

Ho that hearkeneth unto counsel
is wise. *Proverbs xii, 15.*

Pressure

Discipline

Sinning

Christ the Centre

The counsel of the Lord, that
shall stand. *Proverbs xix, 21.*

PRESSURE.

Psalm 4: 1 (N.T.) ; 1 Peter 1: 7-11.

My desire is to dwell upon the word, "In pressure hast Thou enlarged me." It is a principle which is unfailing in its application from the beginning right up to the world to come—a principle of the ways of God. "In pressure hast Thou enlarged me." The word that is used for pressure carries with it the thought of tribulation, suffering, trial. We are familiar with those words, and we are familiar with the things themselves, and I desire to see if we can get help in seeing the application.

There were certain things which would not have come in had sin not come in. If man had not asserted his will in defiance of the will of God, certain things would not have come in—redemption, for instance, or that of which we were speaking last night in another place, judgment—the capacity to sift and discern, so as to put good on one side, and evil on another side. Had sin not come in, the occasion for these and many other things would not have arisen. Sin having come in, then God, the God who loves us, and

whom we love, has established a principle on the line of which He moves, and under the influence of which we come. The first mover on that line was God, so the blessed God would say that if sin, and with sin, death, and many other things, have come in, then the divine activities must move in certain ways. If God would say that, we must not be surprised if the whole cast of things, which embraces the manner of life and the very purpose of the people of God being upon earth, should follow along those same lines. So the first movement of the blessed God, sin having come in, is the indication on the part of God that *He* was prepared to suffer. He was prepared to move on the line of suffering that He might effect recovery in a manner of glory which transcended all possibilities had sin not come in.

And so the first word from the blessed God is "The woman's seed"—Christ, the woman's seed on the line of suffering love and sacrifice. If that be so with the blessed God, then we are prepared that the same shall be true of the Son of His love, for they go "both of them together." From the moment when God announces "the woman's seed," everything from that moment up to the Cross, indicates that the divine mind had brought itself

to this—suffering, and sacrifice, and surrender. The Lord Jesus Christ has passed by the way of death. Thus the Old Testament is replete with those things which suggest to us the love of the Lord in suffering, the pathway of the Lord under pressure, and then, finally, that supreme pressure of the garden of Gethsamene, of the Cross, of the tomb. It is on that line that God inaugurates the principle, "In pressure hast thou enlarged me," He, Himself, giving the character to it, and carrying it through. If that be so, we must not be surprised if we come in on the line of pressure.

One can see, I think, that in the ways of God pressure, trial, testing are the elements which preserve the wholesomeness and the purity of the body. It is a wonderful thing how it works out from beginning to end. Take, for instance, the first word that the blessed God addresses to the woman, "In sorrow shalt thou bear children." Just think how that has worked out in the myriads of those who have come into the world! "In sorrow shalt thou bear children." It is inevitable that God should be on that line. It could not be otherwise, and what I would like to suggest to you to-night is that we should not look upon pressure, or suffering, or trial, or affliction, as abnormal, as

the unexpected, as that which carries with it the sense of shock or surprise; but that, in the spirit of our minds, we accept it as a principle of the House of God that enlargement comes in proportion to the pressure. I might put it another way, like this—that the enlargement carries with it the thought of the manifestation, of the expansion, of the light of the glory which will shine out in the world to come. If there had been no sin, there would not be any “world to come.” I suppose the occasion: for it would scarcely exist, but what it is in its essence is that the blessed God reserves that in the millennial day, in which He will give the answer to all the pressure and affliction and knowledge of Himself gained in these things, He will give that day to the manifestation of light, which consists in the knowledge of God that has been learned in the place of affliction and trial.

I think it would help us very much if we would cease to look upon tribulation, affliction, and the like things, as calamity or misfortune, or the unforeseen, and embrace in the spirit of our minds that it is a normal element of the House of God. One could go so far as to say this—that God maintains a certain amount of pressure or suffering in His House amongst His people, as a necessary com-

ponent without which we could not get on. And if we view it in that way, then I think we shall, perhaps, become the subjects of it, or witness it in others, without the sense as though something unforeseen, or something calamitous, had happened; and we would view it rather in this way—that there is one—this brother, that sister, myself—who is under the tender and gracious handling of God as an essential part of that which has to be maintained in His house, which is pressure.

