

The Cross And Higher Ground

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Chapter 1

The Cross, the Gateway to Higher Levels of Spiritual Life

“He said unto Moses, ‘Come up unto the Lord’ ” (Ex. 24:1-18).

“And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Come up to Me into the mount...’” (verse 12).

I believe the Lord desires to say and is saying to many of His children, *“Come up to Me into the mount.”* And when you come to look into it, it is very clear that the Lord’s fullest thought for His people is that they may occupy high places; that they may in a right sense be an exalted people. All the movements of God are in that direction.

The man of whom it is said in the midst of many others who knew the Lord that he walked with God terminated his career here by going up to the Lord. The end of Israel’s wilderness journey was going up to possess. Elijah finished his course with an upward movement to the Lord. Israel’s later history, when in right relationship with the Lord, was governed by those great seasons of going up to the Lord at Jerusalem, and we have a series of songs called *“Songs of Ascent”* or psalms of *“going up.”*

The Lord Jesus did not finish His course on the cross or in the grave, but going up; and the church, His body, is destined to follow in that way, to go up. All these movements represent God’s highest thought for His own. To fail of this means to have failed of God’s fullest purpose.

The Lord is an exalted Lord, He is represented as being *“high and above all”* and He desires His people to exalt Him above all, and it is a remarkable thing that when you do exalt the Lord you always go up yourself. The Lord desires us to have high thoughts about Himself. If we have low thoughts about the Lord we live a low life; if we have high thoughts about the Lord we always go up ourselves. This contains this simple and yet very rich truth, that the Lord desires His people to be in fellowship with Himself in high places, an exalted place, in true spiritual elevation.

If the end of the church’s course is to be marked by the church’s going up, then I think we may rightly conclude that towards the end, the Lord’s great emphasis will rest upon spiritual and moral ascendancy in His people. He will be calling us on to higher ground, for, as we believe, the chronology of things is bound up with the spirituality of things. The dates of God synchronize with the conditions of His people. There will be no translation of the church, only on the ground of the church’s preparedness for translation; and the fixed time for going up is fixed by God to tally with a state into which the church has come. There will be no mere mechanical and automatic translation of the church. It will be entirely related to the church’s condition and, therefore, there must be a spiritual side as well as what we might call a chronological side, and the going up literally must be bound up with our going up spiritually and morally.

I am quite sure the Lord is seeking to get His people onto higher ground, the higher ground of faith, the higher ground of love, the higher ground of fellowship, the higher ground of spiritual vision and revelation, the higher ground of spiritual power, authority, the higher ground of moral ascendancy. It is significant to note that the Scriptures contain mountains which represent all these things. That will be the realm of these meditations.

In this chapter we do not go any further than the first step. We survey first of all, in brief, this fact (for it is a fact), that the Lord is calling to higher ground, and then we take into consideration the first and the all-inclusive thing relative to higher ground. But the effect of this must be not just more information, more teaching, more knowledge, but it must have a moral effect in us, in our relationships, in the matter of fellowship. We will have to have a reaction from everything that is low, small, mean. We shall see that we must take higher ground in the matter of our relationships.

The present level is too low, it is not high enough, it is not according to the Lord's thought. In the matter of love for one another there must spring up in us the feeling, that the way in which we regard one another is too low. We must take the attitude that it is too low. We must come up higher in this matter. And so on all matters of our life in relation to the Lord there has got to be some elevation, and we must see that it is related to the ultimate purpose of God. This is not some little homily for daily life, that you must try and be more loving and show a greater consideration, and so on. It is related to the great end which God has in view.

The cross — God's essential method

But I want here to point out how striking and impressive it is that in the Word of God all increase and advancement of the Lord's people is connected with elevation. In fact, we may say that all connected with the positive side of the testimony is brought in by an eminence. When the Lord is going to do something on the positive side of adding to and increasing His people, or advancing them spiritually, it is almost invariably connected with some high place. That is impressive.

This 24th chapter of Exodus is one great outstanding example of that. That in its greater ranges will be before us if the Lord continues to lead this way. We make the observation now in order that we might be arrested by this. I emphasize the word '*positive*' because there is a negative side, and that is the cross side. We are speaking about the cross and higher ground. There is that wilderness level where the cross operates in order to make possible the higher ground. The wilderness is not God's positive ground, that is the negative side, that we must be crucified is not God's *end* but God's *essential method*. The setting aside of man by nature is what we might call *the negative side*, *the positive side* is to bring up that which is of God on to a level of God's purpose and God's power.

Higher ground: Christ in glory

And so we see that all that is related to the positive side of the Lord's people and of the Lord's testimony is bound up with some high ground. But before we go on with that we want to see what is all inclusive, that in which all else is bound up in this matter, and that is, to see God's pavement, that upon which His feet rest, so to speak, the highway of God in relation to His people. Come to Exodus 24:9-10 and you have it: God's pavement, that which was under His feet, as it were, a sapphire stone, the very heaven for clearness. We see that as the thing upon which the feet of God rest, that, so to speak, in which the Lord walks up and down, the basis and the foundation of all that follows, and you know what follows. "*As it were a sapphire stone.*" I do not propose to turn to all the passages in Scripture where the sapphire stone is mentioned. You can do that when you desire to make a little study of the Word. All I desire to do now is to point out what this means.

The sapphire stone has a great place in Scripture. You will find it in relation to creation, in relation to grace, in relation to government, and you will find it in relation to glory, both heavenly and earthly glory. And here it is in Exodus 24, beneath the feet of God. In Ezekiel 1:26 and 10:1 you have it seen as above the crystal-like expanse of the firmament. In Lamentations 4 you see princes of Zion spoken of as sapphire stones. In the Song of Songs, chapter 5, the beloved is spoken of as a sapphire stone; and then in Isaiah 4, the metropolis of the earth is seen to have its foundations laid with sapphire stones. And then in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 the second foundation is a sapphire.

What is the sapphire? I think if you look into the Scripture you will find that the sapphire stone undoubtedly represents Christ in universal glory. "*As the very heaven for clearness...*"

You know the sapphire is the stone of heavenly blue, transparent blue, as the very heavens for clearness. Do you notice what is happening here? *“Under His feet, as it were, a sapphire stone, and, as it were, the very heaven for clearness,”* ... for transparency. Immediately following this chapter are the instructions for the tabernacle. That tabernacle is to be a representation of the Lord Jesus through and through, from centre to circumference; it is Christ presented.

The high priest is the central figure, he wears an ephod of heavenly blue; and every man, woman and child throughout all their generations is commanded to have a bit of that same blue upon the fringe of their garments. The predominating element throughout this whole thing which is to be a revelation, unveiling, representation of the Lord Jesus is the heavenly blue. It is something that has come down out of the mount. It is a reflection here on earth of that which was under God's feet, the feet of the God of Israel. Earth and heaven are united in that blue, heaven and earth are joined, to reveal the Lord Jesus in universal glory. That is the nature of everything in the Word of God. That is where you arrive in the revelation of the eternal purpose and thought of God: *heaven and earth united in the revelation of the glory of Christ*. That is well-known, that is perfectly clear, but do not let us make a commonplace of it. Familiar as we may be with the truth of it, it is no small thing that when God reaches His end, this whole universe, heaven and earth, will be united in the display of the glory of His Son, Jesus Christ. God has fixed that, and God will reach His end.

But for the moment the thing that is before us is this, that everything is related to that in the activities of God. God has that in His view all the time and all that He is going to say and do and require is bound up with that, the universal glory of His Son Jesus Christ. So that before ever a hand is put to work to realize that representation in type, before ever there can be a movement in the practical realm of accomplishment, there has to be a vision and a revelation of Jesus Christ in glory. If in a special way the apostle Paul was given the ministry concerning that revelation of Jesus Christ in the mystery of His body, before he can utter a word in that connection he must have a revelation of Jesus Christ in glory. That is basic to all the purpose of God, and we can neither do anything, nor endure anything until we have that, until we see God's end and that upon which God's eye is resting.

Why had Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel to ascend the mount and see the God of Israel and that which was under His feet? In order surely that there might be an adequate representation of what was according to God's mind. This was a solemn responsibility that was being conferred upon these men. They were being brought to see what was under God's feet in order that they might be charged with the responsibility of having everything constructed and maintained in accordance with that.

Seventy of the elders: that is a representative number of the people of God. In the New Testament seventy is representation of the whole church. Seventy is a combination of ten and seven. *Ten* is the number of responsibility and *seven* of spiritual perfection, and the responsibility that was being conferred upon these men was for the spiritual perfection of God's thought in relation to the Lord Jesus. They had to have God's perfect thought about the Lord Jesus and see to it that everything was constructed according to those thoughts. God's thought from eternity is the universal glory of His Son. The Lord must have some people to come into His thoughts about His Son in order to take responsibility in relation to others, and so He says to them in effect, *“Come up into the mount; your coming up is related to a great many more. Your coming up is that you might receive a revelation which will put you in a place of great responsibility, but also of great privilege unto a ministry which has no lesser object and end than the universal glory of the Lord Jesus. Come up into the mount.”*

Recovery of the full testimony of Jesus

Surely these are days in which there is a very great need to come into the fullness of God's thought concerning the Lord Jesus. These are days when God's glory in Christ needs to be known, a recovery of the full testimony of Jesus. Unto that the Lord must take some, at least, and bring them into a special fellowship with Himself in His thought. That is a place of elevation. Oh, but do you notice what had to happen before ever that could be? "*And Moses built an altar under the mount.*" (Ex. 24:4). That is sacrifice. There was no ascending the mount until the altar had been built, sacrifice offered and the blood shed. In other words, there is no coming up into those higher altitudes of divine revelation, divine apprehension, divine vocation and ministry except on the ground of the cross doing its work to set nature and man aside, because man by nature cannot come into God's thought. "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God neither can he know them.*" (1 Cor. 2:14). He has to be set aside, the cross has to cut in there and put man by nature out of this thing before he can come into the fullness of God's mind and God's purpose. "*And Moses built an altar under the mount.*"

The cross is always the gateway to higher levels of spiritual life. It is always the way to the tablelands of God, and it is not a thing so far as we are concerned, done once and for all, only in the matter of our justification and our acceptance. On the *objective side* it is finished once and for all, but on the *subjective side* there is to be a daily dying, a bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. But that is the way up. We sometimes think of it as the way down, this pulling down, destroying, crucifying. When shall we get to the end of this business? If we knew it we are going up all the time, it is the way up.

The Lord Jesus came down. He existed in the form of God but He counted it not something to be held onto, to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, being found in fashion as a man. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death — and the apostle does not stop there — that is enough to become obedient unto death. But there was nothing that the world would applaud about that death; it was not one of those deaths that men would take account of and say it was a noble death. It was a most shameful, degrading death — the death of deaths. Wherefore God has highly exalted Him. We have nothing to give up like that but the principle works: the cross is applied to the pulling down of the life of nature. It does not like being set aside. How many of you like to be thought nothing of? How many of you take pleasure in people just treating you as nothing? The flesh is not made that way.

The cross is applied to set man by nature aside, and as that cross is applied there is a spiritual coming up all the time. This is ascendancy, coming up into a new place, and many people never reach very high ground because they never go down very low. They do not know much of the fullness of the Lord because they know so little of the emptying. A new application of the cross is, in the divine thought and intention, to bring us onto higher ground, and if the church is to finally reach its highest ground, just prior to that it will know the deepest application of the cross.

What is true for the church is true for the individual member. The altar always leads to the mountain in the intention and determined purpose of God. It is not the exaltation of ourselves; it is the exaltation of Christ in us, and in that we find our fullest satisfaction. We shall ever feel less and less, but if it is a right state, which is produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the cross, in God's sight there is a wonderful increase, a wonderful gain. We shall see later, and I hardly dare mention it because of anticipating it here, there is a mountain in Matthew to which the Lord brings His own and says, "*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.*" Do you see the connection?

Everything according to Christ

But now let us come back and close upon this preliminary note. What is the Lord after in that cross, with you, with me? What is it that He has in mind? Just this: everything according to Christ; heavenly blue. That is, the glory of Jesus Christ in His people, individually, in His church collectively and in this universe at large eventually, everything revealing the glory of Jesus Christ. Do you see that that is the movement of the church? When the church is perfect in glory it will be the very vehicle of the going forth into the universe of the glory of Christ. That is our destiny as members of Christ. It is to that we have been called and chosen before the foundation of the world, that we should be unto the praise of His glory and that this whole universe should reflect His glory through a Christ-impregnated church. The blue everywhere... *that* is the end. God is working towards that end now. His dealings with us are towards that end.

Why these difficult experiences, this discipline, this chastisement, why these sufferings? -- all to the glory... all to bring about the crystal clearness, the absolute transparency, the purity of the heavenly nature of the Lord Jesus in us. The Lord is just doing that thing in us by the cross, which is clearing the film of this natural life, removing the thickness and the denseness of this corruption and pollution, getting a pure transparent state which is the absolute purity and clearness of the nature of Christ in us. It is a moral thing. This conformity to the image of His Son is a moral thing — I use that word in its highest sense — something that is being wrought into the very moral fiber of our being, the nature of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has taken that in hand.

Do not think of being glorified as sometime reaching that position where suddenly there will be upon us a cloak of light and we shall be glorified. The glory comes by what we are, shines through from within, not from without. The Mount of Transfiguration is not that suddenly the Lord Jesus was given a robbing of light. It was the shining out of His Person. And glory is the result of the moral process in us, of the Holy Spirit's work through the cross. It will be what we have been made by grace. It will be *His* glory not ours because it is all of grace, because He made it possible and He carried it through.

This universe is to be full of the moral excellency of the Lord Jesus, seen everywhere. What a universe it will be! That represents higher ground for us. It emphasizes and stresses the call, "*Come up to Me in the mount*" ...first of all to see what is in view. When you see that you have an adequate motive for enduring the sufferings of the cross, you have an object in view in the light of which you regard everything that the Lord does with you and to you. That is the end. We need that.

We have often said that Paul got through that terrific life of his because he kept the Lord whom he had seen on the Damascus Road always before him, and in almost his last words he has got that vision still there, "*That I may know Him,*" ...*Him whom I saw years ago on the Damascus Road. He is still my goal, my object, my glory...* "*that I may be conformed to Him*" ... *that is the only thing.* It was that that carried him through. Oh, that the Father would show us the Lord Jesus as His goal for us, that He is operating all the time in relation to that end. He is going to have everything constructed with that end in view, according to that.

And the tabernacle, while it represents Christ in Person also represents Christ corporate: "*the Body which has many members, and the members being many are one Body, so also is the Christ.*" The *Christ personal* will be revealed in the *Christ corporate* in the ages to come and they must be one, therefore, in moral nature as they will be one in glory, having been, from a certain standpoint along a certain line, one in the cross.

There is a work of the cross in which we do not share, done for us and apart from us, but there is a work of the cross in which we do have a place and it is given to us in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for Him, in His behalf. "*Filling up that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ*" (Col. 1:24). It is unto that glory, that end of God.

Now may the Lord bring us up into the mount to see the glory towards which He is working, that in which He walks up and down. All the ways of God are connected with the ultimate glory of the Lord Jesus. His feet stand upon that and He does not move off of that pavement. God's movements are in relation to the Lord Jesus, to the glory of the Lord Jesus. That is the sapphire stone to be revealed throughout the universe.

Creation is governed by that, grace is governed by that, government is governed by that. Ezekiel is government, "*And above the firmament a throne and as it were a sapphire stone*", the glory of "*one like unto a man*". Government is in relation to the glory of the Lord Jesus, and the glory is *His* glory. That is glory: the manifestation of Him in His moral perfections in a people whom He has brought to glory, the achievement of this One bringing many sons to glory. That will be glory for Him and that will be glory for us. The Lord lead us on to higher ground with a vision of the end He has in view, for that embodies all that the Lord has to say in these days. It is related to that. So may we get our vision adjusted at the outset and see God's end.

Chapter 2

Possessing the Higher Ground by Spiritual Exercise

Reading: Matt. 14:22-33; Heb. 7:25; 13:20-21.

Now we are going on from that point, but may I just again say a word or two of a general character before we come to the more specific in the next aspect or phase. It is that we might recognize the necessity for an upward movement on the part of the Lord's people at the end time. It is clear to us all that the course of the church here on earth since the first days has been a downward course. Before we close the New Testament we have a fall from the very highest position of which the New Testament speaks.

That position is the Ephesian position, the heavenlies in Christ and we close the New Testament with a word to the Ephesians, "*Consider from whence thou art fallen.*" The direction of the church here on earth has all the way through been a downward direction. That is, its gravitation has been towards the earth, becoming something of the earth, and something in and of this world. Its attachment has been to things here, its life has become a life in relation to things here, it has become something set up on the earth, and in every way spiritually, doctrinally, and very largely morally, its way has been downward. This is not just a natural course of things. You and I know only too well that which we experience in the corporate body is out from our individual experience, that the whole direction of things is to force us down, to press us down, to rob us of that morale and moral ascendancy and spiritual superiority to the world and to the forces of evil.

The need for higher ground

There is an awful downward pull always at work and you and I know it almost every moment of our lives. Rising, ascendancy is a matter that calls for a constant exercise, vigilance, diligence and if for one moment we yield our spiritual diligence we go down. If for one moment we are caught off our guard like David on the housetop, a mighty man of war but in a moment taken off his guard, it always results in a downward direction. We know that. The whole course of things is to pull us down. And that downward pressure and force has very largely succeeded through the centuries since early New Testament times. The Lord again reacts to that tendency and at the end He would seek in a new way to recover the ground which they held at the beginning.

