

Knowing God in Christ

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Chapter 1 - Knowing Christ Through Abiding Union With Him

Reading: Mark 8:27,29; John 17:3.

“But who say ye that I am?”

That is a word addressed to disciples in immediate personal touch with Christ, who have listened to Him, who have followed Him, who have moved from place to place with Him, who have seen His works; and yet He felt it necessary and evidently important to interrogate and challenge them. They had heard expressions of the popular mind about Him. He knew that they were moving amongst men who would not give expression of their thoughts audibly in His own presence, but who talked about Him as people always do of certain individuals in their absence, and say what they think.

The disciples were in touch with the public mind to some extent, and answered Him according to what they had heard men saying about Him. Then He turned directly upon them, and said, “But”. Catch the full force of the word. He might have said, ‘Yes, and I suppose you agree with them? Do you agree with these opinions, these ideas? Which of them is your own mind?’ The putting in of that “but” seems to demand a different position on their part. It is as though He said, ‘That is all very well, but I expect something else from you.’ *“But who say ye that I am?”* ‘Who do *you* say that I am, you who have the greater privilege and opportunity of closer contacts, more intimate association?’ Upon the answer to His interrogation of the disciples — not only the verbal answer, the theoretical reply, but the nature, the meaning, the depth, the strength of that answer — so much hangs for the disciples, we might even say everything depends on it.

It is the entire question of our knowledge of Christ. It is more than that: it is the knowledge of God in Christ. That is the Lord’s word to disciples. It is a question of knowing God in Christ. Too much, and too often, even we who are the Lord’s have mentally kept a gap between God and Christ, between Christ and God. The removal of that gap makes a tremendous difference when it is done in a spiritual way.

The Lord Jesus said on this whole matter: *“This is life eternal, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”*. Here we have the answer to every enquiry and quest of the human heart. Let the need be what it may, the meeting of that need is in these words: *“...that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ”*.

We must not divide that statement into two. There is no such thing as knowing *“Thee, the only true God”* apart and alone or separate from Jesus Christ. There is no possibility of knowing Jesus Christ in a true way without knowing the only true God. These two are one. This is one thing. It is not new doctrine, but there is a meaning there for all of us which perhaps we have not grasped. God in Christ is the end of all human heart need. It is the perfection of satisfaction, it is *the* heart gratifying knowledge. It is our need.

What would your answer be if you were asked simply to state what you conceive your deepest, your greatest need to be? Think for a moment what you would answer, what you would set down on a slip of paper as being your deepest need. The answers, no doubt, would be various, and perhaps numerous. Many answers would have to do with victory in this way or in that, light in this way or in that. All the answers would be different things. Now let us say, with

considered emphasis, that the need of every one of us, deepest and greatest, is of the knowledge of God in Christ. Given that every need is met, every desire and quest of the human heart is answered in Him. That may not sound very helpful, but we have not got very far yet. If you were to stay with that, and go to the Lord with that and in earnest seeking of Him ask Him to explain that to you, if you made this prayer to the Lord sincerely: "Lord, show me how the knowledge of Thyself, Eternal, Infinite, Almighty God in Jesus Christ, answers my deepest and greatest need", you would be on the right road, and would be in the way of making a new discovery. This is our need, if we did but know it, and it covers the whole ground; the knowledge, not of God, not of Christ only, but of God in Christ.

Not only is this our need, but this is God's aim with us. God's aim with us is to bring us into the knowledge of Himself in Christ. That goes further than you may realise at the moment. The trials and difficulties of spiritual life are countless, and we seek to get through these trials by asking the Lord for certain things: that He will act and work, that He will do something or He will show something. It may be as to our spiritual life, and we have conceived that if only we can have such-and-such a blessing, or such-and-such a revelation or enlightenment, we can go through our trial, we shall triumph in our trial or escape from it. Or it may be to do with our service: if only the Lord would do this or that in relation to His work and our place in it, that would be the solution of our problem.

Now, that is not the case. The fact is this, that what God is after is not to do things for you and for me, not to impart things to you and to me, not to show things to you and to me, but to bring us to some fresh apprehension of God in Christ. The whole matter is a divinely personal matter. It is the realisation of the Person which is going to result, firstly, primarily, and for evermore, not in doing things, not in activities, not in rejoicing in truth, but in worship. Worship is the first, the continuous and the final factor in the knowledge of God in Christ, and is basic to everything else in our relation to Him. True worship only springs from a heart discovery of Himself.

Take your Bible, especially the New Testament, and especially the forty days after the resurrection (if you want that narrowed down to something that you can grasp), and see if that is not true. It was not because He did or said certain things that they worshipped, but because they discovered Him in a way in which they had never known Him before.

God's dealings with us are governed by this supreme aim: that He might make known to us Himself in Christ; but this comes by illumination, and that illumination is by the touch of Christ.

Chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel is a wonderful chapter. You will find few richer chapters. It begins with the feeding of the multitude. That resolves itself into something in the nature of a dialogue, an altercation. "*We have no bread.*" 'Have you forgotten the feeding of the five thousand, the feeding of the four thousand? Do you not understand? Why did I feed the five thousand, and why did I feed the four thousand? It all hangs upon that question. Have you not seen through yet?' Then a blind man comes out of the city. That touch of the Lord Jesus upon his eyes causes him finally to see all things clearly. 'Do you not understand? Are you not getting through to the meaning of this? Who do men say that I am? But who do *you* say that I am?' It is all of a piece. What is the feeding for? To convey something.

You are not dealing with ordinary men here. You are dealing with God in Christ. What you need is your eyes to be touched, the finger of the Anointed upon you to see all things. 'Who do you say that I am? One day you will see all things clearly. You are only seeing men as trees

walking now, seeing with imperfect vision, but one day you will see all things clearly, and you will understand, you will see God in Christ, you will know Who I am, but before ever that can be, the Son of Man must be rejected and slain and the third day rise again.' Then, as demonstrating that he was only seeing men as trees walking, Peter said: "No Lord, never!" and to him the Lord said, "*For you are not setting your mind on God's interest's, but man's*". 'You are not seeing, Peter, although you made the declaration, "*You are the Christ*"; but one day Peter, you will see all things clearly, Who I am - God in Christ. You will have to have the touch of the hand of the risen Lord, and this is life eternal (deathless life, on that side of the grave), to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ... as One.'

Is it not impressive that Mark 8, with all that it contains in knowledge of God in Christ, full, clear knowledge, hangs upon the Son of Man being crucified and raised? John 17 is the chapter of the High Priestly prayer in the presence of the Altar, the Cross. To know is by way of the Cross. In Mark 8 He said, "*Except a man take up his cross and follow Me, he cannot be my disciple*". He might have said (for this is the meaning), "He cannot know Me", for what is the object of a disciple but to be taught to know his Master? You have to let go your own life to have this knowledge.

Our whole need is in this direction. Is it heart satisfaction? Surely that is the need of every one of us. Then the Lord Jesus will say to us, "*I am the bread of life.*" 'This is life eternal: to know Me, in the fulness of My Being, God in Christ, with full satisfaction of heart. It is not something that I am going to give, not something that I am going to do with you or for you, it is your heart apprehension of Me. Your discovery of Me is going to answer all your craving: *I am the bread of life.*'

Is it illumination? So we go on praying, Lord give me light; Lord show me this, show me that. He will answer, '*I am the light of the world.* When you have come to see Me, to know Me truly, in a heart way, you have illumination.' You may not have a verbal answer to all your enquiries, but you have got a heart answer, you are settled on your problems, you know the Lord.

Is it access to the place where the Lord is with His own, from which place all who do not know Him in this way are excluded? Do you want to be in fellowship with His own? Shall we pray, O Lord, bring me in? He will answer, "*I am the door.*" 'When you know personally who I am, God in Christ, you are in. There is no way in except by the knowledge of Me. This is the place of life eternal.'

Are we seeking leadership, protection, that the Lord shall assume responsibility for us and for all our future, and protect us, look after us? Shall we ask to be led? Shall we ask for protection? He will answer, "*I am the shepherd.*"

Do we want to know the Life which overcomes death and is victorious? Shall we pray for victorious Life? He will answer, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*"

We shall not stay with these sevenfold occurrences of the words, "I am"; we just mention them, but only seek to indicate the point. "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day*", said Martha (John 11:24). That is making the resurrection a matter of time. "I am..." 'When *I am* here, time goes; is dismissed for ever. Have Me, and the last day is here.' It is the knowledge of the Person that means everything.

Is it that we are seeking fulness of attainment, reaching out to attain to the fullest, to the whole thought of God? Oh, how many ways we have of seeking to realise that heart desire for full attainment. We pray this way and that, and for many things which we think will bring us into fulness. The Lord will answer, "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*" 'Have Me and you have got everything.'

Do we want to escape from barrenness and fruitlessness of life, to come to the place where life will have something to show for God's satisfaction; not emptiness and barrenness but fruitfulness of that kind which will give Him pleasure? How are you seeking to be fruitful, by what means? You ask the Lord in many ways about fruit-bearing, He will answer, "*I am the Vine.*" You cannot bear fruit unless you are in the fruit-bearing Vine, and if you abide in Him, you will bear fruit. It is as natural and spontaneous as anything can be; it is a question of knowing abiding union with Him. It is a matter of knowing Him.

All these things should bring to us heart rest. I have not been the least of those who have striven, and agonised, and strained, and pressed and reached out for all that the Lord would have, all that is possible. It is possible to wear yourself right out, and kill yourself in a spiritual quest, and the Lord at last says to our hearts: "If you only *know Me*, things will happen; it will all come to pass without any of your strain, struggle and agony. *I am* going to bear this fruit. I will bear it through you by way of union and fellowship. Remember that the holy, blessed secret of fellowship is just resting in Me, abiding in Me."

If you saw all the branches of the vine every day groaning and agonising, and writhing in order to bear their fruit, you would see something which is altogether unnatural. As a matter of fact you will see nothing of the kind. You will see them abiding there and bearing fruit. It is what we often speak of as the rest of faith.

What is behind the rest of faith? It is not bringing yourself to a passive state, when you inwardly sink down and say, I am just going to rest. It is knowing the Lord, *God in Christ*, for the way in which God has joined Himself to us is in Christ, not apart, and the way in which we have been joined to God is in Christ, not apart. The answer to every need is knowing Him in this way.

His answer is comprehensive. The Lord's ability to crowd vast ranges into small phrases is amazing. He compasses the whole range of human need, and answers every heart cry in a simple sentence of two words: "*I am*".

I cry for resurrection, for Life, for something to happen, for a filling, a consciousness, a sensation, a movement, an energy, a "something". The Lord's answer is, "*I am the resurrection and the Life* at any moment, in My will, anywhere." Oh that we might live on that "any moment — anywhere", because of Him! He would woo us away from subjects, experiences, teachings to propagate. Such a course has done much harm. The people of God are divided into groups, larger or smaller, around some thing, some experience, some truth, and the all-embracing and all-uniting reality is lost. Away, then, with things, experiences, truths, to Him. "*This is life eternal, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*". 'Do you not understand? *Who do you say that I am?*' With a touch of divine illumination in your heart you see the thing that you have known so long. Only the Lord can do that. That is the direction of inquiry. The Lord set our hearts on that.

Chapter 2 - God the Father in His Son

Reading: Mark 8.

"*He took bread... brake...*". The whole of that matter is brought up again when He referred to the leaven of the Pharisees. With a kind of association of ideas, in a superficial way they linked that remark with the absence of bread amongst them. Then He goes back to the feeding of multitudes on two occasions — the five thousand and the four thousand — and gathers it all up into this challenge: "*Do you not yet understand?*"

Then the movement in spiritual sequence, all of a piece, comes to this point: "*Whom do men say that I am?*" It is a definite development of what is in His own mind. 'Do you not see through this feeding of the multitude? Do you not understand what this signifies? "*Who do de people say that I am?*" "*But who do you say that I am?*" You are not dealing with an ordinary man, but there is something more here: God is here. Have you no understanding?'

Then there is just the smallest fragment, coming in and going out, the religious leaders asking for a sign. "Why does this generation seek after a sign? There shall no sign be given."

Then He opens the eyes of the blind man, with a double touch. The first touch results in that incomplete, undefined, somewhat foggy, certainly imperfect apprehension of things; perhaps the shadows in which the disciples were moving. The man in his first state of blindness was where the wicked of this generation were. With the second touch the man saw all things perfectly. From the place where the disciples were, in a foggy state, they caught a glimpse of Christ, but then there was the need of an advance upon that in another touch where all things were seen perfectly.

Then you notice the spiritual movement in connection with His crucifixion. He began to say unto them, "*...the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed...*". The Cross comes in for Him and for them. He tells them that except a man deny himself, and take his cross and follow Him, he cannot be His disciple, and he that shall lay down his life shall find it.

There is a perfect sequence of things, and there you see that the whole matter of knowing God in Christ with a perfect apprehension, in clearness, with no shadows, and no partial grasp, is bound up with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. First of all as to His completing the work, and then applied to us and appropriated by us. To know God in Christ demands that twofold thing; all that His Cross and resurrection meant in Him, and now appropriated by us. In simple terms it is, "*Take up his cross*". It is the appropriation of Calvary by the disciple.

Everything of the teaching, the works, the walk of Christ when here on earth was and is gathered up into His Person. To understand the teaching, to understand the works, to have the real meaning of His walk is indispensable. Until you have that inner knowledge through the eyes of the heart being enlightened, His teaching, His works, His walk are but beautiful things — objective, historical, but powerless and without transforming effect — but to have the eyes upon the Person of the Lord Jesus, is to be introduced to the inner side and to find its power, to know its value; to see an inner meaning in His walk.

By His walk we mean as to how His life was ordered in every movement. There is meaning in it, there is virtue in it, there is value in it. When Jesus moves there is some meaning in that movement. When Jesus stops working there is some meaning in that. There is not a movement in the sand but there is spiritual power in that for you and for me. We have to know Him in the reality of His Person before any of that becomes of practical value in our lives. It is all bound up with His Person.

The next thing is that the Person of the Lord Jesus can only be known in resurrection. You cannot know the Lord Jesus in that way as the historic Jesus, as the Jesus of history, as the Jesus of the creeds, as the Jesus of Christian doctrine. It is only when He appears unto us in a spiritual way after His resurrection that we know Him. It is the risen Lord Whom we have to know, in order to know all the meaning of His Person and what is gathered up therein.

Take again that sevenfold "*I am*" of John's Gospel, which we reviewed in a brief way in our previous chapter, and bring them once more into review, and take perhaps one or two of them by way of helping us towards this knowledge of God in Christ. See how that sevenfold "*I am*" of John's Gospel was fulfilled in resurrection. Remember that He appeared after His resurrection by the space of forty days. Israel was in the wilderness forty years. Every time "*I am*" is uttered in John's Gospel it has Israel's history as its background, so that what we have in the resurrection is a spiritual reproduction of what Israel had in the forty years in the wilderness. The number forty in the Scriptures is a period of probation, or specific government. It was a probationary period, intending to lead out into something more. That is perfectly clear in Israel's forty years. It was intended by God to lead them into a place where they should live according to all that they had been taught during the forty years. Is that not true of the forty days after His resurrection? Was He not laying the whole foundation for the church's history? Surely that was so.

"I am the Bread of Life"

You will remember, of course, that when He said that, in the same part of the Word He referred to Israel. "*It is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father...*" (John 6:32). So that here we have something in John's Gospel which is the spiritual counterpart of the feeding of Israel in the wilderness. Carry that over to the forty days after the resurrection, and it is perfectly clear when you look at the Word.

Take two quotations from the Psalms: Psalm 78:25: "*Man did eat angels' food...*". Psalm 105:40: "*...satisfied them with the bread of heaven*".

It takes resurrection ground to fulfil those Scriptures spiritually. You can clearly see what they indicate. Angels' food! The bread of heaven! That quite clearly means that it is not something of earth. It is something of heaven that the Lord's people are to be fed upon, with which they are to be nourished, preserved, built up, satisfied; with that which is heavenly in the Person of the Lord Jesus or to put that round another way: that which is in the heavenly Person of the Lord Jesus. But "*Are they not all ministering spirits...*". How can spirits feed on bread? It is the spiritual enjoyment of Christ, it is for the spiritual life. You get that in resurrection, not before. It required the resurrection to fulfil this "*I am*". The risen Lord is the Bread of Life to His people. What does that mean? If it is of heaven, if it is angels' food, then it is most certainly on the ground of our separation from this whole world system. Come back to Mark 8. These people who were supplied with bread had come out to Christ. The man who had his eyes opened had come out of the village, and the Lord said, "*Do not even enter the village*".

Apply that principle, and you will find that in all of the occurrences of “*I am*” in John’s Gospel it holds good.

“I am the Light”

How did that come in? When they had excommunicated the man from the synagogue.

“I am the Door”

It was said at the same time. When they had excommunicated that man, and he had come out and found the Lord outside as the rejected One, without the camp, then in the next phrase the Lord Jesus begins to speak of Himself as the Door and the Shepherd, and He leads them out. It is out to Christ.

So in every case you find that the governing thing for the benefit, the blessing, the discovery of Christ, is His separation from this entire world system even as a religious thing. Everything is bound up with Him. Its association, its union, its fellowship is with Christ. It is God in Christ. “*I am the Bread.*” You know quite well that you will not find the bread of complete satisfaction in any system as a system. It is only God in Christ. It is a wonderful thing to think that it is not Christ only, but *God in Christ*. It is a wonderful thing to realise God Himself has assumed the responsibility for the maintenance, the preservation, the sustenance, the nourishment, the building up of the life of His own, and He has come in the Person of His Son to be into His own in a spiritual way. What our very bread is to us in a natural way, God has taken that responsibility for us upon Himself.

So the Lord Jesus directs our hearts through Himself in this way, “*Our Father... give us this day our daily bread*” (Matt. 6:11). God has assumed the responsibility of a Father, and has taken up those responsibilities to meet them in and through His Son. The enlargement of that in Christian utterance is found in Philippians 4:19.

This means Christ recognised, Christ known, God in Christ, and that on the ground of our utter separation unto Him. But note: it is God’s gift. He says that it was not Moses that gave the manna in the wilderness, but His Father. Then it is not the result of man’s labours, it is the issue of God’s grace. Are you labouring for spiritual growth? How we have striven and strained to increase our spiritual measure and our spiritual stature. What a burden we have taken upon us in relation to the maintenance of our own spiritual life! We have almost assumed the whole responsibility for our spiritual life, and made it as though it depended upon our labours in prayer, our labours in the Word of God, our labours in the Lord’s service, our effort, our stress.

No one will think that we have made little of prayer or the Word. No one will think that we have said you must have no care whatever for your spiritual life, but there is such a difference between assuming responsibility for ourselves and recognising that God has assumed that responsibility. And because God has assumed the responsibility we should cooperate with God. There is all the difference between trying to work for our justification, and working because we are justified; between trying to work for our perfection, and working because our perfection is secured in Christ. The difference is not merely technical, it is practical, and of immense value. Sometimes it is necessary for the Lord to say to us: “Look here, you are making far too much of your own praying, far too much of your own business in the Scriptures, you are unconsciously coming to think that everything depends upon how much and how fervently you pray.” And then you go out and talk to other people about your prayer life as a

kind of setting up against their own. You do not mean it, but the implication is that this is what accounts for your growth, and it is going to count for other people's growth. That must not be a cause but a *result*. 'The cause, the secret, the spring of everything is Myself, and sometimes you will just have to cease straining, and rest back in Me, in loving trust. Learn to do that a little more, and then you will pray better, and I shall be able to do something more!'

It is the gift of God, not the result of our labours or man's toil. It is a miracle all the time, and you and I are not able to work miracles. The manna was a miracle, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was a miracle. There is a miracle going on all the time in our spiritual sustenance. We are maintained and sustained and kept and carried on. We know well enough that there is nothing here to account for it, and there is nothing but starvation in this world order, but is it not marvellous that, having perhaps to live the life in the very atmosphere of this world, its worldliness, its godlessness, its vulgarity, its artificiality, the Lord, Who knows that it is necessary for some to live their life there not by choice but of necessity, maintains their spiritual life and keeps them alive in famine. It is a miracle, and that makes it all of God. The inclusive miracle of all miracles is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, in which He is given to us in risen life.

It is a mystery as well as a miracle. When the Israelites saw the manna they called it that name which means, What is it? It is something which always has a question mark after it, and which abiding question mark represents the end of man's understanding and the beginning of God's. "*I am the bread of life*". That is something beyond us in all our wit and wisdom, but God knows the mystery. The risen life of the Lord Jesus is inexplicable but it is very real, very true. Resurrection is a mystery.

All this makes it perfectly clear that we are dealing with another Christ than the Christ of doctrine, of creed, of history; we are dealing with a heavenly Christ, we are dealing with a resurrection Christ.

The point which arises for us is this: that much teaching does not necessarily mean much spiritual stature or spiritual health. There are many of us whose spiritual healthiness is far, far behind our doctrine and knowledge. The teaching we have received, and have got in our minds we have not come up to, and yet there is always the peril of thinking that much spiritual knowledge represents much spiritual attainment. Not at all. Not necessarily so. It is not the doctrine, it is the living Lord that makes for stature, spiritual health and strength.

Sometimes a wilderness is necessary in order to discover Christ in this way. Israel had forty years in the wilderness in order to learn the secrets of God in Christ in a typical way, and so we see that the forty days after His resurrection from the side of the disciples were in a wilderness. Have a look at those two who went that same day to Emmaus, and ask whether they were not in a waste and howling wilderness. They walked and were sad. They asked if He were a stranger in Jerusalem and had not heard the things which had come to pass there concerning Jesus of Nazareth. They said, "*But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.*" Here are men in a wilderness. Everything was desolation. And they discovered Christ in that wilderness.

What was true of those two was undoubtedly true of the rest. The indication is that they had lost everything. It was desolation. Poor Mary in the garden said: "*Sir, if you have carried Him*

away, tell me where you have laid Him..." (John 20:15). It was all a wilderness. But what a discovery they made in that wilderness.

May this not be true in the Lord's dealings with you and with me? Ah, it has proved true many times. The Lord has found it necessary to put us in a wilderness to make a new discovery of Himself, and He is doing it all the time. All, or most, of our fresh, glorious discoveries of the Lord have come in wildernesses. What is a wilderness? It is the place where man's effort is unavailing, all his labours can produce nothing, he is at the mercy of heaven, he is dependent entirely upon resources outside of this world. He is shut in and now it is a matter of Life or death, and Life by an intervention, Life by a discovery. Poor Hagar knew life by a discovery. The Lord has to shut us off from ourselves and our own labours (even religious labours sometimes) to helplessness and dependence, where we are at His mercy. It is a matter of Life and death, and Life only if we make a discovery, otherwise it is death. But that is why He takes us into the wilderness, in order that we might know God in Christ as the Bread, the miracle of spiritual preservation, in order that God may put Himself in Christ between us and death. It is not that we discover something, some pool of water, some fading resource, but we discover Himself. When there is nothing between us and death, He steps into the breach, and becomes our Life. It is then that we know the Lord.

As for Israel, so for the disciples in the forty days, there was a table prepared in the wilderness. What was the table? This is the whole point: It was the Lord Himself. "*The Lord is my portion, says my soul...*" (Lam. 3:24).

With all that we have said we realise the impossibility of making clear and living the difference between things and the Lord Himself. You have to make that discovery for yourself in your own heart; no one can explain that. But let the truth be stated, let the fact be emphasised. Our need, whatever that need, is not to find fresh truth, fresh things in a spiritual way, it is a new discovery of God in Christ. Now that may be merely something said, but if that breaks upon you, you will know why it has been said, you will know something that no man can convey to you. This is one of those things which make for such (almost foolish) exclamations which the man who has received his sight says: "...now I see". We had some idea in a mental way before, but there is all the difference between an idea and the thing *seen and known in reality*. The only thing for you and for me to do is to turn to prayer, and ask the Lord to make that difference clear to our own hearts.