Now the purposes of pressure are manifold. For one thing, they are certainly preservative. Take yourself, take myself; if I am free from the handling of God in the way of what we speak of as trial, difficulty, or pressure, I am very predisposed to take things easy, as it were, here in this world. I am very predisposed, in the exercise of vigorous health, of easy circumstances, of surroundings that are to my liking, to regard it with a fairly independent state of mind, without, perhaps, very much concern for others. But, then, pressure comes in as a wonderful preservative. I might illustrate it by Peter. The principle runs right through from Abel onwards, but I will illustrate it with Peter. The Lord said to Peter, "When thou wast young, thou girdest

thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (John 21: 18-19). There is Peter; wherever he goes he has this in his mind, "The Lord has put pressure upon me." Supposing someone comes to him and says, "We have a fine proposition for you—a sure thing to set you up here in this world." He says, "The Lord has told me I am going to die, and die as He did, by the Cross. I have no time or place for the thing." Supposing in one way or the other the power of the world had come in. He would always think, "I have the sentence of death in myself; that sentence of death carries me along day by day to an inevitable end." But how does he regard it? With serenity, in peacefulness. We say sometimes, "Is so-and-so resigned?" Perhaps the answer is "Yes." I am rather sorry to hear it. In the light of Christ glorified, and of the spirit which illumines the house of God, I do not think resignation is the spirit, because resignation implies a kind of stoicism—a sort of feeling one cannot escape that which is inevitable; therefore, we may as well take it quietly. But if we

view Peter as he addresses us in his second letter, speaking of the peace and serenity of a spirit perfectly at home with God, in the contemplation of the fact that he was shortly going to "put off this my tabernacle," that was not resignation. It was the serene expression of one at perfect peace in the hand of God.

Now, the enlargement that came to Peter was that he is enabled to magnify the great glory of Christ as he does, and also that there is secured for him a definite place in the world to come. The pressure is answered by what is proportionate in the world to come.

Beside being preservative, I think we can see that pressure is educational. How do we learn God? We learn God through His handling of us. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." That is how we learn God. Therefore, it comes about that those of us who have been longest on the way are prepared to say, upon looking back, that the things which have been our definite blessing, and which have done the most to mould us in the knowledge of God, have been our trials. David-like, we can say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm 119: 71). "Before I was afflicted, I went astray" (verse 67). "I know that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (verse 75).

So that it is of great blessing to the soul to be able to say of the things that come upon us, "Here is my education; God is educating me." Take it up on that line.

Then there is another great feature in respect of pressure, and that is influence. Where should we all be if we did not have amongst us the influence which we see in the hand of God touching one and another. I remember that Mr. Stoney once said that he went to visit the sick, not for their sake so much, as for his own sake. I know what he meant. He meant that when we who are moving out in activity, and, as it were, breathe the external atmosphere of the world and its affairs, and the people in it, we become more or less hardened, imperceptibly almost, but certainly. And then you come aside, and you come to the bedside of one who is laid there in suffering, and you see the way in which God is making Himself known in His tender love to that one. You and I are often in such a position. I was, a very short time ago, with a dear man now with the Lord, and the peacefulness and the restfulness in the love of God that was manifested in that one was very wonderful. Take the case of another young man with whom I was a very short time ago. The doctor came to him, and said, "I think you are going to re-

cover after all." He said, "You are not bringing me any good news. You told me a little while ago that I was going home to be with the Lord, and now you are trying to bring me back again!" The influence of these things upon our spirits, bringing us, as it were, into the breathing of an atmosphere that is at total variance to this world, and that is redolent with the precious support of God, the encouragement of God, and the priestly touch of the Lord Jesus Christ! You go out from a place like that, and your spirit is purified, and softened, and moulded. So that, as I was saying, the maintenance of these things in the House of God is a necessity for its spiritual wholesomeness, for its spiritual perfection.

I wonder if you see how this principle works all through Scripture. We look for a day of glory. I read about it in the 1st Epistle of Peter. That is the great epistle of suffering, of pressure. What is the answer to that? The answer to that is a day of glory, in which there will be no suffering—the world to come. Talking with a dear sister who was laid aside in very painful circumstances, where she has been for many years, her poor body twisted, lying in one position for many years, I said to her, "You know your present sufferings have not to do so much

with this world as with the world that is coming." She wanted to know how. I said, "In the world that is coming there will be no one who will know God in suffering; there will be no one who will be able to tell from personal experience what the support of the High Priest is in circumstances like these; but you are laid aside here, and have been here for years. It is not so much for its effect in this world, as it is in the education that you will have for the Lord to say to you, 'Go and tell this, and that, and the other one in the world to come what God has been to you in a sphere of weakness and suffering.'" She said, "I never thought of it in that way; I deem it a great honor." That is right. "In pressure hast Thou enlarged me." She was enabled in that sense to apprehend that God has, in the process of training, under his own blessed touch, those who will supply to the myriads of the world to come a manner of light and education they never could get from their own practical experience.

So that the principle holds good. Take Isaac, for instance. You have him in his early youth bound, laid for death upon the altar. That must, indeed, have been a pressure for him. "Here is the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offer-

ing?" And there he is, lying bound. You can see what would enter his mind and his thoughts—what the view of this world would be for one lying in that position, as he was. That was the pressure. Now for the enlargement. He comes back from amongst the dead, and the Lord God comes to Abraham, and says, in respect of Isaac, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." There was the pressure, and there was the answering enlargement.

