

MEMORIALS OF J. B. CATTERALL'S MINISTRY

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FOREWORD.

It is hoped that these memorials of the ministry of beloved J. B. Catterall will preserve permanently some of the wealth of the impressions of Christ which came out in our brother's oral ministry. Our brother had a peculiar impression in regard to the sufferings of Christ, the fragrance of which remains.

It has been a privilege to collect the ministry. Our prayer is that the saints universally may get the gain of it, proving "that he being dead yet speaketh."

H. F. NUNNERLEY.

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THE FIDELITY OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

(LUKE XXII. 7-23 ; JOHN XIII. 1-17 ; XX. 14-18 ; XXI.
15-19.)

I DESIRE at this time that the Lord may give us help together to speak of the fidelity of the love of Christ. I think we must feel that in regard of the love of Christ we touch a theme of peculiar blessedness and sweetness. At the same time, we cannot consider the subject without also feeling that we are drawing near to that which, with all its sweetness, must inevitably be very searching to our hearts. I shall take a human illustration in a simple way ; I might say that in regard of human affection, where there is a pure tie between souls there will always be the desire that the expression of it should be heard and understood. One thing that marks the love of Christ,

beloved, is its intensely plain speaking, and that touches us in many ways, but in whatever way it may touch our spirits, it always has the great end in view of its own satisfaction, and connected with that, the satisfaction of the Father's heart.

It was the plain speaking and inquiry of the love of Christ that tested the spirit of Peter so intensely. Even in the ways of the Lord with ourselves, and I touch on it with all affection, we may find the Lord speaking very plainly to us. We may be, for various reasons, inclined to interpret His speaking to us thus more on the line of His lordship than of His affection and care for us. Oftentimes the Lord may speak plainly to us, and it is of all moment to us that we should hear ; but there is danger lest we might too readily interpret the Lord's plain speaking as only bearing on matters that would shew our contrariety to His mind, and the fact that they were out of line with His own pleasure and rights as Lord ; but there are times when the Lord speaks with intense plainness, when, if we knew the truth, we should know it was not so much that He was drawing attention to existing wrongs, as to the fact that even on the line of rectitude there may be a lack of intensity and warmth of affection to Himself.

It is insufferable to the heart of Christ that there should be remoteness—distance—on our part. We may incline to it, but the longer we remain there, the more accustomed to it we become, and the more disinclined to leave it, but the love of Christ will not endure distance. The institution of the supper, the service of feet-washing, the service and care of the Lord immediately on His resurrection in regard of Mary Magdalene particularly, and the dealings of the Lord with Peter at the close of His pathway here, are the plain speaking of the love of Christ that will not endure remoteness. I know of nothing that one becomes so accustomed to with all one's knowledge of the truth, as the tendency to live in heart at a distance from the Lord. To know the things that are His pleasure and interest, to know the things that are changelessly dear to Himself, and yet, as to our personal links with Him, to be remote, could never satisfy His heart.

I should like to go over with you, as the Lord may help us, the movements of the love of Christ as indicated in the scriptures referred to. As the Lord drew near to the close of His pathway, with His own outlook before Him—death, and what death meant to Him—and to the great end that was to be the final and culminating testimony of His love to the Father, and His love to and interest in His

own—one is deeply impressed with the way in which the Lord moved in regard of the passover and the supper. I do not know that I should be justified in taking for granted that every soul here distinguishes between these, but I think it might suffice if I just say this in passing, that while we need the passover and the supper, and each has its place, nevertheless, when we have distinguished between the two, we might lack the consideration of exercised affection for the Lord, that looks into the matter to see what bearing one has on the other, for assuredly, when we come together on the first day of the week to answer to the Lord's desire as the One who laid down His life for us, we would, if ordered aright, come together in moral conditions that have been produced by the keeping of the feast together. Are we taking it for granted that in our hearts there is a sufficient recognition of the fact, that when we come together to answer to the Lord in the supper, we do not come together to create conditions, but to answer to the Lord in the power of conditions present with us? In whatever way we may order or regard the occasion, we may rest assured of this, that there is that in the supper which touches our spirits in a peculiarly tender and searching way. In many ways we have been tested, when we have come

to take the supper, and have been made to feel more than in any other way how searching was the scrutiny of the love of Christ ; but it was not instituted that we might be searched, or made to feel the remissness of our affection to the Lord, it was instituted that what is due to the Lord Himself in response to His great and precious love might be presented to Himself, the worthy Object of it all.

I draw your attention for a moment to the necessity in regard of the saints at Corinth, that the apostle should recall their attention particularly to the passover at the outset of his epistle. He says, "Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us." Was there ever such a passover ? Paul does not bring it to bear upon them simply to make a distinction between it and the supper, but in order that their hearts might be freshly exercised as to the bearing of the feast on themselves. He says, "Therefore let us keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Whether in respect of the Lord Himself or in respect of one another, as bound up together with the Lord and His interests, may we be exercised that in all our goings, in all our thoughts of the saints in secret, or when together, and in our prayers for those who are precious to the Lord, that all might be maintained with us in sincerity and truth,

for there is nothing that so leads souls astray from the line that pleases the Lord as the lack of these. Individuals, even souls together, may make mistakes, may be diverted, but the Lord places great value on sincerity of heart.

Sincerity, in its simple meaning, is this, that if I *say* I am going a certain way, then I go that way ; if I *say* I am seeking certain things (the Lord sees my heart), then I seek these things. The Lord knows I may slip and fail in my footsteps, but sincerity and truth imply that what the lips say, the heart really knows to be true. It is not a matter of saying we love the Lord more than we do, or the brethren more than we do ; sincerity and truth lie in this, that we love them more than we can tell. May we keep the feast together ! What will hold us together will be sincerity and truth.

I believe, that when we come together to the supper to answer to the Lord, even though there may be a sense of the need of the Lord's present grace in regard of temporal things and needs, yet He, blessed be His name, gives the grace, not only to rise above that, but also that an answer may be moved in simple response to His precious love. One wishes to speak simply of the supper as that which marks the great love of the heart of Christ. What a serious thing it would be for our hearts

if ever there came a time with us when the supper became common! Every heart can answer for itself whether there be any such tendency with us. It should ever have in our hearts the greatness of the place that the love of Christ has given it; not a place as an ecclesiastical centre, not a thing which is the centre of one ecclesiastical setting or another, but that which is the most precious and most searching of all things, for it raises a constant question with us as to whether our hearts are right with the Lord as His heart is with ours. The question raised by the love of Christ is where our hearts are. You may remember the Old Testament incident to which I refer. "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" (2 Kings x. 15.) This question was asked by one who was not omniscient, but who would fain know how he was regarded by another.

The Lord knows our hearts omnisciently, nevertheless in the supper there is a constant appeal to our affections, and the nature of the appeal is this, Is your heart right, as my heart is with yours? There will never be any change in the heart of Christ; His love is the same as when He laid down His life for us. Well-known ground as the subject is, I trust that no heart here has the impression that it has become at all common ground. It never

will be that to the heart of Christ, and may He grant it may never become so to us. If it become common to us, the thing that the Lord most sought in the institution of it will be that which we lack—a clear, simple, true, and affectionate answer to the Lord Himself for His own sake. He instituted the supper; it was His own movement.

The hour of the passover had drawn near, and there is an inquiry on the part of the disciples as to the keeping of it, but the institution of the supper came in distinctly outside the inquiry of the disciples, it came from the Lord Himself. It was not their request or desire that initiated it. Who could have taken them off the ground of the passover, bound up with their affections as it was, but the Lord Himself? Sweetly the Lord served them in taking their hearts outside of Judaism and all connected with it. The truth as we know it will make us free. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." The Lord knew what those disciples needed in regard of Judaism, and He took their hearts with Himself on to new ground in the institution of the supper. I connect the two morally. What the Lord used for the institution of the supper was provided for the commemoration of the passover—the bread and the wine. The bread and the cup speak to us

of the body and blood of Christ. The cup speaks of the love of God. But I am speaking on this occasion of the supper not only as the Lord's provision, but of the conditions which the Lord would have on our side in fidelity to Him.

If we have affection, what is the character of it? Is it that which stands in the power of its knowledge? For a moment I would attempt to make this distinction, that the Lord's appeal is not best answered to by those who know most, but by those who love most. Then, you say at once, that must mean of course by those who have been a long time on the way. No, it does not mean that; but it is really given by hearts to whom the Lord in His own Person is more than anything else, any one else, time, place, or circumstance. It is hearts that love the Lord for His own sake, and respond to Him out of the sense of His own love, that please the Lord best in the supper.

You may say any one might presume out of their knowledge. There is nothing like love for keeping people quiet. I do not know if you have tried it. I may be thinking of restless people, but there is nothing like love for keeping people quiet, for there is nothing like love so simple and easy to understand. In the presence of the love of Christ, when it lays

hold of your soul and impresses your spirit, how much do you want to say ? If you were speaking to *my* soul, which might be a little empty, I could understand your feeling much and saying it too, but in the presence of the love of Christ there oftentimes comes to us a sense that the most we can say may be said in the fewest words. We have nothing to tell the Lord about the supper ; infinite has been the patience of the Lord in what He has told us about it, and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit touching our hearts and bringing before us the great, precious, changeless love of Christ, and the love of God the Father.

The more the love of Christ settles upon our spirits individually or when together, the deeper is the sense our hearts have of the peace, the rest of the love of Christ. Then we do not say things to the Lord on the line of description, but our hearts move only on the line of response, and thus we respond with a deep sense of the way we are indebted to the love of Christ. He instituted the supper from His own side ; it was not the suggestion of the disciples ; the Lord knew they could not be without it. As one goes on, one feels more and more thankful that the time between the occasions of breaking bread are just what they are and no more. I do not speak as if the supper was a place of refuge, for the

more we taste of the love of Christ as it is conveyed to us then, the more thankful our hearts become that the space between one occasion and another is no longer than it is.

I come now to the service of feet-washing as connected with the love of Christ ; it was not done by the desire of His disciples. It stands on the same ground as the supper in this respect, that it was the Lord's institution, and as much above the understanding of the disciples on their side as above their desire. We know much about it. Were I to make a slip to-night and seem to confuse between the Lord's feet-washing service, and His advocacy, I can understand even a young soul saying, You are confusing these things. Though I saw the distinction many years ago, I did not learn till long after, what the preciousness of the love of Christ was in this particular form of service. We want the things themselves. Here we see the love of Christ moving—the same love that instituted the supper. I would not say we come to the supper to get our feet washed, but I believe that often and often, when we have come there we have proved in a most blessed way the manner in which the Lord touched our spirits and washed our feet—removing from our souls not only defilement but the sense of encumbrances and weights, and thus

enabling our souls to move freely to the Lord with a fresh touch of the love of Christ that did it. Many things might press upon us—the care of the household, physical conditions, weariness of body, the effect of surroundings ; these things might be on the spirit in coming together. God in His great wisdom made man a creature of peculiar sensitiveness. Before he sinned I believe his sensibilities were keen, but they became blunted by distance from God and sin, but may again become sensitive as a consequence of grace having reached us. Even when we are coming together to meet the Lord, we may pass by surroundings, and places, and conditions, that touch our spirits and fain would leave a shadow. You may say, Need I be so ? Would it not be better if I did not feel them ? No, it would not be better if you did not feel them, but it would be better if, feeling them, you knew the intensity of the grace and the love of Christ that would serve you in regard of them. Do not get away from the feeling ; it might mean more insensibility than piety.

I wish now to say a word to the young that has been impressed on my spirit by reason of certain experiences of the last few days. Possibly you pass places you have been accustomed to enter that you could not enter now, because you love the Lord and belong to Him.

But you pass the place and you look at it and say, I am glad I do not go there ; I know better now. But is that safety ? Is your preservation from the things you used to serve and follow wrapped up in your knowledge ? No, it is not. Your safeguard is in the fidelity of the love of Christ. You are not safe unless these things touch your spirit with a sense of pain which turns you to the Lord, for you are depending then on the ministry of the Lord's grace to your spirit.

The Lord instituted the service of foot-washing knowing that His hour was come to depart out of the world, knowing too that He was come from God and went to God, and that the Father had given all things into His hand. The widest possible outlook as to the divine dispensation was before the Lord, and He knew it all. All the inward certainty, and peace, and steadfastness of the Lord's own spirit—if I may speak of it in that way—was in God the Father ; and in the great desire and interest of His love He turns to His own circle, and institutes the service of foot-washing. What were His brethren to Him ? A sort of second-best ? just something given Him because He had lost Israel ? No, that is not the love of Christ ; His is a love that holds the assembly as the first, and sweetest, and best thing—the treasure that is meet for His

own heart and the answer to His own affection, and the gift, too, of the Father. "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me"; and of all of them I have not lost even one. How He holds His own! He holds the best thing first; that which the Father would have for the Son, what the heart of the blessed God would give to Christ (I speak of it reverently)—the best thing first; He has given Him the assembly.

With that upon His heart, the Lord instituted the service of feet-washing; He inaugurated it above the desire, above the findings of the disciples' feelings; He presented it to them in its desirability and in its dignity; actually it was the service of the slave of the house, a menial service in man's ordering. What is its dignity? The dignity of it is that the Son of the Father, the Son of God, the lover of His own has instituted it; He did the service first. Will that ever become common to us, brethren? Shall we satisfy our hearts with the understanding of the doctrine, or do we value it in its own value as the thing Christ did first? He did it first, and as He did it must be its character to the end.

He laid aside His garments. It was His own act, done in His own dignity and in the peculiar greatness of His own Person. Then He took a linen towel and girded Himself.

It speaks of the righteousness, lowliness, tenderness, and fidelity of His own affection. He took water, poured it into a basin, and began to wash the feet of His disciples. He *commenced* to do it—notice the word. That was its inauguration. We cannot go into details now, though the more we ponder them, the more precious they will become to our hearts. Look at the circle! I do not know how far round in the circle Peter was, but, in due course, the Lord came to him, and when He came to him, Peter spoke; he had had ample opportunity to consider the matter, but even when the Lord came to him he had not got over his difficulty about it.

Those who do not know what feet-washing is seldom continue. You say, What do you mean? Well, the sweetest thing that comes to us amongst the saints is the outcome of the understanding of the love of divine Persons, and when you get the sense that a thing that has come to you from another is for the sake of Christ, it washes your feet. You neither misunderstand the motive of the person who may be the instrument of it, nor do you misunderstand it on any false line of your deserving it or otherwise, but if the impression conveyed to your spirit is the impression of the love of Christ, your feet are washed.

How the things that are temporal drop

away in the presence of the love of Christ ! Preference for persons, difference of circumstances, and many other things, how they all drop out in the presence of the activities of the love of Christ in the circle of His own. You get a touch from a brother. You may think at times, Well, I wonder if I should be much profited by knowing that brother ; perhaps he does not look attractive externally. How often we are surprised by the fact that from a vessel that on its exterior does not promise much, there may have been much in it to wash our feet—it was there for *Christ's* sake. Our difficulty may have been rather this, that what was there was not for our sake. Brethren, what washes our feet is not for our sake, but first and most precious of all, for Christ's sake. It must be so, if He is above all others. Everything that makes much of Christ washes the saints' feet. Peace and comfort flow from it.

May I say a word as to Peter in regard of continuance ? What Peter trusted in was his own strength. In the things of God ? Yes, he trusted himself. He said, Though all should be offended, yet will not I. He found himself out of touch with the Lord in feet-washing. If Peter had taken to heart the fact that the Lord had to expose to him that his own feeling was out of accord with Himself, if

he had borne on his spirit that tender word of the Lord in regard of feet-washing, might he not have been spared the rest ? If I be not minded to accept feet-washing, am I on a line that I can have the Lord's support ?

This is the first touch in John's gospel that shews us that Peter was not in accord with the Lord's feelings, and a peculiarly serious one it is ; as if the Lord said to him, Peter, the thing that matters most to Me is the thing you do not understand. If he had taken to heart the Lord's word, may we not legitimately suggest he might have been saved the rest ? Howbeit, he reached by discipline what the Lord would have brought him into by feet-washing ; such is the fidelity of the love of Christ. I speak from experience which has taught me this. There are many things I may have reached by discipline that I might have reached by feet-washing, but it is the fidelity of the love of Christ that has brought me there in the end.

In regard of the supper, our gatherings from time to time are so variable, in what I might call their spiritual quality, that we often raise a question as to conditions from the moral point of view, but may I suggest this ? that if we washed one another's feet more, our answer to the Lord in the supper might be more decided and sweet than it is ; and

I believe too that our power to worship would be greatly enlarged in us.

In regard of Mary, we see the unchangeableness and faithfulness of the love of Christ. I see the Lord, not only in the sense of His suffering and superior to it in the greatness of His love, but I see the Lord again, the living One out of death, alive for evermore, having the keys of death and hades—as He speaks in Revelation, “I am he that liveth, and became dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.” Ah, you say, that is a great guarantee of the fact that He will unlock the situation at the rapture. It is a sweet guarantee of the fact, brethren, that He can unlock it now. He took the affections of Mary on to entirely new ground ; rapture affections, in the principle of them, are affections that are engaged with the Lord in an entirely new place. He said to Mary, “Touch me not ; for I am not yet ascended to my Father : but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God.” Before the affections of Mary were in touch with the brethren, in the power of the Lord’s word they travelled to a new place. It was the power of the ministry of the Lord to Mary that took her affections from earthly hopes even in Himself, and anticipatively carried them to the place with which

the declaration was connected : “ My Father, and your Father ; my God, and your God.”

Now He says, “ Go and tell my brethren.” She went and told them. It was the fidelity of the love of Christ securing a heart in the power of affection, connected not only with the lordship of Christ but sweetly and divinely connected with the Lord Himself—the Object of the Father’s pleasure, the Firstborn amongst many brethren, yea, I think we might say, as the Head of the assembly, His body, “ the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” Her affections went to the new place, and they went there to stay there.

I do not wish to be mystical, but I think no one can give you so much practical help in your difficulties as a person who is connected with heaven. God solves time’s difficulties for eternity. The person whose heart is where Christ is, is not necessarily an impracticable sort of person. You will find far more help in your difficulties from a man whose heart is in heaven, for the reason that he brings in the light of God’s presence on them and not the accumulated knowledge of man.

I close with one word more. The Lord spoke thrice to Peter. It was in the presence of the brethren He spoke, and I would draw your attention to this, because it may touch our spirits without leaving any undue shadow

on our minds, that the reason for His plain speaking these three times to Peter was to draw out in tender expression to Himself the character and the quality of the love of Peter. He did not ask Peter if he believed. Look at the tender movement of priestly care and shepherding that reached Peter! That must have been a tender proof to the heart of Peter of how much the Lord loved him. Nevertheless, three times He spoke, "Lovest thou me?" At last Peter was grieved because the Lord said to him the third time, "Lovest thou me?" and he said, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Brethren, that is what the Lord is seeking. Then He says to Peter, "Shepherd my sheep."

The object of the Lord's plain speaking to our hearts at this time may be, that as we are helped to answer to Himself in simple and deep feeling, He may entrust to us in a deeper way than before the things that are most precious to His heart. May we covet these things.

THE FAITH SYSTEM.

(PSA. CXXXII. 13-18; CXXXIII.; CXXXIV.;
HEB. XII. 22-29.)

WHAT is on my mind, beloved friends, if the Lord help me, is to bring before you in a simple way the faith system to which we have come. It will be clear to most that faith is not only a principle, not only divine light in the soul, but that there is also a great faith system established. It would encourage our hearts if we came now more distinctly and positively to that system which has come to pass for the pleasure of God. It would be very encouraging if saints who may be depressed by things in this scene remembered that they are persons of high dignity spiritually. People naturally may suffer very great reverses in this life, and yet are maintained because of the fact that they are persons of distinction. Oh, that the people of God would go through this world in the dignity that belongs to the christian family! We may suffer very many reverses as to our public position, but these things turn us to the living God in the sense that what is established for His pleasure cannot be shaken.

In referring to reverses, I am speaking in respect of our discipline and our exercises. It is very encouraging to see that God never allows anything to go to waste, so to speak, in our circumstances here ; every circumstance here we should take account of in a special way, not in a mere ordinary way ; for God would turn all to profit. There is great spiritual loss if we put any circumstance of this life into the category that we have strength to carry it through without the help of divine Persons. For instance, a person may learn a trade, and when he has learnt it, he may suppose that he has no need of help beyond what human strength can give ; but unless we are exercised and seek the help of divine Persons there will be spiritual loss. Our human occupations, interests, etc., are often put into the category that we can do things in precisely the same way as persons who have no link with God, thus going on in human interests on the same lines on which persons go who have no link with divine Persons whatever, except as Creator. But Christianity brings its own light into all circumstances.

I would draw your attention to Hebrews xiii., where the human relationships of life are taken up in the light of Christianity. They are set in the light of faith, so that we

by reason of the work of God in us, and the revelation of God to us, and also by the gift of the Holy Spirit, can take up these things for the pleasure of God. Before God took us up, everything we did was for our own pleasure, we were our own centre ; but in every life, however small, there is room for the greatness of Christ or the reverse. A person may think it is a very little matter whether he lives one way or another ; his sphere may be small, but in every human life there is room for Christ, and if that is so, there is also the great and solemn danger of excluding Him from our circle. There is the greatness, and reality, and power of this wonderful system of faith, and it is a great thing to every one of us to have the sense of having our links with God's own world.

When this world has passed away, God's world will remain, and all who have links with that world will remain with it and for it, and that is not a matter that you and I have made up our minds about, for God has decreed that no feature or element that has answered to Christ and to the Spirit will ever be lost. He has sworn by His own name ; God has committed Himself, that what is precious and according to Christ, and of the Spirit, and of Himself, shall never be lost ; it will all go on to God's day, that great and

glorious ending when God will rest in His love, and rejoice over His people with singing. So when all of this world has passed, God's world will remain, and "he that does the will of God abides to eternity."

We want to regard these elements of God's world not only as light, but also as realities. We have the light of mount Zion, but it exists. It is possible that many here may not know what it means. They may think it is God's way of describing something, but what that is they do not know definitely. Do we know definitely what mount Zion is? Are we conscious that we have come to something that exists for the pleasure of God? We have been touched in the glad tidings; God has spoken to our hearts, but have we the sense that there is not only that which God accomplishes in us individually, which He has brought to pass on the line of faith in vessels very small and ordinary, but He has brought to pass mount Zion? We are every one of us formed by divine workmanship, so that we might be part of a mountain never to be moved. We have come to it in Christ in the faith of our souls; we pass through this world as part of the great reality which God has brought to pass, and which can never be moved. We have come to the reality of divine blessing; we have been individually touched by the grace of

God—a great and wonderful thing! We shall never get beyond the precious grace of the Lord Jesus which has touched us, and the goodness of God which has reached us. It is no point of spiritual growth to get beyond the joy of forgiveness of sins. It is possible we may stay there too long. You may say, My sins were forgiven twenty or twenty-five years ago; but the truth is you have been a forgiven person twenty or twenty-five years. We are set before God in the virtue and value of the Person and work of Christ, and it is never intended by God that their value should grow less to us. Divine things become mountainous to our souls as they are formed there in spiritual power. Mount Zion can never be moved; I might be moved, and my joy of things might be moved, but mount Zion can never be moved.

It may be that twenty years ago God touched us, that He began then to build into our souls what is of Himself. How far have we gone, beloved friends? Do we imagine that because we have ceased to speak of forgiveness of sins that we have got beyond it? Let us think of the great things that have come to us. What shape and form have divine things taken in our souls since divine light came to us? Faith is the gift of God. We never should have had it, if God had not given

it. If He has given us faith, it is in order that an attachment to divine things should be definitely formed in us. How have things been going on in our souls since the light of God reached us? It is not simply that these elements have come as light to our souls, but we have come to the great divine mountain, the mount Zion which He loved and where He desired to dwell.

A great divine system has been brought to pass in Jesus, the foundation of which was laid deep in His sufferings, and it is as great and wide as the Holy Spirit's work here. Jesus is on high and the Holy Spirit is here, and I am blessed by Him and in perpetuity. It is mount Zion that He loves, and there God will dwell because He desired it—that great principle of divine blessing is outside of all human pride and failure. It is measured by Jesus at God's right hand, by the joy of God in divine blessing, by His joy in the Lord Jesus—all that in its apex is in the Lord Jesus there. Higher you cannot go; it is as high as the very desires of the heart of God Himself. The desire of the heart of God is greater than its requirements—"the mount Zion which he loved"—"there will I dwell, for I have desired it."

What shape have things taken in your soul? God loves you. Let that come to you in power;

you have been made pleasurable to God. All the powers in this world can never accomplish your disaster. God has committed Himself to you, He has pledged your continuance—your continuance in connection with another Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit of God. All the powers of this world in their raging can never move mount Zion: “Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.” The question is not whether you are small and weak, but what is the mountain like? Can anything move the mountain? It is unassailable. It is not what you and I are, but what the great faith system is; what the Lord Jesus Christ is, what the Spirit of God is; what God Himself is—the living God. Christianity is what the Lord Jesus is, what God is, what the Holy Spirit is. The power and stability of Christianity lie in what divine Persons are.

Go back to Pentecost when everything was maintained by the Holy Spirit. There is no change in the system of things. Think of the Lord Jesus Christ here, when the woman with the issue of blood came to Him. She had tried everything in order to meet her physical condition, but she says, If I can only touch the hem of His garment I shall be healed. Think of the crowds gathered together in different places, crowds of needy

ones ! and if they only touched the hem of His garment, they would be healed. Is there any breakdown in His sufficiency ? You say, We are in broken times. But the mountain is intact ; there is no change in the mountain. Well might the Psalmist speak of the hills as a figure of divine blessing ; there is nothing changes there.

Beloved friends, we have come to mount Zion. We may feel it and touch it, and if you have never felt it, I would counsel you to turn to the Lord to increase your faith. It is so clear to the mind and heart that I can put out my hand and touch it. There was a mount which could not be touched, because the creature in his presumption had undertaken to meet divine requirements. But we can touch mount Zion. All that we are need not disturb us there, because all that was taken account of when the wonderful foundation of that mountain was laid. All that I am, and am not, was equally answered in the death of Jesus, never to be raised again. The great reality of it was there before I came to it. Our coming into the world added nothing to the foundation, or to the existence of the mountain. We come to it on the line of faith, but we have also to come to it on the line of reality ; we have to come in our souls to the mountain that cannot be shaken.

God has raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead and given Him glory. Why? Listen to what Peter says, "that your faith and hope may be in God." If there are any here to-night who have not touched Christ in the faith of their souls, God grant that they may get an impression of the greatness and glory of these divine realities. Everything else will perish, but these will endure for ever. His mercy is settled unalterably: "we have come to mount Zion."

Now we shall go further; we have come to the city of the living God. This great spiritual reality has been brought to pass—the city of the living God. This world is proud of some of its great cities, but not one of them is the city of the living God. Take this great city of London; the elements of divine life may be in it, but they have no connection with it, they form no part of its history or its end. The elements of divine life belong to where Jesus is, and are for the pleasure of God Himself. The city of the living God is where divine good resides, where there is a divine generation, where divine order rules, where everything is established for the pleasure of God. The living God must move in His affections, and desires, and sensibilities. All in that city is filled out for the pleasure of the living God. We may be very clear as to

principles, and yet why are we so weak in applying "city" principles? Because we apply the principles without the living God; I believe that is why.