God has chosen to be approached, to be touched, to be known in Jesus Christ. God is not somewhere else, God is in Christ, and you and I shall have to learn our lesson anew perhaps, and think and speak of Jesus Christ as God. The whole weight of the Word, of the Scripture, warrants that. This Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New Testament. This Jesus of the New Testament is Jehovah of the Old Testament. They are one, and the man side is but the gracious method of making Himself available to us and making it possible for us to come near.

Oh, for a fresh apprehension of this Person of Christ... And then we have got the Creator, the Sustainer, the Perfecter, the Consummator as our Father, and we have personal fellowship with Him through His Son. What more need have we? Let us never think that we have to persuade Jesus Christ to get the Father to be kind to us. If Jesus Christ is regarded by us as good and kind, ready to help, going about doing good, always kindly to the needy, then that is God also. God has not to be entreated by His Son to be kind to us. "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). 'You have seen Me all the time, therefore you have seen the

Father all the time.' If you have Jesus Christ you have Infinite, Almighty, Eternal God. All that you know to be the truth about the Eternal God is true of Jesus Christ, and if you have Him, you have got God, and there is no other.

Chapter 3 - Progressive Knowledge through Loving, Obeying and Trusting

Reading: John 14:19-31.

You will see that this portion of the Word bears quite directly upon what the Lord has already been saying to us concerning knowing God in Christ. "*After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will also live...*" ("Because I live" points on to the resurrection) *In that day* (when I live, and you live, in that new way, on resurrection ground, with all that it means) *you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you*". The relationship of the Son with the Father, and of His own with Himself, will be of an altogether new order and nature in that day, the day of resurrection; and as to that relationship, there will be a new kind of knowledge. It will be a resurrection knowledge, or a living knowledge.

So we come back again to the matter of the knowledge of God in Christ.

There are two things of a general character, but which are very important, to be said at the outset.

Firstly (and we only mention it, though much more needs to be said about it), *the prospective element or nature of all Christ's teaching*. It is a matter which can hardly be overlooked, that in all His teaching, in all His utterances, the Lord Jesus was looking onwards, pointing to a future time. Nothing at that moment was complete, and the comprehension of what He was saying was only partial. He was looking for a day when what He was saying then would be understood, seen and apprehended in its fuller significance. So, about everything in His life at that time, there was this prospective element. The phrase so often escaped His lips, "*In that day...*". When we come to the time of His resurrection, which was "*that day*", we find at least the beginning of the fulfilment of that expectation and promise, "*Then remembered they His words*"; then they understood and entered into it.

We are in "*that day*", the day when the fuller and more perfect knowledge of the meaning of Christ is available to us, is for us. We are in the day of the resurrection illumination, and we are not looking now particularly for a coming day when we may have that knowledge; it is for us now. We say that because, while Paul is still right when he says, "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I have been known", a great many of the Lord's people content themselves with a smaller knowledge of the Lord than they ought to have.

Secondly, and closely related to that, *this knowing of God in Christ is a primary factor in that maturity which constitutes the governing body for the coming age*. Let us break that up.

There is to be a governing body in the age to come, a company who are to be with Christ in His Throne in government. All believers will not be in that governing Body. They go by different designations. They are sometimes called "the overcomers". Whatever title may be given to

them, the fact is that there is a governing body going to fellowship with Christ in the coming age for governmental purposes.

The primary thing which constitutes such a governing body is a particular knowledge of the Lord; not a knowledge which is reserved for them, but a knowledge which is available to all the Lord's children, but to which only certain come. Hence the importance of this matter of knowing the Lord, knowing God in Christ, because this knowledge leads to maturity. What is spiritual maturity? The answer is in a simple phrase. It is knowing the Lord, perhaps in a way in which the majority do not know the Lord. You know a mature Christian by this very characteristic. You have to say, 'That one knows the Lord'; and when you say it like that you are singling them out from amongst the mass. You are speaking of maturity, and it will be such in that specific sense who form the governing body; a mature company to be entrusted with particular responsibility in relation to Him in the age to come. It is not a matter of election or of selection. It is a matter of spiritual growth, growth in the knowledge of the Lord.

Those two things need to be recognised, and we can come simply to the Word that is here in this portion, which presents to us the law of this growing knowledge of the Lord.

The Progressive Revelation of the Lord to the Heart

What is that law? Judas (not Iscariot) put this question to the Lord: "*What has happened that You are going to disclose [manifest] Yourself to us and not to the world?*" 'You have manifested Yourself to the world. You have been here so that all men could see You, but now You say that is not going to be so, that You are going to manifest Yourself only to us and not to the world. What has happened? What does that mean? What has come to pass that there should be this change?' Really Judas was asking, 'What is the law, what is the secret, what is the law, what is it that governs this change of situation? On what ground will You reveal Yourself to us, so that the world is apart from that manifestation and it shall be ours and bound up with us? How shall we receive that greater manifestation of which You are speaking, which will be peculiarly ours as something apart?'

It looks almost as though the Lord Jesus sidesteps the question, or at least it does not appear as though He directly and immediately answers it. But if the Lord Jesus did not answer the question in its form, He answered it in its substance, and this answer goes right to the heart of the question of Judas. What is the governing law of an enlarged, a progressive revelation of God in Christ to the believer? "*He who loves Me and keeps My words*". You can have nothing simpler than that. You say, 'Oh, but I thought some educational advantages must lie somewhere behind this matter. I thought that I should have to be someone with certain abilities above the average to be able to understand, to know, to grasp the great things of the Lord. I thought I should have to be someone of special capacity for this progressive revelation of which you speak, and I have given up any hope of ever attaining unto these things, they are too vast for me, I am just a simple believer, and I shall never be anything else.' Listen! "*What has happened that You are going to disclose [manifest] Yourself to us and not to the world?*" 'What is the basis, the nature of this great revelation which You say is coming in that day? How can we have it? How can we have the thing which the world can never have?' "*He who loves Me and keeps My words*". How is it that the world cannot have it? Well, 'He that loves Me not and keeps not My words is excluded from the revelation of the manifestation'. Love issuing in obedience is the law of the full manifestation of the Lord to the heart in a progressive way. That is all.

It is not capacity or ability in the human sense inherited or cultivated, but a question of heart. Revelation on the part of God presupposes a disposition on the part of man; that is, it requires a disposition. What disposition is that? It is the disposition which does not question, does not doubt, does not hesitate, does not hold back debating and wondering, but the disposition to trust in Love and do. After all, that is the basis of the whole life with the Lord; it is so simple that we are almost offended at its simplicity when we have thought that all these other things were important. If we are going on unto the knowledge of the Lord we are destined to make this discovery, either to our joy or to our sorrow. It is so possible to build up a mighty structure of wonderful truth, and get into the place where we think we know, and then discover after years of that sort of thing that in our heart we do not know. A calamity overtakes us, some sort of trial, and we pass into the depths of adversity, and make the discovery that really in our hearts we have not got the quiet, simple, confident rest and trust in the Lord that we thought we had, and we go all to pieces. There is nothing more tragic than someone who has stood in a great range of truth, of doctrine, in the place of much knowledge like that, going to pieces in the day of adversity. On the other hand we may make this discovery to our great joy; it is not our Bible knowledge, be it small or great; it is not our teaching or all that which accompanies the things of Christian life. It is a matter of our heart relationship with the Lord expressed in a disposition to trust Him, to believe Him, to obey Him.

Do not think of an overcomer as some wonderful creature. I do not believe that the New Testament in all its address to what we may call "overcomers" was intended to get people to be something extraordinary in themselves, but it was intended to get them from being less than the Lord wanted them to be. The whole tendency in New Testament times and ever since is retrogression, is decline, falling short of what the Lord had presented. It was not to be something extra to the Lord's revelation that that word was given, but it was to be something extra to that poor expression of the Lord which was found everywhere; something extra to the normal. It was to be just all that the Lord wanted. How can we be that? How can we know all that the Lord wants us to know in order that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord? This is the law, "*He who loves Me and keeps My words, I will make My abode in him and will manifest Myself to him*". Though that is not the actual statement of the Lord, it is the direct answer to the question of Judas. 'Judas, you ask Me how I will manifest Myself to you and not to the world. My answer is this, *He who loves Me and keeps My words.*' That is the basis of the manifestation. It is a disposition to trust the Lord in love and obedience.

When you come to look into it, it is perhaps not so simple as it sounds to trust the Lord. It is that that makes it a matter of the heart and not of the mind. When we talk about trusting the Lord it sounds so simple, and when the Lord puts us into the dark and shuts us away from anything that could call for trust, and calls us to trust Himself and gets us down to bedrock, we find things are not so simple. So often the Lord needs to gets us to the place where we trust Him for Himself, where we say, 'Lord, You are perfect in wisdom, in love, in mercy, in truth, in righteousness. If there is any failure, I take the blame for all the failure. You cannot fail. Because of what You are, You must eventually show Yourself faithful.' We come through the dark time simply clinging, not to what the Lord is doing or not doing, but to the fact of what He is Himself. Is not that the essence of Love? See it in relation to your own in this world whom you love. What is the essence of your love? Very often amongst believers there is the necessity to take a course with another which is open to misunderstanding, becoming involved in a situation where they have to do things which they cannot explain at all, and they seem strange things, all contrary to what might be expected, all contrary to good faith. Other people look on and say that they were failing, they were sacrificing confidence and trust, but the one who loves takes this attitude and says, 'I love them, and I trust them too well to believe that

they are doing anything wrong or mean or false, and although I do not understand at the moment why they should do that, I believe in the end I shall find there was no breach, there was no fault, and I just go on trusting.' It has to be like that amongst brethren. It is a poor kind of relationship when we have to get down on our knees and explain every action, and beg them to understand that we are doing the right thing, although they do not see it. It is a far grander thing to know that you can go on, and, although you cannot be understood for the moment, you are trusted.

If that is noble amongst men, has not God the right to expect something like that? Has not Christ the right to look for that attitude? At best we may fail and be wrong after all, but He never. "*He who loves me and keeps My words*". 'It is the expression of an implicit faith in Me for what I am. That gives Me the opportunity of revealing Myself, making Myself manifest.' The progressive knowledge of God in Christ is to the heart that trusts and the heart which has a disposition to obey the Lord.

Be careful about the word "obey". So often we mentally have a kind of catalogue of things about which we think obedience is required, and we reduce the whole matter of obedience to some of these things, and when we hear a word spoken about being obedient to the Lord we either think of some ordinance that we have got to obey, or some outstanding thing that has been a matter of reservation; some question or some fear. Let us remember that this kind of obedience the Lord speaks of is all-round obedience. It is not just the public obedience to the Lord in outstanding things. It is obedience in secret. Very often we are found out in the matter of obedience away back in the secret place where no one else in all the world knows anything about that particular thing, and the Lord has just mentioned that to us. Sometimes it is in our domestic life. The Lord has said something about a thing that wants attending to, something that is not to His glory, and obedience touches there. It might be in our business life. It may be anywhere, just something that is not according to the mind of the Lord, and if only we were to allow ourselves to reflect upon it we should know that that is not glorifying to the Lord. Obedience touches that, and remember that whatever may be the amount of teaching that you get in conferences or in meetings, this resurrection manifestation of the Lord to your heart can never come where there is not the obedience of love in every realm of your being. Lack of obedience shuts the door to revelation to the heart if there is not this disposition to see to things about which the Lord speaks, whatever they may mean.

That is a simple word, but it is foundational, and it goes a long way. We can link the statements in the New Testament with this without hesitation. Take Paul's great cry in Philippians 3:10: "*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection*". It is the same knowledge as this. It is the knowledge of Him. What is the basis of that knowledge? For Paul it was this: The Lord must have me altogether in heart. That is Philippians 3, the Lord having the man absolutely. Leaving the things which are behind, counting all other things but loss, dross, refuse, "*I press on*". It is not some extra kind of knowledge; it is simply the knowledge of the Lord. It may be a fuller, a more advanced point of that knowledge, but it is knowledge which will go right on for all of us, and the one law governs from beginning to end, the first expression and the final expression of Christ, our Lord. "*He who loves Me and keeps My words*".

"Judas, because the world never loved Me, nor keeps My word, I shall not manifest Myself unto it. If you and your fellows here love Me and keep My word, I will manifest Myself, I will come unto you, I will make My abode." It is the same word as He uses at the beginning of John 14: "*In my Father's house are many resting places*". We have our resting place in the Father's

house. He has His resting place in the loving heart. His word is, 'We will come and find Our resting place, just as you hope to find your resting place in the Father's house'.

Let us remember it is not something wonderful or something technical, it is a matter of the heart being disposed to love and trust and obey the Lord. He, finding that disposition and that expression and that response to Himself, will manifest Himself unto us, and these will be the mature and the governing people.

We would say to all those self-designated "simple souls", who think they can never attain unto anything: it is just that which is the ground of your claim. If only you will love the Lord, and obey Him, and trust Him at all times, you will come through to a high and glorious place. That is the way.

The Lord teach us in our hearts the way.

Chapter 4 - The Corporate Christ: Head and Body

Reading: John 14:8-11,20; Mark 8:27,29; 1 Cor. 12:12.

By the above passages we are brought on to the foreshadowing of the collective knowledge of God in Christ, for primarily these words in John 14:20 are to the company. They apply to what is collective, what is to be, in His resurrection, corporate: "*In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you*". That has a personal and individual realisation but it is primarily a collective or corporate matter. It foreshadows that word in 1 Cor. 12:12, one *Body* with many members, forming a corporate expression of Christ. So much is oneness recognised there, that that corporate thing is called "*the Christ*". It is the fulfilment of this word, "*I in you*" in the collective or corporate way. "*But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him*" (1 Cor. 6:17). It is impossible to dissect spirit, to divide spirit. Oneness is spiritual, therefore indivisible, and it becomes Christ in expression, in manifestation. How wonderfully did they come to enter into the fulfilment of this word of assurance and promise: "*In that day you will know*". "It is oneness between Myself and the Father, and Myself and you; you and Myself, and the Father." Those first days of the Holy Spirit's advent were marvellous days of one expression, a united expression of Christ. He spread Himself, as it were, over them as a company, as a Body, and they found that all those things which divided them (whether they be national, social or of any other kind) became entirely subject, if not entirely ruled out. They meant nothing, they were all so one, and it was Christ.

So here we are led to the foreshadowing of that corporate Christ which is the expression of God in Christ in the church, in believers as forming one Body. We can perhaps best arrive at an understanding and apprehension of the meaning of the knowledge of God in Christ in the church by dealing with the effects first.

We have already referred to the sevenfold "*I am*" of John's Gospel. In the chapter in Mark the Lord Jesus asked the question twice concerning His identity: "*Who do people say that I am?*", "*But who do you say that I am?*". In an inclusive answer Peter said, "*You are the Christ*". That is very comprehensive. It was a title, a designation; it implied at least that this was the Anointed of God. Whether Peter understood what that meant is still open to question. He certainly learned a good deal more about it later. It is one thing to say, "*You are the Christ*" in a comprehensive and inclusive way, attesting Him as the Anointed of God, or even the Son of

God. That may resolve itself into a creed, and then a great many people may accept that as the main factor in a creed and call themselves the Christian church. Our question is, What is the church? We need Christ's own meaning, Christ's own definition of Himself before we know what the church is. He answers the question Himself in this very detailed and blessed way when He says seven times, "*I am*". As we listen to His own answer, and to His own question, we shall know through His own person what the church is.

Of course, inasmuch as this is a sevenfold "*I am*", there is some significance bound up with numbers in the Scriptures. This indicates spiritual completeness, the completeness of spiritual order. That is the meaning of "seven" in the Bible. Then if He has said "*I am*" seven times, giving to each of those a separate and specific significance, putting the whole seven together we have a completeness of spiritual order, and that spiritual order is the constitution of the church. Let us put that in another way: it covers the whole range of life in union with Christ. Whatever union with Christ means, we shall find it here in its seven parts, and in its completeness in this sevenfold "*I am*".

This, of course, will be individual as well as collective, but we are thinking especially of the collective at this time. It must be taken as a personal challenge. What is union with Christ personally, and collectively, and as constituting the church which is His Body? The answer to the question is in each and all of these seven phrases. As we allow this Word of the Lord to lead us we shall see that it is not so difficult, so complex after all.

So, again, we run through the significance of "*I am*".

Divine Sustenance "I am the Bread of Life"

What is union with Christ? In other words, what is the church which is the corporate expression of union with Christ? In the first place it is the living expression of complete satisfaction as found in Him.

Allow a parenthesis here. The church is not an assemblage of people, a congregation, a society of those who have given an assent to certain credal statements or doctrinal expressions. The church is the living, experiential embodiment of a Life. The church is the expression of a spiritual state, a spiritual condition. We have said that with no little consideration. That is not just something thrown off. That is not extemporaneous. Go to the Word of God with that. Take the statement of the apostle in the Letter to the Hebrews. "*But Christ as a Son over His House, whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm to the end*". 'Oh, I thought that the House of God, the church, was something established now, something set up, and we are that!' You are making something, perhaps, of an assemblage, a congregation, a society, a number of people who have agreed to certain truths, and you say that is the church. No! We are the House of God only on condition that a certain spiritual state obtains, and the House of God, the church, does not exist if that spiritual condition does not obtain. It is not a matter of how many people agree to the creed and the doctrine.

So the first phase of this spiritual state, this spiritual condition, which makes the church, is that those exist who are living on the enjoyment of full satisfaction by Christ. "*I am the bread of life.*" From our side it is, quite simply: I have found my satisfaction in Christ, He has answered my heart hunger, He has met my soul's longing, He has come between me and death by

starvation, and has become the very staff of Life to me. That is the church. That is union with Christ at its beginning.

We must not hurry with this matter. We have to challenge our own hearts as to the truth of this. Is that true? Can that be said in all honesty? May I ask, very sympathetically, some of the younger friends if that is true? I remember how during certain years of my own life I was a Christian in a way, because there was held over me the fear of hell, the loss of heaven, and my consciousness was so worked upon. I would go to meetings, and would refrain from all sorts of things, because they were the wrong things to do, to go to, and these other things were the right things to do, to have. A very sensitive conscience kept me in a strait jacket, and when I got to a certain time in my later teens I first of all secretly started doing the other things, and going to the other places, and then I shed the yoke and had a fling. Now I ask some of the younger people, is there any element of that in your relationship to the Lord and the things of the Lord? Are you with the Lord and the Lord's people and the Lord's things, because you personally, inwardly have found your full satisfaction in Him, or are you hungering after something else? Is there all the time a looking over the fence with almost wistful eyes at some of the things which the world has? Test this matter, and be sure of your ground. Do not have any legal Christianity, any forced Christianity, any Christianity which is simply a matter of conscience like that. At some time or other you will shed that strait jacket, you will break away. True union with Christ (and the church has the corporate expression of that union) begins here: that He has been discovered as the Bread of Life. That, in other words, is full satisfaction of the heart. When you are fully satisfied it is not difficult to go on. There is nothing like real satisfaction to make life spontaneous and testimony spontaneous and to drive the "must" and the "ought" out, and to bring in the pleased, the delight.

With that we lay the foundation. You can clearly see the principle that is at work, when we mean and when we say that the church is a spiritual state. It is satisfaction with Christ. To speak of belonging to the church and being worldly is to simply be a contradiction and a denial. Those two things cannot go together.

Divine Illumination "I am the Light of the World"

The church is the corporate expression of a divine illumination. Eyes have been opened, things which could not be seen by men in nature have come to the knowledge of those whose spiritual eyes have been opened and enlightened by the grace and Spirit of God. The church is the company of those who can truly say, "*One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see*" (John 9:25). Eyes have been opened, and there is a knowledge, a comprehension by a spiritual faculty of perception which is uniquely the property of the child of God. No one else has that. So the church is the place of divine illumination, and the central and inclusive Object of the illumination is Christ. We shall see more, and more, and more as we go on, but there is an initial eye opening. Have you had it? Are you living on the ground of the really personal, definite experience of having had your eyes opened? I do not ask if you are having a great deal of teaching and truth presented to you, which you are able more or less to grasp and understand. I am asking if you have within your own spirit a faculty of spiritual apprehension so that you are able to say from time to time, with wonderful satisfaction: 'The Lord has made that clear to me; the Lord has shown me that; the Lord has brought that to my knowledge, not as information but as transforming illumination. It is something not which I have learned as a matter of truth, but is something which has made a tremendous difference in me since it was revealed to me.' That is the value of illumination. It transforms, it changes. The church is the

illuminated company of those in union with Christ and by which illumination it is being changed unto the image of Christ.

Divine Communion **“I am the Door”**

Here the significance is that union with Christ means access into that realm, that sphere of fellowship and communion with God. The door represents exclusion or inclusion. You are on one side or the other of a door; that is what a door is for, to have you on one side or the other. It represents a line of demarcation, a point of division, and it says you are outside, or you are in. Christ as the door excludes or includes. That from which He excludes, and that into which He leads is living fellowship with God. In the meaning of His redemptive person, in Him in Whom the sin which separates and bars from the presence of God is taken up in His own divine Person and dealt with, there is fellowship with God. The sin, the rejection, the exclusion, the judgment, the death has been taken by Him and put away, and now, accepting Him as the sin-bearer, as the judgment-bearer, or rejecting Him, determines which side of the door you are so far as the presence and fellowship with God are concerned. The church is the company of those who are inside, in the place of communion and fellowship with God in a living way.

Divine Leadership and Protection **“I am the Good Shepherd”**

What do we need more to add to the completeness of the Christian life? We shall need to know, now that we are of the company of His own, that there is a way to go, there is a testimony to be borne, there is a work to do, there is a life to live, there is a world in which to move. And in this whole realm, so marked by difficulties, perplexities, perils and dangers, we shall need to discover our need more and more. We shall need to be led, we shall need a Leader. Our prayer will daily arise from a sense of need, “*Teach me Your way O Lord, and lead me in a level path*” (Ps. 27:11). Because of the perils on every side we shall need protection also. Union with Christ secures this for us, for He says, “*I am the good Shepherd.*”

In the capacity of the Shepherd, pictorially He is the Leader and Protector of His own, whom He has now secured as His own flock. The church is the company of the Christ-led and the Christ-preserved.

Resurrection and Life **“I am the Resurrection and the Life”**

Is not that enough? No, for there is an enemy abroad, and an enemy with one object. His object is to slay the sheep. The great enemy is termed in one Scripture, “*him who had the power of death*” (Heb. 2:14). Death is a very comprehensive thing. Death can saturate an atmosphere, so that your spirit may be overcome and paralysed and your mind or your body brought under its power. We may know spiritual death as we walk about this world. Those who have to live the life in the world, in much worldliness and godlessness, know only too well the meaning of spiritual death. Oh, for a breath of Life! They come into gatherings of the Lord’s people, and they know the difference in the atmosphere. They say, ‘This is Life; we can breathe here; we can live here.’ Spiritual death is abroad, seeking by every means to destroy that which is of God, to overwhelm the believer and the church, and this deceiver will never rest until he has done his utmost to bring to death what is of God. What is the church, then?

What is union with Christ in individual and corporate expression? It is, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*"

Union with Christ means union with the Resurrection and the Life. It is a spiritual state which works itself out in a progressive and continuous overcoming of death because He has overcome death. Lay hold of that. We are going to survive because we are bound to the inevitable "Survivor". He has survived. He cannot be overcome of death. Union with Him means that His own victory is for us over death, to be expressed in the church. "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" What is the Christian life? It is all these things. What is the church? It is all these things. Nay, it is *Himself* expressed in all these ways. Is not that enough? No, we have still two features, for we are not at the end yet.

Full Attainment "I am the way, the truth and the life"

The journey still stretches out before us. We have not finished our course, and this is a meaningful course, a vital, important course, fraught with tremendous significance. There is the possibility of failing in our attainment, it is possible to contemplate not finishing the course, a falling short, a missing the mark, a making shipwreck. Then a need arises to secure the full end, to see to it that there is a full attainment to all the meaning of God in calling us, in bringing us into union with Himself in Christ. What do we need? The answer is in this: "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*"

The Way. There is everything there to secure full attainment. Union with Christ means that the whole way is given to us. There is no going astray, there is no mistaking the path, there are no alternatives. Union with Christ puts us definitely, positively upon *the Way*. The end is secured at the beginning when there is union with Christ. It is as though by union with Him we had reached the end, for He is not only the beginning of the way but the end of the way in Himself.