And again, are we not conscious of the need for higher ground in ourselves? Are we not all longing for higher ground? Well, if you are not, I am. I am conscious of the need of a lifting up onto higher ground spiritually, and using the word in its broad, wide sense, morally, to have a greater spiritual morale and to know more of what ascendancy is, superiority spiritually. Oh yes, that is a need that we are all feeling, to come into a new position with the Lord in some higher realm of spiritual life. And that need is very widespread and widely felt, and so the Lord would seek to bring a company up there on behalf of the rest, and that is what He is doing, I believe, and He would say to us in these days, "*Come up to Me in the mount*", in other words, *Take higher ground, let your exercises be to possess a position that is above your present position.*

You know, *mountains* represent exercise. (If you do not know that, come and live where I am living now, and you will discover that mountains represent exercise and you do not get over them with one bound. You get over one mount and then you find another, and you can go on like that indefinitely, and it represents exercise.) And what is true in the realm of nature is true spiritually, that you have got to possess the upper land by spiritual exercise. We shall see that as we go on. But the Lord is saying, "*Let your exercise be to possess higher ground. Come up to Me in the mount.*"

Pressing on unto completeness

Now we have begun with Exodus 24. We want to look right on from that eminence, from that elevation, look right on through ages, through generations and see a still higher one of which this is only a type, a shadow, and that one which we shall see as we stand on mount Sinai is the letter to the Hebrews. The letter to the Hebrews is a beloved mountain. It is that which is only typified and foreshadowed by this mountain in Exodus 24, and you know quite well that the letter to the Hebrews takes up Exodus 24 and speaks to us about the *“pattern of things in the heavens which was shown in the mount,”* but here it says, *“Now we come to the heavenly things themselves.”* We have been led from one point which is only typical, illustrative, to a higher which is the real, which is that typified, and from this one we see that higher one; and when we come to the letter to the Hebrews we hear with a new meaning the word of the Lord, *“Come up to Me in the mount.”* That is what sums up the whole of this Hebrew letter. It is the call of the Lord to these Hebrew Christians, these Hebrew believers, to come up from Mount Sinai to the heavenlies, to come up to the mount.

Oh, but that going up does mean exercise. If there is one letter which represents exercise it is this letter. How the apostle constantly repeats the phrase *“Let us...,” “Let us fear lest a promise having been left us of entering in any of you should seem to come short of it...,” “Let us leave the first principles and press on unto completeness.”* The urge is upwards all the time and it represents real exercise. We will see something of the nature of that exercise before we are through.

Faith

But I want us to get into this thing through the gateway of Matthew 14:22-36. Perhaps you have not seen any connection between this incident on the lake and the letter to the Hebrews, but there is a very close connection. Matthew 14:22 onwards is an event in the lives of the Lord's people, His disciples, which is but an illustration in history of exactly what you have spiritually in the letter to the Hebrews. In both places you have Christ above, *“And when He had sent the multitudes away He went up into a mountain to pray there alone.”*

In the letter to the Hebrews the opening is, *“We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor,”* and then in chapter 7:25, *“Seeing He ever lives to make intercession.”* He is in the mountain alone in prayer in both instances. In both instances it is Christ on high, Christ above fulfilling an intercessory ministry, a priestly ministry of prayer. On the other hand, in both cases the church is down here. It is down here in Matthew 14. The church and that which represents it, is down here.

In the letter to the Hebrews the church is down here. Christ on high, the church down here. In both cases you have a storm raging. That is obvious in Matthew 14, but read the Hebrew letter and you will find there is a storm raging. These Hebrew believers have taken up a position and all hell has come out to get them to relinquish the position. They had begun to let go, to go back, and they are meeting the cost of this thing. You notice how much of this letter is given up to try and get them to endure, to go on, go through and pay the price. There is a storm raging. In both cases the main issue is that of faith.

Matthew 14: *“You of little faith...”* It is a question not only of Peter as representing the others, but the faith of the church. It is the faith question. When you come to Hebrews the issue is faith; all the way through it is that. The letter is gathered up in Chapter 11, and the saints from Abel onwards are gathered in array and brought by their faith right up to this time in which the Hebrew believers were living. The apostle tells those believers that they are the complement of all that preceded them. The Old Testament believers could not be made perfect without them and so their faith added unto the faith of all the saints makes for one mighty victorious faith.

It is the faith question right through to the end. The faith of the ancients was that by which they got through to the end and that alone by which they got through to the end, not the end of their lives but to the end of God's age. They got through to the end of the dispensation. And Enoch got right through to translation by faith (v.5), and this principle of faith is linked with the final issue of the people of God unto rapture. It is a faith question in both cases.

A new apprehension of Christ

And finally, in both instances, the one thing which governs all the rest is a new apprehension of Jesus Christ, an entering more fully into a knowledge of Him by which they are brought onto the higher ground of spiritual ascendancy and authority. That is the thing that governs. Now that you have the element of these two things, of course you will want to sit down and think a good deal more about them. Notice some things in Matthew 14. You have nothing in the Gospels but what is fully developed in the Epistles. The Gospels are the seed-plot of the Epistles and all that is in the Gospels is taken up and led out in fuller revelation in the Epistles.

So we must never regard these incidents and events recorded in the Gospels as just bits of a story, just incidents thrown together to make up a story or a life of Christ. We must always recognize that what is in the Gospels is put there as a seed for a fuller revelation. Whatever happened there is nothing by itself, it never stands alone. It points on to something, the explanation of which you will find in the Epistles.

We should not try to read something into the events of the Gospels or try to get something out of them, for you can be fanciful with things and put in a lot. But there is a true principle that the Holy Spirit has hidden in the sayings and deeds of the Gospels, something which He is going to develop later on, and we look for that. Here is one instance of that principle. So we find a great deal of truth wrapped up in this portion of the Gospels, and in a very real way the whole letter to the Hebrews is summed up in this portion of Matthew.

The Lord's deliberate direction

I am not going to attempt to deal with the whole of the letter to the Hebrews here, but I do want you to see one or two things which are of great importance to us in this matter of coming to higher ground. You see that the section begins with, "*And straight away...*" The Holy Spirit does not use words just for the sake of using them. He has an object. So when He says, "*and straight away*" it means that there is deliberateness about this. It is not as if the Lord Jesus said, "*Well now, we have fed these 5,000 people, what shall we do next? There are several things we might do, we might do this or that; what is the best thing to do?*" And then by thinking it over, "*We will do so and so; you get into the boat and I will send these people away.*" There is nothing haphazard in this. There is nothing casual about it. It is deliberate. He knows what He is going to do. He has this whole thing in His mind beforehand. It is not some sudden idea of a moment. This thing has been with Him and He has decided it, and so He is businesslike about it: "*And straight away...*" It is as though He said, "*Now that is done, we will go on with the next thing.*"

The word *constrained* can be translated *compelled*. He brought them under His constraint, under His compulsion. They were not left to do the thing which suggested itself to their own mind, and they were not left with any option. They were put under constraint to do this thing. He exercised an influence over them which left them with only one course to take, "*He constrained the disciples to enter into the boat*", etc. I say that in order that we might see that when they got out onto the lake and the storm arose, and they found themselves in difficulties and in troubles, it was all His deliberate direction. It was not that things were going wrong. It was

all according to plan. Now you may not be able to accept that, but get through to the end of the story and you will find it easier to accept.

He has brought them into this situation. It is under His influence that they are there, under His considered direction. He has not made a mistake. He has not dropped into a trap by being casual. No, He has done this thing deliberately and they are there because they are under His influence. In verse 24 the margin says they were "*many furlongs distant from the land,*" and again, believing that the Holy Spirit uses words wisely, it is important to recognize that there is something in saying that, in being so descriptive of what their position was. They were many furlongs from the land. They were completely cut off and separated from all that natural stability upon which men rest for their security and they were well out of every kind of natural resource. The Lord had put them there. This is what the cross does with you. It cuts out from under your feet all that speaks of the earth.

The church in the heavenlies

We have been speaking about the church becoming earthbound. In the letter to the Hebrews we are called into the heavenlies, the church off the earth, our feet well off, if you like suspended in mid-air, all the ground of confidence, all the ground of human resource taken away, all that organization and system of the church upon which men rely to maintain the church's work and life and testimony, the cross cuts it all away. And when the cross does that work and you come absolutely under the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, He sees to it that you are well out. You have no confidence in the flesh, and you have no resource in yourself, or in man. You are many furlongs from the land. Here *land* is that which speaks of the earth.

You remember that the church has become earthbound, trying to maintain its testimony as something here in this world, using this world, setting up something that this world can take note of, getting the patronage of this world, and that is all contrary to God's thought. God ever intended that the church ultimately should be something set up here on the earth, that the men of the world could take note of, or that believers could take account of as being something important here.

The outer representations of this thing ceased when Christ went to glory. Ecclesiastical architecture and all sorts of things passed when the New Testament came in. The Lord Jesus made that clear in the days of His flesh and all the meaning of it is now gathered up in His Person. "*Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father ... but in Spirit and in truth.*" And that is something like an invidious comparison. This is not the *true*, this is only the *type*. With the coming of the Person of Christ you come into the meaning of all that, and that which is but a temporary representation is passed.

The church now has nothing to do with this earth, only to bear testimony, that is all. And when you come really by way of the cross you are cut off just as much from your religious order as you are from your old unregenerate worldly order. You are brought out into a spiritual place in the heavenlies in Christ, and the cross does take you out. You realize it is no use trying to cling to the old thing, or look in that direction. You are right out and only the Lord can see you through now, but that is just what the Lord is after. That is the issue of the whole thing.

Well, they were many furlongs from land. Being well out they are in a realm where they meet spiritual forces and their conflict is not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness, and hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies. That is what they encounter. That is the nature of the storm.

This is made perfectly clear on another occasion when the Lord was asleep in the boat and there was a storm and they awoke Him, and after rebuking their unbelief He turned to what? ...He turned to something *back* of the wind and waves and said, "*Be muzzled.*" Literally in the *Greek* it was that. Not "*Peace, be still*" but "*Peace, be muzzled.*" Exactly the same words as

He used on another occasion when He was dealing with the demon possessed. He said to the demons, "*Be muzzled.*" It is the prince of the power of the air that is back of this thing. He is dealing with the spiritual background. That is where they are.

On that occasion in Luke 8:23 where the Lord was asleep in the boat, there is this difference. The Word tells us there was a sudden storm. It was like a sudden squall coming down on the lake, something rushing in all of a sudden. Oh yes, the enemy saw Him asleep and thought he had got a chance and rushed in to take advantage of what might only be for a few minutes, to engulf them all. In this case it is not a sudden squall, it is something that lasts, that goes on through the night to the fourth watch. This is something more dispensational, for the church, and what we know more of is the continuous persistence of the enemy right through the age to swamp, to drag down to the bottom. The enemy does not take holidays in this dispensation, he is at it all the time. It is the age-long conflict that is here typified. That is where they are, out in that realm.

That is where you arrive when you get into the heavenlies, when your feet are off the ground and you are under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, under His government. It is true. He Himself brings you there. It is all in the plan that the church should come out there because the church's battle is there, because its final triumph is there.

What is going to happen is that the church is going right through to a place of absolute ascendancy in Him over all the power of the enemy. And to get there experimentally, not doctrinally, but *actually*, you have to be out there. Well, you are not in the conflict by accident. This storm that is raging is not something that says everything has gone wrong. If you are out there under the sovereign control of your Lord, if you have come into this because you have placed yourself absolutely under His direction, because you have accepted the full meaning of the cross (to be cut off from yourself, and from the world, and from everything of nature, gone out with the Lord) and you find that there you meet the full force of the adversary, that is not because things have gone wrong. It is all in the divine plan. If only we recognized that every time.

The intercessory ministry of the Lord Jesus

We are going to come to higher ground. It is a blessed thought that He is praying up there, and that has a relationship to this down here. He knows all about it. "*He ever lives to make intercession.*" He is able to save to *completeness* (that is the word), to the *utmost*, because He ever lives to make intercession. Because He does not die He can carry on this thing right through, He can save to completeness. "*The God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus ... make you perfect...*" That is the same word *complete*. This is the issue of the letter to the Hebrews. God's issue to this conflict is completeness in Christ, finality: "*... make you complete in every good thing to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.*" Unto what end? "*To whom be the glory...*" the glory of the Lord.

Going back to Matthew 14 we see the Lord Jesus praying. Let us make a great deal more of the intercessory ministry of our Lord Jesus in heaven than we have made of it. We shall be surprised when we get to heaven how much we owe to the prayers of the Lord Jesus while we were here in the battle, in the conflict. We thank God for all who pray for us. I never cease to thank God, for there are a great many people who pray for me. I continually seek to stand in the virtue and value of that praying. But there is this which He also is praying and if ever there was the fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man, that prayer is His prayer and it avails much in its working.

While we are in the storm He is praying. These things are related. What He secured in the mountain we are going to be brought into. We are going to get to that higher ground because He is on it and He is going to bring us to it. That is the effect of this chapter. When He

came to them in the fourth watch of the night walking on the water, He was in the ascendancy over all the power of the enemy, on top of all the devil's work.

He attained His position typically in the mount. We will only attain ascendancy as we are in the mount in prayer. He came to them in virtue of His own spiritual elevation, above things, and then He drew out their hearts to Himself and joined Himself with them in the storm — yes, it was an imperfect, unsatisfactory end so far as they were concerned, but there was this issue: *“they worshipped Him and said, of a truth thou art the Son of God.”*

They came into a new apprehension of Him and that was no small gain. The Lord Jesus has these men in His school, training them in the light of a coming day. He knows the day is coming and He will presently say, *“It is expedient for you that I go away”* (John 16:7). That day is coming when He will be in the mount and they will be down here in the storm, and the enemy will assail, and He knows the only thing to bring them through will be faith tested, proved, and tried. He is training faith for that coming day when He will be above and they will be here in the storm, and this thing, the deliberateness and apparent cruelty of it all is *training with the end in view*.

The Lord has the end in view

The Lord always takes the long view and He does things which I cannot understand, and which the enemy would interpret to us as being contrary to wisdom and love on His part, things which are exceedingly difficult to understand or appreciate. He does them with a long view, as equipment for a coming day. We have to do things sometimes as parents with a long view. If we took the short view just for a moment we would not do some of the things we do, our hearts would fail us.

There are times when parents have to be very firm and deliberate and to seem to the child to be cruel, unkind, and if the child did but know it, it is more painful and costly to the parent than to them. If the parent were only to take the short view the parent would give way, but the parent looks ahead and sees what will happen if this is ignored now, if this thing is unchecked, undisciplined, then it is going to be for the entire impoverishment of that child. The child will lack respect, will suffer in the coming days because of that, his life will be of much less value. So the parent takes the long view and has to do the seemingly unkind thing now.

If that is true of us, that is infinitely more true of the Lord, who knows the end from the beginning, who knows far more than we do what is ahead. Thus the Lord Jesus was deliberate about this thing. He threw them out, as it were, into this conflict, trained them to bring their faith to a place where it laid hold of Him in recognition of who He is, what He is, in a deeper apprehension of Him, that in a coming day that faith might carry them through.

And then they might say, *“We have proved that through experiences like this when the enemy rages and everything seems to be threatening our destruction, God gets much out of it for His glory and these times are rich in their fruits and the Lord will not be the loser but the gainer.”* That is the faith of the apostle later on. After the Lord went to the glory and was up there praying for them, they got out into the sea. When they broke with Judaism and were well out there because of His sovereignty, in the place which the Hebrew letter speaks of, *“outside the camp”* (another metaphor of being outside the worldly system), the enemy had assailed, the storm broke, but what carried them through? They had known the Lord, had proved the Lord, had come to the place where faith knew that the worst thing that ever the devil could do turns out to the glory of God.

Calvary looked as if the devil had triumphed, yet they have come to know a Risen Lord, glorified. What more can the devil do when that is rooted in you, when you know that his last stroke of hatred, animosity, wrath has been met and the issue is Christ in glory. You see, that is what the Lord is after. The Lord is seeking to bring us onto higher ground and the higher ground

for us in this connection is being truly, utterly with the Lord where only the Lord can be our resource, and we know that the raging tempest of enemy adversity, assault and bitterness, is going to work out for the glory of God. That is higher ground and we are bound to come there because He is up there praying.

It is a great spiritual gain when any child of God gets to the place where they can say in the face of the blast, *"This will be gain not loss; this will be glory not shame; this will be victory not defeat because there is One who has gone through and on the ground of His own triumph He is interceding on our behalf."* That is high ground and we need to come onto that. It represents something more than faith being developed. It represents power over all the power of the enemy. There is a mighty effectiveness about faith. It is a mighty thing. It affects things and reaches the rim of the universe. It touches all the forces of hell. That is not difficult to prove. If you care to go into it further you will find that the whole triumph of Satan in the course of the ages has been based upon unbelief and its resultant activity and disobedience. All Satan's work is based upon that. That is where he started: unbelief and resultant disobedience. What havoc in the universe was brought about by unbelief!

