

# From the Wilderness to the Land

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the spiritual journey from the wilderness to the promised land, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing the vast difference between Christ and ourselves for true spiritual growth.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 1:2, Deuteronomy 8:2, Job 22:24, Mark 10:45, John 15:16, Philippians 3:12, Hebrews 3:19 - 4:1

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Faith and Trust in God"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the journey from the wilderness to the promised land, illustrating the spiritual distance between Christians and Christ. He explains that the forty years in the wilderness were necessary for the Israelites to learn the profound difference between their nature and the nature of Christ, which is a lifelong lesson of brokenness and surrender. Sparks highlights that true spiritual progress requires a transformation of mindset and a deep reliance on God, rather than on our own efforts. He calls for believers to recognize their need for spiritual stature and maturity, as God prepares them for future challenges. Ultimately, the sermon encourages a deeper understanding of faith and the necessity of Christ's work in our lives.

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## Transcript

From A Witness and A Testimony magazines, 1943-1945

T. Austin-Sparks was born in London, England in 1888 and was educated in both England and Scotland. At the age of 25 he was ordained as a pastor, however, a few years later his "career" took a decidedly different direction when a crisis brought him to a place of brokenness and he left the denomination with which he was involved and dropped the title of "Reverend". Based in Honor Oak, London, he published a bi-monthly magazine called "A Witness and A Testimony" from 1923 until his death in 1971. He was also used much by God speaking at various conferences.

Chapter 1 - The Distance of Difference

&#147;It is eleven days&#146; journey from Horeb by way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea&#148; (Deut. 1:2).

&#147;Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness&#148; (Deut. 8:2).

This is not a new thought. We are familiar with both the fact and the reason of the extension of what could have been in eleven days to forty years, but that meaning and significance has been pressing in on me somewhat more of late, and I feel that so far as I am concerned any word for this moment arises out of this. It is what we might term the distance, not of space or geography, but the distance of difference. If the Lord had been only interested in getting a people to the point where they gave Him some simple gesture of trust in His salvation from the world, its master and its tyranny, its bondage and its conditions, to become His people by desire, then there is no reason at all why He should not have transported them by the short route, the direct course, and have landed them in eleven days in the place which He had already chosen for them. The Lord could do that sort of thing if it were all objective or outward. If today He presented to us the values of the blood of His chosen Lamb and called for that simple gesture of faith in that blood which appropriates its efficacy, and we in our hearts thereby signified that we desired to be the Lord's people; if that were all, then we could enter tomorrow into everything that He had designed for us, everything in His purpose, we could go straight in.

But few, very few, there have been who have gone that way. It has not, in the vast majority of cases, worked out like that. There is a necessity which sets up a barrier of impossibility. While the Lord would have it so, and has provided for it to be so, the actual position is such that it cannot be. The eleven days are extended to forty years, and then a death! No, it is not the distance even of years of time or of measurement in the natural sense. It is the distance of difference and it is the measurement of the difference between Christ and ourselves, and that is a lesson which it takes most of us a very long time to learn; the greatness of the expanse, the long, long way which lies between ourselves as Christians and Christ, between the spirituality of the flesh and the spirituality of the Spirit, between being Christians after the flesh and Christians after the Spirit. That lesson is a long one, a deep one, a painful one. Indeed, it is a lifelong lesson. It takes a whole generation to learn it, and when at last it is learnt, the wholehearted acceptance of a necessity is made, and that necessity is to die.

I mean this, that in this way you and I come more and more to the place where we feel it is necessary to die, that the only thing for it is to die. You know what I mean by that, not physically just to abandon everything, but that we die out, what we are in ourselves, the self-life; there is nothing for it but to die. The longing to die in that sense grows.

Transplanting this truth from the Old Testament to the New, you can see it coming up in more than one connection. It came up with the disciples while they were with the Lord, when He was here in the flesh. They were His, they belonged to Him: He said, 'Ye did not choose me, but I chose you'; (John 15:16); they were His. But there is a tremendous distance between them and Him, a distance which it was impossible to bridge. Mentally there was the distance of this great expanse between Him and them and between them and Him. His whole thought, mind, ideas, judgments, His entire mentality was different from theirs and they could not follow Him. Disciples, yes, in an outward way, but in a wilderness. They could not follow Him in mind. He had to intimate some things and at once their mentality revolted. Never! was their reaction. This shall never be! 'Thou shalt never wash my feet'; (John 13:8). The mentality of Christian disciples in relation to the Lord is: Never! only another way of saying: Impossible, it cannot be. We cannot see it, we cannot conceive of such a thing, it is altogether foreign to our idea of things! The distance of difference in mind.

In heart, they could not follow Him. Their desires were so different, so far removed. In will it was just the same. Their whole being was far removed, and although a crisis came and a tremendous change took place with the Cross and the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, the whole thing was not done then.