The Truth. In this way there are many things that we shall have to learn, there are many things to know. Knowledge of things grows in this way. We cannot walk blindly and insensibly in this way. We are called upon in this way to receive education, to grow in understanding. How shall we know all that we have got to know? How can we secure all the enlightenment that we must have? How can we learn all that is to be learned in this vast way upon which we have started? There is a simple answer. "*I am... the truth.*" "Union and communion, fellowship with Me means that you simply come to understand, you come to know." The knowledge is secured. It will not be brain exertion, it will be heart enlightenment, heart instruction. It is not knowing a host of things, it is walking with Him. If we know the Lord then we have our heart problems answered.

The Life. We have set out on this way, it is a great way, a responsible way, and there is much in this way that we have to learn, and we fear that we shall fall short of the knowledge and understanding that we ought to have in this way. We are so weak, so feeble to go in this way, so strengthless. How shall we, having started, be able to go on, to continue, and to get to the end and finish our course, not make shipwreck, not fall short, not break down? How shall we arrive? "*I am... the life*". What is that? A mighty energy to keep you going, a mighty power to triumph over your weakness. The apostle Paul was the embodiment of the great revelation of the truth entrusted to him concerning the church; and look at him in this respect, "*We had the sentence of death within ourselves... we despaired even of life... God who raises the dead*" (2 Cor. 1:8, 9). That man, who came to the place where, apart from God in resurrection, he would have broken down on the way and fallen short of completion, was able at last to say, "I have

finished my course". Why? Because he had found Christ as the Life for the way. The church is that. Union with Christ is that. It is a spiritual state; Christ expressing Himself as our way, our direction, our course, our understanding, our knowledge, our wisdom, our energy, our power, our strength, our vitality to go through to the end. That is the church.

That all has to do with our living, our life; but then what do we live for? Is there no vocation? Is it all just to reach the end? Is it all just to live the Christian life successfully? God has brought us into being for His own heart satisfaction, that He might get something. The main issue of our lives and of the church should be that God has gained thereby. Can that be? Is that possible? Can we present God with anything to His satisfaction? Can the church provide God with that which will meet His pleasure? Yes, it must be; that is why we have been called. How can it be? The whole question of fruitfulness arises. "*My Father is glorified in this, that you bear much fruit*" (John 15:8). "*I am the Vine, ye are the branches*" (John 15:5). Christ is the great Media of the Life of God for His own satisfaction. It is a corporate thing: "*... so also is the Christ*". It is a Body with many members. It is the Christ bearing His own fruit through His own limbs. How shall we be fruitful to God's satisfaction? Not by effort of our own, striving and straining, arranging and organising, and projecting and pursuing plans and programmes, but by abiding in Him. Restfully, trustfully, we bear fruit which is of His producing. "*I am the Vine...*". Basically, fundamentally He is saying this: "It is Mine to produce the fruit, yours it is to abide in that union and communion with Me which makes that fruit-bearing possible." Oh, that the church had remained on that ground. Oh, that you and I had remained on that ground. We surely deplore as much as anything, that we have not known this earlier. We have spent ourselves in making efforts to be fruitful, and we have done many things for the Lord, and we cannot see a great deal of real, definite satisfaction in it, we cannot see that God is very much satisfied and glorified in it all; it is labour and travail, but with severe limitation. If only we had known more truly the meaning of the Lord yielding His own fruit through us by our deeper, quieter, restful faith in Him and abiding union, things would have been different.

Here is the sevenfold perfection of the church's life, and you will see that it is a spiritual state. It seems strange to say that the church is a spiritual state, but that is really what it amounts to. It is the company of those who are in this condition, from heart satisfaction to God's satisfaction. That is the whole compass.

May the Lord find us so.

Chapter 5 - The Significance of the Forty Days in Life and Experience

Reading: John 20; Acts 1:1-3.

The Lord is desirous of showing us what is bound up within the compass of the forty days after His resurrection. The Word says that He appeared unto them by the space of forty days, and spoke the things concerning the Kingdom of God. We have called this particular period of the forty days, "The great probation". Forty throughout the Scriptures always represents a period of probation, a period in which certain things obtained and governed, with a great practical issue in view, with a future hanging upon them. That is quite patent from any knowledge which you may have of the various periods of forty days, and months, or forty years, recorded in the Word of God.

This is the greatest of all the probationary periods of the Bible, and of history. It is really a great and tremendous parenthesis with meaning, which it will take not only the rest of the dispensation, but all the ages to come to fathom and to know. That is saying a great thing, and it is not just language. Bound up with those forty days after His resurrection were all the future ages, but for our present purpose and benefit, what we want to see is that the whole dispensation was bound up with those forty days. In that period of probation, in that parenthesis, two great phases of the heavenly purpose met.

On the one side the incarnation, with all that it meant of the life, the teaching and the working of the Son of God. That met in the forty days; that merged in the forty days. On the other side the church, His Body, the corporate continuation of Christ.

These two phases of heavenly purpose: the Christ in life and teaching and work and the church His corporate, continual expression in life and teaching and work, met in the forty days. So that the forty days, on the one side, had a retrospective value. Everything that the Lord Jesus was, all that related to His Person, all that He had said, all His manner of life, and all the works that He had performed, were gathered up in the forty days and came to life in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It is quite clear that they were not alive to it until then, and it was not alive to them. There had been flashes of recognition as to His person, such as when Peter would cry by divine illumination, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*"; but, oh, how imperfect and inadequate was his apprehension of that Person, that he could have made that declaration and not long after have denied the Son of the Living God with oaths and curses, which was surely indicative of that very imperfect apprehension.

The Lord was not alive to them in the full sense during those months and years. He spoke in parables, veiled things, and they did not understand. He made it clear that they were not understanding His acts when He fed the five thousand, and then the four thousand. He had to say, 'Do you not yet understand? Do you not see?' Even in the mighty miracles they were not seeing the significance. In the forty days after the resurrection it all came to life, "*Then remembered they His words*"; "*Then He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures*". It all came to life in a new way.

There was no more dramatic moment than that when Mary recognised Him. "*Sir, if you have carried Him away (He was dead to her), tell me where you have laid Him...*" "*Mary!*" "*Rabboni!*" (John 20:15,16). *He is alive!* There is recognition. Everything in those forty days lived anew, with new meaning, with new power, with new virtue, with new value, all new. All the fulness of the incarnation waited for resurrection to be spiritually apprehended and livingly understood.

That is all the retrospective side of the forty days. There is the prospective side. There is the church to be. There is the dispensation stretching out ahead, and the forty days are unto that. The retrospective brought everything into Life for them. The Lord Jesus during those forty days was preparing them to be the church. After all, what is the church if it is not that Body living in the quickened, divinely illumined knowledge of the risen Lord? He was preparing them. He was really producing (shall we say) the elements by which the church was to be constituted. The very constitution of the church hung upon what those forty days held of spiritual recognition, spiritual perception, spiritual quickening, spiritual worship, and all that we have there.

So, then, how important were the forty days, how full of significance, not for them alone but for us. That is not just history of a bygone time, that abides timeless for the church, and all its members. There is no church, and there can be no membership of the church except on the

ground of what transpired in the forty days as a living experience. You and I have got to come into the value of the forty days. Blessed be God, it can be. The risen Lord is still appearing to hearts, to lives. It is still blessedly possible, and actually true, that hearts are coming to recognise Him, and falling down and saying as never before, "*My Lord, and my God*" and coming to the place where they, with such depth of heart feeling, cried, "*Master, Rabboni*". That is as possible today as it was then. This is a timeless thing. It is this that makes the believer, it is this that makes the church, and apart from this the church is a hollow shell. Oh, that today as never before, with all that we have known of the Lord, all our walk with Him, all our listening to His words, we should say, "*My Lord! My God!*" with a new heart, an outgoing heart-burst of worship. It would take an artist to put into those moments the right kind of expression. You have to sit down and contemplate that little drama in that early hour before the daybreak. Mary spoke to Him as to the gardener, and then with an accent, a tone, something as of yore, and yet with newness, He mentioned her name.

Put yourself in that position if you can. You have lost one very dear by death. They have gone out of your world and left you desolate. A few days after, one is present with you speaking perhaps about that one, and you begin to speak to that one present as though they were only in a very distant way related to the one whom you have lost as to a stranger. Then suddenly that one present mentions your name. They are a stranger to you; you do not know that they have ever seen you before, and they mention your name with a tone that is exactly and only the tone that was used by that one whom you lost. You hear their actual voice, you are startled and you simply exclaim their name, "*Master*", is that You? It is most terrifically impressive. What is going to be the result of that? Imagine this woman, going off as fast as she could to let it be known. Oh yes, there is something new in the relationship to the Lord like that, the marvel of Himself.

It is that kind of thing that makes the church; it is that wonder, that marvel, that ascendancy, that "something" which is not just an ordinary relationship with a member of the Godhead. The church ought to be a people like that. You and I ought to be more like that, and that is what the Lord is saying.

Or look at Thomas. "*Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe!*" 'Say what you like, I am not going to believe!' So he has shut himself out and is a man alone. Then, for some reason or other, perhaps sick of his loneliness or under the persuasion of some friends, he comes in on one occasion where they are. He is no more with them in heart, but he is there in body, and the Lord appears, and the first act of the Lord is to make straight for that man. 'Now Thomas, come and see the marks that you demanded to see, reach hither your finger!' I do not think that Thomas touched those marks or that side. Thomas broke, and went down; "*My Lord, and my God*". It is that sort of thing that makes the true Christian life and makes the church.

That is what the Lord is after, to get us away from our mere ecclesiasticism, all that externality and formality, and get us down to the place where God in Christ has got our hearts in brokenness and worship, and we simply say "*My Lord, and my God*".

It was thus He constituted His church, as a wondering, worshipping, marvelling company, caught up in the sheer ecstasy of a new discovery of Himself, Oh, that that might be the atmosphere in which we live, that that might be the nature of our lives!

You see what we mean by saying the forty days gave character to the dispensation so far as the church was concerned. That is the meaning of the resurrection. The knowledge of Christ after this kind was intended by Him to characterise the rest of the age in the corporate person of the church. That means that the church is something which has died with, and to, Christ after the flesh. It seemed to be necessary that they should die with and to Christ after the flesh before something could happen.

He had been with them in all the fulness of Who He was, and while abiding with them for three years and more, they could not see Him. In many ways He would manifest Himself. John, writing about the whole of that life, speaks of the things which Jesus did in that whole space of time, and he recorded them in order that we might believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. These men were there; they did not have the written record, they had the personal presence, and the things happened; yet they could not see Him. When He spoke they could not understand what He was saying; not that they were unwilling, prejudiced or suspicious, but they simply could not; it was not in them. No doubt from time to time they made honest efforts. We believe that some of these men at least really did want to know and to understand.

In what He did, they did not see beyond the act, they did not see the significance of the act. What are you going to do with that kind of thing? Are you going to say it is hopeless? What do you do with a hopeless thing? Well, you had better bury it. If this is as far as a thing can go, it is best that it should die and for there to be something new. So it was necessary, and so it came to pass in a spiritual way, that they died with and to Christ after the flesh. It was no use their living on that poor level of incapacity, inability, impossibility. So the crash came, and He went, and in a sense Christ was gone for them and all that was bound up with Him went with Him, and we find them in a desolation with nothing left. Not a fragment of His words held their hearts. *“For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead”*. Oh, amazing statement! *“For as yet...”*. After all, they knew not the Scriptures that He should rise from the dead.

So everything had gone, and their world was a blank. They had died with and to Christ after the flesh. But they rise with and to Christ after the Spirit in His resurrection. See all the marks of that resurrection. Why, eyes are growing bigger and bigger, mouths gape, the heart is wondering and worshipping; they have risen with Him and to Him. That is the church. That is how He constituted the church. That is what He was seeking to do. The church that day died with Him and to Him after the flesh, and had risen with Him and to Him after the Spirit. After the flesh is clearly seen to mean just limitation and impotence. After the Spirit is manifestly to release life and power. That is the value of the forty days in spiritual experience. That is the meaning of the probation. That is the thought for the age. That is what the Lord is seeking to have in you and in me.

It is Christ in that fulness released from human limitation, released from earth bonds, released in fulness becoming the answer to the deepest longing of the human heart; so deep that the human heart can do nothing else but worship.

These forty days are strangely marked by the absence of words on the part of the disciples. It is simply a period of ejaculation, spontaneous expressions in short sentences. That is the nature of the discovery of the Lord. You feel far more than you can say, things are too wonderful for words. You have got something in the Lord which it is well-nigh impossible to convey to others.

In all this the desire, the longing, the outreaching is that we should ask the Lord for recovery, or, if it has never been true, a producing, a constituting of this in us. What do we long for? It is not for words, discourses, messages, things to say and preach, but that inner heart life of wonder with the Lord, where the Lord fills everything. That is His thought for the church.

We must ask the Lord to make more of this true in our case, that the divine desire and purpose for this age may have some realisation at least where we are concerned.

Chapter 6 - Christ Known in Resurrection Life

Reading: John 20; Acts 1:1-3.

In this meditation we want to gather up all that we have already said. The dispensation rests upon the forty days. The whole of God's meaning for the church is expressed in the nature of the forty days; not the church as we know it, but as God meant it to be and means it to be. Its character is taken from what happened then.

The Lord still desires that full thought, however much failure there may have been; however things in general amongst His people may be other than that today; however little there may seem to be of the divine thought expressed in what is called the church. The Lord does not abandon His full desire, but would work where He can amongst His own to have as large a measure of that full, original thought as possible, and thus, individually and corporately, we are called to take our character from the great forty days after His resurrection, in which He was laying the foundation and providing the constituents for His own unto the end of the age and beyond. Thus it is that the details of that period are of such great significance and value.

As far as we are able to see, the first movement, the first feature of that forty days — the resurrection of the Lord Jesus — was the meeting of Mary in the garden. It seems that she was the first one on the move before the daybreak. Others came along as the day was breaking, but she was there in advance of anyone, and she, therefore, comes into the very first place, the first step of the manifestations of the forty days, and represents for us the first significance of that great probationary, preparatory, constituting period.

As we look again at Mary Magdalene, what do we see? We must remember that the great new dispensation is at its commencement. This is just before the break of the great dispensational day. That day is just beginning to dawn, and when we think of all that that embodies and involves, all that was ever in God's heart and mind as to this dispensation, it is very impressive and striking to see the first movement. What should we expect if, say, the greatest thing in the history of the world was about to be brought forth, to be done? I think we should expect anything but what we find here. Here is the small, the weak beginning from the human side. God begins at such a small and weak point that you are amazed! It is almost difficult to believe what we have already said about the immensity of the forty days and what they were intended to mean for all time and for all eternity. It is almost impossible to believe that that is all true; and then to say that all that had its commencement in this first step, and really, in a sense upon this first step all the rest was to hang. How weak, how small is this beginning. The whole immense development of the old creation is entirely set aside. The creation had developed, the old creation had reached immense proportions of ability, of knowledge, of power, of world glory. What empires! What ranges of knowledge! Even today a large part of our education is occupied with the knowledge that was up to the day of Christ. Yes, the world had developed,

the old creation had expanded, it was an immense thing; men had great ideas of their power, of their wisdom, of their knowledge; and the whole thing is entirely set aside and ignored. God does not take a fragment of it with which to begin His new creation, with which to bring forth the new order of things. He begins at the lowest point with this woman, who speaks to us of weakness and smallness in human life. That is where God begins, and that is God's link with His new order.

Listen to that in your heart. God's link in this universe with His great new order, with His new creation, with that universe which is to be filled through and through with His own glory, that new heaven and new earth, inconceivable in its wonder and glory and blessings, finds its link for God in Mary Magdalene. God begins right down there. He has chosen the weak things, the foolish things, the things which are not. Deeply scarred by the fall, having known what it was to be possessed of seven demons, having tasted the bitterness and the agony of sin and sin's remorse and Satan's tyranny, now owing everything to Christ as Saviour and Lord; that is where the new creation begins. That is the basic constituent of the church and of every member of Christ.

Where do you begin? Not high up at some lofty point of human development, but having known something of sin's awfulness, and Satan's cruelty, and the remorse of a lost state, and having come to find Christ as Lord of Satan and of sin, and of all adverse circumstances, to bring them under His dominion and save them. That is where the church begins. Any church which takes the name of the church which is not the embodiment of that basic thing, is not His church; it is foreign to His thought. We must remember that the very inception of our beings in relation to God in Christ is of this mind, where we owe everything to Christ's Lordship and Saviourhood, where out of the recognition of Him to Whom we owe everything we cry, Rabboni! Master! That is the beginning of the church in its basic elements. That has to abide through the age, and has to come out in the ages to come; that in the ages to come the manifold wisdom, the grace of God should be displayed by this church. What will be the abiding, the ever recurrent note of the song through the ages to be? "*You are worthy!*" The church is founded on that.

The church has inclined to depart from that position, and has become something in itself; with glory and prestige, fame and honour, and lavishness, and much more which is not just the worshipping, adoring, thankful, humble acknowledgment of Christ as its all. Here is Mary: a clinging, dependent, devoted debtor. Clinging — she would have taken hold of Him; devoted — we know from her past life her devotion to Him; dependent — ah yes, the sun had gone out of her life, everything was eclipsed. There was nothing left when He went; she was heartbroken. She said to the one whom she thought was the gardener, "*Sir, if you have carried Him away...*" 'He is all I had; to Him I owed everything. I have nothing. As long as it is possible even for me to be in proximity to His lifeless form, let it be. That is all I have left. Debtor — He saved me, He delivered me, I owe everything to Him.' It requires a good deal of imagination to reproduce the feelings that must have rushed through her soul to discover that He was alive from the dead.

The Lord was definitely seeking to do things in those forty days. He was establishing for them the fact that He was risen, the fact of resurrection, but the details also have their meaning and value, and this is the first.

It says to our hearts that the church which He was bringing into being was to be constituted upon this basis: that it is composed of clinging, dependent, devoted debtors to Him Who is

their All, and they have naught beside Him. If you and I are there, we have a fairly sure foundation for union with Christ and to the purpose of God.

You notice, then, that the power of resurrection was linked with deep human weakness, and is to be so abidingly. There is no question about the power expressed in resurrection. We are familiar with the words which speak of that: “*surpassing greatness of His power... which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead*” (Eph. 1:19,20). Here is the immensity of divine power in resurrection, but it is all veiled, all hidden, all a secret thing, and becomes linked with the deepest human weakness, the deepest human need and dependence.

That is going to be so always. Do you pray for power? Do you pray to know the power of His resurrection? What are you prepared for? How do you expect to have your prayer answered? The Lord will answer you in words like these, “*My strength is made perfect in weakness*”; “*Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body*”; “*Death works in us.*” For the manifestation of that power there will ever be required a weakness on the human side, and therein is the mystery of that power, therein is the seeming contradiction — power linked with weakness and death, and both present at the same time. That requires a lot of explaining. You say, If the exceeding greatness of God’s power is present, there will be no weakness. That is not the case. Resurrection power is not obvious to natural perception. It is something which works in secret. It is secret and spiritual. It is God doing something unseen for the moment, but that will prove that it had and has in it the exceeding greatness of His power, because it will stand every test that can be applied to it, and go through every storm that can burst upon it, and endure through all ages. That is resurrection power.

This is why the Lord Jesus did not reveal Himself to the world after His resurrection. He only appeared amongst His own. This kind of thing cannot be apprehended by natural standards of judgement. This can only be known in a spiritual people, and they will go out and before the world will be just the same people as ever they were. They will be accounted ignorant and unlearned men. They will be accounted as weak things, the off-scouring of all things, nothings amongst men; they will be looked down upon and despised, seem to be as in themselves quite at a discount amongst men. And yet there is something about these men and these women which you cannot explain or account for on human grounds at all, but you are up against God. Touch them and you touch not them, but God. Counter what they are doing, and you have to reckon with God. That is the power that is present. It is not our presence; it is not what we are at all. We shall be present in weakness, in fear, perhaps in much trembling amongst men, and yet there is present a power which is no less than the exceeding greatness of His power. There is a paradox, a seeming contradiction about this weakness and strength, both present at the same time. Too often foolish and ignorant people have thought that they could touch the Lord’s anointed with impunity, they could put their hand upon God’s work, they could interfere with something that the Lord was doing, speak against it, do it harm and pass on their way unscathed. Oh no! Sooner or later they will awake to the fact that they have touched God, they have touched the anointing, they have stood in God’s way. He is very long-suffering, but

*“The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all.”*

There is no escaping God. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

God was in Christ, and God in Christ is in His Body in the power of resurrection. But it is hidden, it is veiled, it is mystic, and we must never pray for power with an eye to a display, with any ambition for glory or demonstration. Our prayer for power may be answered with a new experience of weakness: weakening, and emptying, and breaking to make room for the Lord, so that the only thing that will be recognised will be that there is more of the Lord there than there was, and there is less of the man and of the woman in themselves. Resurrection power is after that kind. It is, when we have said all, the producing of Christ Who is to be the very essence and substance of God's new universe. When God has His new heaven and new earth, His new universe completed and perfected, its characteristic through and through will be Christ. Everywhere Christ will be felt, Christ will be seen, Christ will be centre; the atmosphere of that universe will be Christ. The slightest experience and touch of that now is a wonderful thing, to be anywhere where you can say that the atmosphere of the place is Christ, to be in touch with anyone concerning whom you can say: 'To be in touch with that one is to be in touch with Christ', is marvellous. When a company of the Lord's people, forgetting all that is of this earth, even in a religious way — all that divides, every human limitation — are just together met to the Lord, and it is all Christ, it is a wonderful place to be in, it is a wonderful time to have. But think of the universe like that, with nothing else in it; Christ, only Christ, seen, known, heard and felt through and through.

That comes in with resurrection, and resurrection is the bringing of Christ into us, the producing of Christ with that end in view. All that is not Christ will fall away like an old garment, and pass for ever, and just what is Christ will remain and go on for ever. That is what God is doing in teaching us what it means to live on the ground of His risen life producing Christ, but what an immense thing it is to bring in Christ! We are not forgetting the Person when we say that the essence and substance of God's new universe is Christ. He remains the divine Person, but He is ministering of Himself, in His risen life to His Body. So you see the dispensation and the church rest upon Christ known in resurrection life, not upon doctrine, not upon creed, but upon Christ known in resurrection life. Was not that the great characteristic of the forty days?

Chapter 7 - The Vessel of Testimony

Reading: Rev. 1:4-20.

It is true that Mary Magdalene was the vessel, in the first instance, of testimony to others. The Lord having appeared to her, she having identified Him in resurrection, her heart having gone out anew in adoration to her re-found Rabboni, He said to her, "*Go to my brethren*". Then He told her what to say to them. We leave that for the moment.

The first thing is that she became the vessel of testimony to others. Of course, it is clear and very simple that you must have Mary's appreciation of the Lord Jesus before you can be a vessel of testimony to others. We can put that round the other way. The vessel of testimony is that which has such an appreciation of Him as she had. If the church is really to be His vessel of testimony, it must have that kind of basis or background; a deep, worshipful appreciation of the Lord Jesus. The very first thing, and the abiding thing in the life of the church, is worship. The first thing that ought to be the mark of every coming together of the Lord's people is worship. What is worship? It is the heart going out in appreciation of Him, giving Him the whole place and getting right down before Him and setting Him up anew as everything. The church is

based upon that. It is out of that appreciation that testimony arises and the church becomes the vessel of His testimony.

These things are very simple and elementary, yet they are not just things said, there is a need for recovery of this appreciation of the Lord Jesus. Oh, to be more taken up with Him, even if we are less taken up with the things which are associated with Him. So often it is the things rather than the Lord. The vessel of testimony is constituted upon the basis of a heart appreciation of the Lord Jesus.

