

# **Discipleship in the School of Christ**

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Originally published by Witness and Testimony Publishers, 1962. This version published by Emmanuel Church, Tulsa, OK.*

## **Preface**

### **Chapter 1 - The Chief Occupation of a Disciple**

### **Chapter 2 - The Nature of Divine Life**

### **Chapter 3 - The Quality of Divine Life**

### **Chapter 4 - Divine Life, Unlimited by Time and Space**

### **Chapter 5 - Divine Life and Deliverance from Bondage to Sin and Death**

### **Chapter 6 - Divine Life: All-Sufficient and Inexhaustible**

### **Chapter 7 - Divine Life: Triumphant Over Natural Forces**

### **Chapter 8 - Divine Life by Spiritual Sight**

### **Chapter 9 - Divine Life: Overcoming Death in its Fullness**

## Preface

The following messages were given at the conference in Switzerland in 1962, and readers will detect some local touches, and some features of the spoken form. We have been repeatedly asked to publish these meditations, and in doing so we can only hope that many more will be able to profit by them. It has been our aim to keep the teaching closely related to life in its practical needs and demands. A messenger can do little - if anything - more than faithfully deliver his message. The Lord Jesus Himself could only do this, and then pray. Surely we cannot cease to give the truth because many who hear it fail to express it after hearing! It is always a matter of 'casting the bread upon the waters', or 'sowing beside all waters', not 'heeding the cloud or the rain'. Ministry is always a work of faith. Eternity alone may *show* the value. We therefore commit these messages to the Spirit of God to make all that He can of eternal value; and we trust that the readers will seek to make it *applied* truth, and not only more information.

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

## Chapter 1 - The Chief Occupation of a Disciple

In this initial chapter we shall be laying the foundation for what is to follow. Later we shall be breaking up the whole ground that we shall be covering now, and we shall get to the real application of the Lord's Word, but this chapter will be of a general character, but quite important.

You will know that in the New Testament the Lord's people were called by various names, and these were the names by which Christians came to be known. Most of the names were given to them by themselves, but there were two exceptions. The name 'Christian' was someone's joke. The inhabitants of Antioch, who loved to tack a name on to everyone, found this a very suitable title for these people and so they called them Christians. And then there was another word which was taken over from more common use, and, whilst not particularly their own choice for themselves, it became the name by which they were more usually known than any other.

The various names, as you will remember, were: Disciples; Believers; Saints; Brethren; People of the Way; and Jesus called them 'My Friends'.

There you have six different titles for the Lord's people, and every one of them was intended to embody and convey some special idea. Put the Lord Jesus in the centre, and all these titles indicate that His people are gathered around Him. Around Him are the disciples, the believers, the saints, the brethren, the people of the Way, and those of whom He speaks as 'My Friends'.

It is the first of these titles that is going to occupy us mainly, and it is possible that we will not be able to go beyond this one.

The first title, then, is 'Disciples'. That name had a double implication. There was that which it implied where people were concerned and that which it implied where the Lord was concerned. As to those who were called disciples, it simply meant that they were learners. The title came from a Greek word which just meant 'to learn', but it had an active element in it and signified something more than just learning in the head: it meant putting into practice what was learnt. So disciples were people who learned and then put into practice what they learned.

It is interesting to notice that this name for the Lord's people occurs thirty times in the Book of "the Acts of the Apostles". That means that it was a name which continued after Jesus had gone and indicated that they were still learning and putting into practice what they were learning. We usually think of the disciples as related to the Lord Jesus when He was here, but the name 'disciple' goes on a long time after Jesus went from this world. Indeed, it continues until today, and I do want you to realize that we are here at this time as disciples: those who are learning from the Lord Jesus in order to put into practice what we learn. That is what the name means where we are concerned. We are meant to be the disciples of Christ *now*.

Then the name carried with it an implication where the Lord Jesus was concerned. Of course, it just meant, and still means, that He is the Teacher, the One from whom we have to learn everything. That name was often used about Him when He was here, and in that capacity He had four names: Teacher; Rabbi; Rabboni; and Master. You will remember that He was called by all those four titles. They addressed Him as 'Teacher' - Nicodemus said: "*We know that thou art a teacher come from God*" (John 3:2). But He was a different kind of teacher from all other teachers. He was not a teacher of the schools, for His teaching was spiritual, not academic. But this name 'Teacher' carried with it something very important and very rich. We are going at this time to be very much occupied with the Gospel by John, because it is there that we learn more deeply of the meaning of the Lord Jesus. The little phrase 'to know' occurs fifty-five times in that Gospel, and that very phrase belongs to the teacher and to the disciples. It is perfectly clear in the Gospel that the subject is 'To know', for it is all about knowing, and Jesus is the spiritual Teacher.