Dependence upon God

The Lord Jesus came down to a human level to take up the whole question of faith in God, accepted a life of faith in God, a life of absolute dependence upon the Father, voluntarily decided He would never do anything out of His own judgment, at His own instigation. He never would speak or act except by getting His instructions from the Father. His course might seem obvious, but He would not move until He had gone to the Father about it. He exercised absolute obedience of faith and waited for the instant when the Father would give Him witness that He could do a thing: *"Go up to the feast," "I go not up,"* etc. And He is not deceiving them. No, He is waiting on the Father for the Father's witness in His spirit that He should go up.

Whatever might be the construction that they would put upon His action in seeming to go back upon His word, seeming to be even untruthful, whatever they might say about *"He only wanted to get rid of us,"* He accepted all that and would not move until He had His word from the Father because He had come to break unbelief in man, had come to destroy unbelief in humanity.

He went right through to the cross and in the depths of temptation to doubt, the cry wrung out from Him, *"Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"*, His faith almost trembling then. But He broke through in triumph and the next moment, *"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."* *Man* has triumphed in the realm of all hell's assaults to break faith, and He has taken back to the glory a faith which is perfect, and this is the faith of the Son of God. This is the basis of our triumph. This is our union with Him that is going to see us through and as we see that *Man* in the glory interceding, we know He is interceding on the ground of something already accomplished, to be made good in us.

It involves exercise. These Hebrews were finding the climbing out of systems rather difficult, but that is what is involved and it is out there we learn to prove the Lord, out there that faith comes to the place where it also triumphs in Christ over all the power of the enemy. Shall we not say with the hymn-writer J. Oatman, *"Lord, lift me up and let me stand, by faith on heaven's tableland?"*

Chapter 3

The Cross and the Higher Ground of Fellowship

Reading: Ezra 3:1-13; 1 Chron. 12:38-40; 1 Cor. 2:2; 3:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:14-17.

We have already considered our subject along two lines, but what we are seeing is that the Lord has as His supreme thought for His people, their occupying of the high places, to be with Him on high, an exalted people, an elevated people in a right and proper sense and that, having been very fully revealed in His Word. As we approach the end time He will lay a new emphasis upon the matter of coming up higher, that the ascension, the rapture of the church must be hand in hand with a spiritual rising up, a spiritual ascendancy, a spiritual taking of higher positions in the Lord.

The Lord would say to His people more and more strongly and definitely, *"Come up to Me in the mount."* And so we want, in some measure at least, to contemplate the higher ground to which the Lord would bring us, and in this chapter the word is in connection with the cross and the higher ground of fellowship. Before very long you and I and all the Lord's people have got to live together for all eternity at very close quarters. We had better get ready for it, and that represents high ground. Yes, very high ground spiritually and morally, and I am feeling so strongly for my own part, that we *must* take higher ground in the matter of fellowship. It is becoming absolutely imperative. If we do not, I do not know what is going to happen to us. We are going to be marked by a great deal of weakness and defeat. Our testimony is going to be bereft of power and the full weight and impact of a corporate witness is going to be destroyed. One of the most essential things to the testimony of the Lord Jesus in the church, which is *His Body*, is that the church should live on heavenly ground in the matter of fellowship. And when we read and so often quote the words, *"in the heavenlies in Christ,"* we are very much in danger of getting into an abstract realm of mentally, of interpreting the words and ideas as having some meaning of being in the clouds, being off the earth. We have not taken hold of those words and brought them right down to practical business in everyday life, living here on the earth in the heavenlies.

How often we have pointed out that in that very letter which is so much occupied with the heavenlies, *Ephesians*, the Holy Spirit through the apostle brings in right at the heart of that letter the various relationships of the Lord's people here on the earth: husbands and wives, children and parents and masters and servants. This is not a sudden swoop down from the heavenlies to the earthlies. This is a relating of the two and showing that all these things which may be regarded as the commonplaces of life are to be lifted into a heavenly realm and are to be brought onto higher ground. They themselves will be the very means and occasion for defeat in the Lord's people unless they are brought onto higher ground.

Opposition to higher ground

And so the matter of fellowship and of relationships must be brought onto higher ground for the testimony's sake. The low ground is always the devil's ground and it is always the ground which gives him the occasion for which he is looking to make havoc of the Lord's people and of the Lord's testimony as bound up with them. The one objective of the adversary is the destruction of fellowship amongst the Lord's people and of the Lord's Testimony as bound up with them. You have only to survey the whole course of things from the beginning to see that if there is one thing against which the enemy has moved with all the resources at his command, it has been with a diabolical persistence against the fellowship of God's people.

The Lord has declared the minimum of His Testimony. You cannot divide one but you can divide two. One is *unity*, two is *testimony*, and the Lord begins with testimony always in two. He sent them forth two by two. *"If two of you shall agree on earth ..."* He begins with two and the

enemy does not require that there should be the 100. If he has only two he will exhaust all his ingenuity to get in between the two. That represents witness, testimony. That represents fellowship. He is against that. To deprive him of his power to weaken, to dishonor the Lord's testimony, we must take higher ground in the matter of fellowship. And we have to see a little of what that higher ground is and what is involved in taking it. We are speaking about the cross and higher ground and we begin by making the simple basic statement that the cross is the basis of fellowship.

The cross itself is the very basis of fellowship. It is the basis of fellowship in this way that the death of the Lord Jesus sets all that is of nature on one side. It is that which is of nature which provides the enemy with what he needs for destroying fellowship. To destroy him and his power and his work there must be a setting aside of the very ground which he demands, and in the death of the Lord Jesus that ground is set aside.

Man by nature is set aside in the death of the Lord Jesus. We have read it in 2 Cor. 5: *"The love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge that if One died for all, then all died in Him, that they which live should henceforth live not unto themselves ... wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh ... there is a new creation ..."* Henceforth not unto themselves ... knowing no man after the flesh. You see that the cross (the death of the Lord Jesus includes us in it -- we died in Him) is the setting aside of man by nature. That is a great fact declared but that is also a very real test of how much we have spiritually and truly entered into the death of the Lord Jesus. This will find us out and the test of our death in the death of the Lord Jesus is just how far we transcend what is of nature in one another and live in spiritual fellowship.

It is very practical, this life in the heavenlies. It is how far we get above one another naturally and find one another in the spirit and stay there, how far we take the low ground of being affected by one another's natures naturally, by the old Adam in each other, or how far by the grace of God and in the energy of the Spirit we rise above that, repudiate that and abide in fellowship on resurrection ground. That is a test of our death with the Lord Jesus. That is a test of our doctrine of the cross, and it is a very practical test. The death of the Lord Jesus has set aside all worldly standpoints in relationships. As men judge, as men behave, as men react towards one another, as men make their selections and choices by their preferences, all that is set aside. That is the world's level of things, and in the death of the Lord Jesus we have died to that in the matter of relationships.

Selectiveness set aside by the cross

I am preaching at my own heart far more strongly than to you. Natural and carnal preferences and selectiveness must be set aside if we are going to be true to our doctrine of the cross. If we really do mean what we say about identification with Christ in death, then all those preferences which come up in us according to nature, all that selectiveness among people, influenced, directed, controlled by what we naturally like or dislike, that has got to go. The cross has got to deal with all that and we have got to get above it. So much is bound up with this. It is higher ground. It represents the higher ground of spiritual maturity. We are beginning to grow up in the Lord when we occupy this ground.

The apostle said to the Corinthian believers who were not on this higher ground, *"I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, babes. I fed you with milk and not with meat ..."* Babes, occupying the low ground of *"I prefer Paul"* and others: *"I prefer Apollos,"* and others: *"I prefer Peter,"* and others: *"Well, I prefer Christ,"* making Christ a party. That is spiritual infancy, immaturity.

When you grow up you occupy higher ground where those things cease, and I want to say that this is not a matter of years. This is not necessarily a matter of time. In the natural very often as we get older, those stronger feelings of youth in this realm in some measure pass

away. We learn to judge and regard people in a different way. When we were younger we had very strong likes and dislikes in the realm of people. We selected our friends and avoided others, but we are learning to act differently as we grow older. Some people in the matter of many years do not get out of that old childishness, but normally it is so.

In the spiritual realm it need not be a matter of time, and young men and women should attain spiritual maturity in this matter. Young people are influenced and swayed by strong preferences for people in the natural realm, setting up strong friendships which, while there may be nothing wrong in that, work out to the exclusion of other children of the Lord. That violates the one great truth, that of our oneness in the Lord Jesus and that we are one family.

If you who in nature by reason of your youth would be influenced so strongly by likes and dislikes about people, even the Lord's children, and preferences and selectiveness, could reach the higher ground of this fellowship with every one child of God, bringing all into the realm of mutual love and consideration, you have reached spiritual maturity in a wonderful way beyond your years. This is where the Lord would have you. You know that we have been seeing that this higher ground is all with one end in view: the glory of the Lord Jesus.

I think there are few things more calculated to reveal the glory of the Lord Jesus than brethren dwelling together in love: *"How beautiful a thing it is to see brethren dwelling together in unity; it is like the precious ointment ..."* It is the Lord who says that. The thing that is precious to the Lord is this, the high ground of fellowship where the cross sets aside what is of nature in the matter of *relationships*.

The cross and gathering together

You notice in Ezra 3, the Passover was the great cause and occasion for the people coming out of their separate cities to one city, and coming up to that city. Jerusalem is a city upon a hill. Zion is always in elevation. It is always presented to us as a place high up. *"Whither the tribes go up"* represents ascendancy. It says in the seventh month the people were in their cities but they went up out of their cities to Jerusalem and the occasion was the Passover.

When Christ crucified becomes the central and supreme Object of our hearts it is not difficult for us to leave our own separate position and come together with all the Lord's children. You have to have a center which is strong enough to draw you away from your separateness, your isolation, from the things which occupy you as your own things. The trouble at Corinth was that they all sought their own things, not the things which were Christ's. But here, Christ crucified is drawing the people together, and what a time it was. There was great joy in Israel and they had a great time, blessed, happy fellowship because there was one center, God's high place with the Lord Jesus in view. They came out of their own cities and were gathered together unto the Lord.

Come to Corinth again and that is just what you have. Paul has come into a place where people are, so to speak, spiritually and morally in their own cities, *"I am of Paul,"* etc. They are all in their own circle. Now, says the apostle, *"I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* That is the remedy, the higher ground will be occupied and there will be blessed fellowship, and all divisions and schisms will disappear when *Christ crucified* is only and fully in view. The cross is the basis of fellowship and Christ crucified is placed right over against the divisions that were at Corinth.

And you notice in 2 Corinthians 5, relationships are to be regulated by our death with Christ, and our resurrection in Him. *"All died in Him ... henceforth know we no man after the flesh."* Relationships regulated by that death. It is the easiest thing in the world for us to know one another after the flesh. We are so accustomed to it. But there has got to be a deliberateness about this business. The flesh in one another comes out at us. The natural make-up of one another strikes us. It is there, probably always will be there, and I wonder where

those disciples would have been if the Lord had taken account of them as we take account of one another! Oh, what a business He had with the natural side of those men.

But He refused to take that as the ultimate thing. He knew that there was going to be something else. He knew what His cross would do with those men and He held them onto the cross because He knew that it would make all the difference. And afterwards it was proved that the cross had made all the difference in them, and He refused to abandon them on the natural side because He knew that there would be a spiritual side resultant from His cross. And He was holding on for that and to that. And, *“Henceforth,”* the apostle says, *“we know no man after the flesh.”* That is the higher ground that we must deliberately take. I must take it. You must take it.

The issue will arise again and again from day to day that in one another the natural features will come out and our natural features will meet those natural features with a strong dislike and the peril at that moment is the break in spirit, the rift in fellowship. The great opportunity of such a moment is for us to repudiate that and say, *“Yes, but that is a child of God, in that one the Lord is resident; I must trust all that natural side to the Lord, leave it to Him. My business is to seek to maintain as much fellowship as I possibly can with that child of God on the spiritual side. Although a thousand times that thing may come out and seek to drive me to the place where I cannot go on with them, I must hold on trusting the Lord that He has something there which is precious to Himself, and if I let go it will be defeat, the testimony will be let down, and so I stand with what is of God.”*

I believe as we take that ground we shall be surprised at the wonderful fruit that will come out of a new kind of fellowship. The other course means desolation and barrenness. You will never get anything out of that course, constantly living in that realm where all the time you are chafing against the natural side of people with whom you have to have contact, taking account of it. It leads nowhere, it means desolation, it means barrenness; but when we take this other side, we have to leave all those matters with the Lord and trust Him. We cannot crucify other people’s flesh. We must not try — it is the Holy Spirit’s work. For us it is to take the positive side and then we shall be surprised that so much was possible. Fruit will come out of that side and what seemed to be a wilderness may be made to blossom as a rose.

The cross is the basis of fellowship. The Christ enthroned is the bond of fellowship. We read in 1 Chronicles 12 when they came with one heart to make David King in Hebron, they sat down to eat and drink for three days. Their brethren made provision and those all round came along to make this fellowship a success. That is a wonderful picture of fellowship. Why? Because God’s king is in his right place and he is the center and object of all hearts. What was it that brought these people together in that wonderful oneness? It was the center, David, the king.

Paul sought to put the Lord Jesus in His place amongst the Corinthians. He sought to stand aside. *“Who is Paul?”* said he. It was not that Paul was jealous of Apollos or Peter. He deals with himself in exactly the same way and says, *“Who am I? Who is Paul? It is not Paul or Peter that matters, it is Christ that matters.”*

The glory of God and fellowship

Earlier in Exodus 24 we saw Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy elders of Israel going up to the Lord in the mountain and we read that *“they did eat and drink in the presence of the Lord.”* An extraordinary thing! That is not mundane, that is not vulgar, eating and drinking in the presence of the Lord. Here seventy men with one or two others are sitting down and literally having a feast in the presence of the God of Israel in His glory. There is no conflict in those ideas, but what was the thing that was in view? They saw the God of Israel and under His feet, as it were, a sapphire stone, and, as it were, the very heaven for clearness. And we saw that that sapphire stone represents the universal glory of the Lord Jesus. Therefore the

meaning of that incident is this, that when the universal glory of the Lord Jesus is the dominating feature, then there is fellowship and feasting together, and fellowship is only possible by the Lord Jesus having His place.

When God's King is in His right place in our hearts the resultant fellowship is very wonderful. What is the opposite of fellowship? Well, that which makes the contrary — divisions, strife, separations — is jealousy. What is jealousy? Wanting something for yourself. Envy? Pride? All these things lie behind wars, strife and divisions, and they all come back to self. "I," says Paul, "I". When the Lord Jesus has supplanted self in our hearts, when He is enthroned as Lord, when we are taken up with Him, dominated by Him, spontaneously we will have love for one another. We will stop our selectiveness. That will cease in the measure in which the Lord Jesus is the dominating, governing reality of our hearts, our devotion.

Find the man or woman in whose heart the Lord Jesus really reigns, any life whose heart has been completely captured by the Lord Jesus, and that one has love for everybody and they love the unlovely and bear and forbear with the difficult. There may be some like that here. I want to be more like that ... *Higher ground*, and the higher ground is God's King reigning in His place in our hearts. That is fellowship. If Christ really has captured our hearts there will be fellowship and love on this higher ground where jealousy, envy and pride and all such things have been left with the lowlands. We have climbed out of that when we see Him. It must be the high ground of Christ's exaltation in our hearts.

Fellowship and the testimony of Jesus

In Exodus there were three movements in relation to the tabernacle. We know that that tabernacle was meant to be a setting forth of the Lord Jesus. It was Christ set forth according to God's thought, and there were three movements in relation to it. Firstly, all the people had individually to bring an offering, secondly they had to make the tabernacle, and thirdly Moses set the vessels in their right places and put the tabernacle together. That is what makes the Testimony of Jesus. First of all the individuals have to bring their offering. They are bringing something personally and individually which is a feature of Christ related to all the other features to make up the whole. Now the question is, "*What am I bringing on my part as an offering of the features of Christ to contribute to the whole setting forth of Christ according to God's thought?*"

We may perhaps be able to bring more than one kind of offering but at least the Lord would have in us one grace which betokens the Lord Jesus. Different Christians are marked by specific graces. In one you will see a wonderful reality of divine patience, in another a wonderful expression of divine love, and you go through all the features of Christ and you find that different children of God are marked in a special way by one feature of Christ and that is their offering. It cannot stand alone. That is only a part of Christ. Christ is not all patience. He is something else as well, not to the contrary, but there are many other graces and we all have to bring our offering for the whole testimony. That is, a part of Christ which is our contribution to the whole representation of Christ.

What am I bringing of Christ to the testimony? What are you bringing of Christ to the testimony? So often when we pray in that testimony to the oneness of the Body, that testimony which is borne among us, the Holy Spirit leads us to lay very special emphasis upon some special grace in that life. Sometimes the Lord holds us up as we pray in the matter of love, that this one may be specially marked by the love of God. That may be a special feature of Christ as His testimony there. In another, wisdom. And so the Holy Spirit would have not just isolated fruits in us but He would have every one of us making a definite contribution to the whole testimony of Jesus.