The thing works all the way through. Take Joseph, down in the pit—no water, the place of death. He is taken from there and put in the prison. The iron enters his soul. He lies there in fetters. But what was the answer to the pit and the prison for Joseph? His glory filled all the land of Egypt, so that every being in the land, and from other lands, too, came and said, "Thou hast saved all our lives." Take Paul. It is a lovely subject to follow up. Here is Paul in activity, and he is taken and put under pressure. He is shut up in prison. In all the intense devotion and activities which were his for Christ, he is put in prison. There is pressure. What now? Out from the prison there came the most precious of all epistles, that we have—the epistles to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, to

the Philippians, the 2nd epistle to Timothy, and to Philemon. That rich and glorious enlargement, which has nurtured and fed the whole Church of God from that time to this, came out of the pressure of prison.

The thing works all the time. You might take up those who have been known to us in our day. For instance, our beloved brother, Mr. Darby, whom it was my privilege to know—it worked with him. He had ideas and thoughts from which nothing was coming, and God was pleased to lay him aside for three months through what we call an accident, what we term a misfortune, a calamity, and in those three months laid aside, with capacity to do nothing but think, there was formed in his spirit that light which has become clearly the light of recovery for this present day. There was the pressure, and the enlargement has come in a manner, not only for his blessing, but greatly for our blessing and our enrichment.

So, beloved brethren, I just want to suggest, both to you and to all of us, that, in the ways of God, we are in the environment in which these things will reach us. I would like to impress this upon you, that, as a matter of observation, there is more of trial and pressure

and affliction amongst the people of God than there is in the world. The world has its vicissitudes that have come about as a consequence of sin and lawlessness in man, but, in addition to our being affected by those things, we cannot doubt but that God makes selection in His own garden, so to speak, of those whom He lays aside just for the pure blessing of the house of God, choice souls—souls who live in the love of God, and who, being laid aside, you might say their value in activity has gone. Ah! but laid aside, as it were, under the hand of God, who can tell their worth in that way?

So one is privileged to look upon it that God makes selection of those who shall adorn His house, in the way of pressure, and trial, and affliction. We should look upon them in a certain sense as honoured vessels, while we convey to them the expression of our deep sympathy. They are honoured vessels. Time was when I used rather to wonder whether pressure or affliction was the evidence of the governmental dealings of God, but I think it is more correct to view it that the laying aside in the governmental dealings of God is much the smaller part of the affliction and pressure which we have amongst us. Rather, one looks upon it that, as you go

to your garden and pick your choicest flowers, or your best fruit, so does the Lord make selection of those who are very choice in the knowledge of Himself, and who are evidently much in the secret of the Lord, as loving Him.

I think we might see that, of the grounds on which we are laid aside, the governmental thought is one side only; another side is certainly, admittedly, that there may be light in the Heavenly City. There cannot be light in the Heavenly City unless there is acquired the knowledge of God in these days, and the knowledge of God is acquired, in the main, through pressure, and sacrifice, and surrender.

But then it is also allowed and produced in the house of God for its influence. For we who are active would be very different in our spirits if we did not come from time to time and put ourselves under the influence of those on whom the Lord puts His finger of pressure. I do not know how it is with you younger ones here, but I do certainly commend to you that you should account it a privilege, and seek the opportunity, to get close in with those whom the Lord is laying pressure upon, and learn God in witnessing the way in which He enables

them both to bear suffering, and to learn, and to pray, and to carry the exercises of the assembly in their hearts. A beloved sister, for instance, whom many of us knew, and who passed away a short time ago, 97 years of age, had been for well nigh 80 years of that time absolutely stone deaf, and a good part of the time after that laid aside. It was a choice privilege to go and talk with that dear child of God, and amongst the last things that she said to me and wrote to me was, "My education is not yet complete!" But she contributed to the education in the spirits of countless numbers of the children of God, whom she carried in her spirit in prayer. Every concern that was going on in a broad way in the house of God came to her, and she had a thought and a judgment upon it all. The value of a woman like that in the house of God is simply inestimable, and of her it could be said, "In pressure hast Thou enlarged me." I do not know whether you have read her little poem, "The Cloud and the Argument" (it is not really a little one, but a long one), but, if you have not, I advise you to go to the Tract Depot and get it, and you will see how a young soul in her teens could take things up with God, that afterwards in intense pressure she maintained for 80 long years.

When our brother, Mr. Cutting, said to another dear soul recently taken home, "Why do you think the Lord leaves you here so long?" she replied, "Oh! that is easy to answer; He leaves me here to pray." That dear soul was bright in her faculties and 103 years old when she went home recently.

What can we do without such amongst us? Take the company of the Lord's people here in Adelaide; if you have not amongst you those who are the subjects of the pressure of the Lord in these ways, you are impoverished. If you have them, look upon them as a source of spiritual wealth. Regard them as assets of the greatest value. You do not know how much you are supported by the prayers and the spirits of those who are the prisoners of the Lord in this way, suffering in body and in spirit, and in infirmities, and so forth.