And then the phrase 'The Truth' occurs twenty-five times in that Gospel. To what does 'To know' relate? "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32). So 'the truth' mentioned twenty-five times is linked with 'to know' occurring fifty-five times.

Then another phrase is linked with those two: 'The Light', which occurs twenty-three times. 'To know the Truth by the Light' is the subject of John's Gospel, and, indeed, describes the school of the disciples.

All that is connected with the title 'Teacher'.

The name 'Rabbi' is used separately of the Lord Jesus. In the Gospel by Mark He is called 'Rabbi' three times, and in Matthew four times, but this title is not used once in the Gospel by Luke. You will see why in a moment. In John Jesus is called 'Rabbi' eight times - more than in all the other three Gospels put together. It is quite clear from that what John is really seeking.

'Rabboni' does not occur often. It is an intensified form of 'Rabbi'. You will remember that Mary Magdalene cried 'Rabboni' in the garden on the resurrection morning, when Jesus turned to her and said 'Mary'. It simply means 'the great Teacher' and it only comes in John's Gospel.

But why did Luke leave out this title of 'Rabbi'? In his Gospel the Lord Jesus is called by a fourth title more than He is in any of the others. Luke's favourite title for Him in this capacity is 'Master', and when you remember the object of his Gospel, which was to set forth Jesus as the very perfect Man, then you understand why he preferred this title. Jesus is the Master Man, and Luke meant to say: 'We are all the servants of that Man.'

I have said all that just to introduce this matter of discipleship and to show that the great business of Christians is to learn Christ. This is not just a subject to study. I want to ask you: What is the greatest desire in your life? I wonder if it is the same as mine!

The greatest desire in my heart - and the longer I live the stronger it grows - is to understand the Lord Jesus. There is so much that I do not understand about Him. I am always coming up against problems about Him, and they are not intellectual problems at all, but spiritual ones: problems of the heart. Why did the Lord Jesus say and do certain things? Why is He dealing with me as He is? He is always too deep for me, and I want to understand Him. It is the most important thing in life to understand the Lord Jesus. Well, we are here that He may bring us to some better understanding of Himself. The material of the word will not be new - it will be old and well-known Scripture. Perhaps we think that we know the Gospel by John very well. Well, you may, but I do not. I am discovering that this Gospel contains deeper truth and value than I know anything about, and I trust the Lord will make us all see that as we go on.

That has to do with the disciples, who are learners, but what about the Teacher Himself? What is His subject? Every teacher has his subject. Some teach theology, and others teach science, or philosophy, or art, or engineering, or various other things. What is the subject of the Lord Jesus?

(I would like to send you to your rooms to put your answer down on a piece of paper, and I think it would be very interesting if I were to read out all the answers later on!)

However, the answer is: Himself. He is His own subject. Jesus was always the subject of His own teaching. He related everything to Himself. He said: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6): "*I am the good shepherd*" (John 10:14): "*I am the bread of life*" (John 6:48): "*I am the door*" (John 10:9): "*I am the resurrection, and the life*" (John 11:25). He is His own subject. He spoke about many things, but He always related them to Himself. He said very much about His Father, and we may come to see something of what He taught about Him, but He always related the Father to Himself and Himself to the Father. He said: "*I and the Father are one*" (John 14:9). He spoke much about the Holy Spirit, but He always related Him to Himself. He said much about man, but He always related man to Himself. His own favourite title for Himself was 'Son of man'. He said much about life, but He always related it to Himself and never thought of life apart from Himself. He said much about light, about truth and about power, but *always* in relation to Himself. He was His own subject of teaching.

But we are going to see that Jesus brought in a complete revolution in this way of teaching Himself. There is no doubt whatever that Jesus created a revolution. Of course, some people would not have it, for it was too revolutionary for them. But others said: "*Never man spake like this man*" (John 7:46 - A.V.). And it is said of Him that "*He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes*" (Mark 1:22). He brought in a complete revolution, but He did it by bringing Himself into view by what He said about Himself. He was always talking about Himself, and He is the only one in this world who has a right to do that. We are here today because He had a right to talk about Himself.

So the one business of disciples is to know Him, and to do what He called His disciples to do: "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me*" (Matthew 11:29). Jesus came to bring

heavenly knowledge in His own person, and in His person we come into heavenly knowledge. It is not just what He says: it is what He says He *is*.