They had to bring their offerings personally and then they had to make the tabernacle, and that represents the *working-at-it* side, exercise. These divine graces are not developed in

us without real exercise in our hearts. We have got to get before the Lord about this: *“Lord, you want in me the feature of divine love.”*

Now before the Lord there has to be heart exercise about that, a daily working in the presence of God on that matter of Christ-likeness. We have to work at it, make the tabernacle, make the testimony. And then Moses puts the vessels in their right places and sets up the tabernacle. Oh, but that is the last thing. Let the Lord Jesus stand in the place of Moses, and He brings all things together and puts them into their right place, controls everything and sets up the whole testimony to His glory. He will do that when we do our part, when we first of all bring our offering and contribution to the testimony.

When we are engaged in spiritual exercise about this thing we will find the Lord just fitting it all in in a wonderful way and relating it to all the rest, and there will be a corporate setting up of a very blessed manifestation of Christ. That is fellowship, and He will put love and administration together. If it were all administration there would be a great deal of law. He will put Moses and Aaron together... Paul and Barnabas, love and administration. The Lord will just put you together in a way that there is a complement, a fitting in, but each of us has to stand in our own place, bringing our own offering, by exercise. That we should on our part represent the Lord Jesus in some special way. That is the way of testimony, of witness, of fellowship. That is higher ground.

Now I must stop there, not having finished this matter. I am anxious this should come home to our hearts and we should see the tremendous importance for the sake of the testimony of our Lord Jesus, for the sake of the undoing of the work of the devil, for every good sake, that in the Lord's Name we should take higher ground in the matter of fellowship. Begin to do it now. If you have a strain, a rift, a break between you and that has been brought about by some fleshly reaction on your part, say, *“Look here, we were in the flesh when that came about. That was done in the old Adam life of things. We will put that right.”* Make this thing a practical matter and apply this truth. Deal with the Lord on this thing. If you are finding it difficult to get on with some child of God because of the natural expression, go and take higher ground for more grace. Do not say it is impossible and we cannot hope for anything better. Believe that all things are possible by the grace of God and you will be surprised at what comes out of it. Do believe this and take higher ground now in the matter of fellowship because we have got to live together forever at close quarters and the Lord must bring us into a spiritual condition for that. There will be only one street in the New Jerusalem. You cannot live up a side street in the New Jerusalem. There is only one street!

Chapter 4

The Foundation of a Life of Victory in Christ

Reading: Numbers 23:7-10, 18-24; 24:3-9, 15-25; 22:1-41; 23:1-3, 21, 23; Gal. 3:13; Rom. 8:1.

We have been occupied so far with the matter of the cross and higher ground, seeing that the Lord is seeking to have His people occupied on higher ground with Himself spiritually and morally, and that this especially relates to the time of the end when the Lord Jesus will appear in glory and call to meet Him in the air those who are looking for His appearing. Literally, translation to be with the Lord on high must always be in company with a spiritual state of elevation. A state is required in the Lord's people which is the spiritual counterpart of that literal event, that they are already spiritually occupying the high places, that they may come literally to occupy *the* high place with the Lord. And we believe that we are in the end time, that everything is pointing towards the hour of His appearing, and so we expect that He will gather His people together and call them spiritually higher up, onto higher ground, and that is the call which is engaging our attention in these chapters. The word of the gospel has its touch for unsaved ones as well as for the Lord's people. And so we come to this matter of the cross and higher ground, and in this chapter we want to see the foundation of a life of victory in Christ. That there *is* such a life hardly needs to be stressed here. The Lord has made it evidently clear through His Word that there is a life of victory for His people, and we simply take that as a fact without arguing or seeking to prove it. What we do seek to do as the Lord enables is to see the foundation of it, what is basic to it.

A people in victory

The passages which we have been reading all bear upon that in a wonderful way. Coming back to these portions of the Old Testament in the book of Numbers, we have that part where Israel, the people of God, having come out of Egypt in the power of the blood of the Lamb slain, having been separated unto God, have now gone beyond Jordan and are in the presence of their foes, which foes are taking account of them quite seriously as being a real menace to their dominion in the earth. And Balak, king of Moab, recognizes that these people of God represent a great threat to his kingdom and to the very existence of his nation as a people. He uses very strong words in expressing what he feels about them, that they will *"lick up the inhabitants of the earth as the ox licks up the grass"* (Num. 22:4). That is the appraisal that He makes concerning Israel, and he recognizes that a people in victory is indeed a menace to his kingdom. We hardly need to have that interpreted in New Testament light. There is an enemy who has a kingdom. To him and his kingdom a people in victory represent a threat and a danger. And it would not be going too far to say that that enemy has already measured the significance of that people in victory unto the degree of wiping him out. The Word of God makes it perfectly clear that that is going to be the issue. It is that a people in full victory, the people of God, the church, the Body of Christ, will ultimately rid this earth of the enemy kingdom. It will be through the church, His Body, that this kingdom will be wiped out. And the enemy knows quite well victorious Christians are the greatest menace to his existence, a threat to his whole kingdom, and that is what is here as typified in Balak and Moab. And so he has to consider how best he can nullify these people, how best he can cripple them, rob them of their power, destroy their effectiveness, frustrate the end which he sees is threatening him. He comes to one conclusion, that if only he can bring these people under the power and operation of a curse, they are done for and he is safe.

The blood and victory

Knowing of a man who has a spirit of prophecy, and who has power to bless and to curse in the Name of the Lord, he sends for that man Balaam saying, *“Come there is a people come up out of Egypt, come curse them for me.”* We know the rest of the story, we need not go through all the details of Balaam’s curse, but we come to some striking, significant and wonderfully blessed things in this story which lead us into the New Testament with new appreciation. The last verse of chapter 22 shows that Balak took Balaam up into the high places of Baal. These are the high places of the enemy. Before the Lord has done with them they will be captured for the Lord and turned against the enemy for the good of His own people. That is what the Lord is always doing for His own, those who trust Him. The Lord takes hold of those mountains of Satanic opposition and adversity and makes them mountains of blessing to us. Balaam is taken up into the high places and he looks from the high places and sees the uttermost part of the camp of Israel, and then under the sovereign government and control of God, not being allowed to speak his own words, he begins to utter things about Israel which are very wonderful things when you think about them. And *one* of them, which we have read, is full of wonderful value, Num. 23:21: *“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel.”* Was there no iniquity in Jacob? Was there no perverseness in Israel? Why, half the Old Testament is taken up with the iniquity and perverseness of Jacob and in Israel, but it clearly states, *“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob nor perverseness in Israel.”* The people of Israel in themselves were full of iniquity, full of perverseness. It is strikingly impressive to notice how the name Jacob is used here. *Jacob* is Israel’s old name, the name of the man in the flesh. Here he is in a position where God does not see iniquity or perverseness in him — and yet it was there — but God did not see it. Something has happened that God should not see it, and that is the heart of the whole story, that is the heart of the gospel. While in themselves there was much iniquity and much perverseness, whenever they came from underneath their covering by the precious blood and whenever they are found in a state of rebellion of heart, God Himself charges them with those very things, iniquity and perverseness. But while they abide in their covenant fellowship with Him, while they are under the shelter of that precious blood, while they walk in the light as He is in the light, God no longer sees iniquity and perverseness, no longer lays it to their charge: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”*

Two things had happened with Israel here. They had come out of Egypt and gone over Jordan. They had come out of the kingdom of darkness and through Jordan, and in their union with Christ typically in His death, burial and resurrection, they had been translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love and brought into the place of His triumph. They were out from Egypt. They were over Jordan, and we here of course know quite well the typical meaning of Egypt, the Red Sea, and Jordan. They are in a position by reason of the blood which had been shed and appropriated for their deliverance from the power of the enemy, and they had been brought into the place of victory by having been crucified with Christ as represented in Jordan. And that position which appropriates all the work of the Lord Jesus in His cross on their behalf, their faith acceptance of it, their faith standing in it, that position for ever meant that what they were in nature, full of iniquity and perverseness, was not taken account of by God, but that all the moral excellencies and spiritual glory of the Lord Jesus into Whom they were typically baptized, was laid to their account and covered up what they were by nature.

God beheld not iniquity or perverseness. I think it is a wonderful thing. I must confess that when I first began to seriously read the Bible and came on this very passage in the book of Numbers it held me up for a bit and I could not get round it: *“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob nor perverseness in Israel.”* I said to myself, *“There is some conjuring here somehow, for if I read the Bible rightly I see a good deal of iniquity and perverseness,”* and I had to come to see how God, who sees everything, did not see that. And we have come to see that God, in what He

has done in and through His Son in the cross, has put away all iniquity and all perverseness on our behalf, and that when we take all Calvary's work by faith and stand in the good of it, trusting Him, He no longer sees us as we are in nature. He sees us as we are in Christ and all the ground of condemnation is done away. That is very simple Gospel, I trust simple enough for everyone to understand, but that is how God gets over this difficulty of not seeing us as we are naturally, and not seeing that thing which is in us by nature but seeing us as though we had never sinned at all and as though there never was any sin in us at all. God has done something to make that not a bit of make-believe, but of glorious working reality for us.

The curse nullified by the cross

That calls us to focus our attention upon another mount where it was all done. There in the book of Numbers is the mountain upon which Balak and Balaam stood. It is first of all by the enemy meant to be constituted *the mount of a curse*. God comes in and makes the mount of a curse a *mountain of blessing*, and from that mountain top you can look down the ages and see another mount, a green hill outside a city wall where our dear Lord was crucified, and on that mountain the curse destroyed itself.

We have read in Gal. 3:13, "*Christ was made a curse for us,*" that is, in our stead. He was made a curse in our stead. He who knew no sin was made sin in our stead, in our place, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. On that mount the curse which rested upon the whole race (and rests upon you and me by nature now if we are outside of Christ) was taken by the Lord Jesus and worked out to the full, exhausted and burned out, so to speak, in Him, so that there was no more curse left because He was made a curse. He gathered up in His own Person all the ground of the curse, every bit of ground upon which the curse could rest and did rest. He gathered it into His own representative and Holy Person, and so the ground being there on Him, not *in* Him but *on* Him, the curse with all its judgment, all its destruction, came down upon Him.

"Jehovah lifted up His rod, O Christ, it fell on Thee. Jehovah bade His sword awake, O Christ, it woke against Thee." The curse was finished on the person of a representative One on that mount. He was made a curse for us. And when you destroy the curse by taking away the very ground of a curse there is no more condemnation, the very ground of condemnation has been taken away and condemnation is robbed of all its power.

Now, it is a high place to reach the appropriation of that. We are found spiritually on a mountain when we really get hold of that. I may speak to the most matured and advanced believer and say that. I would say it to the unsaved, to the young believer, and I would say it to the oldest and most advanced believer, that it is high ground to occupy, to really have that in the grip of your faith. It is ascendancy. That is the point. It is ascendancy over the power of the enemy. It is high ground. It is elevation to be there and I am quite sure that all of us need to possess that high ground more thoroughly, more truly in our hearts. For you see, a curse in the Scriptures is that which always brings crippling and paralyzing. You notice immediately there was a curse pronounced at the beginning by the work of Satan. Everything was paralyzed, all nature was paralyzed and there has never since that day to this yet been a full realization of destiny on the part of any bit of the creation. In Romans 8 we see that the whole creation was subjected to vanity. Vanity there means it was caused to labor in vain. It never reached the end for which it groaned and for which it was created and it never will until the Lord Jesus universally has His place, until there is a full redemption of the whole creation.

Nothing has ever yet arrived at fullness in this creation since the day that a curse was pronounced upon it and upon man. Man has never yet reached his destiny and never outside Christ will he do so because this curse has caused the reign of vanity to come in. On other separate occasions you have instances of a curse. You remember when Achan took the

Babylonian garment and the wedge of gold from Jericho and hid them in his tent. A curse was pronounced and everything that Achan had, all his possessions and his family, had to be brought to an end. There could be no going on. And then Jericho was overthrown, destroyed, and the word of the Lord says, *“Cursed be the man who builds this city, with the death of his firstborn shall he set up his gates.”*

A curse was pronounced upon Jericho. And when you come to the life of the prophet Elisha, the people of Jericho come to him and say that the city is good, is pleasing, but the waters are bad and the trees cast their fruit before their time. The fruit of a curse worked in this way. Nothing came through to maturity, nothing came to the full end. It failed before its time, man falling into his grave before he has reached that point of full development which God intended for Him. A curse always paralyzes, nullifies, and brings about barrenness and desolation.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us.” In His cross He took the curse upon Himself as He took up a position of representing the accursed race and destroyed the power of the curse in His own Being. And now it is possible for us to come right through to the full realization of all that God eternally intended for man. And God is said to have eternally intended, before this world was, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. The curse got in the way of that, it nullified that, it paralyzed that, but now the curse has been removed in the cross of the Lord Jesus. It is a high place to come to, to apprehend that. It is possible, and the possibility is so thoroughly established as to have already been realized in the first One of those men of that new creation. He is the firstborn among many brethren and as man He has been perfected to be the representative and the forerunner of all those sons whom He will bring to glory. And God has secured that thing in One and because He has done it in One He can do it in all the race. Now we have to come to the practical application of this, for we have got to see that a curse, while it is always something that paralyzes and destroys, always comes about by contact with something cursed.

Deliverance from condemnation

Satan was cursed and man entered into a kind of agreement with him at the beginning, and man came under the curse that rested upon Satan. That is a thing to recognize. God never intended man to go to hell, but if man voluntarily associates himself with one for whom hell was created, there is no alternative. He becomes cursed because he is related to a cursed one and the curse comes upon him.

Jericho and all who were in that city were cursed by God. If Achan takes the cursed thing he comes under the curse and must perish. What then is the way of deliverance? It is the way of separation, and that is a feature of this story. Balak says, *“There is a people come up out of Egypt,”* and Balaam in his prophecy twice says, *“God brought them out of Egypt.”* And then they were over Jordan. Typically they were separated unto God from all that upon which the curse rested and, therefore, the curse could not be applied to them. And Balaam had to say, *“You cannot bring these people under a curse. They are separated unto God by that lamb slain, that precious shed and sprinkled blood, by that typical death in Jordan.”* Separation unto God from the old creation, and from the world, is the way of deliverance from condemnation and from paralysis.

The apostle said in the Galatian letter, *“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”* Separation from where the curse is by the cross of the Lord Jesus, brought out onto ground of glorying in life triumphant in Christ, on the high ground of no condemnation. Condemnation is a low ground, it is the ground where the enemy operates to paralyze the people of God.

When shall we sufficiently apprehend the good of this, that if truly we have by faith laid hold of all that the Lord Jesus Christ did for us in His cross, we have been put into the position where the very ground of accusation and condemnation has been put entirely away and there is no condemnation? For there are multitudes of the Lord's people who are on that low ground of condemnation, still living under accusation, and the enemy is paralyzing them because they have allowed themselves to come under the effect of the curse. In their minds, in their imaginations, they have not persistently maintained the position that in Christ they are cut off from all that, that there is no condemnation. There is defeat, paralysis, helplessness because of accepting a ground from which the cross of the Lord Jesus has severed them, cut them off, and delivered them.

Of course it is a challenge to our position. Have we really come out by faith through Jordan in virtue of the precious blood from the old creation? Have we repudiated that and seen that Christ is the way out for us, and that in Christ there is a new creation, and we are in Christ? Are we separated utterly unto God from the world? If so, the condemnation of the enemy is broken for us and he now recognizes that we are in a position which represents a terrible menace to him. What he is out to do is to bring us back again onto a ground of condemnation and accusation.

The enemy does not give you up when he has lost you. He follows you to bring you back. If only he can lodge in your mind some ground of condemnation and get you to accept condemnation and accusation you will soon be down, paralyzed. But faith must take the high place of justification. It is a high place because it represents not only something which is a delight to our own hearts but it represents the undoing of all the work of the devil. It breaks his power. His power can only operate upon the ground of condemnation. If he can get us there again, in defeat, he will. By faith stand on justification ground in Christ and he has no power.

These chapters in the book of Numbers represent a people in strength. Twice it says, "*He hath the strength of a wild ox ... like a lion.*" Here is strength, power, dominion. And all because they stood upon justification ground where God sees no iniquity and perverseness. It is a strong, high position to be in to really apprehend the first effect of our salvation, that we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus. We want to hold onto that ground because it is revealed by the Word of God that when the Lord finally deals with the enemy He will deal with him as *the accuser*. This means that his work of accusation will go right on to the end and that he will seek to the last moment in an awful persistency to bring the child of God under accusation and condemnation.

Walking in the light

You and I are the fields of the enemy's attention and cruelty to bring us down onto ground where we accept condemnation, and we have to keep off all that ground. We have got to continually recognize the power of the cross to cut us off from that, to avail ourselves of the power of the cross of Christ to deliver us from the power of the curse which brings condemnation and the dominion of Satan. Appropriating Calvary's victory right up to the end is that we overcome because of the blood of the Lamb. Overcome whom? The *accuser* ... by the blood of the Lamb. The power of Satan as the accuser is broken by the blood of the Lamb. Yes, that is high ground.

There are two sides to it. There is the faith position as to our *standing*. Once and for all at the beginning we took by faith our standing on the ground of justification and were brought into a place of victory and deliverance. But there is something more than standing, there is such a thing as *walking*. We, by faith, stand justified before God, but the Lord calls upon us to walk in justification. The Word of the Lord is this, "*If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another*" (that is, with God and His Son) "*and the blood of Jesus Christ,*

God's Son, keeps on cleansing us from all sin. "If we walk in the light..." now that has to do with everyday affairs. It means this, that in fellowship with God, dark things will be made manifest. We are in the light where dark things are seen, where things that are wrong are revealed. "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses ..." Things that are there will be made manifest as we walk in the light.