I suppose that one might say that the pressures of God, through which He enlarges, follow certain lines. For instance, bodily pressure. Of all things that men esteem most, I suppose it is their bodily health. Therefore, it is no wonder that the blessed God is pleased to break our bodily health in various ways, sap our energies and strength, convince us that we have got bodies of humiliation, and

put us in pain and suffering. The amount of education we get of the knowledge of God through our bodies is certainly very great, and our bodies being handled in that way by God, we become privileged to be a great influence for spiritual blessing to the people of God.

Then I suppose another way in which pressure comes in, and where we, in a sense, very quickly respond to it, is in our business vicissitudes. How quickly we cry out when the finger of God comes upon what we call the means of our living, but which very often are not the means of our living, but are the means of gratifying tastes and likings altogether beyond what God has indicated to us when He says "food, raiment, contentment." How many has one seen whose careers have been shattered by the failure to see the simple principle, "Godliness, with contentment, is great gain"! Food, raiment—therewith be content. And, therefore, God has come in, and in His mercy and His goodness, has shattered our business concerns, perhaps even shattered the very means of our gaining a livelihood. I know what I am talking about. I have been through it. I trust what I am saying to you now might be of some value to some of you younger ones.

Then there are other pressures,

pressures from the world. It is a hostile world. Do not let it be a friendly world. God forbid that it should be to us a friendly world. It is a hostile world, and it brings its pressures, and if you are not the friend of the world, but get the pressure of the world, there is great blessing for you.

Then there is another kind of pressure we know something about, some of us—pressure in our families, in our relationships. It is a thing of deep admiration for the divine wisdom that God can turn about the things which lay closest to our hearts; that in our very families, in that which is nearest to us by nature, we are brought under grief and affliction; and yet from it all bring out an enlargement which, perhaps, in this world is of great blessing to others in its influence, and which surely in the world to come will have an answer from God.

Then there is another line of pressure, and that is as identified with the house of God—the assembly. What cares, what pressures, what trials, what griefs, arise in that circle so dear to us! And, as God softens us and moulds us by bringing us personally under affliction and pressure,—or, viewing it where it hurts us more, in our loved ones; or, viewing it in others whom He has laid aside amongst us—one

understands how those things prepare our spirits so that, under the impress of Christ, we may suitably handle and care for that which, in its tiny measure, we may touch, as Paul touched it in its great measure—"Beside all these things the care of all the Churches."

Then there is another pressure, to which all of us at some time or another have responded, and that is bereavement. It is a something to contemplate that we belong to a company, a people of God, who, throughout all ages, will enter into the world to come and into the eternal state as having known in greater or less degree the pressure that has come from bereavement. If it be the definite word, "With pain thou shalt bear children" (N.T.), so the word, "In pressure hast Thou enlarged me," applies that none of us is suffered to pass through this scene, and go out of it, to live here among others, but there must come the constriction of the heart's affections, the throbbing of grief, in bereavement. It comes to all. It is the Lord's prerogative to touch us in that way. How much does that constriction of heart enlarge us! As the blessed Lord could say at the grave of Lazarus, "Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (John 11: 40).

And so in all these ways we trace that the blessed God is effecting His intentions not alone or principally governmentally. Perhaps I had better explain that a little more before I close. By "governmentally" I think the hand of God comes in upon us in pressure where the *will* is unsubdued and defiant to the will of God. I do not think that is true of many. I think with regard of most, speaking from observation of the children of God, they do not carry a will that is intentionally defiant of the will of God, or that purposely goes contrary to what He shows to be right. Where failure comes in, and infirmity, and breakdown, it is generally the case that the motive is good, but the intelligence is not good, the intercourse with God is not good, the communion with God is not good, but it is not the deliberate pursuing of a course which is contrary to the mind of God. When I say, "I am going to have that object at all costs," that is where the *will* is asserted against God, and where governmental dealing comes in. I think if you follow it through Scripture you will see that this is so. But, on the other hand, the most of those that are laid aside amongst us are those who, in large measure, accept the will of God. Many of those who are laid aside amongst us

are absolutely the choicest ones of the flock. How often has that been verified! The other day I saw a dear sister in her early forties afflicted with cancer, pain, suffering, knowing that very soon, a few weeks or so, she would be with the Lord. Everybody who could, flocked to her bedside. One got the impression one could not afford *not* to go there, to get her impressions of Christ, as she was in the hand of God. I had a dear sister of my own just that way, who has been with the Lord for many long years now. She had pilgrimages to her bedside from all parts of England. It would be like sacrilege to say she was *governmentally* there. But why laid aside in the midst of her years, when so much of activity might be possible? There is plenty of activity. It is that kind of pressure which lays one aside to meditate, to be alone with God, to pray, to bear up, it may be by name, each one individually in your own company where you are, consider for you in all your circumstances, when you, in the bustle of your lives, have scarce time to bend the knee to God morning and night. You may have amongst you some laid aside to whom you go as an act of mercy to visit, but who are considering you profoundly. You may be the debtor to that brother or sis-

ter, who may be carrying you along in prayer before God that He may preserve you in the temptations, and trials, and testings you have in your activity.