Years afterwards, Paul has to withstand Peter to the face (Gal. 2:11). You can see there is room yet for approximation, even in the innermost apostles; they are still on the journey, they have not yet arrived, and with their latest breath they will say, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on" (Phil. 3:12).

Again the truth is seen in companies of the Lord's people. We think of the Corinthian company, not necessarily only of those resident at Corinth, but all whom they represent, a Corinthian kind. They were the Lord's, blessed with many blessings, having the Spirit, but oh, what a gap between them and Christ! So much so, that Paul himself in visiting them resolutely determined to keep utterly to Christ and Him crucified, because of the distance, accounting that to be the only thing that could meet the situation.

And is it not this very thing which arises again in connection with the churches as we find them at the beginning of the Revelation? Here is the Lord Himself presented to them, first of all in that very full way with those symbolic features, and then to each of the churches in a particular way, and both in the general and the particular it is a challenge. It is intended to be a challenge, a challenge to this distance which lies between them and Himself, this difference, the distance which has come about because of difference, the difference which has made a distance.

#### The Difference Between the Lord and Ourselves as Christians

Well, what does all this amount to, to what does it bring us? I think it brings us to everything. We cannot touch anything but what we find this applies to it. But the one thing which perhaps will help us most now will be this lesson that you and I have to learn, which the Lord is trying to teach us and which we are bound to learn if we are going on with the Lord, and which we shall not escape, namely, the utter difference between the Lord Jesus and ourselves even as Christians. Perhaps we have thought that having reposed faith in the Lord Jesus, in His redemptive work, His atoning blood, and having declared ourselves for Him, that simply opens the way for us to go right on straight away in full acceptance in every sense, and that the next thing to do is to turn outwards and begin to do everything and anything that we can think of, that our minds and our wills and our hearts, our emotions and our enthusiasms can possibly do for Him, and we begin to do it.

Now I do not want you to misunderstand what has just been said. Acceptance in Christ is complete, is utter. In Christ we are accepted from the beginning. But there is another sense in which there is a vast amount that is not Christ which is not accepted, never is accepted, and the lesson of our lives is that of learning what is not accepted by God even though we are in Christ, and it is a terrible, grave mistake for us to think that, because we have become Christians and now belong to the Lord, that anything we may do, anything we can think of, anything that rises as a generous impulse for the Lord within us, and any plan that we can put into operation and any zeal that we can exercise for the Lord, is acceptable. That is a grave mistake.

To be Christians after the Spirit is altogether a different thing from being Christians after the flesh. It is this Christianity after the flesh which has brought into being a vast system of things on this earth today which is not really serving the Lord, which is not really of vital consequence in this world, which is but an outward formal thing, which not only occupies the ground but is a menace to the genuine, the true; for so many say of it, If that is Christianity, I have no room for it! So the true is rejected and refused because of the false thing which is "Christian";.

No, that which is after the Spirit is very different even from Christianity after the flesh. This latter can carry us a long way. We can have the very fullness of Christian teaching and truth in words, we can go right on to the fullest presentation of Christian doctrine and truth, getting right into what might be called the deeper things of the Word of God, and it may all amount to nothing more than our own natural interest in spiritual things. It is possible for us, for instance, to take up such a matter as the Scriptural difference between soul and spirit and to have a grasp of that as truth, as doctrine, and be able to analyse and present the analysis of that difference, and for it still to remain our natural mental interest, a fascinating subject, something of interest, and for the thing to be without the unction of the Spirit to precipitate a crisis, to effect something of God. That is only by way of illustration. We can preach the gospel in the flesh and make it of none effect, said Paul, because it is preached in the wisdom of words, in the wisdom of men. (1 Cor. 1:17). The very thing preached is nullified because of the source from which it comes, a natural interest, a natural drawing to that kind of thing, mystical Christianity; it does not get anywhere, it goes round and round in the wilderness. That which is of the Spirit creates a crisis, that which is of the Spirit takes a direct course, a direct route. That which is of the Spirit is a straight way.

Dear friends, what is the Lord doing with us? That is what we want to know. What is He doing with you and me, and with those who are really in His hands? &#151; Is He not doing with us that which He has done with all who have come completely under His hands, that is, leading in a way and realm where human understanding and ability are completely confounded and exhausted, where it is totally impossible to cope mentally with His ways, or to explain Him? We cannot see, we cannot understand; neither is it in us to do, to achieve. We are learning that all our resources are of no avail, and that everything depends upon the Lord Himself; HIS wisdom, HIS strength, HIS grace.

Well, if it is your experience so far and at this time, understand that it is quite right, it is not all a mistake. True, it is very painful, it is testing. It is testing up to that point where your feet have to touch the very brink before you prove God. You have to come to an utter end of one way and to a beginning which is a beginning even to the point of lifting your feet to take a step to prove God, for God to come in. You say that is very utter. Yes, but it is this utterness of the difference between the Lord and ourselves that we have to learn, and that is going to set us over against the colossus of false doctrine, of the iniquitous lie which is being built upon this earth up to heaven, the lie of humanism.