Every true teacher is not one who says a lot of things, but one who, when he says things, gives something of himself. You have had teachers at school, and I had many during my school years. Some taught me, or tried to teach me, this and that and something else - it might be arithmetic, or English language, or one of the many subjects. I hope I learned something from what those teachers said to me, but of them all one stands out in my memory. He said all the things, but he also gave me something of himself. I could say of him: 'He did not only talk; he made an *impression*. He left something with me. I remember him, not for his subject, but for himself. He made a difference in my life.' And that is the kind of teacher Jesus is. He did not just say things, or teach subjects only. His subjects were very wonderful, as we have seen: the Father, the Spirit, life, and so on, but Jesus gave more than words. When people listened to Him they said: "*Never man spake like this man.*" He made an impression on their lives and they carried something away. Afterwards, it says, "*they remembered his words*" (Luke 24:8). Something had entered right into the deep places of their lives and they were able to say: 'I not only learned certain truths from Jesus, but I have got something in my life from my Teacher. I have been influenced by Him.' Jesus said: "*The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life*" (John 6:63). That is something more than words.

The question which covers and governs all learning is this: Why did the Lord Jesus Christ come into this world? Of course, you might answer that in simple fragments of Scripture. You might say: "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (1 Timothy 1:15). That is the Scripture and is quite true. Or you might say: "*The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10), which is also quite true. There are many other things like that which seem to answer the question, but you need to put them all together - and even then you do not have the full answer. It has many more aspects than those! We have to approach it by two steps, and the first is a very big step indeed.

The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem was not the birth of the Son of God. He did not begin His existence when He came into this world: He was with the Father before ever this world was. He said: "*O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*" (John 17:5). We do not know when He began to have His being, but it was somewhere, if at any time at all, before time began. He was with the Father from everlasting. If you can fix the date of the first words in the Bible, then you know the answer. Perhaps you are wondering why I am saying this? Because this is where the Gospel by John begins, and you can never understand the Lord Jesus until you begin back there: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1:1). That is where the teaching begins. Oh, we have come into a very big school! It is the School of Eternity. We are going to see later on how that applies to us. It is one of the things that I hope we are going to learn, but for the moment we just have to note this: that it was not the beginning of Jesus when He came into this world.

The other step is this: His coming into this world in human form definitely related to mankind. He did not completely break with His deity, but He came in the form of humanity, and that means that His coming had something vitally connected with human life. 'It is not unto angels: it is unto men.' He came as Man to men in order to teach men. God was in Christ, but in human form in order to do something in man: not only *for* man, but *in* man. God could have done everything *for* man without coming in human form, but in order to do something *in* man he had to come in the form of a man.

The full answer to our question, then, is this: Jesus came to bring in His own person all that which man was intended to have, but never had. Man was intended by God to have something that he has never yet had. He missed it by his disobedience and has never possessed what God intended him to possess. And man as he was never could possess it, so there had to be another kind of Man to bring it to man.

And we repeat: the answer to our main question is just this. Jesus came to bring in His own person all that which God meant man to have, but which he had never had. That is why the teaching of Jesus was always united with His acts. Do you notice that? After Jesus said something He did something to prove it, and He never said anything about Himself without doing something to prove it. Did He say: "*I am the light of the world*" (John 9:5)? Then He opened the eyes of a man born blind. Did He say: "*I am the resurrection, and the life*" (John 11:25)? Then He raised Lazarus from the dead. And so He was always uniting His words with acts, His works with His teaching. He was not just saying things, but with the saying He was doing. That still continues to be His method, and is what you and I have to understand. I hope we are going to learn that in these days, and that it will not just be only words, but the works of the Lord Jesus accompanying the words.

There is something that we could just put in at this point which is very helpful. There is something very unusual about this great Teacher. Have you noticed the kind of disciples that He chose? Why did the Lord choose that kind of disciple? What kind of people were they? They were not the great scholars of the day, nor men with university degrees. I think we could say that on the whole they were a poor lot and seemed to have poor brains. They were always misunderstanding what He said, or failing to grasp the point. They were always forgetting things He had said to them and He had to remind them later on, or bring these things back to them by the Holy Spirit. Paul's description of the Christians at Corinth fitted these disciples well: "*Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble... God chose the foolish things of the world... God chose the weak things of the world...*" (1 Corinthians 1:26,27). Now, that is not the way in which the world goes to work. You would not stand a chance today if you were a Peter, or a James, or a John, in any high position in this world. Why did He choose those men? Because there was plenty of room in them for what He had come to bring. They were not already full or strong. In a sense they gave Him a very good opportunity for putting into them what they did not have. The people in Christ's day who had it all never got anything. You know how true that was! The full went away empty and the empty went away full. That is something for us to learn!

One of the things that we have to leave down in the valley when we come up on to the mountain is our ignorance. You will say: 'Ignorance means "I don't know"', but just think again. What is the hallmark of ignorance? It is: 'I know it all.' Is that not true? The really ignorant people are those who think that they know everything.