What is the vessel? The vessel is a witness. The vessel of the Lord's testimony, be it the individual member of Christ or the corporate Body the church, is not a repository of truth. It is a witness. The vessel of testimony is not a preacher, in the first instance. So many have made the mistake, with so much loss to the Lord, of thinking that the first thing for a Christian worker to do is to preach. No, the first thing for a Christian (all Christians ought to be workers) is to be a witness. There is a very great deal of difference between a preacher and a witness. A witness is one who possesses personal evidence, a preacher may be one who is telling people a lot of things which may be second-hand and collected from many sources. A witness is one out of whose own life experience and knowledge there arises the thing which they have to say. Mary was a witness. The first thing she said to those men was the thing which she had seen, which she had proved, that which had come to her without any question whatever, "*The Lord is risen.*" You can say that as a preacher and there be all the difference of two worlds between your saying that as a preacher and saying that as a witness. It is so necessary for us to come back to the forty days for the substance of our testimony; that is, to the personal, living touch with the risen Lord, identifying Him ourselves as the risen Lord and being able to say, not because it has been told us, not because it is a part of our Christian education, but because we have come personally, directly, immediately, livingly, with tremendous effect and result in our own hearts into touch with Him risen and alive. The vessel of testimony is a witness; preaching may result, but in the first place it is being a witness.

The church is a witness to the risen Lord; that is, He, the risen Lord, has entered right into its very life, and become its life as He had become the life of Mary at that time when all was lost. It is a matter of knowing Christ in resurrection. Let us set our hearts upon that. It is a matter about which to be before the Lord continually, individually and as parts of a local assembly, or as members of the whole Body, even though we may be physically and geographically isolated. Let us set our hearts before the Lord to seeking that we shall not be people who are just marked by some truth which we state, some doctrine which we reiterate, but we are marked by the personal fellowship with the risen Lord; that others coming amongst us shall first and always have to say, It is not their teaching, it is not the truth that they expound that strikes you most, it is the risen Lord, the Life in the midst which is the thing that you realise. That is the testimony. That is the church's business. So we must continually pray that it shall be like that, and that there shall be a jealous and zealous safeguarding of that testimony. If the enemy can in any way get in a deposit of something that works death, he will do it, for he works towards death. Death is His object as the offset to the testimony of Jesus.

That kind of knowledge of the risen Lord bounds the whole dispensation. The dispensation is bounded by that living knowledge. It began with Mary Magdalene. That is the first movement in the dispensation. It was knowing the Lord as living. There is a sense in which we may say that the dispensation commenced there in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and His first touch with a being here in that risen life.

You go right on to what represents at least a movement at the end, an end time condition, and the great apostle is nearing the end of the course. Writing one of his last letters from prison he says, *“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection”*. You see the beginning and the end of the dispensation in a figurative or representative way as set forth in Mary, and Paul related to this same end. You and I will have occasion for knowing the risen life of the Lord right on to the end.

Resurrection is connected with the trumpet. *“The trumpet will sound, and the dead in Christ will be raised”*. The resurrection is connected with the sounding trumpet. As you remember, right through the Scriptures the trumpet is always the symbol of testimony. The silver trumpets of the Old Testament (silver being the type of redemption) in the hands of Aaron’s sons, proclaimed, declared and set in order. Here the trumpet comes in in connection with resurrection. It is the trumpet which sounds forth the note of testimony that redemption is complete, reaching unto the very body lying in the grave, redeemed from this mortality, this body of corruption. For this dispensation Mary was the first one to blow the trumpet. In a spiritual sense, she sounded the first dispensational note upon the trumpet of testimony as to resurrection Life. You and I are entrusted with the trumpet of testimony, to sound forth the fact of resurrection as including redemption from death, from the grave, from all that has to do therewith. The whole dispensation is governed by the trumpet. The first sound with Mary and the last sound of the trumpet when the dead shall rise, its note ever and always is that Christ lives, Christ is risen. Resurrection in Christ represents complete redemption.

The next word about Mary is this, *“Go to My brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, unto My God and your God.”* Here is the message for the vessel of testimony. Here is the message for the age: *“My Father and your Father, My God and your God”*. I wonder if we catch the significance of that. *“My Father (then He is His Son) and your Father (then I am His son), my God (that puts Him in the place of Man, but what a Man!) and your God (then with that Man you are united, and God becomes the God of one united Man in Christ)”*. Simply it is this: the combined and the combining Person of Christ. What is the combined Person? God and Christ joined in the most vital and intimate relationship. That relationship is for you in resurrection. That is the resurrection family, that is the wonderful message which the church embodies and represents and has to give. In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus everything has been put away that stood in the path of the closest relationship with God, even such a relationship as Christ and the Father. *“In that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you”*. What do you make of that? We are not putting ourselves in the place of the Godhead, of Jesus Christ, and saying we become absorbed in the deity of the Godhead. We are saying that here is set forth a relationship in sonship. Paul says so much about, *“We were predestined to the adoption of sons”*; *“Because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts by which we cry, Abba, Father”*. *“My Father and your Father”*. That is what is contained in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the removal of every obstruction to that kind of relationship. It is something new, something that never was before. The marvel of it all is that that position, that relationship, that union which Christ had with the Father is our blessed privilege, our right, available to us and to all in resurrection union with Jesus Christ. Go and tell that. Go and announce that. That is the church’s first experience and that is the church’s message. *“Go to My brethren, and tell them...”*

“My God and your God”. Gathered up in the Manhood of the Lord Jesus one new Man is brought about, that one new corporate Man in Christ. Great, eternal, infinite, almighty Lord God is our God. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our God.

When you have said that you must take the next step, and this is where the wonder reaches its point of greatest ascendancy. That God, that Infinite God, that Almighty, that Eternal God, Who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is in Christ. God was in Christ, Christ is God manifest in the flesh. He says, "*We (My Father and I) will come to him and make Our abode in him*". All that we think of the great God in Christ is our possession. We cannot grasp that, we cannot believe it, we cannot understand it, but this is what comes to us in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It is a thing we have to learn all over again in a new way. We so often part these two, and think of Jesus Christ as Someone apart from and perhaps less than God, Jehovah. "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father.*" Oh, to be able to grasp it! To have Christ is to have God. "*My God and your God*". This is the combined and combining Person of the Lord Jesus.

Just for a few moments we will say a word or two on something more general, but of very great practical value. It is concerning the potentialities of resurrection Life in union with Christ. The thing that we are so slow in recognising and grasping, which comes to us so late, is the very reality of union with Christ. We are dealing with something very real. We are not dealing with so many things as we might find in a bookcase or upon a shelf, taking them up and using them, and looking into them, and then putting them down: they are lifeless, powerless things. We are dealing with something very terrible and gloriously real when we deal with risen Life in union with Christ. If you and I have that union and that Life, there is that in us of which the potentialities and capabilities are altogether beyond our imagination, and if that life in union with Christ is given a chance, given what it requires for its expression, for its fulfilment and realisation, it can carry us through to no less a place than the glory which He has with the Father, to be glorified together with Him. But, oh, the tremendous things that that Life can do on the way. How wonderful they are!

Let us illustrate this again from the forty days. What was one of the features of those forty days so far as Christ was concerned in resurrection amongst His own? The result of His appearances was to draw from them a wondering acknowledgment, recognition and attestation of His Lordship. Mary will say, "*Master*". Thomas will say, "*My Lord and my God*". That is the spirit of things; that is the atmosphere. Presently, before He leaves them, He will say to them in clear words: "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and in earth*". Now that Lordship, that universal Lordship, that coming to the place of virtue and spiritual enthronement as Lord of the universe, is by resurrection. It is not just official, by appointment, by placing; it is moral in its background, it is because of certain things. "*For this reason God highly exalted Him*". It is because of things that He has done. He has come to the place of Lordship, and it is the resurrection that brings that about, brings that into being, brings that forth. He reigns as the Risen One because He is risen. This is the potentiality of resurrection. There is that in resurrection Life in union with the risen Lord which can bring into complete spiritual ascendancy, and in the end land us at His side in the Throne. It is that mighty thing which overcomes, and makes overcomers.

What is the overcomer? The overcomer is the one in whom the power of His resurrection has had its fullest expression, in whom the risen Lord has been proved and known in the power of His resurrection. In risen union with the Lord and the deposit of His risen Life in us by His Spirit, there is the potentiality of the Throne. It is spiritual now. So far as this world is concerned now, Christ's sovereignty is a spiritual thing. He is expressing His Lordship in a spiritual way. In your life and in mine His Lordship is not official, it is spiritual. Every challenge of that Lordship is a spiritual challenge. Will we bow our minds, our reason, our will, our affections, our judgements to Him? Anyone who has prejudices has not owned the absolute

Lordship of Jesus Christ. They have put their own judgements in front of Him, not submitting everything to Him. Anyone who takes into account and allows the cost and the consequences to influence them in a reservation, in a hesitation, in a delay, has not bowed to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. In ten thousand ways that Lordship has a spiritual association and application, and so in this world it is not His official position, it is His spiritual power and His moral position which is governing everything.

The day will come when literally and officially He will rule the nations with a rod of iron. At present His Kingship is spiritual, and it begins in the church. It is the power of resurrection, the power of Life, the mighty potentiality of that risen Life, in union with the risen Lord, and it is capable of bringing us into spiritual ascendancy and spiritual dominion. You know quite well that in the Name of the Lord you cannot assume literal and official authority in this world today. The Kingdom of God is not a temporal state. At present the true church is not a temporal power, but there is spiritual power, spiritual authority, spiritual ascendancy in union with Christ which makes the temporal forces yield, which makes differences and changes all around, and usually (I think we should be right in saying invariably) the working of that spiritual potency takes place when some new experience of death and resurrection with Christ takes place in us, when we pass into some new place of letting go of self. It is then that we conquer. Hold on to your own way and you are weak, you have no power; cling to your own judgements and you are defeated. Yield to the Lord and to His Cross the self-life, the self-will or whatever it may be, and you come into a new place of power, spiritual ascendancy, spiritual influence, and something happens; changes take place and you see that the Lord orders things. Oh, the potentialities of resurrection union with Christ! They are in the direction of His Lordship.

Then another thing in the forty days in resurrection, as we have already mentioned, is sonship. What potentialities there are there! Resurrection Life in union with the resurrected Lord produces sonship and brings sonship into view. You need to read again the letter to the Hebrews to understand the values of sonship. If you have all that the New Testament has to say about sonship, you will see that it points in the direction of that responsible fellowship with the Lord in government. A son is not a child. A son is one who has come to the place of maturity and authority, and been placed to represent the Father in responsibility; entrusted by the Father with a position of honour. That is the meaning of sonship, and the whole of this vast creation is creaking and groaning and agonising and travailing in a state of inward ferment and revolt. Things are not right, it is as though there is dislocation in all its joints, and it is an aching creation. It is saying as within itself, I was meant for something, but I am not realising that, and I cannot; something is holding me back, something is arresting, something is hindering, there is something that I am waiting for and when that something comes about, then all my purpose and intent will be realised; but I am waiting, and as I wait I groan for that day of deliverance. What says the Word? "*Waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God*". All the creation, for the realisation of its eternal intention, hangs upon and waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. By what means shall that manifestation come about? It begins in resurrection Life in union with Christ - that which you and I have now in us if we are Christ's. The end of this is intended to be such a manifestation that shall release the whole creation. If you are in living union with the Lord Jesus, that Life is within you. The end of that thing in the will of God is such a manifestation as the universe shall recognise, and find itself in joyous satisfaction and redemption in that moment. Oh, the potentialities of resurrection Life!

That with which we must close is this: You and I must let the risen Lord in His risen Life have His way. We can put hindrances in the way of that Life. We can arrest even the risen Life of Christ in our own hearts. Doubt will do it. Unbelief will do it. Fear will do it. Mistrust will do it.

Disobedience will do it. What a lot of ground disobedience will cover! It is our compliance with the risen Lord, it is our utter subjection to Him. It is that we do not by any means or in any way allow hindrances and checks to come in the way of the working of the Life that is in us, that we always keep the way open in prompt obedience, swift response, open-heartedness to Him in simplicity and purity of spirit, abiding in His love. He says, "*Abide in my love*". What does He mean by that? That it is possible to get out of the love of the Lord? "*Who will separate us from the love of God*"? No, it is not that. The only way of getting out of the love of God is to cease to believe in His love. He would say, 'Always believe that I love you, no matter what the circumstances are, what the situation, no matter what you are passing through; always believe that I love you, and, having loved you, know that I love to the end. I am unchangeable, there is no variableness with Me, no shadow cast by turning; I change not, My love remains the same for you. Although it may sometimes seem that I am not loving you, but may seem just the opposite — it looks as though I am against you — believe always, at all times, in all conditions that I love you; abide in My love.' That is the way of Life. That is the way of giving opportunity to this mighty, risen power which has in it such potentialities as to bring us at last to glory.

The Lord teach us in our hearts this lesson for His Name's sake.

Chapter 8 - The New Testament Assembly and the House of God

Its Importance and its Values

It would be difficult to say things too strong or too great in connection with the importance of the assembly and the House of God. There is only one danger, as far as we can see, in that connection, and that is that mentally we might put some "thing" in the place of "Someone", but inasmuch as we have been occupied with the "Someone" and recognise that if it is "something" that emerges, it issues from the knowledge of the "Someone". We make that safeguard to warn our own hearts about that peril. It remains true that it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the House of God and of the local assembly.

Realising the Divine Purpose

In the first place, the House of God is a divinely appointed means and method of realising the divine purpose. We would put a good deal of emphasis upon the importance of the divine purpose. We should not minimise or belittle that, but we must remember that God has His own way, His own method, His own means of reaching His end and for realising His purpose. And if God has appointed that, fixed that, established that, then the means and the method take importance, and the House of God is the divinely ordained and appointed means and method of realising the divine purpose.

We must assume that you know the Word of God. We could go right through the Old Testament and the New Testament proving, gathering the data, to establish what we have said, that the House of God is something ordained, fixed as God's means and method of realising His end. You have a great deal immediately coming to your mind as such things are said. So we assume your knowledge of the Word.

Again, the House of God is -

A Spiritual and Heavenly System

A lot of people are afraid of that word “system”, and, put in a wrong realm, we might well be afraid of it. Nevertheless, God is a God of order, God is a God of arrangement, of design, of plan. There is a fixed economy with God, and the House of God is a spiritual and heavenly order. It is fixed, it is divinely governed. To violate it is to run great risks, is to be in peril. It means loss, calamity. If the Holy Spirit, Who is here to preserve that divine order and to have it recognised and established, really has His way, He will bring us into the knowledge of what that order is and require it of us, that we recognise and we accede. Herein, of course, is the importance of the Holy Spirit being sovereign amongst the Lord’s people, because we do not know. The majority of the Lord’s people do not know the heavenly system, the heavenly order and the thoughts of God.

This is not a hard thing. It is a very blessedly simple and easy thing. Given that one's condition is of absolute yieldedness to the Holy Spirit, the established sovereign government of the Spirit of Christ, we shall spontaneously come to know. Of course, that yieldedness to the Holy Spirit means a very great deal more than it sounds in a statement of that kind, such a comprehensive statement. We have to learn that there is still so much of the domination of our own ideas about the Lord, the Lord’s things and the Lord’s ways. There is that strong inheritance from a system which has perhaps run in the stream of our blood for generations. All sorts of things count, and very often it means a very big upheaval, a terrific break with a past, with what seems to be very constitutional with us, in order to come under that absolute government of the Holy Spirit so that He can reveal to us something which perhaps may be altogether contrary to our deepest and fullest and most long established convictions. It takes time; nevertheless the truth is that as the Spirit gains the upper hand we are bound to come into the knowledge of the heavenly things according to the mind of God.

Just for the moment the point is this, that God is a God of order, and the House of God is that in which God’s order is set up. The opposite of order is anarchy, and we know that outside of the House of God that is what obtains.

Then again, the House of God is -

A Necessity to God and to His People

I suppose we could take it for granted that if God appoints things, ordains anything, He does not do so just by a whim. He is not playing at something, He is not pretending. He does that thing because it is essential to Him. If it is true that God has chosen and appointed that that which is called His House should be His means and method of realising His purpose, then that thing is necessary to Him. Let no one say that this is something which is optional, something which is quite extra to a normal Christian life. It is nothing of the kind. We cannot play with divine things as though the Lord were making a pretence, that the Lord was in a realm of fancifulness and without any serious meaning saying these things, and bringing in certain ways and means. God is above all that sort of thing, and with Him this is essential. If that is so we may take it that we shall never reach God’s full end until we recognise the absolute necessity for God’s method and God’s means.

Now, all that we have said is general concerning the House of God. The assembly is intended by Him to be the local expression of that. The local expression is therefore as necessary as the whole thing. That is, the thing as a whole can only have an expression by local means.

Divine Purpose is Related

We now come to some of the values of the assembly as the local expression of the House of God. We said that all divine purpose is bound up therewith, but we must go further than that and recognise that all divine purpose is related, so far as believers are concerned, as to

a) Knowledge

We mean by that that the divine purpose cannot be wholly attained unto and realised in a detached, isolated, separated or fragmentary way. Divine purpose includes all saints, and all saints together, not as parts, fragments, separated or detached. Divine purpose is an indispensable whole, and requires the whole House of God. We can explain that as we go on. Divine purpose, being related, being one, being bound together so far as believers are concerned, can only be known by all saints. To make that quite simple, if you or I as individuals should be born again, and then in detachment from every other born again child of God should live our life in some isolated place, we as individuals could never know the whole purpose of God. We might know a fragment, but we could not know the whole. The full knowledge of God's thought is given to the church, not to any one individual, and not to the individuals as separate, isolated units.

The working of that truth is quite clear, that when you have an assembly that is moving under the Lord's headship by the Holy Spirit's government, you have a wonderful range of divine illumination, instruction and revelation. It is wonderful what a fulness the Lord unveils of Himself to a spiritual company, and it is that company that draws it out, so to speak. The company is the Lord's opportunity, the Lord's occasion. He gives fully, in great fulness, and great ranges of revelation of Himself to spiritual companies who are moving on with Him. So that the very knowledge of divine purpose is a related knowledge. It requires the assembly.

b) Growth

The same thing holds good with regard to spiritual growth, just as to spiritual knowledge. Fulness of spiritual development does not take place in isolation. Fulness of spiritual growth takes place in the related lives of the Lord's people. We owe more than perhaps we realise in our spiritual enlargement to our fellowship with the people of God. That is a tremendous factor. It is a divinely ordained factor. If Thomas goes outside the circle he will simply remain an arrested unit, going round in his own little circle, and never getting anywhere; but if he will come in with the others, he gives the Lord the opportunity and the occasion that He is waiting for of giving him a new revelation of Himself. Take yourself off, and you will begin to go round in a very small circle, and there will be no advance and no growth until you come back again, because the Lord has ordained this. You cannot set aside something that the Lord has established without loss. For spiritual growth, divine purpose is therefore a related thing.

c) Vocation

The same thing is true as to vocation. If you prefer you can call it service, though vocation is a bigger word and covers more ground. No one can ever fulfil the whole of the divine purpose in service in an isolated way. Take account of things as far as you have any knowledge and experience, as to whether it is not true that where relatedness does not obtain, there is

limitation and arrest in the knowledge of the Lord, in spiritual growth, and in the service of the Lord according to the Lord's whole purpose.

Let us see some of the effects on both sides.

The Assembly is a Necessity to

a) Fulness

No one member can come to the Lord's fulness on his own. The greater measure of the Lord's fulness requires a company, and the entire measure of the Lord's fulness requires the whole church, not just a local assembly. That word of Paul in Ephesians 2 may apply to local assemblies, it may apply to individuals. In either case the principle is the same. "*Each several building, fitly framed together*". That may be the individual as a separate building. There is much in the Word to indicate that the individual believer is a building of God. It may apply to the local assemblies. The law is the same in either case that the several building fitly framed together, whether they be individual or local assemblies, are required unto the full end, a habitation of God through the Spirit. Now you reach the crux of the whole matter. In what does God dwell in fulness? Not in individuals and not in local assemblies, but in the whole House. No individual, no assembly, can know the fulness of the divine indwelling; it takes the whole, it is related. So, therefore, we can only know fulness in a related way.

b) Balance

Balance is not an unimportant thing. It is a thing of very great importance. When we speak of balance we are speaking of measure. We are needed in a related way for the government of our individual measure. I should help you to your fulness, but I also ought to keep you within the bounds of your measure, and if you try to get beyond your measure and still remain in fellowship with me, you do damage to that fellowship.

Now spread that over the assembly. We have often illustrated this from the human body. You can take an organ from the human body, and separate it from all its associated or related organs, and by artificial stimulation you can keep it alive, and you may even develop it beyond its ordinary proportions or measure; but you have done great damage to it, and to the rest of the body. The result is that you get something detached from its right connection but it is quite abnormal. What has happened? All those other related organs and tissues are essential to keep it within its measure but also to help it to fulfil itself to its measure. All related organs are essential to its normal life both within its bounds and up to the full measure of its bounds. You and I are organs in that sense, in a great organism.

Now put that to the test again. If any individual, or any company of individuals, become a law unto themselves, detached from the rest of the Lord's people and run on their own, on the one hand there is spiritual loss, and on the other hand there is abnormality and loss of balance. It is always so. It is impossible for a true Holy Spirit assembly to become unbalanced. A true assembly according to God can never be departmental, *it can never have one line of teaching only, it can never have one line of activity only*. An unrelated organ becomes unbalanced. Now, if you set up a company of the Lord's people and say that their whole work, their entire work — and they must touch nothing else — is evangelism for the salvation of souls, you have not got an assembly. You may have a Gospel Mission, but you have not an assembly. If you constitute a company of the Lord's people, and say, "Now our whole and our entire and

exclusive purpose is teaching, we must not touch evangelism, we must not touch anything else!" you have something unrelated and abnormal and unbalanced. Wherever that sort of thing obtains you have an arrest of development somewhere, you have an unbalanced state, you have not got fulness, and sooner or later that abnormal condition produces a lot of trouble.

You have set up a line of "holiness teaching", for instance, and let it always and ever be that. Call yourself a Holiness Movement, and have nothing else to say than about this thing. Sooner or later you will get a lot of people into trouble, and the world is strewn with people who have got into an awful mess because of an undue emphasis upon one thing. You can get the purely evangelistic or Gospel line. What happens? As a rule, after fifty, sixty or a hundred years you have a whole company of babes, who have been born again for fifty years or so and are still babes. That is abnormal. A true assembly can never be departmental in that way. A true assembly is marked by fulness. It has the full-orbed revelation of Christ. You are never allowed unduly to remain along one line. You think you have sometimes reached the apex of revelation, and there is nothing more to be shown, and then the Lord breaks in and you find yourself with something more coming through from Him than you never thought of. So you go from peak to peak; that is, when the Holy Spirit has the matter in hand.

This is connected with the assembly, with the House of God. Such as have not assembly training spiritually both lack and come short in the matter of spiritual fulness, knowledge, growth and serviceableness to the Lord, and are unbalanced, having preponderances. All freelances are abnormal. Sooner or later, whether they be individuals or companies, they will be abnormal, or perhaps we ought to say subnormal. They either fall short or go beyond. Perhaps both are true. One of the unfortunate things about such people and such companies or institutions, is that they are more right (so they think) than anyone else, and everybody else is less right than they are. They are blind to anything else. If there is anything else they do not see the need of it, and they despise it, set it aside as something unnecessary, and think that what they are on is the necessary thing.

A true relatedness amongst the Lord's people brings us to the place where we see the value in everything that is of the Lord, and we are grateful for everything in the world that is of the Lord. We appreciate it, we do not despise it, in so far as there is something really of and for the Lord, a truly balanced believer appreciates it and never sets it aside.

The Assembly Builds Itself up in Love

Herein lies the values of the assembly. One course, one direction of assembly life is that it builds itself up in love, it edifies itself. Its increase, its maturity is mutual, and it is by its maturity that it makes its increase. The assembly, on the other hand, checks everything that is abnormal, keeps down every preponderance. If you are going to live a true life according to assembly principles, no one will be marked by an importance greater than their due. Everyone will be given their due importance, but no one will be marked by an importance which does not belong to them. You cannot set up people on natural grounds to take precedence and to be important people in a true assembly. Those things go. It does not matter what they are according to nature, be it social, be it intellectual; in the assembly their measure is spiritual, and nothing else. Their place is according to spiritual measure, and the assembly simply makes it impossible for them to be anything else. If they do not accept that, they have a bad time about it, and say, 'These people are not taking account of who I am and what I am, of my social status and my tradition, my position and my acquirements.' They are not taken account of, and they feel offended; they will go, and they had better go!