That is the greatest lie that has been brought into this universe, that it is in man to be his own saviour, that it is in man to rise to perfection, it is in man to be God. It is all in man, the roots are in himself. That is Satan's colossus of iniquitous untruth, and God is working out the contradiction of that in a company, in His church. It is being wrought, worked out, in the unseen, and, while it is so difficult to accept it in the day of suffering, weakness and darkness and inability to understand, if we knew the truth, the probability is that it is just this: God is doing with Satan in and through the church what He did with Satan in and through Job, answering his challenge and his lie. Here is a broken, shattered, helpless little vessel of saints, bewildered, stripped, thrown back upon their God, unable to do or to understand, clinging to Him and seeking to prove Him, and through that the greatest iniquity in this universe is being assailed by God and answered.

The lie! There never was a time when that lie has reached greater proportion than it has today. Of course, it represents the greatest enigma that confronts us, when what is going on shouts at the top of its voice what kind of creature man is after all, yet at the same time men are pinning their faith to humanism as never before. But in you and in me, poor broken ones, God has His answer, and it does mean something to the Lord that we have been emptied out to the last drop, thrown back upon Him, where He is our

wisdom, He is our strength, He is our life, He is our very breath. That means something to Him.

### The Otherness of Christ

To return to the central issue of this whole matter, namely, the great lesson of the vast expanse, the desert expanse, which lies between Christians in themselves and Christ. Karl Barth has coined for us a phrase which has gained a great deal of strength and place, and it is a very useful one — the altogether other-ness of Christ. Oh, that goes much further than we realize, certainly much further than most people are prepared to believe. Even yet in evangelical Christianity there is a clinging to the idea that we transfer every thing to Christ and to Christianity when we are born again. We transfer all our faculties and our powers over to the interests of Christ and then, instead of using them for ourselves and for the world, we use them for Christ. That is the meaning of consecration, of surrender, as the terms are used so largely today in evangelical Christianity — the consecration of ourselves, our gifts, our faculties, our everything, to the Lord and to His service. But that falls short of something, and that is the meaning of the forty years in the wilderness. If that were all, then the eleven days would be enough. But no, it is not. It is not the transference and the consecration of everything that we are to the Lord to be used straight away as it is over on His side, for His interests instead of in the world. Christ is other yet, Christ is still different yet from consecrated natural life, oh, so other! Something has to happen, our entire mentality has to be changed, transformed. The mind has to be renewed, we have to have an altogether different kind of outlook, even about the things of God. It is a constitutional matter, not merely a directional one.

You have heard this many times and I want to emphasize it, I must emphasize it, because this is the meaning of the Lord's dealings with us, namely, to get a new mentality, a new conception, another, not our old one transferred, but another, and the distance, I said, is not the distance of time or geography necessarily, it is the distance of difference, and we make faster or slower progress spiritually according to how we learn this lesson. It need not be forty years, the Lord has not fixed it at forty years; He never did. It need not be.

### The Secret of Spiritual Progress

What is the secret of it? What is the secret of spiritual progress? It is the letting go of our own will and mind to the fact, to the truth, that after all, though Christians at our best, wanting to be a hundred percent for the Lord, it is not in us either to be or do. Our will can never do it, our reason can never accomplish it, our impulses and desires can never get us there. We have to come to a brokenness and yieldedness where nature is laid low in the dust and all our treasure is with the stones of the brook and the Almighty becomes our treasure (Job 22:24-25); the Lord alone our wisdom, our strength and vision, our desire. Until you and I have learned the lesson of that utter brokenness and yieldedness and letting go to the Lord, spiritual progress is delayed.

You look at all that came into the forty years in the wilderness, and you will see it was but the working out of that principle. The Lord was working to keep them close to His Christ, to make His Christ the basis of everything, but they wanted it in themselves, for themselves, and so that generation never attained. The strong word so often repeated in the New Testament about that episode is that they could not, they could not enter in — So we see that they could not enter in; (Heb. 3:19). Why could they not? It says, because of unbelief. But what is the basis of unbelief? Is it not desire to have it in ourselves, to see it, to feel it, to know it, to have it according to our minds? What is faith? Well, faith has nothing under its feet but God, just God. It is the Lord.

May the Lord just indicate the meaning of the word, show us the great distance that lies between ourselves as Christians and Christ, and give us a heart that yields to the Spirit's work in teaching that lesson and making it good and bringing us more and more to the measure of His Son.

## Chapter 2 - The Purpose of the Wilderness

Reading: Deut. 1:2-3, 8:2.