So that one would not look upon pressure, affliction, and the like, as being calamity or misfortune, but rather a rich endowment, which proceeds from springs which have their origin in the heart of God Himself, who, at the outset, moved on the line of sacrifice and surrender, and who committed His beloved Son on the line of sacrifice and surrender, and who maintains His household up to the world to come on those same lines. How beautifully it is expressed in those words, "We also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"! We ought to lay down our lives for them. Consider what that means! Where is the perfection of it? In Christ! In what spirit did the blessed Lord come? In the spirit of the God who gave Him.

In view of these things, motives are clarified, actions are purified, the wholesome atmosphere of the House of God is maintained, breathing conditions, so to speak, are preserved in a world that is full of the foul gases of hell, corruption and violence, and an atmosphere pure and sweet is maintained along the lines that "in pressure hast Thou enlarged

me.” So Peter addresses the beloved saints as regards their present place of trial, “The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though ye now see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1: 7-8).

So may we take it home, and not speak too much of misfortune, not speak too much of calamity, not speak too much of being shocked when this comes or that comes, but accept it in the quiet, peaceful serenity of peace with God, for it is along those lines we reach it. That is the line on which we reach it. You know your Saviour, He “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom, also, we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also” (Romans 4: 25; 5: 1-3).

Well, now, I just put it to you: Do you glory, do you boast, in tribulation? Is it so? It is so if you understand it. If you

see the place it has as an ordinary principle in the ways of God, you will "glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." So that the link is perfect. God moved in divine love at the outset to sacrifice from Himself and in the blessed Lord Jesus, and He passes us through the same line. The link, the circle, is perfect. It ends up in the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given unto us.

—F. L.

Adelaide, 14/10/27.

DISCIPLINE.

Another benefit of God's dwelling is that we are disciplined. He said to Israel of old, "You only have I known . . . therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities" (Amos 3: 2).

God suffered other nations to walk in their own ways, full of evil, but Israel was God's House, and the object of His discipline was to save them from going down to the pit; but they despised the discipline of God, and were, for the time being, cast off. If we dwell where He dwells, His eyes are upon us. Only the righteous are really in God's House, and He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; He sees our path, and searches our ways, and, therefore, He disciplines us.

Hebrews 12: 5-8 shows us that we come under chastening because God loves us. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

None would be *kept* in this world, except for the discipline of God; we are kept by the power of God, but that power is exercised towards us through discipline. God will not let us go our own way;

He takes notice of our ways and chastens us, so that we should not perish. He keeps us for "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

These thoughts are easy, for we understand the care and order of a father over his household, and God has *His* House, and we come under His blessed influence there. He loves His children, and makes them feel His chastening, that they may be kept in His will and love.

Let each of us meditate on these privileges that we may be consciously under God's influence and care, and so be sound in soul.

—F. E. R.

SIFTING.

When God is about to use a Christian in His work, He takes the one who has gone the farthest in the path of trial. Thus here it is said, "Satan hath desired to have you that He may sift you." The danger is presented to all, but He adds, speaking to Peter, "I have prayed for thee"—for thee in particular, for Jesus distinguishes him from all the rest, because he had taken a more prominent position than the others, and was thus more exposed—though they were all sifted at the death of Jesus.

The Lord then says to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." He was not going to spare any of His disciples the sifting, but Peter was to be the most severely tried, and, therefore, the best to strengthen his brethren.

—J. N. D.

MINISTRY.

There is such a thing as present ministry—that is, there is the voice of the Spirit at any given moment.

But there have been certain things ministered in the past, which are published, and which are truth for all time. If I may be allowed the word, they are “classics,” and among them I would commend to my young hearers, “Discipline in the School of God” (J.B.S.) and “The Sufferings of Christ” (J.N.D.).

—Wm. Johnson.

1918.

CHRIST THE CENTRE.

One has felt, dear brethren, for some time that the Lord's interests call from every heart a complete committal to Him. I believe the sense of weakness and lack of power of which we are all often conscious, arises largely from the way we are reserved in our committal to the Lord. One is conscious of the need for oneself of again and again looking through the door that is opened in heaven, to take account in one's spirit of what is seen through that open door, viz., that the Lord Jesus Christ is the centre of everything in heaven, so that apprehending that in one's soul there is created the desire to be in accord with heaven. Nothing could be a greater privilege, nothing could be more pleasing to God, than for us here on earth to be in accord with heaven. I think we will all see at once that that must be the greatest possible position we can occupy—to be actually down here on earth, but to be here in accord with heaven, so that what is true in heaven is true on earth.

I think you will see, dear brethren, that what exists in heaven is that the Lord

Jesus Christ is the centre of everything there; that all the activities of heaven find their centre in the Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed Lamb that was slain. So one desires that, for a few moments, we might take account of how the Lord Jesus, once He appears, takes the central place in everything because of His own moral greatness and glory.