Yet the lowliest according to this world, the humblest, the poorest, the least having spiritual measure will be recognised and will gradually come in that spiritual recognition to a place of usefulness and helpfulness. The assembly governs. It is not that there is a law projected, and put upon people; it is simply the very state of things. You are in a spiritual state, and all that you take account of is what is spiritual, and people cannot breathe in the presence of such if they are not spiritual in a spiritual assembly, and they know that if they have got to remain, they must go on with the Lord. It takes all responsibility off of us; it is Holy Spirit governed. Spiritual government takes responsibility of an official kind away from us, and a good deal of anxiety. We must leave that with the Lord.

There is all that value in true fellowship, and it makes for spiritual increase. It is mutually helpful in enjoyment of what is spiritual, and in the holding unto its measure under spiritual government of what is not spiritual, so that in a related way we fulfil our function to the full, but we never get into the realm of what is untrue, unreal, artificial or false by becoming abnormal. There is no place like a spiritual fellowship, a true assembly, for making unrelated falsehood and artificiality manifest. It comes out, and you feel that you are all false, it is all artificial, it is not real, and you have got to let go, it cannot thrive.

Many questions will arise from what we have said, and one of them will be, What about those who have no local assembly? The answer is quite ready, and, I believe, quite a right one provided that you are not out of fellowship because you are an awkward person, but because of a true case; not that you are expecting every other believer to be up to your standard or you want a certain line of teaching and you want a certain measure before you could associate with that. Provided there are true children of God seeking to walk with Him, you should be associated with them as far as possible. But given that there really is nothing, that there is a barren desolation, there are no children of God but geographically you are really cut off, what are you going to do? We have said that the assembly is essential for all these purposes and how you can learn the assembly in truth, in spirit, in principle yourself in relation to all the Lord's people. We are not necessarily speaking about people who are actually in assemblies, but those who have an assembly background, an assembly understanding, that you must know the truth of the relatedness of everything of God and never cut yourself off and be a law unto yourself, a freelance; but that, given a spiritual knowledge of the revelation of the church which is His Body, you can move according to the laws and principles of the church as the Body wherever you are.

Some will have to go to different parts of the world, where they find nothing of this actually existing, but the assembly being something which is primarily the Holy Spirit's business, can mean a very great deal to us wherever we are, in spirit we can enter into that. We can by faith appropriate the fellowship of the Lord's people and derive great benefit therefrom. We can stand by faith into the prayers of the people of God who are praying for all saints. They may not know us, either by name or in any other way, but they are praying for all saints, and that includes us, and a faith appropriation of that which is universal so far as the church is concerned, brings benefit.

Then again, we must remember that any decisions that have to be made, any work that has to be done, is not something that belongs to us. It is not our work, our mission, our particular line of things. We have to bring that to the Lord, to have everything of a related kind, and get the personal element entirely out of it. You must see that failure to recognise that means a petering out of things sooner or later. Take anything that has been built up and around individuals. What happens? It goes on while that individual is alive, and for a little while after.

Then artificial respiration has to be brought in to keep it going, and the thing has got to go on by its own momentum, and the momentum has got to be produced by itself somehow. That is not how the true church has gone on through the ages. God has looked after that, and maintained a testimony in the earth. He has taken responsibility. Anything of man always goes that way, and anything that is of man usually becomes something in itself and more or less unrelated to the whole thing that God is doing. Somehow or other it seems impossible for man to have any other mentality than that and, however well he means, in the long run the issue is that it is his thing.

We have so often heard people saying about certain pieces of work that this is God's work and not theirs, and they are out for the interests of God, that is all. Then you have touched their piece of work in some way, and there has been a furore, and you have said, 'But you said it was for the Lord and it was not your work, that you are out for the Lord.' 'Oh, yes', is the reply, 'but you interfered with us.' Now, with all the good meaning in the world, until the Cross has slain that which is personal, it becomes something of man and it will have to be carried on by man sooner or later. The thing which is of the Holy Spirit must be carried on by the Spirit, but it does demand the Spirit and the principle of the whole Body of Christ; that is, that everything is related to the whole.

That should be a kind of spiritual mentality with us, that wherever we are we never for a moment accept isolation, detachment or independence, or be freelances, but we must always recognise that we ourselves and all that we are in, and all that we are doing is but a part of a whole, related in the Holy Spirit, and has got to be maintained as that. So that God has His complete thing, His many-sided thing, His diversity in unity. The trouble is that man has taken the diversity and destroyed the unity. So that the evangelist has no room for the teacher, and the teacher despises the evangelist, and so on. That is not the House of God. In the House of God all these are equally divinely appointed. If God gave these gifts, who shall say that any one of them is unimportant? They are all necessary.

May the Lord give us this spiritual mentality of fellowship, not the technique of the church but the spiritual mentality of fellowship with all saints.

Chapter 9 - The Nature and Order of the Assembly

Resurrection Position and Resurrection Values

One of the very comprehensive facts about the New Testament assembly is that of its essential spirituality. It is essentially spiritual in all respects.

We have been saying much about the great forty days after the resurrection as setting forth the elements and constituents of the life of the church for the rest of the dispensation at least. You will remember that one of the things said in that connection was that everything of the three and a half years preceding came in a new way into life during those forty days. Presently we shall say more about that, but at the outset there is one particular thing that must be said in relation to that. It is this, that a resurrection position is necessary and is indispensable to resurrection values. We have spoken, and shall speak again, of the resurrection values; all that comes of new life, new meaning, new power, new effectiveness with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus demands that there shall be a resurrection position on the part of those who are to know those values.

What we mean by a resurrection position is this: we saw that the disciples were bound by terrible limitations in themselves during their time with the Lord on earth. As to understanding Him, either in His sayings or in His doings; as to seeing through to His meaning or in any other way, they were simply defeated all the time in themselves. They could not do it. The end showed that altogether they were out of court so far as He was concerned in all the meaning of His person, His life, His words and His acts. We cannot blame them. We have often felt very angry with them, but the Lord Jesus Himself was never angry with them though He was sometimes astonished. Certainly He was surprised, and intimated that from time to time: "*Do you not yet understand?*"; "*Oh you of little faith*". It is the amazement of this thing, and well might we be amazed at the result of the terrible touch of the blinding hand of the devil upon men. However, there it is, they were like that, and the only thing to do was to end that sort of thing, and it must come to a full and final end. So the death of the Lord Jesus saw, as it were, the seal put upon that. It was sealed up and finished as a kind, as a nature, as a state, and it went down into His death. That kind of association with Him, that kind of apprehension of Him all went, and now it is gone and they know it.

If they had thought at any time that they understood Him, and probably they had thought that — for such is this nature of ours, that in our blindest hours we think that we see, and we talk about things that we know nothing about — now at length in His death they know the thing has stopped for them. They have no delusions or illusions about themselves, everything is finished, and the need now is for them to stand on new ground, in a new position, with "finished" written definitely and finally over that particular kind of relationship with the Lord. It is that kind of relationship with Christ which is the relationship of teaching, of truth, of doctrine, whether it be inherited or by which we have been brought up, or which we have received later on. It does not matter what it is, it is that kind of relationship with Christ which is purely historical. That has to go. Then we have to stand on a new ground where we know that even our Christian doctrine is no good to us. All the mighty bundle of inherited and received teaching is useless to us, it does not work, it has not saved us in the hour of real need, it has not come to our rescue in the time of deepest trial. So far as we are concerned it is not working.

It is as well that we do get there, and we take it bit by bit, and every bit of doctrine finds us sooner or later in a position where it is no use to us, something has got to happen to make it of use to us. He said all these things, but what is the good of it to us? We have seen all this, but what is the value just now? The question arises, 'Was He right, or was He wrong? The alternative was, What was the matter with us if He were right? Granted He was right, what has been wrong with us that we landed into a position like this after we have seen it all?' The trouble is with us, and the sooner we come to that position where we recognise it is no use naturally, merely humanly grasping, apprehending divine things, the better; for it gets us nowhere. It is just possible for us to be able to remember what the Lord has said and done, and have it all fresh in our memory so that we can talk about it as a wonderful range of truth and historical fact, and yet it be of really no spiritual value to us whatever and there be a terrible contradiction to it all in a deep hour of trial.

A new position is needed on our part. There is nothing wrong with the truth, nothing wrong with the Lord. He has not been wrong, He has not misled us, misinformed us, deceived us. On that side everything is right; what is needed is a position on our side.

Well then, they came to the place where they had that whole level and realm of things concluded, and, being concluded so far as they were concerned, and their knowingly being dominated by something altogether other, that gave the Lord the opportunity that He needed.

What did He want to do? Did He want to give them new revelation? No. Did He want to teach them fresh things? No. He wanted to make all that they had heard and seen, to live. That is what happened in the forty days.

We shall speak about that more perhaps presently, but the point is this, and it is of great practical importance and value: that we need a resurrection position unto resurrection values.

Let us enlarge that and say we need resurrection conditions in order to have resurrection values. There may be a whole realm and range of things, which are quite true as to the Scriptures, in which we move. We may even be teaching those things, and yet the real, mighty working power and life, energy and fulness, and spontaneity and joy of all that may be lacking. Then the Lord brings into a place where all that comes under the hammer. You cannot go on with it any longer, and you have to come out of it somehow, it is finished. It is impossible to go on. You ask: 'Can it be that we are wrong?' No, there it is in the Scripture. We are not wrong as to terms, and as to Scriptural truth, but what is the matter? We are in the wrong realm, we are not in a realm of living conditions. We have taken it up in a way that is our apprehension of it, and we are not in the living position.

You may be in an earthly system of the Christian religion, for instance; that is, you may be in the traditional realm of things, and everything there may be, so far as the Bible is concerned, quite sound. The Bible may be taught, it may be quite Scriptural in its form of expression and practice, and yet it may all mean such a grind, such a burden, such death; there may be such strain. You have got the truth in a way, but you have no expression of it. There is everything that contradicts it until the whole thing breaks you. Then the Lord works to deliver you out of that whole realm of things, at great cost perhaps, and constitutes a simple, pure, open fellowship of living believers. The old ecclesiastical line of things is gone, the old order, and now it is on the simple basis of fellowship with the Lord Himself, and in the Lord, on the part of some of His people. What happens then? You do not learn things that you never knew before, so far as the Scriptures are concerned, but there is a difference, the Word lives, you have got new values altogether. It is resurrection position.

You can see beyond what we have said. We have only said this by way of trying to help you to grasp this important thing: that you cannot take New Testament teaching into any realm and have it living; you have got to be where it has its required conditions for it to live. There must be a resurrection position for resurrection values. The resurrection position is the entire cutting off and sealing up of all our natural (though very religious and devout) dealings with the Lord and His things in association with Christ and His teaching, and a coming to the place where, knowing the utter inability of man even religiously and devoutly to understand Him, to know Him, and to move with Him in a living way, the Lord has a new position for coming in and making all things new.

That is a very important thing as we go on in this matter of the assembly, because it applies to the assembly in a peculiar and particular way. You can take up the New Testament assembly here. You can get it all by reading the New Testament, and then you can, by way of teaching, make it set, put it into a "New Testament" mould, and say, 'We will have it like this, and so we will have a New Testament assembly.' It cannot be done. You could do everything but put divine Life into a thing, and what is the good of the most beautiful thing if the divine Life is not in it? It may be perfect in its articulation, and its symmetry, and its make-up, but supposing it still remains without the divine Life? We are better without it.

So a New Testament assembly demands a resurrection position, and it is concerning that that we want to say what should be said at this time. We have said that it is essentially spiritual in all respects; that is, as to the presence and knowledge of and communion with Christ. There are more ways than one in which Christ may be other than spiritually present. We may have Christ present in a sense that is not the true spiritual sense in this way. We may have the fact of Christ, that He was and that He is, purely as a historical fact. We may have the creed, which declares those other facts about Him, as to His eternity, His incarnation, His deity, His redemptive and atoning work, His resurrection, His ascension, His coming again; and yet we may not have Christ present. Many people have made a mistake in thinking that to be fundamental is all that is required, and that secures all that is needed. Not at all. The true Christ, the Christ of God, the Christ of the Scriptures, the Christ of eternity, the Christ of the incarnation, the Christ of the earthly life and teaching and miracles, the Christ of Calvary, the Christ of resurrection, the Christ of ascension, and the Christ of coming again, may all be present in an intellectual way. We may have that kind of Christ, but we only have Him in an intellectual way. It is possible to be like that, even as an assembly of what is called the church. It may be in a mystical way, an artistic way, but not have Christ present in a living, spiritual way. The church is not that, and the assembly is not that which is Christ present after this manner. It is that in which Christ is spiritually, livingly present as truly in Person as He was here in the days of His flesh.

We want to try to distinguish between those two things that we have mentioned, Christ present in a spiritual way and Christ present in a mystical way. What is spiritual demands that something is done in our very constitution. What is mystical is but the development and projection of the psychic elements which are already in our constitution. There is a vast deal of difference. For spiritual fellowship with Christ, something has got to be done in us, something that was not there has got to be made to function. We have got to be made different beings altogether for spiritual fellowship and communion with Christ. That is not so with the mystical. The mystical is simply the projecting of certain elements in our own beings as psychical beings, and you can go to great lengths with the projecting of those psychical, mystical elements in the human soul. You can produce almost anything. We have heard of one who so projected those elements in her being, as she concentrated upon the physical death of the Lord Jesus and His agony, that the result was her hands began to bleed, and her feet also. We believe that is something which can be established as a fact. You can produce by this soul-life anything if you concentrate enough. You can get any kind of sensation. You can kill yourself by sheer soul force.

You could enter in that realm into contemplating Christ present, you could dwell upon Christ present in that realm, and go out away from people into the street, into the countryside, into the wood, and into the field, and with an intensified projection of your own soul you could become mystical and contemplative of Christ and His things with strange effects upon yourself: feelings, mighty emotions, even hearing voices. And you could come back and say you have had a great experience, you have heard the voice of the Lord, and you can build up something on that ground. That is the tendency of all that is artistic and ornate as far as the external is concerned; it is to project upon the imagination that which relates to God so that there is a sense and a sensing of things divine. That is one realm that demands no constitutional change in humanity; that is simply the bringing up of what is more or less latent in the human soul and that is not living or a spiritual touch with Christ. These two things are two different realms altogether, and it is as well that we know it.

One is of God, and of God alone. The other is of self strain. One is true, the other is false. The false thing is exceedingly dangerous, and very often its hallmark is that it is not practical. Practical things of everyday life are not looked after by these mystical people. Such a commonplace thing as punctuality comes in here; they are too much up in the clouds to be punctual. The Holy Spirit is the best former of character and constitution of a moral integrity. The mystical people are very often much wanting in these practical, simple things. They are intensely and religiously devout. Then there are the perils of deception. It is always dangerous to project your soul life in relation to the things of God. It is just what Satan has always tried to get people to do, in order to set up his counterfeit of God and God's things.

So we are speaking about the church as not being something mystical (we always fear the term "the mystical body of Christ" because so many people have this other idea, that it is a soulish thing); we are speaking about the essential spiritual character which has come about because there is an end of that other thing.

No doubt some of the disciples were mystical, and had all these elements well developed in their lives. Some of them were exceedingly practical, we do know. Andrew stands out as a practical man, but there were others who were mystical; but they all came to the same end, they all had to come to the winding up of what they were before ever they could enter into the living values of Christ. Something new had to be done. That is what we mean by the spiritual presence, the spiritual communion with Christ and the things of Christ.

So we see that in resurrection the teaching and works of Christ are taken up in an altogether new way, and a living way. That will take us once more to something already intimated: the prospective nature of everything related to Christ in the three-and-a-half years. There was His teaching. His teaching in the main was of two kinds, the direct and the indirect. What we mean by the direct is clear, plain statements of facts; such a statement as what is called the sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes and all the rest. It is a direct statement of teaching, of truth; or such things as we have in the Gospel by John. If you like you can begin with chapter 3 of that Gospel, and read the direct, plain statement to Nicodemus, "*You must be born again*", and such things. Or read chapter 4, the talk to the woman about the well and the water. Or see chapter 5 and chapter 6. This is all direct statement, direct teaching, but it does not want much arguing that that was all prospective. It has no meaning until the resurrection of Christ. It has no value until the resurrection of Christ. It is of no value until you get resurrection conditions.

It is all very well to talk about applying the sermon on the Mount to this world. It can never be done. Human nature being what it is, and remaining what it is, the sermon on the Mount will never, never be possible of expression. You must have Kingdom conditions before you can have the practical working of the teaching of the sermon on the Mount. Go to the world such as it is today and talk about being poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and all these things. It comes into direct collision with human nature. Something has got to happen to human nature before that can be made effective. That is just the thing; it has got to happen. So the whole thing is prospective, it waits for the Cross and the resurrection. The word, "*You must be born again*" waits for the resurrection, the work of the Cross. The well within and the water springing up unto Life eternal waits for resurrection. So you see all the direct teaching of the Lord Jesus was prospective.

It was equally true of the indirect teaching of the Lord. By that we mean His parabolic teaching. There is no doubt about it that He taught by that method. He deliberately hid or veiled things with a view to another day. He knew quite well that it was impossible to understand, and that

something must be done, and so He must put things in simple illustration and hide their real meaning, and they did not grasp it. The disciples came and asked Him to expound the parable unto them, and it all had a day in view; but the resurrection did make it all live. What was the one word that governed His teaching? "The kingdom"; "*The kingdom of heaven is like...*"; "*...cannot see the kingdom of God*".

What was the word that Luke used concerning His speech during the forty days? Acts 1:4 is perfectly explicit, that during those forty days He was teaching them the things concerning the Kingdom. What was He doing? It would seem that He was now making live that Kingdom teaching. If Luke 24 is a sample, they were not ignorant of the Scriptures. Surely they were not ignorant of Moses and David and the Psalms and the prophets; but He opened their eyes that they might understand the Scriptures, and spoke to them by the space of forty days concerning the Kingdom of God. Surely it was illumination concerning what He had already said, 'This is what I said to you! Do you remember that I said certain things would come to pass? Well, here they are.'

That is what we mean by the spiritual knowledge of Christ and His things. It is resurrection; and the church and the assembly is called into being for the very purpose of being the repository and the sphere of living truth concerning the Lord Jesus after that kind. That is the spiritual nature of the church, that it has the knowledge of Christ in a spiritual way, which is a living way. It is for every one of us to have it in a living way.

You probably know in your own heart and experience the difference between these two things, between one period in your life when it was teaching out of the Bible, and then the other part of your life when — not teaching other than out of the Bible, other than the Word of God, but with some other feature: that element of divine unfolding, unveiling; that it is not just teaching concerning things as from a manual of truth, but it is speaking these things in a living way.

The Lord needs the assembly for that. We have already said that the assembly is necessary to the Lord, and it is in this way that it is necessary to the Lord: He must have a living assembly for living Truth, the living knowledge of Himself. It is necessary to Him. That covers the whole ground, both as to the presence of the Lord, and the knowledge of the Lord, and the communion with the Lord. It is of that nature: spiritual.

As to the works of the Lord, the same perspective rested upon them. Take His miracles. They are all pointing on to a coming day. They are in different realms. For instance, they are in the realm of nature, the feeding of the five thousand or the four thousand with a few loaves and fishes. You know that immediately He began to speak about Himself as the Bread of Life, broken. It was unintelligible without the Cross and the resurrection. It all looks on. This explained that through the Cross and in the resurrection Christ gave Himself in a spiritual way as the Bread; He could not give Himself in a literal way. That is why the question was instantly raised: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" The natural man could not understand that. With the natural man there is always the big 'How?' But these men through the forty days knew, and they knew from Pentecost onwards, because one realm of impossibility (the natural) was finished, and now there was the new realm of the Spirit. We know what it is to be able to receive the Lord in a spiritual way. We may not be able to define it, but we know it. This is Life, this is health, this is strength to have Christ ministered. The miracle looked on.

In the realm of men those miracles were prospective also. Whatever His miracles were, as to raising the dead, healing the sick or opening the eyes of the blind, they were all prospective in

their significance, looking on to another day. So Paul will say concerning His appearing to him in resurrection: "*Last of all... He appeared to me also...*" (1 Cor. 15:8). The risen Christ, appearing to His servant, commissioned him saying, "*...to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes*" (Acts 26:17,18). This is something bigger than opening physical eyes.

The miracles were all prospective, whatever realm they were in. Were they in the realm of demons, the casting out, the muzzling? That was prospective, it pointed on to the day when God shall put Him far above all principality and power, all might and dominion, all rule and authority, above all powers in this universe. It was all looking on to the resurrection time, and all this becomes alive with new meaning on resurrection ground.

We must not go further without reminding ourselves of the great value lying at the heart of this, the value of Who Christ was. This is not a matter of what Christ said, and what Christ did; it is all at heart the matter of Who He was: that is, God in Christ. As they had never known and recognised that before, they realised it in resurrection; but for us it does mean an immense thing. All hangs upon this one thing (so simple as it may seem) that if Christ is present (which means nothing else than that God is present) anything is possible at any moment. Are you waiting for some day when things will be better? It is not a matter of time at all, it is a matter of *Him*. He says, 'I am time and eternity all in a moment, and you need not accept anything in the matter of time; you accept Me, and you may be wellnigh dead in the morning and be very much alive before the day is over.' "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" Mary said, "*I know that He will rise again in the last day.*" For her resurrection was a matter of time. Oh no. Resurrection was right there! When He took those loaves, as I think the hymn says,

*"He took the loaves, it was spring time;
And when He break, it was autumn."*

As long as it takes to break a loaf you have gone from seed-time to harvest. "*Do you not say, There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?*" (John 4:35). I am here, and there can be harvest at any moment when I am here.' It is not a matter of time, of circumstance. We are dealing with God, and He is not bound by anything that is known to our human life at all. Eternity dwells in any moment when He is present. All things are bound up with any moment when He is present. The centurion said, "*Just say the word and my servant will be healed*". 'You need not come. Distance does not matter, time does not matter, just speak the word and it will be done.' The Lord said, "*I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel*". The word was uttered, and when the enquiry was made as to when it happened it was found to synchronize with the moment when He spoke. He takes everything into His hands, and says "*My hour...*", and when that comes, there is no postponement.

Oh, that we should lay hold of that more, live on that, never surrender to conditions, never surrender to the inevitable from the standpoint of the human, but say, "We have Him; He is our future, He is our circumstance." Anything can be at any moment with the Lord present.

Chapter 10 - The Forty Days and the Assembly

Reading: Acts 1:2-4; 1 Cor. 15:3-8.

These passages do not give a complete record. A more complete one would be this: To Mary (John 20), to the woman, to the two disciples on the Emmaus way, to Peter, to the apostles

without Thomas, to the apostles with Thomas, to the seven disciples by the Lake (John 21), to a multitude of Galilee (Matt. 28), to James in Galilee, to all the apostles (Acts 1), and then in the ascension.

In these passages, especially 1 Cor. 15 with the larger summary which we have added of His appearances, we have something which is a great feature and factor of the church in the mind and will of the Lord. Why would not the Lord be content with waiting for, or bringing about what we would call "the psychological moment", when all the disciples were gathered together with the believers, and then appear in the midst of them and let it all be done in one act, so that they all beheld Him? There would have been nothing personal and private as such, and everyone would be able to verify the other's witnessing. Why should He spread it over so long a period, and make His appearances so diverse, so various? Why these two features of adversity and continuity? The answer is that which provides the church with its meaning. They each, and all, saw the Lord. In the end it was a company, each of which had seen Him alive. That is the church. That is what He intends the church to be, so that every one personally can say, "I am one who has seen the Lord", and then they are formed into the large company, and they are all together saying, "We have all seen the Lord". You cannot have anything simpler than that, and yet how vital, how important that is.

