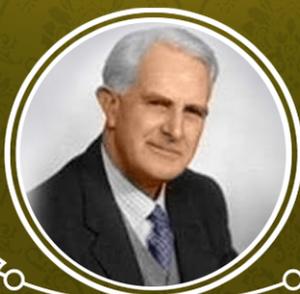




POWER WITH GOD



T AUSTIN SPARKS



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By

T. AUSTIN SPARKS

CHAPTER ONE

POWER WITH GOD - EXEMPLIFIED IN NOAH

"Righteousness Which Is According To Faith"

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against Me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out My hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord Jehovah... Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My wrath upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast; though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they should deliver neither son nor daughter; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." (Ezek. 14:12-14, 19-20)

"Then said the Lord to me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth." (Jer. 15:1)

GOD TAKES ACCOUNT OF THOSE WHO HAVE POWER WITH HIM

It is a remarkable thing that the Lord is doing when, in this way, He selects certain names and brings them to the fore over against such a very dark and hopeless situation, and says of them: 'Although these men were there, and although these men stood before Me, it would make no difference; they alone, by themselves, would be saved.' In doing this, He has selected from all the men who had ever prevailed with Him those who, more than any others, had power with God. If anything could be done, if God could be influenced, persuaded to intervene, to change the situation which was so desperate, these men would do it, and would be the ones who would have power with God. The very first thing that strikes us is just that - God taking account of men who had power with Him. The Lord carries that a very long way. He says, in effect: 'I take that right to the very limit of possibility - where possibility ends these men go; if anything could be done, however desperate the situation, these are the men who will bring it about.' It is something to note that God takes account of men who have power with Him. God knows them; He knows what He has had to do, what He has been compelled to do because of such men.

GOD PUTS HIMSELF IN TO THE HANDS OF MEN

By inference, this carries the truth that God puts Himself into the hands of men. God is not going to move unless there are those who prevail with Him, and the inference is: 'I am your hands, if you will press the matter far enough, if you will learn how to prevail.' God will, or will not, move according to knowledge of how to prevail with Him in a situation or a matter. That is something to think about. If a situation could be altered God says: 'Such and such are the men through whom I would do it.' Of course, I am not dealing with the situations in the contexts of these two passages in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. That is not the point. I am not taking up the situation in Israel, which had become an impossible situation, and its handling and solution was one which could only be done through judgment, and the terrible judgment of the seventy years' captivity. God would deal with it in that way. But He had reached the point where no man could ask the Lord to deal with it on the spot, and it would happen. That is not our concern at the moment.

It is this: That there are situations which do go a very long way, as we shall see, which are still open to be dealt with by heaven, but which never will be dealt with unless there are those who know how to prevail with God. God offers Himself to be prevailed with, to yield Himself in all His sovereign power, in all His grace, in all His mercy, to men and people who know the secret of prevailing.

Now let us note at this very point, lest our hearts begin to lose assurance and hope, that the men here mentioned as being the most outstanding examples of prevailing with God were not taken account of for what they were in themselves. There were two things, which made it possible for the Lord to take account of them.

A HEART RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD

One was their heart relationship to the Lord. Look at the men: Noah, Daniel, Job, Moses, and Samuel. Well, there are some grand things about those men. The Lord has not covered up the other side. You are sometimes a little surprised at what the Lord does say about some of them. If you read the whole story, you do feel that there may be some ground of contradiction here in these men. You know the end of Noah - a very sad picture. You hear a New Testament Apostle saying: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job" (James 5:11, but when you read the Book of Job, you sometimes feel that if ever there was a man without patience, it is Job. We know about Moses, and even Samuel seems to have passed out almost under a cloud. Well, I think it is clear that in their case, as in the case of so many of the others who are held up by God as examples of this or that, it was not because of what they were in themselves that God singled them out, but in every case you do see this: that in spite of their humanity, their weaknesses, their failures, their lapses, there was a heart relationship to the Lord which cannot be questioned, and when you look at the context of these very passages, that is the thing which first of all is impressed upon you - the heart of these people. God is troubled about the heart of this people. The prophetic word about Israel at this time was: 'The heart of this people is turned away from Me, and turned to idols.' "This people draw nigh unto Me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me." (Isa. 29:13 It is a heart question, and it was that state of heart, which at length brought about this impasse - that God could do nothing. Over against that, men are mentioned who, despite their human weaknesses, were men whose hearts were in a very utter place with the Lord.

But that is not all. That is a beginning point, but there is another reason why the Lord singled out these men. It was because of certain spiritual factors, which were the great characteristics of their very life, factors which do count with God. When you look at each of these men, read their story and sum it all up, you have to say: That is the thing that marks that man's life, and that, and that. Each one of them is the embodiment of

something, and it is that thing which counts with God and which was the basis of their having power with God. That is what we are after at this time - that which makes for power with God.

TWO WAYS OF ESTIMATING MEN

May I just stay here, after what I have just said, to add this. There are two ways in which we may estimate men, by which we may judge them and their history and arrive at a conclusion about them. There is the natural side, the way in which men naturally look at men. When the world reads the story of some of these men, such as David, and others, well, they sum it all up with a sneer and pass it all out as utterly unworthy. It is the natural way of judging men and appraising their value, and that was the point upon which the Lord came down with Job's friends. They judged Job naturally, by the sight of the eye, by what appeared on the surface, and summed him up as a bad lot. You can look on men of God like that, just taking account of the flaws, the weaknesses and all that human side, which is, after all, poor stuff in the best. Very few men, if any, have ever come out of the judgments of men completely free of that sort of thing. But there is another way, and that is as to their spiritual values, to judge spiritually. It is just here that the Lord says: "Touch not Mine anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm." (I Chron. 16:22) Why should they touch the Lord's anointed? Only because they have misjudged them and had come to wrong conclusions about them. The Lord will not let us touch any one of His, however much they may be at fault in our judgment. It is a very solemn thing to remember that: that our hand must not come down upon any of the Lord's own in judgment; that has to be left with the Lord. It may be that there is plenty from our point of view and to our judgment that would justify our taking such an antagonistic or opposed attitude, but the Lord will not have it. That comes out in the case of Job. Moses was a frail human vessel capable of making mistakes, but see what the Lord will do with those who assail Moses, and touch his acceptance with God, his standing before the Lord! I do feel it is necessary for us to remember that, because who belongs to the Lord is very precious and must not be touched. There are always two ways of looking at and judging men and people of God. There is this natural side, which has plenty to criticize, but the Lord will disapprove if we do it. There is the spiritual way of judging, and it is necessary to look further and see how far these count for God, whether there is not something there that is of the Lord.

NOAH SINGLED OUT BY GOD

Having said that - and it is only introductory - we can come to the first of these men, Noah. This is not a study of the life of Noah, and certainly not of the deluge, but just this particular point - power with God. God singled Noah out from amongst a great host of men and said: 'If I could be prevailed upon, if I could be persuaded, Noah would do it; of all men, he could do it.' Noah is amongst the few. Perhaps you have not thought of Noah as being so important as that, and all that you know about him is that he made an ark. You always associate the ark and the deluge with Noah, and that is all it amounts to. But here the dispensation is closing, the whole existing order of things is passing, the antediluvians, patriarchs, the Mosaic economy, the whole monarchy, the prophetic ministry in the old dispensation are coming to a close. God looks over the whole and sees men who have prevailed with Him, and brings five out from amongst them. The first one He mentions is Noah - a man who stands over a great extent of time. God says: 'If I could be moved, Noah would move Me. I would have to yield to him.' Well, that surely forces us to look to see what it is in Noah's case that represents that which prevails with God.

I think the key is in Hebrews 11:7: "By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." That is the summary of it, but it wants breaking up.

NOAH STOOD ALONE FOR GOD

First of all, we go back to Noah's time. You read chapters 6 and 7 of Genesis and this whole situation concerning Noah is introduced. The statement is that God looked and saw, and what did He see? A whole race of men, in every imagination of their hearts corrupt, evil, a universal state of iniquity and departure from God, of godlessness and of positive iniquity so utter, so terrible, that God repented that He had made man on the earth, and He said:

"I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground; both man, and beast, and creeping things, and birds of the heavens; for it repenteth Me that I have made them." God has said that, and then the next sentence is: 'But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.' "But Noah..." - the exception. Then at the beginning of the seventh chapter you have the reason why: "... for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation".

Well, the first thing about Noah is that: that he stood true to God as one solitary, lonely man in a universe of iniquity, one man amongst all men, distinguished from them by righteousness over against utter unrighteousness. One man true to God when all others had departed. How easy it would have been for Noah to have been carried away, not only by the sin and the atmosphere and the general course of things, but by this: "Well, everything has gone. God has not got anything, and what is the good of trying to stand true? What is the use of MY trying to hold on when everything has gone?" So often the Lord's people have given up, not because there were no other people of the Lord on the earth, nor because there were no other righteous people, nor because there was not another Christian in all the world, but because things have gone so largely astray, have departed so extensively from the Lord's revealed mind, and have got into such an appalling condition that they say: 'Is it any use trying to stand for what is of God in any full sense?'

We may as well accept things as they are and capitulate, and make the best

of a bad job.' - the kind of argument which is the result of the seemingly impossible situation, prospect, and outlook. Death and departure: what is the good of our trying to stand up to this? Probably you, as an individual Christian, placed in a setting of so much that is contrary to God, often ask your heart: Is it any use trying to hold on, to stand for God? You see, the question of power with God does immediately arise. It is a tremendous thing that God is saying:

'Here is one man in the whole human race, one man in the whole world, alone who will not capitulate, and that is the basis of power with Me. If anything can be done, that is the kind of man who will bring it about.'