What are you going to do with the dark things, the evil things, the wrong things, the sins that are still in believers coming out in the light of fellowship with God? They have to be taken before Him and dealt with instantly. That is walking in the light, moving in the light, that is exercise in the light. It is dealing with things that the light reveals as wrong, dealing with them instantly in relation to the cross of the Lord Jesus and repudiating them and putting them away. And as we do so the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son keeps on cleansing in relation to those things.

By faith we take the initial position of justification, but any revealed wrong in us not taken to the cross becomes the ground of condemnation, and while we let it remain, the enemy will have power to bring us under condemnation. If you delay in the matter of dealing with the Lord in the power of the blood in respect of anything that He lays upon your heart as wrong and shows you to be evil, you will be beaten, baffled, crippled, paralyzed, and the enemy will at once encamp upon delayed repentance and confession and bring you into a place where you are helplessly crippled.

As you walk in the light, as you act, as you are exercised in relation to the light, fellowship with Christ continues and the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing. As you go on walking, the blood goes on cleansing. But stand still in the matter of something that the light has made clear as wrong and the blood is suspended, and all witness until that thing is dealt with. We must keep short accounts with God so as not to be brought down into defeat, and must maintain our ground by abiding in Christ, which is another way of saying, "walking in the light as He is in the light" and the blood keeps on cleansing from all sin.

How does the enemy get us down onto condemnation ground? Only by delaying in the matter of repentance or confession, or not dealing with something the Lord has shown us to be wrong. To defeat him we must at once go back to the cross with every wrong thing revealed and put the wrong thing on the cross, put it back there behind the work of our Lord Jesus, and as we put that cross upon every sinful thing revealed in us as believers, the cross becomes victory over the power of the enemy in our lives that would bring us into condemnation and spiritual paralysis. We have to walk there and stay there by exercise.

Israel was saved from the direct action of that curse because they stood in the light which the precious blood had provided to bring them into fellowship with God. But Balaam got round a back door a little while after and subtly worked with Israel and taught them to make alliances. He whom the devil cannot openly defeat he can very often subtly ensnare, and when Israel was caught in alliances with the cursed thing, the enemy got the thing he had sought, of which he had been robbed in the direct way. And Israel, by alliances with that which was cursed, lost their ascendancy, their glory and came under judgment.

May we not yield to any subtle suggestion of the enemy to come down onto the ground of alliance with sin, with the world, with that which lies under the curse, but stand clear in the light, walking in the light, abiding in fellowship with the Father and with the Son in the Holy Spirit, the blood continually cleansing from all sin. Do take that high ground. If the Lord gets people onto that high ground where they stand positively, glorying in the fact that in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation, the devil has no ground whatever and they stand and abide there. That is high ground for all believers.

Many of the Lord's advanced children are today finding themselves in a state where the enemy is accusing them and they are taking it on. Many Christians are coming under a spirit of

accusation. If you take your position and stand there, there is no condemnation. Believe that. Plead the precious blood of the Lord Jesus against the accuser and there is no condemnation.

I was asked to go and see a poor soul who had come into that condition in a terrible way. She had known the Lord for years, loved the Lord and enjoyed much of the Lord's presence, had been used greatly of the Lord, but for some reason or other she had come under accusation from the enemy. The enemy accused her of sin and so inflated that thing until she believed she had committed the unpardonable sin. There she was, a dark cloud over her face, under the deepest depression, all joy and hope and rest gone, like one hunted, pursued. She had lost her Lord, and do you know for a long time, for an hour I tried to get her to utter one sentence: "*The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from all sin.*"

No, she could not get that out; she would say anything else but not that. I tried everything I knew of to get her to express that word. No, as soon as she got near to that she was done. I prayed, I entreated, I besought, I almost put the words into her mouth, but no, anything you like, but not one expression concerning the blood of Jesus Christ. And I saw where the full force of the enemy is directed. If you stand on that blood, he is beaten. If you recognize the great and glorious truth that the blood of Jesus Christ represents justification, no condemnation, the very ground of the enemy will be taken from him and turned against him and you will be a people in victory, and you will represent a great menace against the kingdom of Satan. The Lord make us to know the victory of the blood as we have never known it, for His Name's sake.

Chapter 5

The High Ground of the Heavenly Jerusalem

Reading: Isa. 25:1-12 (note verses 6-8); Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 21:1-4; 9-11.

We have been occupied so far with the matter of the cross and higher ground. We have had brought before us what is believed to be the Lord's desire for His people, that they should occupy the high place, the heavenlies, in fellowship with Himself. This is the *ultimate* thought of God for His own, and it is the *full* thought of God for His own, that when God reaches His end, and when God reaches the fullness of His desire, He will have a people who are a heavenly people, who are a heavenly, exalted, and a very much lifted-up people in the best sense of those words.

The time is swiftly passing which leads to that great event which represents spiritually and literally the realization of His thought, the translation of the church to glory. We have stressed constantly that the literal translation has to have alongside of it a spiritual condition, and that it is that spiritual condition the Lord is especially anxious to have in His people, a spiritual and moral condition of high levels of life and experience which are preparing them to occupy the high places that He has already prepared for them. We have to be prepared for that for which God has prepared, and the preparation is along the way of spiritual elevation, spiritual going up, followed by a literal going up. We will seek to go on with what the Lord has yet to say on this matter.

In Isaiah 25, as you have noticed, we have a mountain. Three times the words occur, "*in this mountain,*" and with that mountain various features are connected. That mountain is Jerusalem and Zion. There is an earthly aspect of this historic connection related to the Jews, but there is also a heavenly aspect related to the church. That there are two Jerusalems and two Zions in Scripture needs no proving or arguing. It is clearly set forth. The apostle Paul speaks of the Jerusalem which is from beneath and the Jerusalem which is from above. And it is clearly seen that there is an earthly Jerusalem and an earthly Zion, and a heavenly Zion. One represents the historic, the other represents the eternal. One is earthbound and the other knows nothing of that bondage or that limitation.

If that is true, that there are two Jerusalems and two Zions, and that they both come out of the same mind, then we expect that there will be similar spiritual principles which govern both, which lie behind both, and we shall expect that the one that is seen will be a type and illustration of the one that is not seen. And so we find that while we have history in the Old Testament, typology, symbolism, representation, we have there the embodiment of spiritual principles which are not related there to earth or to time, but which are related to heaven and to eternity and which are reproduced, so to speak, in that which comes out of heaven and out of eternity. And when we begin to look for the present spiritual value of Isaiah to Christian believers, we shall find that it is very largely brought out in the letter to the Ephesians.

There is a living link between Isaiah and Ephesians. In Isaiah you hear, "*Arise, shine; for thy light is come,*" and there is a very real sense in which the letter to the Ephesians is the light of the assembly. If you get Ephesian revelation (*revelation*, not just *doctrine*) you have come fully into the light of God's eternal purpose. Now then, we are going to mark some of the features of Isaiah 25 and the letter to the Ephesians, always with the basic thought in mind, "*the Lord shall bring us on to higher ground,*" and that is where we begin.

We have noted that in Isaiah 25 we are on high ground. "*In this mountain*" is repeated three times. You are in a place of elevation. When you come to the letter to the Ephesians you know quite well you are there. We shall mark that more specifically in a moment, but what we want to see right at the outset is this, that an Ephesian ministry demands an Ephesian position. And in saying that we are not just saying something trite or commonplace, or even giving expression to a truism. It is a most striking thing that with scholarship and natural intellectual

ability you can get right into the letter to the Ephesians so far as its teaching is concerned, and yet it makes no practical difference as to spiritual effectiveness, spiritual position, or ascendancy in spiritual matters, or in the matter of the eternity of vocation. It may puzzle you sometimes to see how men of great intellectual capacity have analyzed these New Testament letters, such as the letter to the Ephesians, and yet have continued in a thing which was diametrically opposed to the whole Ephesian position.

To have an Ephesian ministry you must have an Ephesian position. Ephesians is meant to bring us not merely to knowledge, but to a position, a life, a standing, a mighty effectiveness - in a word, on to high ground spiritually in every realm. That is the position to which we are introduced in both of these portions of Scripture: an Ephesian position, a place up above. Now what is the Ephesian position? Well, take up your letter to the Ephesians and you will note that for the most part the Ephesian position is marked by three features.

Firstly, it is marked by *the eternity of things*. Look at chapter 1, verse 4, "*Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*" There is a phrase, "*before the foundation of the world.*"

Verse 5: "*Having foreordained us unto the adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself.*"

Verse 10: "*Unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times.*" That gets you out of something that is merely of time duration. It takes you into the "summation" of the ages.

Verse 11: "*In whom we also were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will.*"

Chapter 2, verse 7: "*That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace.*"

Verse 10: "*For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.*"

Chapter 3, verse 11: "*According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Verse 21: "*Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever.*" You see how this thing is marked by the eternity of things. As I read Isaiah chapter 25 I was struck with this, that when you come to the end of verse one, "*Thou hast done wonderful things, even counsels of old,*" (and in my margin the note is, *see foreordination Eph. 1:1-11*). You see the link? You come up in this mountain and then immediately you come into touch with the eternity of things. That is the Ephesian position. You go right out of time.

The second feature is that of *the heavenliness of things*. Here we are on very familiar ground. Eph. 1:3: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.*"

Verse 20, 21: "... *which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenlies far above all.*"

Chapter 2, verse 6: "*And raised us up with Him and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies in Christ.*"

Chapter 6, verse 12: "*Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies.*" You see the heavenly feature which marks things here when you come up on to this level, into this mountain.

And then the third feature is *the universality of things*. Chapter 1, verse 10: "*Unto a dispensation of the fullness of times to sum up all things in Christ, the things in heaven and things upon the earth; in Him, I say, in whom also we are ...*"

And in verse 21: "... *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.*"

Chapter 3, verse 10: *“To the intent that now unto principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God.”*

And then of course again in chapter 6, verse 12 you see the universality of things. You are not dealing with something local, not flesh and blood, but the whole range of principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies. That is the universality of things with which we come into touch when we reach this position, this high ground of the Ephesian position.

Now all these are gathered up in three things as to the church (we have just been laying our foundations). The first of these three things is, as you notice, *the one body*. Twice in this letter to the Ephesians that phrase occurs, *“There is one body.”* All that we have said about the eternity of things and the universality of things, and the heavenliness of things is true in relation to the body, and that body is the church, not an earthly body but a heavenly body, not an earthly church but a heavenly church. The church, which is the body of Christ is a thing which is the embodiment of the eternity, the heavenliness and the universality of God’s thought and God’s purpose. All that is gathered up into the body of Christ.

That is what I meant when I said at the outset that it is possible to get the content of a letter like the letter to the Ephesians intellectually without it making very much difference to you. But the position must be arrived at, which means that in the body of Christ, the church which is His body, we immediately become marked by these features, that we come into what is eternal in God’s thought and purpose. We come right into relation to what is called the eternal purpose He purposed in Christ Jesus, and we are not just pottering about here on the earth trying to do something for the moment which is going to improve the world, not being occupied with things here on the earth religiously, or even evangelically, which are things in themselves related to this earth for the time being, but we have come right into oneness with God’s eternal purpose and thought. Everything and every moment of the life of the believer here is related to eternity in a specific purpose that God is engaged in working out and realizing.

We do not have meetings just for the sake of having meetings, or getting help for the moment, but every meeting should be put right into the eternal purpose of God and make a contribution towards that and should be given character by that. An eternity put into every hour. Something which has come out of the *“before times eternal”* put into this hour which shall shine forth throughout all the ages of eternity as of specific character relative to what was in God’s mind when He projected this purpose into this universe. Eternity — everything has got to be tested by that. We are not working for our lifetime. We are not working that we might make a name here on the earth, do something that will be remembered as our work, not something that will collapse when we leave it but something which will go on into eternity.

Now if Paul truly represents the truth in his own life and person, the truth which was given to him as his specific ministry, the truth of the body of Christ, surely we today can see the feature of eternity about that ministry. Was there ever a ministry, apart from that of the Lord Jesus, which has had the mark of eternity upon it more clearly than his ministry? Of course, the ministry of all the apostles was eternal, but how throbbing with life today is the ministry of that man! He has survived more criticism, more attempts at destructiveness than another man. The epithet that is held over him is “Paulinism.” Ah, but the hammers are broken on that anvil, and they are still breaking. It is not the anvil that goes, it is the thing that strikes it that goes and today the eternity of this thing relative to the church, the body of Christ, is more vital, more potent than it ever was, and we shall find that the Lord is going to maintain this ministry in a marvelous upholding, and bring us back to an Ephesian position for our very life.

Ephesians 6 represents a position which, if the church does not take it, will go out, and any believer who does not come to that position of spiritual ascendancy over principalities and powers will be beaten. For our very life we have got to come on to this higher ground. There is eternity about this thing and we have to come into the eternity of it. We are not fighting a battle for the day, we are fighting a battle *of the ages*, and eternity is bound up with that. With every

feature of the church's life and ministry, eternity is bound up. It has always been a matter of very great strength to me to know we are fixed into something that is eternal in our ministry. Nothing is worthwhile if it is going to finish with our lifetime, if we are only doing something while we live and we shall die sooner or later. I would not go on another day on that level.

But we must see we were chosen in Him and foreordained before the world was, and put into something then, in the eternity past, which will sweep the ages into eternity and never end. We are in that ministry, that is high ground, that is elevation, that is moral elevation which brings you to elevation of proper dignity. We ought to have a proper kind of dignity, the dignity of a Nehemiah who says "*I am doing a great work and I cannot come down ... I cannot come down on to your level of things.*" We must be set upon the principle of a spiritual and right kind of dignity which is taken from the nature of the work in which we are engaged, not ours because we are something, but because of our calling and we are the greatest people in the universe. That is not something just flung out. That is God's estimate of His church. Here on the earth they are nothing. In themselves they are nothing. But God has an inheritance in them.

Think of God coming into something for His own enrichment. Can God be enriched by the church? Yes, He has an inheritance in the church. It is wonderful to think of the Lord Jesus letting go all the glory of heaven because He had seen one pearl of great price, and that pearl is the church. The dearest thing to Him in the universe is His Bride, the New Jerusalem. For that, for *Her*, He has and will let everything go. Well, that ought to give us a right kind of dignity, because we are called unto a great thing in relation to the Lord.

Here is this poor, cowed, bowing and scraping thing on the earth going hand in glove with the world to try and help it on with its ministry and mission, making appeals to the ungodly to keep itself going, a caricature of the church. How low she has fallen! The Lord says, "*Come on to higher ground.*" The eternity of things is here. We are not children of time. The heavenliness of things is here in this body. The universality of things is here in this body, not of earth but of heaven, not of any location, but in ministry and character, universal. *The one body*, not an earthly body. That is the first thing into which all these three things are gathered. Eternity, heavenliness and universality are gathered into the body of Christ. Oh that we should see the real nature of the body of Christ! If we saw it, it would bring us on to higher ground.

What is true about the eternity of things in that body is also true of the heavenliness of things. The church is not an earthly thing. And that which has spoiled the church has been man's constant endeavor to make it an earthly thing, something that has wonderful patronage, something that is linked with the earth, something to make an impression upon men. The church which is His body is nothing of that. It has been cut clean off from this earth. It is in the heavenlies, and anything that would make the church to be related to and linked with this world is opposed, completely contrary, to God's thought. The church is here in this world to bear a testimony, to register a spiritual fact, but not to take root, not to anchor itself. It is a stranger here for the time being. It will possess the earth later on. At present the world knows it not because it knew not its Head, the Lord Jesus. We shall see the value of that as we go on.

There is one body and it is a heavenly body. It belongs to the upper regions. Universality is related to that body. The church is not of any location. We have often said there is no such thing as a Chinese or an English church, a Scotch church, a French church, an American church, no such thing as an Ephesian church, or the Corinthian church. It was always the church in Corinth. It is the church in China, the church in India, the church in England, but one church according to God's thought. Mark you, it is not undenominational any more than it is denominational and it is not interdenominational any more than it is denominational. And in a sense it is not international any more than it is denominational. It is super-national. The church is not composed of a combination of all sorts, that you make up the church by taking some out of every kind and bring them together and they still retain their distinctiveness of nationality, of character, denomination. The coming together of all kinds of denominations is not useful, and to say that is the church is not true.

It may be a blessed thing to let go all those things, but that is not the church essentially. The church is something where every kind of distinction which is in nature has been ruled out by the cross and there is one Spirit. It is something above the nations. It is not an international organization. It is a heavenly body, universal in its features. It is not made up of Jews and Greeks. It is where there is *neither* Jew nor Greek. That is the Word of the Lord.

People think that when you get a mixture of nations in a gathering that that is a beautiful representation of the church, but not necessarily. It is blessed to have that, but there is something which must lie behind all that to make the church. The thing which lies back of that, the very deepest thing, is that we have all been baptized by one Spirit into one body whether we be Jew or Greek. That which is of nature is finished. That which is of this world order has been finished. Blessed be God, when He gets the church there Babel will be destroyed. We will get over language difficulties without any trouble, we will speak the same heavenly tongue, and that which has come in to defeat will have gone out fully and the oneness will be manifested on the outside as it is now in reality on the inside in the heavenly body: universality in the body of Christ. We may come back and say another word about that presently. That is only the first thing into which all these are gathered up.