What happened at the outset was that, under the influence of the serpent, *self* became the centre of man's life. We all know it, we all feel it, we all have to judge it, but the natural heart finds everything revolving around *self*. It may take various forms; it may take the form that the Spirit of God calls the love of money, around which one's life simply revolves. It becomes the centre of life. In another case it may take the form of what the Apostle speaks in Timothy as love of pleasure; or it may be that there is the love of this present age; but, behind all that, Satan has secured that *self* in some form or other has become the centre of human life. What I would like to show with the Lord's help is that once the Lord Jesus comes into view, then, to every intelligent heart *He* must become the centre of everything. So we find at the beginning as He entered this world it says there were a multitude of the

heavenly host, and what they say shows clearly that the great theme and centre of their praise and all their words is the Lord Jesus Christ. "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good pleasure in men" (Luke 2: 14—N.T.), they say, and "this shall be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." Their eyes, their faces, their hearts, centred on the Babe. "This shall be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger"—outcast in this world, indeed; but the centre of praise of the multitude of the heavenly host.

Then we see the Lord Jesus at the age of 12, and where do we find Him? Mary says, "Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." He was found in the midst of the doctors, or the teachers, although but 12 years of age. There they see Him, right in the centre of the teachers. How did He get there? By moral power, by the right of what was there in Him. The teachers all sat around Him, wondering at His understanding and His answers. Every teacher took up a seat around Him, even at the age of 12. Wise, indeed, were they; true teachers were they, dear brethren. If a teacher does not sit around that blessed Centre he is not a teacher, according to

God. They found Him in the midst of the doctors, it says, at 12 years of age.

We move on in our thoughts of His sojourn in this world. The Lord is in a certain place. It says, "They come to Him and say, 'Thy mother and Thy brethren without seek for Thee'" (Mark 3: 32). It says He looked round about, and says, "Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother and sister and mother." It says He looked around in a circuit. He was in a certain place, and everyone who desired to do the will of God came and sat around Him, with Him, in the midst. A right position, dear brethren, for everyone who desires to do the will of God. Everyone who has the slightest desire in his heart to do the will of God sits around with that blessed One as the centre for his heart and life.

If we turn in our thoughts to the end of the life of Jesus we will find that, because of the perfection of His blessed Person, because of the way He, in an unqualified measure, maintained the rights of God, He became the centre of the whole power of evil. The whole of the powers of evil, of darkness and sin, at Calvary were centred entirely on Christ.

They had sought to attack others. Cain, who was of that wicked one, slew his brother, Abel, and Pharaoh sought to have Moses put into the river, because he was fair to God; and the Lord says, "Which of the prophets have ye not persecuted and slain?" But the powers of evil never had a centre for their hatred against God until the Lord Jesus Christ appeared. If Revelation 5 gives a door open in heaven for us to look through, Calvary gives us a door to see just the opposite view. So it says in Psalm 22, "Bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round." The door in heaven shows us Him as the Lamb in the midst of the throne. We look down beneath the moral depths of evil, and we see that same blessed Lamb of God in the centre of the strong bulls. It was just exactly as if a lamb was in the centre of bulls, with all the ferocity and hatred which they represent. The cruelty of the powers of evil was arrayed against Him who is the Lamb of God, finding expression through human hearts, as the Lord says in that Psalm, "They pierced My hands and My feet"; finding expression when it is said, "For My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink"—bulls in Bashan. Then the Lord says again, in that wonderful Psalm, "Dogs

have compassed Me.” Dogs! A dog represents that which is utterly unclean. Think of the uncleanness of the powers of evil finding a centre to express their uncleanness upon in Christ. “Dogs have compassed Me.” Then the Lord says, “The assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me.” The centre of the counsels of the wisdom of hell was the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. His right place is in the midst of God’s assembly. He says of that dark moment, “The assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me.” They took counsel together, it says. Scripture speaks of the wisdom that is from above. The Apostle says, “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3: 15). All the wisdom of hell was seen in the counsel of the assembly of the wicked. They said, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Ps. 2: 3). He is the centre of the attack of all the powers of evil expressed in that Scripture. The bulls, the dogs, the assembly of the wicked—all find their centre in hatred, in persecution, in dark counsel against Christ.

Then, dear brethren, just to get before our souls a little clearer how He must in every way be in the midst, we find Him in John 20 coming up out of the

grave, standing here in resurrection power. There are hearts together that love Him. On the Lord's Day morning they met, and it says, "Jesus . . . stood in the midst." He came in and took up His own blessed place there—the only place He could have. Now we follow Him to where He is to-day, and, looking through the door opened in heaven, we see this—that in the midst of the throne, and in the midst of the living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain. Our thoughts and our hearts are directed to the Lord's place in heaven, right in the centre of the throne. The throne represents the rule of God—God's blessed rule. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," and it is the centre of divine rule. In the very centre of it stands the Lamb that was slain. If there is a soul in this room who professes to be under the rule of God, the test of it is this—is the Lamb in the midst? Is Christ in the centre of that rule that you profess to be under? If He is not, it is the rule of the king of the bottomless pit, and there is nothing between. Between the throne of God and the Lamb in the midst, and the throne of the angel of the bottomless pit there is no other rule over men's souls. Let me ask you to which throne are you subject—the throne of

God with Jesus in the midst, or the throne of Apollyon, whose name is Destroyer?