May we not be tested by the situation in which God places us, so difficult, so contrary, as to whether we are going to stand with God so that we come to a place where we do know the secret of prevailing with God and are able to say:

'I have been in very difficult situations where the whole thing seemed hopeless and impossible, but I have learned that it is possible to prevail, to triumph, to bring God in, and I have seen those hopeless, impossible situations touched by God and dealt with by Him. I have come to know the Lord over against a very dark and seemingly impossible background.' God needs men and women like that. Alone - yes, desperately alone!

NOAH HAD NO PRECEDENT

"Moved with godly fear, prepared an ark." He built an ark, as the context shows, without a precedent. That, I think, is the point here. "Things not seen as yet." First of all, it is fairly generally concluded that rain had never been seen up to this time. "There went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground" (Gen. 2:6, but rain was an unknown thing up to Noah's time. They had never seen it, so he had not a precedent for this. Probably there are other things covered by that little statement: "Things not seen as yet." The point is that nothing in history up to this point gave any ground of justification for taking the course that he did. He could never say:

'You see, this happened at such and such a time; this happened there; we have examples of this.' We, today, have examples of almost anything and everything that may come, but Noah had no examples, no evidence, no precedent, nothing to give point. He was simply told by God that it was going to happen, and he could not in the realm of his whole knowledge say: 'Well, I know what that means!' There was nothing like that at all. It was going to be something altogether new, something that had never happened before.

Every individual life with God is something so much by itself. Ten thousand, or a million, may have gone that way before, but when it comes to us, we always feel that no one in all God's universe has ever had this experience before. We feel that we are the only one who has ever gone this way. People can say to us: 'I know all about it. I have been that way.' 'Yes,' we say, 'but you don't understand. You have never really been in my position.' That is our immediate reaction. It is like that - the utter loneliness of a personal walk with God. Noah had no precedent, nothing to go upon. Faith is tested like that. Noah, "moved with godly fear" - and you know what that word means in the Scriptures: fear of the Lord, that is, just believing God and obeying Him because He is God; not because of any proofs or evidence, but because He is God - "prepared an ark".

A PROLONGED TEST OF FAITH

But then, remember the duration of it. He did not start this thing, get so far and say: 'Well, I have been at this for a good long time now. Month passes into month, the months are mounting up and it is getting into years now and nothing has happened. No one takes any notice, no one is influenced and I am making no impression at all. I think there must have been a mistake. Surely there ought by now to be something that indicates that I am on the right line and that I have not taken the wrong course!' One hundred and twenty years! Of course, that was not much out of his whole life of nine hundred and fifty, but a hundred and twenty is enough to test faith. Now the point is that for one hundred and twenty years he went on with it without anything coming in. He went the whole of that time of required, demanded activity with nothing whatever to prove that he was right or to support him in his way, with nothing that looked like some effect of his message (because one writer speaks of Noah as a "preacher of righteousness" (II Pet. 2:5) with nothing happening through all his preaching, whether it was by word or act - but what was happening really? There was something happening, but it was one of those things that you and I do not ever feel happy about. It says that he condemned the world. By his faith and his works of faith, he put everybody else in the wrong and prepared them for judgment. In Paul's words, he was "a saviour unto death." (II Cor. 2:16) There is always that effect of faithfulness. It is not ineffective and neutral. It does have an effect, although it is a very disheartening kind; nevertheless it counts, is effective, is tremendous. His work of faith just prepared the world for judgment. God has to do that to be justified.

FOR A TIME TO COME

But over it all there is this element - and you see we are getting at the question of faith and analyzing it - this element of the future aspect of ministry, of service to the Lord. It was for a time to come, and I think there is nothing so testing as that. If only we are going to live to see the result of our ministry! If only it is all going to come about in our lifetime! If only we are going to know here our vindication! If only something is coming to us before we pass from this scene to prove that we have been right, well, we can go on. But note: This, with all the rest, is summed up by the writer to the Hebrews in this:

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises." (Heb. 11:13) Oh yes, Noah saw the flood, he went through it and came out on the other side, and made a sorry mess of things afterward. Is that all? No, not a little bit of it, really, there is something very much deeper and greater than that about this whole matter.

But I want to emphasize that it is this 'for a time to come' feature which is so testing to faith. We are told, and as frankly as Jeremiah was, that we give our lives, spend our strength and go through all the travail and sorrow and suffering and see very little. We go home to the Lord and do not see all that we hoped for. There is the ultimate test. How far do we come into the picture?

What place do we have in it all? Can we eliminate ourselves altogether and go right on without any reservation, and give ourselves for that which we shall never see, for a time to come?

There is a lot of that in the Old Testament. You remember that Jeremiah gave his prophecy. We read in II Chronicles 36:22: "That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished," but Jeremiah did not live to see it. His word was fulfilled, and people did go back from Babylon according to his word, but he did not live to see it. He worked for a time to come in which he had no place, so far as this earth is concerned, other than a spiritual place. The spiritual values of his life and work were there. It is a test of faith, because we do, humanly and naturally, crave so

much to see something for it all before we pass hence, just to know that it has been worth while. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." Noah was really living and working for a time to come.

Now let us get right to this thing. By this kind of faith which, to begin with, would not capitulate to what was practically universal departure from God, but, in effect, said: 'Although I may be the only one left standing for God, and for God's full rights, and God's full place, I have that faith in God that it is worth my standing alone for Him. God has something bound up with my aloneness for Him.' That is faith, tremendous faith, the faith which would not surrender, to begin with, a faith which was not passive in standing in a world which was so contrary, a faith which was active, and went on, seeing nothing, with no precedent to work upon, went on building for one hundred and twenty years, and a faith which believed that, although he saw no converts or anyone coming over to the side of righteousness, something was happening. 'This is not all for nothing. Something is happening even now. These people are being brought under the effect of my stand and my ministry and my preaching, even if it is to take all ground from under their feet and leave them condemned, without an argument, without an excuse.' That is something, which God must have before He can judge, and that is why He has sent us to preach. He is going to judge the world, but He cannot judge those who have never had an opportunity, those who have had no light and have had no witness. He must be justified. That was Noah's faith. It was not a happy side of faith, but again the faith which believed that this thing related to something very much more somewhere ahead in the future. That was the kind of faith that Noah had, and it says: "he... became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith".

'He became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.' Now we can link up with that Hebrews 11:39-40: "And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (the word is 'complete')." Here is the great, future, prospective factor in Noah's faith. He, with the rest of these men, was not made complete. Why?

Because completeness belongs to our time, to this dispensation. It is the

whole argument of the Letter to the Hebrews: "nothing perfect" (Heb. 7:19). But now that which is perfect is come. This is the age of completeness, perfectness. Noah's faith looked on, and he had to die in faith, not receiving BECAUSE this perfectness, this completeness, belongs to OUR dispensation, the day in which we live.

You come over to Hebrews 12:22-23: "Ye are come... to the spirits of just men made perfect" (complete). Noah's spirit is amongst them. What has happened? The Lord Jesus has perfected the work of righteousness, the Son has fulfilled all righteousness. Noah's faith linked him with Christ, with this dispensation, with us, in perfect righteousness. Peter talks about Noah and the flood in chapter three of his first letter: "The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." John the Baptist would have refrained from baptizing the Lord Jesus, but Jesus said: "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt. 3:15) The flood, the deluge, says Peter, is a figure of baptism in which all righteousness is fulfilled. But all righteousness stood AGAINST the men of Noah's day, but all righteousness stood FOR him through his faith. Baptism was not his doom, but his way into life, a new creation. "All righteousness"; "the spirits of just men made perfect." So Noah in faith came right into this age of perfect righteousness and inherited it. We are come to the spirits of these just men, Noah and all the rest, made complete.

Now what does it amount to in this particular connection? His life work, after all, was not just that incident of the flood. It ran right on to Christ, and on to the Church. "They"; "we"; these are the two words here. "They without us." "They,"

"us," brought together in the perfect work of Christ in fulfilling all righteousness.

RIGHTEOUSNESS ACCORDING TO FAITH

'Though Noah stood before Me.' What is the first mighty ground of power with God? It is the ground of righteousness which is according to faith, and you can test it any day that you like, because power with God is not just a matter of somehow persuading God to do something you think ought to be done. Let us get this right over. Power with God is not cajoling God into moving, getting a God, who is reluctant to come in and help, to change His mind and to be kind and intervene. That is all wrong, completely wrong. We have a magnificent picture of this whole thing in Zechariah 3: "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary." Satan has established himself there in the place of power, which the right hand always represents. Christ is now at the right hand of the Majesty in the heaven (Col. 3:1, the place of power and honor, but here Satan is getting honor and has power because Joshua "was clothed with filthy garments." One who stood by said: "Take the filthy garments from off him... I will clothe thee with rich apparel... let them set a clean miter upon his head." Now the scene has changed. Righteousness like filthy rags (Isaiah 64.6 have been put away; righteousness which is power has been placed upon him, and: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." Satan's rebuke, his dethronement, and his removal from the place of power and getting the honor is related to a change of condition from unrighteousness to righteousness. It is only this that can move God.

That is the background of those passages in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Why did there come deadlock and impasse? God said it was because unrighteousness had become so universal and absolute that 'I cannot do anything. I just cannot. Even though these men stepped in, it is only righteousness that would save THEM. If there was righteousness here, they would be saved, but there are none righteous and I can do nothing. Remove unrighteousness and I am released. I can repent and come in. You who want to prevail with Me must provide Me with a ground of righteousness.'