In our previous meditation, we were almost entirely on the negative side of this matter, namely, the distance which is the difference between ourselves and Christ. Forty years were taken when eleven days alone were necessary from the divine standpoint, because of the great expanse which lies between what we are, even as the Lord's people, in ourselves, and what the Lord is. This expanse of wilderness was bounded, as we know, at both ends by death; by the Red Sea and by the Jordan respectively. It was a space locked up in death, and, from one standpoint, it is that place in the life of the Lord's people where death has to be applied and made to operate.

Now we rather desire to strike a more positive note and aspect of the matter. It is true that one of the great lessons in the life of the Lord's people is that of the other-ness, the complete other-ness of Christ from what they are; a lesson to be learned in every respect, and along the line of undoing so largely, our undoing. But what is the Lord after? What is the positive outcome of it all in the Lord's mind and will? What issued from the forty years, or what issued from this company of the Lord's people? At the end of the forty years of this wilderness journey, what have we really in hand, so far as this particular company and journey were concerned? We have only two men in hand at the end, Joshua and Caleb. We know that another generation went in, but that is another thing. So far as this particular generation is concerned, all that we have at the end is two men; but what two men! Those two men, one of them perhaps in particular, represented and embodied all that there was to be. The future hung upon them. The Lord's interests for His people were bound up with them. And they were the fruit of this school of the wilderness.

### The Lord's Need of Men and Women of Stature

But let us come to it immediately, without any further delay or going round. What is the Lord after? This came to me with very real force recently in a time of indisposition, and when it seemed that everything on the outside was being narrowed down and the prospects for anything very much of the Lord seemed to be so limited. I was driven very much on the Lord about the whole situation, to inquire very earnestly what it all meant and what it was the Lord was really after, and I can say to you that it came to me, in the way that things do just now and again in a lifetime, as the Lord's own message to the heart; and it amounted to this: "What I am after at this time is men and women of spiritual stature, I am going to need them." That is how it came to me with great strength. When it so happens, it is as though something has been written inside, and you know when you get something like that from the Lord it is life, it is salvation, it is release. And so it was; there was a new sense of meaning, real meaning, in things. Men and women of spiritual stature; I am going to need them!

The whole of this work in the wilderness for forty years was found in two men. You may say, that is a poor issue. Not when you recognize the value of those men and how many there were afterwards who owed everything to the spiritual stature of those men.

You pass on in the Word and you find that fact coming up again and again. You go to 1 Chron. 21, and you know what you have there. David is in the wilderness. All that in a public way is of the Lord is in the hands of a man who had been chosen &#151; representation. Saul holds the public position, but he is man-chosen, and he embodies everything that is man, man in the things of God. But God&#146;s anointed one is there outside for the time being, and he is in the wilderness. In that chapter you have three secessions to David. There is the secession to Ziklag, the secession to the stronghold or cave, and the secession to Hebron; and if you look you will find that those who seceded to David in each and every case are described as men who were able to wield the sword and the spear, men who were able to keep rank and to lead. They of that sort came finally to David at Hebron to turn again the kingdom and make David king over all Israel, and these are they who were needed when the kingdom was turned. When David came to the throne, he needed men of stature for the constituting of the kingdom, for its carrying on. The men of stature had been found in the wilderness. They had come to him, not when all was going well, when there was any appeal to the flesh, when coming to him would have meant popularity, influence in the world. No, everything was to the contrary. They had to leave that realm and come out to the place where everything was in disrepute, in rejection, under ostracism; to be the enemy of what was public religion, the established and acknowledged and recognized thing; to come out and be tested there with David in the wilderness, men of stature whom he was going to need in a coming day.

We need not follow the principle through. You know that it comes up so frequently. The Lord finds a little company, speaking generally, amongst His people and brings them into the difficult school of a spiritual wilderness, to increase their spiritual measure in the light of a need which is coming. We, I think, are not mistaken and wrong in saying that the Lord is not giving a great deal of encouragement in these days to great public movements and efforts and activities in Christianity. That is not His line at the moment. Many who are honestly burdened with the need are straining after something like that, a great movement amongst Christians and in the world, but the Lord has not yet set His seal to anything like that in any very real way. He is not doing it just now.

But I think we are just as right in saying that the Lord is very intensely occupied in an inner, hidden, secret way with many of His children along the line of deep discipline and trial. I do not think there is any doubt about that. This is a time in which the work of God is very much hidden, and is of a very intense kind, with a company within the main company of Christian people. Not all Christian people are going the same way, but there are those who are. To secure men and women of spiritual stature in the light of a need which is coming &#151; that seems to me to be the explanation.