Secondly, there is *one Spirit*. "*All baptized in one Spirit into one body.*" That means, I think pre-eminently, that the government is in the hands of the Holy Spirit and that He is the life of the one body. It relates to *government* and *life*. In this body of which we have been speaking, marked by these features, the government must be in the hands of the Holy Spirit. It is a most practical thing and a most necessary thing. If this is a body related to the eternal purpose, who knows anything about the eternal purpose but the Holy Spirit? He alone knows the mind of God, we do not know it. We shall only know it in so far as the Holy Spirit dwells within us and is allowed to teach us.

Now if the church, the body of Christ, is related to that eternal purpose, the realization of that eternal purpose depends upon the intelligent *outworking* of it, the *in-working* of it and working *according* to it. Therefore, the government of the Holy Spirit is essential in this body. Any kind of church in which a council of men does the governing by arranging, programming, organizing, and using their natural judgment in the order of things, is a contradiction of the church which is His body. The church which is the body of Christ is not run by councils, boards, committees, diaconates, and so on upon a basis of making plans and arranging things that seem to men to be the best things, even though they may be influenced by the very highest motives.

The church is governed by the Holy Spirit, and only men full of the Holy Spirit and faith will be chosen by God to have administrative positions. "*Full of the Holy Spirit*" is administrative qualification, not full of wonderful wisdom, not full of Christian influence amongst men, not full of means by which things can be carried on, but full of the Holy Spirit. The government of the Spirit is essential to this heavenly body, and only as the Spirit governs will there be life. He is the Spirit of government and of life, and the life depends entirely upon His government, His control. That is true not only for the whole body, but that is true for every member of the body. Just in so far as the Holy Spirit has complete control and government in my life, spirit, mind and body shall I know the power of the life of the Risen Lord to live, to walk, to grow spiritually and to fulfill ministry. And that is true of every member. He is the Spirit of life and He does not operate as the Spirit of life except as He is given the place of government in the life.

You will not have life from the Lord if you are not walking in the ways of the Lord. If you want life you must go the way of the Lord and in so far as you do not, you are in death. That is very simple but it is very important, for this church which is His body is called to be above all other things, the witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will touch upon that later. The church, the body of Christ is called into being to be the witness to the universe that Christ is raised from the dead. The apostolic standing was only upon the ground of witnessing the resurrection, or being witness to the resurrection, and if that was the basis of fellowship, and the

New Jerusalem has upon it the names of the twelve apostles, the New Jerusalem has to take its character from the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The body of Christ is in that sense the testimony to Christ risen. The impact of the exceeding greatness of God's power which He wrought in Christ in raising Him from the dead has to be registered upon the whole realm and range of death through the church now, and at the end. For the church to fulfill that vocation, for the church to come there, the Holy Spirit must be absolutely in possession and having full governmental control. Is that the church that we know of? It is our business to see to it that as a member of that body it is true in our case individually. That is the way of life, life triumphant over death. It is His triumph in resurrection. There is one Spirit, in government and in life. And there are the bonds of the body which is the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Then the third thing here into which all this other is gathered up is the *one Sovereign Head*. "... hath given Him to be Head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all." One Sovereign Head. The eternity is gathered up into that Head, "*which He purposed in Christ before the world was ... to gather up all things into Christ, things in heaven, things in earth.*" That is universality of the Headship, the eternity of the Headship, the heavenliness of the Headship. "*Hath raised Him, made Him to sit at His own right hand in the heavenlies far above all.*"

You have the three features gathered up into the Head, and the church, the body of Christ, takes its character from the Head. What does the Head represent? It represents the authority, the seat of authority. Paul speaks to the Colossians about "*holding fast the Head.*" That means giving the Lord Jesus His place as the Administrative Headquarters of all the body's life and action. It means drawing our life from the Head, drawing our power from the Head, drawing everything from the Lord Jesus as our Head. It means submitting everything to Him for His authority, and that Headship represents our safety.

Is the church to be preserved from error? How does the church fall into error? By getting out from its cover, becoming exposed to deluding spirits, deceiving spirits. What is its cover? The absolute Sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus. He is Head. The apostle says to the Corinthians, "*As the man is head of the woman, so Christ is Head of the church, the body (every man)*" and then he goes on in those mysterious words of his about covering, the infinite peril that comes to a woman if she does not wear the sign of authority upon her head ... mysteries to the natural mind, but he is bringing in the deep things of a heavenly order and what he is presenting there is this great fact, that to be saved from being smitten, deluded, deceived, misled, and by deception being smashed and broken, we must remain under the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus in all matters. His will has got to be established over our wills. His desires have got to be established over our desires. His judgments have got to be established over our judgments ... His thoughts and reasonings over our thoughts and minds.

And it is not what we think, what we judge, what we reason, what we feel, what we desire, what appeals to us, and it is not what we do or choose to do, it has all to be submitted to Him for *His* judgment. The impress of His own mind, will, desire, and everything has to come there, to be submitted to Him, to His Sovereign Headship. Immediately we lean to our own understanding we are exposed, and the enemy takes advantage and smites that uncovered head. Immediately we act by our own force and volition we are uncovered and the enemy will get us into chaos and darkness.

The church has been misled because it has not maintained that life in the Holy Spirit where everything is received from the Sovereign Head. If it did that it would be on higher ground today. The Lord must bring us back on to the higher ground of the Ephesian position where truly it is one body, one Spirit, one Sovereign Head embracing all the fullness of the eternal purpose in its eternity, its heavenliness, its universality. It is only possible as Christ is really taken as Sovereign Head in all the practical things of our daily life.

If we forsake that, we forsake our protection and we will be smitten. This is the high ground of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the mountain. That is just the first fragment — we have got to see a very great deal more of what this means in order that we might come to this Ephesian position. May the Lord bring us there today. It is going to mean a great deal to us if we come to it.

Just for one moment contemplate this — all that I am that I hate in myself, and all that I am not which I know I ought to be, yet I was in God's thought before this world came into being, and not only was I in God's foreknowledge but in God's "foreordained". He chose me in Christ. Get your position and see what is involved in that. What does that mean? Say, "*Lord, bring me into all that You planned in Your purpose.*" Do apply it to your heart. You may feel the weakest, the poorest, you may feel that all these grand things have nothing to do with you, but they do have something to do with you, and you have everything to do with them. God has given us the infinite comfort of His Word that He has chosen the weak, the foolish, and the things which are not — He has chosen you before the world was, in Christ, unto His eternal purpose and that ought to make us reach out and see that when God does a thing like that He does it with a big meaning.

Chapter 6

The High Ground of Spiritual Ministry

Reading: Isaiah 25.

Now we are able to go on from that point and continue to see the ministry from this position, this place of spiritual elevation. This is the mount to which the Lord gives character. You notice that in Isaiah 25 it is what the *“Lord of Hosts”* is going to do about this mountain. The Lord of Hosts has spoken about this thing and the Lord of Hosts will do it. In this mountain the Lord of Hosts will do this, and that, and everything. It is something that the Lord will do. The Lord Himself will give the character to this mountain.

And in Ephesians the ministry there, this spiritual eminence, this spiritual high ground, is the ministry of the Lord Himself. It is the character which He gives to the ministry. It is the ministry which He constitutes. And then you are able to see what that ministry is on this mountain, which ministry is constituted by the Lord Himself, which takes its character from Him. What is the first thing in Isaiah 25 that relates to that ministry as a feature given to it by the Lord of Hosts? *“In this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.”* The feature of an Ephesian position, of a ministry on this high ground, is *abundance of good food*.

Now I am sure that ravishes all your hearts. We are in a day when the food question is a very acute one spiritually. There are multitudes of the Lord’s people today who are hungry and who are not being fed, who are living on husks, and there is a very real problem about the food question. We are not saying a thing which is contradicted by the prevailing condition when we say that it is the Lord’s will and desire that there shall be for His people an abundance of good food. The conditions as they exist are not according to the Lord’s mind, they are quite contrary. Spiritual starvation is not after His heart. His thoughts and purposes are all the other way: *“In this mountain will Jehovah of Hosts make for all people a feast of fat things.”* But as we have said, in order to have an Ephesian ministry you have got to have an Ephesian position. And you will not get an abundance of good food if you are on any lower level of the church, the body of Christ, than the Ephesian position, and it is by reason of their being bound up with a lower and lesser thing that people are starving today spiritually.

The trouble with so many of them is they know they are hungry, they know they are not being fed, they know the whole thing is not according to God, but they will not pay the price of taking the Ephesian position and coming clear with the Lord into the heavenlies. That is the explanation of the whole thing in this spiritual starvation matter. If you want an abundance of good food then you must come into the place where you get it spiritually. You must come into the heavenlies and you will have plenty of it. You will have more than enough. You will have wherewith to give away.

That is not fiction, that is fact. There are those of us who are living testimonies to this fact. We knew the day when, earthbound in our vision and conception of the church, we had to labor and struggle day and night to find wherewithal to meet demands of that order of things. We had to burn midnight oil to keep abreast of theological literature in order to have something to give out as each demand came round week by week. For us the food question was, indeed, an acute one and looking back, we do not know how the poor people managed. But the time came when the Lord opened the heavens to us in relation to the true nature of the church which is His body, and by applying the cross and all the rest, that is, the *cost*, the *price* that had to be paid, we were brought out of the earthly into the heavenlies and from that day to this we have known no spiritual want.

There has been an abundance of spiritual food, and the wonderful thing is that very often we start empty and we finish up with twelve baskets full. There is an abundance of good food to be had when you are out there. You can have it and you can have wherewith to meet the need

of others. In this ministry it is the position that makes available the riches, the fullness of the Lord. That is true, and I am quite sure that the food question, the food problem is going to be solved when people will pay the price of taking a heavenly position and leaving the lower grade of mere tradition, mere history, and coming into that living fellowship with the Lord in the heavenlies.

When shall we have exhausted the food that is in Ephesians? Men have been living on Ephesians for 2000 years and we are still at it, and I sat down with Ephesians again this morning and felt I knew nothing at all. But you have to be in a position to know what is there, to recognize what is there and to enjoy what is there, and that position is a heavenly union with the Lord Jesus, "*a feast of fat things ... wines well refined.*" That is one phase of the ministry from this higher ground, this mount.

A second thing is the *universality of the ministry*: "*Unto all peoples.*" It is a blessed thing to see the Lord doing that. This is not an international organization. This is something which, because it is according to God's mind, because it approximates to His thought, because it is on His level of things, the Lord can use to minister universally and spiritually. You do not have to organize it, but the Lord does it. The Lord constitutes a universal ministry when He gets things according to His own mind on the right spiritual level. It is just very blessed and very wonderful to see how He has done this and how He does do it. The Lord knows where the food is and the Lord knows where the hungry people are, and He knows how to bring the two together without any organization at all. It is wonderful how He does it, quietly, secretly, in a large measure it is unknown. The Lord gives the characteristic of universality to things which are according to His own mind and causes that that thing shall cease to be merely local, merely in a corner. It begins to move out into ever widening circles and before long has reached the ends of the earth without any effort and machinery, and peoples everywhere are deriving spiritual benefit from that. The Lord supplies in this mountain for all peoples.

Take the Ephesian letter itself and you see how that ministry has become a universal ministry. The ministry of the apostle which is found in Ephesians is of universal range, and it goes even beyond the peoples of the earth, it reaches right up into the heavenlies, it affects the principalities and powers. How wide is this ministry which is a ministry of the Holy Spirit! It is resultant from a position reached in the Lord, and beloved I want you to notice this. We said that you must individually and personally recognize that you were foreknown before the foundation of this world, and chosen in Christ then, and foreordained, that God knew you then and had His eye upon you, and called you in relation to this purpose of eternity, though you be in your own eyes very weak and poor and of no account, and although in the eyes of the world you may be utterly at a discount and a nothing.

But when we are come into our position truly in Christ, He marks us with a *universality of significance*. Every believer, the simplest, weakest believer, is marked by universality when in right relationship to the Lord Jesus. The ministry of every believer has no bounds whatever. There is no limit to the range of a prayer ministry in the Holy Spirit. Each member of the body of Christ is brought into the vastness of the body's full purpose. The body of Christ is a wonderful, universal thing. We can, in the Lord, touch other members of that body in any part of the world and in a moment of time it can be done, ministering to one another from the ends of the earth as the Holy Spirit governs, as we hold fast the Head we fill all things, we affect all things and there is no limit whatever to the range of our ministry. Oh if we could get a strong apprehension of this great truth.

You see that this body is intended to minister throughout the whole universe. It is going to do that in the ages to come but it is already called to enter into that ministry, to touch the heavenly ranges. That is Ephesians 6, to touch all saints, to touch all situations and reach all places and affect all matters. It is a universal body and each member takes its character from the whole body, and we must recognize that no man lives unto himself and no man dies unto

himself, and we are not up in a corner, limited, hedged in, but we have the universe as our parish to walk about in, we are called unto a spiritual effectiveness which is universal.

I believe if the church had maintained that truth and position, things would have been in a very different condition from what they are today, and if the Lord could recover something of that in His body it is going to make a tremendous difference. It is going to affect those children of His out on the far-flung line of battle, hard pressed, sometimes almost pressed out of measure. If only the Lord could bring again the revelation of the truth of the oneness of the body also to His people in an adequate measure it would make a tremendous difference to the issue of these situations -- much less defeat, isolation, much less triumph of the enemy. The Lord brings us into the universality of our ministry that we can, in Him, affect the whole universe, and that is what we are called unto.

The Lord does it when He gets His people on the mountain. Then He marks them, without organization, by what is universal. From becoming something just local, not by any effort or strategy or plans and programs, but by simply moving in the Lord's realm with Him, we have seen things reaching out and out until the ends of the earth have been touched -- just a simple, pure, spiritual ministry to the benefit of the Lord's people everywhere. It is true that that is what happens and it happens in quite a spontaneous way, it simply comes about. The Lord gives that feature. And mark you, it is impossible for anything to be truly according to God's thought as to the church and remain local, national, or even international. It has to become *universal*. All peoples met in their need through that which has come up on to God's level of things.

Then there is a third feature and that is *timelessness*, the timelessness of the purpose. This purpose is not something that has been developed in time, in an age. This purpose has been fixed before time was and this purpose is going on when time shall be no more. And we are brought into the timelessness of the purpose of God in our ministry, in our vocation, when we come into this Ephesian position, on to this mountain. We said in the previous chapter that it is a most blessed thing to realize that we are not laboring for a lifetime, not laboring for a mere fraction of time. We are putting forth our strength in the Lord for something which is eternal, which will never cease and never fade, but will go on forever and ever, something related not only to the ages but to the eternities. "*God prepared the works afore,*" the counsels which were of old. The work in which you and I are engaged is the work, if we are in it by the Holy Spirit, which God arranged before times eternal. It is not our work for the Lord, not something we have taken up, instituted, projected, organized, but something into which the Lord has put us which is the work that He prepared before the world was. It is wonderful to think that if our lives are led by the Holy Spirit, we are being led to do the very things that God determined to be done before ever this world was. Oh that we might be kept to that.

We instigate and initiate so many things that come from ourselves which we call work *for* the Lord, but the important thing is to get into the work *of* the Lord, not *for* the Lord. Of Timothy it is said, "*he worked the works of God.*" We want to work the works *of* God, and not our works *for* God. The Holy Spirit will bring us into the works which God foreordained, that is, work which He arranged, and that makes our works eternal. It is taking the things of God out of eternity past and carrying them into effect now, and they are going to stand for all eternity. They are worthwhile. This is something that will not leave us as though we had nothing else to live for. We have all eternity to live for what has been taking place here. Things that we have brought into our lives here by the Holy Spirit are the things for which we are going to live for all eternity -- an eternity about the purpose of the ministry in the heavenlies in this mountain.

And the fourth feature is *revelation to darkened hearts*. "*In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts remove the face of the covering that covers all peoples and the veil spread over all nations.*" The prayer of the apostle was "*that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.*" In this mountain the eyes of your heart will be enlightened. The Lord will take the veil of the covering from off all faces in this mountain. It is the revelation to darkened hearts. And among all the needs of the Lord's people today, not by any means the least, is the need of real spiritual

revelation, the eyes of their hearts being enlightened. Oh, there is a wonderful power about having the eyes of the heart enlightened. There is not only emancipation for the person who has that enlightenment, but there is a mighty registration of power upon the power of darkness itself as it blinds the eyes of them that believe not.

To be in a place of spiritual revelation is to be in a high place of power where we are not just giving out things we have read, studied, worked up, got together, not things which we have heard, but that which has been revealed to us by God Himself concerning His Son. It is a high place to be in. It gives power. We can have all the doctrine of Ephesians and Colossians, and of all the other letters, and of the Bible, and have all the truth and yet lack that spiritual impact, that effectiveness, that vitality, that energy of God which quickens, makes alive, lifts, liberates, brings people out into a place of enlargement and fullness and ascendancy.