I remember a certain lady some years ago. I do not profess to be a great teacher, but to every sentence that I uttered she said: 'I know it! I know it!' That would have been all right if her life had proved that she *did* know it, but it proved that she did *not* know it, and you could get nowhere with that dear soul because of: 'I know it! I know it!' The mark of ignorance is knowing it all, and that is one of the things to leave down there when we come up on to the mountain.\* We must be teachable, empty, weak, foolish in our own eyes, just nobody. The School of Jesus Christ is filled with people like that - and that is why He chose the men that He did.

Let us remember that we are His disciples and still have everything to learn. We really understand the Lord Jesus very little, but He is amongst us as Rabboni, our great Teacher, and I believe that He will reveal Himself to us if our hearts are open to Him.

*\* Spoken at the Conference among the mountains in Switzerland.*



## Chapter 2 - The Nature of Divine Life

*"I came that they might have life" (John 10:10).*

We come back to the Gospel by John, for we have seen that this is the Gospel of spiritual education. The others are largely a matter of history - the history of the earthly life, work and teaching of the Lord Jesus, but the Gospel by John is the spiritual life and interpretation of Christ in Person. Do you notice how the Gospel begins? It begins with these words: *"In him was life; and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4). The main part of the Gospel ends with these words: *"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name"* (John 20:30,31). (Notice that chapter 21 is something added on afterward - it is quite clear that John intended to finish with what is chapter 20, and he really finished with these words.) The Gospel begins with: 'In Him was life'. It ends with: 'That ye may have life'. The main Gospel comprises twenty chapters, and halfway through twenty is ten. In chapter 10, verse 10, we have: *"I came that they might have life"*.

The beginning: 'In Him was *life*'; the middle: 'I came that they might have *life*'; the end: 'Believing, ye may have *life*'. In that one word 'life' we have the full answer to our question: 'Why did Jesus Christ come into this world?'

Note one or two things: All the teaching and works of the Lord Jesus related to this thing that He called life. All His teaching and all His works were in relation to life.

The second thing to notice is this: Jesus demonstrated that to possess this life is a miracle, and showed that it is impossible to have it without a miracle. To come to be possessed by this life is something super-natural.

And the third thing we have to notice is: It is revealed by the Word of God that the possessing of this life is the basis of all God's works. He can do nothing in us until we have this life. He has to stand back and say: 'I can do nothing until I have My life in you.' His life in us is the basis of all His work.

So now we are going to look at this Gospel by John to instruct us in this matter of life.

Notice again what it says in chapter 20: *"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples"*. Note - 'in the presence of His disciples'. John said, in effect: 'All these signs that Jesus did He did in the presence of His disciples.' That was because it was His disciples whom He was teaching. They were the ones who had to learn the meaning of these things because they had to carry on His work. So we can take it that Jesus never performed a miracle unless His disciples were there. If there was some great work to be done, He looked round to see if the disciples were there. He was not just doing these things for the benefit of the multitude, though they may have had some benefit, as in the case of the feeding of the five thousand, but these things were for the education of the disciples. Jesus was most careful that they came

to understand the meaning of what He was doing. We are going to see how important that is.

I do hope that when I use that word 'disciple' you are not thinking back two thousand years! I think the majority of the people here, if not all, are disciples: those who are learning Christ. Just as the chief business of the disciples in those days was to learn Christ, so it is our chief business today. The most important thing for Christians is to learn Christ.

We turn once more to those two verses at the end of chapter 20, and I want you to underline three words: In "*Many other signs did Jesus*" underline the word 'signs'. In "*These are written that ye may believe*" underline the word 'believe'. And in "*that believing ye may have life in his name*" underline the word 'life'. *Signs - believe - life*. The whole of this Gospel is summed up in those three words, and we are going to look at them for a few minutes

Firstly: *signs*. The whole of the teaching of the Gospel by John is gathered around seven signs, and they were seven especially selected signs. John says: 'Many *other* signs did Jesus', and that if they were all written "*even the world itself would not contain the books*" (John 21:25). There must have been many more signs, but John has selected seven and has gathered the whole of this matter of learning Christ into them.

There are four words used for 'miracles' in the New Testament. In some places they are called 'wonders', and that conveys the idea of something quite unusual, extraordinary, a wonderful thing. In other places they are called 'powers', which conveys the idea of spiritual, super-natural energy. In other places they are called 'paradoxes', which, as you know, is a contradiction. They were called 'paradoxes' because they were something which contradicted the natural order of things. But the fourth word for 'miracles' is this one which John always chose and is his favourite word for them. He always called them 'signs', which meant that these works indicated something more than themselves. The work was not just something in itself: there was a meaning behind it. It signified something. There was the actual work, but it had a spiritual meaning and was a sign of something more. That is John's word for 'miracle'.

We leave that for the moment - we are going to take it up again.