Then it says, "In the midst of . . . the living creatures . . . stood a lamb." One of these living creatures was like a lion, the second like a calf, the third had a face as a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. They represent the four great heads of creation. They are living *creatures*, and, as such, they represent the whole creation before God. What we see in heaven is that the whole creation finds its centre in Christ. I know that is not admitted on earth. I know if you move in the creation here you do not find that recognised, but you do in heaven, for, under the influence of Christ, the creation recognises God—God's place is maintained in creation by Jesus the Lamb that was slain being in the midst of the four living creatures.

The apostle Paul, in the epistle to the Romans, is thinking of the Creator. He opens his epistle by saying that he is the bondman of Jesus Christ—that the centre and object of his life of service is Jesus Christ. He has not written many verses before he says this: "The Creator who is blessed for ever, Amen." He said that, dear friends, as being in accord with the four living creatures that surround the

throne with the Lamb in the midst. That is to say, as we are maintained under the influence of Christ we shall take our true place in the recognition of the Creator.

You might have said, "Paul, you are further on than that. You have been brought into the blessed kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ—you are one of His subjects." You might have said to him, "You know the wondrous place of sonship before God, yet you speak about the Creator." He says, "The Creator who is blessed for ever, Amen." He did not serve the creature more than the Creator. He served the Creator. It says on the ship that he took bread and gave thanks. (Acts 27: 35.) He contributed the praise and thanksgiving of the creature to the Creator, who is blessed for ever. That is one result of Christ being in the midst of the four living creatures. He directs from creation the thanksgiving that is due to God, the Creator.

Then we see Him in the midst of the 24 elders. These 24 elders are those who have proved that they can be trusted with the Lord's interests. They are those who had experience in what is due to God, and they sought to maintain it. They are those who are divinely intelligent as to what God is doing. Everyone of such has the Lamb in the midst. That

is to say, that Blessed One is the centre of their service as elders. All the care which they had for the Lord's interests arose from the fact that they had the Lamb in the midst. They were perfectly delivered from having themselves as a centre. They were not seeking to further the Lord's interests because of anything in themselves, but because of the Lamb as it had been slain; and what is seen in heaven is to be maintained, dear brethren, in a living way here on earth.

Then we find round about the throne was a great number—many angels, it says, numbering "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands," and they, too, have a centre in Christ. They are the servants of God. Every servant of God finds a centre in Jesus. Innumerable though they be, He is great enough to be a centre for their service, as was manifest when He was here, for it says, "Angels ministered unto Him." "Ye ministers of His which do His will." Dear brethren, one would like to suggest that we look at that, not only literally as they were, but as representative of the thought of service. Service that is of any value in heaven has Christ as its centre.

One would love to think that every heart in this room desired to take up some service for the Lord, for it says,

“His servants shall serve Him.” If we are going to do it in that day, surely we should begin now. Do not let us think that service belongs to just a few. It belongs to all. Do not let the sisters think they are outside of it, for the Apostle says, “I commend to you Phœbe, our sister, which is a servant of the Church.” “A succourer of many, and of myself, also” (Romans 16: 1-2)—one of those blessed servants of the Lamb. Again he says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks.” Note, dear brethren, Priscilla is first. She is the sister. She took the lead in staking her own neck in devoted service to Christ.

The path of service in many, many ways is open to everyone that loves the Lord, but to be effective, to be acceptable to heaven, the Lamb as it had been slain must be in the centre. So, dear brethren, when the Lord Jesus Christ appears anywhere, that is the only place He can have. We think of the blessed moment when He is coming. The apostle says, “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him” (2 Thess. 2: 1). We might feel, as many a heart has felt, pleased to leave this scene of sorrow,

suffering and death, but the apostle says, "Our gathering together unto Him." He is to be the centre of that wondrous gathering soon to come. When He appears on earth, when He comes to take up His rights, as it says, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory," it is said of that kingdom that, "To Him shall the gathering of the people be." In the coming day on earth once a year all the nations will come up to Him. All the peoples, the heathen as we know them now, what is left of Christendom, the dark conditions of Africa—everyone of the people representatively coming up yearly to Him as the centre of gathering.

Then we pass beyond time into that scene of eternity where the pleasure of God is ministered to, where the paradise of God is found, where the questions relating to good and evil are finished with. We find in the very centre of the paradise of God the tree of Life, which is the Lord Jesus Christ there in manhood, to minister from that blessed paradise eternal pleasure to the heart of God.