You may say of another, I do not know what his end will be. If you have such thoughts about another, go to the living God, present your petitions, unburden your heart, pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. You desire that at the end and through the grace of God even now, such an one may appear before the living God in His city. See how it will enlarge your affections! The Psalmist goes out in his affections and says, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem." It is a wonderful city. It is not only a mountain, but a mountain crowned with a city, the city of the living God. There is no need of the sun in that city, or the moon or a candle, for the Lord Jesus is the light thereof. That is what we have come to. There is a city. Do we pass through this world as those who have no commonwealth? Do we lower the standard because the world despises the flag? No, surely. Our citizenship is in heaven. Would you rather have it anywhere else? We want to have acquaintance with that city in our minds now.

The greatest vessel which comes out of heaven from God, having the glory of God and her light like to a stone most precious, will be the Lamb's wife. Whose wife? The wife of the King—of the great and only Potentate? Yes, indeed. The wife of the Person who will sweep away all evil by the power of His own Person? Yes. But the city is the Lamb's wife, formed according to God, formed according to Christ, to answer to Him. He is the One whom the city expresses. Every element speaks to the heart of God of the preciousness and greatness of His own Son. Every one will be like Christ. As another has said who could express it,

“Like Jesus in that place
Of light and love supreme.”

Is there any one else we should like to be like but Himself? Is there any one else our hearts are more drawn towards, or have more affection for? “Like Jesus in that place.”

When I was born in the city of G—— I knew nothing about the city, but as I grew up and its responsibilities, and privileges, and opportunities came to me, then I began to understand what sort of a city I was born in. You have been born into the citizenship of the city of the living God. What you may be

in this life makes no difference. You may have the commonest human lot, but in Zion where your interest lies everything is for the pleasure of God. It is the greatness of Christ that is yours there, not human littleness. All have the same divine letters there, the letters that spell divine working and that is Christ. Our greatness there is Christ.

You may say, What a wonderful end to the journey. Yes, but it is very wonderful at the present moment. You may be exercised as to forming links with the saints. May the Lord grant that in your exercises you may link it up with mount Zion, and the city of the living God. What is ecclesiastical has no stability, but what is living has.

Jerusalem was a situation *won*. The fruits of divine glory and pleasure have been won in your soul and mine. What God has won in our souls is measured by God Himself. I am not what people think I am. The world looks upon a Christian sometimes as a partridge hunted upon the mountains, pushed from pillar to post. That may be what the Christian is outwardly, but the inward is what he really is ; he knows the living God. We belong to the living God and to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, and the Spirit that dwells in us is the Spirit of the living God. That is what we are, and if we

walk in faith we are not only in the light of these realities, but we are part of them.

Then we come to "an innumerable company of angels." "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth on account of those who shall inherit salvation." What a wonderful company, what a wonderful sphere of divine interests that calls for an innumerable company of angels! We see it in this life; we see how a man orders his estate, we see his servants, etc., and every step we take nearer to the centre we form a fresh estimate of his greatness by the companies of his servants. It was so with the Queen of Sheba; she marvelled at the retinue of Solomon's servants. Is Christianity a small thing? "An innumerable company of angels." Have you ever considered the strength of an angelic being? Man thinks a great deal of himself. Have you ever thought of what God says of His angels? "Who maketh his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire." What a system it must be that calls for an innumerable company of angels! Christianity is not a small thing. There is no need to go through this world as a poor person. Do you go through this world with the support and the help of divine Persons, in the consciousness of what Christianity is? We may go through in communion with, and in the company of the Lord

Jesus Himself; we can go through close to Himself, and in the consciousness of the Father's love, and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven.

But there is also the faith system, and we go through in the care of the angels themselves. Men call to their aid the organisations of human resources. Beloved friends, there are powers you can depend upon beyond everything here. You may say, You do not know my situation; where I am employed there are difficulties arising, and men are making up their minds that if I do not join their organisations, they will carry things to the bitter end. God has an angel for that. God has an angel for every situation. During the time when there was terror because of what was going on overhead, how was it that the lives of the saints were preserved? What deflected the instruments of destruction? God had an angel for every one of them. You say, There were lives lost. But who can tell for every life lost how many hearts were spoken to? How many souls were touched by the living God by those raids, eternity alone will unfold.

The Christian does not pass through this world unattended. "An innumerable company of angels." I ask you, have you ever experienced what it is to go into something where you carried with you the sense that you were in

danger ? There was something connected with your movements that you were not quite clear about. What explains that sense of fear ? The Lord who loves you could not let you go there without the sense of fear. You went unattended. You could not ask the Lord to go with you, and therefore you went unattended. You had contravened one of the great rules of the faith system. Satan tempted the Lord to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, quoting the words, "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." But to do what the Lord was asked to do would have been to infringe the divine pledge. When our path is not according to the will of God, we cannot ask His support. May the Lord help us to keep in the path of the will of God, and then we shall never go unattended.

Next we come to "the church of the first-born who are enregistered in heaven." Is not that sweet ? Your title, your name is written where no power of man can efface it. It is never to be erased, you will never have your privilege and your title taken away from you ; your name is written there, your name is enregistered there—the firstborn ones. Your place is according to His place as man.

Your standing is according to His standing in the presence of God. You can go through this world as belonging to the faith system. What a wonderful dignity !

“ And to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant ; and to the blood of sprinkling, speaking better things than that of Abel.” You do not know what you may suffer at the hands of sinful men, but what things do you speak ? There we have come down to the precious foundation—to the blood of Jesus which speaketh better things than that of Abel. What is the manner of your speech ? When you are condemned, do you resist ? When your rights are taken away, how do you answer ? “ The blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” That which we suffer, God in the day to come will vindicate. God grant that we may be so in the faith system in divine power, that we may pass through this world without a single call for vengeance. If the Lord tarry, we may have to face fresh trials in the path, but if we call for vengeance, the spiritual gain of the suffering is lost. May the greatness of the faith system so come into our souls that we may go through this world in greater dignity.

FOLLOWING CHRIST.

(LUKE IX. 37-52.)

MY desire, as the Lord may help me, is to speak to you of what is involved in following the Lord. The thought of following the Lord must present very great attraction to every one of us, and I think, too, that the young whose hearts have been drawn out after Him must also have some sense of the gravity of such a path. I would say at the outset that it is not a way that will be found easy naturally; the energy of nature, or even the strength that the knowledge of divine things as information can give, will not carry us through. It is a way in which we must find the help of the Lord, if we are to be walking in it for His pleasure, in fidelity, and in spiritual affection. I hope that I may be able to encourage your hearts before Him as to what it is to Him for us to be found in that way, and to have before us the preciousness and value of following the Lord; and not only what it is to us, bringing light, and comfort, and preservation of mind and spirit, but what it is to Himself, bringing joy and comfort to His heart.

At this juncture I shall refer to a very peculiar and sweet word employed by the Psalmist at a time of very great pressure through the attitude of men in their wickedness towards him; speaking in the spirit of Christ and as a type of Him, he appeals to Jehovah and says: "The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me." Then he lifts up his heart to Jehovah and says, "Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed." (Psa. lxxxvi. 17.) I would impress upon our hearts that in the path of following Christ we are God's token for good to Christ; we have been given by God to Him, not only that we may be associated with Him in that scene into which He has entered, but that we might come out in the spirit and character of Christ here; so that in that sense we have been given by God as a token of good to Christ. If we view for a moment the light that has come to us in these days of brokenness, and departure from the truth, it is of very great moment to realise that we have been given it for Christ's sake, not because of faithfulness in us; we have been given it in the faithfulness of God that we might come out as God's token of good to Christ, that His enemies might be ashamed.

Now that precious thought is presented in

the gospels as applying to us ; in Matthew in connection with the kingdom ; in Mark as connected with the holiness and service of God ; in Luke's gospel in regard to the testimony of divine grace ; and in John's gospel as connected with the fellowship of God according to the truth. In every case we come out as God's token for good to Christ that His enemies might be ashamed.

I desire to raise the question in our souls as to the truth as it is known in Christ personally ; the very knowledge of the truth which we possess, if we be unwatchful, may come between our hearts and the person of Christ who is the expression of it. We may become accustomed to what exists in the company of those with whom we walk ; what is clear and concise in the knowledge of the truth is our very heritage, but there is the possibility and the danger of dissociating it from the person of Christ, in receiving whom we have received all. Every one of us is being formed in soul history in relation to God ; I do not speak of our public and known history amongst the people of God, but of soul history in regard to God's things. Let me ask you how far in regard to your apprehension of the supper has there been consecutive steps in soul history with God ? How easy it is to regard our comings together as that which has to be

formally sustained, comings together that may stand upon custom rather than upon affection ! So one would raise the inquiry as to how far as we gather together from time to time, from the least to the greatest of us, are we working out our true soul history in regard of the things of God, and spiritually and livingly following Christ.

The connection that scriptures in Luke's gospel have with the thought of following Christ may not be immediately apparent to you, but in various aspects it opens out with the view that is seen of the glory of Christ on the mount of transfiguration. The Lord, in His own movement, takes His disciples aside from their position here as connected with the testimony, and as the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, He takes them with Himself to the mountain apart, and while He is in prayer, as recorded in this gospel, He is transfigured. The sight of the blessed Lord in that attitude is deeply touching, and to see the glory of God in the person of Jesus roll in as the answer to His prayer is very affecting. It is not the majesty of His Person that we see here, it is His moral glory as the Man who has come to do the will of God.

We have in that one blessed Person the answer to every yearning of faith and to every

spiritual desire in the Old Testament dispensation, and the answer to every utterance of the Holy Spirit, "for the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus." The glory that shines there is the glory of the Man Christ Jesus, the One whose "visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the children of men"; the One of whom the Spirit of God records the sufferings, through which the glory of God would be brought to pass abidingly. You will recall the word He spoke to two of His own who, discouraged by His sufferings, were turning away from the path of the testimony; He appeared to them on the way to Emmaus, searching their hearts and said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke xxiv. 26.) Thus the glory of Luke's gospel is the glory that is at the end of suffering: "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. viii. 17.) The beloved apostle, writing to the Philippians said, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." The path of suffering is that into which we have been called, and we have not been called there because of any superiority on our part, but by the sove-

reignty of the love of God and by the measureless power of His grace. We have been called to it, not that we may shine in any way peculiar to ourselves, but that we might come out in the mind, and spirit, and character of Christ. I do not wish to discourage, but it is possible to have a very great amount of light, and be very clear in our minds as to divine truth, and yet not be following Christ. It is a very serious matter to be in the circle where faith, and separateness of heart are maintained for us, and yet not to be really following the One who by His faithfulness was the originator of it.

You will observe in this chapter that as the Lord comes down from the mount of transfiguration a condition of things is discovered, which had crept in by reason of the fact that Jehovah as an Object had been lost to His people Israel. I apply this in principle to ourselves. There are many of us, young in years and young in faith, and many who are older too, and we are following in one path together, having one blessed and peerless Object; but let us consider together whether we are at this present moment in our soul history in the light of the truth "according as the truth is in Jesus." Does that blessed Person hold our hearts as He should do? Is He nearer to us in a spiritual

way than ever ? Or are we in the spirit of our minds, while perhaps adding to our knowledge, less in nearness to His Person than we have experienced formerly ? I have been greatly impressed by this fact, how possible it is to be adding to our intelligence, and yet to be drifting from His own Person ; how possible it is to be adding to our store of knowledge and yet not “growing by the true knowledge of God.” As we view these possibilities, it moves our spirits to exercise.

As the Lord descended from the mount, there was brought to Him by one of the multitude his child, possessed of an unclean spirit, or as Matthew describes it, he was a lunatic. It is very striking that that statement follows immediately upon the manifestation of the Lord's glory on the mount, where He is seen in His majesty, His face shining as the sun. Evidently the condition of things that had supervened was the result of the glory of His Person having been lost sight of. But in Luke's account it is spoken of as an unclean spirit ; the blessed Lord speaks of it in that way. It is a spirit which is the result of a gradual process of drifting away from the glory of God in a living Person. Bear with me in a word to my younger brethren. Although you may be indwelt by the Holy Ghost, unless you are sustained in nearness

to the Lord, you will become marked by another spirit. Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, does not relieve us of the need of prayer for a supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ ; nor does it preserve us from the need of exercise, lest we should be affected by another spirit.

The Spirit of God has been given to us, and His normal ministry is that our hearts may be held livingly, directly, and dependently in nearness to the Lord Himself. So the condition of things which the Lord found in coming down from the mount had come in typically by reason of the Lord in His glory having been lost sight of, and now figuratively in place of the power of the Holy Spirit, there was another spirit that affected the mind, and character, and controlled the succeeding generation. If we who are going before others, do not manifest unquestionable proofs of walking with a living Lord, we are leaving a door open to a contrary spirit in the next generation.

Well, the Lord meets this condition in His own power. He casts out the spirit, which was a spirit of bondage, cowardice, and fear, a spirit which may gradually possess our hearts, unless we are kept by the Lord. Then we have in a very precious way this suggestion as to following the Lord.

If we were asked by the Lord Himself what we wanted most in the assembly, what should we say? Some might say, I should like to preach; others might like to teach; some, perhaps, would like to be wise; while others might desire to be available to the saints in whatever service opened to them. The greatest thing open to us in the assembly of God's people is to be *like Christ*. But there arose a reasoning among the disciples as to who should be the greatest. The power manifested by the Lord, undoubtedly, underlay their inquiry and reasonings, and He, knowing their hearts, took a little child and set it in their midst as an expression of what He loved best—the thing that was nearest to His own desires, the subject of His most tender approval. Would any one accustomed to man's ways have expected a way like this and a word like this? But if their hearts had carried forward the lesson of the glory on the mount of transfiguration, what else could they have expected but that the Lord would take a way that was entirely His own! Man in his greatness, and wisdom, and knowledge is set aside entirely; whereas one who has seen the glory on the mount will never desire to figure anywhere in the assembly but in the way which Christ loves, and which He approves.

The fact is, the line of following Christ

begins in the assembly. My dear young friends, you will find that the Lord will gently lead and direct your hearts to this point—to the assembly as the place where you are most tested by the mind and spirit of Christ. If I am in the world—the world that is against Christ and the testimony—and its conduct comes out in a flagrant form, I may present a moral contrast, and I may set upon myself a mistaken value for that reason, but when I come to the assembly where, normally, the Spirit of Christ rules, I am tested by what is according to Christ, not by what is contrary to Him. If the world speaks against Christ, any little syllable of mine for Him is great ; in a sense, it stands out great by its contrast, but in the assembly I am tested as to whether I am near Christ or not.

It is where the Lord is enjoyed that our greatest tests are found. The Lord took that little child and put him in the midst. Can we follow Christ in that ? It is one thing to follow Him in the world where there is such contrariety, but come to the centre and look at the position which is Christ's own—for where else are His joys, His possessions, but in the assembly of His people ? Into the midst of this company, He sets a little child and challenges their hearts as if to say, This is the starting-point, can you follow Me in this ?

Can we follow Him in it ? Set together in our various localities as we are under the Lord's hand, can we follow Him in this ? What men love is one thing, what the Lord loves is another. He did not wait until we were like Himself before He loved us and died for us ; it was when we were totally unlike Himself. Yes, we have to do with a loving Lord ; what His heart is set upon is, that we should follow Him, and learn what it is to be set up here in the power, and fragrance, and wisdom of His own Spirit, so that we may be found in our little companies following Christ, in that we are prepared in relation to one another to take the lowest place possible, in order that the pleasure of God may be assured. Anything *else militates against it*. If I have gift before me unduly, I put gift before others ; if service, service. If I have Christ before me as the living, loving object of my soul, I shall put Christ before myself and everything else.

In this same incident, according to Matthew, the Lord calls the attention of the disciples to the fact that unless they be converted and become as little children they cannot *see* the kingdom of God, let alone have greatness in it ! That does not mean a person is not the Lord's ; it means that in regard to the Lord's own circle, nearness to Himself as having been converted and become a little

child, you are pursuing the kind of greatness which is greatness in His eye and in the sight of God. There can be no other greatness ; it is that upon which God had already set His approval when He said, " This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight ; hear him " ! (Matt. xvii. 5.)

I come to another point—one raised by John. Moving in the path in which the Lord had set them, the disciples encountered a man casting out demons in the Lord's name who did not walk with them. We are surrounded with this, and this scripture is not only given as guidance in regard to it, but that we may be helped from pursuing that line. Will you bear with me in asking a question touching this ? Have you ever felt inclined to use the power of the Lord apart from Himself ? If we move in the light that God has given to us in these days, but apart from communion with Christ, what are we doing ? We are using the power that has been given to us without reference to the Person. But, you say, I am responsible to speak for the Lord wherever I am. Yes, you are the Lord's wherever you are. But have you ever felt yourself content to use your knowledge, as knowledge, while in your heart of hearts you know you are not walking with the Lord ? You say, You are guessing ! No, I am not gues-

sing. Then you say, You know me ! No, I do not ; but I know my own heart ; I know what I have done, and I feel that this scripture is given to affect us so that we may be lowly and in the mind of Christ.

Our business is to keep near to the Lord, to be in our minds and spirits free with Him that He may use us, but not to seek the Lord's interference to justify our position ecclesiastically. In what we have from God, be it ever so much, if we are not following the Lord in it, what is it worth ? Whatever I know, if it be not held in my soul in relation to a living Lord, it is but religion ; it may be a good brand of religion, but so far as its power and value go, it is but religion. May the Lord grant, in regard to what we have received from Him, that we may seek grace from Himself to test ourselves as to whether we are walking with the Lord as a living Person.

John was one of peculiar exercise, and I am glad that it was he who raised the question. He was the one who leaned on the bosom of Jesus, who asked the question, Lord, who is it ? John is marked off in scripture as one who kept near to the Lord personally, and I can understand his difficulty. He was not merely seeking the Lord's guidance as to their relative positions ; he was seeking the Lord's mind in this matter, for he could not under-

stand how a person who could use the Lord's name could do so without following that Person, and if our hearts were rightly exercised, we should feel it to be an intolerable and unseemly thing that we should move on the line of using knowledge without being near Christ. May God keep us !

But the Lord did not interfere. He said to John, Leave him alone. That was enough for John ; if his Lord did not interfere neither should he. Do not frown on anything, even though it be marked by a lack of knowledge that seems to have little regard for Christ. If you cannot go with it, leave it alone. Our business is to follow the Lord in what we know. Have we not experienced it ? I have. One has come into contact with souls who in regard of knowledge needed help, but in regard to the preciousness of Christ to them, they put one to shame. Let us follow this line as to being called after the Lord. It is a precious line, one in which there is testing for the spirit, one in which, however, there is great comfort, and realisation of our desires as they are found centred in the person of Christ.

But to pass on. The Lord speaks to His disciples as to the end before Him, not an end of greatness according to man, but of greatness according to God. He was going

to Jerusalem, His face set as a flint to go there, committed entirely to the will of God and His glory. As He moves in that way, a man comes to Him and says, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." The Lord says, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." The Lord pointed out to the man the character of the way; He never indicated to him the character of the end. We start on this way with a very great deal of impetus; we start with the impetus that grace gives, with the sense of relief that comes to our spirits by meeting the Lord Jesus; so we say to the Lord, There is no place where we would not follow Thee! Why does the Lord leave the question of the end of the journey when speaking to this man? To test his heart as to what Christ was worth to him. You say, I will not leave the testimony! But you will leave the testimony, if you leave the Lord. There is not a heart among us that can be trusted as to what might transpire to-morrow, if to-morrow finds us out of communion with the Lord. But, blessed be God! the testimony is independent of human resting-places—holes or nests—but we have the blessed love of Christ. We are not expected to stand in the place of exposure without that love holding our spirits;

but so far as nature is concerned, and so far, too, as religious supports are concerned, are they sufficient without Christ? Oh, you say, I have been with the brethren from my early days, and my parents were with them before me! And so were mine, and in the mercy of God, through that provision, I knew what it was to find a resting-place; but I did not know its value until those who cared for me took another road from mine, and, even though professedly following the same Lord, we had different roads.

God may use what is human in bringing light to our souls, but there is not one thing in God's system which stands with natural heredity. In John ix. we get a man's eyes opened by the power of the Son of God; Jesus having made mud and anointed his eyes, he went to Siloam (by interpretation "Sent") and having washed came seeing. You remember what happened; the very day he saw the light for the first time he had to turn his back on what he saw. Blessed be God, he had the light of another world in his soul, or it would have been too much to leave! He never saw the synagogue until the day that he was cast out of it for the Lord's sake. He never saw his father and mother until the day that they denied him! But he proved the truth of the words, "When my

father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." (Psa. xxvii. 10.) It is not of nature.

You give God thanks for the saints; you give Him thanks for the parents who loved Christ before it became yours to love Him, but you have to learn that the light of Christ in your own soul is the tie that binds you personally to Him. There is no room for natural heredity in the things of God. We do not know what happened to the man in Luke ix. We have this word of the Lord to him as to His having nowhere to lay His head. There are few men who can do without sleep for more than a few nights; but the simple meaning of the Lord's words is, Are you relying upon nature? Are you relying upon knowledge that came to you through the instrumentality of nature, to follow the Lord whatever changes may take place, if He tarry?

Let us learn this together, that our power to continue in the testimony lies in being kept near the Lord. Where is the Lord with you to-night? It is not a question of what we did five, ten, or twenty years ago. Has the Lord moved since then? Oh, you may say, I am in the same room and in the same locality. Where is God's room and God's locality? Where is the Lord in matters, and where am I with Him? Am I as near the Lord? Is

He a name to me, or a Person ? Is it doctrine or the truth in a living Person who died for my soul ? He gave Himself for the church, and to accomplish the will of God—the living, blessed Person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. To follow Him is not to follow a line, or a system ; it is to follow all that is of God. The foxes have holes, the Lord says, and the birds of the air have nests ; it was just as much as to say, If you think you can follow Me you will have to move in the path that I am in. Are you in it for Christ's sake ? May the Lord grant that it be so. I do not know why the youngest lover of Christ here may not step out confidently, lowly, and dependently on a path even like this, having regard to the fact that the blessed person of Christ will be their object and support in it.

Now I come to another point ; the Lord calls again. He says to another, Follow me ; and this one answers Him, saying, “ Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.” Then Jesus says to him, “ Let the dead bury their dead : but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” Things connected with our lives here, natural objects, live long with us. I once came in touch with a brother who seemed to be under a shadow. I inquired as to what was the cause. Well, he said, I have never

got over the matter of a brother's defection some eighteen years ago. It had taken him eighteen years to bury his father, for it was the brother's father, and for eighteen years he had been under a shadow because, looking back upon it, he thought that his father had not been rightly handled. It had taken him all those years to bury his father—nor was he buried then. If we are not very careful, often what we think to be our rights, our own ways, and thoughts, will hinder us in the things of God. Is there any brother or sister here to-night who feels that in their companying with the saints they have not been treated as they might have been? Is it not buried yet? Some one may say, "Yes, but then you know it was wrong." Well then, I say, for Christ's sake, make it a matter of sacrifice, not of disappointment, but keep in the path of following Him. May we who feel that we have anything outstanding in our minds in connection with natural links or of our own rights, seek grace of the Lord to bury it; for the sake of Him who is our Object in the path, the One who has died for us, put it under ground, get it out of sight. It may cost you tears, but you will be able to enter into your relation with the saints happily, and without shadow to follow the Lord.

And now I come to the closing word. An-

other said to the Lord that he would follow Him, but wanted first to return to those who were at home. He wanted to save a rupture and to preserve a reputation; he wanted to follow the Lord in a way that would carry an element of nature with it. He was not prepared quite to set out in the reproach of Christ. He was carrying forward elements of danger, of going back. My friends, we need not stretch our imagination. Our history as brethren has proved it, that there have been things carried forward in times of crises which have well nigh wrecked the saints and dishonoured the Lord. What is reputation in the things of God? Do you want to be reputed as a follower of the Lord Jesus?

You can leave your reputation; it will hinder you in the race. Your reputation lies before. Keep to the Lord's reputation, His honour, and yours will be all right. Make up your mind, as the Lord gives you grace, not to sully *His* name and yours will be cleared. Consider not your reputation now, it lies on before, and the day will declare it. No man can be a true lover of Christ who tends to look back; "no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Let me close with a word for all our hearts, especially those who are younger: that he

who thinks to follow Christ must see to it that he is not easily turned aside by a word, by a threat, or by an attraction ; such an one must keep his face in one direction only. I remember, as a boy in Scotland, watching what is not seen in these parts, a ploughing match, and in ploughing matches they do not usually set the furrow where all the ground is seen ; they contrive in setting the men to plough that they shall finish their furrow perhaps over the hill, so that the end is not seen at the commencement. The man who ploughed the most straight furrow was the man who kept his eye upon one thing, and one thing only. He fixed his own mark and never watched what his neighbours were doing, and you do the same. The greatest power that can be found amongst us in following Christ is to be attached to Him with undivided affection. I do not get in your way, nor you in mine if we are both following the Lord. May He help us, for His name's sake !

THE MEANS BY WHICH FELLOWSHIP IS MAINTAINED.

(1 CHRON. XXII. ; XXVI. 26-28 ; XXVIII. 11, 12 ; XXIX. 1-9 ;
PHIL. II. 1-11 ; IV. 8, 9.)

WHAT is in my mind to bring before you, in a simple way, is the wonderful interest that divine Persons have in the activities of those who compose the assembly, of those whose hearts have been enlightened, and divinely instructed in what is precious to God. In bringing these various scriptures to your notice, I think one cannot fail to see how the Lord enters into all that pertains to fellowship, and how He would encourage our affections that we might all become exercised ; for then the instruction will become divinely profitable.

One thing I feel has hindered us—we have given to fellowship a hard and fast form which has hindered the Spirit of God. We have looked upon it, I do not doubt, in the spirit of thankfulness, but I fear we have been bound too much by the mere form of our being set together. I would not say a word to encourage carelessness with regard to what is due to the Lord in a day of breakdown, but I do not believe

that fellowship need in any way be diminished by outward circumstances. We are threatened sometimes with what is contrary to the divine principle of fellowship, but the Lord will maintain the fellowship in its entirety. Where there are two or three desiring to walk together in the light of the Lord, there is no reason why the fellowship enjoyed should be anything but large. In the path itself, if the Lord be with us, and if our hearts are open to the door that He delights to keep open for us, there is nothing diminished. God's things are as pure, as full, as powerful as ever, and I would encourage our hearts to get to God's point of view. If we are occupied with the public situation, then distress must come into our minds, but if we turn to God's side, we shall find the line of spiritual happiness, and spiritual power, lines on which we may hold things together. All along that line we shall have the strong consolation of the love of Christ, and at the end of the line we shall find the company and glory of the One who has set out that line.