The second word: *believe*. This is the key word to the whole of the Gospel by John and occurs ninety-eight times in it. Everything in this Gospel gathers around that word: "That ye may *believe*". But what does the word 'believe' mean? It means two things, which are in the word itself. It means an acknowledgment of the truth, that is, the reaction which says: 'That is true', or 'He is true', 'I believe He is true'. But it means more than that. The word in the Greek means: 'Believing that it is true, you commit yourself to the one who says it.' John puts that in another way in one place: "As many as *received* him" (John 1:12). That is only another way of saying 'They committed themselves to Him'. Believing is not only a mental thing: it is the committing of the life to the one whom you believe. I once heard Dr. Billy Graham put it in a very simple way. I was sitting on the platform just behind him, and, as you know, he is quite a big

man physically. He could put his weight on to the platform where he stood. He said: 'Now, when I come on to this platform I do not stand on the steps and say: I wonder if the platform will hold me or whether, if I get on to it, it will collapse and let me down. I have such confidence in this platform that I walk right on to it and commit myself to it. I have no question about the platform. I put my full weight on to it.' He went on to say: 'That is what the New Testament means by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.' 'That *believing*'... that is, committing yourself to the Lord Jesus.

Now our third word - *life*, and this brings us to the main object of our consideration. The signs were the instruments used by the Lord Jesus; the believing was the reaction of men to the signs, and the life was the result of their reaction. They committed themselves and they received life.

Let us look at this life. What is it? What is its nature and what does it mean? I do not think it is necessary to remind you that this is a kind of life that no one has who does not possess the Lord Jesus. The very word that is used for life here is different from other words for life. This is not animal or human life, but divine life, the life which is in God alone. It is a life which is different from every other kind of life because it has a different nature in it. Every kind of life has its own nature, and divine life has divine nature in it. Peter speaks about being made "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4), and with this life the very nature of God is implanted in us. It is a different nature from our own nature. We are going also to see how that is.

But, remember - "In him was life" (John 1:4). Is He different in nature from other men? Everyone can see that He is different from other men in His very nature, and the difference is made by this life that is in Him. This life brings with it a new and different consciousness. Look at the Lord Jesus! What was His real consciousness? This was a thing about which He was always speaking, and it was so very evident in His case. He said: "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30); "*I do always the things that are pleasing to him*" (the Father) (John 8:29); "*The works that I do in my Father's name*" (John 10:25). Oh, this word 'Father' in John's Gospel! The consciousness of Jesus Christ every day was of His union with His Father, the oneness that existed between them: "*As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee*" (John 17:21). The consciousness of the Lord Jesus was of the very closest union with God as His Father, and that was because the very life of God was in Him. His life was a God-conscious life; but God-consciousness in the sense of perfect oneness. And that is what it means to have this life. Man never had that. Jesus came to bring it in His own person: not to talk about union with God, but to live out a life of union with God and to bring His disciples into the same union. "*I came that they might have life*" - in other words: 'I am come that they may have the same consciousness of God as Father that I have and that they may have the same divine nature in them as I have.' (Not deity, but nature.)

This life means another thing. Life must always *grow*. You know that very well! Whatever kind of life it is, if it is really life it must grow. You know that in your garden, and it is true in human beings. The law of life is constant development. This was true of the Lord Jesus. It is said of Him that He was made "*perfect through sufferings*" (Hebrews 2:10) and that word 'perfect' means 'complete'. He was made complete, full-

grown, through sufferings - *"Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered"* (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus was growing by the power of this life in Him, and if we possess this life we should grow. Paul says: *"That we may be no longer children... but may grow up in all things"* (Ephesians 4:14,15)... *"Till we all attain... unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:13). So, to possess this life really means that we ought to be growing, and if we are not there is something wrong with us.

Now notice these things: a different nature - a different consciousness - a different relationship - and a constant growth.

You see how these things are illustrated in this Gospel. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Let us think of Nicodemus as being a perfectly honest man. A great many things have been said about him which are not to his credit, but I believe that he was a very sincere man. He came and he called Jesus 'Teacher' - *"We know that thou art a teacher come from God"* (John 3:2). What did he come to Jesus about? Evidently he had come to talk about the Kingdom of God, because the Lord Jesus read his thoughts. He knew that Nicodemus was interested in the Kingdom of God, but He said to him, in other words: 'You will never get into the Kingdom of God unless you have God's life. You and I cannot even talk about the Kingdom of God because we have not the same life. How do you get this life? You must be born again, and if you have never been born you are not alive.' So it is quite clear that Nicodemus had not the nature of the Kingdom of God because he had not the life. For any of us to get into the Kingdom of God we have to receive the life of God, which is His very nature.