That is very practical. We are paralyzed so often and Satan is so often getting the glory, the honor and the power, because he gets us to move off this ground of the righteousness which is according to faith, bringing us under condemnation, bringing us back to that old ground outside of Christ, nullifying all this wonderful work of perfect righteousness fulfilled by Christ and our appropriation of it by faith. So often it just heads up to a situation like this. The enemy has got possession, he has fastened upon us and has made all kinds of suggestions and accusations. 'I do not know whether I am right or wrong, whether I have grieved the Lord, or not. I do not know whether the Lord is for me or against me. I do not know where I am.' Satan holds us there until we take positively a position of righteousness in Christ by faith, and put that to the enemy. 'I do not know in what I am' - and neither did Noah, nor Job, nor Daniel, nor Moses, nor any of them. Their faith was counted unto them for righteousness. 'I do not stand on the ground of what I am; I stand on the ground of Christ's perfect righteousness.' It is the only way to begin to have power with God, and we are nullified while we have a question on that matter. Oh, for a beginning, a foundation of a mighty settled faith in the righteousness of Christ as ours through faith in Him to put us in a place of power with God!

Because it is not just persuading God, it is moral power with God. He must have a moral ground for all He does. If there is a question of unrighteousness, He cannot do it. That unrighteousness is dealt with in the Blood of the Lord Jesus: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (I John 1:7) Therein is our power with God. It is moral power. He is not a reluctant, unwilling God. He is a God who is only too ready, but He is bound by His own nature of righteousness. Have you that ground? Show Him on the ground of righteousness that He should do this, and on the ground of His Son why He should do it. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." (Isa. 1:18) How are you going to reason? Not like Job in the transition stage, reasoning about your own righteousness and why God should do it for YOU. No, let us reason together - on what ground? What is the issue? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." How? On what ground are you reasoning? In what way are your sins made as white as snow? We know it is by the precious Blood. That is the reasoning ground with God. It speaks, it works with God. Oh, plead the Blood and you have the greatest argument with God

and against Satan, the adversary and accuser. I know this is elementary. It is the beginning of things, but, dear friends, it is a thing that follows us through to the end. What is the fear in your own heart that arises so often as to whether right at the end you will be able to hold out and get through triumphantly? Yes, it is the battle right through to the end. The enemy will never leave us alone, but are we just going to be under this condemnation of Satan, with the hand of God paralyzed, because we have taken Satan's ground instead of God's?

God's ground is righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Satan's ground is unrighteousness through doubt, through unbelief.

Well, if Noah begins the great line of examples of power with God, it is that: righteousness, which is according to faith, but what a faith! - tested, tried, proved, but faith. I feel that we are in the great test of faith in this day as much as ever the Lord's people were.

As we close this first chapter, let us be reminded that, for power with God, there must be conduct, behavior, and "walk", which is the EXPRESSION of righteousness. If there is practical unrighteousness in behavior we shall be in weakness with God.

CHAPTER TWO

POWER WITH GOD - EXEMPLIFIED IN DANIEL

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against Me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out mine hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God... Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." (Ezek. 14:12-14, 19-20)

"Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth." (Jer. 15:1)

The situation in relation to which these Scriptures occur is indeed a desperate one; it is one of hopeless extremity. God is represented as stating that He Himself has come to the end of His human resources as far as the salvation of His people is concerned. He says that there is not a man who could avert the judgment which must come upon Israel. In such a state He says that if that averting WERE possible there were certain five men who could do it; and in mentioning the five by name - "Moses, Samuel" (Jer. 15:1. "Noah, Daniel, Job" (Eze. 14:12-14, He pinpoints that which those men signify which would prevail with Him, if anything could do so.

We are therefore seeking to put our finger upon that particular feature and factor which God Himself indicates as having power with Him up to the last degree. We have considered Noah; now we move to the second in the order in Ezekiel - Daniel.

Incidentally, it is impressive that, with the acceptance of Ezekiel by Hebrew authorities for inclusion in the Old Testament Canon, they should have made such heavy weather over including Daniel. Only after much

debate and controversy was Daniel admitted to a place in the Bible by those higher critics. The reasons for this attitude are full of interest, but not to be considered here. The point is that, as always, prejudice results in contradiction and inconsistency. Admit Ezekiel, yes, but overlook the fact that in Ezekiel God sets the very highest importance upon one whom you will not admit without a battle - Daniel.

FROM NOAH TO DANIEL

It is a very far cry from Noah to Daniel. Noah stands in the book of beginnings

- Genesis; Daniel stands so near the end of the Old Testament era. Are we straining the truth when we say that that fact really brings us to the very significance of Daniel as an ultimate factor in power with God? We must remember that when God speaks there are very deep and eternal thoughts beneath His words; they are SPIRITUAL thoughts. We have seen that with Noah the vast eternal and fundamental spiritual truth of the righteousness, which is by faith was the power by which believers were delivered from universal judgment and secured a new, regenerate world. How far-reaching that truth is in the light of the New Testament 'Genesis' - the Letter to the Romans! If that is foundational and at the beginning, what is it that is ultimate as indicated by Daniel?

The book, which bears his name, may be regarded as a book of history and apocalypse; of prophecy, and history written in advance; but that is surely not the point made by God when He singled out Daniel as a man of pre-eminence in power with Him. No, we must think again.

We have to begin by reminding ourselves of why Daniel was in Babylon at all; that is, why the people of Israel were there. That brings us to the point that Daniel was physically and temporally - though not spiritually - involved in Israel's situation and condition. Was it not because Israel had forsaken their high and distinct position as God's 'Peculiar People'? All distinctiveness of life and testimony as "not reckoned among the nations" had been wholly violated and forsaken. They had become like Babylon before they were in Babylon. They were not only in the world, they had become of it. To this position and condition Daniel reacted with deliberation, positiveness, and faithfulness. His decision regarding the king's meat; his refusal to bow to the king's image; his persistence in rejecting the king's edict about praying to any other god; and his acceptance of the penalties of all this - in fellowship with his other three friends - was all related to one principle. From the lips of the king himself were forced words, which precisely and concisely embodied that principle:

"The heavens do rule". The inclusive truth of Daniel, in himself and in the effect of his life with God in secret (remembering that it is in the age of "the times of the Gentiles", that is, the era when the "kingdoms of this world" are in WORLD

power), is that after all "the heavens do rule", and that any power with God over "the world rulers of this darkness" demands a heavenly position on the part of any vehicle of that power.

This means, as in the case of Daniel,

ABSOLUTE SPIRITUAL DISTINCTIVENESS

Of life and testimony, AT WHATEVER COST.

It may involve the lion's den, and there are many kinds of lions' dens. It may mean the fiery furnace, and there are many kinds of fiery furnace. It may be the fire of jealousy and spite on the part of men, as with David. In His great and spiritually instructive prayer (John 17) Jesus had VERY much to say about the world as THE enemy of His Church. How He prayed for the Church to be saved from the world; to abide in its "out of the world" position, and so be kept from the evil one. This kind of praying was based upon His immediately preceding words: "I have overcome the world", and this because (as seen throughout that Gospel) He Himself maintained His heavenly position.

It is therefore so impressive and significant that the Letter, which speaks so forcefully about the Church's warfare with "world rulers" is the Letter, which is based wholly upon the heavenly position of the Church. The measure of powerlessness in the Church, in preaching, in the prayer-life, in the testimony, within and without, will be determined by the measure of the "world" in the methods, means, behavior, habits, accommodation, compromise, etc., in its members and corporate life.

This is an age of imitation of the world by the Church, and the power of the Church is pathetically small. If the Church were what it is really meant to be there would be neither need nor thought for imitating the world. We have to recover "the rule of the heavens" by recovering our heavenly position spiritually.

Daniel is a kind of summary of the Old Testament and a prophetic voice to the New. The one battleground of all the Old Testament is that of the heavenly distinctiveness of the people of God. That battle was lost in Israel, and the hopelessness of their position AS A WHOLE NATION (apart from the Remnant) at the end, with the desolating judgment of God, was on this one issue - compromise with the world! The Lord has thus

thundered in history and through all the Prophets to warn His Church of the calamity of this lost distinctiveness through compromise with the world. The whole Gospel of John, his Letters, and the Letters of Paul make unmistakably clear three things:

One: there is a "Prince of this world;" a "Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;" that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one," etc.

Two: that there is a spiritual realm where Christ is Lord, and not Satan, and where "the prince of this world (has been) cast out." Into that realm, by birth

"FROM ABOVE," believers have been related and spiritually, inwardly, located, so that, as Jesus said: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

Three: there is a fierce and relentless warfare between the two realms and their two Lords. But THE point is this: Satan, for any success at all, must have his own ground. Therefore, to rob Christians and the Church of prevailing power, he MUST get Christians and the Church in some way, on some point or points, on to his own ground - this world.

Why did Daniel "determine" not to touch the provision from the king's table?

Why did he and his friends refuse to have anything to do with the king's image? Why did he keep his prayer window open three times a day? It was all to avoid compromise with the world and its god, and to maintain his link with heaven. He knew that such was the secret of spiritual power, and he is the very personification of the law of power with God.

If we were DESPERATELY concerned about power with God in life and testimony, we should be stretched out to know by the Holy Spirit where

"Achan" (Josh. 7:1) links, contacts and ground are in our lives, sabotaging our spiritual strength. The Holy Spirit would very faithfully say: 'There, here, this, that!'