There may be darker days yet to come ; I think in a certain sense the days now are darker than ever they were. It is not the bitter antipathy of the world towards the testimony which is the prevailing feature of our day, but the working of human wisdom

that would turn saints aside from what is precious in the sight of God to what is great in the sight of men. The One who has originated the path of the assembly is the One who, though in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. One thing that has interested me much of late is the wonderful way in which the Apostle Paul, in the later phases of his ministry, speaks of himself as the bondman of Jesus Christ. He never sought relief from the outward situation, save in the blessed Lord Himself who is the Head of the assembly.

There is one thing very touching in the Old Testament scriptures which I have read, and that is, that although David was king and he had but to speak the word of power, yet what marked him was not the commanding of things, but the appealing for them. It is not the exercise of power, might, and majesty, seeking to actuate hearts on the line of obedience, but the heart of David seeking an answer in Solomon his son.

The chapters that follow chapter xxii. may appear wearisome reading, being filled as they are with proper names, but remember, it is the book of life in relation to the work of God. In Philippians Paul speaks of the

book of life. God had a wonderful work on hand ; David was not exactly the accomplisher of it, for we have to take David and Solomon together ; but then we find that the Spirit of God has furnished us with a most beautiful type of Christ. We have to put together Solomon's glory and capacity, and all the character, affection, interest, and tenderness of David. From chapter xxii. to xxvi. there is a list of names of different persons doing different work—men of special fitness, brought into relation to the work of God in varied divine services—the result of the varied exercises through which the Lord had brought their souls. There you get the book of life. When God makes His own record of names there is much profit to be derived from it ; there is not one name missed out that God intended to record. Each one is of use, and the name recorded is the name given in connection with our usefulness. The name *pronounced* on us is the name of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord ; but there is too a name in the book of life. The Apostle Paul brings that book forward in Philippians because of the special relation of the assembly to Christ ; not simply because such are saved for eternity, but because they are divinely intended to be serviceable in time.

Now in chapter xxii. we find David moving ;

he felt the need of the house of God and there is something remarkable about his exercises. The thought in his mind took shape from the ark: "Arise and build the sanctuary of Jehovah Elohim, to bring the ark of the covenant of Jehovah . . . into the house that is to be built." *There was the need for the people of God to enter sympathetically into what it was to gather round the ark—to surround Christ.* God had a certain thing in view; it was from God Himself the wonderful thought had come, and David looked round on the situation, and so he sets to work. David had to face the fact that in connection with flesh and blood the house could not be built; he was a man who had shed blood abundantly. There could be nothing formed except in connection with the Son of the living God. He came into the flesh and blood condition that He might bring the light of God where the creature lay; He took upon Him the likeness of flesh of sin that sin in the flesh might be condemned, that in His new condition He might be the beginning of all things for the will of God. It was so with David here in the type. New ground had to be taken; all that was connected with God in righteousness was connected with Jesus here, it was met in Christ here; but the fulfilment of all that was in God's thoughts is taken up in Christ.

We stand therefore in relation to Christ as Son of the living God, as the One in whom divine light has come to our souls, but we stand too in relation to Him as man, and all that marked Him as man here. We read in Philippians of the One who though He was in the form of God, came to the point where we could first touch Him; He was found in fashion as a man. He brought into humanity all the greatness of divine glory, but in that humanity there was all that was precious to the mind of God. There is one thing we know little about, and that is the humanity of Christ. If we had understood that better, if we had been nearer to Him as man, and contemplated Him and His grace, we could never have borne the distance we have endured one from another. If we contemplate the graciousness of Christ, the hardness of our own touch would go. Standing in relation to Him, His mind—the mind of Christ—would take possession of us. The mind of Christ never takes forcible possession, “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*” Beloved, we have to give it right of entrance. God commits us to the whole truth, to all that He has in mind; and that is involved in His first touch.

David first presents himself as the one gathering great store and preparing material

in abundance, and putting all into relation to the work of God ; and the Spirit of God goes on to give the details of the wonderful store he had brought together. David is the type of the Shepherd, of the One who laid down His life for the flock, of the One who loved the church and gave Himself for it, of the One who humbled Himself down to death.

When we set to building a house we are greatly concerned about the foundation being sure, and then we forget all about it, but God never does. One of our difficulties in regard of the work of God is that we have forgotten the foundation. " Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Had the Corinthians remembered it ? We are prone to forget it. God reverts to our being on the foundation, because there it is all the character of Christ. Our character is determined by what we build on the foundation. One thing mentioned in Chronicles is the nails. I wonder if we have paid much attention to these, those secret attachments, those feelings, confidences, exercises that mean so much in regard of the work of God. Everything is produced by the work of the Spirit ; but we can gather up. We have to do with a divine fellowship, with a holy fellowship, where everything of Christ will come out, and come out for profit. The

saints are typically formed, and fashioned, and a value given to them as the mind of Christ prevails with them and marks them.

I come now to chapter xxvi., and a peculiar thing comes out there. David has given Solomon the charge, and now we get the book of life, so to speak. God has an intention with regard to every name that is written there. Whatever the exercise may be that is connected with every individual name, God's end is one. He never allows anything to be unprofitable. (1 Chron. xxvi. 28.) If you look back through the Old Testament history, and think of Saul the son of Kish falling on mount Gilboa, where he really made a public suicide, you would never have thought that anything would have come from that source to be dedicated to maintain the house of God. And if you think, too, of Abner and David's lament over him: "Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou," one would never have thought that God would have brought anything out of that as treasure of the dedicated things. And again, reading of the end of Joab, seeing how he died by the horns of the altar, and how his sympathies were with Adonijah, and what his opposition was to Solomon—his treacherous career—who would have thought that God

had anything out of that; but He had. God had from Samuel all the testimony in the day of ruin. It was the testimony of Samuel that disclosed the spirit of Saul, and it is the testimony which God has raised up now which discovers things in the way they are discovered. Why should we expect to come into the joy of things connected with the assembly without establishing a moral title to it? Why should we take it for granted that God has raised up a testimony that we may participate in with joy, without being exercised by it? The testimony that God has raised up is for all the people of God, but do let us treasure it at all costs; let us seek to be worthy of it! Indeed, we never shall be worthy of it, but let us have this in our hearts, that we so value it, that we retain it with the sense of dependence and self-judgment, for not otherwise can we hold it.

The testimony of Samuel was in connection with defection, but it had nothing less in view than the accomplishment of God's own thoughts, but it came out in the exposure of the evil; comfort and enlargement marked the progress of that testimony. There is that which comes from Saul the son of Kish. The tenderness which records it might well impress our spirits, for all our hearts have been on the Saul line. You may say, But I have trusted Christ. But even then your heart may be on

the Saul line, for you are liable to be so as long as you are here. It is not human judgment he was tested by; his sin was that he disobeyed the commandment of the Lord; he spared Amalek's king and cattle. He ruled over the heritage of God, and yet he began in a way that should have been a discipline to him; he had to borrow from his servant a piece of silver. May God grant in His mercy that we do not begin on the borrowing line! We should begin in the consciousness that, little and poor as we are, we begin with nothing less than all that is treasured up in the Son of the living God. We need the faith of it, we need the greatness of it as divine light in our souls to impress us. If we had been writing the book of life we might have included Samuel, and possibly Abner, but I feel certain we never would have included Saul and Joab. Every exercise that is wrought in a trying and sorrowful way for us, yields its profit when our hearts are in the right direction.

I pass on to chapter xxix. David brings in there a special thought which we do well to take notice of. It is both testing and encouraging. The thought is that the house is not for man, but for the Lord God. We may be tested by that, but that testing takes us to God and brings God in; we are tested far more, and to our greatest loss, if we treat

it as if it were for man. It is *God's* house. Christ is Son over God's house, and every influence in that house is actuated and governed by the One who is Son over it. David speaks of gold, silver, brass, etc., and we see the way he amplifies his instruction in regard of these materials. If the fellowship does not provide us with joy, the fault is on our side. There is no lack as to what David provided ; there is the provision of workmen, of men skilled in all cunning work, and of all necessary material. So now in the assembly there is divine provision, and sufficiency of gift coming from the ascended Head ; there is no lack of any good thing.

David tells Solomon the work is great ; and enlists the sympathies of the people in connection with him ; Solomon, he says, is young ; and then he begins to touch on the gold. (See ver. 2.) In the previous chapter you get the purpose of the gold and silver. Everything that David gave out, he gave out by weight, it is all measured and tested in its true worth ; and that is the purpose of the Epistle to the Philippians ; it is brought in to test the material for suffering. There are the scales, the balances of the sanctuary ; and there are no unjust weights with God. The blessed universal balance that is applied is the mind of Christ—gold for things to be made

of gold, and silver for things of silver. Who would have thought of anything else? But we have had other thoughts; we have put gold into things not worthy of its use, and have put other things where gold ought to be. Is there any lack? Are you deploring the lack of certain elements among the people of God? Gold will always be found until Christ comes and takes the church to Himself. "And the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood." There you have it all, "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." I do not think I can possibly exaggerate the importance of finding amongst the saints what is necessary to the things of God. The defect is, not that we look for too much, but that we look for too little. Look for Christ in the saints, look for Him in every feature; you will find Him there. It is the work of the Spirit of God to keep the material there. The Spirit of God will see to it that there will never be a lack of material in the people of God. Find it as it exists, and use it in the fashion that God intends it should be used—gold for things of gold, silver for things of silver.

Then there are the precious stones, "onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones,

and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance." And then we have the willingness of the people and their readiness in offering. It says in connection with the precious stones, "They with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord"; they take some looking for, they are not found on the surface, you do not find them promiscuously. Precious stones are things which have to be sought for. Have you ever thought how the affection of Christ in type touches the hearts here and there where there is desire, and purpose, and a mind to work the work of God? Has it ever occurred to you how the eyes of the Lord go over the objects of His affections, and how the Spirit of God travels in His activities through the sphere given into His hands? What are they looking for? They are looking for things that are divinely precious. How can that exercise of yours come out—your part in regard to the work of the Lord? Go to the Epistle to the Corinthians, where the Corinthians make much of all they hold in the way of gift; one thing they lacked, they lacked the precious things; but when the apostle begins to encourage them in respect of gift, he does so on right lines: "Covet earnestly the best gifts," he says. The best gift is the gift that makes most of

Christ. You need not think you will have much spiritual support in what makes much of you, or any other, but you will have it in what makes much of Christ.

“Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.” Yes, the more excellent way, that greatest gift ever given, is love; love—the best, the brightest, the most precious, and glorious stone in the assembly—that which fills it out and gives it its lustre and its glory. What will hold the glory of God and the preciousness of the light of Christ at the end will be the power of divine affections. “Love suffereth long, and is kind”; could you say that of gift? Love is never exhausted; it suffers long, and has a store of kindness left; it is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own. These are all wonderful features of love. The precious stones are set out in 1 Corinthians xiii., but they have to be found in the saints. Paul in 1 Corinthians xiii. shews you the way to them, and when you have found them, how to use them, and how they will affect others according to God.

I call your attention in the Epistle to the Philippians to those addressed there: “the saints in Christ Jesus, with the bishops and deacons,” it says. There are not those now who are set in these offices of a bishop, or a

deacon, but the work has to be done, so the first thing is the brethren have to find him, and secondly he has to find himself. Everything connected with divine order now has to be found in the moral qualification and exercise suited to it, and held there when found. So when Paul writes to the saints at Philippi he writes to them, as I have said, as saints in Christ Jesus, linked up with those who have responsibility and privilege in connection with them ; and so he addresses with the saints those who have the care of God's people in their hearts, those who would lay down their lives for the testimony, and who have their names in the book of life, not in an ecclesiastical register ; men who serve the flock of God.

The apostle brings in for us in that remarkable epistle all the outpourings of his own heart, his exercises in regard of the saints, and all those deep emotions that would have had a public outlet if they had not had that private one. He was in prison, his public and outward path had ceased, but in the prison his heart is held in the secret of the preciousness of the assembly as the sphere of the mind and spirit of Christ ; so he heads this epistle with this peculiar application.

Now in closing I want to touch briefly on the things the apostle has in his mind. He

sees the things that were to be found in Philippi. He speaks of a class that look on their own things, not the things which are Jesus Christ's, but he himself is concerned very largely as to the latter. There are two spheres, and things belonging to each sphere ; one is filled with the man that exalted himself at the expense of the humiliation of Jesus ; the other is filled out with the Man the world has humiliated, but whom God has exalted. The things of this blessed Man are treasured up in the assembly, it is the treasury of these precious things. So the apostle has the things of divine preciousness before him, the things that proceed from Christ, the things of the Holy Spirit, the things that are holy realities connected with divine fellowship. " Finally, brethren," he says, " whatsoever things are true," etc. Note that in the apostle's mind there is no scarcity of these things among the people of God, there is not any lack of material for the divine building. He is putting them on the lines of self-sacrificing service. If you are dismayed about the people of God, you have not really seen what is to be found. Why do you not look for Christ ? Because He is not enough for your heart ? If Christ is enough to my heart, I shall find Him in the saints, I shall look for Him there. " Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, what-

soever things are just, whatsoever things are pure . . . if there be any virtue, and if any praise, think on these things." On that line you will find gold for things of gold, silver for things of silver, brass for things of brass. For every necessity and for every precious means of fellowship, you will find material in the saints. May God give us to look for it !

SAMSON AND JEPHTHAH AS EXAMPLES OF FAITH.

(LUKE IX. 51; JOHN XII. 25, 26; HEB. II. 7-10;
JUDG. XI. 7-11; XIV. 1-13.)

It is my desire, with the Lord's help, to speak of the line upon which the Spirit of God would move us in our affections and in our spiritual judgment. I should like to refer in that connection to the faith of Samson and Jephthah. They are exceedingly important examples, and my desire is to speak of what is of value in the eyes of the Spirit in regard of both. The details which the Spirit of God gives in the Old Testament as to Samson confront one with actings of his own which were not of faith, but which brought him into sorrow, that brought dishonour on the name of Jehovah, and that increased rather than diminished the pressure that lay upon the people of God.

One is greatly comforted, however, in considering how graciously God looks upon the movements of His people. We are liable often to lack the sense of this, and to have the impression that the scrutiny of God over our souls is exacting. It is, no doubt, a necessary feeling, but a feeling that is never complete

in itself and really might conceal from us what God intends to do for us. One might pass a long period of one's spiritual history occupied with the fact, perhaps legally, that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 13); nevertheless, it has become a great comfort to one's spirit. I get a little into the light of the fact that I am peculiarly under the scrutiny of the Lord because He cares so much for me, because He loves me; the light that shone out in His own Person has been made to shine into my heart, and He has made me His; and this is true in regard of all who love Him.

One has often referred to the incident in the gospels, when the Lord was on His way to Jerusalem to be delivered into the hands of the chief priests, and scribes, and to be condemned to death, how His own followed Him in the way, and were afraid as they followed, yet at the same time they strove as to who should be the greatest. The Lord was perfectly aware of their fears, and their misgivings, but He was also aware of their reasonings as to who should be the greatest, and He waited in patience His own opportunity when they were withdrawn from their public position and were more directly under His own influence when He asked them defi-

nitely, and directly, What was it that ye reasoned among yourselves by the way?

Might I say reverently, we are all He has in the world; His most precious possessions are the saints; He loves them beyond all telling; and, with all their frailty and feebleness, they love Him, and so the Lord tests them, and tests them perhaps increasingly. There may be those here who are under pressure and testing in regard of the claims of Christ, and one would be greatly comforted, if anything one said should be of service to such in strengthening their spirits in it. Nothing in our circumstances here could make up for the spiritual loss resulting from want of fealty to Christ. It may be with some of us that ease as to circumstances having been assured to us, we have relinquished what is due to Christ; it might appear to be only in small measure, but as soon as we fail to respond to His rights over us, we become conscious of spiritual loss. Our desire should be that while our hearts may be comforted by these considerations, yet that they should be searched, and that thus we may be encouraged to recognise more fully His claims over us.

The One who tests our hearts more than any one else could, or has a right to, is the One who cares for us more than any one else

does or could. All His searchings of my spirit and yours are the extension of the activities of the same love that moved Him to lay down His life for us. How often one has spoken of the love of Christ ! He gave Himself for me. But did He give Himself for me that I might have links with Himself in view of eternity only, that when time is past, and the testings and dangers connected therewith are over, I should be with Him there when all else is gone ? No ! He gave Himself for me that *in time*, and in view of eternity, He might have His own place with me ; that I might be His in the testings of time ; that I might be His while here in all things and always. I do not wish to leave an impression that the blessedness of those eternal links are undervalued in their wonderful reality, but I am concerned, at the moment, as to the place the Lord has in our souls *now* ; so I have alluded to these scriptures, these two examples of faith, Samson and Jephthah, and I want to speak very briefly and simply about them both.

Samson was brought on the scene at a time of very peculiar necessity in the history of the people of God. What was called for at that moment was separation. There can be no doubt that the condition among the people of God was very sorrowful ; they were in bondage to the Philistines. It was not that

they were held by grossly evil things, for I do not think the Philistine represents that; he stands for the power of the enemy in what professedly belongs to God here in this scene; he is within the pale of what professes His name. The people of God were in great bondage to the Philistine power, and God brings in a deliverer for them of a very peculiar type. He brought in a Nazarite. You may say, But he did not live up to the standard. That is so, but my present concern is what *is* the standard, and are we in the light, and in the presence of Him in whom the standard is set forth, and who *did* live up to it. We are set in the presence of Him who in His pathway here set out the divine example of the true Nazarite, the One who came in from God's side apart from all that marked the people in their bondage; He came in according to Hebrews as made "a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death." (Heb. ii. 9.)

In Samson we see a Nazarite provided by God. We see what he did, and one would take account of it, but his great snare was the sight of his eyes. The feature that the Spirit of God would make clear to us is that a Nazarite must never walk by the sight of his eyes; if he does his Nazariteship is gone. We must walk by faith, not by sight. If we walk by the sight of our eyes, Philistine objects

will engage us, and Philistine works will lay hold on us, but if we walk according to the instincts and the judgments of faith, and in the presence of the preciousness of the claims of Christ, then we shall judge for Him, and receive the present compensation of the company of Christ. It is better to be with Christ at loss in regard to our circumstances here, and better to have the compensation of His company than anything else beside.

So Samson was raised up of God as a Nazarite. I touch on his movements as from God's side. The first feature of his power as a Nazarite is the slaying of the lion—a young lion roared against him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid. The Spirit of God tells us, moreover, that he had nothing in his hands. In human judgment and feeling such a course would be folly, but in faith it is power. All the things that you or I might bring in to meet the situation would become a snare to us.

Supposing in my circumstances here the question is raised with me as to my allegiance to Christ, as to the extent to which I am prepared to follow Him. I might say, Well, I shall be with Him where He is in eternity! That is a very sweet hope, and one would not be without it; but I need something else in the meantime. It may be my present circumstances are in jeopardy; if you only

knew my circumstances, how dependent I am on individuals ! But you are to be dependent on one Person alone, the living Lord ; and to be dependent on no other. You may say, But the actual facts of my circumstances have to be considered. It was the blessed Lord who enlightened you and gave you to see your soul need and met it, and you must leave your circumstances also in His hands ; meet the situation with nothing in your hands, with no natural resources ! But you say, Surely Samson was a type of Christ when he slew the lion with nothing in his hand. I have no doubt he was, but I am not now looking at him as a type of Christ, but as a man of faith, as one who met the most peculiar difficulty, the threatening of death itself, with nothing in his hands. Ah, you say, he was Samson, he was a Nazarite ! Yes, but that is a feature of faith that the Lord would establish in every one of us. When do we get on to the line of being Nazarites ? It is when the heart in separation from the world and from what is natural makes room for Christ, when we begin to consider more for Christ and for those who are His than for our own interests, and when we begin to love Christ more than we love ourselves.

What marked Samson was affection, but he let his heart go in the wrong direction ; he

saw a Philistine woman and she pleased him well, and all the sorrowful consequences of it failed to turn his heart from that direction. And then he looked upon another, and he loved her too. I do not know the thing that immediately tests you, but we all need much correction. You may have a certain judgment about things, but if you are lukewarm in relation to the Lord, you may be ensnared by these very things. I can only meet the things as having seen the Lord; it is only in the known preciousness of Christ that the heart can steer clear of being caught.

We have thus seen Samson when Jehovah was his only object. The Spirit of God speaks much to us of what we love and what we hate. There is a marked difference between the conduct of Samson on one occasion and his conduct on another. What a contrast between the burning of the standing corn of the Philistines to avenge himself, and the slaying of the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass! In the one you have the consequences of the way he had taken; in the other case you have the outcome of power and faith. I love to think of the faith that marked his soul as a Nazarite—called by God to be a Nazarite—born a Nazarite! The Spirit of God would greatly exercise our hearts, I believe, as to Nazariteship—to be entirely separated to God.

And some things are more difficult to be apart from than others—human ties, for instance ; things that ask for the first place in our hearts, and would fain claim Christ's place in our affections. I believe the Spirit of God would exercise our hearts in regard of Nazariteship.

If the Lord asked us what we desired most, should we hesitate ? Samson desired much ; he saw a woman who pleased him well ; his eyes were not where they should have been. Was there not a woman amongst his own people who could have pleased him better, that he should “ take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines ” ? But the eyes of his soul were blinded in that direction ; what he desired most was this woman who pleased him well. That, however, was the last bondage he was to be under ; Samson came to a moment when he found he did not need the sight of his eyes ; the man of faith does not need the sight of his eyes. He turned to the Lord and presented the situation to Him, and he slew more Philistines when he was blind than when he saw. What was in his heart was the deliverance of God's people—poor, blind, and broken as he was, and being made a sport of by the very element that his eyes had looked upon and coveted. “ If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out.” Things would not weigh with us nearly as much as they do, if we

knew the love of Christ better. I say, He died for me ! Yes, and I might put that fact back two thousand years, but it should be a present and abiding fact, controlling my heart. "He loved me, and gave himself for me" ; He "loved the church, and gave himself for it." He loved us and died for us that we might be wholly His, that His glory might be the glory that lights our hearts constantly, and increasingly, and that His present claims and His thoughts for us in regard of eternity might hold our souls now.

The Spirit of God has drawn attention to Samson at the end ; He does so as a warning so that in passing through this world I may not make my links with it. If I do, I become defiled, I suffer spiritual hurt, I am hindered from the joys of Nazariteship, and who can tell to what extent ? How many have been turned aside from the path of testimony because they let their affections flow out on the things of the world ! It was so with Demas ; the Apostle Paul says to Timothy, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." (2 Tim. iv. 10.) It was this that ensnared Samson. There are the Philistines, there is their power, their subtlety, their wisdom and their attraction, hence in the New Testament these principles are exposed, and the Lord makes Himself the test.

Now I wish to make a few remarks about Jephthah. Jephthah was a man of peculiar experience ; what marked him was his judgment in regard to things. It has been sometimes said of him that he was very harsh in his judgment. But let us examine the circumstances and see if there were any moral reasons for his judgment.

When the elders of Gilead came to him, he said, " Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house ? " They did. He had been hated by them ; and yet he yielded to their appeal to help. They had been the means of his discipline, but he did not refuse their request ; they had caused him suffering, but he was prepared to serve them. He was on the line of the Apostle Paul, " though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." (2 Cor. xii. 15) ; and he won his point in the end. Love always does, " love never fails." You may say, But Jephthah made a great mistake. I would suggest that you look at him from another standpoint. The Lord speaks of loving and hating. Samson fell because of what he loved, because he did not hate what was hateful to God with sufficient spiritual intensity. The Spirit of God speaking of Christ says, " Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity." (Heb. i. 9.) He loved what God loved ; and He hated what

God hated ; and these must be the features of our faith if we are to move rightly on the line of God's pleasure. Samson loved with peculiar intensity ; but he did not hate with like intensity. The difficulty was that he loved what God did not love, and he did not hate what God hated. Had he hated the Philistine rightly, he would never have loved the woman of Timnath ; he would never have been ensnared, nor lost the sight of his eyes.

But to return to Jephthah. Jephthah had been the object of hatred in a way like the Lord, "For they have rewarded me . . . hatred for my love" (Psa. cix. 5), but the time came when God opened the way, and he put the people of God first. It was a day of small things, but as the opportunity offered he looked on the people and said, It may be true that they are few and broken, and there are reasons for it, but I am going to be of service to them. May be there is some one here who has a precious opportunity of serving the saints within the compass of their circumstances. I am not thinking of teaching, or any public service, but of being at the disposal of those who are precious to Christ, and perhaps of bringing comfort to their hearts. In preparation for that you might find your heart much under pressure and the soul may

be tested by it. At the close of Hebrews xi. the Spirit of God enumerates wonderful things that were done in the power of faith, and then He comes to a peculiar thing on the line of suffering : others “ were tempted.” Is it not one of the most precious things that is said about Christ, “ For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted ” (Heb. ii. 18), and “ was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. iv. 15.) There is more suffering in temptation than we think. Temptation may be intense suffering, it may be going on in the soul and unknown to any one ; it may be with you in the home or in business, or in connection with the Lord’s things, and no one be aware of it. It may be that you are tempted in regard of the claims of Christ ; perhaps you have never looked at that as being tempted, but it is temptation.

The Lord may be asking some soul what it is going to do about His interests, about His claims, whether it is minded to seek what is pleasing in His sight ; if that consciousness is with any soul, I pray you to give the Lord His place. It will be your safety ; you cannot otherwise be safe ; none of us can be, save as we give the Lord His place. We are so hesitant, we give such place to other interests, persons, and purposes, and give so little to

Himself. Jephthah's judgments were pronounced. Note how he answers. (Chap. xi. 9.)

If you regard the death of Christ merely in a historical way, you will not ascertain your true place in this present evil world ; but if you see it as in the sight of God, an unchanged reality, and as separating as when it happened, you will be exercised as to your present pathway in this world. I am not occupied with what is sinful, but with what is natural. It cost Jephthah something !

What marked the pathway of Jephthah so peculiarly was the fact that he hated what God hated. His love was much tested—his love for his brethren, his love for his virgin daughter, his love, too, for those with whom he had links in Israel, but he put God first ; and so may you and I.

I now refer briefly to Luke ix. As the Lord went up to Jerusalem He sent messengers before His face, and coming to a village of the Samaritans, they refused Him because His face was towards Jerusalem. Perhaps you deem it necessary not to be so definitely pronounced in the expression of your feelings in regard of Christ ; you may find it easier to be silent than to speak ; although you may desire to retain the light of Christ in your heart, to have His preciousness to yourself, yet you do not want the matter put to the

test publicly, or in your family relations. You may have found that to put Christ first has caused you loss in business, and you therefore think the best way is to say less about Him. The Samaritans refused that blessed Person, because His face was turned towards Jerusalem. His disciples would have commanded fire to come down from heaven and consume them, but Jesus turned and rebuked James and John and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."

Now I pass on to other features. As He is on the way one comes to Him and says, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest ! And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Have you ever known what it is to be spoken to by the Lord in that way ? I think I have. What words of searching they are in regard of our thoughts as to His Person and claims : "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head" ! Do you say you cannot follow in such circumstances ? It depends on the nature of the links, it depends on what you are following after ; it is not the things you are to follow after, you are to follow a *Person*. In whose company would you rather be ? I would rather be where Christ is. "Where I am, there shall also my servant be"—here in the circumstances

in which He finds His place now, and there at the end in the place that will be all His glory in the presence of God. Better to be there than anywhere else ! Better to have Himself and His things than anything else !