Then we said it is a different consciousness. How beautifully this is illustrated by the woman of Samaria! Poor woman, she wanted to know the secret of life. She had missed it, had tried to find it but had never done so. Hers was only a poor existence! Jesus began to speak to her about life and said, in effect: 'The water that I give you will be living water in you, springing up into eternal life. When you have the life that I can give you, or that is in Me, then you will find the secret of life.' What about this matter of a new consciousness? A whole section of John's Gospel is taken up with this. On one side stands Jesus alone: on the other are the Jewish leaders. They are in two different worlds and do not understand one another - at least, the Jewish leaders do not understand Jesus. How different they are! Jesus puts His finger upon the very point of the difference - He speaks of God as His Father. He says to them: 'You just do not know the Father'... *"Ye are of your father the devil"* (John 8:44) ...*"I came from above - God is My Father."* He had the consciousness of God as His Father and they had no such consciousness, and the reason was that they had not this life in them.

Then what about this matter of constant development? There is a very beautiful illustration of this in John's Gospel, in chapter 12, where Jesus says: *"Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone:"* ...*By itself alone...* *"But if it die, it beareth much fruit"* (John 12:24). The new life that comes in resurrection means that that seed is multiplied a hundredfold. There is no end to the development of it once resurrection life comes into it. There is constant development by the power of this new life, and that is a law of life.

Dear friends, all these things are meant to be true of you and of me, for this is what it means to have this new life. I trust that what we have been able to say makes very real this wonderful thing that Jesus Christ came into the world to give to us. In his Letter John said: "*He that hath the Son hath the life*" (1 John 5:12). If we have the Lord Jesus then we have this life, and what this life is in all these respects is supposed to be true of us. That is the miracle of eternal life. May it be true of every one of us! We have the Son and we have the life; we know that we have the life and that, as we said, we are having it more abundantly, meaning that the life has to grow forever.

### Chapter 3 - The Quality of Divine Life

We have pointed out that the Greek word for disciple means 'a learner', but I want to make a correction to that. The Gospels were not all written originally in Greek, but in Aramaic, and in Aramaic the word 'disciple' does not mean a student, but an apprentice. So we have to make an adjustment. Disciples are not just students - they are apprentices. Jesus was a carpenter and would not think of His disciples just as students. He was far more likely to think of them as apprentices learning a business. You may be an apprentice to engineering, or to the law, and the idea of an apprentice is something quite practical. The idea of a student is only theoretical, and Jesus never wanted His servants to be merely theoretical. He intended them to be very practical, so His training was not in theory but in practice. He was training His disciples for His work: not just to be preachers, but to work. Jesus was not just a lecturer. He was a demonstrator, and there is a lot of difference between a lecturer and a demonstrator! So Jesus took His disciples into very practical situations.

We have shown how John said that Jesus always did His works in the presence of His disciples. He took them into actual situations and involved them in the situations so that they became a part of them. We must remember that because, as we have already said, we are supposed to be disciples. Perhaps you have not thought of this before - but you are apprentices if you are related to the Lord Jesus. That may be a new idea to you, but the reality is no new idea. You know quite well that the Lord Jesus is taking you into very practical situations, and is involving you in situations where you have to learn something. You have to learn how to be the master of a situation, and that is very practical training. So, whether you take the name or not, the truth remains. If we have come into relationship with the Lord Jesus it means that we at once become apprentices.

In the New Testament there were three phases in discipleship.

First of all, there was the *call*, and it seems that this was much more general than the call to the twelve. It is put like this: 'He *called* unto Him whom He would and He *chose* twelve.' The first was a general call. Jesus was calling to people: 'Come, follow Me.' A number of people responded, and then from them He chose twelve. It does not mean that all the others were not faithful or that they were not suitable, but it does clearly show that the twelve came into the real business of their calling.

You can see quite clearly how true this is at all times. There are multitudes of people who are just followers of the Lord Jesus. They would take one of the other names and call themselves Christians. If you said: 'Are you a follower of the Lord Jesus?' they would say 'Yes', but many of these people are not really meaning business with Him. And the Lord must have those who do mean business, so He draws such ones nearer to Himself. It may be one thing to be *called*, but it may be another thing to be *chosen*. You remember that in the Book of the Revelation these words are used when speaking about the followers of the Lamb: "*And they that are with him are called, and chosen*" (Revelation 17:14 - AV). There is a difference between being chosen and being called.

The third phase was that He put them into His business and gave them the great commission. I am going to leave that there for the moment.

What was the work for which the disciples were chosen? I can put that in the present tense, for we are in the same dispensation: What is the work for which the Lord would choose us? The answer is: the work of His Kingdom. Notice: "*And he chose from them twelve*" (Luke 6:13). Twelve is the number of the Kingdom. Jesus was following the pattern of the twelve tribes of Israel, who were to be the kingdom of the coming Messiah. Twelve is the Kingdom number. Jesus has come to set up His Kingdom and has chosen disciples, or apprentices, for the work of that Kingdom.