We do not know what that need is. It is useless to try to forecast, to shape, the future. All sorts of things are possible and probable. It is not difficult to imagine &#151; though I think it goes beyond imagination, mere imagination &#151; that the horrors of peace will be greater than the horrors of war. You may say, that is strong speaking. I have used a strong word &#151; horror &#151; but I do not think it is too strong, I do not think it is the wrong word. Perhaps the difficulties and sufferings and trials of peace will be very much greater than those of war. We do not know. I say it is useless to try to forecast the future, but there are such prospects, and if that is so, a very great need is going to exist spiritually. Things are not going to be easy for a long time; they are going to be difficult, hard, tight, perhaps severe. A need is going to arise, and that need is only going to be met by people who know the Lord in a peculiar way, who have proved and come to know the Lord in a wilderness, a spiritual wilderness.

The Measure for which the Lord Looks

What is this stature of which we have spoken? Well, if you investigate the life of Israel in the forty years, you can see something of the meaning of it. Take it, for instance, from the standpoint of reactions, reactions to the situations into which the Lord brought them. The Lord said, I led thee these forty years in the wilderness to prove thee, to try thee, to know what was in thine heart. Really the words there mean more than that; to make thee know what was in thine heart, to bring it to light. It is not as though the Lord did not know their hearts. He knew before the trial was applied, but He put them into a situation to bring it out, to make it manifest. "It was in thine heart"! That could be stated thus, To manifest natural reactions to situations.

Today the situation is one of lack of bread, or tomorrow lack of water, at another time a different situation; and so difficulties, trials, arise along the way of different kinds. What is the reaction? There is nothing wrong with a reaction that is perplexed. There is nothing wrong with a reaction that feels the stress of things. There is nothing wrong with a reaction that says, I do not know what the Lord means by this, I do not know what the Lord is doing with me; I am bewildered! There is nothing wrong with such a reaction at all. But what actually took place was that they were embittered against the Lord. The New Testament way of putting it is, that they hardened their hearts in the day of trial (Heb. 3:8). They were embittered, they allowed themselves to be soured by trial, they turned in their hearts against the Lord. They lost their concern for the things of the Lord. The way was hard, very hard, but the effect which they allowed the difficulties to have upon them was just that "Oh well, if the Lord does not please me, I have no interest in His affairs; if the Lord does not do what I want Him to do, well, I am just going to let go! That is a state that is nature, a state of the human heart. It is a wrong interpretation of the Lord's way, the Lord's dealings and experiences. That sort of thing can drag on until the heart becomes stony and the life is lost entirely as a positive thing to the Lord.

The spirit of grace produces another kind of reaction. It does not take the sting out of trial, it does not prevent the trial being a trial and fire being fire, it does not make us insensitive to difficulty, but the spirit of grace, the spirit of faith, says, Well, it is hard, it is difficult, the Lord is not doing what I expected, what I would like; He is doing just the opposite, and in every way He is emptying me and breaking me, and withholding what I in my heart would like; but He knows what He is doing. "He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." He knoweth! And, beloved, that is stature, that is measure, that is growth, that answers to Joshua and Caleb whose hearts did not turn back, but who wholly followed the Lord.

Oh, I know this must not be a hard word, and it is not said harshly at all. There is not one of us who has not suffered in this way. We have all got confessions to make about our reactions to the Lord's dealings. Maybe there are some here who have lost the flame, the warmth, who have lost zeal, who are letting go, who are not concerned about the Lord's interests so much as they were, because the Lord has not taken them up along the line of their own desires and expectations and ambitions, but has frustrated all that again and again. If you are there, I want you with me to try to recognize the seriousness of the crisis of that position. My dear friend, whoever you may be, if you are in that particular state or peril just now, a coming need is the strength of appeal for you to stand up and seek to trust the Lord in your dark day in a new way when you cannot understand, to have confidence in Him in this time when you feel that, so far as His ways with you are concerned, they are calculated to undermine all confidence. The Lord has a need which is going to arise, and He is going to need men and women of measure, of stature, and He has been trying to make you such in the light of that coming need.

I do believe that the ordinary Christian resource and Christian life and Christian measure of today is not going to meet the need of a near tomorrow. It is already failing. Leaders, if they only would be honest and confess it &#151; and some have already done so &#151; would say: We are failing, our methods have not succeeded, we are not meeting the situation; the need is beyond us, we have not got what is required! That is more or less recognized by responsible people today, and there are many who are deeply aware of that need, but they do not know what to do, where to turn, which way to look: so they just have to stay where they are. If only they knew where to find what they sense to be necessary, they would be there. Is God going to take no account of that? Is He not true to His word, &#147;Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled&#148;? Is He not going to satisfy the hungry soul? Is there going to be real need, and the Lord be indifferent to it?