POWER IS A MATTER OF POSITION.

Have you noticed how dominant in Daniel is the phrase "The End" (11:27, 35; 12:4,13)? This spiritual position to prevail is peculiarly characteristic of the end, and who shall say that it is not THE issue in our time? The Church is feverishly trying to recover power, but is it by SPIRITUAL POSITION?

CHAPTER THREE

POWER WITH GOD – EXEMPLIFIED IN JOB

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

Reading: Job 1:6-11; 2:9,10; 42:7,8,10

JOB'S SPIRITUAL HISTORY

Job is introduced to us as a man in great fullness: fullness of possessions and of wealth, fullness of good works and of personal righteousness, and standing before God in acceptance. Then there begins a course in his experience, the meaning and the secret occasion of which is altogether hidden from him. He knows not the why nor the wherefore, but he finds himself suddenly in the course of being stripped of everything. One thing after another is stripped from him – all his possessions, all his relations, all his friends and all his righteousness which is of works – and with it all come the investing, the encompassing, the onrushing of those hostile forces with their suggestions of accusation, condemnation, judgment. There is an encompassing of spiritual antagonism and of a spirit of death, with God hidden, withdrawn behind the clouds, and Job is left stark, bare, apparently alone, a stripped and afflicted man, oppressed in spirit, bewildered in soul and in anguish of body. The circle of all his relationships narrows to the closest, the nearest – his own wife –

who bids him renounce God and, in so doing, surrender his life, for that is what is meant. The man has come right down from a great height and a great fullness to a very deep depth of utter emptiness, weakness, helplessness, and is as good as dead.

In the course of that history a transition takes place. You can hardly perceive it, but it does take place. It is a transition from a righteousness, which is of works to the righteousness which is of faith. Whereas earlier he pleads his own cause on the basis of his own righteousness and his own works, you find him being stripped of all that and at the end of it all he is saying, “Wherefore I abhor myself.” (Job 42:6) And yet he is still holding on to God, but this is a righteousness which has no foundation in his own goodness and works now. It is a righteousness, which is by faith in the

mercy of God. With that transition, that change from one basis to another, something else has happened. Satan has gradually been edged out of court. At the beginning Satan is there in full power – or almost so – with a great deal of liberty, doing pretty much as he likes. Then there is an almost imperceptible point at which Satan has stepped out of the scene and Job is left alone with God. Satan has had all his ground taken away, he has had to withdraw and give up the fight, he is completely worsted. Then comes resurrection from the dead into a place of new spiritual power, opening the door for God to come in in a new way, investing Job with a new fullness which is not now the fullness of his own works, but the fullness of Divine grace; not the fruit of his own labors, but the gift of God; not what he himself has brought about, but what God has given him. That is Job's spiritual history in a few words.

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION

In saying that, we are able to look further and discern Another, a greater than Job, standing in His own fullness and in all His own rights, accepted with God, of whom God could say 'There is not another – not only in the earth, but in the universe – like Him'. And then, because there is something in the universe that is evil, something that has to be undone, to be robbed of its power and put out of court, that One in all His fullness is steadily stripped and laid bare in the vortex of this terrific controversy. Picturesque words are used to describe these forces of evil: "They compassed me about like bees." (Psa. 118:12) The whole scene is set in a spiritual realm where the forces of evil are rampant, accusing, condemning, judging, appraising. It is an atmosphere of terrible antagonism and terrible spiritual death. He is brought right down, "crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4), stripped stark naked, emptied, with God's face hidden behind the cloud. "Thou hast forsaken Me!" You can almost hear that in Job from time to time, "Thou hast forsaken me!" How much more real was that in the case of this greater One. "Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." (Col. 2:15) They are ruled out of court, the great spiritual opposition has been brought low. And up from the grave He arose, back to a place of new power, opening the door for God to come in in a new way and make Him a minister to His own brethren with a new significance, investing Him with all the heavenly fullness. It is in

PRINCIPLE the same as Job's experience.

PAUL'S STRIPPING AND FILLING

The principle is repeated in limited, much more limited, ways. Read that little Letter to the Philippians and hear the Apostle speaking about the fullness, which was his, the righteousness of works. He could speak about being full, about the time when he had all things, things that were gain to him. And then this man was stripped of it all. There is no man in the New Testament who speaks more of his own unrighteousness and unworthiness and of the worthlessness of the righteousness by works than does Paul. He was stripped of it all, everything in this life, everything natural, his own ability to accomplish anything, to achieve anything. And yet, with all the suffering and all the terrific assaults of evil powers upon that man, we see him living in the power of a resurrection, of an ascension union with Christ which says, "I have all" (Phil. 4:18); "All things are yours." (1 Cor. 3:21) All things are ours. You see, this is the same principle.

THROUGH SUFFERING TO GLORY

In saying that, you have got to the heart of this whole matter of what is power with God, what is the ground upon which God comes in. It is just contained in that phrase, through suffering to glory. Job suffered for the rights of God. That is the point. He did not know it, but that is what it meant.

What was all this about in heaven? Satan had come to God and God had indicated His servant Job. “Hast thou considered My servant Job?” ‘Oh, yes, I have considered him all right, I know all about Job!’ – You can see the sneer, the leer – ‘Yes, I know Job. There is not another like him in all the earth! Him!

DOES Job serve God for nought? I have so spoiled all your work, God, that even the best among men have an ulterior motive. Even the best of men, as you would call them, on the earth are time-servers. You think that Job serves you because he is devoted to you? He is only serving you for what he gets out of you! You have not a man after all, even Job, who is so disinterested and selfless as to trust you and serve you without the idea of reward. I have spoiled that whole lot for you and your best are like that!’ This is what is implied, this is the sneer of the devil, that he has spoiled God’s work to the very last man, even to the best. ‘All right,’ says God, ‘you claim that there is nothing whatever in the whole creation that will satisfy Me, that will provide Me with ground for My pleasure? I accept your challenge. I take away the hedge that you talk about. You go and touch him. Touch all that he has first of all.’

You know the story. One thing rushes upon another. Read that first chapter again and see the repetition, “While he was yet speaking, there came also another...” Someone else came with another terrible tale of woe, one thing on another. Before one thing is through, there is another. All that he has is taken

– sons, daughters, cattle, camels, sheep, everything – yet, in all this, Job

sinned not with his lips.

Satan has to come back again. ‘Well, what about it?’ says the Lord. ‘What about Job?’ ‘Oh, yes, but you put forth your hand and touch his body!’ ‘Very well, go and touch his body, but touch not his life.’ Yes, it is becoming very deep and terrible. You know what happens – the terrible physical affliction and then his wife saying, “Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God, and die,” ‘Put an end to it all.’ Oh, Satan is behind all this so subtly. Satan has been forbidden to touch Job’s life, but he has come round in such a way as to try to get him to take his own life. It is the same thing. Satan cannot take it, but he thinks he can get Job to take it. Satan is after his life, but he does not get it, and Job goes through this terrible experience, this devastating time. We do not know how long it lasted, but it must have been a long time and been very drastic, but in the end Satan has not proved his case. Through the very work of Satan, through the very discipline, God has only changed the ground from one which could not ultimately stand up to Him – that of righteousness which is of works – to a ground which does stand up to God. It is a marvelous thing to see that the very ground that makes it possible for God to be glorified and justified and vindicated – the ground of righteousness which is according to faith – was the ground on to which Satan forced Job. There is the sovereign hand of God. The Lord is – may I use the word? – very clever. Satan thinks he is clever; the Lord can outwit him.

What we must get at is this point. We see the spiritual history in the transition from the objective to the subjective, from the outward to the inward, from the hearing of the ear to the seeing of the eye – “I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee” – from the righteousness which is of works, to the righteousness which is according to faith. We see that transition as an essential thing to give God His ground.

GOD SERVED THROUGH SUFFERING

Now the point is that there is a service to God, which lies in an altogether different realm from the realm of things earthly and temporal. “My servant Job.” He is God’s servant, but the real service of Job’s life was fulfilled in a spiritual realm, out of sight. It was fulfilled through temporal things, it is true, but there is a background to all this. These were not just happenings in his life, the ordinary misfortunes which could overtake any man. Something is happening in the unseen, in another realm where, through all this, God is being served in a peculiar way. What is the object? What is the end in view? It is just this: God must eventually be vindicated in creation by having glorified humanity. When God undertook to create man, He undertook all the responsibility and all the liability of creating man, and it was a tremendous liability. You get down into the depths with Job and sometimes you will ask ultimate questions, ‘You created me, I am your responsibility, I lay the responsibility at your door.’ God says, ‘I accept that, and when I undertook responsibility for creating man, I did so with the unalterable determination to have man glorified at the last; a glorified humanity is the only thing that will vindicate Me.’ Satan has done everything in his power to defeat God in that intention of a glorified humanity. The whole battle in the unseen has to do with that, and the very work of Satan is being sovereignly used by God toward that end. Job’s last state is only, of course, a figure, a suggestion, of man raised from the dead and exalted to a very high position and filled with Divine fullness – all through grace, all through the mercy of God acting sovereignly. That is the end in view.

Now, in the unseen something is going on in relation to that, and God is being served through the sufferings of His own people in this way, that He is being vindicated. What do we mean? We are the Lord’s people and we have not only been saved in order to be saved, but, in that old, very hackneyed phrase, we have been “saved to serve”. God knows that means a great deal more than most people think when they talk about serving the Lord. Read the Book of Job and see what serving the Lord is. The very highest service that could be rendered to God was God’s own vindication,

the rights of God in man, God's vindication in creation. This was not a matter of running about, taking so many meetings, preaching all over the place and doing many things which are called service. Sometimes it means being stripped of everything and being put through a deep and terrible experience in which God can do something in us that makes possible the glorifying of humanity, investing man with glory so that, at the last, with a glorified humanity, God can say, 'I am vindicated, I am justified in having created man. Does this not justify Me?'