Here is an important thing for us to notice. Jesus knew beforehand how things were going to work out and exactly what would happen in His own lifetime and afterward. He knew that Israel would refuse Him as the Messiah and as the Head of the Kingdom, and would refuse the Kingdom that He had come to set up. He knew all that beforehand, and so He was working with this foreknowledge. He foreknew that the time would come when He would say to Israel: "*The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matthew 21:43). He was working with this foreknowledge of the transfer of the Kingdom from Israel to the Church. So He chose twelve. This was the nucleus of His new Kingdom, which, as represented by these, will call Him 'Lord'. They will go everywhere proclaiming: 'Jesus Christ is Lord.' They are the people who have come to see by divine revelation the place of Jesus Christ in the appointment of God. They have come to see "*that God hath made him both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36).

So you have the new Kingdom and the new King, but there is a great deal of difference. The old kingdom of Israel was a temporal, earthly kingdom and the new Kingdom is a spiritual, heavenly Kingdom. I am not going to dwell on the Kingdom just now, but we are moving toward something. He chose, and He chooses, for the work of His Kingdom. He puts us into His school as apprentices to learn the nature of the Kingdom, and what the Kingdom of Heaven really is.

The last thing, and where we start again, is the basis of this new Kingdom. What is the basis of this new spiritual and heavenly Kingdom? It is heavenly life, divine life... and now we are back again where we were in the last message. John, introducing the Lord Jesus, said: "*In him, was life*" (John 1:4). Right in the middle of the Gospel he put the words of Jesus: "*I came that they might have life*" (John 10:10). And he summed up the whole of his Gospel with: "*That believing ye may have life*" (John 20:31).

John, as we have said, gathered the whole of his Gospel, his spiritual Gospel of the Kingdom, around seven signs, and those signs are a setting forth of the meaning of this life of the Kingdom. You remember that John said he selected these signs out of a great many more. I like to think of John doing this. He said that the signs which Jesus did were so many that "*if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written*" (John 21:25). And so you can think of John, with this great mass of material, saying to himself. 'Now I want to convey to those who are going to read this the real nature and meaning of this divine

life. I have to select the best illustrations out of this great mass of material.' And so he went through it and said: 'That is the first one, that is the second', and so on, and then 'Those seven will do', and he put these seven signs into his book, which is the Gospel of eternal life. Remember, he called them signs, not miracles, although they were miracles. He did not call them wonders, although they were wonders, nor did he call them powers, although they were powers. He left Matthew, Mark and Luke to call them by those names. He called them signs, which meant that they pointed to something more than themselves. There was the work that Jesus did, which was one thing, but the meaning was another thing. John said: 'I want to get at the meaning through the work.'

You know what the seven signs are in the Gospel by John, but let us just run through them to refresh our memories:

- (1) The Turning of the Water into Wine:
- (2) The Healing of the Nobleman's Son:
- (3) The Raising of the Impotent Man at the Pool of Bethesda:
- (4) The Feeding of the Five Thousand:
- (5) The Walking on the Water:
- (6) The Giving of Sight to the Man born blind:
- (7) The Raising of Lazarus from the Dead.

John said: 'That is quite enough. If only I can get the meaning of those things over, then people will know the meaning of life.'

Now we are going to consider these seven signs, the first of which is the Turning of the Water into Wine.

Reading: John 2:1-11.

Of course, there are many lessons in this incident, but I am going to leave them in order to come to the one main point. We are dealing with the matter of divine life, which Jesus came to give, and we are seeking to understand the nature of that life. I trust it is true of all of us that we have received what the New Testament calls eternal life! But it is important for us to know what it is we have received, that is, what it means to have eternal life, the life which Jesus has brought to us in His own Person. And here you have the first characteristic of that life.

The key to this sign is the verdict of the master of the feast. You can take it that this man knew all about wine, whether it was good or bad. He was an authority on wine. He would not have been responsible for the feast if he did not know what wine was.



Therefore, this authority on wine gives us the secret of the whole thing in his verdict. What was that? "*Thou hast kept the good wine until now.*" If this wine was intended by John and by Jesus to illustrate eternal life, then there is a quality about that life which is different from every other kind of life. Every other kind of life is what this man called 'poor wine', but you never know how poor the other wine is until you have tasted the better. The point is that this life which Jesus gives has a quality in it.