But the Lord&#146;s way is not to meet it direct from heaven. He needs you, He needs me, but we have to have it to give. We are &#147;stewards of the manifold grace of God.&#148; And what is a steward? A steward is one who knows what His Lord has, has an entr e to it, a right to it, and knows what to bring forth for the specific case: a steward, one of understanding and resource. The Lord is needing stewards, He is wanting to make stewards, and that is what He is trying to do with many today. He has cut off a great deal that was good. There was nothing wrong with it in itself, but as the good was the enemy of the best, it had to be cut off. We had to be separated unto something. We are not going to judge anybody who may still be in things we have felt we must leave behind; we thank God for every measure there is of Himself however limited. But the Lord in His sovereignty does so work as to deal with a people in the light of a greater need, and that is His message to us today. I have less doubt about the truth of that than about anything else. If I am speaking in the name of the Lord at all, that is His word to you. A need is growing, it exists, and it is coming into manifestation, and for this a stewardship will be necessary, men and women of stature, Joshuas and Calebs, and such as those who came out to David, such as have wholly followed the Lord.

#### Trial is Meant to Yield Measure

Well, what is our reaction to the Lord&#146;s dealings with us? Are we less concerned than we once were? If we become petulant, peevish, displeased with the Lord, anything like that, that proves beyond any doubt that we have interests of our own: nature was in this thing, it was not all the Lord. And so it has had to be exposed, we have had to know what was in our hearts.

But there are two ways, you see, even of coming to the place where it does not matter to us what happens to us. Under trial we can come to the place where at length we break away, saying, The Lord does not care, does not hear; oh well, it does not matter; if the Lord is not concerned about it, I&#146;ll just let it go! We can drop out like that, petulant, disappointed, soured by trial and adversity: it does not matter, we have lost interest. That is one position; and you will acknowledge that is not right, there is something wrong with that.

But there is the other position. It does not matter what happens to me, it does not matter what happens to my interests, it does not matter at all whether I myself am used or not in this thing that the Lord wants to do: all that matters is that the Lord gets what He is after, and gets it in His way. So far as I am concerned, what happens to me is quite a secondary matter! That is stature, that is measure, that is Christ. &#147;The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life&#148; (Mark 10:45). It does not matter what happens to me, so long as the Lord gets what He is after. Does it matter to you? How does it matter? Why does it matter? The answer to that determines our spiritual measure, and it

determines whether the Lord is going to be able to meet His need by means of us when that need is manifested. I do not believe the Lord will ever have spiritual measure in a life without using it, without finding a way for it. But oh, so many of us have come to the place where our one cry is, Lord, do not draw upon me beyond my measure, do not put me into a position for which I am not fitted, do not involve me in responsibility for which I am not qualified!

And what is qualification, what is fitness? It is simply Christ.

#### The Measure of Christ

Well now, we come back to this wilderness, and you see everything was on that basis; nothing whatever was of man in that wilderness from God's side, nothing at all. Everything was forbidding from one standpoint. Take that tabernacle, the outer court with its curtain stretched right round, and so high; there is no getting through, and no looking over. It all says, Keep out! Everything says, If you come inside here, you die! Keep out! There is but one way in, and that is through sacrifice; and that is your death representatively. You come in here, and your life is taken. It is all so forbidding, from one standpoint.

And yet from the other standpoint, there is the representing of the people in the presence of God. But how could it be? Well, from the first word to the last, it is all Christ. The whole of that structure of the tabernacle came from heaven. Not one idea was allowed to come from man's mind. It was not left with man to produce one thought as to the manner of that tabernacle, or how it should be built; from start to finish, it came from heaven. That is the other-ness of Christ. The ideas are God's, not ours. Though we may be the Lord's people, it is still not a case of our ideas, but God's. Not a single thought from us is allowed. The fellowship, the access, the communion &#151; oh, you cannot come in there save on the ground of Christ. It is by sacrifice. That sacrifice is Christ. It is by priesthood. That priesthood is Christ. The very garments all speak of Christ. It is Christ, only Christ, and you cannot come in except as Christ, so to speak. You are only accepted in the Beloved. You are never accepted in yourself, not even as the Lord's child.

And what of service? &#147;Let my people go that they may serve me&#148;, the Lord had said to Pharaoh (Ex. 9:1). But what is the service in the wilderness? It is priestly service. The Levites represent the service of the Lord's people. Priests and Levites &#151; what are they? Why, their very adornment, their very clothes, are all types speaking of Christ. Everything about these priests and Levites is symbolical, representative of Christ. So that service is Christ, and you and I are shut out, even as the Lord's people, shut out in our own natures. Everything is God's thought here. All access in God's thought is Christ. All service is Christ, and only as you and I learn Christ, put on Christ, walk in Christ, and live Christ, have we any place, and the measure in which that is so determines the measure of our value to the Lord, our usefulness to Him.