Then the Lord Himself speaks and says to another, Follow me. And this one says, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. The Lord replies : " Let the dead bury their dead," He says, as it were, You follow Me ; get your eye on Me ; get your mind away from dying and dead things ; there is no death where I am going, no sorrows there. There are testings in the pathway ; there are, but you will get compensations. I would rather suffer the losses to find the compensations, than never to suffer the losses at all. The Lord would thus encourage our hearts in following in the direction of the realisation of living hopes. Let the dead bury their dead ; put Him first.

Then the Lord speaks a third time. Another had said, " Lord, I will follow thee : but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house." He wanted a reputation for courtesy. He did not think it right to leave them without bidding them farewell. And the Lord says to him, " No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." If the Lord

is speaking to any soul here in respect of His claims, I beseech you to see how you answer. It may mean a great deal to you, but the simple solution in felt weakness, and in the searchings and tests is, get to the Lord, and tell Him that you love Him and desire to give Him the first place ; tell Him your difficulties too, and He will settle them all for you. No soul ever went to the Lord with difficulties, and put them before Him in simplicity with a deep desire to be separated to all that was pleasing to Himself, but the Lord answered them.

May God help us with regard to these features of faith in the presence of the One who loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Anything, beloved friends, less than Christ, is lawlessness.

CHRIST, THE TEST OF MEN.

GOSPEL ADDRESS.

ACTS XXVI. ; JOHN V. 17-30 ; REV. XX. 11 ; XXI. 1-8.

PROBABLY all here are quite clear as to the doctrine of the resurrection. There are very few in this christian country of ours, who make any profession at all, but are quite clear as to this truth. But I am not going into the doctrine of the resurrection now ; what I want to speak to you about is the question as to how far your life is affected by the great fact that you have to give an account of yourself to God.

There are several records of the conversion of the Apostle Paul in the Book of the Acts, and in every one of them, while the main facts recorded are similar, yet there is a peculiarity in the way the tale of grace is rehearsed in each instance. In the one that I have just read this is very noticeable in that it is the only one in which you have the question of the resurrection raised. The great point of the Apostle Paul's testimony of his conversion in Acts xxvi. is that he brings very forcibly to bear upon those who listen to him the great fact of the resurrection ; indeed he does so, in such wise that they were brought

face to face not only with the questions connected with the testimony of Christ on earth, but with the great question of their eternal relations with God.

I often think that the carelessness of people in regard to the glad tidings is explained by the fact that, in the preaching, the question of their eternal relations with God is not sufficiently raised. When people listen to the preaching, the idea in their minds often is that it would be a very good thing if they believed it, but that after all it is not so very serious a matter if they put off believing it to suit their own convenience. But I venture to say to you that the real question raised between your soul and God in the preaching of the glad tidings is that of your eternal relation with God. That relation may be for blessing, or it may be for eternal loss.

Now as to the character of your life as you are living it at the present moment, I cannot go into the secrets of your life ; I have no knowledge of them ; but what I desire to bring before you in all tenderness and affection in regard of the Lord Jesus is this : Is there in your life what God can raise for His pleasure in the resurrection ? Have you anything in it that, in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, will stand for the glory of God ? When Paul speaks to Agrippa here he “ speaks

for himself." It is always interesting when people speak for themselves. That the apostle was supported by the Holy Spirit, and by the grace of the Lord Jesus, there can be no question, but an interesting feature of his testimony is this, that he defends the faith of his soul, the character of his life, his whole position, *for himself*. The way in which the secrets of the heart are all brought into the light when he spoke for himself is very remarkable. What he had in his soul was the purpose to be here for the pleasure of God. Everything in the detail of his soul's exercise was in the sight of God. He took his judgment from God ; God was the ruler of his soul.

Now I want to shew you how very real this was with the apostle and the divine interest attaching to this in regard of his conversion. He brings before Agrippa and the Jews who listen to his testimony everything in regard of his past life. From his very earliest days up to that moment everything about his life was known. I have no doubt that he carried secrets in his heart, secrets which he would not have disclosed to any, and which it would not have profited any one to know, but there were all the facts of his life which could be both ascertained and proved, and in which he is found testifying for Christ. He shews how from the beginning of his life he lived after the strictest

sect of his religion a Pharisee. If it had been a matter of human judgment, the life of Saul of Tarsus was one of the highest examples of what human religiousness might produce in man ; but while that was all true, while his life would have brought nothing but credit and honour from man, yet according to God there was nothing really in that life which was enduring and pleasurable to God.

Paul then goes on to shew that such was his animosity to Christ, that every one who bore His name was a subject of the bitterest hatred ; so bitter was he as a persecutor that despite his human education and religiousness, even his natural sensibilities were sunk in his indignation against Christ, and so no matter whether the Christians were men or women he haled them to prison and to death. He was a very notable example of bitterness against Christ, you say ; surely there are not many such in the world to-day ! Well, perhaps not ; but at any rate this is an outstanding example of the grace of the Lord Jesus, for even in such a case it overcame the breathings of threatenings and the spirit of slaughter. But when it is a question of our soul's relation with God, it makes very little difference whether our bitterness be a bitterness of this sort or the ordinary bitterness of indifference to the Lord Jesus. I can safely say

this, that when it comes to the examination of the human heart in the presence of God, it is either a case of bitterness against Christ, or the sweetness of Christ Himself. Now, after all, if Christ is not in the heart, if the heart has not learned to treasure Christ and the grace that brought Him down from heaven to earth for your blessing and mine, what real difference does it make whether it is ordinary indifference to Him or bitterness against Him? It is the appreciation of Christ that brings blessing and sweetness into the soul.

Now here, as I have said, the apostle refers to the same facts as he does elsewhere, but there is this peculiarity in this testimony, that he uses the fact of his conversion to bring home to those who listen to him the great and solemn fact that they have to do with God. The question raised in the chapter is that of the resurrection. He challenges all his hearers as to why it should be considered a strange thing that God should raise the dead. It is God's right and title to raise the dead. But in John v. we read that it is not only God's title to raise the dead, and that He *will* raise *all* the dead, but the resurrection is brought in in relation to Christ, and the question that God is raising with souls at the present moment in the glad tidings is as to their attitude towards *Christ*.

I feel, beloved, as I speak, how unable one is just to present it in all its force and simplicity, but I would earnestly desire that what I say might have the effect of creating in your soul an inquiry as to how you stand in relation to Christ. What do you think about Him in your own heart? If it were all brought out into the light, would there be anything found of the preciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, here is Saul, garbed in all his religiousness and in all the human glory that attached to him, and as God looked down from heaven upon him at that moment, he would seem to be at the very apex of his position as regards his hatred of the Nazaræan and against those who bore His name. God looked right into his heart and He detected all the breathings of his soul against Christ—all the tumult, and hatred, and animosity, and pride. What a wonderful thing to think that what was uppermost in the heart of the Lord Jesus was the most tender and direct compassion for that man—Saul of Tarsus! There was not in the heart of the Lord Jesus the smallest reflection of the heart of this bitter persecutor. I feel that what we really need is to have brought home to us, that no matter what the nature of the human life may be, the great test which God submits every heart to is as to its attitude towards Christ.

Now in John v. we find the Lord Jesus speaking, and I should like you to notice the way in which the Lord brings the truth to bear upon souls. He takes His stand on the foundation of the blessing that had been accomplished at the beginning of the chapter. As the Lord passes the pool of Bethesda where there lay a great multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, and withered—all in great extremity—He saw one man. You may say, Why did the Lord pass by all the others? You will find, as you read the gospels, that the grace of Christ made no exception in blessing, but in this chapter, I take it, the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to shew the activity of the grace of Christ and the discernment of Christ. Here is one who had lain thirty-eight years at the pool, and there was no blessing for him; and the reason was just this, that he had no power in himself to put himself in the way of blessing, and there was no one sufficiently interested in him to take and put him in the way of it when the occasion of blessing came. But as the Lord passed by He looked on him, and knowing that he had been a long time in that case He spoke to the man, and I want to point out to you that that example of blessing gives the foundation for all the rest that is in that chapter. This man who was the subject of the Lord's blessing

in this remarkable instance was the proof of the Lord's ability to come in, in divine power, where there was moral death. It is a proof to us that the Lord can take the soul out of the place of moral death and put it in the place and power of spiritual life. It is not merely the proof that the Lord can raise the dead, which He will, but it is the proof to us that He in the power of His own word and grace can penetrate into the indifference, and deadness, and distance of the soul, and bring it in power into life and being according to God.

I feel what a great mistake people make in confusing knowledge concerning divine things with what is really of value to God. I suppose most of us here have had christian training, and could begin at the beginning and go right on to the end and tell the terms of the glad tidings, but how very poor all that is if Christ has no place in the heart. If the heart has never found out its own extremity, the need of the saving grace and power of the Lord Jesus, all the knowledge concerning divine things only makes its case the more serious, and its extremity the greater. But now this is the interest of the Lord Jesus. He touches this case of need. In all the records of the conversion of Saul, there is not a single word that would indicate that the desire of his heart

was toward the Lord Jesus ; it was all against Him, but in grace the Lord oversteps that opposition.

In this scripture we find that the Lord in grace and power makes His own inquiry in regard to the need of this person, and the interest He manifested in his need is the interest which is really in the heart of Christ in regard to every one who is at a distance from Himself. The One who measures the nature of our need is none other than the blessed Person who manifested Himself in grace to the man at the pool of Bethesda, and according to His grace to Saul of Tarsus. You may say, My heart is not opposed to Christ ; I have no consciousness of opposition, or of feelings of hostility. We shall leave that aside for the moment, but let me inquire whether you feel your need of Christ or not. Do you feel that you are in a case of extremity and need the saving grace of Christ ? Do you realise that you have no power to get near the Lord ? that you cannot even put yourself in the way of blessing, and that unless the Lord come near to you in the grace and love of His own heart you must remain where you are ? As one looks around on the world, how very great the needs are ! There are many things which men and women *reckon* they need which they do not really need at

all ; they spend themselves in seeking things for human enjoyment, but it is a great thing when the heart comes to the understanding that what it needs most of all is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the Lord Jesus knew, both with regard to Saul and the man at the pool of Bethesda, just what the need was. What comes to light in regard of the latter case is that it is a matter of helplessness and hopelessness ; if he had all the desire in the world to get the blessing of God, he had not the power to attain it. In Saul's case not only had he no sense of his need of Christ, but his heart was filled with hatred to Him. There are the two extremes. I do not know where you stand between these two. You may have no real sense of need ; you may have no active opposition in your heart to Christ, but whatever your case is, you need Christ. And I venture to say this with all confidence, that if you but knew how much there is in the heart of the blessed Lord Jesus for your spiritual and your eternal welfare, you would lose your indifference, if indifference possesses your heart, and your opposition to Christ would be broken down, if opposition reigns in your heart.

There is one thing I can say with all confidence, with no fear, and with no hesitation, that there is no heart in all the universe like

the heart of Christ. There is much I do not know, there is much I am very ignorant about, but I know something of the heart of Christ, and I earnestly desire for you to get the impression, above all other impressions, that there is nothing in the heart of Christ towards you but the deepest desire for your blessing. He wishes you no ill, but not only that, He desires for you all the good of God, He wishes you every enduring blessing. Whatever your station or your experience in life may be, there is one thing you can rest assured of, that the whole safety and security for your soul for time and for eternity lie in realising what is in the heart of Christ towards you.

Now the Lord's words in John v. are extremely solemn. One feels that they search our hearts. When the Lord speaks, He speaks not only of grace, but of the certainty of divine judgment, of a moment "in which all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall go forth; those that have practised good, to resurrection of life, and those that have done evil, to resurrection of judgment." I am not going into the detail of how and when both these things are accomplished, what I want to bring to bear upon your mind for the moment is the absolute certainty of it. Were it in your mind to avoid these direct dealings with God, you could not accomplish it.

You might evade your responsibility now, you might live a life in defiance of the righteous claim of God, and you might remain for your lifetime indifferent to the grace that had given Christ for your salvation ; you might live indifferent to the grace of the heart of Christ towards you personally, but there is one thing you could not evade, and that is giving an account of yourself to God. Your own conscience tells you that it cannot be avoided, but when the question is raised between your soul and God, *it will be raised in relation to Christ.*

Some one may say that they do not believe that all the things in a person's life will be taken into account. Scripture is very clear on that point. From the Book of Revelation it is plain that with regard to those who stand in that solemn case, every detail of their lives will come under the review of God. Direct dealings with God is what you find at the great white throne, and direct dealings without an atom or an element of grace. But I want to say this, that besides the question of the detail of your life is the great question of the attitude of your heart to Christ. I feel that what explains the carelessness of the human heart in regard to Christ, and in regard of God, is just ignorance of what is in the heart of God and in the heart of Christ towards you personally.

Let me say to you in closing, that what I feel is desirable above all things is that you should know that in the heart of Christ there is absolutely nothing but the deepest desire for your blessing. May the Lord convince us all of it, for His name's sake !

THE THREE GREAT FEASTS [OF THE LORD AND THEIR SPIRITUAL IMPORT.

(EXO. XXIII. 14-19; DEUT. XVI.)

I DESIRE to speak to you simply of what God's desires are in respect of His people, and one feels the need of special grace in doing so in order to be preserved from presenting things merely on the line of intelligence or theory. It is often possible to be clear in one's mind as to certain ideas in Christianity, but it is not one's clarity of mind that is so important, but the measure in which our affections are in spiritual exercise.

I read these scriptures so that we might dwell a little upon the love of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, and the way in which the Lord delights to take account of conditions amongst His people. It is interesting to consider how graciously God expresses Himself to His people in the Old Testament when giving them communications, and how pleasurable it was in His sight that there should be response from them to Himself.

It is a very searching word for each of us—that we have to beware that we do not present ourselves empty before God. We may be greatly concerned as to the importance of doing right things, and that our conduct should

be blameless, without flaw, and yet we may appear before the Lord empty ; but I venture to say that the heart that loves Christ will never be found empty. Some may think that it is our want of intelligence that is the root of the trouble. Instruction is provided for us, if we need that, but what lies at the root is that we are spiritually deficient. But the more the heart resides in the presence of the glory of Christ, the more do we grow in the appreciation of Himself, and we shall not then be empty.

In referring to these three feasts one would desire to consider the way in which they are brought before us in these two scriptures. For the sake of the young, I would say that it is not with us a literal appearing before God three times in the year, or a matter of keeping actual feasts, whether the passover, the feast of weeks, or the feast of tabernacles, but it is a question of spiritual response. I want, therefore, in a simple way, to bring before you how there can be with us in the power of the Holy Spirit what answers to these feasts. The first, the passover, presents what is moral ; the second, the feast of weeks, what is spiritual ; and the third, the feast of tabernacles, what is divine.

The Holy Spirit has furnished for our spiritual instruction these definite lines of

divine teaching, so that we might increase spiritually. As I said, it is not a matter of keeping actual feasts. In I Corinthians v. 7, 8 we read, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." If we are careless or indifferent in respect of the passover, it will result in our going back in spirit to what is in Egypt. The passover is kept in the wilderness. It was to be the means of preserving God's people. He would have the sense of what was connected with the passover ever kept before them; during the whole course of the year He would have them in continual remembrance of the month "Abib." We often say, I think it is time we got beyond that point; but I should pity the soul that gets beyond the passover. It was observed in the wilderness, and was God's means of preservation for the people from what was Egyptian and hostile to God. But it also had to be observed in the land. They were always to be solemnised in their spirits by the fact that their place in the land was entirely due to their having been covered in the passover.

In the Epistle to the Colossians, the apostle presents to the saints at Colosse the wonderful

outlook, presented on the heavenly side as risen with Christ, and in doing so he reminds them of the fact that they had been reconciled to God "in the body of his flesh through death, to present them holy and unblameable and unreprouceable in his sight." (Chap. i. 22.) That is the way the position was brought to bear upon the Colossians; it was presenting to their affections the sphere of things on the other side of the Jordan. He encourages them to pass over, but they could not be there on the line of the flesh, but as secured by the offering of the body of Christ.

It is very easy to get occupied with what is Egyptian. Often our associations, which are perhaps full of apparent value to us, are the hindrance, and we feel we have not the power to free ourselves from them. That should be a most serious consideration for us. If we are desirous of being free from what is Egyptian, are our hearts tied or held by what is contrary to God's rest? When Moses, the leader of God's people, recounts the passage of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, he says they "removed from Rameses." (Num. xxxiii. 5.) Moses had the opportunity of being the greatest Ramesian that Egypt had. If he, that chosen vessel of God, had made his position in the opposite direction to what he did, he would have been the greatest

head that Egypt ever had. Rameses denotes all that is great on the Egyptian line ; and Moses measures their pathway from that point—the place where the Egyptians buried their dead.

Many a heart has gone out of Egypt at the start in the enthusiasm of evangelical conditions, and afterwards it has begun to feel that in leaving Egypt it had left what was living instead of what is dead. Egypt is a giant burying-place ; their occupation that of burying their dead. What a solemn sight in the eyes of Moses was the thought of his heart in bringing it afresh before the people of God at the close of Deuteronomy ! How have we left Egypt ? Have we left it with regrets, with any lingerings in respect of its things ? You will recall the incident of the children of Israel murmuring in Numbers xi. They said, “ Who shall give us flesh to eat ? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely ; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick : but now our soul is dried away : there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.” The Spirit of God challenges them as to whether there had ever been any time that they had been in trouble when He had not come in for them.

How solemn to forget “ Abib,” the be-

ginning of months ! Moses makes express mention of this in Deuteronomy xvi. ; he says, " Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the Lord thy God : for in *the month of Abib* the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the Lord thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the Lord shall choose to place his name there. Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it ; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction ; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste : *that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life.*" How well might they and we remember the month " Abib." It is to be held in spiritual recollection. We must not always abide by the forgiveness of sins, we must make spiritual progress. But is it spiritual progress to forget the month Abib ? Is it spiritual progress to go back to the things from which God has freed us ? If we do forget it, we shall begin to long for something of Egypt. We need never be empty, we need never be spiritually deficient, or feel the slightest need of turning to the world. No heart ever found a void filled by turning to the world ! We may have been disappointed because we have had a feeling that we have

not been loved or cared for enough, or that others have not been sufficiently interested in us. If this has been so, there is need to get to the Lord, for Him to come in for us. There is enough in Him to satisfy our hearts; but unless God be our object, disappointed we must be. One has heard of those who had a little feeling that they were not loved enough, but let me assure you, there is warmth enough in the christian circle; there are comfort, sympathy, and tenderness to be found there if we are prepared to keep near enough to feel it.

When God took the people out of Egypt, He thought of them as one man, as was predicated of them by the Holy Spirit through the prophet Hosea, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." (Chap. xi. 1.) They came out in that one identity, as one under God's eye, both in discipline, and as to blessing. As they had been similar in trials and testings, so they were to be similar in the purpose of God, in that great end to which He was bringing them—"What hath God wrought?" And what possibilities there are when God puts out His hand in divine blessing and touches the soul; it is the breaking forth of the green leaf! What does God intend to do? To bless us in His own way as those in whom He has wrought, and

to establish us by the discipline and trials through which we may be called to pass. But we must be free of Egypt ; there must be no entanglements ; we must not forget the gain of discipline and the end God has in view in allowing us to go through it.

Much of God's discipline is exercised to get us free of entanglements. He brings us out in the power of His blessings, and sets us up richly supplied for ever. We may not get the sense at the outset that every step of our way is a matter of divine interest, but there is not a step of our goings that God is not interested in—not only at the beginning and the end, but also right through the whole journey.

You say, My pathway has been so vacillating. But if I told you mine, you would be amazed. That is not the point really. What is God's view ? The end will be, "What hath God wrought ?" I do not know anything about you or what your path has been, but if you have got blessing from God, how comforting it is to know that from the first moment you got blessing, God was interested in you in regard of every step of your entire pathway.

The passover is connected with what is *moral*. We keep the feast together. What is our mind ? We are here in the world where there are many objects before men, but God's object in bringing His people out of Egypt

was that He might set them free from bondage. He did not do so by dealing with the character of things in Egypt; He did not bring down the political and human greatness, but He broke its power that He might let His people go free. He has brought us out of the world of human greatness, and pride, by the power and grace of the Lord Jesus, His Son, come down from heaven. The greatest thing in our hearts is the grace of Christ. Is there anything then in the world that appeals to us? The greatest thing that has ever been seen in the universe has been the down-stooping of the Son of God, "Who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 6-8, New Trans.) That is how we came out.

It was the blessedness of God Himself that drew Moses' heart away from human greatness, and Egyptian pride. What has brought your heart out of the world? Has it been because you found certain troubles attached to things that are seen? The power of the plagues did not bring His people out of Egypt,

but the knowledge of Himself did. What filled the heart of Moses when he came out of Egypt ? It was by faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood. What moved the heart of Moses in connection with the deliverance of God's people was the keeping of the passover, and the sprinkling of blood. And for us, dear friends, to be detached from the One who has loved us so much should be intolerable to our hearts. If you had spoken to Paul of the many great things in the world, and asked him if he would not have been a much greater man in Egypt, he would have no doubt agreed as far as the things of the world are concerned, but as a spiritual man he reckoned it all as dung and dross. The greatness that had captivated his heart was the grace of Christ. What is the humanity that God is occupied with now ? It is before His face—the Man Christ Jesus ! Jesus glorified as man ! The apostle says, “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell ; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell : God knoweth ;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell : God knoweth ;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” (2 Cor.

xii.) What a vision was his, to be caught up to such a place ! Higher than Rameses and the Sphinxes of Egypt ! and enough for his heart ! Oh, that one had seen earlier that God's first touch had in view that ever afterwards we should be in the knowledge of His interest, instead of only seeing oneself as a sinner saved by grace, and the interim left insecure !

But you will tell me that on the Lord's day morning we do not come together to be occupied with the passover ; that may be, but we come together in a state that has been secured by the passover ; we come together in moral conditions that have been produced in that way. The passover represents the death of Christ. Everything in Christianity connected with the death of Christ can be brought under that heading—the passover. The apostle said, “ Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” That was the moral obligation of the death of Christ ; it is the great divine negative applied to all that is fleshly and that would interfere with the operations of the Holy Spirit. “ Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be

made manifest in our mortal flesh." (2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.) The great moral power of the death of Christ applied to the path of the believer makes room for what is spiritual. May we keep in mind the month Abib ! so that nothing that is Egyptian may have any hold upon us.

" Art thou weaned from Egypt's pleasures,
 God in secret thee shall keep,
 There unfold His hidden treasures,
 There His love's exhaustless deep."—(J.N.D.)

Now let us come to what is spiritual. The antitype of the feast of Pentecost—the feast of weeks—was to begin with a wonderful message to the nations of the Holy Spirit. Why should such a place be given to the operations of the Holy Spirit ? Because the issues are so tremendous. The end with God is so great and glorious ! What a place has been allotted to the presence and operations of the Holy Spirit ! "Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee : begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn." (Deut. xvi. 9.) That is the bringing to pass in the power of the Spirit in the souls of the saints what Christ died to secure, and what He suffered to bring about—the glory of God. He suffered in respect of everything that was offensive to God. He endured and felt it all.

How can we speak of it ? But the Lord would have us to consider it—His atoning sacrifice ; He who knew no sin was made sin for us. One feels how little we have understood it ! How easy it has been to say it ; how often quoted ; and how often preached from ! What marvellous words ! “ He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” (2 Cor. v. 21.) Never had He had the slightest touch with it ! When the Spirit of God speaks of His sinlessness, He is speaking of His perfect, holy Person—Him who knew no sin. Oh, the depth of it ! And it was “ that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”

The Spirit of God has come to us in virtue of Jesus being in the presence of God—He has come from the glory. He was in the divine majesty of Godhead glory—deity, before ever the world was ! But the glory that the Spirit of God has come from is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Stephen saw it ; and he saw the blessed Person : “ Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” (Acts vii. 56.) The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He has come that He might be with us, to dwell in us, and to be with us as comfort and power, also as teacher to lead us into all the things that pertain to that sphere that has been brought into being through the death,

resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus as man. So in the feast of weeks we find the great reality of not only what is moral but of what is spiritual. What is spiritual rests on what is according to God. The Spirit has come to us. What are our links ? They are spiritual. What a sphere of divine comfort and blessing is ours ! The Spirit of God has come to us, as the apostle says in Ephesians i. 13, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation : in whom also *after* that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise." He has come to us believers, not only to deliver us from what is contrary to God, but that He might form us in features that correspond to Christ. The Spirit of God fills out the whole interim from the moment Jesus went on high.

The truth as to the Spirit is illustrated in that incident of divine beauty in Rebekah being brought to Isaac by the servant. When she inquired what man is this ? he answered her, It is my master. She gets down from the camel and walks towards Isaac ; and then we find the account that the servant Eliezer renders of his service. "The servant told Isaac all things that he had done." What a rendering at the end of all the service of the *Holy Spirit* ! We are in the feast of weeks—the Spirit's day ; but we must not forget the

month Abib. Let us never forget that Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us. If we have forgotten the month Abib and lost the fresh sense of the sufferings of Christ and their import, may the Lord recover it to us ! The apostle says in 2 Corinthians iv., "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*" (Vers. 5-7.) And again in Philippians iii., "For our conversation [or citizenship] is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ : who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Vers. 20, 21.) May we give room to the Spirit ! *Every discipline is intended to make room for the Spirit.* No discipline ever fully yields its fruit until what is spiritual has been built into our souls.

Now I come to the feast of tabernacles. In considering what the import of that is, we must not think only of certain occasions

of coming together. Sometimes in getting clear as to different ideas we are in danger of putting them into little pigeon-holes of divine truth. The truth of God will help us to distinguish one truth from another. This feast is not a matter of occasions—three times in the year. The Lord is caring for us every step of the journey. Do we touch what is divine? If we touch what is spiritual, we must touch what is divine. How often is it so when we come together? The Lord would have us then in the inside place with Himself. Blessed be God, there have been times when we have touched divine realities! It does not satisfy the heart of God that we pass along the outside, so to speak. He would have us within with Him. There is a great difference between what is inside and what is outside. This feast of tabernacles is the type of God's rest. We are hastening on to it, but we who believe do enter into God's rest. There is a rest remaining for the people of God—remaining in all its entirety and greatness. We are moving on to that end. And the Spirit of God is moving. The proof of it is that the Spirit of God has been bringing to bear upon the hearts of the saints what would make them spiritually ready—the power of the grace of the ministry of Christ—what really answers to Christ. And how tenderly the

Lord comforts us ! God comforts all those who are cast down. But besides comforting us, He would give us spiritual confidence that what is divine is being built into our souls never to be removed.