Eve said to the serpent that, "of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it." The question of good and evil is so great to the creature's mind that we inevitably think that it is the centre of

everything, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil never was in the midst of the paradise of God. It was the tree of Life that God put there, and when the question of good and evil is settled—settled for ever, settled in our souls in exercise before God—we wake up to this blessed fact—that the tree of Life is the centre of the paradise of God.

Now, dear brethren, I believe this, and a great deal more lay on the apostle Paul's soul when he wrote these words we have read. He was thinking of the saints as contributing to the Lord's interests here on earth, and so he says to them that "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who, though He was rich, yet, for your sakes, He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be made rich." He wanted them to spend—he wanted them to use their resources for the interests of the Lord, and how would he secure it? By putting Christ in the centre of their souls. He says, "You know how He gave, how He spent everything." He says, "He was rich—you know He was rich." Rich, dear brethren, beyond speaking, unsearchably rich He was. He had everything that was worth having. He had the unclouded favour of God as a man. This refers to what He had as man; it does not refer to when

He was in the form of God; but it was as man that He was rich. One of His treasures was this—He had the unclouded favour of God. Never a cloud between God and that blessed life here. His tongue never spake evil, His lips no guile. He had a right to life and good days—a perfect right to it. He had, dear brethren, as to His own precious body a right to live. The claims of death as the wages of sin and the judgment of God had nothing whatever to say to Him. He was exempt. Many a man in this world would part with his fortune to secure proof from the power of death. The Lord had it inherently as a man on earth, and He had much more that we cannot speak of now; but the apostle sums it all up when he says, “He was rich; but for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be made rich.”

Calvary again, dear brethren, is the expression of the poverty of Christ. Instead of the unclouded favour of God, He is forsaken. What He has is the darkness and distance. Instead of the blessing of God shining down upon Him, He is in the place of the curse. Instead of a throne to which He was entitled, He has a cross. Instead of life and good days, He goes down into death. “Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death,” and

so the prophet says in Daniel, "He is cut off and has nothing."

The apostle says, that is how He gave, that is how He spent. He did not withhold anything for your sakes, and now, he says, it is time for you to spend. With such a centre for your heart, it is time, the apostle says to the Corinthians, for you to begin to spend, and then he refers to himself. He had followed the spending of Jesus. The Lord could say, "I have spent my strength." He had spent everything, and became poor. The apostle's heart had followed it. He had become enthroned in his affections, and he says, "Of a truth, I am ready to spend and be utterly spent for your sakes." He could say that, for he says, "We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4: 2). "I am ready to spend and be utterly spent for your sakes." What for? For present gain, for a reward here? To secure even the love of the brethren? No! He says, "The Lamb as it had been slain is the centre of my heart. Under the influence of His spending I am ready to spend," and he held back nothing. He spent not

only his time, his days, his strength, his money—for he did that—as he says, “These hands have ministered to my necessities and to them that were with me” (Acts 20: 34). Think of that—the great apostle speaking of working with his hands! What for? To meet his own needs and the needs of those who were with him. There is Timothy, his often infirmities, the weakness of his body. Paul must care for Timothy. There is Trophimus to be ministered to, who was left sick. He says, “These hands ministered to my necessities and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (Acts 20: 34-35). So he says, “I am ready to spend,” and then he says, “and be spent,” or, in the New Translation, “be utterly spent.” It often is not hard to spend a little money for the Lord’s interests, to spend, perhaps, a little time for the Lord’s interests; but the apostle says, “I am ready to be spent.” How many of us stop when we, ourselves, are to be spent, not only to spend, but to put ourselves altogether into the treasury of God. He says of the Macedonians that, “They gave not as we

had hoped" (or "expected," rather, it means); "but," he says, "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8: 5). They put themselves in the box, so to speak, they gave themselves unto the Lord.

Dear brethren, the Lord's interests in our day at the end call for complete committal to the interests of Christ. Our hearts, our time that is available, our money, our homes, ourselves, under the blessed influence of the Lamb that had been slain, with Him in the midst of our affections. The Apostle could commit everything to Him without one single reserve. What power, what support, what pleasure to heaven to see a man living his life on earth exactly corresponding to that scene in heaven where the Lamb is in the midst of the throne, in the midst of the living creatures, and in the midst of the elders and the angels. The apostle lived entirely in accord with that scene for the remainder of his days, when once that blessed Person became enthroned in his heart.

One only just had the desire to say that, that the Lord Jesus Christ, because of His own intrinsic worth, must be the centre of everything in the universe that is according to God.

May the Lord grant that each one of us, from the youngest to the eldest, may come under the influence of the love of Christ, for the apostle says, "The love of Christ constraineth us." He says that is how it is done. We are bound, but bound by the bands of a man, by the cords of love. We are bound and constrained to live for Him who died for us and rose again.

May the Lord encourage every heart in that direction! I am sure we all feel how continuously that scene is a challenge to our life and ways; but if we catch a glimpse in living power of the Lamb in the midst it will help us in a practical way to conform to it on earth.

—W. J. H.

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