And for this present moment the increase of Christ in us is by that ruling out, putting aside, thrusting back of our own encroachments and impingements, even in the things of God, the pushing back by the Lord saying, I do not want you! That is how it seems. That is how we feel rebuffed so often. But there is another interpretation. WE are wanting to get in. The Lord says, No, there is no place here for you, keep out; this place is reserved for My Son; your appreciation of Him is the measure in which you come in here; your abiding in Him is the measure of your standing here; your being hidden in Him, covered by Him, is the measure of your acceptance!

And for the coming need the Lord is intensifying the process, taking us deeply and soundly into this in our experience. Presently, perhaps, we shall thank the Lord for it all. We have been able to meet a need which was too deep for anything ordinary to meet. If we had not been that deep way, we could not have met that deep need. If we had not known those bitter fires, we could not have served that divine purpose. Whatever else the Lord is doing &#151; and I am not saying this is the only thing He is doing &#151; whatever else He is doing, He is doing this, and whether it be for this life here or for His Kingdom afterwards, there is no doubt or question about the truth of this principle. For the kingdom now in this life spiritually, and for that kingdom which follows the Lord must have at hand men and women of stature. May we find the grace to follow Him wholly.

### Chapter 3 - The Entry Into The Land

Reading: Deut. 1:2-3, 8:2; Heb. 3:19, 4:1.

We have been thinking of the distance of difference between Christ and ourselves. In virtue of the shed and sprinkled blood, Israel had been brought out of Egypt and made the people of God; they were the Lord's redeemed ones. But even so a fact existed which could not be overlooked, ignored or made light of, a fact which had to be recognised, and fully so. That fact was, and is, that even when we are the Lord's, in ourselves there is a vast distance of difference between ourselves as ourselves and Himself. Eleven days and forty years &#151; not a fixed period, a period fixed by God; that is, not of necessity forty years. The distance is determined, not by geography or time, but entirely by the appropriation of faith.

#### Entering into God's Rest

What is the end of the journey, the goal? What is it all unto? God calls it &#147;My rest&#148;. Rest, God's rest, that is the end of the journey, and how soon we reach the end of the journey entirely depends upon our apprehension of the meaning of rest, our faith's apprehension of the meaning of rest. You can be out of Egypt and into the end of the journey in no time where faith is large enough for it. But &#147;we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief&#148;. The end of the journey is always immediately present to faith. It is not distant. It is nearer or farther according to faith.

#### Faith's Foundation for Entering into God's Rest

But we want to understand what the basis of this faith is, and therefore what the meaning of God's rest is. We have said that it is the apprehending of Christ. This letter to the Hebrews, which brings the journey and its end so much into view, is entirely given up to laying the foundation of faith unto God's rest. Chapter by chapter or stage by stage, it presents us with that foundation, or those foundations. We might just look at one or two of them, but we begin with the all-inclusive and comprehensive one, the presentation of Christ at the beginning of the letter. There the whole background of all the rest is presented to us, the foundation of all that follows.

#### a) God given to us in Sonship

It is that Christ is God given to us in Sonship: &#147;the express image&#148;, &#147;the effulgence&#148;; to use the words of the prophet, &#147;unto us a son is given&#148; (Is. 9:6). Not only &#147;a child is born&#148;, but &#147;a son is given.&#148; It is God manifest in the flesh, Christ is God. Again, referring to the prophet's words, &#147;His name shall be called Wonderful,

Counsellor, Prince of Peace, Father of Eternity; or Everlasting Father. This Son is called that, the Father of Eternity.

What is the value of that for rest, for faith unto rest? Oh, surely it must appeal to our hearts as being of supreme and infinite significance. You see what the apostle is saying here. In the past the great revelations of God Himself were mediated through angels. What mighty and marvellous things were done through angels! The greatest things in that dispensation were done through angels. God came to men through angels. God communicated Himself through angels, revealed His mind through angels, and exercised His power through angels. The angels of God were constantly ascending and descending in that dispensation, to carry on the purpose of God amongst men. The highest form of God's manifestation was through angels.

But here the apostle says: not unto angels, not through angels, but better than angels, higher than angels, Son-wise. God has given Himself in terms of Sonship. It is a great word of the prophet, "Jehovah has become my salvation" (Is. 12:2). Yes, the Name, the highest Name of all, Jehovah, the Lord Jehovah has become my salvation. Not a representative of the Lord, not even an angelic representative, but Jehovah Himself has become my salvation. The Lord Himself has come forth in this matter of our salvation, and if that is true, well, we must believe, our faith must go the whole way and believe either that Jehovah can fail or that He cannot, that Jehovah can do His work or He cannot, Jehovah can see this through or He cannot. If Jehovah cannot, it cannot be seen through. It is ultimate, final. It is no less than the Lord Himself.