The feast of tabernacles is at the end of their wilderness labours—harvest labours—and they dwell together. “The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” (Rev. xxi. 3.) Oh, what a blessed end to be arrived at ! And God is building the church to that end now ! May the Lord help us ! I would seek to encourage my own heart and yours to remember that everything that has come to us is heavenly—forgiveness of sins has come from heaven ; my justification is from heaven, and the Holy Spirit who has come to us has come from above where Christ is. Everything is heavenly for us before we reach God’s end. He is building the heavenly into our souls. John shews you what is abiding, and says : “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” (1 John iv. 4.) And, “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ? ”

(1 John v. 4, 5.) The apostle is not here applying the passover to those to whom he is writing, but the faith of Jesus as Son of God. May the Lord in His grace help us in the consideration of these few thoughts together, for His name's sake !

THE SUPPLY OF THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST.

(2 SAM. XIII. 37; XIV. 1-33; XV. 7; PHIL. II. 11;
2 TIM. IV. 5-11.)

I THINK you will understand the feeling of hesitation I have in bringing such scriptures as these before you. There are some here a good deal older than I am in spiritual experience, and they will have proved what gain is to be derived from being devoted to what is pleasing to God. I have proved for myself the gain of seeking to be devoted to the testimony; and the youngest can get gain from doing so. I am not now speaking of those in a special position, marked off as "ministering brethren," as we speak, for to be addicted to the ministry is the privilege of all who have known the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In people's minds ministry is often only what is public, something spoken or written, or preached, and of course that is true, but in the New Testament the thought of ministry has also the thought of living ministry—the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. i. 19), the object of it being the promotion of the people of God.

It should encourage our hearts that all can have part in that ministry, and rest assured, if we do not go in for that ministry, we shall be going in for some other. There is the ministry connected with God, and the ministry connected with man, and we must be going in for one or the other ; hence it is important to understand the situation, to understand our privileges, and that which may fashion our whole life perhaps, so that every difficulty, every exercise, only leaves us enlarged spiritually. All who love the Lord can testify that the ministry is more precious to them now than it was at first.

I should like first to draw attention to the spirit in which this exercise is taken up. You may handle divine things either by the Spirit of God or in the spirit of man, but you can bring in nothing to help but what is of God. Wisdom like Joab's in the chapter we read can go a long way, but it can only bring in what spoils or what nullifies the work of the Spirit of God.

The first passage I read in chapter xiii. is a very solemn passage—a peculiar situation—presenting the spectacle of one putting distance between himself and the city of the king as fast as he can, fleeing because of his own offence, and endeavouring to put distance between himself and judgment. We may

think this does not mean much to us. Let us remind ourselves, that naturally we are all Absaloms, and until we accept this, we shall bring a wrong spirit into things. I am not speaking now of Absalom as a very bad brother—I know he was a very bad brother—nor of him as a sinner and how a sinner is recovered for God ; my point here is to shew that apart from the mind and spirit of Christ the ruling spirit in man is the spirit of Absalom. My desire is to shew you the mind of Christ Jesus. We need not go into Absalom's case. I believe myself that his action would be justified, speaking according to man, by the circumstances. The most serious departures are those which would be justified by human judgment, but human judgment is no good in Christianity. I want to shew you the import of the mind which was in Christ Jesus. So Absalom, leaving the consequences of his sin behind him, goes away to Geshur, a place where one can find room at a distance from God, and there he abides three years. I do not doubt he went through much down there, one can go through a great deal in three years, but he did not come to God's point of view. Everything is judged by its sequel, and it is that which makes me say he never came to God's point of view.

He was gone a long time ; he had fled,

and had sacrificed everything that had given him glory. He was a prince and yet he was banished. You may imagine him weighing up all this and much more, but the balances he used were not the balances of the sanctuary. He was actuated by human judgment ; he was governed by the spirit that had slain his brother. The mind of the world is not the mind of God, and the conclusions it reaches are not according to God.

Joab was one whose naturally shrewd mind saw that the king's heart was towards Absalom. David's heart went out to Absalom. We read, "And king David longed to go forth unto Absalom." (Chap. xiii. 39.) David's action here was not perfect ; his actions as a man were misguided, but the heart of David was affected also, although his affections were right. Joab takes account of the breach. It was solemn in the eyes of all. The son of David, as Absalom was, yet David is in Jerusalem and Absalom is at Geshur. What kind of effect can that have at Geshur ? What do they think of Jerusalem now ? What a reproach it is to Israel ! The sooner it is put right the better. Yes ; Absalom must certainly be brought back. Joab looks at Absalom in Geshur, and determines that at all cost the rupture must be bridged. So he sets his mind to work. But he forgets the solemn fact that

unless the spirit is touched, unless the heart is reached, there can be no real reconciliation effected. The only thing that will conquer the natural mind is the mind of Christ. You may bring me up among all the privileges of Christianity from babyhood, yet if there is nothing wrought in my spirit, the only thing that will come out, sooner or later, will be the spirit of Absalom. We all know the doctrine, and possibly we use the doctrine sometimes, alas ! to cut one another in pieces. Beloved, the flesh is no good. But on the other side we see the Spirit of Christ.

Joab ponders over the matter and he makes his plans. He sends for a wise woman, but it is the wisdom of this world ; Joab tells her how to approach David, he even puts the words in her mouth. She follows Joab's instructions to the letter and gets David to commit himself. It is the human wisdom that acts in the letter of things. The parable used is of two brothers ; as far as outward circumstances go, they are together, they keep the peace to shield one another, but alone, in private, you find there is rupture, they are really at enmity. Although for the sake of their own reputation they go about as brethren, yet the spirit that rules them is a spirit that leads to spiritual poverty. Those who go in for the ministry will be tested by the ministry, and

the Lord wants workers who are prepared to take up the burden in His own spirit and mind.

So Joab by dint of his scheme prevailed, and Absalom was brought back, but he was prevented from going back to his privileges at once. The test came—whether he was seeking restoration, or seeking distinction, or, as we should say, whether he was seeking Christ for Christ's sake, or only for his own advancement. He was allowed to return, but he was not allowed to see the king's face. But we see in him that there are further lessons to learn—that everything we have done springs from a mind which is contrary to the mind of Christ, and that the only cure for self is to come under the Spirit of God, under the influence of the mind of Christ. So Absalom remained two years outside the king's presence. There was opportunity for exercise afforded. For two years the matter stood, and then Absalom sent for Joab. Now Joab was the wisest man in all Israel as after the flesh. Step by step his wisdom carried him; one solemn test after another was passed; he stood the test of Absalom, only to fall at last under the test of Adonijah. (1 Kings i.) Had he turned to God, it would never have happened. God walled Absalom in, the question at stake was his motive, but the question was

not settled, for Absalom, without turning to God, turned to Joab.

Now in a crisis Joab always withstood David. His wisdom was absolutely opposed to the spirit of David. David was continually opposed by Joab and his brethren, the sons of Zeruiah. Who were they that would have smitten Shimei when David was fleeing from Jerusalem? The sons of Zeruiah. (2 Sam. xvi.) Who would have put Shimei to death when the king came back? The sons of Zeruiah. (2 Sam. xix. 22.) Now Absalom trusted Joab, and he committed himself to him when God had closed him up. Have you never felt what it is to be closed in? But God does not give these exercises to damp our spirits or desires. He does not wish to break our spirits. He would give us the mind of Christ. He would form our desires, our affections, after the mind of Christ. It is God's controversy with all men.

Well, Absalom sent to Joab, but Joab would not come, and a second time he refused to come, so Absalom set Joab's field on fire. When he cannot get a hearing, he will make himself heard. It is a spirit that will be heard, even if it be in a way that causes commotion among the people of God. He set the barley on fire. The enemy always attacks what is living, what is connected with Christ, what

stands in resurrection. You may ask, Did Absalom think of all this? I do not say there was any such thought in Absalom's mind, but the destruction was done and as recorded in scripture carries its own significance. Have you ever seen destruction wrought among the people of God through self-will? I do not wish to arraign any one, but what but self-will can bring in such confusion, can break the peace more among brethren, or can more hinder the saints of God, and hurt and harm what is of Christ?

You remember in the law, if when men strove together they hurt a woman with child, what severe punishments were laid down. They had no intention of hurting another, their strife was all that occupied them, but they had done the mischief and must suffer—eye for eye, stripe for stripe, burning for burning, and so on. (Exo. xxi. 22-25.) How was the matter to be adjudicated? Not as to whether they meant to do any harm, but on the facts of the case—that what was due to Christ had been injured. And so the destruction of the barley was more than Joab's loss. A mind bent on distinguishing itself will go so far as to handle divine verities to that end, and you cannot check it. So Absalom sets a field on fire, he introduces the element of destruction to make himself heard, and he

does make himself heard. You may think he was a very bad brother. Yes, he was, but remember that is your heart and mine. Nothing subdues that spirit but the mind of Christ.

So at last Joab came, and he did as Absalom told him. Absalom is introduced into the presence of David, he is restored to his place in the king's house, but how deep is his restoration morally? According to human judgment the open breach is healed, but what about Absalom's next movements? The very next verse shews us Absalom preparing chariots, and horses, and fifty men to run before him. No sooner was he restored to apparent favour, than he commenced to steal the hearts of the men of Israel. He intercepted those coming into the city who were on their way to lay their case or grievance before the wisdom of the king, and he was prepared to flatter them, and took ways and means to gain influence with the people by ingratiating himself into their favour.

A proud spirit never holds the saints together. It can only re-create in its own likeness, and the only way to be among the saints to do good is to be in the mind of Christ. That is why I read part of Philippians ii., "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"; it was to bring you to admire

the Lord's blessed steps, so that you should have the mind in you that was in Him. It will never make much of us, except in the way of bringing glory to God. Do you give people your hand to kiss on this line? No, you go down. But that was not Absalom's way; he came to Jerusalem and stole the hearts of the men of Israel, and if you—no, I will say it of myself—if I am in the mind of Absalom, I shall steal the hearts of the saints in view of my own importance. Only one thing can come of the mind of Absalom; it can only bring in its own thoughts in what should belong to Christ. Only one thing can proceed from the mind of Absalom, and it is what is destructive to the saints. God would have us enter on all that Absalom was entitled to in the city, but in the mind of Christ. There are needs to be met, not natural needs, but spiritual. If we come together in the mind of Christ, we may be very little, very few in numbers, but if brought together in the mind of Christ, only two or three perhaps joined together in the love of Christ, there you will find what can only be found in God's world. You will find a heart and mind that will bring in glory to God. James saw those who had the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. (James ii.) Beloved, there is nothing so impoverishing.

We have only one Lord and Master, only One who is entitled to our homage and reverence, and adoration, besides being the revelation of God to our souls.

Absalom had been restored, his holding was regained, but his mind was contrary to the mind of Christ, and all the savour and sweetness of his position had gone out. His spirit resisted, and was hostile to the Spirit of Christ, and he stole the hearts of the men of Israel. God grant we may be set for one another's affections in such wise as at all costs to safeguard the saints for Christ. I would appeal to you, young brother or young sister, stand together according to God, and seek grace to come closer to your brethren than human links can bring. Looking back over my pathway, I see what hindered me was that I touched others on human lines, more than on spiritual lines, and I sought grace to be able to touch others on spiritual lines rather than on human lines, and that is, I understand, how we become set for preserving our holding.

I turn now to say a few words on the verses I read in 2 Timothy. The apostle there shews that not only was that maintained which was from the beginning, but what was more wonderful, the brightest light shone at the end. When Paul's public testimony was over, when he himself was a prisoner, when there was

no active service he could do, he was willing to be poured out as a drink-offering. (Ver. 6, New Trans., perhaps alluding also to Phil. ii. 17.) It is not the thought of water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again, but it is a libation poured out, a fragrance which moves our souls to this day. The spirit of the man is in it; that is the wonderful fact; there he was, the mind of Christ in him, and yet a man of like passions to ourselves. Like Absalom he had been kept in ward, but he had learned his lesson. The One whom he had opposed had broken him down on the road to Damascus, and had sent him into the desert. (Gal. i. 17.) He could say, "For me to live is Christ"; his whole course was that, and when that course was finished and he has no more to do, he was ready to be poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of the faith of the Philippians. These are not the words of a young convert, but the last communications of the Apostle Paul.

Then the apostle goes on to speak of his companions in chapter iv. Right at the very end Demas breaks out in the spirit of Absalom on the line of the revolt of Adonijah. You will find that Absalom and Adonijah were born about the same time, although not of the same mother (1 Kings i. 6, and 2 Sam.

iii. 3, 4.) As I understand, Absalom is in contrast to the humiliation of Christ, and Adonijah is the denial of the power and authority of Christ. Christ at the right hand of God is the same Person as Christ in His humiliation down here. It is the same Jesus. Now Demas went out. He left the sphere of the testimony. He did not leave it because he had committed some sin, but because the spirit that prevailed was not to his liking. He loved this present world, and the sphere he left was ruled by Christ. He endured it as long as he could, but in the end he went because he could endure it no longer; he was not prepared for the mind of Christ.

But Paul goes on to give Timothy a charge: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (Ver. 11.) Now Mark was one who had gone astray. (Acts xv. 36-41.) I think Mark must have had great personal charm. Barnabas evidently thought much of him. You remember that Absalom was renowned in Israel for his beauty; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head he was without blemish (2 Sam. xiv. 25), and when once a year he polled his head his hair weighed two hundred shekels after the king's weight. It is very remarkable that the Spirit of God should record the weight of Absalom's hair, the long hair being really

a mark of effeminacy. Nothing that is of the mind of Christ makes for effeminacy. Then, too, he used the king's weight in weighing his hair, which is not suggestive of the mind of Christ. May I ask you a question, Have you ever weighed your hair? Have you ever weighed up what is naturally to your advantage? When you come to divine things, you must revise the calculations you have made of your own advantages. When you weigh things for God, the value they have undergoes great revision. You find, too, that you value what you did not value before.

Now Mark was put in ward, and he was allowed to go to Geshur. He went with Barnabas, and with Barnabas he went outside the testimony. Perhaps you do not think he went very far; may be he did not, but he went outside, and outside is not inside, even if only a wall and a gate separate. If I were to use an ordinary human illustration, this room has not a very thick wall, yet you and I are inside, and a man standing outside is still outside, even if he is standing with his back against the wall. So Mark went with Barnabas in the power of his own effeminacy, and he went to Geshur, but he came back under the Spirit of God through the instrumentality of Timothy. How came Mark to be in Timothy's keeping? I think all Timothy's

service is hid until the day when Christ will reveal it. He hid all he had done, but he let at least this be known, that he that had been lost was found; and you can imagine him letting all the brethren know that he had just had a letter from Paul, and had been enjoined to bring Mark when he came, as he would be useful to Paul for the ministry. There is only one thing worth troubling about, and that is the ministry. Is it nothing to you? God has taken us up to be here for the ministry, for that is what is here that is pleasing to Himself.

Now, may the Lord give us grace to put these things together. The strife between Paul and Barnabas was between the line of the supply of the Spirit and the line of human judgment. There is only one way to prosperity in the things of God, only one way, and that is to let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be the mind in us. That mind does not come into us against our will, and the mind in us naturally keeps Christ out. Let it be our exercise to let Him in.

DISCIPLINE IN VIEW OF SPIRITUAL ENLARGEMENT.

{JOB XXIII. 1-10 ; XXIX. 1-6 ; HEB. XII. 1-17.}

MY desire is to speak of the way in which the discipline of God is used for enlargement. We must all feel at times how small we are as to spiritual stature, in spite of the fact that we have been wonderfully endowed with knowledge as to divine things in general. The Lord of necessity has often to allow this feeling to come home to us, but it can be explained most sweetly by the fact of the Lord's unfailing love for us. If He did not value us as being so precious, there would not be sufficient explanation for the testing and pressure through which His own are called to pass. It is because of the tender love of the Lord that we are tested as we are.

One would refer for a moment to the gospels, where it is evident, in the Lord's handling of His disciples, how He watched over their spirits. The pride of the world doubtless pained the Lord's own spirit as He considered for God, but it never moved Him to interfere with its course ; He left the world alone,

but any trace of its spirit in His disciples was never passed over. Because He loved them so much, nothing was allowed to pass that was contrary to His own mind and spirit. The Lord took His own up; He moved to secure His disciples; it was not they who moved first to attach themselves to Him. That there were deep and tender feelings of attraction there can be no question, but one would be reminded of the way in which the Lord speaks of the foundation of their ties to Himself: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." The divine ties that bound their hearts to Him were those God had formed, and they had answered to the Lord with joy and tenderness of spirit, as is the case with every one who loves Him. One would, therefore, cover our considerations to-night with the sense of the Lord's fidelity. If He allows us to come into the dealings of testing which, if the Lord tarry, must increase, it is because of the greatness of His love for us. That we are coming out with Him in the day of glory is a wonderful outlook for every one of our hearts; that we should come out like Him and with Him in the day of glory is a wonderful prospect, but it would be impossible for us to reach such an end without testing. If we are to "come forth as gold," we must be purified, and we are purified by way of

testing. It is with a view to our being partakers of God's holiness that we are tested. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

I would refer to the fact that there is the positive side of ministry. The Holy Spirit has come as the Comforter to present to us the things of Christ, as the Lord Himself refers to Him anticipatively, "I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter"—One who would be here in place of Christ personally—One who is identical with Christ in all His movements and feelings. The Lord spoke of Him as an additional Comforter—another Comforter—and the Lord enlarges on His ministry. There is this positive side of ministry, and I refer to that for a moment so that what is before us might be kept in its proper balance. Discipline of itself does not build anything into the soul, but under the good hand of God it *makes room* for what is to be built.

On the positive side of ministry, the Holy Spirit being with us, there is the taking of the things of Christ, and the shewing of them to us. Things shewn by the Spirit are shewn to prepared affections. There is a movement of the Spirit which is sovereign and not de-

pendent upon the preparedness of affections. I was in darkness when the light first came to me from God, and even the very misery that comes to a soul when first touched by God is of God's own sovereign movement. While we should not forget the sovereignty of the Spirit in the sense that He is above all human limitations, nevertheless the Holy Spirit, as Comforter, ministers Christ to *prepared* affections—affections that want Him. Hence when it is a question of the Spirit's ministry of the truth positively, there must be antecedent to that a line of divine working which prepares our hearts for the ministry of the things of Christ. I have often found (one is speaking in a sympathetic atmosphere to-night) that I had more truth (little as I may have) than there was room to place it in. Much of my knowledge, when put to the test, was not formed in the place of secured affections, where the Lord would have had it; hence the need of discipline, that there may be a place in your soul and mine for the truth, and that we may be weaned from the things that would hold us to the detriment of the Lord's interests.

There is a great deal of discipline (I would speak to you to-night in a comforting way) which does not belong to the aged; indeed, we have in scripture a principle as to dis-

cipline that I would encourage my younger brothers and sisters to consider : " It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." (Lam. iii. 27.) The throwing off of discipline in the days of our youth may affect us in a serious way later on in our histories. Discipline is not altogether dependent on human circumstances, but rather upon the way in which our spirits are moved according to God. You may find discipline in circumstances that are not in any sense extraordinary as men would regard them. We may never be called upon to sacrifice what could be spoken of as a very great deal for Christ's sake, and yet Christ may have a large place with us. Hence the work of God is not dependent on human circumstances. The most ordinary human circumstances may shut Christ out from a heart, and in the most ordinary circumstances of life Christ may have a great place in the heart. Far better be ordinary as to our circumstances than extraordinary, as men would judge. The higher men get in what is called the social scale, the more they are exposed, and the closer they come to things opposed to God and His Christ. But I would never apply the thought of being ordinary to one who loves the blessed Lord. Every one who loves Christ is extraordinary. The very attention of heaven itself is focussed on every one who loves Christ.

The saints are of such interest to God Himself that they are coming out with Christ in the day of His glory in likeness to Him, fashioned as He is ; but greater than coming out, there is what they are to be for divine Persons when the world to come gives place to the eternal state.

What a sweet explanation of all the testing through which we are called to pass ! If it seem that things are taken from you, I would say again it is that Christ may be more precious to your heart ; that is why the disciplinary element comes into your circumstances. " All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." What Job had to learn was that God had much to do in him ; he was to be enlarged for a day when man's things and man's thoughts would exist no more, when God Himself would rest in all the results of the discipline and in the results of His own positive ministry and work. When the world to come is ended and the eternal state is being introduced, God speaks from the throne—the place of power—and He says, " Behold, I make all things new." What is so comforting is that the end reached according to divine purpose and by divine ways is through the line of discipline. We are formed for that day in the power of the Spirit's ministry,

as the result of the Lord's tender care and interest, and as the result of the Father's dealing in a disciplinary way that has made our souls to be partakers of His holiness. In Luke's gospel the transfiguration is on the eighth day. The eighth day is the end of all that has been gathered up and done during the seven preceding days; it is an eternal day—eternity not looked at as introducing a new day, but eternity looked at as the end of the ways of God and the sufferings of the Christ.

These Old Testament scriptures are wonderfully sweet if read in the light and spirit of the New Testament. Job had not the Holy Spirit as indwelling, yet his movements, expressions, and feelings are wonderfully recorded by the Spirit so that we who have the Spirit might get the gain of that through which Job passed in his soul history. I believe there is a soul history connected with every truth made known to us. If the statement seems hard, I will seek to explain it. What should we do with any truth apart from soul history? There was a time when I was made to feel this, and I am not without the feeling of it now. There are times when we may have been refreshed by ministry, and had a deepened sense of the Lord's preciousness and glory, and almost immediately discipline seems to

follow. Why? That there might be soul history connected with the truth. Where are we in that regard? There is great encouragement in these days in regard to the truth in the simplicity with which the Lord is bringing it to our hearts. The youngest soul who loves the Lord has a soul history. That history commenced when the light came to you from God, when the eye of your heart was brought to see Jesus in His beauty; and whatever still remains to be learnt, your soul history commenced when you were linked livingly with the Lord, and received the Holy Spirit.

All that is made known to you as you grow in the knowledge of divine things is made known in the Spirit's ministry and is centred in Christ. Everything that tests you in regard to the preciousness of Christ is discipline. You need not get into extraordinary circumstances to be tested. You may be tested in the office, in business life, or among your relatives. Even with the young the test is brought to bear as to the preciousness of Christ. It is the sweet and simple setting of discipline. Our discipline is due to the fact that we have been enlightened by God and we love God, we belong to Him, we are linked with Christ and have the Holy Spirit. The Lord's own blessed words prove it: "They

are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Did the disciples rightly appreciate it? Had it been measured by their judgment, that statement would never have been made, but He who measured it rightly made the statement: "They are not of the world." We have to handle things that others handle, but we handle them differently, because we love the Lord, and there is nothing in the world that loves Him.

However difficult the path may seem, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose"—called for a world in which, when God's end is reached there will be nothing save that which makes everything of Christ. You are called out of a world where there is nothing that answers to Christ, yet you are left in it, that you may learn how to make room for the preciousness of that Person, and you are enlarged and formed in view of a day of glory, when He will be everything.

I sometimes wonder if in our companies at times there is not more soul distress as to discipline and circumstances than we know of. Are there not sometimes thirsty souls with us? Do we judge rightly in thinking that the thirst is only with those outside? Are there not hungry souls with us? Is the hunger only

to be found outside ? Some of us have known what it is to be with the saints, and know the truth, and yet be thirsty and hungry. Some of us have known what it is to be acquainted with the truth, and yet have experienced a lack of joy. Job looked forward and backward, on the left hand and on the right hand, but there was one way Job had not looked ; he had not looked up. He was being tested by God, and he gives utterance to a statement of such intensity and character that only God could have produced it : “ When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” That is the end for every one of us, but in Job’s utterance there is a sense in which he speaks as if he thought there was no dross in him, although there is a strain right through the chapter which makes one feel that Job had to learn from God’s own side that there was plenty of dross in him.

Discipline does not only concern itself with the dross. I recently visited a sister in peculiar circumstances of testing (she lives some distance from here, so one may refer to it) ; she said to me, “ In regard to my discipline, I have got a little bit shattered, and I am wondering if my conduct has not something to do with it.” I said, “ It is a matter you can only speak to the Lord about, but what I have noticed with great encouragement is

that when the Spirit speaks of conduct in regard to discipline, He speaks of the conduct of God: 'God conducteth himself towards you as towards sons.''' (Heb. xii. 7, New Trans.) That brings God near to our spirits in His disciplinary care. He is the Father of spirits. Take your circumstances from God, and wait upon Him in regard to them. Do not measure God by your circumstances. God will come near to your spirit in regard to your discipline.

Job had to learn God as the Father of spirits. You will remember that peculiar moment when in the depths of his soul searching he says, "What is man that thou makest much of him? and that thou settest thy heart upon him?" *I can understand some one* saying, I have been taught that God does not make much of any one. That is a mistake. God does make much of His people, but not always in the way they expect. God makes much of His people in what makes much of Christ. "What is man, that thou makest much of him? and that thou settest thy heart upon him? And that thou visitest him every morning, triest him every moment? How long wilt thou not look away from me?" Then he comes to this, that God is the "Observer of men." What does that mean? The Father of spirits looks in upon the heart;

He knows what the heart is set for. The Holy Spirit is deeply sensitive as to how much we are really desirous of giving place to Christ. I say again, the Spirit ministers Christ to prepared affections, not prepared so much in the way of information as in the way of desire. We may have as much of Christ as we are really set for.

Job was in circumstances without light. There was a sense of darkness on his spirit. No discipline need cause darkness with us if we turn to God. In the Lord's testing, as we see Him here as a man for the pleasure of God and see Him waiting upon God, there was no sense of darkness on His spirit; even at that moment in the garden of Gethsemane, when taking the cup from the Father, there was no darkness on His spirit. The darkness in Job's case was the darkness of misunderstanding as to God's intentions. He had not the light of God's lamp over his head. He refers to it later. (Chap. xxix. 3.) He says, "Oh that I were . . . as in the days of my youth." How often God uses discipline to recover us to our freshness. Our hearts are taken back to a moment when Christ was a blessed living Person to our souls. I would encourage and exercise any who have known what it is to lose their freshness and joy by the thought that the Lord has never relinquished the value

of that, and never will. When Israel forgot it, He remembered it for them. He said, "I remember *for* thee [not only I remember thee] the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." Jehovah always cherished the remembrance of that moment. Discipline recalls to freshness.

Do we look for united testing? I believe, if the Lord tarry and we are left here, we shall have to learn to stand very much closer to each other than we have ever stood before. There has always been the necessity for it, as far as spiritual links are concerned. God's thought was that His own should stand closely together. We have been bound together, and we must be bound together in the experiences of our discipline and testing.