You can constitute a Christian society in many other ways, but you can only constitute the church on that basis. The true church is that, or it is nothing. It is the company of those who can all look at one another and say, "You have not got an experience of the living Lord that I have not. I have seen the Lord!" It is a matter of personal testimony to having come into touch with the living Lord, the risen Lord, and that personal testimony becoming collective forms the church. That is as essential to the local assembly as it is to the whole.

That is where you begin, but there is something more inside of it. The diversity of appearances was in order that there should be particular meaning in each case. The thing which was common to all was that they saw the Lord, they came into touch with Him as alive, but there were things which were not common to all added to that; that He appeared to different ones with a different meaning, for particular purposes.

There was something secret in the heart of Mary Magdalene. The coming of the Lord to her first, alone as He did, had a big meaning. Of course, you want that verified, or you might think that is straining the point or is fanciful. Tell me why it was that to Mary He said, "*Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God'*", but that when the others saw Him they held Him by the knees? We will not answer that question at present. It does not come within what we have to say, but it would be strange, would it not? If the Lord were really right in what He said to Mary, then there was some principle involved, some truth at stake. But He allowed the others to embrace Him. You cannot say there is nothing in that at all. Mary stands alone in every way, and it was for a specific purpose that He appeared to her first and alone. There was a secret. She had that secret.

Why did the angel say, "*go your way, tell the disciples and Peter...*"? Here you do not know when it was. It says twice over in the New Testament that He appeared unto Peter. One is, "*...and has appeared to Peter*". Here is an isolated appearance. They reported it. Why? There was a special reason. He was a man who had a secret, a tragic secret, a terrible secret. He was a man who might never have forgiven himself. There was something in his life that he

might never be able to overlook. Why did the Lord appear to Simon alone? You have the answer in your own heart; you know why.

Why did the Lord appear to James alone? It is not a matter of answering the question and saying why. The point is this: there is a diversity of appearances which had its own meaning for all concerned specifically. It meant something to Mary that it meant to no one else. It meant something to Peter that it meant to no one else. It meant something to James which was peculiar to him.

There is the diversity.

Our knowledge of the Lord, while it must have the common basis, must be the same with us all. That we have really come into touch with the living Lord, that must mean something to our own hearts particularly and peculiarly so that we have got a treasure, a pearl, something which that has come to mean to us.

Bringing all these things together you have the church. For one to be able to say, He means this to me, and for another to be able to say, He means that to me, and to pool our appreciation of Christ, constitutes the church's full-orbed testimony. We all have the Lord, but we all know our own secret as to what the Lord means to us in a particular way. There is no mere generalisation about this. The Lord touches the individual life with a meaning that becomes very personal. That ought to characterise our coming together, that we are not only able to say that He is our Lord with one voice, but we ought to be able to speak of what He is to us personally in a particular way; to have our own secret about the Lord.

There is not only the diversity, there is the inclusiveness: "*to the whole company of about five hundred brethren at once*". Why that? Perhaps you would think that it was enough when He had appeared to them separately and apart. There is such a thing as verifying one another's testimony, and if anyone is going to make a statement about having seen the Lord, it will be necessary for all the rest to be able to corroborate. The Lord does not leave anything to chance. Here is this multitude together, and some are saying: "We have seen the Lord", and others may be saying: "Well, that may be your imagination, that may be simply a psychical experience that you have because you are made like that". No, they could all verify, they could all corroborate. The church's testimony must be a corroborated testimony. We must all be able to stand alongside of the other and verify this as a solid whole. The fact is that the Lord did not go until He had covered the whole ground both separately and collectively. So He made His church a whole, both by individual and collective proof, evidence and witness. So far as the individuals were concerned, they were the separate notes of testimony. When you get the multitude you have the whole harmony, and you have that as really the nature of the church. It has its separate and distinctive notes, but it is ultimately and finally a great harmony of testimony to Him.

That is why He extended His stay so that there might be this diversity and this unity, and that there might be an establishment of this matter, that it should not be something transcendent, something leaving them, after all, with the question: Was it real? Was it true? It was so fleeting.

Arising out of that you have this particular feature: it is reality. If you prefer the word: truth, it is a more comprehensive word. It is the characteristic of reality that the Lord is after; reality in spiritual life, reality in spiritual experience of Him. How He works at this matter of reality! What pains He takes! How He will deal with us personally in a secret way, and how He will persist

and persist, and not leave us until He has established reality in us! The Lord has His heart set upon reality. Let us use the Scriptural phrase for that: "*You want truth in the inward parts*" (Psa. 51:6).

As we have pointed out, these men, for the time before the resurrection, were moving in an unreal realm: they themselves were not in reality, it was all something which they had not really grasped. They heard things, and saw things, but they were not in those things. They would declare their belief both in Him and in His statements, but with all their declaration, with all their good intention, with all their sincerity, with all their desire and meaning to go all the way with Him, the root of the matter was not in them, and they were really not in it. The Lord knew that quite well, and He knew that there being this element of untruth, this lack of truth in them, that structure would collapse sooner or later. If there is an element of untruth anywhere in the church in any member or in any place, that structure will collapse, it will not weather the storm.

I wonder if we dare turn to illustrate again from literature in this connection. You remember Buskin's "Seven Lamps of Literature". When he speaks about the lamp of truth he tells of his visits to Italy. Going round looking at the great buildings he saw some which had weathered the storms of generations, showed no signs of wear or crumbling, were still as steady as when they were first constructed, and he said the builders had put true foundations and true stones into the buildings. But he went elsewhere, and he saw buildings the roofs of which had collapsed, fallen in. He entered into one building and found that buckets had been placed to catch the rain which was dripping over priceless frescos. Into another building he went to see the wonderful marble columns that were spoken about, and as he scratched them he found that the marble was painted on. They were forsaken buildings. People had discovered the deception, and in disgust left them alone. So he went the round, and he said these roofs had collapsed, these buildings were forsaken, these buckets were all a testimony to a lie; lying stones in a foundation, lying paint pretending to be marble; and it tells its own story at length. At length the lie found it out.

It would be too strong a word to say that these men were in a lie during those years, but they were not in a true position. They may have thought they were, but they were not, and the Lord knew that; there being an absence of that truth, the building would collapse sooner or later, and so by the space of forty days — a complete period of probation, testing, evidencing — He would make sure, He would make for reality. He would leave them in the place where they were able now to say, not in testifying to something presented objectively, but in speaking of that which had entered into their very being: "We know. This Christianity and this Christ is not a teaching, a doctrine, or anything like that to us; it is a living reality. We know it is true." So John wrote years afterward: "*We know Him Who is true*", and in writing the Apocalypse he repeatedly speaks of Him that is true. It was that that made the church. It is that which makes the church. It is that which must make the assembly.

The Lord pursues that course, and persists in it with you and with me. If you and I are really in living union with the risen Lord, under the government of the Holy Spirit, the Lord is going to check us up on all matters of reality. We may get a lot of teaching, and think that we know it, and go and talk about it, but sooner or later we shall go through something which will find out whether that truth is our very life or not, and if it should be found that we can say, "Oh well, this thing that we have been in, and all this that we have heard does not work!" That would be the disclosure to the Lord. The Lord is working against that by taking us down into depths, trial, adversity, suffering; sometimes suffering in circumstances, sometimes physical suffering, sometimes mental suffering, sometimes the suffering of a long-drawn-out demand of patience.

What is the result? When we come back we are more real, there is something more genuine, more true. We know what has happened. The storm has passed over us, and, passing over, it has swayed us, it has tugged us, it has sought to root us up, and sometimes we wondered whether we should not be rooted up and thrown over in that storm. But at length our rooting has become deeper and stronger, and we come out of the tempest knowing something more settled, more restful, more assured, more steady, less self-confident, but with more confidence in the Lord. The solemn reality has been wrought by means of the storm.

The Lord is out for reality in us, not mere profession without possession. May we urge upon you the need for continually seeking the Lord for reality, for truth. You do not want to come to the day when your edifice will collapse, and the sad story be of a lie, an untruth, something that was not real, but which was a pretence, that was an assumption; you were in a false position, you were there because it was expected of you, or for some other reason. Be sure you are on ground of truth, ground of reality.

The Lord was making sure in the forty days. That was what it amounted to. If you want that proved you must read on into the New Testament, and read through the book of the Acts, and you will see that the one mark of an apostle was that he had had his own evidence of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and he could say: "I know!" This is the foundation of the apostles and prophets, upon which the church is built. We have to come on to that foundation.

Another thing which shines out so clearly in those forty days is fellowship. The cross scattered them, the resurrection gathered them; and I think it scattered them in more ways than one. "*I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered...*" "*You all will be offended... this night*". "*We shall be scattered every man to his own...*". Probably they were not only scattered in that geographical way, but they were very largely out of touch with one another. That is true at any rate in some cases. His appearing was a steady process of recovering, and some of the most beautiful touches of those days were when they were together talking about Him, talking upon a report perhaps. Some had reported that they had seen the Lord, and as they were reporting and talking about this He was in the midst. It was fellowship by which the Lord was realised. It was the risen Lord creating the fellowship, which in turn brought an enjoyment of His presence. There was a wonderful, steady gathering together. You start with the individual, and you end with the whole company. They are being brought together in some new way. They were flowing together, and there was one testimony.

There is nothing like having one testimony to make for fellowship. There is nothing like having a similar knowledge of the experience of the Lord. It is the sharing of the one Life of the Lord that brings fellowship. So the forty days were making a growing, consolidated fellowship. When He has finished there is no more scattering. What happens when He is received up? They all go back to the upper room together, and then there comes the Day of Pentecost. They waited together in the upper room for a further period, and then Pentecost. And what an exhibition of fellowship there is on the Day of Pentecost. That is the church. It is the fellowship of one Life, the fellowship of one basic experience of the Lord, the fellowship of one testimony. The Lord was making for that. He was definitely at work to secure that. It was wonderful to see it coming about. Thomas was a little awkward. In effect he said, I am not coming in; you can have your meetings if you like, I shall not be there. But this spiritual movement which was going on made it impossible for him to maintain that indefinitely, he could not keep it up. There was something doing, he was one of them, and he had to come in. So the Lord in the end secured them all.

Fellowship is a feature of the church, and is of tremendous importance to the world. There is one who works against it; but he would work for it, to him it represents values of no small character. Do remember that the proof of this is seen. Whenever any one gets out of fellowship they get out of Life, and they interfere with the real life of the assembly, the church, when they are out of spiritual fellowship. They become a dead spot, and the whole fellowship, the whole assembly is hurt. If you in secret are out of the spirit of fellowship with any of your brethren, any fellow members of Christ, remember that that spells death for you, and it spells death for the assembly in measure. The Lord's way is not being given Him while that is so, and you know quite well that if you have ever been like that — and most of us have had our bad times, when we have been disgruntled and out of good spirit with others — we know that it is not until we have settled that matter that there is joy, and we are able to go on, and the Lord is able to go on with us. Fellowship is of tremendous importance to Life and the very purpose of God. So He wrought fellowship for forty days after His resurrection, seeking to bring it about.

There is one more word to add. It is not so clearly marked as these things, it is a thing that you can sense only, and which you must really deduce, and yet it is of great importance. It could not be otherwise, and as a matter of fact it always does work out like this when you have got that of which we have spoken, that personal visitation of the Lord as to a Mary. Oh, wonder for Mary. I have no doubt she was overwhelmed with it, in the light of what she had been and who she was, that she should be the first, and then that she should be entrusted with this great message. Surely she would have said, "Who am I? What am I? Is it true? Am I dreaming? Think of what I have been; think of what I am. Is it true?" Then see Peter. The Lord made a special point of giving him a personal visitation in resurrection. What must Peter have thought? "Oh, this is too much for me. Think of what I have done. Think of that awful night, and yet, and yet, He comes to me in a personal way, not as one of a crowd, but alone." And then look at Thomas. What must Thomas have felt? "Oh, a week ago I was talking as a disaffected man, declaring my unwillingness to believe, and now He has come right to me, '*My Lord, and my God*'".

What is behind all that? What is the result of all that? There is only one word for it: a deep, deep humility. These appearances did not make these people feel important. This knowledge of the Lord did not puff them up. They did not set themselves up as *the* people. It did not inflate them. It did not for a moment stir any pride of a fleshly kind. It went to the depths and created the deepest sense of humility.

A true assembly as the expression of the true church is that. Something which is proud of its teaching, proud of its knowledge, proud of what it has of the Lord in a wrong sense, and looking down on others, talking as from a pedestal, is not the true thing. The true thing is of a very humble spirit: "Why should the Lord have done this for me? What am I? Who am I?" That ought to be the effect of a personal knowledge of the Lord, and that ought to be spread right over the church:

*"Not I, but Christ, be honoured, loved, exalted;
Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known and heard...
No self-important bearing".*

The true child of God is not self-assertive, does not keep himself or herself in view, does not put on airs to attract attention, is always seeking as far as possible to be hidden in the Lord and to keep Him in view. The Lord is everything and such a sense maintains a true humility.

“The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is of great price...” (1 Peter 3:4). That is the church.

These things can be felt, can be sensed, can be discerned in the forty days, and they are great elements in the making of the church, and they tell us what the assembly ought to be; the assembly is only the aggregate of the individual; the assembly can never be more than its individual members are.

So may the Lord make us like this, for His Name’s sake.

Chapter 11 - The House of God as Expressed in the Assembly

The assembly is spiritual, in that it is entirely outside of this world realm and order. In John 14 the Lord definitely says that He would reveal Himself to His own, and not unto the world. Judas took up that statement and said, *“What has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?”* (John 14:22). Then again He said, *“After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me...”* (John 14:19).

I think that one of the meanings of His forbidding of Mary to take hold of Him when He said, *“Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father”* is this, that the order is entirely changed, entirely different. What could be in the days of His flesh of a physical apprehension and association, a natural contact, that which is in the realm of human senses, no longer obtains. Everything now is outside of that realm, and outside of that order. So it was that to His own alone He appeared for the space of forty days, with them alone He assembled, in the midst of them alone He was received up. He was moving entirely outside of this world’s scene of things.

It is a strong, definite mark of the true church and of the true assembly that it is with its Lord, quite outside of this world. This world and this order must not on any account be brought into the church or made a part of it, neither must the church move into this world order and become a part of it. Immediately and inasmuch as that clear distinction and division is overridden, the value and the meaning of Christ risen is lost. All that is bound up for His people with His risen life is arrested by those very communications. He has put these asunder, and at the peril of the church they are brought together.

That, of course, works out in many ways. Nothing more fatal to spirituality could ever have happened than that the church should have become a world institution. That is what is the matter, considered at an extreme point. There are a great many who will not have that because they see the error of it, and they will call themselves by names which imply that they repudiate the temporal status and position and office of the church and its world connection, but who at the same time are just as worldly and perhaps more so in other respects than that particular body. The thing works down to very fine points. We are not going to try and analyse it, but simply make the definite statement, because even in a spiritual assembly, where these things are recognised, the peril is never far away of something like this.

What it amounts to is that there must be, on no account whatever, consideration given to this world order for spiritual advantage. No considerations at all must be entertained for the danger of the things of God, so far as this realm of things and this order is concerned. It will rule out a great deal. It will challenge our decisions and our contemplations, and our considerations.

What is the motive in adopting any given course, making certain appointments, choosing certain people? Is it because they have something of this realm of things, and of this order which will be an advantage to the things of the Lord? Any such consideration may be a snare, and may be found to violate a basic principle of the very assembly, the very House of God itself.

Resurrection is something altogether apart from this realm and this order. It is something outside, and all that is bound up with resurrection is, therefore, outside, and must come into the church from an entirely different quarter than that of this world and this order of things. In this way the House of God is a spiritual thing, as something apart, and the hand of man as man, the touch of the world, may not rest upon it, may have no place in it. To all such, from centre to circumference, the Lord's attitude is, "*You have no part or portion in this matter*" (Acts 8:21).

Having noted that as something which is very distinct in relation to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, forming His church, and which cannot be overlooked, we can pass on.

The assembly as expressing the House of God is spiritual in three other connections. This has to do very largely with its order.

1. In its Membership

On what ground does the membership of the assembly subsist or consist? Spirituality is the governing factor, and it determines relationship from start to finish. There is no other ground recognised by the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God, for membership of the church, the House of God, of the assembly. A roll of membership may be a very great snare. It has no place in the New Testament. How strange it is that words from the New Testament have been taken up and used in connection with things with which they had no connection in the beginning. Take such a phrase as: "*the right hand of fellowship*". It is a word used by Paul, "*They gave to me the right hand of fellowship*" (Gal. 2:9). Now did he mean that they received him into membership of the church? That is unthinkable. No one ever was received into the church or into an assembly by the right hand of fellowship. No right hand of fellowship can ever make a person a member of a spiritual assembly. All that that phrase meant as Paul used it, is that there was a recognition given to the fact that the people concerned were the Lord's people. "*They gave to me the right hand of fellowship*" simply means that they recognised me as the Lord's, and as the Lord's messenger. You can go no further than that with any right hand of fellowship.

If you have the right foundation in spirituality, even though it be in its earliest and most immature degree and form, nevertheless the right foundation, you have no need of any membership. But if you get to work on things to keep your people together on some other ground, and to get them to take responsibility because of this official recognition, then you had better have a roll. It will become necessary. But a true spiritual background will bear its own fruit, it will secure the strongest fellowship; it will result in the taking of responsibility, it will mean mutual care of one another. There need be no mechanical contrivance whatever in the place of the true fellowship.

Now that is said more by way of illustration than by seeking to criticise. The point is that the membership of an assembly is spiritual in its foundation, in its nature, and if you have not got spiritual people in the assembly you are better without them, and certainly you must safeguard

the Lord's interests from their interference and from their having any place whatever in the ordering or the influencing of the things of God's House.

This is a law which may be simple, in some senses weak at its beginnings; that is, you may have a babe in Christ, but there is spirituality at its beginning, and a true babe in Christ is one ready to be taught and recognises the need of being taught, and needs to know everything as to walk, and knowledge, and everything else. But this matter of spirituality is the law by which the church grows, and, as we shall see in a moment, everything springs out of it and must do, and if it does not, you have a false formation. We must be very careful as to the ground upon which we come together, and as to that which holds us together.

Just as a roll may be a snare, so may be a confession of faith. You get many people to subscribe to a confession of faith who have no spiritual understanding of what it contains. To them it is a creed. That has obtained right through the dispensation, with very baneful and disastrous consequences in many directions. You can subscribe to the most utter declarations concerning the things of the Lord, and yet remain very unspiritual.

These may be but things presented and emphasised and imposed to constitute something; but the way of the Lord is that people should grow from a beginning into everything that is of Himself. It is no use, even though you might get many people to accept and bow to your presentation of truth, to guarantee that they are spiritually in what you present, you have not secured your end by getting that assent. But even if they cannot, that is no ground for excluding them. It is no ground of excluding people because they cannot at present understand all that you say. Given an acceptance of the Person of the Lord Jesus in all that that Person is, God in Christ, Christ in God, and that on the basis of a spiritual, living, though elementary knowledge of Him, fellowship with Him, union with Him, that is the true beginning of the assembly, and all that is essential. All the rest has to be grown into. Do you accept, do you understand, do you know this truth, or that truth? The answer may be: "No, I do not understand that, I have not yet seen that." Then we have no right to exclude anybody on that ground, and we have no right to try and cajole them into it, to force them into it by any means. The way into all the truth is to be led in, and that by the Spirit; or to grow into the truth. All that is required by the Lord is an openness of heart, and a responsiveness of spirit, a readiness that, should it be of the Lord, although it may not be at the moment seen to be, it will be accepted willingly. Once there is any movement of the Spirit of the Lord in the heart in that direction there will be no holding back from it; that is, the refusal of truth is not wilful, it is not by prejudice, it is not by the leadership of human judgement, but rather the heart is open for all that is of the Lord, whatever it may cost. Given that there should be the ground of fellowship.

Let us be careful that we do not allow artificial false barriers to come up between us and other children of the Lord because they do not see all that we think we see, and are not just going all the way that we think we are going, have not just reached the point that we think we have reached. It is so easy to say they have not come into the truth yet, and when you have done that you have put a hedge around them and put a label on them and put them on the shelf. That is not the assembly. Membership is governed entirely by spirituality, not by any imposed or artificial instrument.

2. In its Ministry

The ministry of the assembly is also spiritual. Here, of course, Christendom is far from the mark. Those who have influence, whose influence has to be with others in the direction of the

thought of the Lord for His people, in our desire that everything should be living in His House, know that this law governs life, that only as things are in accordance with the Lord's thought can there be life. That is, life is measured by proximity to the Lord's thought. The Lord's life may be found in realms where His full thought is not apprehended, only in a limited way. And who shall ever say that anyone has yet known the full thought of the Lord? We are speaking in a comparative way now. We may find life at a point somewhat remote from the full thought of the Lord, but that does not alter the fact and rule out the law that there should be more life, and will be more life as the Lord's thought is approached more closely. It is not a matter of whether we know blessing in this thing. The question is, How much more blessing could we get if we were more in line with the Lord's things? People take this attitude that says, Well we get blessing where we are. Yes, that is all right, but could you not have a great deal more blessing? If it is not only a matter of blessing, could not the Lord have a great deal more. So we must never think that because there is a measure of life in anything we have reached the end. The Lord would lead into the greater measure, and as we have said, this is the governing law, that life is in proportion to the measure of the mind of the Lord as expressed anywhere.

Ministry is very much involved in this. Ministry is a matter of spirituality, and ministers are constituted only by spirituality. The great illustration of this is the book of Numbers. The book of Numbers seems to correspond very closely to what came in in the book of the Acts, and especially through the ministry and labours of the apostle Paul. What you have is the whole company of the Lord's people being ordered as an assembly, and if you notice, the ordering begins with God speaking out of the tabernacle. You look into that closely, and you find that what it really means is God speaking out of Christ. "*God... in these last days has spoken to us in his Son...*". God's speech in Christ, through Christ, is the commencement of the church's order. He speaks out of the tabernacle; not out of heaven now in the direct sense. God spoke directly out of heaven, directly to Israel in the Mount. What was that for? That was the giving of the revelation of Himself. The result of that was the bringing into being of the tabernacle. In a word, that is the incarnation. When God acts directly from heaven by producing His Son, Christ becomes the heavenly expression of God amongst men. That is the Mount. But then Christ is here, the incarnation has taken place, God has spoken. Now He has to conform a people according to that speech, and it is Christ in the tabernacle, in the assembly, in the House, in the church, and God speaking out of the tabernacle by and through His Son. To have the order of the House of God you have got to have Christ as a Son over God's House present in it. Christ's presence is the commencement of the divine order amongst us. He is governing, He is Head, everything is in His hands.

This is not merely technique, it is a living reality. We know in our own personal experience that if the Lord is in us truly, and we know the Lord is in us, and we have a touch with the Lord, that our way, our walk, our conduct is checked up, comes under His hand. The ordering of our life is taken up by Him, and we know it. How is it that we cease to do certain things? How is it that we begin to do certain other things? How is it that there is this changing of conduct by us without anybody saying anything to us? It is because the Lord the Spirit is ordering the House. In exactly the same way the presence of the Lord in the midst of any assembly, any company, is bound spontaneously to reach the heavenly order, if the Lord is having His way. Man does not have to come and impose something. It grows into that order. God speaks out of the tabernacle, out of Christ, and the result is the ordering of the House of God. So, of course, it becomes necessary for us to listen to the Lord's voice within His church, within the tabernacle, for the putting out of anything superfluous, the putting right of anything that is wrong, for the bringing in of anything lacking.

We have already said that the House of God is a heavenly, spiritual system, and it is this system that is put into operation when the Lord speaks. The sons of Aaron blew the trumpets, and a certain way of blowing the trumpets indicated a certain thing, and there were various ways of blowing those trumpets, and every different way implied a different thing. A loud blast meant one thing, a soft blowing meant another, a repeated blowing meant something else, and so on. Now that is all very well from the Lord's side, but from the side of the people it was necessary to have spiritual intelligence, otherwise what would happen? Either they would do nothing, take no notice, the trumpets would not mean anything to them, or they would do the wrong thing because they had misunderstood the trumpet; or they would be so divided up in the apprehension of the thing that they would all be doing different things. It was necessary for them all to be governed by one spirit of intelligence.