There are multitudes of the Lord's people today who have got truth, but that is not enough. It is not enough to have and hold the truth. Have you got the power, the energy, the vitality of the truth, the emancipating, liberating effect of the truth? That is the question, and the difference is coming into *doctrine* or coming into *revelation*. There is a great difference. You may not understand that, and it is one of those impossible things of transporting to another's mind, but we can only state it as being true. It is a fact that you may give out a thing which is truth as to doctrine, and people recognize it is true doctrine, and yet it is just a matter of information to them and they do not go away lifted in spirit by it. They go away having heard it all, can find no fault with it, it is quite right, but they are just the same in the measure of spiritual life as when they came. The same thing may be given out by another, and the people leave, not having necessarily heard more truth, but they go away feeling lifted up, refreshed, renewed, energized. Yes, something has been done.

The difference is that one has been giving *doctrine* and the other has been giving *revelation*, what was given by the Holy Spirit in revelation — not something apart from the Word, but something that comes out of the Word. The Lord Jesus said, "*The words that I speak unto you are spirit and they are life,*" and when the Lord speaks, the effect is spirit and life. That is the difference between mere truth as such and revelation by the Holy Spirit. Now you are able surely to discern between the two. When you really come into an Ephesian position, when the Lord brings you there by opening the heavens to you and reveals that to you, it is as if you knew nothing before. As one has often said, for years one preached on Ephesians, analyzed Ephesians on the blackboard and gave all the content of the letter to the Ephesians, and with a great deal of energy, believing it all, but the day came when Ephesians was revealed and it was as if nothing about Ephesians was known at all. It makes such a difference in one's life and ministry. People begin to say, "*What has happened? He is saying the same things as he used to say but there is a difference.*" That is it, the difference between the letter and the Spirit, truth and revelation. In this ministry we need to come up on to higher ground. Ask the Lord to bring you up on to higher ground in this matter, off the mere doctrinal ground on to ground of revelation and you will be surprised at the difference in effectiveness and power.

Then the fifth feature is the *power of resurrection*. In this mountain "*the Lord of Hosts hath swallowed up death for ever.*" What is the counterpart in Ephesians? "*...the exceeding greatness of His power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.*" That power is to "*usward who believe*" in this mountain, the power of resurrection, the power of life triumphant over death. That relates to the high ground of a spiritual position. That is the testimony which is raised by a spiritual ascendancy on the part of the Lord's people. Paul was ever seeking to attain more fully to that eminence. Right up to the last it was as though he were climbing. Some of his last words are about the "*upward calling*" and you see him in mighty spiritual exercise to get to the summit, "*to know the power of His resurrection,*" reaching to the very pinnacle. There is something Paul has not attained unto and he says, "*Not as though I had already attained, but leaving the things which are behind I press on.*" It is the upward calling and belongs to the heights.

It is no small thing to come to the place where the power of His resurrection begins to be displayed, where we begin to know the might of His triumph over death, where death is swallowed up forever. Blessed be God, that is true at the beginning of our faith. Calvary secures all for us, the gift of eternal life. But there is something more in the expression of that eternal life. There is a continuous development in the manifestation of that life triumphant over death. The apostle says, "*As always, even now, Christ should be magnified in my body whether by life or by death.*" Christ magnified — that is the power of His life triumphant over death. The Lord is never magnified in a body in death unless life is triumphant over death. If death swallows up life Christ is not magnified. The Lord is magnified in death being swallowed up by life.

We are come to mount Zion. Revelation 21:2 says, "*He showed me the great city, New Jerusalem ...*" And what follows? "*... no more death.*" Death is swallowed up forever. It is a feature of Zion, a characteristic of the New Jerusalem: life, where death is no more, and the Lord would call us up there on to higher ground. If the Lord is calling us up there, and it is His desire, He makes possible what He wills. This is not something towards which we ourselves have to struggle. This is the very work that the Holy Spirit has come to do as the Spirit of life, to manifest Christ as life victorious over death in us. We have to be exercised in faith to appropriate that. It is the appropriation of faith to take. The Holy Spirit's work is to make the victory of our Lord Jesus over death manifest in us. Oh, that we should be sufficiently impressed with the Lord's desire for this, and what the Lord desires He always makes possible.

Each one of us is called by the Lord into this great ministry of displaying to the universe Christ's triumph in resurrection over the power of death. That has got to have a beginning now. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. That will take place when the church is perfected, completed, then death will be swallowed up forever. There will be no more death. Death will be broken by Christ through His body eventually, and the ascension and the rapture is an indication of that mighty victory where death is set aside altogether.

You get your foreshadowing type of that in Enoch. By faith Enoch walked with God and "*he was not; for God took him.*" And we have noted how all the verses of that fifth chapter of Genesis end with "*and he died*" and then suddenly, "*Enoch walked with God ... God took him,*" and then it goes on again, "*and he died.*"

And in his walk with God, Enoch learned this secret that God is able to set death aside, and he believed God on that matter, and he proved God on that matter by his faith and was translated, and became a foreshadowing of the church which has such faith for translation. Paul, as a minister of that life says, "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" That life which is *deathless life* I live by faith.

By faith Enoch lived that life and overcame death. Paul was never forced to die. When they executed Paul, it was not because he was a helpless prisoner and could not say no. It was because God's time had come. He said, "*the time of my departure is at hand ... there is laid up for me a crown of life (righteousness).*" Paul knew his time had come. This life cannot be destroyed by death and no man can take this divine life away, and we cannot be killed until God's time has come, and then it is not death — it is *triumphant life*.

You see the principle at work, death swallowed up in the victory of Calvary for the believer. Do you believe that? Do you take that high ground? It is high ground to take for the Lord's children when they are passing into what is called "*the shadow of death,*" that it shall not engulf them, that it shall not wrap itself round them and make for darkness. We ought to stand on that ground for ourselves, that it shall not be death even though we pass out by way of the grave. It shall be the triumph of life. It is high ground to take, and our testimony is that Jesus swallowed up death in victory. "*The exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe ...*"

The sixth feature is *comfort for the disappointed*. "*God shall wipe away all tears.*" This is a feature of the mountain of Zion. Why these tears? What is the cause of these tears? We sing,

"The church's one foundation," and before we get through we reach words which say, *"And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song."* What is the cause of the weeping in this particular connection? *"Though with a scornful wonder Men see her sore oppressed, By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed,"* etc. It is the disappointing state of things that causes the grief, such a disappointing state of things. Paul shed many tears for the Corinthians' divisions and schisms and the low level of things among the Lord's people. If there is any cause for tears it is that.

I wonder if you ever have inward tears about the spiritual condition of things amongst the Lord's people. I wonder if you have ever had such keen interest among the Lord's people as to feel anything like tears about the state of things. I wonder if you know what He would have among His people so that you are able to see the difference. You know nothing about the *ecstasy* unless you know something about the *travail*. The wiping away of tears is not because of personal griefs and sorrows. It is bound up with the church, the body of Christ. When we come to God's position, God's standard, then these earth-things give place. When the apostle can get the Corinthians off that low level on to higher level, his tears will be dry. When these carnal elements are set aside by the cross and we know one another no longer after the flesh, then there will be a good deal of drying of tears, putting away of grief and sorrow caused by this state of things. There will be great joy.

I believe one of the joys into which we shall enter at last will be the joy of seeing the completeness and perfection of the work of grace in God's people in making them so completely one. On earth we experience many divisions and many heart-breaks. And then, at last, we will find not one slightest strain or division. All will be governed by the most perfect divine love. There will be no more tears. When we come to God's place it makes a big difference. If we could come on to higher ground, that higher ground of fellowship and love, God shall wipe away all tears. The cause of these tears is banished when you come up on to God's level of the church's life and fellowship.

The next thing we notice in Isaiah 25 is *power over the enemy*. Absolute triumph over the work of the enemy is in that chapter. When you come to Ephesians you know quite well in the sixth chapter you are getting into the high places where our wrestling is with principalities and powers, not a conflict unto defeat but of spiritual ascendancy, because already in that letter we have been *"seated with Christ far above ..."* He has been raised and seated at the right hand of God, far above all principalities and powers. Then chapter 2 brings us to be seated with Him, Chapter 6, conflict, as far above with the principalities and powers. It is a picture of ascendancy over the enemy which is for the Lord's people... conflict, but conflict from a position of advantage, the heavenly ground of spiritual union with Christ. There is victory over the enemy in this mountain.

Ephesian position is required for Ephesian power in this mountain. The enemy has got to be defeated in the high places, and for us it is in the high places that he makes his attack. The Lord Jesus met him in the high places and we have to meet him there in the power of Christ's victory. Now there are all sorts of high places revealed in the Word of God as aspects of this conflict with the enemy, and victory over him. But I want to indicate how practical this thing is by suggesting one or two. The Lord Jesus defeated him in the high places. Right in the beginning of His ministry we are told the enemy took Him up into an exceeding high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of this world and said, *"All these will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me, for they have been delivered unto me,"* and the Lord Jesus never disputed that statement. The Word bears out the truth of it: *"The whole world lies in the wicked one ... the prince of this world."*

It is in the enemy's power to give position in this world, to give advantage in this world. We cannot understand the power of that temptation to the Lord Jesus, that it was a real temptation in this way. It was for that very purpose that He was born, that He had in His very being a sense of an eternal destiny to be the Ruler of the kingdoms of this world, and that He

had come here for that, and there lay before Him a way of unspeakable suffering to secure them. And the enemy comes along and in effect says, *"Why suffer to have them -- why endure all that to have them -- why go that way to have them? Recognize my lordship and you can have them as a gift."*

What is it that lies in that temptation on that high mountain? It is the temptation to take the lesser ground to save ourselves from suffering and to gain advantage. Now that is a temptation that comes to the people of high places. People do that in the low places without very much temptation, but there is acuteness about that temptation to the people of the high places. Come up into the high places and you find yourself against desperate adversity. You have to pay a great price to come out there with the Lord. The suffering is not little suffering. You meet things against you from every direction when you are going right on with the Lord. You have to make all kinds of sacrifices that other people who live on the lower plane do not make. Out here you meet the full force of things, and the enemy sometimes comes along with the temptation to compromise. All this is looking you right in the face and you are feeling the acuteness of the path you have taken and he says, *"Make a little compromise, come down on to a little lower level and you can save yourself a lot of suffering and gain your end just as well."* To compromise to save ourselves from suffering is a temptation.

You can put it in many ways. If you are going to stand absolutely and utterly and uncompromisingly for the Testimony of Jesus, it is going to cost you. If you do not stand so utterly it will not cost you so much and you will have a good deal of present blessing, but the realization of your ends is suspended. If you take the *utter* stand, it lies at the end of a course of suffering and pain. It is an unseen thing. If you will come on to the lower level you can have a good deal now without the suffering. People who have gone right out with the Lord know that temptation, the temptation to compromise in order to be delivered from the acuteness of the suffering and in order to have things now instead of waiting for them until later on.

Yes, the Lord met that temptation in the high place. In that high place He triumphed over the enemy, but He took all the power of that thing to another high place, *Calvary*, and He met the enemy there and triumphed not only over his temptation but over his authority and power, and broke his dominion and got the kingdoms of this world without any compromise at all. At great cost He is uncompromising and gained over the enemy the dominion of this world. He is at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And you have to keep your high place against all the subtle temptation of the enemy to come down to the lesser. You have to be uncompromising if you are going to reign. It is unthinkable what would have happened if the Lord Jesus had bowed to the devil. We cannot think of it as a possibility.

We know that the first Adam lost the dominion and we see the result of that. What would have happened if the last Adam had bowed to him? But He did not. He paid the price. He kept His high ground and would not come down. He triumphed and has the kingdoms in spite of the enemy. *"If we suffer we shall reign."* If we maintain this high ground uncompromisingly we shall have the kingdom. The kingdoms of this world which are the kingdoms of our God and His Christ will be given to us to rule over. He will say unto one, *"Have rule over ten cities"* and I shall come along one day and see some of you as kings over ten cities, over five cities. But that represents a spiritual position. Alongside of it we are going to have position in the eternal kingdom according to our present position of ascendancy and government in Christ.

We must come up on to high ground in this matter of victory over the enemy. I would like to refer to another high place, 1 Kings 19. You remember after Carmel, (a great victory on a high place), Elijah had slain the prophets of Baal and it says, *"Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done ... (Jezebel) sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them ..."*

Under the threat Elijah collapsed, and he went down on to low ground and you find him under a juniper tree. You are on low ground if ever you get under a juniper tree. What can the Lord do with a man like that? The angel of the Lord touched this man who was so low down,

and said, *“Arise, eat,”* and as he woke up he saw a meal prepared for him and he ate. He must be fortified again, and then the word *“Arise and go,”* and where did he go? To Horeb, the mount of God. He must come from his low place to a mount. He must get on to higher ground than that. The Lord cannot do anything there for a man. *“What doest thou here Elijah?”* ... and he pours out his complaint.

When he came to the mount of God, to Horeb, behold the Lord passed by, and there was a great tempest, thunder, wind and an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the wind, not in the tempest, not in the earthquake. But afterwards there was a voice, as the margin says, *“a gentle stillness,”* and the Lord was in the voice.

I do not know that I am fully assured of what the meaning of that tempest and wind and earthquake is, but I think I have had some experience that indicates something, at any rate. When the Lord is going to speak to revive, to re-commission and put us on our feet again, there is very often a terrific onrush of thunder, and lightening and earthquake beforehand. The Lord would call us to higher ground, put us on our feet. Perhaps some of you are disappointed, cast down, feeling as Elijah did, that you are the only one left. No one else has felt as you have, no one else has suffered as you are suffering. You have a loneliness complex, and the Lord is calling us up on higher ground to re-commission us.

Elijah, abandoning his commission, had to come up and have it renewed. This awful storm came and the Holy Spirit caused it to be written, *“The Lord was not in the wind ... not in the earthquake.”* They raged but God was not in them; God was in the still voice of gentle stillness. Maybe that storm was a reflection of what was going on inside the prophet, the tempest raging and the Lord would say to him, with all this terrific crashing of the thunder, *“What doest thou here Elijah?”* ... so kind, so gentle, such a contrast to the storm. I am sure the voice of gentle stillness struck the stormy feelings of the prophet and made him feel subdued and quiet before the Lord. The Lord spoke quietly in a voice of stillness over against the tempest and re-commissioned Elijah.

The Lord cannot do anything with us while there is a raging storm inside, an earthquake inside. We have to be quiet. The Lord speaks gently and re-commissions and tells us the next thing to be done in relation to the eternal purpose. He puts us on our feet and says, *“Go and do this and that,”* and not least among those things was, *“and anoint Elisha to be prophet in thy place.”* That was not a small thing, Elisha, the only prophet in Israel who was ever anointed. It was on the higher ground where the enemy was defeated, the enemy who had come out to destroy that soul, who had threatened his undoing, who had pressed so hard as to have almost shattered and broken him. But the Lord called him up into a higher place and put him on his feet. The enemy's power was broken at Horeb, as in the mount of temptation, and Calvary. The power over all the power of the enemy demands that we should come on higher ground with the Lord. It is the Ephesian position again, high ground with the Lord and victory over all the work of the devil.

Do you want to know that? Well, it represents higher ground. It means we have to come up higher in our spiritual life; we have to take ascendancy in the Name of the Lord. We have to have a higher moral life, which is bound up with the spiritual life, by which the enemy's work is brought to nought. The Lord write in our hearts that He is calling us on to higher ground for His eternal purpose.

Chapter 7

The Higher Ground in Relation to the Lord's Coming

Reading: 1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Peter 3:11, 12; 1 John 3:3.

We have been occupied with the cross and higher ground and from the beginning we have seen the movements of God with His people in an upward direction spiritually and morally, which are to culminate in a literal, upward movement to join the Lord in the air and in glory. Now for a little while we shall be covering things which have been said in relation to that final movement of the Lord's people from these passages, specifically in Thessalonians in the clause "*shall be caught up.*" That is the Lord's side of this thing. We have been dealing very much with our side of it: going up, upward exercise, the Lord calling us to higher spiritual position. This is the Lord's act, but it is the Lord's culminating act. It is, as it were, the Lord's counterpart of that in which we have been spiritually engaged and exercised. It is as though we had been spiritually moving upwards until we reached a certain place and then the Lord suddenly finished the movement and took hold and gave a literal expression to what had been spiritual and we are caught up to His side. There is a condition for being caught up. We cannot too often point out the fact that there will be no *catching up* on the Lord's part unless there is a *going up* on our part. The translation of the Lord's people to glory is not going to be in spite of a bad state, in spite of a low condition, and that it does not matter how we go on here so long as we are saved, but it will be upon the ground that we have been going up all the time. Now that is a thing that we must have written deeply in our hearts. The weight of the New Testament is brought to bear upon that truth.

There is a tremendous urgency in the New Testament. We ought to read it through with that one thought in our mind and then we would be tremendously impressed with the atmosphere of urgency in the matter of pressing on, going on, holding on, keeping on, maintaining, enduring unto the end, and we ought to bring in all those words "*if*" - "*if*" - "*if*" - relative to holding fast, enduring, and so on, very weighty little words. We cannot rule out the whole realm of what is provisional in the New Testament and make light of it. We cannot dismiss from the New Testament that imperative element that is there in the matter of a pressing forward, a seeking to attain. It is there and it means something, and it just means this, that we are seeing and have been seeing so often that the Lord's consummating of an end waits for an upward movement on our part towards a certain position.