There was doubt on the spirit of Job, because the light from God's own side as to his discipline was not with him. Our preservation will not be through immunity from discipline, but in discipline rightly taken. I believe that, without presuming, we shall realise that God has so much to do in us that a great place must be made in our souls. Oh, that the Lord would greatly encourage our hearts in this! I would speak to the youngest who love the Lord; He has reached you from His own side. There is *that* ministry from His own side, and a place must be made

in your soul for all that Christ is going to form in you. It is not that I would occupy you with yourself, but that your heart might be drawn out to Christ, and as He becomes your object, whatever is needed to make a place in your soul will be accepted, without doubt or gloom, in the light that shines from Him. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

We need to keep the freshness of youth. Does that mean that we are not to grow up? No; but why not grow up retaining that freshness? Why treat the thought of spiritual growth as if it means getting away from what is youthful and fresh? Why not grow up in it, with it, and carry it with us. Did Caleb lose his youth? Caleb draws attention to the fact (Josh. xiv. 11) that he still had the strength of his youth when he was eighty-five years of age. He had not become faint by the way. The object of divine glory had been set before him, and it carried him into the land where God intended all His people to be carried. Even in human things, while of course we must grow old (we cannot change that), yet there is a proverb that the way to keep young is to be with the young. When we come to divine things, we have been given to stand together, and to grow up together. I do not believe there is a person who is a greater help

to the young than one who has kept the freshness of youth spiritually. That does not mean that such a one has not grown. We grow both up and down ; yes, and we increase in girth—we become enlarged in regard to divine things : “rooted and grounded in love.” The Lord would have every one of us to go on, hence I press upon our hearts, from the least to the greatest, the necessity of a place being made with us in which to put divine things.

We may often feel a lack in that way. You might go into a house where there are many things of interest, but you get an impression that there is not a place for them all. There is a place for everything that God makes known to our hearts in Christ. Job learnt it, and the time came when he lifted his heart to God, and his conclusion was this, that God's way was the blessed way ; that God was going to make much of him, but in a way that was contrary to the way in which he had been making much of himself. Job refers to his testimony, his preaching, to his place with the brethren and to his family setting, and he learned that in all these things God was going to make much of him as one who had found his centre in God Himself.

I see many young here, and I would encourage such that with purpose of heart they

may be kept with the saints and the testimony to the end. The Lord Jesus is a living Person as surely to be proved as ever He was, and as surely to be depended on as ever He was at any moment, and He will be so to the end. God made much of Job in the presence of his friends, and he came in for a very great store ; he received presents ; that is all indicative of spiritual possessions, and there was a place for them.

What we read in Hebrews xii. was all set out in the Lord Himself. It is comforting to one's heart not only to have the saints and God's way with them in view, but to see everything centred in Christ Himself. Of how many of us could it be truly said that we are characterised as those who run a race ? Of how many could it be said that there are the marks of real spiritual earnestness, energy, and devotedness ? Do not think I am speaking critically. I am speaking with a sober sense in my own spirit of the need of the Lord's grace to carry each one straightforward. When I think of the running of the race, I am not thinking of its being pursued so much in a correct way, but of what is marked by distinct energy and desire, and by the laying aside of every weight. You could not lay anything aside for me, and I could not lay anything aside for you. It is an individual thing. You

may see in me things that would far better be removed than allowed to remain, but the laying aside must come from a heart set upon Christ, and deeply, tenderly, and earnestly desirous of reaching Christ where He is. No person can run a race in the dark. If there be darkness in your spirit you cannot run the race; you may speak of the race and have plenty of information connected with it, but darkness upon our spirits in discipline, and running the race towards the Lord Jesus Himself cannot go together. If our hearts are enlightened and free before God, and we take up things in regard to His divine and gracious purpose as the Father of spirits, then we can run the race with patience to the end.

The Spirit delights to bring before the hearts of the saints the One who has gone right through, "Who for the *joy* that was set before him"; that is the secret joy which lies before us in running. Job had not got that joy; there was darkness on his spirit; he felt himself oppressed on every side. He had known what it was to have the lamp of God shining upon his head, but darkness came on his spirit. Think of the Lord, "Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." I delight to put myself into that little word *joy*, so expressive of divine feeling. One of the things

that carries the heart on with increasing tenderness is that I have no link with the blessed Lord that was not secured through His suffering, and my every link with Him is a part of that joy that lay before Him. That He might have me, He suffered for me. We speak of His death, but let us draw near to the truth and see the immeasurable fulness of it. The tremendous reality of the sufferings of Christ can only be measured by God Himself. He suffered for the joy that was set before Him, He “endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In closing, I would say that what you know the worth of, you carry as treasure, and only what you have learned the worth of is treasure to you. What has come easily to you, is not yet treasure to you. What comes to you in connection with soul history is treasure to your spirit ; you value it, and there is a place made for it. May the Lord encourage us in this, for His name's sake.

THE LORD'S DESIRE TO HAVE THE SUPREME PLACE IN OUR HEARTS.

(1 SAM. XX. 2-4, 41-42; JOHN XII. 23-33; XVI. 8-11;
XVII. 13-26.)

WHAT is before me to speak of is the place that the Lord desires to have with us personally. There is great comfort in knowing that above any exercise or desire in regard to the Lord on our side, there is the sweet and blessed fact that His desire is towards us. At times when one may have been conscious that there was diffidence or coldness in one's spirit, it has been a comfort to the heart to realise afresh that the whole foundation of my blessing, the divine acceptance upon which I stand, and the whole future outlook of divine glory, are based on divine desire. We can rejoice together that we have become attached to the Lord, but the movement of attachment did not begin from our side; it commenced with the Lord Himself. There was a divine movement which intercepted our course, so that we might be attached to Himself. It was *He* who spoke; it was *we* who heard. It was the voice of the Son of God that we heard.

Right through John's gospel we find that

the Spirit of God would impress upon our hearts that the whole system of divine blessing originated with God Himself. One feels encouraged in the thought of the Lord's desire in respect of the place that He would have with us personally. We see His tender movements towards His disciples, particularly towards the close of His ministry, when the moment of His departure was drawing near, and when all that was connected with it was beginning to come in on His spirit, as if to ascertain from themselves how He stood with them. One would speak reverently, not forgetting that the Lord was omniscient, and needed not that any man should testify what was in man, and yet, knowing all as God, there was the desire with Him to know as from themselves where He stood in their affections.

There is nothing more testing, and yet more comforting to the heart, than the question as to how the Lord is with us in our affections in regard to His personal worth, for the reason that He who tests the heart so deeply is the One who is set for the thing that He seeks above all other things. There is nothing that is of such preciousness to the Lord as affection that centres on Him for His own sake. Were we able to labour ten thousand times more than we do, we could not provide the Lord

with one atom more of pleasure to His heart than what we are as loving Him. That we love Him, own His glory, and own His worth are of infinite preciousness to the heart of Christ.

I believe the great aim and object of the Lord's ministry, as it searches our hearts, is to make evident how He stands with us in personal affection. It is not only what we know in regard to Himself, but where is He in our affections? That we love Him is more to the Lord by far than that we preach Him, although if we love Him we shall most certainly preach Him, but, alas! we might preach Him far beyond our love for Him. Hence the Lord does not judge by the measure of our preaching; He goes beyond the appearance of our labour, and tests the heart as to where He stands with us for His own sake, for His personal worth and beauty.

We find in John's gospel, as I have said, the most tender movements on the part of the Lord Jesus in regard to His own. In the opening of the gospel when the Lord comes upon the scene, you will remember how John the Baptist looked upon Him as He walked, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." It was no limited sphere of blessing that was going to be effected by the coming of Christ as the

Lamb of God ; it was not that He came to bring in blessing in a partial way. He came to take away the sin of the world in order that in the power of His sacrifice He might bring in a world of divine pleasure.

Let us look for a moment now at the type of David in the Old Testament. David came in at a time when God's earthly people were labouring under the hand of God governmentally ; they had chosen a king for themselves. Saul had been chosen according to man's judgment, for his stature, human beauty, and for his greatness, but they suffered under their choice. The government of God had come upon them, and yet while God in government was searching their hearts because of their choice, the grace of Jehovah was seeking deliverance in another man. God's grace was above His government, and is always so. In His faithfulness God must search the hearts of His people because of their choice of Saul, yet He had made provision for them in His own choice of David. The pride of man chose Saul, but those in distress and in debt appreciated David ; those embittered in spirit or sorrowful gathered round him. That is God's way in Christ. It is *figurative of the grace of God that has come to light in the Man Christ Jesus—the Son of the Father, the sent One of the Father.* “The Father has sent the

Son as Saviour of the world." Was it for a few that David was given? No; it was for all. Was it only upon a section that the burden of Saul had come? No, it had oppressed and impoverished all. In John's gospel we see the Lord as the Son of the Father, as the sent One of the Father to bring in blessing in the widest possible measure, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

David is but a feeble type of Christ, yet the illustration is most appealing to our hearts. Every soul that was added to David was added to him because of the value of David himself. Before there was a kingdom in power, and even while Saul was still king on the throne, their hearts found the true kingdom in David. Before ever his throne was established, they found love, liberty, and peace in David himself. We find all these things in Christ. How infinitely we have been supplied by God in Christ. We have had relief for the heart, relief for the conscience, joy in the power of the Spirit, peace to the mind, and freedom from fear: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." What wonderful things we have received in the Person of Christ!

But again one makes the inquiry, What is He in His own Person to our hearts? What is He to us? That in us, whether collectively or individually, which is most precious to divine Persons is what Christ as the Son of the Father is to us. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Every heart that followed David must have followed on that line. They saw in him the power of suffering love that must fill the sphere, cleared by his power in suffering, with every element of divine goodness. "Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." They followed a Person because of His preciousness, and when the Lord knew that they were following Him, He said, "What seek ye?" Do you think He did not know? Was He not omniscient? He well knew, as much as He knew when Nathanael was under the fig tree; He was as completely Master of the situation with these two as with Nathanael. Why did He inquire? Because His heart was set upon being the centre of their affections. "They said . . . Master, where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day." He would have them follow Him.

Does that not explain to us what most of

us have felt ? We have had knowledge, we have had the scope of the scriptures, yet at times when we have inquired into our own hearts in private, we have had to confess that much that we knew we did not enjoy, and for the simple reason that we had not followed the Lord into it. You will enjoy everything in divine knowledge that you have followed the Lord into. If it be knowledge that has carried the mind onward, then the mind may be far ahead of the affections, but the heart follows a person. It is wonderful and yet so simple. When God made man at the outset, He made him with affections that would never be satisfied without a personal centre. Things were never intended to hold the heart of man apart from God as a centre. God never intended man's heart to be held by any single item that had not Christ as the centre. Where is Christ with us ? You say, we are in a mixed condition. I know we are, but we need not be in a confused condition. We are in a mixed condition in the sense that we carry with us a heart that, apart from the operations of the Holy Spirit in us, would ever turn on a line adverse to the pleasure of Christ and our own good. We get a touching word in the Epistle to the Ephesians : "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." There is no complexity there, no confusion.

I would suggest this line of inquiry as to how our hearts are moved in regard to Christ. I am not speaking now so much on the line of privilege as on the line of the Lord's grace to our hearts. There is the privilege side. Hearts that learn the Lord in privilege must follow Him in testing. The Spirit of God, even in His ministry, does not always operate sovereignly. Our affections need to be prepared for His ministry. He ministers Christ to affections that are centred upon Him for His own sake, hence one would seek to indicate the line upon which our souls may travel individually and as walking together.

I know of nothing so encouraging to a young heart as the sense of being under the Lord's personal knowledge, care and interest. Whether young or old, there may come a feeling of formality and a sense that our souls are not making progress. But the youngest may have a sense of the Lord's personal interest and care. He cares how we stand in our affections. I would say to the youngest who loves the Lord, you will never conceive the measure of the Lord's desire to be supreme in your affections. It is not because of what you are, but He seeks a great place in your heart. It is not that He wishes to be supreme so that you can be much in testimony; you can be much in testimony when Christ is

supreme, but He wishes to be supreme, because the assembly is His supreme possession. He has suffered on the line of testing; He has suffered rejection. "Disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious." "Unto you therefore who believe, he is precious." He is supreme to the heart of God, and God would extend to our hearts the peace and joy of His supremacy.

David was supreme. You may say, He was not so at the first, but the truth is he was so from the moment that Goliath fell before him, but not wholly so to Jonathan, as after results solemnly proved. The time of his public glory was another matter.

So many do not understand the Lord's supremacy. They connect it with the future; they look forward with genuine desire, which one would not undervalue, to the moment when He will be publicly supreme. But He is to be paramount now. Far better have Christ supreme in your heart in a day when He is disallowed of men, than to wait until the day of His glory. It is now that He is finding His place with us. Our affections are being enlarged now. Discipline helps us. Our trials and adversities help us, if we learn that they are on account of the value we set on Him. Jonathan desired to make a place for David in the system of Saul, but

God had decreed in regard of that system that it was all to perish and pass away. God had chosen His man. He had brought in one whose supremacy had been declared when Goliath fell before him, when he took the sword of the giant and cut off his head. He was supreme as the one who had power over death. The supremacy of Christ is in His own Person ; He is peerless ; there can be no rival to Him.

Jonathan was misguided. He would have persuaded David that Saul was not seeking his hurt, but David knew that was not so. As we have read, he said, "There is but a step between me and death." That word should have gone right through to the very depths of Jonathan's heart and brought him out. Jonathan should have gone out, and made one man's room in the world that hated David. There may be a heart here to-night tested as to Christ, and labouring in the vain hope that they can bring Christ into something that makes little of Him. How much better to step out for Christ's sake, and leave one man's room in that which is making little of Him, and peradventure others may follow.

I do not want to put into scripture what is not there, but have you ever considered what possibly might have arisen in regard of Jonathan's brethren had he stepped out after David ? You may say, We cannot tell. No ; but this

I can tell, that Jonathan should have stepped out after David, and if that be true, I am not unwarranted in thinking of what might have happened had he done so in the simplicity and power of David's attractiveness and followed him. Jonathan had said to David, "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee." (Ver. 4.) What did David's soul desire most? I believe he desired Jonathan personally. In John xvii. we see how the Lord follows His own. We do not hear Him speak of their service, though we know He speaks of their word; He speaks of those who would believe on Him through their word, but that chapter is engaged with the disciples personally. Had it been a question of man's valuation of those persons, how small would have been their value. Wherein lay their value? That they loved Christ; in spite of all their weakness, their hearts were centred on Him.

I have no doubt that Jonathan loved David far more than he loved any one else. David himself said of Jonathan, "His love to me was wonderful." He loved David *as* his own soul, but what he lacked was in not loving him *more than* his own soul. A little more love would have brought him right out to David. He did not understand that with all his supposed power, he had no power to make

a place for David in the system of Saul; the truth was it had no place for him; God was going to bring in another kingdom around the man who was after His own heart. Had Jonathan only understood that David wanted *him* far more than *anything he could have done* for him, he would have turned his back upon everything, and followed David through all the testings and greater sorrows that David up to that time had not yet experienced, for David's greatest testings came at the end just before Saul's kingdom perished. Jonathan never expected that Saul's kingdom would perish in the presence of the Philistines. But God had withdrawn His face from that system; it was all to perish and pass away because *God's man was rejected there*.

"If any man serve me, let him follow me." I do not wish to make little of the possibilities of your service (I would assure you that I would make much of it; every heart that loves Christ would serve Him), but notice the last two words: "If any man serve me, let him *follow me*." Jonathan was quite willing to serve David, but did he follow him? There were two who might have followed David, but they did not. Michal might have followed him. She let him down from a window, and made an image and put it upon a pillow of goat's hair; she preserved his life in that way.

You may say, It was no place for a feeble Michal to follow David. Then it was no place for a feeble Abigail to go to him. If Michal did not follow him, Abigail did. Jonathan might have followed David. I would not say it was unfaithfulness on Jonathan's part; I believe it was a misunderstanding of the whole situation, because he did not see that he was confronted with a system that would exclude David.

"Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." There never was, and never can be another object for any heart such as the object of a glorified Christ who has suffered to go where He is. Eternity will stand on the value of His sufferings. When time is past and our limitations have all gone, we shall be able then, without a shadow on our spirits, to appreciate in a full way the value of the sufferings of Christ—the One who was the corn of wheat, who could have remained alone, but who went down into death that He might bring forth much fruit. Oh! that our affections were rightly secured for Christ!

What is being wrought into our souls by way of testing relative to the work of Christ is going to abide with us when time has gone.

“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and *where I am*, there also shall my servant be.” What infinite sweetness! We need not assume to be prophetic in saying that if the Lord tarry, there will be greater testings for the saints than have ever come to them before. I am not thinking of martyrdom; I do not know what may come, but I feel that if the Lord tarry, we shall know what it is to be tested more than we have ever been tested before. Does your heart take alarm at that? Listen to the infinite sweetness of this: “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and *where I am*, there also shall my servant be.” Not only does the Lord pledge Himself to be with you where you are, but He pledges that every one who follows Him for His own sake will always be where He is.

I would refer again to the figure in David. In that last interview between David and Jonathan they wept together “until David exceeded.” Jonathan’s tears were stayed first. David’s was the supreme sorrow—he overwept Jonathan. Jonathan might have followed David to Keilah when Saul tried to slay him, and when David in his sorrow turned to Jehovah and asked Him, “Will the men of Keilah deliver me up?” Jehovah said, “They will deliver thee up.” Think of the treachery of that city which had been safeguarded by

David, and yet those people were prepared to deliver David up to Saul! Let our hearts be simple and honest, where would we rather be, speaking in a figure—with David in that testing or with Saul in the city? Surely we would rather be with David.

The Apostle Paul says in writing to the Corinthians who had become careless in their walk, haughty in their hearts, knowing so much of the truth and yet so lacking in love, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread." Whenever a heart inclines to trusting things here, the place of Christ as supreme in the affections is in jeopardy. "Where I am, there also shall my servant be."

Jonathan might have been in Keilah and seen the beauty of God's man shine in a way he had never seen it shine before. He might have seen his glory too when Ziklag was destroyed by fire. He would have seen his power in a priestly way when he turned to God; he would have seen his endurance, and patience, and his kindness to the poor Egyptian who fell sick by the way and was forsaken by his master; he would have seen David in the hour of his supreme suffering had he gone out and followed him. There is much in Christ to hold our hearts. The Spirit of God

Himself has come to declare the glory of Christ in the preciousness of His own Person.

I will refer now briefly to John xvi. In verse 9 in connection with the Holy Spirit the Lord says, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." I would call attention to the Lord's own explanation of those words: "Of sin, because they believe not on me." If Christ is to be supreme in our hearts, we must learn to turn away from things here not only because they are defiling, but because however good their outward character may be, they have no place for Christ. You know what it comes to in natural ties and affections; it is then that you begin to learn how much there is that is against Christ, and how deeply your heart may have to be searched in order that Christ may be supreme. How close it comes home to the soul in connection with your links in nature—with those dear to you! There are obligations, and the Lord would give grace so that you might maintain all that is due to the persons involved in those ties. How it searches the heart to find in the links of nature, sin and unbelief!

Then the Lord continues His further explanation, "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father." Why do we turn away from things here? If Christ is to be supreme in

our affections we must turn away from things here because Christ is not here ; He is with the Father. " Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." We must turn away from all that makes little of Christ. " I pray not for the world," the Lord says.

In John xvii. we get the Lord's own sensibilities, and feelings, expressed in such a way that one feels one must draw near that scripture with unshod feet ; you cannot approach it carelessly ; it is such an unfolding of the tender desires of the Lord : " I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine." Were we to speak to-night until we could speak no more, we could not add an iota as to the meaning and preciousness of those few words : " For they are thine, and thine are mine." That explains all the Lord's ministry, all His faithfulness, all His tender dealings with us. May the Lord help us so that we may be assured on this line !

As the Lord looks upon our hearts we need resort to no dissimulation, no covering ; He knows us perfectly. May we say to the Lord, Lord, above all things, above all hopes, above all possessions, above all persons, Thou art the object of our hearts. We shall be with Him where He is, because we are His, and He

would be with us now in the power of His own preciousness in the ministry of the Spirit, and He will never be less than supreme. Think of the infinite tenderness of the Lord! He bears with us, ministers to us, instructs us, and even rebukes us—"As many as I *love*, I rebuke and chasten"—but all is in view of His being supreme in our hearts.

PERSONAL LINKS WITH THE LORD HIMSELF.

MAL. II. 11 ; III. 4, 16-18 ; MARK IX. 2-10 ; 2 COR.
V. 14-16 ; XI. 1-11.)

IN regard of these scriptures, possibly to all appearances unrelated, I trust the Lord will enable us to see their spiritual connection. One's simple desire before the Lord at this time is to seek to indicate a little how we are privileged, not only to depend on what the Lord ministers in the way of help and care, but upon the Lord Himself. Oftentimes we depend upon what we find amongst the saints, and I do not deprecate that, provided we are really dependent upon the Lord ; but if we depend only on what we find when together, and if our hearts are not actively engaged in a spiritual way with the Lord Himself, we shall become formal in what we enjoy together. So I wish to present a few considerations in connection with this important matter, in order that we may raise with ourselves the question as to whether our links of spiritual joy and affection have been maintained with the Lord personally as He would desire.

There is a good deal that goes on in our hearts that others may know nothing at all about. We may become disappointed, for instance, without others knowing; we may become anxious, and the anxiety be known only to ourselves, and we may become proud, as I have proved, and yet attempt to appear otherwise. So you see it is quite possible for what is unworthy to have entered the heart, and for the spirit to be defiled, and thus the Holy Spirit be grieved with us, and yet our brethren not be aware of the fact; nevertheless all passes under the Lord's eye, and is a matter of real concern. I am not careless, I trust, in respect of my brethren. Everything that is spiritually hurtful to me is spiritually hurtful to them. If I am careless as to my own conduct, motives, or objects, I am certainly careless as to the spiritual good of others. But while I should encourage every one to take the utmost possible account of the exercises of their brethren, I would add this simple expression of opinion, and I trust it is a spiritual opinion, that with all deference to the exercises of our brethren, we should always be assured that our relations with the Lord are right. The opinions, the judgments of our brethren may be right, but if our links with the Lord are not right, and we take our guidance only by the exercises of our brethren,

we miss the full spiritual good and gain that the Lord would have us to receive. So now we shall look at these scriptures together, and see how very peculiarly and precious the person of the Lord Jesus is presented to us.

I referred to the passages from the Book of Malachi, but it was not on my mind to speak about defilement. For that I might have gone to other scriptures in the Old Testament, some of them in their terms much more serious than those which are used in the Book of Malachi. But defilement is not my subject, but rather the person of the Lord Jesus in His grace to maintain us free from defilement. But in order that we might *be rightly dependent on the Lord*, light is granted to us, light in the scriptures of truth, and light in the person of the Lord Jesus Himself, by which we can judge as to the real character of things. I read from the last book of the Old Testament, which presents in a very precious way the sweet process and power of recovery at a time when everything had become defiled. At your leisure you may read the Book of Malachi, and you will find how very seriously everything had been corrupted by the people. In their very offerings to Jehovah, instead of going zealously through their flocks in the appreciation of His good-

ness to them, and bringing therefrom the best to present to Him, they brought the lame and the sick and the blind—that which was defective. That was the result of their having become spiritually defiled. Want of spiritual vision is one thing, but it is always the outcome of defilement ; if the heart becomes corrupted as to its objects, spiritual vision is immediately affected ; it may not be totally lost, but there are defects in it that very seriously affect the soul. If we get the eye of the heart off Christ and on other objects, our spiritual vision becomes perverted.

So the state into which the beloved people of God had fallen in Malachi's day was very serious indeed, and God was deeply grieved *because of their sin and departure*. But His heart had not changed ; they were still as precious and as greatly beloved by Jehovah as ever, as He says elsewhere : " I have loved thee with an everlasting love : therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. xxxi. 3.) His was a love that could not change by their defection, for it was founded typically on the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ ; it was there it had its basis. The people had been brought to God on the basis of redemption, of divine righteousness and of holiness, so that the question of God's faithfulness could never be raised ; and they had

been brought to God because He loved them, because He had set His heart upon working out, in and through them, the good pleasure of His will.

Now, that is what is true in Christianity ; but as we look at things around us, we see that the holiness, the purity, and the perfection of it are gone. It is distressing indeed to the hearts of many of the Lord's people to look out on the sphere where the name of Jesus is acknowledged, and to find there what is so defiling and dishonouring ; and to many the recovery of truth to souls and souls to the truth must seem wellnigh impossible. But in Paul's second epistle to Timothy, where he speaks of those naming the name of the Lord separating themselves from iniquity, he does not speak of coming into a path where things are enjoyed in diminished measure, or into a reduced inheritance, but he looks at them in connection with the faithfulness of God ; " Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure," he says, " having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Tim. ii. 19.) That is the sealing of things on the line of divine faithfulness. You might say, Well, if the Lord knoweth them that are His, that is all right ; but if link of heart with the Lord Him-

self begins to work in power in the soul, then necessarily it must view things from the standpoint of His pleasure.

So we find in 2 Timothy the great question raised of our link with the Lord Jesus. What an encouragement to the heart that loves the Lord in a day of weakness to know that "the foundation of God standeth sure." You may say, What about the structure? God's structure is a spiritual structure, and there is no hindrance to prevent His having His pleasure there; and if we are prepared to walk according to the truth of God, we shall be supported along that line. Therefore souls are found walking together. Do you find them following ecclesiastical opinions or mere doctrines? You find them following the doctrines of divine truth, but not the doctrines of divine truth as treasured up unalterably in the blessed living person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The principles of that epistle are unalterably connected with the person of the Lord Jesus. To follow opinions is disastrous; were the opinions ever so scriptural, they would fail us, and we should fail them. But, beloved, we are following a Person, a Person who leads. It is a touching feature in Mark's gospel, where the Lord is set forth in all His perfection, in His purity, and in His unblemished service to the Father, that when

you come to the mount of transfiguration the Lord leads His own : " Jesus taketh . . . Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain."

It was not an act of power or the sovereignty of His own selection as in Matthew. In that gospel when they got to the mountain top they saw His divine glory shining out : " His countenance did shine as the sun." If all men's pride accumulated together had thrown this world into perdition, in the Lord Jesus there was power that could bring another world into being for the glory and pleasure of God. We read too : " And his raiment was white as the light." He took them there in His divine rights, in His sovereignty as the Son, the One who had come forth from God in the power of His Person to accomplish the pleasure of God.

But in Mark's gospel He took them up into the mountain as the One who was here for the service and pleasure of the Father. In His perfection, and purity, He led them on to the mount of transfiguration. There is something special and peculiar about it ; He took them up into an high mountain apart " by themselves." That is where the heart is tested—on the line of separation. You may say, I follow Jesus, my heart has been touched by His grace ; when I was a sinner He saved

me from my sins, and the things I once followed I no longer follow ; I follow His Person—Himself. There may be a time coming in your spiritual history when you will be tested on that line. Are our hearts prepared to follow the Lord into a place of spiritual blessedness and glory and excellence, but “apart by ourselves” there ? We carry for quite a long time a good deal with us that we depend upon as religious assistance, but as the Lord leads us in His faithfulness, He makes us feel that this prop and the other has to go, because we have been depending on this religious assistance to maintain us in the position, and not upon Himself.

I want by the Lord’s help to make clear from the point of view of the present condition of things—not from a doctrinal point of view, which only leaves the soul in uncertainty—how we are to get along in the state of things that exists around us at the present time. Let us consider this for a moment ; if weakness has to be considered, we have to take account of our own weakness ; if self-will marks the state of things around us, let us bear in mind that all the will does not lie outside these four walls ; if there is breakdown, the breakdown is not all outside of ourselves ; if failure is to be faced, and faced it undoubtedly must be, it has to be faced in

our own history. But, blessed be God! we can face all in the light of, and in the presence of the One who is faithful.

