimes think that we are two persons, one here and one in heaven. Naturally we are here, but there is something of ourselves "going up" all the

time, when the Lord is getting in us something more of heaven. It is being stored up there. Is not that perhaps what the Lord meant, when He referred to Himself as "the Son of man, who is in heaven" (John 3:13), even while He is on earth? There is an aspect of us that is growing in heaven. Do not think of heaven as some remote planet. We are growing in that heavenly thought of things. Something of us is "going up."

I believe the Church is like that. The real Church is an invisible thing. You do not know, except by the Spirit, what the Church is really. You cannot say that people attending a certain place are the Church. You cannot say that people who profess certain doctrines and Christian truths are the Church. They may be or they may not be. But if you meet in the Spirit - and that is something intangible - there you have the Church. The Church is like that, and that is its heavenly character - and that is "going up," so to speak, all the time, and it is going to come down presently in fullness out of heaven. It is being built in that way now. It is God's will that it should be like that.

But my point now is that the Lord must have that kind of representation, be it in individuals or in companies, to place alongside of all His people here to keep them in touch with heaven, to keep the heavenly things always in view. One of the functions of the Levites was to teach the Word of God - that is, to keep the Lord's people in touch with God's thought. That is functional, not official. You need not call yourself a Levite, any more than "Reverend." Do not take on titles, but grasp the principles. If we here on this earth are keeping people in touch with heaven, if we are linked with heavenly things, if people are built up by our presence - not by our preaching necessarily, not by our getting down and saying, "Now you see this and this..."; no, just by our presence, by our embodiment of the heavenly life and nature and fullness - if they are coming to see God's fuller thought because we are here, we are Levites without the title and that is what the Lord must have.

It may be as individuals. The Lord has the disposing of His people. In this very book, heaven disposed of the people, of the tribes, and said, "You shall be here, this is your place." Sovereignly the Lord will dispose of you, and put some of you in Germany, some in Holland, some in England, some in America; and when He has disposed of your life you are there by heaven's appointment, to be a link with heaven, to keep things from settling down spiritually on to this earth level.

That, of course, is also the meaning of churches in the New Testament. That is the Divine idea - to have companies of the Lord's people, planted here and there and everywhere, as a corporate Levitical ministry, to keep heaven near, and to keep things near heaven. Oh, that every church were like that, keeping things near heaven!

Well, that is the beginning. Much more could be said. We could begin now to consider all the letters of the New Testament and to see the outworking. We would begin with Romans 12 - for here you have a Levitical principle: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world." That is Levitical, the living sacrifice not conformed to this world. So we could go on through it all. But the great issue of our meditations together is this - that we have to be here in relation to heaven, under heaven's government, bringing in heavenly things. We are ministering in relation to heaven. It must be as true of us, in our measure and in our calling, as it was of Paul, that we have a heavenly vision and we are not disobedient unto it. What do we not owe to that dear man for all the sacrifice and the suffering that he knew for heavenly things! But how faithful he was to heaven, right to the end - cast into his prison, on his chain, and talking about nothing else but the heavenly places.

Do you say your situation is too difficult to bring heaven in? Well, there are difficult situations. Daniel's was a difficult situation - his three companions were in a difficult situation; but they brought heaven in. A grand phrase in the book of Daniel is - "the

heavens do rule" (4:26). And they proved it. Headquarters is in heaven: not in Babylon, not in Rome, not in Jerusalem or anywhere else, but in heaven. The Lord help us to live up to and out from heaven.

And now, at the end, we bring the specific object of these messages into view once more.

God has but one end which will bring Him complete satisfaction - the "Fullness of Christ." That fullness is meant to be found in a people taken out of the nations. By that people in that fullness He purposes to rule the creation in the ages to come. This will not be attained to willy-nilly, but only by infinite cost and conflict now.

All who "come out" do not "enter in" to this ultimate. Many will not go all the way, fulfill all the conditions, "make their calling and election sure," but will enter the Kingdom to inherit in different measures; smaller or larger.

Unto the fullness of purpose, pioneers are necessary, and the way of the pioneers is a peculiar way, fraught with experiences, sufferings, perplexities, and testings, of which others know little.

But God *must* have His pioneers - individuals or companies; and these are they who
"WHOLLY FOLLOW THE LORD."

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