That is Pentecost. That is the New Testament church: having the same mind, all speaking the same thing. How? By being governed by the one Spirit. The result of that is in living fruitfulness, not by arranging a programme that you agree all to speak on the same subject, that you just impose things on people. You may all, of course, say the same thing, all be dwelling upon the same theme, but there may not be that livingness of the Spirit, that fruitfulness, without any arrangement, and without any conference. The one Spirit speaks through one and another, giving the same emphasis. It leads things away from man to the Lord. It leads to worship. That is the governing law of the Spirit, to bring everything to the Lord. Trumpets were governing factors as to the mind of the Lord.

That is how the Lord would have it amongst His people, and, blessed be God, this is not an ideal impossible of realisation, this can be known and is known in measure amongst some of the Lord's people today; and if only in a measure it is actual today, surely it can be anywhere where the Lord has spiritual people.

Then we were saying this system came into operation. He speaks first out of the tabernacle by His Spirit from His Son. But then He speaks to the tribes by representative members. These representative members are gathered into the closest touch with Him. What they are we will mention in a moment, but here is the way. To the tribes the Lord speaks by means of representative members; that is, to use the term in Numbers, "heads of fathers' houses". There are responsible ones to the Lord for His people, who have to have that intelligence which the babes may not have, that they may bring the spiritually apprehended mind of the Lord to His people for the ordering of the House. That is what we have in the book of Numbers.

What are these heads? Headship in the mind of God is always spiritual. The head is generated, not manufactured. The head is a living, born one, who has grown up; not an officer appointed. That is a very big difference. Headship is spiritual. He is the head, He is not made head. No one is made head in the House of God. You cannot vote for a head in the House of God, you cannot appoint a head by ballot. These who occupy any such position are that by the act of God, by the walk with God, by the knowledge of God, by the operation of the Spirit of God in them to produce headship, or they are in a false position. The Lord will call right back from anything else if He has His way, if we have become officers in any other way, and when the Lord has His way with us He will work so that He undermines all that we know and bring us down to the place where we cannot be in that place of responsibility only as we have a knowledge of the Lord commensurate with that responsibility.

Therefore ministry is spiritual, not official. You cannot make a minister by any outward activity or appointment. The minister must grow up, must be the product of a walk with God, so that he

and his ministry are spiritual. In the New Testament elders were not made: they were recognised. When it says that they ordained elders, it does not mean that they appointed officers as such. They recognised where there was spiritual value, where there already obtained those features of spiritual trustworthiness, spiritual measure, spiritual values, and took account of that, recognised in the midst of the assembly such as having by the Holy Spirit been provided for that assembly as its ministers. That is how we come into any place. As it works one way, so it works the other. If the Lord gets hold of us in the fullest position, He works to bring us into the truth by destroying the merely official, destroying it in such a way as to make us know that we cannot go on because we have not got the resources to go on; He brings an end to that. But it works the other way, that the Lord Himself maintains that ministry; He is the fountain of oil for His own ministry. If at any point you and I cease to draw upon the Lord, and go on with our official position, we create disaster, and we very soon begin to realise that something very serious has happened, and there will be a breakdown. The Lord is the fountain of ministry, and we need the olive tree in order to go on.

The case of Barnabas and Saul is a striking example of this, being what they were, Paul having had such a revelation as he had, and having received such a commission as he received at the commencement, even at his conversion. Paul was such a chosen vessel, and he with Barnabas became just a part of the assembly in Antioch, and stayed there amongst the others as members of an assembly during long months. The Lord the Spirit did not come to them directly and say, "Now, look here, you know what I commissioned you for thirteen months ago; now go out and do it, the time has come for you to take up your office." He did not leave them with the necessity of announcing to the oversight of the assembly that they were servants of the Lord, and the Lord had told them that they must recognise them as servants now, and they must go out to their life work. It came through the assembly and its spiritual headship: "*Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" Probably the oversight knew who the men were, and what their experience was, but there is the case that it was nothing official, nothing that they could enter upon as an official thing. It had become spiritual in every sense, and the spontaneous result of the Holy Spirit's sovereignty in the assembly.

These heads of fathers' houses, and these princes in Israel — now speaking of the type, speaking of what they were literally — were men of dignity, and men of substance, men of wealth, and, while we may not trace those things in the New Testament order, that those who were given ministry and oversight and responsibility were, so far as this world is concerned, men of position, and honour, and substance, and wealth, there is no doubt about it that those were the things in the spiritual direction which marked the servants of the Lord then, and always are the marks of true ministry. There is spiritual dignity, there is spiritual substance, spiritual wealth, so that as the princes in Israel were marked out by the people, were conspicuous amongst them, so amongst the Lord's people there is no mistaking those who are to take responsibility. They strike upon the consciousness of others, as those who have something of the Lord. So the Lord would have it, and govern everything in this way by spirituality.

This is important, because it requires the upsetting of another system, and it explains how the Lord does things. We have so often found ourselves in the difficult position of being asked why we do not give work, responsibility, ministry, and so on. But that is the old way of doing things, it is not the living way; because anyone has a scope and an opportunity for ministry who has substance. If you have something of the Lord, you have substance, and yours is a life of dignity in accordance with the holy things of the Lord, and there is room and opportunity for

that. We put it that way simply to make the point practical. This is the way of ministry. This is according to spiritual value and never by arrangement or organisation. It must be spontaneous, and it must come out and be revealed by the Lord Himself.

We should perhaps be missing something if we did not point out that in the book of Numbers, which is illustrated for us in the New Testament order of the House of God, in the assembly, the ordering of the House came along two lines. Those two lines are represented by Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron are only two sides of one person. They are brethren, and they represent the two sides of the Lord Jesus Himself: Moses the administrative side, and Aaron the priestly side. You have them wonderfully combined in the case of the apostle Paul, and you have them wonderfully manifested in the ordering of the New Testament assemblies. I have been reading again Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and have been greatly impressed again with this very thing, how that for a time he could speak so strongly, so firmly, could be very downright and very straight. He will speak of his coming, and if he comes there will be no weak handling of the situation. But before he has got much further he is saying that he entertains them as a father. He tells them they have many instructors but not many fathers. The two things come in one chapter, and you find Moses and Aaron operating together, the administration and the love.

That has to be in a true assembly. The Lord has to express Himself in that way. The two sides mean this: Moses is really God dealing with man, Aaron is really man coming to God. It is from God to man, and from man to God, and it is very blessed to note that, while God must have things right if He is going to deal with man, He cannot overlook anything that is wrong. He must and He does jealously watch and deal with all sin and all wrong, and so you get administration of the Holy Ghost, the judicial administration of the Holy Ghost, governing a true assembly, and letting nothing go that is evil and wrong. Sooner or later it is brought to book. Yet when that is yielded to, submitted to, when the evil is put away, then you have the other side: there is a clear way to the Lord.

It was in a marvellous way that Paul dealt with that man at Corinth. Who he was I am not sure. Some people think he was the fornicator of whom Paul wrote. What is clear is that he was a violent opponent of the apostle himself, he was one that had opposed in such a way as to make things very difficult indeed for the apostle Paul, probably to turn the assembly aside from Paul, to do much mischief. There were evidently evil things in the man's life, and so the apostle was dealing with that in writing to the assembly about it, and did not just take up the cudgels for himself, and try to reinstate himself, but he pointed out the evil, and that if there was evil in this man's life they were altogether wrong in being influenced by him. That influence was against the apostle. How could they accept an influence which was arising from a life that was evil? Paul's personal acceptance was a secondary thing. They were exhorted to put the evil thing right, and to judge that, to deal with this man, and then Paul was quite sure that they would be all right with him. That is what it amounted to.

Then they judged the man, probably put him out of the assembly, and the Holy Ghost seems to have judged the man, and he seems to have had a very bad time. Then the apostle heard what they had done, and what the man had said, and then he wrote and asked them to forgive him if he were penitent.

Here you see judgement and mercy, here is Moses and Aaron working marvellously in the assembly, wrong being dealt with severely in the assembly by the assembly, and by the Holy Ghost, and it seems that it was an extreme case of evil in the assembly, a very bad case. It

does not matter how bad the case was, there is restoration, there is the priestly place to bring back the wrongdoer. Thank God there is always the priest alongside of the administrator.

God always comes to us in the dual capacity. If He must deal with sin in judgement in the assembly, judgement beginning at the House of God, He never ceases to be the priest, keeping the way open for the one to return, to come into full fellowship with Himself and with His own. Let us see that we never finally close the door to anyone. If we do we abandon the ground of the priest. At the same time let us see to it that we do not try to keep on the ground of the priest, to close our eyes to the need of holiness, and righteousness before God, and to forsake our responsibility in the Lord to judge wrong, and to administer.

We can see through all this a little of what a spiritual house, a spiritual state is, and how necessary it is to be spiritual for all this and not official.

Chapter 12 - The Priestly Nature of the House of God

We will say just a further word on this. You will remember that we have referred to the way in which the apostles Paul and Barnabas went out from Antioch in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts, and we had one point only in view. We were seeking to stress the point that ministry is not official but spiritual, and that Barnabas and Saul were not taken at Antioch simply because they were official ministers. There is all the difference between their arriving at Antioch and people there saying, These are two important missionaries, and setting them up in some official capacity right away, and then regarding them like that, and their having their place purely on an official basis — there is a lot of difference between that and what we have in Acts 13. They came there as fellow-members of Christ, not as officers, and there in the main they remained as fellow-members of Christ as in the assembly, and when the time came it was as such that they were dealt with and sent forth, not on an official basis at all.

We have to be careful as to how far we apply what is written in Acts 13 as a kind of formula, because there is a good deal more behind it, no doubt, that is not written. I do not think for a moment that Paul and Barnabas had never said anything to the elders there about the consciousness of their call, what the Lord had revealed to them as to their mission. I should say, though it is not written, that that was well known in the assembly, and they in all probability kept at least those in responsibility there, if not the whole assembly, alive to that fact, and sought their continual prayer as to the Lord's time and their outgoing. So that the assembly were probably continually asking the Lord about this thing. Then it was at a special time of prayer and fasting that the Holy Ghost said what He did. The Lord may have other ways of sending out besides the Acts 13 way, but we have said this because there are probably a lot of people who, having a real sense of the way in which the Lord is calling, are keeping silent until the Lord in some extraordinary way reveals it to the assembly. There is no reason why we should wait until it comes from another source. Perhaps that is in the way of a confirmation of the call. Paul and Barnabas did not do anything like that. If the Lord has laid it on our hearts we should seek prayer fellowship in the matter, even although we are ready to wait for some confirmation in other hearts of that leading. Probably that which took place at Antioch was confirmatory; the thing commenced in their hearts and was confirmed by other witnesses in the Spirit.

Having said that we can continue. There is a matter which has been coming up and letting itself be known that it was there and had got to be mentioned, and the time for mentioning it

had not come. Now one feels that this is the time for our touching upon this particular matter, phase or aspect of the whole thing that the Lord is saying to us. There may be a measure of reiteration, but its value will probably be in the new emphasis.

The Priestly Nature of the House of God

It comes up in a very real way in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. There is no doubt that the Word of the Lord makes it quite clear that the church enters into the purpose for which Israel was raised up, in a spiritual way; that is, that the church takes up Israel's place and vocation in this dispensation. Israel was called for a special purpose. That purpose was very largely, if not entirely, failed of, and Israel was set aside. Even although there was a time when Israel fulfilled the purpose, as far as Israel could fulfil that purpose, yet the whole purpose of God was not fulfilled or realised through Israel; probably it never could be. But as things worked out, Israel was a failure and was set aside. Into Israel's place the church was brought to take up, in a spiritual way and in a fuller way than Israel could ever have fulfilled it, the divine purpose. That purpose was priesthood.

Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests unto God, a priestly house. The marks of what is priestly are seen in Israel's history from its very commencement in the exodus, and right on. The church is called with that calling. The Word makes that perfectly clear, that we are called a kingdom of priests unto our God. You have no need to be referred to the Scriptures in this connection, you are familiar with them. So that what we have to say of the church is that it is a priestly church, and then we have to understand what that means.

Now a little reiteration from our last meditation. We said that in the Mount God revealed Himself to Moses and the elders of Israel, and as the result of their revelation we have the tabernacle in the wilderness. And we said that that revelation in the Mount, issuing in the tabernacle, is in type, in figure, in foreshadowing, the incarnation - God coming in the flesh, God manifested in the flesh, Immanuel, God with us, amongst us. But there in the Old Testament it was a matter of types, figures, symbols; that is, its deepest meaning was secret, hidden, not perceived. It was a great parable, its reality was veiled, and the central feature of that whole pattern was a veil. Through that veil the people could not look. The innermost truth of things, God present, was veiled from them and hidden from their eyes. That truth ran through everything; that is, there was a governing veil over everything, within and without. They did not see, they could not see the inner meaning of any part of things. All they knew was that a certain system was set up in a certain form, and they were called upon to regard it as an expression of God's will, and to be blindly obedient to it, and in that way they found their salvation and their life. As to any knowledge of a deeper meaning, they had none. That veil obtained right through that dispensation.

That is what came in at the Mount. You know what Paul says in the second letter to the Corinthians about the veil, and that even to this day there is a veil over their hearts in reading Moses. They do not see, they do not understand, and not until it shall turn to the Lord will the veil be taken away, will they understand.

The great figure gave place to the great reality. The figure of the incarnation, the tabernacle, coming out from heaven, God showing Himself in that form, gave place to the Person, the incarnation. Here we have the reality. But although the reality is present, the veil is not taken away. There is still a veil, and through the three-and-a-half years, at least, of God's sojourn in flesh amongst men, they knew Him not, He was veiled from them. As we have said repeatedly,

both as to His person and as to His teaching and His works, they were still, in the main, in the dark.

Now the one thing which governed both the type, the figure of the Old Testament, and the reality of the New Testament in the Gospels, was the priestly element. It was all priestly. The tabernacle was priestly, everything to do with it was priestly. So in the incarnation the predominant element is that which is priestly, and it is a great spiritual education to move through the Gospels with that thought in mind, to note the priestly features of Christ's work here on the earth, of His life, His teaching, and His works. We shall see a little of that as we go on.

If you like to narrow it down to John's Gospel alone, you have Israel's background so fully there all the time. It seems as though he is striking at Israel all the way along. Read the third chapter about Nicodemus and Israel in the wilderness. Israel is in the background. Read the fourth chapter, dealing with the springing well. Israel is in the background. Chapters five and six, deal with the manna in the wilderness, the bread from heaven. It is Israel in the background. The impotent man, thirty-eight years a cripple. That is Israel's thirty-eight years in the wilderness, a helpless cripple. The blind man, born blind. Oh, how much he had to say about Israel's blindness! Israel is in the background. But over against all those things there is that which is the priestly offering.

That is enough to at least indicate what we mean by the predominant priestly nature of things. Yet, as present in all the living reality of that in the days of His flesh, there was a veil, the veil was not taken away. They did not in a living and spiritual way enter into the meaning and value of it. Christ was veiled in flesh. Two things synchronize: God's destruction of the veil of the Temple and the removal of the veil of Christ's flesh, showing that these two things were one in the thought of God, the type and the reality.

What we have been saying is not mere interpretation or fancy: it is truth. God smote that veil, and split it from top to bottom. God acted from heaven to reveal Himself in Christ through the rending of His flesh. After His resurrection He still has a body of flesh and bone, but the veil is gone for His own. There is a manifesting forth of God in Christ, a seeing of what was never seen before. The apostle tells us that we now enter in through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, rent so that we find God in Christ, God through Christ.

In the resurrection of Christ the veil was removed. That means that, although the priestly feature was predominant, both in the type of the Old Testament and in the reality of the incarnation, it is only truly, livingly, spiritually entered into in the resurrection. It requires the resurrection, it requires the risen Lord to make us in the real meaning and value of priesthood, and to bring us into it.

Features of Priestliness

That is all very simple, but it leads us to see what the church's real position and nature is. So you find that in the forty days after His resurrection, in which He was seeking to lead His disciples into the spiritual meaning of the church for the future, its nature and its vocation there are many priestly elements brought out.

Let us look at some of them. We know what priestly elements are, but look for them in the forty days.

a) Mediation

First of all there is mediation. What is mediation? It presupposes a state of conscious need, on the one hand, in the matter of pardon, grace, forgiveness, restoration. On the other hand, the gracious One, the pardoning One, the receiving One, the accessible One. What was the great word which was running through the forty days? It was peace. He had made peace by the blood of His cross, and His one word as He moved amongst them during those days was, "*Peace be with you*". We have already thought about His first appearance to Mary Magdalene. If ever there was a heart needing peace, hers was. We have talked of His appearance to Simon alone, and to Thomas. Each of these had their sin brought to remembrance. If there is one thing which the cross meant to them, and probably to all of them who had forsaken Him in the flesh, it was their weakness, their failure, their sinfulness. Probably they were going through torture during the three days after His death, and His appearing to them was for the special purpose of bringing that peace to their hearts which only One Who could bring the sense of forgiveness and restoration and acceptance could give. On the one hand there was a speaking of failure, then, on the other hand, the speaking of grace and acceptance and mercy and pardon and peace. I am perfectly sure that the forty days for them were days of heart healing. You have only to try to put yourself in their place. Put yourself into Peter's place, if you can, having denied the Lord with oaths and curses, gone out and wept bitterly, and that is the last scene; the Master is slain and leaves you there. You remember fellowship with Him and all that He was to you, all His love, all His grace, all His forbearance, and then think that is how you finished up when He was in difficulties. That leaves a sore heart. That leaves a state of agony inside. But, oh, the healing of the forty days, the healing of the heart.

So it must have been for them all. What kind of healing was it? It was priestly healing, not just saying, Oh well, we will say no more about it, do not fret and be troubled, let bygones be bygones. You cannot let bygones be bygones. You have got to have the assurance from God that that thing is forgiven, and that no longer stands between you and Him, to interfere in the slightest degree with fellowship, that thing has not left a shadow where He is concerned, in His memory, in His attitude. You have got to know that that thing is all blotted out from God's sight, and you have got to have in your heart the witness of peace from God before you can get over it and go on. That is the mediatorial work of the forty days.

The Lord Jesus was seeking to establish that for them. So far as He was concerned, and they were concerned, He was seeking to establish them upon that thing for their future ministry, so that their ministry would be like that. Look here, you may have turned your back upon God, you may have done despite to His holy Name, you may have been as bad as I was; I denied Him with oaths and curses, but He has forgiven me, He is a forgiving God, He is a marvellous God, He can bring you right back to full fellowship. That is the priestly character of the priestly ministry of the church. It is in this sense a taking of the mediatorial ministry of Christ.

Now we must guard that. It is not on the official basis of the Church of Rome, with many mediators; there is but One Mediator. We are speaking of mediation in Christ. A broken failure can be brought into new fellowship with God, be made to meet on the ground of absolute fellowship, and that in a Man Who combined in Himself God and Man. The veil is taken away, and you see this is God and Man, and in Him you have peace. He brings the peace of God into the Man's side of things. We are joined in that Manhood with God in His mercy and grace. "*He showed to them His hands and His side*". That is the ground of peace. That is the way of peace.

b) Illumination

Another feature of priestliness, as we well know, is illumination. The priests' lips were to teach knowledge, the priests' business was to interpret the things of God, to make them plain; just as Ezra stood up and expounded the Word, read it and gave the meaning thereof. The priest of the Old Testament had as a vital part of his vocation the giving of the sense and the explaining of the Word. I suppose the Old Testament priests could go little further than saying, This is the will of God, God has said this, and God wants this done, and you must ever bear it in mind, even if you do not understand why God has said this. We do not have a full knowledge of God's meaning, but this is His will for us, and we must keep these things in view. So the priests would teach the knowledge of the will and the way of the Lord.

Now this is so patent, it lies on the surface. In the days of the resurrection, when the veil is taken away, the Lord Jesus took up the Old Testament from Moses, the Psalms and the prophets, all the Scriptures, and the veil was taken away. That it was necessary for Him to open their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures, shows that the veil was still there, even for disciples. He brought them into true spiritual understanding, and in that He was fulfilling the ministry of the priests.

That became their ministry, as you see afterwards. Listen to them as they begin to preach. What are they doing? They, with unveiled face and opened eyes, are bringing out from behind the veil hanging over the Old Testament the real meaning of God. What a wonderful discourse was Stephen's on the Old Testament, and what a wonderful discourse was Peter's on the Old Testament. If there was one man who had the veil over his face more than another it was Saul of Tarsus. What a blind man he was, what a darkened man he was concerning Scriptures with which he was so familiar. Then the veil was taken away, "*God has shone into our hearts...*", "*Whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*" Sometimes you are astonished, and do not wonder that the Judaisers said he was making it all up, the Scripture did not mean that. They needed the veil to be taken away. That is priesthood.

That is the vocation of the assembly. There should be a living, opened, unveiled ministry of the things of the Lord, not speaking in parables and in types, but the mystery no longer a mystery, revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets. So He constituted them priests in the days after the resurrection, and fitted the church as it was then for its future work by taking the veil from their eyes.

c) Representation

The third feature in priesthood is representation. The priest must represent before God, must stand in the presence of God, bringing the people with him upon his heart, upon his shoulders. He must have access, and he must bring the people into the place where he stands with God, and represent them before the Lord. So, on the other hand, he must represent the Lord before the people, he must be amongst the people in the behalf of the Lord. There must be the Godward side and the manward side in priesthood.

Now listen, "*Go to my brethren, and say to them, 'I ascend unto My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.'*" Here is One Who brings them with Himself into the presence of God in His own Person, and Who brings God in His own Person into their presence. So that man and God meet in Christ, and He represents both. That is priesthood. He takes them in where He is with God the Father. He brings God the Father out where they are.

This requires very careful guarding when you carry it forward to the church, and yet it is true, that this gives character to the church's nature and vocation. Christ (we use the word, though we feel it is very dangerous) is incarnated in the church. We use that word only in Luke's thought, that Christ is continuing His words and deeds in the church. That which He began to do and teach He continues in the church. He is here, and Christ imparting Himself in His church makes the church His Body, and makes the church function in this way, that God comes to man in the church and man comes to God in the church. In the true, spiritual church there is a meeting of God and man, man and God, and God is represented there amongst men, and man is represented there before God. It is a great, a solemn, and a holy vocation with which the church is called, that it should represent the living presence of the Lord to men, and that man coming into the church or into the local assembly should know that God, while He may be in heaven, is also here. That is the importance of the church to God, that He might have a dwelling place where man may approach Him, and where He may come to man. He does sometimes come to men singly and apart, but by far the greater meeting between God and man is found in a spiritual company. That is the continuous side of this; the other may be spasmodic and fragmentary, but the church should be the continuous presence of God and man meeting. That does not put Christ apart.

In the forty days one thing that was left with these men and these women when He eventually did go up into heaven was this wonderful reality, We never know when our eyes shall see Him. It is always dangerous to say He is not here, for just when you think He is not here He is here. He is here all the time. He is in heaven, and yet He is here. That was left with them to be a mark of the future, and then they understood. That is what He meant, "*Lo, I am with you all the days, even into the end of the age.*"

d) Ministration

Another feature of priestliness is ministration, the imparting. At Emmaus He sat down to supper that was made a sacrament, and as He brake, their eyes were opened and they beheld Him, and they knew Him. That is a ministration. That was not the only meal in which the disciples shared after the resurrection. All this was intended, as He made perfectly clear, to let them know that it was not a spirit with which they were dealing, not a mere apparition. He is a real person, and to prove that He is a real person He gives them real food and as He gives them real food they know, strange as it all may seem and mysterious, that He is a real person, feeding with real food. This ministration of Christ was known in the breaking of bread.