So in the Book of Malachi we find the precious light of the unchangeable goodness of God shining out. He speaks of the sin of Judah, of the abomination he had committed. Why is Judah singled out? Because Judah is spoken of as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Judah stood in a peculiar relation to the one who was the centre of Israel's hopes and expectations. Judah should have been in power instead of in weakness. But if he was in weakness, why was it so? Because he was defiled; he had dealt treacherously with the wife of his youth. (Chap. ii. 14.) He had got out of touch with his God; his heart had become first cold, then distant, and finally defiled and corrupt.

What a controversy God has with His people! But you say, God's controversy is with Christendom. It is very little help to think of God in controversy with Christendom. Is it not better to face things as before God, to see whether there be not some hindrance or outstanding account with ourselves? What are we to gain by constant occupation with the complexities, the departures, and failures in that sphere of things? The Lord would give us grace to seek in nearness

to His own Person to have the question of our own relations with Himself raised and settled. Where are we in divine things? Jehovah raised this question with His people, as we get it in Malachi's record.

What a comfort it is to think that, if there has been departure, the Person who is presented constantly to our view is the Minister of the covenant! There can be no change there. The messenger of the covenant comes to the temple, to the very centre of things, to gauge the situation, and He comes with the fire of the refiner; He comes to bring in the light of the truth, exposing the whole matter as before God. But He comes, too, with fullers' soap; that is, not only with the element of divine searching, but also with the power of divine cleansing, testing the heart under the application of the truth, but comforting the heart with the sweet comfort of His own ministry, and with the support of the Holy Spirit.

We were speaking this afternoon of the ashes of the red heifer, which had to be treasured up in a clean place. There must be a clean place for the ashes, and I think the Lord would give us grace to maintain in our links together that which would be a depository of what would answer to Christ. Those ashes of the heifer were to be set apart, and when occasion

arose for their use, they were to be connected with the fresh running water, typical of the power of the Spirit of God, according as the truth is in Jesus. They were to have spiritual efficacy.

How often there is such a lack of power with us, that an exercise arising in a locality which seems so simple to begin with runs on indefinitely, and the longer it does so the more complex and difficult it becomes ! Is this not because we are unable in meeting the exercise to bring forward the ashes and the living power of the Spirit together. How often it has been proved that our intelligence has failed us in the presence of an exercise, and those whom we thought of little account in the assembly have been used of the Lord to put their finger on the spot, and healing has taken place ! The Lord's eyes take account of the situation ; He comes like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap in order that He may put us on lines of spiritual rectitude ; and thus we can rejoice to take account of the Lord as the One who has the refining process and the cleansing means in His own hands.

You will notice in the Gospel according to Mark (I just touch on it as I pass) that after the mount of transfiguration (chap. x.) the Lord comes to Judah, so to speak, and he

raises the question with him as to the wife of his youth. The Pharisees in Judæa say to the Lord, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" The Lord says that from the beginning it was not so. The same Person was raising God's controversy with Judah. How are things with us? Have we lost freshness? I ask it in the light of the fact that One has drawn near to us who would restore freshness. What we suffer greatly from is the lack of being spiritually saturated, so to speak, with the truth. We touch it; it touches us, but to be maintained free from defilement we must be kept *in* the truth.

One loves to think of the fullers' soap. It suggests how the Lord in all His tender care for His people would touch them so that their freshness might not be lost, and if they have become contaminated with defilement as passing through this scene, that it might be removed from their spirits for His pleasure. What could be more touching than John xiii. in that connection? The Lord well knew the elements of the scene through which His own were to pass. He knew its testings, and the demand that would be made upon the spiritual capacity of His people, and so, knowing it all, before He left them He instituted that wonderful service of feet-washing. Not only did He do it for them as indicating

that He would always do it for them, but He also did it as indicating how He would bind them the one to the other in the service, as He had bound Himself in it always. "He took upon him the form of a servant." (Phil. ii. 7.) How low the Lord was prepared to go that He might secure and preserve His own ! "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. v. 25-27.) "Without blemish," think of it ! The One with whom we have to do in all the searching dealings of His love is the One who gave Himself for the assembly—the One who is constantly serving, tender, true, and ever moving in His affections towards that consummation of His own pleasure—the presentation of the church to Himself. Need we fear His scrutiny ? He will come with the fire of the refiner, but also with fullers' soap. Come to examine ? Yes ; come to test ? Assuredly ; but come to cleanse, to free the spirit from bondage, and the heart from the power of associations that would hinder our communion with Him, and to help the heart into the liberty of personal links with Himself.

Think of the Lord coming in that twofold way, and over and above all His coming as the Minister of the covenant, unchanged and unchangeable ! If the heart be bowed to confess it has failed, the Lord will speak to it tenderly, shewing where and when and how it failed, and in the very process of confession set it free, renewed in strength and vigour, and fresh in its links with divine things.

So He tests His people, He refreshes them, and then finally, though it be a day of breakdown, there is that sweet allusion to what is recovered for the pleasure of Jehovah in it : "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." It is always a serious symptom when people only occasionally speak of divine things to one another. We cannot get on without it ; there can be no question about that. You may tell me that your business hinders you. So be it. I have noticed in reading the gospels how very crowded, speaking reverently, the Lord's days were ; but He always knew how to speak a word in season to him that was weary. His ear was opened morning by morning as the taught One. The Apostle Paul, too, night and day was unceasingly occupied with divine things. I venture to think that no business man ever had his life so crowded with business interests as the apostle had his—crowded with spiritual

interests ; but crowded as his life was he spoke often to the brethren. And when the enemy put him in prison, he could not silence the apostle's speech to the brethren ; the most precious words that came from the apostle to the brethren came from his prison cell, when he was as low as man could put him on the line of sufferings. It is a serious symptom when we become content with our formal comings together. We may say we see one another five times a week. If those occasions hold all their original preciousness to us we are safe, but if we have become content with the mere form we are very unsafe indeed. "They spake often . . . and the Lord hearkened."

The things that were sweet and precious in the eyes of Jehovah were noted down ; the pure, the holy, the precious things that had been wrought out in soul exercise had all been written down ; a book of remembrance was kept. Think of it ! "They shall be mine," the Lord says, "when I make up my jewels." The discipline, the trials, the things that the Lord allows us to experience are all useful in His blessed, unfailingly, tender and true hand, that there might be produced in us that which is for His own pleasure.

The Lord has set Himself to nourish and cherish His church. Why is it that He is

spoken of as the minister of the covenant ? Because Jehovah looked on to the coming of the Lord Jesus when He spoke that word. The minister of the covenant is the One who never gives His people up. He has all the saints before Him. When we are tested, we are tested because Christ loves us ; when He comes near with the fire of the refiner, what has He in view ? To use the soap of the fuller. When the disciples followed that blessed Person to the mount of transfiguration and He led them to a place apart by themselves, they did not understand the meaning of that word separation ; but He did ; He knew what separation would mean for His own.

Later they disputed as to who should be the greatest : but see how the Lord settles the dispute ! He settled it in a twofold way, by the fire of the refiner and with fullers' soap. He put their hearts to the test, brought the light of the truth to bear upon them, gave them to feel how unlike Himself it all was. We need have no fear of the Lord in His methods. He will tell us things about ourselves that our dearest friend might hesitate to state ; He will tell us the whole truth, but He does it with no other object than our spiritual good. That is the fullers' soap. It says, " His raiment became shining, exceeding

white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them." There were two men on the mountain with the Lord that day—the greatest refiner apart from the Lord that the testimony of God has ever known, and the greatest fuller. The Lord was supreme. The greatest Refiner—God's own Refiner—was there; the greatest Fuller—God's own Fuller, His sent One, the One who had come to do His will—was there. And Peter said, "Master . . . let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." And then "a cloud overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him." (Mark ix. 7.)

Beloved, our souls are safe if in our links together we hear the voice of the Lord Jesus, but if we only hear what is current, be it ever so correct, it will not carry our souls to the end. God grant that it may be correct with all the correctness of the ministry of Christ Himself; but let us not be satisfied with correctness and clearness of ministry without our links with the Lord being maintained in the freshness, and purity, in which the Lord Himself would keep them.

Now I close with just a simple reference to the apostle's word to the Corinthians. In chapter v. we get a peculiar point reached, the constraining power of the love of Christ,

which lies in the fact that the heart has come to a judgment in respect of things here—the judgment which the Spirit of God would bring us to in connection with the type of Christ in the red heifer. The ashes of the heifer were to be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel. Thus the judgment which the Apostle Paul had come to, I am privileged to come to, that “if one died for all, then were all dead.” May I ask, Have we come to that judgment? You say, I think I have. Let us be certain about it. Until we come to that judgment the love of Christ has not its way—its constraining power—with us. You say, He has forgiven me my sins, He died for them. But have you noticed that when the Lord Jesus died, in the sight of God there was not a living thing on earth? To measure the grace of God and of Christ by the forgiveness of our sins is a very small measure indeed. Had I been as clear from sin as to conduct as it was possible to have been, Jesus would still have had to die. He died that the whole fact of my guilt might be settled, but His death proved that all were dead. “If one died for all, then were all dead.”

Now what about the living? The love of Christ constrains us “because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead :

and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." A person who is living to himself can never be clear of defilement. Get your heart shut up to a blessed, living Person who loved you enough to go into death for you. Death to Him was a tremendous reality. He loved you enough for that, and He rose that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to Him who died for them and has been raised.

Just a word as to the Apostle Paul. He says in 2 Corinthians xi. 2, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." He had concern for them. He feared "lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty" their "minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Are these things as precious with us as they have been in the past? The truth is, if they are not more precious to us to-night than they were this time last week, they are less precious, for Christianity is a growing thing. Have you learned any more of Christ this past week? Has His touch as the refiner been proved to you? Have you known what it is in any fresh way to come into contact

with His own gracious ministry as God's unfailing fuller? He is either more precious, or less precious. May God grant to us that He may always be more precious, that the chastity, the purity of the chaste virgin might be kept, so that at the end of the Spirit's ministry we may be able to answer to Christ according to His heart. The Lord Jesus will have realised His desire, the Spirit will have accomplished His end, and God's purpose will have been given effect to. May the Lord in His grace give us a better understanding of how He values our exercises in regard of these things, for His name's sake.

THE LORD'S APPEAL IN THE SUPPER.

(1 COR. XI. 28, 29.)

WHAT is on my mind is to consider together, as the Lord helps us, the Lord's supper and our remembrance of Him. One feels that however often we may do it, yet there must be in every fresh consideration impressions graciously granted to our hearts of the preciousness of the appeal of the love of the Lord Jesus.

Now what was particularly before me in suggesting this was, that we might look at it from the point of view in which the Lord in His care for us would help our hearts to be entirely free from all that would bind us in our spirits here, or at all involve us in our associations.

God brought His people Israel out of the land of Egypt. He brought them through the Red Sea, and in the way of His deliverance of them He shut up His people to the leader whom He had not only chosen, but whom He had, moreover, specially fitted to bring them through the wilderness into the land. God had absolute right over His people—a right that He was prepared to vindicate in

respect of them in the presence of Pharaoh in all his pride. Whether it were a question of the obstinacy and opposition of Pharaoh, or a question of the weakness and hesitancy of His own people, God fully intended to vindicate His own rights, not only by an act of divine power, or the call of divine majesty, but by setting His people free from the bondage of Egypt. God must come in in His grace and consideration of their sore bondage, and He must not only clear their way, but in the manner in which He does it make a most precious appeal to the hearts of His people.

We never really get free from things which bind us, or with which we have become contaminated, until we begin to feel their burden. If our hearts have become defiled by things connected with this world, whether it be the original bondage in which we all lay before we were converted, or whether it be what is found even with those who have trusted the Lord, our hearts never get free from defilement until they feel the burden of it.

The first moment in which God made His approach to Moses in regard of His claims over His people was at the close of his forty years in the wilderness, during which time Moses had endured as seeing Him who is invisible. At the end of those forty years of personal suffering, God spoke to him out of the bush.

Moses at Mount Horeb saw a wonderful sight. He saw a bramble bush burning, and the bush was not consumed; he turned aside to see this great sight, and God spoke to him out of the bush. Interest was awakened in the heart of Moses to inquire into this great sight. It was a remarkable thing—a bush burning and yet not consumed. The wonderful thing is that when God spoke to Moses, He did not speak from a thing that was wonderful in itself, or that would express greatness in itself. A bush being burned was in no way worth observing; but the strange sight was it was not consumed. The fear of Jehovah was in the thorn bush; that speaks of the government of God and all that was weakness on the part of His people.

Now when God begins to speak to Moses about His people, and when He tells him that the cry of their bondage had come up to Him, not only does He say He had heard their cry, and that it was His intention to effect their deliverance, but He puts before him a most touching consideration, He says: "I have acknowledged them." (See Exo. ii. 25, New Trans.) Whatever the accuser of the brethren might say against God's people, however weak they might feel in themselves, God will acknowledge them. He has not only power to deliver, but grace to acknowledge.

God then brings before Moses that in His divine power He was going to bring the people out of Egypt, but that supreme moment when He passed over His people in the land of Egypt had peculiar features that spoke, not only of divine power, but of divine affection. God might have cleared the way in majesty, but when He broke the pride of Egypt in the slaying of its firstborn, He passed over the Israelites when He saw the blood—the blood that spoke to the heart of God and appealed to the eye of God. God could have come near in majesty ; He could have swept the whole ground clear in power, but He wanted to win the hearts of His people as well as to break their bondage. There is readiness on the part of people to be cleared from bondage, disabilities, hindrances, and the weight of things here, but God only breaks the bondage of a heart by appealing to its affections.

There can be no doubt that the paschal lamb speaks of Christ ; it could speak of no other. And they were not only to sacrifice the lamb according to the divine commandment, but they were to take it to them on the tenth day of the month and before they sacrificed it, to keep it for four sweet and precious days in order to have it under their attention and observation during that time. Why was this ? Because before God

passed through the land to destroy the pride of Egypt, He was making His own gracious appeal to the hearts of His people. The lamb was for the hearts of His people. God did not sprinkle the blood on the door-post and lintel for the people, and He does not do it for you. He draws near to you in the true presentation of His own glory and love in the person of Jesus Christ, and so touches your heart that you sprinkle the blood on your own door-post. It is faith that does it, and faith springs from a heart that has been touched by the grace of God. Faith is found in the heart into which the light of the preciousness of Christ has shone—God's own beloved Son—the Lamb of His own providing. He met all that was due to God, and took account of our deep need. In the person of Jesus the light shines that breaks down all our pride, that turns our hearts to God Himself, and gives His truth entrance into them. I speak on this line because I want to come to the Lord as our leader.

Why is it that souls do not get out of Egypt ? Because their hearts have not answered to Christ. It is the failure to answer to Christ that explains why people remain behind, and find themselves, after light has reached them, still in darkness. It is not want of information. Wherever you go in Christendom you find

there is information enough, but mere knowledge will never get hearts out of the world ; it never cleared a heart yet from what is offensive to God. Only the preciousness of the appeal of the person of Jesus—of His suffering love that enabled Him, the rich One, to become poor for our sakes that we through His poverty might be rich—will do it. God spoke to their hearts in the tenderness of love ; the lamb itself was under their eyes.

I call your attention now to the Gospel of John. The greatest exodus in the New Testament is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ ; Jesus, bearing His own cross, went forth. He was the One who suffered without the gate. What does that mean ? The gate, *in that case, meant the way out, not the way in ;* He suffered without the gate. He did not suffer simply outside the wall, or the city, or the camp ; He suffered without the gate. There was an opening made in His suffering for every simple and true heart to follow Him for His own sake. It was the suffering of the lamb in the land of Egypt typically that opened the way for the people, and if they had only known the heart of their leader, they would never have wanted to return to Egypt.

“ Behold the Lamb of God ! ” What was the effect ? The two disciples of John left him

and followed Jesus. They did not leave what was wrong, they left what men would have considered religiously the best thing going, but they left it to follow Jesus. What did they find? They found a place where the Lamb of God was shut up under the eye of God Himself. Had you been in Egypt when the paschal lamb was provided, you might have seen an Israelite moving with a little lamb toward his home. It was to be kept four days before being sacrificed. What was he taking it home for? To consider it, to dwell upon it, to understand the lesson of it. So when the two disciples left John and followed Jesus they followed the lamb home, so to speak. "Master, where dwellest thou?" And He said, "Come and see." They went to see, and they saw the Lamb under the eye of God, shut up, as it were, before its sacrifice. The sacrifice was the pouring out of all the preciousness of the lamb—its flesh for their feasting with bitter herbs, its blood for their sprinkling and for the eye of God. Had their hearts understood the preciousness of the lamb, they would have relinquished Egyptian things.

Now why do we cling to so many things? Because, my friends, we have considered the lamb of God's providing so little. The lamb speaks of Christ in His capacity for suffering ;

it speaks of Him in His purity and preciousness, in His freshness and beauty, distinct and different from everything that was in the world—everything that our poor vain hearts followed, served and were in bondage to. “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” God made their exit when the time came; He did it in divine power that smote the firstborn of Egypt, but also in divine compassion and grace that appealed to the hearts of the Israelites when they came to the Red Sea. The Red Sea shut them up to the Egyptians, as they thought; but the cloud changed its position; the rod of Moses was stretched over the sea, and they passed through as on dry land. *It was no test to their hearts when the Red Sea opened; it was fear to their spirits before a way was made through, but it was no test to their hearts when they passed that way; the test was when it closed behind them.*

I want now to speak a little of the song of their leader. You remember the song of Moses. “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song.” Sometimes we have said that they sang more than they knew. Well, they could not stop before their leader, and why did he travel the whole way in his song? Because he had travelled the whole way in his suffering. Had he not been over the whole

wilderness ? There was no step of the wilderness that he had not trodden ; there was no bitterness that he had not tasted. He knew there was no bread and water in the wilderness ; he had doubly proved it was a howling waste with no resting-place ; he had been through, and he sang the whole song because he had gone through all the suffering. The song of Moses carries you right over into the " mountain of his inheritance," to the place which Jehovah had made to dwell in, and where God was bringing His people. Israel said more in their song than they had light to believe ; nevertheless, the whole song was sung. We, too, have to do with a leader who is prepared at all times in our wilderness journey to sing the song that carries our hearts into the land. Oh ! that we kept nearer to Christ. That is the secret.

Formality exposes us. To be casual about the Lord and divine things is a most grave matter. I appeal specially to the young. There was never a time in what may seem to you the most ordinary of your days, when the Lord was not thinking of you all the while.

Then three days after the Red Sea the people came to Marah. It is said in the Book of Exodus that Moses brought the people from the Red Sea, and they came to Marah. Let me say a word here, especially to the young,

for it may be a help to you, You never come to your sorrows yourself. I am not for the moment speaking of what your waywardness may bring upon you, but just seeking to present God's line. It was Moses who brought them to Marah. Did they come there accidentally, or merely by a combination of circumstances? No! they came there because Moses, who was their leader, brought them there. Why did he bring them there? He brought them to Marah because until the soul tastes Marah in the wilderness, it never moves according to God.

It was not by their own choosing that they came there. Marah's waters were bitter. Many attempts have been made, both human and religious, to sweeten the waters of Marah, but none have ever succeeded. There is only one thing that will sweeten them, and that is the death of Jesus—the love of Christ which moved Him to die for you. The people tasted the bitterness of things; the bitterness of death was their experience. They felt the reproach of being attached to Christ, and having no place in the world; but the cure was that Moses cut down fresh wood in the wilderness—God shewed Moses a tree and it was cast into the waters. What was the wood in the wilderness? “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.” “He weakened my strength

in the way." "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." That is the fresh wood that goes into Marah and makes its waters sweet. "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death."

Is there any heart here that is in difficulty about following such a Leader? "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Who would forget Him? Why should we need to appeal so much to souls to remember Him? Might we not challenge our hearts as to who would forget Him? The Spirit of God has to say of that congregation: "Yet they forgat Moses." Moses had suffered for them. Typically he had laid down his life for them; he went the way personally of all the penalties and trials of the wilderness; he stooped from eminence to be joined to them in their poverty. Yet they forgat Moses!

The only time the people were said to be jubilant in the wilderness was when they forgat Moses; they said, "As for this Moses . . . we wot not what has become of him." The next thing is they are dancing before the golden calf. I look out on Christendom (and I speak humbly, because only the grace of God has saved any one of our hearts from its snares) and souls are made jubilant in

Christendom, religiously jubilant, in the way they handle the things of God, but yet are unconcerned in their consciences as to what is pleasing to Christ. We do well to consider these things. It may be said of Christendom what the Spirit of God has put on record when the Lord instituted the supper : "The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table." Look around, and what will you find ? The spirit that would sell Christ, and what is precious to God and His people, for a paltry thirty pieces of silver. The Spirit of God in John's gospel follows this thing to its source. He tells you that when the woman anointed the feet of Jesus, it was Judas who objected. But the other gospels, including Luke, tell you that they all murmured against her. We do well to search our hearts. But, blessed be God, there was a difference in their hearts ; for the disciples loved the Lord, in spite of their failures, and He said to them, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations."

You ought to be perfectly clear whether you love the Lord or not. You may have a sense of your weakness, and of your failure, but even with that sense you should still be able to say, I love the Lord. If you cannot say it, I appeal to you to look to it quickly, for there may not be much more time left

to decide your choice. If any heart has at all appreciated the grace of Christ, I feel sure that when the test comes we can be confident that the Lord Himself will help such to make their decisive choice—to choose Christ and His interests above other things. You will find if your heart is ever so simply prepared to remember the Lord, you will have all the sweet confirmation of the fact that He never forgets you. We might well challenge our hearts, instead of bringing it as an obligation to bear on our spirits, as to who could possibly fail to remember the Lord. Fail to remember Him ! My friends, He might have laid upon us some tremendous burden of service or sacrifice, and asked us to do great things ; yet the one thing that Christ wants most is the sweetest and simplest and most wonderful thing. He did not leave it to His own to decide how they should respond—to decide what they would do—He instituted it Himself. It was He who instituted the supper. He neither asked them to make some great sacrifice nor to do some great service, but that they should remember Him. Might I make an appeal to our hearts in regard to the supper ? How shall we satisfy our hearts before the Lord, if between the times that we take the supper, we touch things that displace the Lord personally ? How shall we satisfy our

own hearts, let alone satisfying the Lord's eye as He looks on us ?

We have to be exercised in regard of things which may displace Christ, such as personal feelings against a brother. It is most solemn to think that it is possible for us to take the supper together, and think we can ignore any feelings in our hearts against our brethren for the time being, and then rise from the supper, resuming those feelings, and go on our way as before. If we were simple about it, there is not a breach between ourselves and the brethren that would not perish the first time we took the supper together. Why bring it up again ? You take the supper together. Perhaps you cannot speak to each other, it may be you are not happy together, and yet you sit down at the supper together. You say, Here we are on privileged ground. But we are not on privileged ground so far as that is concerned. You may maintain that you have been right. If you have, there will be some merit in your sacrifice, but there is no merit if you are wrong.

We read : " If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." That is very sweet. God

intends you to come back again when the matter is put right. Do not take your gift away because things are not right between you and another. Leave it at the altar, and get a sense in your heart of the blessedness of the love of God that did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. The greatest sacrifice ever on the altar was Christ. Carry the sense of that in your heart and in the light of it deal with the thing that stands between heart and heart. Then come back and offer your gift at the altar. You may say, We share the supper together. Do you? What is it that makes that table for our hearts? The grace of the One who serves at that table. Is it only the table of the Lord in the sense that His power provides it? The Lord is host of it, and not only host in personal rights and power, but the great host who is among us as He that serveth. If there are one or two things you are not free from, what are you going to do? Because of these are you not going to respond to the Lord? Are you going on with these wrong feelings, or are you going to respond to the Lord? I feel sure you will get free from them, provided you keep near the Lord.

I add a word from John xi. I should like to leave this impression upon your spirits and upon my own, that the One whom we re-

member is the One who suffered. In John xi. "Lazarus, come forth" was answered by Lazarus from the tomb, but before the Lord exercised His power He suffered. "Jesus wept," we read. He understood all that it meant to the spirits of the bereaved. He knew what the loss meant. Mary tasted Marah in the loss of Lazarus. What was it that sweetened the sorrow to her spirit? The power of Jesus? No. It was His sympathy. What must it have meant to her heart that "Jesus wept"; then the word of His power followed. The presence of Jesus quietened her spirit.

In conclusion I would appeal to your spirits that if you are to answer to God in connection with the altar, and know what it is to go on consistently, and exercised by the truth in connection with the Lord's table, you must know what it is to follow the Lord as the One who suffered to set His people free. May the Lord help us in this.

THE BRIDE CONDUCTED TO CHRIST.

(GEN. XXIV. 10-28, 61-67; XVI. 13-16; XVII. 9-23.)

WHAT is on my mind to bring before you is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the purpose of the Father's heart, and in relation to the desires of the heart of Christ. The Old Testament scripture from which we have read presents a very beautiful and distinctive picture of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The moment came when in the mind of Abraham it was necessary to move in regard of the inheritance, and of the necessities of his son. There was a design in connection with Isaac. But this was not all. Connected with Isaac there were necessities which arose out of the sovereign purposes of God, and these had a two-fold bearing. In the first place, God had connected individual blessing with Abraham and with Isaac, but He had done more. He had made promise unconditionally and sovereignly to Abraham, and on the ground of resurrection in regard to Isaac He had made known wonderful thoughts of universal divine blessing and glory. "In thy

seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Now for the accomplishment of these thoughts there was the necessity that there should be a wife for Isaac. I take the point of view from that side first. Apart from the desire of Isaac, there was all the necessity of divine purpose. It was necessary that there should be one provided for Isaac; and in order that what was provided and procured for Isaac might be according to the counsels of divine sovereignty, according to the glory of God, we see the gathering together of exercises, of counsels, of wisdom, and discretion expressed by Abraham to his servant. There was a dignity about these words of Abraham. It is wonderful the way in which he rose in the faith of his soul, and thought according to the line of divine counsel. His soul felt intensely the necessity of separation in connection with the counsel of God; he felt that anything other than what was pleasing to God would be altogether unsuited to Isaac, and particularly unworthy of the glory and the love that had touched him in the midst of idolatry. His soul was set in a most definite way to keep in spiritual accord with the manner and the nature of the blessing. Accordingly, he gives his servant instructions in respect of Isaac, and the servant moved out

on his mission in connection with divine necessities. There was the necessity of a wife for Isaac from the standpoint of divine counsel, but there was also the necessity of a wife from the point of view of the desire of Isaac's own heart. I think that is exceedingly touching. Isaac was a special vessel constituting a type of Christ. He was an only-begotten one, one who was the entire and only vessel of his father's pleasure. He was unique in every way, and specially so as having come to life again, as it were, from the dead. God had tested the faith of Abraham, and typically of Christ ; Isaac had been taken to the mount of sacrifice, and Abraham had received him again from the dead in a figure.