While we, at the moment, cannot grasp all the eternal significance of it, we know this thing in principle. It is working out in principle in minute forms and ways with us. The Lord allows us to come into very deep and dark affliction and suffering where we are deprived and stripped of so much. We go down into the depths and Satan seems to be having it all his own way, just riding over us. The Lord seems to be so far away and so hidden and yet, in His faithfulness, He is doing something in us. We do not know what it means. Our constant cry is, Why? Why this? We go through it and then we come out of it. It is a phase and we come out with measure, with spiritual wealth, with a new knowledge of the Lord; we come out with our souls purified into a new place with the Lord and as we look back on it we say, "Well, it was pretty bad, but it was worth it; it was terrible, but I have something which justifies it; I know today as I could not have known by any other way and really I justify God; I go down before the Lord, saying that He is right, He has effected something that would not have been effected in any other way and it is worth having. What is more, I am now in a position, like Job, to stand before God on behalf of others.' There are others in desperate need and they are not going to get through. Job's friends could not get through with God and they would not have got through but for Job. He stood before God for them in a place of power and influence. God was right, after all, because of the outcome of that experience, the values that have come from it, the knowledge of the Lord, the spiritual strength, the ability to help others – that justifies God in His ways.

That is true of many of the Lord's people in fragmentary ways, but it is also the whole history of Christ in union with His Church and of His Church in union with Him in a true spiritual position. It is the history of the Church – the Lord's people going through a terrible grueling time at

the hands of the devil, under the sovereignty of God, out of which the Church becomes “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27); “when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed” (2 Thess. 1:10). That is the Lord having all the glory out of all the suffering. Is that your experience in a small way? I think you can see something that touches you, but do you recognize the upshot of it? God is saying that this is what He requires in order to be able to move in. Job represents the ground that He needs. Job represents that which is power and influence with Him. What is that? It means being prepared to suffer with Him, prepared to suffer for God’s rights.

We have a great deal more light about this than Job had. Job did not know about that interview in heaven, he knew nothing about Satan appearing with the sons of God and all that took place there, the challenge and the permission given. All he knew was that these things were happening. His cry is the cry of a man in the dark without any explanation and that is very helpful to me. There is a difference drawn here between the bewildered, perplexed, confounded arguments, statements and words of a man under terrible pressure, and sin. Job says some pretty hard things, even to the Lord, and you wonder how God can support that, stand alongside of that. Yes, when we are down under the pressure, the enemy lying to us and God seeming to have hidden Himself and left us, we are bewildered, perplexed and confounded and the whole thing is so terrible that we begin to cry out and challenge God as to His faithfulness, as to His love, we begin to question God. Take heart, God does not call that sin. I do not mean that we can take liberties with God, but we may get to the place where, because of the intense difficulty of the way, the deep suffering and affliction, because God seems to be outside of His universe and Satan seems to be doing all he wants and we are involved and everything that is ours is involved, we cry out even against God and question His faithfulness. These are the cries, the groans – almost the screams – of a bewildered, perplexed, baffled soul passing through an experience, which has a spiritual meaning beyond the understanding or knowledge or apprehension of that soul, and God does not call that sin. He understands our frame, our humanity. It would have been sin if Job had done what his wife told him to do, to renounce God. That is sin and Satan would try to drive a soul there. But God is sovereign here and that is not Satan’s right. We may go a long way towards that

point, but God has the matter in His hands; He has not allowed it to come to pass. I think it is a wonderful thing, when you read all that Job has to say, to hear God saying that in all this Job sinned not with his lips. God is standing by Job.

This is, after all, a marvelous triumph of faith in God because, although Job does go down and does say some very hard things, it is not long before he is up again and saying other good things. His faith is having a terrible time, but he is constantly coming up again and his faith triumphs through it all! “And after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God”

(Job 19:26). That is faith in resurrection.

What is it that prevails with God? Power with God does necessitate our standing for God’s rights and serving Him in that intensely spiritual sense. There are all kinds of things here on this earth, which may serve the Lord, but there is a service to the Lord which is deeper than things, deeper than our activities here. The greatest service we can render to God is His own vindication and that can only come by Him redeeming, transforming and glorifying humanity. That is what He is doing with us and He is doing it through suffering.

CHAPTER FOUR

POWER WITH GOD – EXEMPLIFIED IN MOSES RESPONSIBILITY
BORN

OF LOVE

Reading: Exodus 32:31,32; 11-14; Numbers 14:11-20.

"Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people" (Jer. 15:1)

GOD SEEKING TO MAKE A MAN UTTERLY ONE WITH HIMSELF

"Though Moses.... stood before Me." We have to get right into the heart of this matter as quickly as we can, and it seems to me that the best way of doing that is first of all to look at this God who is presented in these passages. What impression does it all make upon you when you see a man, who himself is shown to be a man of weaknesses and imperfections and human frailty, seeming to exhibit more patience than the Lord with whom he is dealing, and trying to persuade the Lord to be gracious, to be merciful, not to be

'unChristian', not to be so impatient, and not to be so revengeful, so swift and utter in His judgments? How does that impress you? It almost looks as though Moses is, in grace and character, superior to God. It almost appears that Moses is trying to bring God up to a higher standard. That is how it looks. Taken just by themselves, lifted clean out of the whole Bible and context, such passages of Scripture would put God among the gods of the heathen - cruel, swift to anger, needing to be appeased from His wrath, and persuaded to be kind. But, of course, you all shrink from such an ideal. There arises in you, perhaps, something of indignation that one should even say such a thing, but I want to get into the heart of this thing as quickly as I can, and I think that is the best way of doing it.

Is that the Lord? Is that the true position? Is it really a fact that Moses had more of those graces than God had, and had to win God over to his side, to his point of view, to his position? Was it true? No, not in the slightest, not for a moment! Oh, but here it is! Here is God saying that He is going to do something, He is going to blot them out and destroy them, and Moses comes along and says: 'No, don't, Lord! If You do that, You see what it means. First of all, the Egyptians will hear about it and they will say: "See the kind of God that they have! He is one who starts on a thing and finds He cannot carry it through, and so has to wipe it all out" - the God whom we have declared the only true God above all! They will say it just is not

true, that is all. He is not the only God, and He is not any better than any other god.' Can you imagine for a moment, while Moses argues with the Lord like that and presents the situation, the Lord saying: 'I had not thought of that, Moses! That is a new idea. Thank you for reminding Me! You have saved Me.' - Moses saving the Lord from getting into trouble and disgrace with the nations of the world! Do you accept that? It looks like it, does it not? No, we cannot have it. There must be some other explanation, for that is not it. Then what is it? Well, it is just this. The Lord is Himself taking that line deliberately in order to get this man over to His side. The Lord had no intention of blotting this people out, or disinheriting them. He said: 'Let me...', but Moses said: 'No, I will not let you' - and that is the point. The Lord wanted to get this man to the position where he was so truly one with the Lord's deepest intention that he could not entertain the slightest suggestion that God should not stand up to His Name, His honor, and carry through His purpose. You will notice all the way through the Bible that that sort of thing is happening. What is He doing? He is out to make a man so utterly one with Him as an absolute necessity for the realization of His purpose.

You see, MAN is involved in this. This is a great heart principle of redemption. God could have dispensed with all instrumentalities and mediators and intercessors and go-betweens, and Himself, sovereignly from heaven, acted directly and have done the whole thing. He could have done it, but that is not the principle, and that is not the way. The whole Bible comes in to show and to prove that, man himself being involved in this, it requires a Man to redeem man. We sing the hymn: "A final Adam to the fight and to the rescue came." The Man Himself, Christ Jesus, the redeeming Kinsman, the Mediator - that is the principle. Moses is called the 'mediator of the covenant'. Moses, the mediator, had to be in that position where, on the one hand, he was so truly one in heart with God's purpose, and, on the other hand, so truly one in heart with the object of God's purpose, that he brought the One who purposed and the object of the purpose together in his own person. He took the hand of God and the hand of man and brought them together in his own person. That is the whole work of the Lord Jesus, and the principle is here. God is testing this man in the same way as Elijah tested Elisha: "Tarry here... for the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel. And Elisha said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel... And Elijah said

to him, Tarry here... for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." (II Kings 2) Elijah was apparently trying to shake this man off, but was really testing him because of something tremendous in view. He had already cast his mantle upon Elisha, who was to come into the good of that mantle on Elijah's ascension and do greater works than Elijah had done, but he is going to suffer a tremendous testing. But he went on and refused to be put off.

God is working on that principle with Moses. 'Let Me destroy this people, disinherit them.' Supposing Moses had said: 'All right!', what sort of mediator would he have been? And, mark you, the point is this - that God would have lost the essential basis of His work and purpose, and the essential basis was a man whose heart was so deeply and terribly in this matter that he himself would rather perish and lose all than that, on the one hand, God's Name should be dishonoured and, on the other hand, God's purpose should not be fulfilled.