The church must reach a certain position before the Lord can come in on His side. There are two sides to *translation*. Now these simple fragments of the Word that we have just read introduce us to that. "*Seeing then ... what manner of persons ought ye to be ...*," and then, "*He that hath this hope in himself purifies himself.*" That is only saying in other words, we take higher moral ground and higher spiritual ground in relation to the Lord's coming, "*Hastening the coming of the Lord.*"

That brings me back to all that we have been saying about upward movements, or taking higher ground in various directions and respects, that it is all in the light of the Lord's coming, and if the coming of the Lord is really in our view, if we have this hope, if we look for the coming of the Lord, if the coming of the Lord means anything to us, if really the cry came from our hearts, "*Come, even so, come Lord, come,*" then it puts us under a moral obligation to hasten the coming of the Lord, and to hasten the coming of the Lord *by preparation*. The Lord can only come to a *prepared people*, and that people cannot be forever with the Lord until they are prepared for the presence of the Lord.

Now then, let us gather up the things that we have been saying in the main points in relation to the Lord's coming. We saw in Exodus 24 that what is in God's view and governing all His activities with His people is the glory of His Son, Jesus Christ. Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of the children of Israel went up into the mountain and saw the

God of Israel, and under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, as it were the very heaven for blueness, for transparency, for clearness. And we saw that the sapphire stone is representative of the Lord Jesus in universal glory, and that it is upon that that God's feet rest. It is upon that there are all the movements of God. That regulates everything that God is doing and God is saying. He has planted His feet firmly upon the glory of His Son Jesus Christ and He does not move from that position, and everything that He now commands and now does is because of that which is the place of His feet, the glory of the Lord Jesus.

The building of the tabernacle, all the instructions for it, came out of that, and those that went up into the mountain saw that and became a representative company in testimony to that, so that that heavenly blue of the sapphire came out into the tabernacle and became the chief color of the tabernacle, from the robe of the high priest to the fringes of the garment of every man, woman and child throughout all the generations of Israel.

That blue was there. It was the glory of the Lord Jesus which they had seen under the feet of God, and that glory of the Lord Jesus was to mark everything throughout the whole of that people's life. They were gathered in a typical way in relation to the glory of the Lord Jesus with which God Himself was so closely connected. That is where we begin and that is where we end. Everything is gathered into that. When the Lord Jesus comes He comes to be glorified in His saints. He comes that they may be glorified with His glory, and the coming of the Lord and the being caught up to meet the Lord in the air is the manifestation of the breaking forth of the glory of the Lord in His saints. Then shall His glory be seen in them. Then shall they be glorified with His glory. He is glorified in His saints.

And we pointed out that the glorifying of the saints is not the sudden mystical enrobing with rays of light, of a kind of phosphorous glory round them. That is not the glorifying of the saints, and that is not the glory of the Lord Jesus. It is something that comes out from the inside, it is something which has been wrought into them, and it is the moral beauty and the moral excellence of the Lord Jesus that is His glory. It is what He is in His nature, in His character. It is wonderfully blessed and glorious to contemplate that there is something going on in us if the Lord is having His way. And if we are moving spiritually upward with the Lord, there is something going on right at the center of our being which in the moment when that which is mortal and of corruption falls from us, will at once blaze out through a body of glory. It is only this mortality and body of corruption that is hiding what is going on. All we need is that the films of mortality and corruption should fall from us and that we should have a body suitable to us, of Christ in us, and that will blaze out as a moral glory.

That is what happened with the Lord Jesus. This matter of the appearing of the Lord and our being caught up to Him represents a moral state, that position where the work of grace is done in us, and where there has been a marvelous conformity within to the image of God's Son. That is glory which is His moral excellence and perfection made to shine *out* from us because it has been wrought *in* us.

Now then, hastening the day of God, purifying ourselves even as He is pure, being the manner of persons that we ought to be because of that means that we are by the Holy Spirit's energies being conformed to the moral likeness of the Lord Jesus. I do feel the Lord wants to stress that word "*moral*" amongst us. We have entered the abstract realms, something that we have called spiritual, and we have divorced the spiritual from the moral. You can be so "*spiritual*" that you neglect your moral obligations, and that is a denial and contradiction. The glory of the Lord Jesus will be spiritual but it will be moral glory. It will be character in the highest sense of character, and the grace of God working in the heart of every child of God ought to be forming character in them. They ought to be the finest characters that this world knows. Yes, there ought to be moral strength and moral ascendancy and moral purity, righteousness and equity, reliability, trustworthiness. They ought to be people you can count on. They ought to be the best type of people you can meet, those in whom the grace of God is at work.

Conformity to the image of God's Son does not set aside these moral values of character, but the greatest force for making character is the grace of God, the Spirit of God, and we must not differ between spiritual and moral. It is the moral perfection of the Lord Jesus that has to be planted in us, to which we have to be conformed, and that is related to the coming of the Lord Jesus. That is why we are seeing we must take higher ground in His Name, and that has to be concrete and not abstract. The Lord would have us holier people, more upright people, more righteous people. That is not conformity to the image of Deity, it is conformity to the image of a perfect Man in Christ, a glorified humanity, a soul that has been purged, cleansed, redeemed, elevated.

Now we have not come down to a lower level when we say these things. They are very important things and this is purifying ourselves in the light of the Day of God. It is taking higher ground. Well, that is the meaning of God's will for the glory of His Son. The meaning of the universal glory of Christ as represented by the sapphire stone is that throughout the whole universe in the new heaven and earth, the moral splendor of the Lord Jesus will be revealed, and all that is immoral and non-moral in this universe that makes it what it is, has to be swept out. And this universe has to be filled with a positive moral excellence, the Person of the Lord Jesus as Man, and at the same time being very God Himself. The coming of the Lord requires that sort of thing.

We must recognize how very practical the spiritual life ought to be and why all these moral exhortations — *“putting away all filthiness, all lying, all evil speaking, all malice, and all such things, speaking every man truth with his neighbor.”* That is not a low-down level of ordinary ethics. That is related to the work of grace in our hearts, learning the lesson of faith.

We must not stay with the first thing any longer, we go on to the second. After seeing that first, primary, all-inclusive thing about the glory of the Lord Jesus, we went into the Gospel by Matthew 14:22-36 where the Lord Jesus constrained or compelled His disciples to get into the boat and go before Him to the other side while He sent the multitudes away. He went up into a mountain to pray and when evening had come He was there alone. The ship was now many furlongs from the land and distressed, for the wind was contrary. In the fourth watch of the night Jesus came to them walking upon the waters; and out of that incident we linked Hebrews 7:25.

We saw that the Lord was training His disciples in the light of a coming day when He Himself would be in the Mount making intercession for them and the church would be down here in the storm. He would be there, and they would be here, and in view of that coming day they would have to learn the lesson of faith by which to get through to the other side. In the midst of the conflict, the opposition, the raging of the enemy, the only thing that would get them through would be a mighty faith in Him as up there interceding for them. That is where we come to in the secret place, and we see that the issue for the church in this dispensation in the matter of getting right through all the storm and the raging of the adversary against the church to swamp it is the issue of a mighty faith in the Lord Jesus. We notice how deliberate He was in that. And straight away He compelled them, and they went out under His compulsion, and when they found themselves in the conflict, in the trouble, it was because it was all according to plan.

The Lord has Himself precipitated the church into the conflict of this age, He Himself holding on up there in prayer in order to bring out of the church that triumphant faith over all the work of the enemy by which it shall get through to the other side. In the illustration in Matthew it broke down because He had to say, *“O ye of little faith,”* but the question in view is the matter of faith which goes through and gets to the other side, a faith in the Son of God, and that is where we are now.

Do we believe that all this conflict is an accident, or because things have gone wrong? Well, if you study it close enough, the closer you get the more you feel there is a plan about it, a divine purpose in it. It all has a meaning. The Lord does not deliver you out of conflict however much you cry to be delivered, but He teaches you how to go through in the power of a growing

faith, and the church in the end is going to triumph by this faith in the Son of God. It is unto the coming of the Lord.

What the Lord is doing is to develop in the midst of conflict in the church a faith that will overcome and break through and reach the Lord. It is ascendancy. It is a *coming up* principle. It is a faith rising over the storm and believing in Him when He is out of sight. He is not unmoved. He knows all about it and He ever lives to make intercession. He is praying there, and we ought to make more of the intercessory work of the Lord Jesus than we do and believe that this will prevail for us. It is a great thing to think that the Son of God is praying for you and for me. It is a blessed thing to think of people praying for us, but He is praying for us! That is the basis of faith. He is praying the prayer of faith and we can take advantage of that by faith. Now you see relative to the coming of the Lord this is ascendancy of faith and it has got to be maintained in the storm and has to become a feature of the Lord's people.

And then we went on with the third phase of this higher ground in relation to *fellowship*. And this also is just as much a matter of relationship to the coming of the Lord as anything else. How important it is to recognize that our fellowship is connected with the Lord's coming. It is in this matter we have to take higher ground. We stop merely for one word about this. "*So shall we be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, so shall we be forever with the Lord,*" and if there is one thing which that consummation will represent, it will be the finality of oneness among the Lord's people, a blessed prospect, a glorious hope. In His appearing and our being caught up together to be with Him, the last remnant of all the divisive, schismatic, disintegrating natural man, carnal man, will be left behind.

We saw that all divisions come out of "*I am of Paul, and I of Apollos*", and it is "*I,*" and that all our lack of fellowship is because of natural elements which predominate and which we allow to predominate. But with the coming of the Lord the last vestige of that will fall away and there will be a perfection of oneness without a carnal element ever to interfere with that oneness. The Lord keeps this in view all the time, that we have got to hasten and prepare for that, and we have, spiritually and morally, to take now that ground which shall be ours literally then. And in relation to the Lord's coming we have to take higher ground in the matter of fellowship, mutual love, and mutual forbearance, striving, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of perfectness, completeness. It is a matter which has to do with the Lord's coming.

We are moving into that day and it is imperative that we do move into it. We have just pointed out that in that city only one street exists, and that street is of pure gold. There are no back streets and side streets for us to live in, we have all got to live on the same street, and that street is of pure gold (which is the divine nature). Here that divine nature has got to be wrought into us, which brings about the oneness of fellowship of that city. The city of God is the full, ripe product of a moral and spiritual process in our hearts. That gold is just typical of the divine nature wrought into us and seeing the street is made of that means we all live together in fellowship of the likeness of the Lord, and even now we have to move towards that. The more we come into the Lord's likeness here the more we shall love one another, which I am afraid if it is reflected upon in the other direction becomes rather a challenge when we think that all our systems speak little of divine likeness.

Where are we? Higher ground must be taken in this. The Lord lift us up on to higher ground in this matter in view of His coming. He that has this hope gets right. And what is getting right? It is conformity to the image of His Son, giving diligence to the matter, applying our hearts, hastening, purifying ourselves even as He is pure. The perfect fellowship of heaven demands the perfect oneness in the likeness of the Lord, the church in the heavenlies.

We go on now to mention the previous two chapters and we come into the letter to the Ephesians. It is not easy to gather all that up in one application. But we do see when we come into Ephesians we come on to the high ground of the heavenlies in Christ. To gather it all up as far as possible in one word it represents this: that the church, the body of Christ is something

which has been cut off entirely from this earth by the cross of the Lord Jesus in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That high ground of the heavenlies is that in which there is a ministry of good food, a ministry of universal value, a ministry of eternal purpose, a ministry of triumph over all the power of the enemy. That is all there. That relates to that wonderful word at the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians in connection with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, a word so familiar and yet we have not valued the full power of it yet, *“the exceeding greatness of His power according to that working of His which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead ...”*

You see the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the taking of Him out, up to the throne and it represented the absolute release and emancipation of Jesus Christ from all limitations of the old creation. When you find Him on resurrection ground not one of the old limitations remain. Geographical limitations no longer prevail. He can go anywhere in a moment of time. He covers all space without any time being lost. He can pass through a bolted door. Nothing at all of the old creation limitations exist on resurrection ground. He is cut off from that realm, brought out into the limitlessness of resurrection life. There is a principle there which has to be established in the church, that it is something cut off from the old creation and united with Christ in the heavenlies where it is no longer bound by the old limitations. That is the meaning of the power of His resurrection, and that is set over against all other earthly conceptions and ideas of the church and the Christian life. We are now a resurrection people and have been cut off from this earth, from every kind of bondage and limitation, and brought out into the emancipation of the heavenlies, the universal where we are no longer bound by the ties of this nature, and that has to become a mighty, practical thing in our experience. I am talking about a position which we occupy in relation to the Lord Jesus where we are on the high ground of what is possible to Him because of His resurrection. There is nothing impossible to the Lord on resurrection ground. There is no limitation by which He is governed and we have to come into all the possibility and limitlessness of Christ in resurrection. The coming of the Lord Jesus will be but the ground of that.

When we come into the full meaning of His resurrection, spirit, soul and body, we shall be as He was in resurrection. With those spiritual bodies we shall not be hindered by any material barrier, time and space will no longer have any place. We will be free in the universe literally, but for that we have to move spiritually now. The Lord can do things now. He can take a Philip out in a desert and in a moment of time plant him at Azotus. The Lord can do these things literally now though we have not had any experiences of them, but that is the sort of thing that will be in resurrection bodies, where all the old creation limitations have ceased. We have to come spiritually into a place where there are no hindrances, barriers, limitations, because Christ has triumphed over them all. We have to learn how to apply that principle. Here is a thing that represents a limitation. How are we to transcend this limitation to the Lord's interest? Only in the power of His resurrection. It is a practical working. I know what the enemy is trying to hinder. In these bodies of infirmity we are limited in the Lord's interest sometimes. The Lord's interests are limited because of them. How are we to transcend the limitations of these infirmities and accomplish things which are impossible to the natural man? In the power of His resurrection it can be done. The weakest, most infirm naturally can by the energy of the resurrection accomplish more than the most healthy man by nature. It is the testimony of Paul who represents the truth entrusted to him to preach. There is nothing impossible to those who believe and who take their position on resurrection ground, regarding what is in the will of God for them. If the Lord wants something done, nature and natural conditions may shout it is impossible, but in the power of His resurrection it is possible. We have to learn how to apply the law of resurrection and live by that life which is triumphant over the old creation.

We must not surrender to our natural conditions. We must not say *“I feel so bad I cannot”* but, *“I feel so bad, but I can through Christ do all things.”* We must not say, *“I am too tired tonight to go to the meeting,”* but, *“I can in the power of resurrection”* and come home from

that meeting feeling as fresh as if we had just got up in the morning. The power of His resurrection leaves out the conditions of our old creation, and we must not surrender to them. The Lord would teach us how to live on that ground. Do you know anything about it? Would to God we all knew more about it. This is the testimony of the Lord Jesus. What kind of a testimony are we in this matter? All points on to that day when these spiritual principles will be consummated in the body of Christ, and that body will be a universal body without the ties of geography or time.

I have only indicated the thing. So this meditation of Ephesians is intended finally to bring us out into the heavenlies spiritually now, where limitations cease because the power of His resurrection has come in. You will not get resurrection power to do anything that is not in the will of God. But if the Lord requires anything, He has provided the means to it whether you feel three parts or nine-tenths dead or not, it can be done in the power of His resurrection. That is what resurrection means. *"The grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you"* — and that is higher ground. When Paul went to Corinth he said, *"When I came unto you, brethren, I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* That is his first word. When he closed he said, *"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect ... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you."*

That is the gathering up into a couple of lines everything that has come out of that first word, *"Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* What has come out of it? The grace of the Lord Jesus. Over against what does that stand? *"I" - "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual ... ye walk as men."* The grace of the Lord Jesus is altogether the opposite of that. What grace of the Lord Jesus? It is Philippians 2: *"Though He existed in the form of God, He counted it not something to be held on to on an equality with God but emptied Himself ..."* unto the most shameful death of all, where no one will look at it, honor it and say it was a heroic death. Everyone will turn their faces away in horror. This is the grace of the Lord Jesus. Emptied of all the *"I"*, every bit of personal interest, every bit of pride, emptied right down to that death. *"Let this mind be in you."* That is the grace of the Lord Jesus, and that is set over against *"I"*

Higher ground and the love of God - that is set over against all that lust on the part of the Corinthians for display gifts. You notice how the apostle enumerates the gifts with a grieving heart rather than with pleasure as far as they are concerned. He is not speaking happily of the gifts because he sees these are being used for the display, for making something of themselves and he goes on to 1 Corinthians 13:1. He says in effect, *"the gifts are alright brethren, they are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, true, but unless there is love it only makes the one who has them official and it does not profit very much."* Knowledge, that was one of the things they lusted after — *"I determined to know nothing ...,"* and the love of God is higher ground even than gifts. There is much higher ground even than the gift of faith: *the love of God*. All these things may be right and good but unless the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit they mean very little spiritually.

The grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, and that is set over against all the systems and schisms at Corinth: *"I am of Paul and I of Apollos, and I am of Christ."* There are divisions among you, says Paul, and against that, the communion of the Holy Spirit. That is higher ground. The Lord bring us on to higher ground of the grace of the Lord Jesus which is marked by selflessness and self-emptying. That higher ground is the love of God (which is far more powerful and beneficial to the body of Christ than any amount of official government) and the communion of the Holy Spirit which is the bond of the body. This makes possible the corporate testimony and stands over against all that dishonoring of the Lord which comes by schism. The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all for evermore.