That is the significance bound up with this first presentation in the letter to the Hebrews; the effulgence of His glory, the express image of His Person. God in Christ in terms of Sonship (the significance of which we shall note again in a moment) has come forth. That is the foundation of everything. The Lord personally, directly, immediately and absolutely, has taken this thing in hand. He has not committed it to the hands of angels or men, but has said, I Myself will accomplish this thing, I will go down and do it! "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). That is the full foundation for faith that can lead us into rest, and immediately the journey is shorter or longer according to our apprehension of that; whether we are able to stand alongside of the apostle, even when the gale is blowing, the storm is as a blast, and say, I believe God! (Acts 27:25). I say the journey to rest is shorter or longer according to our ability to take that position. If Israel in the wilderness had taken that position, it would not have been forty years; but they did not believe God.

#### b) God in Christ our Kinsman

Then you pass on in this letter and you find that is broken up, expressed in different forms. In the next place, God is revealed in Christ as having come to us in kinship. Passing into chapter 2 from verse 10, you know that sublime section about "I and the children whom God hath given me"; "I and the brethren"; "I will declare thy name unto my brethren". Or again, "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same." And then about the sons; "bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Children, brethren, sons: God has come forth in terms of sonship to bring about a kinship, to be the redeeming kinsman Himself. It is God Who is redeeming in Christ. Heirship; "joint heirs with Christ"; (Rom. 8:17), and so on. He is redeeming the lost inheritance, He is the redeeming kinsman. If redemption is to be at all, it must be by somebody Who Himself has a right to redeem because He is in the family, and Who Himself can and will make the family's

condition His responsibility.

The family has lost its inheritance, has lost its all. Somebody has to take responsibility for recovering, and God in Christ has come down to take responsibility for our lost heritage, to recover it all in terms of kinship. The Father through the Son has done it. The point that I want specially to emphasize is that it is God Who has assumed this form of a kinsman to redeem, and if it is God Who has taken responsibility for it &#151; and He has &#151; that is the basis of faith unto rest.

You see how impossible it would be, because of the utterness of the situation, for anyone to enter into rest and deny God. You cannot enter into rest if you deny God. We are not dealing with truth, we are not dealing with doctrine, we are not dealing with things, we are not dealing even with angels, great as they are. We are dealing with God, and here He is coming to us in and through His Son in terms of kinship, so that in Christ He is to us our brother, our brother to redeem, taking responsibility. Usually even in earthly families, the elder brother is looked up to and trusted. So often he is the most wonderful person in the family for the rest of the family. There is nothing he cannot do. It is not always so, but so often it is. That is the idea brought in here. It is a family of sons that God has constituted, with the eldest Son, Who was able and willing to take full responsibility for the family&#146;s title, the family&#146;s heritage, the family&#146;s destiny, the family&#146;s honour, and to secure it all in Himself. That is what is being said here. He has done that. What could we do? Nothing! But He has done it, and faith apprehending that can enter into rest, God&#146;s rest.

#### c) God in Christ His own Priest

But then we pass on and find the next phase, God in Christ becoming His own priest. Priests have failed, failed to carry things through to finality. They all failed, they made nothing perfect &#151; that is the argument here. So God Himself became His own priest. It is God in Christ in priestly activity carrying out all the functions of priesthood, and the functions of priesthood are just to satisfy God in all His requirements. This is where the subtle fascination and attraction and power of Rome lurks. The Roman system is built upon the idea of priesthood. The priest stands between you and God, and stands for you, and all you have to do is to pass everything over to him and take no responsibility yourself; you need not take any responsibility, the priest will take all responsibility for you. That, of course, has degenerated into this kind of saying: Do as you like, pay the priest and he will clear it up with God. But behind that there is this fact that man craves to have the responsibility God-ward taken off himself by somebody, to be freed from that responsibility for himself, and to come to that absolute rest where the responsibility is not his at all. The Roman system has provided a false answer to that craving of man and put man in a false position. But the craving remains. You and I have it. Our deepest longing and need is for a priest, somebody to take responsibility for us, so that we do not have to take that responsibility. Oh, that I might be free from an evil conscience, may be perfectly at rest because someone all the time is standing and answering to God for me. And here it is: God has said, I will answer to Myself for you, I will be My own priest to satisfy Myself on your behalf.

We find it such a difficult lesson to learn, just what the High Priestly function and ministry of our Lord Jesus is. &#147;Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us&#148; (Heb. 7:25). You notice what the apostle says about His being able to sympathize because He Himself has been here, been where we are, been along our road, knows all about it, been tempted in all points as we are, although without sin. He has been here and He is a sympathetic High Priest, He understands it all. He is not a stranger, and He ever liveth to make intercession in perfect sympathy, and He is there taking responsibility for us before God. Is

not that a ground of rest? Ought we not to be at the journey's end much more quickly if only faith could grasp that. Apart from faith, we shall all the time be trying to put ourselves right with God and be stuck on the road, going round in the wilderness. Progress waits upon faith's apprehension of this thing. Cast the responsibility for your salvation and sanctification upon the One Who has taken that responsibility.

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