That is a ground of power with God - a tremendous thing! He is saying: 'Oh, I acknowledge it, I perfectly agree and I make no excuses for them. "This people have sinned a great sin." It is quite true. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin.'" He does not finish... "And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Could anything be more utter than that? 'You disinherit THEM and You disinherit ME. I have nothing to live for. I do not want to go on in life at all if you disinherit them.' What a oneness! And that is the kind of thing that God requires in order to do His great things. You notice that God went on and did His great things because He had that ground. That ground prevailed with God again and again. And the Lord said: "I have pardoned according to thy word." "And the Lord repented of the evil which He said He would do unto His people." That is only a way of putting it. God said:

'All right, I will not do it - ACCORDING TO THY WORD'.

ABSOLUTE ONENESS WITH GOD'S PURPOSE

Where do we begin, then, with this? It begins here. Moses had become, in heart, deeply one with God's purpose concerning His people. God had indicated and intimated what His purpose was concerning this people. Moses quotes that to the Lord: 'Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and what You said.' He has become one with God in His purpose concerning His people, he has seen what that purpose was, his heart has espoused the Divine purpose for the people of God, and he has involved himself in that utterly and without a reservation. For him his eternal destiny is bound up with that and he has nothing else to look for, or hope for if that fails.

I expect you are wondering what that has to do with us! How does it apply to us? It is all very true about Moses, but I think this indicates something to us of what the Lord's will and desire is, and also it is a searching and challenging word. If God, for the realization of His purpose, must have an instrument or instruments (personal or corporate) like this, because He has bound Himself to this kind, and cannot get on with it without such instruments, may it not explain why the coming of the Lord's people to the inheritance, to the fullness of Christ, the attainment of the Church unto the glorious purpose of the ages in which it is called, is so retarded and delayed, and why there is something wrong in this respect? Dear friends, this, to me, is a most searching thing. It has searched my heart tremendously as I have dwelt upon it. It is not just some Bible teaching; this is something which will search us very deeply. What are we committed or devoted to?

GOD NEEDS THOSE COMMITTED TO HIS PURPOSE IN AND THROUGH THE CHURCH

Shall we go back a step before that and say: are we committed? Are we devoted? Here is a company of the Lord's people; not a large company but a representative company, and sufficient to stand right here before the Lord to meet this challenge and to hear it said in the Name of the Lord that the Lord needs people like this, constituted on this-wise, like Moses. He absolutely needs them. He cannot get on with His work until He has this at His command

- people who stand in this relationship to Him, to His purpose and to His people, those who are the people of the eternal purpose. God must have people like this, men and women who have seen God's purpose concerning the Church and who know what that purpose is.

It is not just a matter of doctrine, teaching, or Bible study. God needs people who have seen it in their hearts. And then He needs such people who, having seen it, are committed up to the hilt to it without any reservations. God is needing such people, committed utterly to Him for His purpose in relation to His people, the Church. Have you seen? What is it that you are doing? This is where I think the thing is so searching and challenging. There are many people of God who are committed to the work. I am not asking you if you are committed to Christian work or Christian service. That is not what I am after at all. There are any number of people who are up to their eyes in Christian work. Let the work test them out, and they will resign from the work. Let the conditions become too hard, and they withdraw from the work, or they will change their sphere of work, or the nature of their work for the Lord. It is the work. The work has an appeal. Oh, the appeal that is made for the work of the Lord, and how appealing it is made to be! The romance of it all, the fascination of it all, the idea of realizing something, expressing yourself, of being in

the work, is the force of the appeal.

Moses is not there. Ask him about the work! He would say: 'Oh, may the Lord have mercy upon me and deliver me from the "work!"' Moses said he was not able to bear the people (Deut. 1:9), and that is the 'work'. Moses was not interested in, or concerned with the 'work'; he was concerned with a people for the realization of God's purpose. We can get this abstract idea of the 'work'

of the Lord. We do not stay to define it, but, somehow or other, it is something we get into. We come up against difficult people and we begin to despise and criticize them. We think of them according to their natural constitutions and put them into 'pigeonholes' - 'THIS is a worthwhile person, THIS is not.' There is all this sort of thing - human judgments about people. We have no room for certain people. All that, however, is false to this principle. No people on God's earth have ever been more difficult than Israel! Yes, all that you can say about the Jews is true, and yet look at this man! It is not the work; it is the people. He loves the people and his heart is bound up with them. Oh, what a people - and yet the marvel of this love for them! Not the WORK, but the people, just as they were and as bad as they were. He put his whole destiny at stake for that people. Why? Because he saw that God's purpose was bound up with the people and not with the work and not with organization.

It is challenging! What am I committed to? Is it a ministry, or a teaching? Am I interested in the teaching of the Church, this teaching and that teaching, this kind of work and that, and this kind of ministry and that? The people may be another thing. Do you see the point? You can divide between those two things. You can be thoroughly in your work, in your ministry, in your teaching, in your system of things - but the people! There is something else when you really come to think about it. How much pains are you going to take with the people? How much are you going to give yourself to the people, to THAT

difficult one, and THAT difficult one, and THAT awkward one, those who show so little response to it all, those who turn upon you when your heart is really burdened and say: "Who made you a ruler?" That is what they did. And when Moses went to them in Egypt, they turned against him. We

sing: "From Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand" - all wanting you to come. If only you will go to China they will all rush to you and be saved. Go and see!

They will begin to stone you.

Well now, what about the people? Moses met that affront on the very first movement into Egypt to bring out the people. God needs those amongst us who are not interested in teaching, and orders, and Christian work as such. It can all be so abstract and can all be a fool's paradise when you come up against facts. God needs those who are right in this thing for His purpose, and who will meet the affront and the discouragement, and who will not suffer the shock of disillusionment because they have been building 'castles in the air'

about the Lord's work. Those who know that this is a life and death matter...

that it is going to cost everything, and they are in it to that degree. They have no illusions. "I know this people have sinned a great sin." You do not make any excuses for them, but nevertheless your purpose is bound up with this

'bad lot'. 'I am committed to the purpose.' That is what the Lord was trying to get.

You can follow it through to His Son, the inclusive, supreme example of this very thing. Oh, He has given all, and He has been cast out by those for whom He had given all and for whom He had left the glory. What is the end? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) His heart still yearns. He is not invoking Divine judgment upon them because He is a disillusioned and disappointed man, and they had not responded. His heart is in this.

Hear Paul! "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake." (Rom. 9:3) That is the sort of thing. It is that that has power with God. That is why Moses, to speak after the manner of men, caused God to repent, changed the mind of God. It is not true when you know the real truth, but that is how it looked. He had that power with God.

God said:

"According to thy word."

What are we committed to? Are we committed to the interests of the Lord like that? Have we seen His purpose concerning the Church? Are we in it? - and do remember that the appeal is for servants of God. Two great titles used more of Moses than of anyone else are these: Moses, 'the man of God', and Moses, 'the servant of God'. Outstandingly Moses carries those twin titles:

'The man of God', and 'Moses My servant'. The Lord is wanting men of God, servants of the Lord.

But this is the nature of service. I do not ask you to come and give yourself to the work of the Lord, to go out and begin to organize Christian work here and there, near and far, and to do this and that and other things for the Lord. The appeal is: the Lord needs people, not necessarily to go out in the romance of missionary service, but just where they are to be committed right up to the hilt to the Lord's own honour as bound up with His purpose in the Church and through the Church, and upon whose hearts in the first place is the Church. I am very emphatic and careful in saying that - in the first place, the Church. If only that were recognized there would be a very great deal of difference in the situation today. God's instrument of evangelization is the Church. God's means of realizing His purpose is the Church. The Church has been ignored, and the thing has been attempted on a wide scale without the Church. The result is, for one thing, a terrible failure to accomplish the purpose, and you have to say that in a large degree the Church has failed. And what about the type of Christian that exists? A vast number of converts do not go on very far. You cannot leave them alone. You have to hold them up, support them, and put them on crutches all the time. And so you find that, whenever people try to organize an evangelistic campaign... they have to start with getting the Church right. Very often the whole thing resolves itself into a mission to Christians first.

Israel was not an end in itself. If Israel failed, if God let Israel fail, or let Israel go, the nations would be lost. But by means of Israel being kept and strengthened and built up, and moved on, the nations will be compelled to

confess that God is in the midst of them and God is with them. That is Moses'

argument: God is amongst you, and this is the kind of God He is. That is revealed by a people living in the good of Divine fullness.

RESPONSIBILITY BORN OF LOVE

What does it amount to? It just amounts to this: coming into a place of the responsibility born of love. Not busy responsibility, nor official responsibility, but the responsibility born of love. It is the responsibility, which a mother feels for a child, a parent for a child, and a parent's sense of responsibility for a child is not a business responsibility, nor an official responsibility, but a heart responsibility. The heart is bound up with this. Will you not agree with me that the most terrible and tragic thing of which we can conceive is a parent without a sense of responsibility for his or her children? And here the relationship between Moses and Israel was the responsibility born of love. Something had been wrought deep down in the soul of Moses, so that he and the people were one in life, and one in destiny. It was a great love.

"Christ... loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it." (Eph. 5:25) There is a relationship there, which is the deepest, most sacred of all the relationships God has ever created: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church." Moses loved Israel; Christ loved the Church. And if you want to see all that summed up in few words, you have only to look at Hebrews 11

and read: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." That is the first thing about Moses - he refused.

"CHOOSING rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Refusing all the honour, reputation, status, resources, and choosing, definitely choosing, to be evil-treated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

"Accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"..."By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible." Just make a sum of those

words: He refused, he chose, he accounted, he forsook, he endured. There is a heart in something. It is a HEART that is the ground of power with God. That is the kind of servant that the Lord needs, concerning whom He can say: 'If Moses stood before Me... Moses My servant.'