And so, charged with a mission according to the divine counsels, and according to the necessities of divine affections, and the capacity of Isaac, Abraham's servant moved in his mission. He began, I might say, from the heavenly side of the position. Isaac is undoubtedly a type of the heavenly One, so Eliezer came in from the divine side and he moves out on his mission. I pass over the details until we come to that remarkable part of the incident when he turns to Jehovah, bringing before Him what he felt to be the necessities of the case. I think it is wonderful to contemplate the exercises of the servant,

and to see how he spreads them out before Jehovah in relation to the one of whom Abraham had spoken.

It was the God of glory who appeared to Abraham, and it was when things were disordered on the earth that He appeared to him. The faith of Abraham answered to the light of a coming day, when the heavens and the earth should be linked together, when the end of divine purpose would be reached and his seed should be as the stars of heaven innumerable, and as the sand of the sea-shore for multitude. With Abraham's faith there was the conception of God's purpose—heaven and earth brought together in unity and power of blessing. But while he knew God as the God of the heavens, there was nothing but disorder on the earth. The time had not yet come when the heavens and the earth should be in unison; the full blessing had not been brought to pass. Abraham was still a stranger, separated from what was on the earth, and delighting in the God of glory, and he sends forth Eliezer charged with the mission that whatever sacrifices were involved, whatever difficulties had to be encountered, and however many sufferings were entailed, he was to keep this ever before him, that the bride for Isaac was to be a bride entirely separate from what was worldly—as entirely separate as the one

to whom she was being brought. Isaac was a type of Christ, the heavenly One who "came down from heaven," "the second man out of heaven."

But Christ is not only the heavenly One in the sense that He is of heavenly origin, but He is the heavenly One as having re-entered heaven, as having passed into the presence of God as a man who came forth from the Father into the world, and has again left the world and gone to the Father. (John xvi. 28.) And between His coming and His returning the righteous basis for the display of the glory of God has been accomplished, and there is not one iota of the divine counsel that has not been secured in the Person and work of the heavenly One. And the Spirit has come here charged with His service in relation to the heavenly One. Do you think the Spirit of God does not know what He is looking for? The Spirit of God is definite in His movements. I am not now speaking of His sovereign movements, because the Spirit of God moves sovereignly in the world, but of His ministry and His service in regard to the assembly—of the place He has taken, and the place He has been given. He has come forth from the Father, and He has come forth from the Son in order that He might bring to the Father, in the power of divine

ministry, the many sons given to Christ to bring to glory, and that He might bring the bride to Christ. That is the ministry with which the Spirit of God is charged. And so Eliezer, type of the Spirit, spreads out before Jehovah the features that he was looking for, the things that he would immediately recognise as being in accord with Isaac.

He tells Jehovah what it was he wanted to see. Behind that, beloved friends, there is the sovereignty of God's touch. I am not now thinking of conversion simply, but God comes in and touches your conscience and mine, and He brings light to us. We get peace with God, the knowledge of forgiveness, and justification, and the Spirit is given to us, and so soon as the Spirit is given to us, He begins to form in us what answers to Christ—to produce it sovereignly. He begins to promote the features that are sweet and precious in His eye; He is set for what answers to Christ. We may feel ourselves very small, and we are; beloved friends, the whole truth of the matter is, that on that line we are generally much smaller than we feel; but small as we may be, there is no question but that the Spirit of God is moving with us, searching us, and producing in us what answers to Christ. It is that which He has come for.

So Eliezer tells Jehovah what he is looking

for, and he points out the features of grace, and the lowliness of character that would answer to Isaac. You may say, It was never with us until God produced it. I grant it, but do you not see that the Spirit of God comes to take up what has been provided sovereignly? That is exactly what happens in regard of Rebekah. Eliezer turns to God for direction, and he tells God what he wants to see. There was the God who was moving as sovereignly in regard of Rebekah as He had moved in regard of Abraham—just as sovereignly and faithfully and certainly as ever, and God brought Rebekah forward, and Eliezer recognised the features as he stood by the well in the eventide. You may say, There is not much to be expected at that time of the day. The truth, I believe, is the Spirit of God is more active now in His operations in respect of the bride of Christ than ever He was.

It is at the close of the day that you will see the marks of the Spirit's intense movements, heading up in view of the return of Christ. Cannot you feel them? Cannot you see them in the comings together of the saints? Cannot you see the dropping off of formalities with which they may have been content a few years ago, and the seeking after what is vital and precious, and that has spiritual moisture in

it ? I see in that the work of the Holy Spirit in view of the near return of Christ. This is no day for contentment with merely correct, ecclesiastical position ; what we want is a better understanding of what the Spirit of God is doing.

You might know me very well and might come to see me, and drop in just when I was packed up and ready to go away ; you see me busy getting ready for departure, and you say to me, I have just come in to have a quiet chat about things in general. But when I am going off it is no time for a conversation about things in general. I am going away and I want you to know where and why I am going, and I labour in the short time at my disposal to give you an understanding of the urgency of the case, in order that you might be rightly directed.

Let us not intrude what is superficial upon the ministry of the Spirit. The time has come when He is, so to speak, packing up. The Spirit of God is getting the saints ready for the rapture. The Spirit would have us to be exceedingly careful, to be wonderfully definite ; He would convince our souls that the most urgent thought of His mind is to get the saints ready for Christ.

Here, as the servant takes his stand at the well's mouth, at the evening time, Rebekah

comes on the scene. She is carrying a pitcher on her shoulder. It was at the time when the daughters of the men of the city came forth to draw water. The day is very exacting indeed in the matter of moisture. We pass through a scene that will take all the spiritual moisture out of us, if we are not being constantly refreshed. "He restoreth my soul." The Lord Jesus would keep us in spiritual freshness. He would see that the fountain is never checked in springing up ; He would see that the well's mouth is never covered ; He would see that the refreshment and renewing of the Holy Spirit is never interrupted.

And so Rebekah went down to the well, and it was as she came up again with her pitcher full that the servant spoke to her. He did not speak to her with an empty pitcher ; he did not bar her progress going down to the well. She had come for water. And I want to say this to you, You will always prove the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. There may be times when He touches you, and tells you that when you ought to be full you are empty, or well-nigh so ; but you will find that though your emptiness, or nearness to emptiness, be your own fault, He will never stop you before you are full ; He will wait. This is soul history. It is not only the blessed, complete history of the Holy Spirit's ministry,

but it is individual soul history as well. She went down to the well, and she came up again with her pitcher on her shoulder and her pitcher was full, and when she came up with a full pitcher, he said to her, "Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher!" And she let down her pitcher upon her hand and gave him drink. It was a personal act, and she did the whole service.

You may think I am dealing too much with detail, but I think even in such a scripture as this, the Spirit of God would bring out the traits of the Spirit of Christ, He would present Christ to us. She takes the pitcher from her shoulder; she does not put it into the hands of Eliezer and say, Here you are, drink for yourself. She does not put it on the ground and say, Well, there it is, take as much as you want. She takes the pitcher and lowers it to her hands in personal service, and she gives him to drink. That is the answering mind in Rebekah to the capacity of the affections of Isaac. She had not yet seen him. She did not know who, nor what he was; she neither knew the greatness nor the gentleness of his person, but the gentleness of Isaac comes out in a wonderful way.

Three times we read that he went from well to well, and as he digged the first two wells the herdmen of Gerar strove for them, but

he never resisted, he only retreated and dug more. He never was without water. You will never find that in the mind of Christ you will be without refreshment. If we go our own way we may often find ourselves parched, but you will never be without water if you go on the line of the Spirit of Christ. Isaac retreated, and he dug again. He might name his well "Quarrel," but he never strove. He might name another "Opposition," but he never opposed; he retreated from the strife.

That was the mind of Isaac, and here we see it had been sovereignly produced in Rebekah—a beautiful and sweet answer to what was true in Isaac. The heavenly One is being reproduced in Rebekah and coming out in formation in the bride for the heavenly One. She lowered her pitcher down on her hand and gave the servant to drink; she took the remainder and poured it into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water and watered his camels until they ceased drinking.

These are affections connected with the bride of Christ, affections that bring pleasure to the heart of Christ and affections that bring pleasure to the heart of God the Father. Who is the bride? The bride is the vessel that is filled with affection, and sensibilities, and intelligence, that are according to Christ Himself. She is the fulness of Him that filleth

all in all. Rebekah watered the camels, and remember this, they were the camels of Eliezer's master. You see the spirit she was of coming out: she drew water for all his camels, and a camel can drink abundantly. It is a wilderness animal, and a wilderness animal can drink abundantly. Might I say a word to any one here who would serve the saints? Get into nearness to the Lord, get near to Him and understand His way of doing things, and get your instructions direct from the Lord Himself.

And then the man begins to speak to her. He asks her who she is, and she tells him. She is no less than, we may say, "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh." That is who Rebekah was, and when Eliezer finds it out, he takes the anticipative emblems of union and association, and puts them on Rebekah. "And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord." He has found the one who is suited to Isaac, and he has found her not only in the proof of sovereignty, but also in the sweet and appealing proof of the spirit and mind that answers to Isaac. That is what the Spirit is looking for. He is looking for what answers to Christ, and rest assured He will find it. I want to say this for our encouragement, the Spirit of God is not disappointed in His ministry.

We were seeing this afternoon in John xiii. that the Lord is not disappointed. You will find elsewhere in scripture in regard of His title as Son of man and His ministry to Israel that He says, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain" (Isa. xlix. 4), but there is no such word in John xiii. or xvii. "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me"; and "all mine are thine, and thine are mine"; "those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost." There is no complaint of unrewarded services, and disappointed desires in John's gospel. No, beloved, the Lord's own are sufficient for Himself. We need not hesitate to say it, and we need not hesitate to get into the presence of it. The nearer we come into the contemplation of the truth, the more will it empower us, and the sweeter will be the light that will shine out on the most ordinary human circumstances of those who are His own people.

I come now to the closing scene; I pass over intervening details and come to the hour of Rebekah's departure. The hour for departure having come, everything was at issue; the time had come when those who were attached to her after the flesh would have detained her; they say, "Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten."

I think we can see in the history of the assembly here what the results of tarrying ten days are. "Ye shall have tribulation ten days." Ah! the One who was the Lord, the Head of the assembly, knew how to meet these ten days of tarrying in the world! He met it with ten days of discipline, with ten days of suffering and reviling and reproach in the world, that He might bring to a termination the time of tarrying. It is when the Lord sees our affections held that He comes in in disciplinary dealing. When He can free us by no other means, He frees us by discipline, by experiences that get at the foundation of the objects that may be detaining our hearts.

Here the time comes for departure, and there is the attempt to detain Rebekah, but Eliezer will not be detained. If he will not be diverted, if he will not be disappointed, he will not be detained. There is infinite patience with the Spirit. You have doubtless had the experience of this in your soul, as I have had in mine. How infinite has been His patience, how wonderful His consideration! But at the end we shall always find that if He has not taken one way to attain His end, He has taken another, and has not been defeated. Eliezer would not be defeated, and so the time comes when the whole thing is put to the test, "Wilt thou go with this man?" Concentrated in

the ministry of the Spirit is the Person, the worth, and the glory of Christ. "He shall not speak of himself . . . for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John xvi. 13, 14.) When the Spirit of God begins to speak to our hearts and to shew us things, and when in the freshness of the Spirit we speak to one another, who is in evidence? Surely not the mere vessel that might be used, but the Person who is the one and only subject at all times of the ministry of the Holy Spirit—the Son of God, the Son of the Father, the heavenly One, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And she said: "I will go." For brevity it is matchless. "Wilt thou go?" "I will go." Beloved friends, at the end of the Spirit's ministry it will appear as if our answer to Him had been as brief as His question to us. There will be wiped out of the records, as it were, all the tarrying, all the hesitations, all the misgivings, and the end of His service will make it appear as if we had answered on the instant, and never thought otherwise. She said, "I will go." And Eliezer took Rebekah and she went with him. You will not be able to hinder the Holy Spirit claiming what belongs to Christ. I have seen many attempts, but I think we can say this with all boldness and confidence, that you will

never prevent the Spirit claiming what belongs to Christ. He will have it ; it might be very near the end of the day, but He will have His own. He took her, and she went with him. In the support of the Spirit of God, she travelled over the desert as though it never existed. There are no details ; we find the details elsewhere.

The ministry that carried Rebekah from the country of Syria to Isaac's side of the desert, to the well of Lahai-roi, was the ministry of John xiii.—the blessed refreshment of the mind and the spirit with the love and the tenderness of Christ. The Spirit of God sustains that service, and rest assured that every little bit of refreshment that comes to your spirit in the power of the Holy Ghost is meant to be good to another. You pass it on. There is a saying somewhere, and I think it is true, that "Joy shared is joy doubled." Pass it on ; it will lose nothing of its sweetness, provided you connect it with the right Person. Do not go and only say to a brother, "Do you know I saw something in John xiii. to-day that I have never seen before, I do not know if you have seen it." It would be better to say, "I was shewn something in John xiii. which I have never seen before. Come and let us see it together." The Spirit of God is here to shew us. "He . . . shall shew

it unto you." Think of it, beloved ! Not a divine thing do we ever find out by ourselves—it is shewn us. The Spirit of God is the great Revealer in that way. He spreads things out before us, He opens them out to us. He puts His touch to-day on a word that we may have read many times before, but now He illuminates it ; and He touches another to-morrow, and so the work of the Spirit of God goes on. He continues to the end of the journey.

How many questions Rebekah asked Eliezer during the wilderness journey I do not know, but you will find in the hands of the Holy Spirit the scriptures of truth are written to answer every question of the bride, from the time she follows the Spirit until the time she reaches Christ. But what God has been pleased to put on record is the first and last question, and the first and the last answer. The first question in the land of Syria was, " Whose daughter art thou ? " and the last question that Rebekah asked Eliezer was, " What man is this ? " and he said, " It is my master." There is the last question, and there is the last answer. Can we not see it in the ministry of the Spirit ? Can we not see it in the movements of the saints, in the way that those who are dear to the Lord are beginning to be increasingly exercised about spiritual verities ? Can we not see the shaping of this

question, and answer, "Who is the man that is walking in the fields to meet us?" When Eliezer answered, "It is my master," she lighted off the camel, and the last part of her wilderness journey was finished on her feet; she walked the rest of it, leaning on the arm of Isaac. The last part of her journey in the wilderness was in company with the beloved. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Cant. viii. 5.) That was the end of the Spirit's ministry, and you will never divert the Spirit.

May the Lord give us grace, beloved. We need the grace and nearness to the Person that the Spirit may have room to work. Isaac came from the direction of the well Lahai-roi at the eventide. His place was in the south country. He had travelled as it were a certain distance to meet Rebekah, and from the time Eliezer answered her question she had travelled on a certain distance to meet him, and they finished the journey together. Before he took her into his mother's tent, he presented her to himself. Christ will present the church to Himself a glorious church! (Eph. v. 27.) Before He presents that vast and wonderful company of those—the many sons whom God has given Him to bring home to glory—whom the Father has given to Him, the Leader of their salvation,

He presents the church to Himself "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing"—all in contrast to the desert. No trace of weariness, no trace of the desert, no decrepitude, no marks of defilement, nothing but what is pure and blessed and glorious, and that answers to the mind and the services of Christ.

At the end the Lord's work in the assembly will be so wonderful, and in such measure, that it will appear as if we had never resisted it, as if we had never failed to respond to it; the end of His work will be that the church will be just as He would have it, perfectly suited to Himself. And we shall also find, to the eternal joy and satisfaction and rest of our hearts, that the One in whom all these wonderful counsels and services will have their end is no less a Person than the One who saved us from our sins at the outset. He came from the direction of the well Lahai-roi, and the first to drink from that well was Hagar and her son Ishmael. The one who saw that well first was the poor, perishing sinner. We saw it first that way, but the blessed Person who brought in the remedy for our need, the refreshment for our utter weakness, is the One who is also the Object of divine pleasure.

“ Object of eternal pleasure,
Perfect in Thy work divine !
Lord of glory, without measure,
Worship, joy and praise are Thine.”

It is the same Person ; and it is the same well from which He walks to meet Rebekah after her wilderness journey is over. And so the heavenly Man comes into possession of His bride ! It is the same well from which the poor, perishing sinner first consciously drank.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus, and what we have already tasted of Him, move our hearts to a better understanding of what lies within His own heart, for His name's sake.

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THEIR RESULTS.

(2 CHRON V. 4 ; LUKE XXIV. 33 ; JOHN XX. 19-24.)

MY desire is to speak to you a little concerning the sufferings of Christ. I can hardly conceive that any subject could be of greater interest to us, or of greater concern than the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are aware that in Christendom generally these sufferings have a very small place, and one very serious consideration in connection with that fact is this, that it professes to stand on the work which involved those sufferings. I think it is a very solemn fact that systems that profess to stand in relation to them give no living indication that those sufferings have any place in their hearts. We may add to that, that on account of a better understanding of the truth of the sufferings of Christ, there are those with whom they have a very great place. I feel encouraged to say that in general among those with whom we walk, that subject is a cherished theme. Yet, there are times when both locally and individually there is a ques-

tion as to whether in our appreciation of Christ the truth of His sufferings has sufficient place with us.

I would be free to urge this upon you, that no truth of divine interest can ever be nearer to our hearts than the Lord personally. All our knowledge of doctrine, and clarity of mind in regard to matters of divine interest, will not suffice to take the place of Christ personally in our affections. By reason of our clarity, we may be able to speak easily ; it may give us ability to speak of those things as though we were in them, but I believe that in His ministry the Holy Spirit engages our hearts with the sufferings of Christ, when the person of Christ is near to our affections. There are things in which we need to be constantly helped of the Lord, for we are passing through a world that is entirely against God's principles. If divine things occupy a casual place with us, we shall find that things which we once discarded will acquire power over us again.

We can never be self-supporting, either in the human sphere or in the divine sphere, so that we have constant need of being preserved in seeking a spiritual outlook by the Lord's help. The Psalmist had the sense of it when he said, " Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust." There are times

when that is what we need, and, brethren, we forget sometimes that we need it. Our circumstances sometimes bring in a reminder of our need. I believe that the Lord's ways with us in assembly, and also in our individual histories, are definitely directed to the end that we might learn our need of Him. It is not the young only who need His help, the most matured need it also. Our need increases as our knowledge increases. The more we know of divine things, the more we need the Lord, and only as we are near the Lord and supported by Him, will our knowledge of divine things be of service to our brethren ; so that we need to have our affections drawn to the Lord personally.

Now the Holy Spirit is given to us as the Comforter, and nothing should be remote to our affections. The Lord Himself speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter—One who would be in us, would dwell in us, and abide with us, so that every divine reality might be nearer to our affections. The Spirit is within, so it is what we might speak of as an internal ministry—as near as Christ was near His own—there was to be no diminution. When the Lord was going on high, there was to be a great divine addition and nearness—the Comforter would come and there would be an abiding nearness that was not possible when

Christ was here. The Spirit was to come identical with Christ in that sphere, so that whatever moves in the Spirit of Christ, is transferred to the believer. He brings Christ before the affections of the saints ; He never occupies them with their own sufferings, but with the sufferings of Christ ; so I would desire to speak of them in their blessed divine appeal, as in the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

I read this Old Testament scripture because I wish to speak on the thought that the Spirit of God presents—the way the ark had come as set forth in the staves. Every item of divine history presented in the person of Jesus, was to be constantly in remembrance. No incident has been recorded merely to give us the history of Christ on earth, but to set before us the ways of our Lord Jesus Christ in relation to the will of the Father, in relation to the testimony of God, to the pleasure of God, to the service of God, and to the expression of the Father. We may take up the gospels to find the history of that which comes out in our Lord Jesus Christ, but in the power of affection we come to the gospels to see Him personally, who He is : His ways, the moral glory of His person, His patience, His meekness and lowliness, and to have our hearts brought under the power of these. All has been

recorded that Christ personally might be known.

The epistles have been written to shew all the divine result brought in by our Lord Jesus Christ by His work, by His sufferings, and by His death. The accomplishment of it is seen in the gospels ; you can trace His ways from the outset to the finish. In the epistles you can follow ideas and doctrines, but you follow the Person in the gospels. You may follow Him step by step, and in that pathway you come by the Spirit to see beauty ; you see it in that One, and it increases in power over your soul. It is the Person of Jesus, and there is nothing that we can less dispense with than that. No one, whatever knowledge he possesses, can afford to dispense with the contemplation of the person of Christ. He was indeed the ark of the covenant of the Lord ; He was the ark of the covenant, whether in heaven or on earth. Everything that was morally excellent shone out in that blessed Person ; nothing was superficial ; He was the expression of everything that was pleasurable to the heart of God.

I would speak now for a moment of His grace, so that we may not think of what came out in the Lord Jesus as merely the traits of what was expressed in a man. He was here in lowliness in the world, where men were

in pride and haughtiness, but think also of who He was, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . for I am meek and lowly in heart." There is no haughtiness in God's world. When God's end is reached, every man will be lowly. What a contrast to what is around us! Before the enemy made man independent, he was dependent on God. God made man dependent, and as a creature he must ever remain so. Independence is the very opposite to the mind of God for man; independence is felt far more in the assembly, when it exists, than in the world. In the latter case it is not seen in such contrast to Christ as it is in the assembly.

These things are permanent and abiding; His lowliness went right on to the end of His sufferings. They are more intensified in Psalm xxii. than elsewhere in scripture. There you get the appeal of Christ in His absolute obedience to God. The answer—and He answered it Himself—is, "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." There it was the abandonment of our Lord Jesus Christ. God was a holy God, and must have a holy people, and in order that this might be brought to pass Christ suffered. What marks this present day, beloved, is the solemn refusal of those who name the name of the

Lord to depart from iniquity. If you have a sense of the holiness of God, you must move.

Whatever you look at in Christianity, you cannot separate it from the sufferings of Christ, and the appeal that those sufferings would make to our spirits. It represents the service of God. The Spirit of God records that the staves of the ark could not be seen from the outside ; they were to be seen in the holy place. The things in the holy place and the things in the holiest were one. In the former everything stood in relation to the responsibility of the people—the candlestick and the shewbread were there, the one expressing unity and the other the divine pleasure. The staves, I think, spoke of the way the ark had come ; you see the end in view. You would think that but for the ark, the way would never have been. The table of shewbread and the candlestick shining over against it give the thought of unity according to God. When you look at the table of shewbread and the twelve loaves, all in their equal size and in order, you get the impression of what the people of God are at the end. It cannot be so seen publicly. If we only thought of what was public, we should have no power to come together, but God has given us in His mercy to see that every

divine truth is abiding, and is capable of being put into practice in principle until the Lord comes.

There are those—we do not speak of them unkindly, but feelingly—who recognise the truth of the one body, but who assert that it cannot be put into practice. If it cannot be acted upon, it is like saying not only that man has failed, but that He who is Head of the body has failed. We cannot claim to be it, but it is a question of humbly holding to the truth of it, and the Lord loves to support that, and it is sufficient if there are only two. We are responsible to act according to the truth of the one body. The Lord is Head of the body, and let us not say that it cannot be acted on.

The shewbread sets forth the unity of the people of God; they are united by the spirit and mind of our Lord Jesus Christ. The loaves were put on the table, frankincense was placed over them, and the fragrance of it ascended to God. Then over against it was the candlestick that supported the light. The light shone on the table of shewbread and it lighted up the holy place. It was constantly attended to, and the priests took the oil from the people. It was not a matter of quantity but of quality. The least appreciation of Christ Himself in our local assembly

has a far greater effect than we are conscious of. We are tested on the simplicity of our light.

You may think that the young need advice—it would be strange if they did not—but they get it from those who are walking with the Lord. Oh, beloved brethren, let us take godly account of what God is doing with our young. It is a matter of quality, and not of quantity; it is a spiritual matter, and the least of our company who love our Lord Jesus Christ may bring some contribution; but no one is qualified to do so save as the sufferings of Christ are felt. You will not then discriminate in your affections. If there is distance of heart and mind, you will be a grief to the Holy Spirit, and His ministry will be restricted, and you will lose the gain of the holy things with which He would move your soul. May we see afresh what God would give us in the ministry of the Spirit as to the sufferings of Christ.

The sufferings of Christ are not confined to the assembly—a world of bliss will be based on them. When that holy city comes down from God out of heaven, it will be the dwelling-place of God. The Spirit of God opens, as it were, the door of eternity to us, and He speaks of Christ to our hearts. In our time here, it is always accompanied by the feeling of

suffering in our spirits, but there will be no shadow on our hearts then. Whatever we handle in Levitical care, we may handle with the sense that all emanates from the sufferings of Christ. The Lord would thus speak to the affections of His own.

I did not read the whole narrative in Luke, but only the portion in which we see the recovery of the two who were going to Emmaus, and the ministry that springs from it for their affections. They returned to Jerusalem with that which the Lord had brought to pass by a strong reminder of His sufferings—the memorial of it—He was known to them in the breaking of bread. When we learn the truth of the Lord's way with His own, we find that this has been more the way of recovery than any other way—that is, not only in the way of light, but in the breaking of bread. He asserted Himself to these two in their affections. I believe that the Lord is constantly doing this. They returned to Jerusalem, not occupied with their fatigue.

It is remarkable how infirmity encroaches upon us when the Lord becomes remote to our affections. We become cold in our spirits in our relations to the brethren, and then we feel our infirmity, and our weakness, and the demands of the love of Christ become remote to us. It is a question as to what things are

near to us. The truth cannot be nearer to us than the Lord Himself.

When He broke bread, I can understand how their affections awoke—no one else had ever done that but the Lord Himself. The apostle says, “I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you”; Paul delivered it in the compelling power of the fact that he had it direct from the Lord, and he delivered it to the saints. He says, “That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he break it.” We have no right to handle anything in the things of God unless we give thanks to God for it. Then it says, “After the same manner also he took the cup,” They saw it—they saw the memorial which brought Christ livingly before them—the One who had suffered, and who had appeared to Simon. The Lord had moved in each case for recovery; and although it has not been told us what passed between the Lord and Simon, yet the results of it are seen. He had his last impression of Christ—going out in suffering. You can understand how the Lord fixed in the soul of Peter the certainty of his recovery.

When a soul has been recovered in any sense of the sufferings of Christ, it cannot fail. I am not overlooking what the heart of man

is, but no soul who has a God-given sense of what Christ suffered, could be anything else than recovered, and God has done it sovereignly that we might be blessed. There is a necessity that we should be preserved in the sense that all we are, and all we ever shall be, are the fruit of the Lord's sufferings.

Now in Luke the Lord shews His hands and His feet. It is the service of Christ to bring man into the pleasure of God, brought to pass through the work and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ—that which He endured and through which He had passed in accomplishing God's will. We must not be casual in the things we handle together. God has given us the Spirit—the grace of the Lord Jesus is favourable to us, and there is too the power of the Holy Spirit.

And now I come to another side, that is John. The Lord shews them the marks in His hands and His *side*. These stand connected with the expression of the holy love of God to the world. The soldier with a spear pierced His side; it is not confined to the house of His friends; it is a mark of world-wide significance, but it is a mark that stands connected with the side of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then it says, "Forthwith came there out blood and water." It is God's holy thought—the divine pleasure—that man should be cleansed

by the water, the moral cleansing, that he might be sanctified by the Holy Spirit and that he might live for God's pleasure. Oh, beloved, how blessed, holy, pure, and eternal are the results of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ.