That is a priestly function to break the bread, to minister. That needs hardly dwelling upon in its application. Is it not true that that is the church's function? Is it not true that Christ is to be ministered in the church and by the church so that the reality of Christ is proved by that spiritual substance which is our very life, our nourishment, our strength? We can come into the assembly weak, empty, weary, finished, and there is ministration to us, and we go away as though we had had a meal, as though we had been at a banquet. It should be so, and it can be so, and this is what the Lord means, that it should be the place where there is real ministration of heavenly bread, and Christ is identified, verified, known in the giving of what He does give in the assembly, which makes us know the miracle of passing from emptiness to fulness, and weakness to strength, and weariness to freshness, by coming together.

That is better than attending church services. Oh, how much there is of going to the meeting, going to church, going to a service, listening to a sermon, and singing some hymns; and having done your religious duty you go home for another week. That is very different from the

Lord's thought of the church, and those who belong to the Lord's true church in spiritual union with Him ought to be in a place where they can no more go without assembly life than they can go without their daily food. It ought to be just as impossible for them to continually keep out of the fellowship of the assembly as it is for them to keep out of their meals for their bodies.

The Lord meet us there, and have us recognise that our life very largely depends upon our assembling of ourselves together when it is possible. That is ministration.

e) Life

Another great feature in priesthood is Life. That has been spoken of so much that it hardly need be added to now. In the Old Testament the blood was the life, and the life was in the blood. That is the central feature in all priesthood in the Old Testament. That is the most holy, the most sacred element. The life is there. That is priestly ministry concerning the blood, or concerning the Life, and it is very clear that the forty days were days of Life. Two men went to Emmaus, half dead, nine-tenths dead, and they go back over those few miles as men who had been raised from the dead. You see the difference in the going out and the coming back. There was Life coming in all the time in those forty days. Things are getting more and more alive as the days go on. It is the risen Lord bringing them all back to Life and making them feel that they live anew, with new purpose, new hope, everything new. There ought to be Life in the assembly, in the church. That is priestly ministry. If people do not get Life amongst us, we are failing in our real vocation. If they do, let us thank God that to that measure we are being enabled to fulfil the ministry of the priestly company.

f) Communion

Communion is also a part of the priestly work. We are not going to stay to say anything about that. We are just reminding ourselves of what is said in Acts: "*Being assembled together with them...*". It was an assembly before He left them, and the real value of assembly life is that it is communion. We leave that for the present, and just say a closing word about priesthood, and this is the seventh thing:

g) Firstfruits

Paul tells us that, "*Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that are asleep*". Christ amongst them was the Firstfruits from among the dead. Then the very term itself implies that there will be other fruits, there must be a complete harvest. He was the Firstfruits. The Word teaches that the church also is a kind of firstfruits. It is the firstfruits of the nations. When you get the church in resurrection you get that which first of all satisfies God's heart and answers all His desire, but then it points to the fact that others are coming on too. Let it not be thought that the church is the whole company of the saved. It is not. There will be a great many more saved when the church is gone, and afterwards the nations will bring their glory and their wealth into the City. God is seeking the satisfaction of His own heart, first of all, to make good in the church all that Christ meant to Him of satisfaction.

Look at the farmer as he goes out into his field and sees the first ripe grain, and the joy that fills his heart as he gathers those and takes them home. He is satisfied that he has the earnest, the promise, the proviso, the assurance, the foretaste of what is coming. That is what Christ is to God: Christ is to God the assurance, the promise, the proviso of a church conformed to His image, of a great company like Him; and then after that still more.

We cannot stay to speak of the particular meanings of resurrection as in the church, as differing perhaps from all other resurrection in its content and its value. There is no doubt that God has a special thing that He is doing in the church. It is concerning this that Paul, who had been "*caught up to the third heaven*" and seen things which it was not lawful to utter, says in effect: "Look here, that is as far as I can go, but believe me there is a great deal more bound up with this than I am able to say, vast ranges of meaning and value that I am not allowed to utter, and which lies behind what I am saying. I have seen things I cannot talk about to you, but what I do say is to urge you on to something that I know." So when he says, "*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection*", we must believe that Paul saw something to know of Christ, and something in the resurrection of Christ and the power lying behind that which he had ever mentioned, far more than he had ever spoken; he knew the outworking of that, he knew what it was unto. He called it "*unspeakable things*". That is bound up with resurrection, and that particular kind of thing is bound up with the church. That is not for the nations afterwards; that is for the church in the first place. The good of that may come to the nations, but it can only come through the church, and in that sense we are a kind of firstfruits of resurrection. Here the High Priest says, "*Touch me not*", I am not yet ascended to the Father. He is going to present Himself as the Firstfruits, as the priest presented the firstfruits of old. He is the Firstfruits, but He is BUT the Firstfruits. He says, "the others are all coming. I have secured them!"

We are a kind of firstfruits, we have to be before the Father in the power of His resurrection, and go on continually to know by His illumining and leading and teaching what His resurrection Life means unto the satisfaction of God, and the reaching of His full thought in the church.

Chapter 13 - The Need for the Anointing of the Spirit

We want to remind ourselves that, while the forty days were a parenthesis, they were only a parenthesis. We want rather to change the emphasis and say that, after all, they contained more in them than we have seen; yet they were only a parenthesis for everything was still objective. Whatever they entered into, or whatever happened to them, was still only by outward help. It says that He opened their understanding, or, opened their eyes. It was a fleeting thing, transcendent, something that happened to them for the moment, and it was by an outward act of His, by something done in that way. It was by His help and if it had all been left it would only have been another phase of history. If He had left it there at the end of the time it would have been just something, though very wonderful, that had happened; something that had taken place; something which had been a wonderful, amazing, mysterious part of their lives. They would have moved on from it, and it would have remained as a phase through which they had passed. There was the phase of the earthly walk, and then there was the phase of the resurrection. Both would have taken their place in history and become a memory, and that is all. It was not yet an inward part of their life and their being. Just as there was the prospective element about the three-and-a-half years of His movement and His teaching, and His work, so there was the prospective element in the forty days. Something else was required. It was all pointing to something else.

There are many prospective features about the forty days if you care to look at them again, which we have no time to do now; we will content ourselves with but one point which embraces everything else.

In John 20 we have these words: "*Then he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.*" This was spoken on one of the occasions of His appearing to them. Now that was prospective. Not at that moment of His breathing did they receive the Holy Spirit, we know quite well, but it was a promise and a proviso. It was a designating of them as responsible to the Spirit when He should come. It was a securing unto them and of them unto the Holy Spirit. With Him, of course, the whole matter was timeless, and there is a sense in which there was no time in this, it was as good as done when He breathed on them, but actually and literally on the other hand, it was prospective, it was a looking forward; "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" In that one inclusive prospective feature of the forty days you have gathered up the one great need which is essential to make all those values inward, abiding, permanent and living; turning history into experience. That is bound up with receiving the Holy Spirit.

We just want to look at that in its various parts. We have realised our need and confess it. We have expressed our longing and our desire that all that which has been presented to us should become a living reality in us. We declare that we believe it possible, because with Him all things are possible. Then how shall it be? How can it be? By what means can our desire be realised and His will fulfilled, and the impossible be made actual? "*Receive ye the Holy Spirit*" is the answer. It is all the Holy Spirit's work.

The forty days do not take the place of those great chapters in John 14 and 16. "*I will not leave you as orphans...*"; "*I will send you the promise of the Father...*"; "*When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth... He will take of Mine...*"; "*He will not speak of Himself...*". That was not fulfilled in the forty days. Something that looked very much like it, something that seemed very much in that realm (and it was) took place, but it was not the fulfilment. There was a real tasting of it, but it was not the abiding and established thing that the Lord had promised. The Holy Spirit must come to abide for the age, to Himself establish and make good all that the Lord had shown, had revealed, had set before. That is elementary, but I am quite sure that we are ready to admit that we need a new touch of the Spirit to bring us in a new way into this. That is what we need, what we must have, but, blessed be God, that is what He has provided, and what He intends.

Of course a lot may depend upon what we mean by a touch of the Spirit. Some things that we mean, the Lord does not mean about that, and the way in which that should happen according to our minds is not the way in which it actually does happen. Let us be frank about these things, and not allow any traditional interpretations of the Holy Spirit's coming and working to lead us astray. There are those children of God who can fix more or less definitely the time when they consciously received the Holy Spirit, just as there are those who can fix the hour when they were born again. There are others who cannot fix that hour in either case, but who, nevertheless, are born again and have the Spirit. We want to be quite clear about this, because some people get into trouble if they have not had some burning experience going through their whole being in a certain moment when they receive what is called the baptism of the Spirit. The increase of the work of the Spirit in illumination, in quickening, has often come through suffering, a dark time, a deep time, a time of total eclipse, a time of great emptying, going again (as we say) into death, and coming back, not with some new burst of revelation, but with some fresh secrets. That is the Holy Spirit going on with His work, doing this very thing. You know when the Lord touches anew, and that is as real a work of the Holy Spirit as any great cataclysmic burst and demonstration and sensation. So do not tie this matter up to any given, specific method. Our Pentecost may be without a sensation, but be very real.

What we want to recognise is that it is the result, not the method, that matters. The question before us is not: Did we, in receiving the Holy Spirit, have certain particular and peculiar sensations and accompaniments in any realm? but: Have we the evidences of having received the Spirit? Do we know the Lord Jesus in this resurrection way, this living way? Do we know the opening of the eyes? Are the results of the Spirit's activity known?

The Lord desires to make this good in the case of everyone, and perhaps He may do so in a different way with everyone. Please do not feel that you may have missed the reality because you have not gone by a certain prescribed course. It is always dangerous to confine the movements of God to one line.

We must seek to break this up a little, and work from its beginning. "*He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'.*" I can never read that without somehow my mind linking it with the beginning of the book of Genesis, "*He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*". I think it is quite a true and right link and association. In the first place in Genesis you have the old creation by the breath of God, and all that came in with that creation required that breath of God in man to make its values and its meaning of practical account. God may have a world, a universe, but for that universe to be turned to practical account He must have a living man. He brought in man, and breathed into him the breath of life in order that His already created world might be turned to practical account. By the breathing everything was given its real meaning and turned to value.

Pass that over to the new creation, and here is the Head of the new creation — or the Creator Himself — on the ground of new creation breathing, and, in effect, saying, "You, the church, are the new creation man, to occupy this new world which has come in with resurrection, with all its new values, all its new potentialities". This new world of the resurrection requires a new man to give it its practical meaning. So He must bring in the men, and He breathes on them, and the church is the one new man inbreathed.

If this is the *new* creation, its very name presupposes the end of an old. Of course, we always come up against that sooner or later, somehow or other. It is quite useless for us to contemplate the Holy Spirit on the positive side, with all the new values and meaning, until we have looked squarely in the face the end of the old creation. We have seen it in the case of these very men, and that they had with them for evermore this knowledge, which they could always declare as a positive thing in their history. There was a day when, in spite of all my good desires, intentions, professions, protestations, in spite of all that I knew about the Lord Jesus, in spite of all that I tried to do for Him, there was a day when I died, and all that died with me, as a hopeless, unprofitable thing; a day when I came to see that in men, even in a religious way, dwells no good thing.

Each one of us must be in the place where we can say, "I know, not as having been taught it, not as having read it, not as having come by it as a part of a system of teaching with which I have become associated, but I know, written deep down in my own heart, as a part of my own spiritual history, that nothing is possible apart from Christ risen". All is unprofitable. That is not all done at once. It is only done in parts, and there will always be more to be done in that way, but there is that which is sufficient to make us know in our hearts that that is true. We may yet have to discover through futile attempts, that that is more true than we had realised. We may yet have to discover how utterly unfruitful and unprofitable we are, more than we ever thought, because this flesh is a "die-hard"; it takes a long time to really give up the ghost. It clings to its own ability to do something, and to know something, but nevertheless, however long-drawn-

out that may be, and it may be lifelong, there is that from which it begins, where it comes home to us in some way which is a foundational thing, that the old creation is, so far as we are concerned, ruled out as unprofitable to God, and lies under His ban as a worthless thing.

Have you got a cross in your history? Have you got a grave in your history? If you have not then you are dwelling in the shadows. You may get flashes and touches, but they will be fleeting, transient, coming and going. If you have a cross and a grave in your experience, in your history, the Holy Spirit has got what He requires, and it is blessedly possible for you to have the abiding of this risen life in which all these values are made good, and growingly good.

What is the new creation? With it there comes first of all a new consciousness. You are conscious that things are new, and things are different. It is a new consciousness as to the Lord. You are alive to that to which you were never alive before; in every realm things are the same, yet entirely different. Somehow or other you move in the same surroundings, and touch the same people, but there is something new. There is a new consciousness. Things have become different.

You know how true this is in conversion. When you are born again truly, you go back to your business and it is the same business, and you are with the same people, and the same old routine, but you are different, and you have got a different consciousness, and you have, therefore, a different consciousness about you. There is a new aliveness that comes in with the new creation to what was so dark and dead before. Take just the matter of the object of being alive. Before you did not know why you were alive, but now there comes a sense of a new purpose. You may not even yet know what it is, but you have a new sense that there is purpose in your being here in this world. We have often said one of the blessed marks of new birth is that there is a new consciousness of having been born for a purpose. What is it that makes the new convert want to do something in relation to Christ? It is the new consciousness of purpose. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

I believe that when the Holy Spirit really has His way He makes remarkable differences in this direction, that we see people differently. Before we saw them for what they are in the flesh, and found them exceedingly awkward and difficult and impossible. Somehow or other when the Holy Spirit really gets hold of us there is a new consciousness as to people, our relationships, and we see something that we never saw before in people. Things are very much more possible than they were. You and I need the Holy Spirit in this direction. Whether you are able, out of experience, to follow what we are saying, it makes no difference to the fact. If you have got an impossible person to work with, and the Lord has called you alongside of that impossible person, what you need is the Holy Spirit to enable you to have a consciousness and to see something more than just the natural condition, to lift above that level. The Holy Spirit does give this new consciousness.

Not only do we have a new consciousness, but we have a new capacity. The Holy Spirit gives capacities that none of us have by nature. We may by nature be very limited in our capabilities. By the anointing of the Holy Spirit we may have capabilities that the best men and women of this world without the Holy Spirit have not got. A truly Spirit-indwelt child of God has capabilities and capacities that no one else has. This very breathing carries with it capacity. Until Adam was breathed into he had no capacities for all that he was intended to do; but when he became a living soul by the breath of God he had capacities for knowing, for doing, for understanding. The new creation is like that, with new capacities, capabilities for knowing, for understanding, for doing, that we never had before. No child of God ought ever to settle down

and finally accept the position that they cannot in any particular. We should never say in any matter that is presented to us in the will of God, "I cannot". The presence of the Holy Spirit means capability and capacity for doing things which we could never do before. We ought to prove the Lord in that way.

This new creation, then, is the result of the Holy Spirit, it is by the Holy Spirit, but that means that all things have to be of Christ. In the new creation all things are of Christ. The Holy Spirit sees to it, and keeps us in accordance with that.

In the forty days the disciples were making wonderful discoveries about Christ, and the Holy Spirit comes to make known to us the meaning and values of Christ. That is the very nature of the new creation, that all things are of Christ and we are forbidden to have anything else. The Holy Spirit calls upon us to regard everything just in the light of Christ. How far is that Christ? How far does that accord with Christ?

Let us remember that we are thinking about the great values of Christ risen. We have said that these are our desires, our longings, our needs. We have reached out. Very well, the Holy Spirit can make it all good, but the Holy Spirit will require, in order that He may make it good, that we have all things according to Christ. If you and I are according to ourselves, according to one another, according to nature, according to the world, according to anything that is not Christ the Holy Spirit does not operate. He does not operate in the matter of life.

Take our judgements of one another. I do not know what your experience is, but I am quite sure that not a few know the Holy Spirit's checking up in the matter of talking about other children of God. You do not need to be told by anyone that it is wrong, and you have made a mistake when you have been criticising some children of God, when you have been speaking of their faults, and what they are, and really bringing out what is there of imperfections, making something of it, or doing them any kind of injury. You know quite well that you feel miserable afterwards, and you make up your mind that you are never going to do it again, but, of course, you will do it again. Then we try to cover up our tracks by perhaps finding a few good things about them, and mentioning those, but we know quite well something has happened, and we have a bad time. That is not according to Christ. We have all much to learn in this way. Everything of the new creation is of the risen life of the Lord, and it is necessary to have everything according to Christ. If you and I can frustrate the Holy Spirit's activity in eye opening, illumination, revelation, life-giving, or in any other of the great values and benefits of Christ risen, we can frustrate His work by indulging in something that is not Christ. We have got to allow the Holy Spirit to be here, and to govern in our hearts; when He would say, not in words, but in the very feelings that He causes to come into us: Now that was not Christ, that is not Christ, therefore it must go, we have to adjust to Christ, and then the Holy Spirit will make good to us and in us these resurrection values.

It is so easy for us to get up and talk about receiving the Holy Spirit and everything will be right, all will be well if only you get the baptism, the filling, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and that what you need is the Holy Spirit. Everybody knows that. We have got the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, His person and His work, what He is for, and all that. We know that. We ask the Lord for the Holy Spirit, and cry for the Spirit, and we want to get more inward over this matter, and that is what we are trying to do. The Holy Spirit demands new creation conditions, and new creation conditions are that all things are of Christ. And if you and I in the simple things of everyday life, are not according to Christ, we frustrate the Holy Spirit, but in so far as we adjust the details of daily life to Christ in our talk, in our dress, and in every other way, then He is able

to do His work. The Lord seeks to get rid of things that are not according to His mind, and if we do not follow the suggestion of the Lord, we can say goodbye to all our talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. The whole thing is held up by conformity to Christ or failure in conformity to Christ. If you want to know resurrection values, listen to the Spirit on details. Do not get great, vast, sweeping ideas, but listen to the Holy Spirit on details as He is trying to get conformity to Christ in our speech, in our dress, in some conduct of ours, to put us right in line with Christ, in Christ-likeness, humility, selflessness, and a thousand and one other things.

The Spirit speaks so quietly, but, oh, what is bound up with that quiet voice! Our very life, our very growing knowledge of the Lord is bound up with it.

So Pentecost (that is a great word, and how the very word carries people off their feet) may be a matter of your having your lips crucified, your desire to be taken notice of crucified. Pentecost may just be that for you or for me. The whole of Pentecost may hang upon that. The Holy Spirit is very careful, and very particular. He overlooks nothing.

Far be it from us to make the Christian life difficult. The Lord trains us steadily, and spreads His training over a long enough time for us to learn without getting into distress. Nevertheless, in the end the Lord Himself in us and our life and our knowledge of Him, and everything else meant for us, depends entirely upon how we respond to the Spirit's requirement that things should be according to Christ. Do you believe that? You can get to your Pentecost that way. You can get to the knowledge of the Holy Spirit that way. You can get to this marvellous new consciousness and capacity and illumination and all else simply by recognising that everything now has to be of Christ, according to Christ. That is the first demand.

Then the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the new creation, being breathed, constitutes the Body. The Body is constituted by the Breath, just as in Ezekiel 37 the scattered bones by the breath of the Lord came together and became articulate, living bodies, so the Breath of the Spirit constitutes and forms the one Body. He is the Spirit of the one Body, and it is a violation of the Holy Spirit when there is anything about us which is other than according to the meaning of the one Body — schisms, divisions, personal separations on spiritual grounds, or as affecting our spiritual life because natural elements come in. That is a frustration of the Holy Spirit; that is a violation of the Holy Spirit.

We were speaking about the church, the House of God. Let us remember that it was for this that Christ died, and the church, His Body, is His Bride, and that is the issue of the Cross and the resurrection, the object of it all. Calvary in all its range had its supreme meaning in the church, His Body, His Bride. "*The church of Christ which He purchased with his own blood*". Now if that was the supreme object of Calvary, if that is the issue of the resurrection, the Holy Spirit has that as the supreme thing, the one Body. If you and I are going to be Holy Spirit governed, it will work both ways. It will mean that we shall have growingly this Body consciousness, there will be the development of a fellowship-with-saints spirit in us. One of my problems (and I do not think that the existence of this contradicts what we have just been saying) is how people who profess to have received the fulness of the Spirit can criticise other people of God, and be governed by suspicion and prejudice. It seems to me to be a great contradiction. It shows that somehow the Holy Spirit is, after all, very definitely in subjection to something other, and that "something" is not in subjection to Him. The judgement is not in subjection. A full way for the Spirit must issue in fellowship, and if that fellowship is not

spontaneous, is not with us, we may take it that the Holy Spirit is not being able to go on with His work for some reason or other.

All that means that the resurrection values of the Lord Jesus are for the Body in the intention of God, by the Holy Spirit, and that we can only have them altogether. We cannot have them as our own personal and private property. You cannot take these values and walk away with them, and have them just alone. You need the thing that the Lord has appointed for the enjoyment of resurrection Life. It requires the assembly for the fuller enlightenment. The individual does not get the same enlightenment as the assembly, and the larger enlightenment comes through the assembly, and so also the larger Life. If we want personal accession of Life we shall get it in fellowship. As scattered individuals our life is limited, and sometimes it is crushed down. If we come together as the Lord's people, then there is an accession of Life, and we go away refreshed. The Holy Spirit requires the assembly, because that is His object. He is the Spirit of the one Body, and it is in true Spirit fellowship that the Lord's people come into the values of Christ risen.

Just as Thomas will not get the benefits while he goes wandering about on his own, but he gets those benefits when he comes into fellowship with the others, so it is always the case. If you want to lose joy, and the life and values of Christ risen, just break away from the Lord's people in spirit, and go and live on your own as spiritually detached. Spiritual detachment, for any reason at all, is the enemy's great chance for contradicting the testimony of the risen Lord, and doing great harm to the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit Who constitutes the one Body.

The Holy Spirit means, of course, a great deal more than we have said. All this applies to every part.

It is the Lord's desire, the Lord's will, that everyone of His own to the least, even to the youngest, should live in the values of the anointing Spirit. When there is a place where there are many gatherings, and there is a great volume of speech, there is a danger, especially to the younger people, of regarding that as their Life; and it is: "Does So-and-so say this or that? And if Mr. So-and-so says it, then it must be right; that we accept!" That is all very good, but the Lord wants you to have the anointing *yourself*, and there is a right sense (please do not take this wrongly) in which the anointing makes us independent, makes us an individually responsible being, one that has spiritual intelligence. It is a great thing when you find those who have their own personal knowledge of the Lord and the things of the Lord, which they have got from the Lord, and with the Lord in their own life with the Lord, and they are not going out to others and giving out what they have got from meetings or from their teachers, but are able to speak of their own walk with God, of their own knowledge of the Lord, and what the Lord has shown to them. The Lord would have it like that.

Do you believe that you personally can be taught of the Lord? You can be taught of the Lord now. You can be an intelligent one, with spiritual intelligence. You can know in your own heart the truth. The Lord would have it like that, and only if it is like that will there be a true growth. The other, after all, is a false truth, it is not real, and that falsehood will at some time be disclosed, discovered; we shall find that we have got a top-heavy structure, and it will come down. We have a building on the sand, and when the storm comes, down crashes our building of teaching and religious knowledge and spiritual instruction. The Lord would secure us against anything like that, by telling us that the Holy Spirit Himself would be our personal teacher, and we have to have dealings with the Lord over things. Believe it first of all. Do not rule yourself

out of that realm, but believe that the Holy Spirit can give you new faculties, these spiritual faculties, these capacities. Believe that they may be developed by use until you know just as well as the one whom you now think knows the Lord better than anyone else.

Everyone should have the values of the anointing, and should have very definite dealing with the Lord about it. Be precise in the matter, and say, "Now, Lord, you have given the Holy Spirit, Who You said shall guide us into all truth, reveal Your things to us. As one who knows, who believes, who trusts You, one who is abandoned to You, one who accepts all the meaning of the Cross for the setting aside of nature, I definitely count on You in all faithfulness and truth to make this true in my case, that the anointing teaches me, and I am taught." The Lord will have His own ways of teaching. They will differ. He will use many means for teaching, but how He does it does not matter so much; the thing is that you and I come more and more to the place where we know, and say, "*We speak that we do know, and testify that which we have seen, and (in a spiritual sense) our hands have handled...*".

The Lord make that good to us.