CHAPTER FIVE

POWER WITH GOD – EXEMPLIFIED IN SAMUEL

A PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

"Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people." (Jer. 15:1)

"Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name; they called upon the Lord, and He answered them." (Psa. 99:6)

"And the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have indeed done all this evil; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart: and turn ye not aside; for then would ye go after vain things which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain... Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will instruct you in the good and the right way." (I Sam. 12:19-21, 23)

We come now to the fifth and, for the time being, the last of these representative men who stand in that relationship with God which is acknowledged by Him to be one which has great weight and great power with Him. In our previous meditation we were seeing what Moses represents as to the ground of God's power put into operation. Moses stood at the beginning of Israel's national life. His work was mainly the shaping of the rough material, the raw clay, into a vessel for God, and he found it hard work.

THE SITUATION WHICH CONFRONTED SAMUEL

When we come to Samuel, we come to the point where that vessel is marred in the hand of the potter, and there are extra and even more difficult conditions. Samuel's work was with a vessel, which was not being made from the beginning, but with a lot of material that had gone all wrong. It is important for us to recognize exactly where Samuel stood, and that with which he was confronted, in order to see the specific and peculiar significance of his ministry, and therefore in what way he represents power with God.

There were many features, which made Samuel's time very much like our own, and therefore many features in our own time which are very much like his time. His was a time when the people and the work of God were not upon God's essential basis. They were on a secondary line and basis, which was only accepted by the Divine sovereignty. It was being governed and ruled, and, as far as possible, blessed, in the sovereignty of God; but it was not immediately in the thought of God. Taking Saul as an illustration of that as a part of a much greater whole, it is perfectly obvious that Saul was not God's essential thought. But God went as far as He could in the acceptance, the recognition, and the blessing of Saul, and in using Saul and that order of things, which obtained in his days. God just did the best He could. But it was not His real mind. It was secondary, and it only came within His purview at all on the ground of His sovereignty. God sovereignly uses and, so far as He can, blesses whatever there is in existence - but, oh! that it might be otherwise! That is His attitude, and that is clearly seen as to the Lord's and Samuel's attitude toward the whole order of things in those days.

A SITUATION AKIN TO THAT OF OUR DAY

It does not require a great deal of spiritual understanding, perception, enlightenment and education to see how akin to that time is our own. There is, so far as what is of God on this earth is concerned, something of which God is taking account, is allowing, is accepting in a sense; He is using it, He is blessing it, He is going as far as He can, but it is only just as far as He can. He cannot wholly commit Himself to it. It is a secondary idea. He has His own thought, but His people are not in the good of that. I cannot very well go further than that statement. It is a general statement, but I say that you do not need a great deal of perception to see that God is limited, and if you are at all exercised and concerned about the situation - that is, about the effectiveness, the fruitfulness, the permanence, the purity, the power of what is related to God on this earth - and troubled that it does not go further, then you should look into it from this standpoint: is it on a secondary line, or does it correspond to God's original and full thought as to His way, His means and His purpose?

Well, read about the times of Samuel and you see how restrained, limited and straitened God was, and, therefore, what an unsatisfactory state - to say the least of it - existed amongst the Lord's own people. That is the setting of Samuel, and that really is the key to the whole situation: something which God uses as far as He can because there is nothing else, and because the real thing has been lost.

There are a lot of things in the whole course of the Christian era, from those early New Testament days, which are not God's thought as to how the work of God should be done, by what means, on what basis, according to what principles, which He has blessed and used, and is still doing so, but they represent a limitation to the Lord because they are secondary. And that is where we are! There is no doubt about it. That is Samuel's situation, and because he had to contend with such a situation we see the significance of his life.

SAMUEL AGAINST THE SECONDARY AND FOR THE PRIMARY

What was that significance? Samuel came in at a time like that to stand in the midst of it; on the one hand against something secondary, and on the other hand for something primary. I think his life is summed up in that. Samuel did not wholly accept Saul, and he was inclined to have absolutely nothing to do with the idea of a king, so that the Lord had to say to him: 'Samuel, they have not rejected you; they have rejected Me.' (I Sam. 8:7) Samuel was not going to have anything to do with this, and the Lord had, in other words, to say sovereignly: 'We cannot have what we would have, but we will allow this. We know how it will work out; nevertheless, give it a chance, facilitate it as far as you can.' Samuel had that secret with the Lord all the time. He knew how it would work out, and he was not accepting it. He was there to hold things for God's primary, full thought amongst His people. That is what he represents.

Now we are going to break that up, and I want to do so very simply. I do want that the Lord should get this across in very definite ways, in simple ways. When things are like that, when there is a lot of history in the background, a lot of tradition, and the things of God and the people of God have become very mixed and confused, and are not clear, precise, definite, distinct in relation to God, what does God have to do if He is going to be true to Himself, to His Own thought, to His Own intention, and go on without committing Himself to a lower level, a lower standard, and wholly compromising and surrendering? If He is going to react again to His full intention, what will He do in such a day? He will do exactly what He did with Samuel - and I do hope you are not just following this with an objective mentality, thinking back to Samuel and his day, or looking out in a sort of nebulous, abstract way. I do hope that as we go on, step by step, you are putting yourself right into this. If it is true that the situation in our day is very similar to the situation in Samuel's day, so far as the Lord's people and the Lord's work are concerned, that represents a loss to the Lord, something other than the Lord intended to have at the beginning of

the dispensation, and we have to come to some position about it and ask ourselves: Is God going to accept that as final? Is He going to settle down and just take that attitude, saying: 'Well, we can have no more. We will be thankful if we can have half a loaf if not a whole one, so we will leave the other.' We do not believe that is God's attitude.

A NEW BEGINNING

If it is like that, then in such a time God must react to the situation. His reaction will be on the same line as it was in the case of Samuel - and what was it in his case? Well, firstly, Samuel was a new start in himself. That is a simple way of putting it, but it is very precise. He was a new start in himself. Samuel was not a child of tradition. He could not be; it was impossible. A miracle from heaven had to be worked to bring Samuel into this world at all. There was no open way for Samuel to come into this world. He began at a grave, a place of death. You know what I am referring to in the case of Hannah. Oh no, this is not a succession, this is not taking up a tradition, this is not just following on something that has been. This is a new beginning. Right from zero, right from death, he in himself is a new beginning. He does not take things up with a background of inheritance. God has taken precaution against that in His sovereignty again. The impossibility of Hannah having that child was God's sovereignty in relation to His purpose. Nothing could have been at all but by a special act of God. There is no carry-over from the past, no link at all. It is a clean-cut, new beginning.

You are wondering how that is going to be applied. It can be applied in various ways, and quite simply, too. Perhaps most of you have a tradition. You say: 'Well, I am out of it. I do not come into this, for I have a tradition.'

Yes, many of us had a tradition. I suppose everyone who comes into Christianity comes into a tradition; but, you know, God can do something in a life with a very big tradition to cut them clean off from their tradition and bring them to an end of it. They can make a completely new start, and if He is going to do the kind of thing that He did with Samuel, He is going to do that. But is He not doing it? Some of you young people have been born into Christian homes and have been brought up in godly surroundings, and you have received a great deal of your Christianity secondhand. How you view that, I do not know. I used to think that if only I had had a long line of godly people behind me, it would be a tremendous asset. I have changed my mind about that. I used to think that the men who were 'sons of the manse' had all the advantages. I was not a 'son of the

manse', and therefore I was handicapped. I have changed my mind about that. Your tradition, even your Christian home, may be a handicap to you. You may have got a lot secondhand and it may not be yours at all; it may be your parent's. You have taken it over. It may have become just a straitjacket to you, or it may be an altogether false position where you are concerned and it is not yours right from the beginning. What is God doing with you? Is He not putting you into positions and situations and taking you through experiences where father's or mother's religion is no use and you have to have your own? The knowledge of God which has been given to you and which may have helped you in the matter of counsel and influence in your childhood does not stand up to the situation now. You have to know God for yourself, and unless you do, you are not going through. You know quite well that if you are going to be of real value to God you must not be just a child of tradition; you have to be born right 'out of the blue' and know God right there from zero. That is the application of this.

That application, I say, is made in various ways and various stages. The trouble with a lot of people is that they will not hand up their tradition to God and let Him transcend all that is merely secondhand and bring them from zero into something of Himself. They are clinging to their accepted, already-made beliefs and doctrines, and God has His great difficulty there. He has to say, in effect: 'All right, I cannot do anything here. I must go and work where I have a chance.' If God is going to do today what He did in Samuel's day, somehow there has got to be that clean cut in between what is merely tradition and what is experience, what is secondhand and what is firsthand, what has come to us from the outside and what has come to us inside.

You can see how true this was with such men as Paul. What a tradition! What an inheritance! What a history! Ah, but what a break right down to death and starting all over again! He said: "It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal His Son in me." (Gal. 1:15-16) That is the beginning. We need not enlarge upon it. This is the very first thing. God needs men and women, a vessel, which is not constituted upon something secondhand, although that something may be true and right and of Himself. Do not despise it, but remember that is not good enough. You have got to have it from the beginning in yourself, and God would do that. He can do it, and

some of us know how drastically He can do it. We have had a big tradition; we have had it all and been in that whole history and realm, and then an end was brought, and so complete that it was beginning all over again, even although we were preachers and in the full flood of Christian work and activity - an end, and a new beginning, everything born right out from God in a new way. Well, something like that is necessary. The Lord will have His own way of doing it. You ask Him to do it. Your transaction with the Lord must be this: 'Lord, give me firsthand knowledge of Yourself. Bring me into the place where everything is living between You and myself, and where I know You for myself.' You may go through it, but God will do it. It is essential.

Do you brethren - those of you who have had years of experience - agree with me that one of the paralyzing handicaps today is a fully-fledged, established system of Christian doctrine, which is taken up in a secondhand way and propagated? Put that round the other way. Is not the weakness of today the inability of men to come forth and say: 'Thus saith the Lord! The Lord has spoken to me and He has spoken to me today! I am not speaking about stuff that I have been collecting, gathering up from books and libraries. God has spoken to me, and this is what He is saying.'? Do you not feel there is a need of men to come out with a message straight from God? What is being given?

So much that is secondhand, so much tradition, so much long-established truth, but it is not alive and crucial in the hearts of the preachers. That is the situation. God must begin again. Samuel represents a new start, and a new start in himself.

A PERSONAL LIFE WITH THE LORD

And going hand-in-hand with that is this: Samuel represents a personal life with the Lord; not only a new start in himself, but a personal life with the Lord. The Lord did not let him off. He did not say to Eli: 'Go and tell Samuel. Samuel does not understand. He is a little child and you must teach him.' God called SAMUEL. It was one of those double calls of God, which made it emphatically personal: "Samuel, Samuel". The only thing that Eli, with his long experience, could do was to tell Samuel to get personally into touch with the Lord - 'You say, "Speak, Lord!"'. Samuel is just that. It is very simple, but it is a wonderful and mighty thing - a personal life with God. No one will bring God in power to meet and to change situations, which are not according to His mind and satisfying His heart who has not a personal life with God. Have you a personal life with God, so that you are outgrowing a lot of things? There was a time when you picked up a spiritual book and got a lot of help from it. You now always think of that book as a wonderful book, for it meant so much to you. After a year or two you pull that book down again. Where has it all gone to?

There is nothing to bite on! Where did you get all that help from? You have outgrown it. Yes, it belonged to a certain stage, but not now. I use that only as an illustration. Have you that personal life with God, which means that you are outgrowing your spiritual clothes all the time? The clothes that were all right at one point are no use any longer. Have you a growing personal life with the Lord? Are you living upon the past - even of your own experience? Are you living upon meetings, upon conferences, upon addresses, upon someone else's help? All these things are good, but if you live on these things and they are the beginning and the end - well, conferences will soon fade out. You see, the very strength and value of a conference is that there are living people together, people who are moving with God and who are growing. It is a living thing. Is it like that with you? Are you sure you have a personal life with God, that God is speaking to you, dealing with you in your own life, that He has His hand upon you and He is doing something in you? It may be a painful thing - perhaps one or

more of a whole lot of things - but you know that God is active in your life and is doing something.

On the one hand, He is undoing, He is weakening, taking away your own strength and stripping you of your own sufficiency, but, on the other hand, He is making Himself known. Oh, young people, let me beg of you to take this to heart. It is so wonderfully and gloriously possible for every one of you, the youngest and the simplest, the one who has the greatest complex of inferiority, to know the Spirit of God working and speaking in your own life so that you can say: 'The Lord would not allow me to do that. The Lord checked me up on that. I know the Lord spoke to me about that.' That is Samuel! It is simple, I say, but it is essential if God is going to do something effective. He must have a people walking with Himself. That does not admit of any independence and unrelatedness and freelance line of things where you say:

'God has spoken to me and I therefore brush aside all that others have to say about it and I recognize no authority in the Church.' God will never do that. Because you have a personal walk with God, it does not mean that He makes you a law unto yourself spiritually. That is a misapplication of this principle. Well, do please take this to heart. Do have very definite dealings with the Lord. 'Lord, I must know You dealing with me, speaking to me.' There are times in your life when God allows you to do certain things, but as you move on with Him you know that no longer does He allow that. God overlooked it in the times of your ignorance, but now He is not accepting it, and you know it.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN HIS DISSATISFACTION

Samuel had a personal life with God. These two things - an absolutely new beginning in himself and a personal life with God - led to Samuel being a link with God in the Divine discontent, the Divine dissatisfaction and the Divine reaction. God was not satisfied. What does Eli know about that? What do the other people know about that? They are going on; they have no registration of God's dissatisfaction and discontent. God is not having it and is reacting, but they are insensitive to His feelings. That is the state of things. They simply go on with the form of things. Yes, they are having their services in the tent of Shiloh, they are still carrying on their round of meetings and sacrifices and priestly orders, but they are not troubled or disturbed with a disturbance of God in their hearts. They simply go on, and, I say again, there is a lot like that today. Samuel, because of the things which we have mentioned, came immediately into a sensitive, conscious, intelligent union with the dissatisfied heart of God, and that night in the temple God made known to him that dissatisfaction. It involved him in difficulties and in most painful courses. It was no easy thing for a young one like that to go and have to tell the old what God thought about the situation. But Samuel was brought so much into the heart of God that he was able to be perfectly loyal to God and hold nothing back. We will give Eli credit for this: that he compelled Samuel to tell him what God had said, and Eli accepted it, though tragically.

MINISTRY OUT OF A BURDENED HEART

But here the point is this: when God gets that foundation with Himself, then there begins to arise in those concerned a sense of things not being right. It is not just that outward discontentedness, "again the Government" kind of thing - criticizing and judging and superiority. Oh, dear friends, anything of the pedestal judgment is foreign to what I am talking about. It is utterly in a different world. But there is that deep heart pang, the echo of God's disappointment, dissatisfaction, something that you feel God's Spirit is grieved about: it is suffering. It is out of that that ministry is born. It was from that time that Samuel began his ministry. When he came into heart union with God's anguish and disappointment and dissatisfaction, and that had its echo in his heart, then his ministry began. Effective ministry from God must spring out of something like that. Oh, you are not just going to MAKE addresses, no matter what the subject, however high the truth may be. It comes out of something that God has done inside and you have a burdened heart about the state of things; you have seen what God wants, and you have seen what exists, and out of a burdened heart ministry begins. You need not go and become an official in ministry for that. You have not to go into what is called 'ministry' and don a certain kind of attire and join some society. You will just be where you are until God moves you somewhere else. Samuel started there where he was, with his burdened heart. Later on he went in circuit from Ramah round in his ministry. The extension of ministry may come later, but it is just where you are that your ministry begins. Where you meet God, where you come into the personal experience of Him, where you have your own personal life with Him - that is where your ministry begins.

And what is your ministry? To be there in relation to God's desire, God's thought, as one standing against the tide of what is contrary to God, and even if that tide will break over you, you stand against it. That is the essence of ministry.

In that ministry Samuel became a bridge. He and his ministry were a bridge for God, a bridge for God's transition - Saul to David, from this

kingdom to that, from this state of things to that. The first book of Samuel is called the book of transition, and that is what it is. You know the issue - the transfer of the kingdom from Saul to David. That is the issue of Samuel's life, and he and his ministry were that bridge over which God could pass, leaving one order behind and bringing in another. Yes, it may in our case only be in measure, in a limited way, but God needs the bridge to be the link - one side rejecting, and the other side standing for.

You see, all that just comprises this ground for God. You say: How is God going to work, move, commit Himself, come in? It is just on those lines. He must have a beginning which is a beginning with Himself and not a secondhand thing at all, not something of the past, not something from someone else, but with YOU from the 'A' of the alphabet of spiritual life and experience between you and God. He must have a walk with Him on your part. Yes, in fellowship with His people, having all that there is available of spiritual help in a related way, but, nevertheless, in the midst of it all, you are walking with God. It is only in that way that the Holy Spirit says the same thing and safeguards what He is saying to you, because He will say the same thing in all who are walking with Him and that will be a great safeguard. But the point is - a personal knowledge of and walk with God is His way; then coming steadily, quietly to know what God does not want, what He really does seek and what He really must have to be a link with His heart in that way. And then a bridge for God - that is, God is able to reach His object in measure through us individually and through us collectively. Oh, that it might be like that with the Church as a whole! Perhaps it is too much to expect. Because the whole is not like that, are we just going to capitulate and say that NOTHING can be like that? If Samuel had taken that attitude, it would be a very different story, but he did not. Samuel will be a bridge for God between all that is not, and what God could have.

Do take this to heart! I do not want to leave anyone out. I do not want to seem to be despising anybody. I am not doing that when I especially appeal to my young friends in this matter. Of course, it may be that some who have been on the way a long time need a word like this as a safeguard, or a deliverance from things, even their own experience becoming a tradition, something that was many years ago but is not right up to date with God. Young people, you can be saved from so much like

that. You need not have many years of undoing. You can come so quickly into this if you will be very definite with the Lord. Say: 'Now, Lord, as for me, I want everything to be firsthand. I do not despise what I have been taught, what I hear, or people who know, but, Lord, I must have it firsthand, I must know it for myself. You must begin in my case as though I were the first that ever knew You. You must bring me into a life where I am just walking with You, where I am learning, where I am knowing You in a growing, progressive way. Then, getting that, You bring me into fellowship with Your heart, what You feel about the situation, to constitute me a servant, a useful instrument in relation thereto. Whether You want to call me out into full-time service or not is not the point; the thing is that I should be here standing for God and influencing the situation according to Your mind.'

God commits Himself to that; that counts with God, and that has power with God.

The great thing said about Samuel is: "God... let none of his words fall to the ground." (I Sam. 3:19) That is God committing Himself to Samuel. Just think of a man speaking and not one of his words falling to the ground, not one being in vain or ineffective! That is tremendous! The point is that God commits Himself, and that has power with God.