Let us look again at this story and remember that the heart of the incident is the training of disciples. It says: "*And the third day there was a marriage in Cana*". It is not quite easy to understand why John said 'the third day' here. If you read what goes before you say: 'Well, evidently that incident was on the first day, that one was on the second day and this was on the third day' - but it does not say so. All that it says is: 'On the third day'. Does that strike a note? "*He hath been raised on the third day*" (1 Corinthians 15:4). The third day is the day of resurrection, the day when divine life triumphs over death, the day of life. "*And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee.*" John knew what was in his mind when he was writing, for he had one thought running all the way through: 'I am working on the line of resurrection life', and he brought that into everything in his Gospel. And so this verdict of the master of the feast gives us the key to divine life. It is a quality in that life which is quite different from everything else. You can see, as we say, 'by reading between the lines' what the quality of this life is.

This was the reversing of human failure. Someone had failed, had made a terrible mistake: they had not provided enough wine - it says: "*When the wine failed*". That was a terrible thing for a marriage feast, for the wine was everything, and if that failed the whole feast broke down. And what happened? Everybody looked at the master of the feast, and looked on him with reproach: 'Oh, you terrible man! You have spoiled everything. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!' And the poor man bowed his head in shame. He was altogether dishonoured as the master of the feast. Jesus, in bringing in the new wine, removed the human failure and took away all the human shame. He made it possible for this poor man to lift up his head and to feel that the feast was a great success and not a great failure.

Dear friends, that is exactly what divine life does - it takes the failure and shame out of life. It makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and say: 'Life is not a failure, not something to be ashamed of.' We need not hang down our heads in dishonour. We can lift them up and rejoice. Is that not true of the life which the Lord gives? There is a quality about this life which is different - it gives character to the people who receive it. If you think that I am just reading into this something out of my own imagination, I can prove to you that what I have said is true.

I want you to notice the change which came about in these disciples with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Look at them when the wine failed - when Jesus was crucified! It was as though they had lost everything. They were wondering if they had made a great mistake in trusting Him, and were going about with their heads hanging down. They were afraid to meet the people who knew they were His disciples. When Peter, the leader of them, was down in that room warming himself by the fire, a little

serving-maid came in and said: "*This man also was with him*" (Luke 22:56), but Peter said: "*Woman, I know him not*" (Luke 22:57). What shame! What dishonour! Yes, they were men going about with their heads hanging down because they thought the wine had failed.

Look at these men not many days afterward! Their heads are up. They can look the whole world in the face and there is not the slightest sign of any shame about them. They are *boasting* in their faith in the Lord Jesus. What a difference the life has made! Before, they were cowards, afraid even of a little servant maid. Now look at their courage! It is said of the rulers: '*When they beheld the boldness of Peter and John*' (Acts 14:13). From being cowards they became men of courage. From being men who were ashamed to be in the world they became men of dignity - they are standing upright before everybody. From men who were always thinking about themselves and trying to draw everything to themselves - such as the first places in the Kingdom - they are men who have forgotten themselves and are altogether selfless, thinking only of the Lord's interests and not their own.

They had been men who had very little sympathy in their hearts for other people. The poor Canaanitish woman came crying after the Lord to help her daughter and the disciples said: "*Send her away; for she crieth after us*" (Matthew 14:23). When He entered into a certain city the people did not receive Him, so the disciples said: "*Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?*" (Luke 9:54). Mothers brought their little children to Him to get a blessing, and the disciples drove them away. There was not much sympathy in their hearts for other people.

Now look at them! After the resurrection and the life had come into them the whole world is in their hearts, and their hearts have become as large as the whole world. They go everywhere in this great sympathy for sinful men.

In the old days they could not stand up to any kind of difficulty. They began to give up altogether as soon as things went wrong. "*This is a hard saying*" (John 6:60) ... "*Upon this many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him*" (John 6:66). These twelve were all too ready to give up too soon when things became difficult.

Now look at them! What about difficulties? Why, they are greater than anything they had known before! All the rulers, all the world, all the circumstances and the devil himself are against them, but they are going on: they are not giving up. This life has brought into them a new stamina, the power to endure.

All that is in this new wine. There is a quality about this life. It makes us different people from what we are naturally. It puts into us that which was in Christ Himself, and we are better able to understand the words: "*Christ in you the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27). There is not much hope of glory in the old wine, dear friends. There is not much hope of glory in that old, natural life, but it does come with the life which Christ brings. This life is the very character of the Lord Himself.

You see, there was something about Him that was different. The rulers looked at Him and there was a big question on their faces. They were really perplexed and did not know how to explain Him. They saw His life, His work, and the wonderful fact of His life and His work. They heard His teaching and saw how it met the need of the people. And they said: "*Is not this the carpenter?*" (Mark 6:3). But there is something different about this carpenter, something more than just an ordinary carpenter. See His dignity as He walked amongst them - and what dignity there was when He was before Pilate! They tried to make Him look very small, but all that they did to Him did not take away His dignity. What endurance there was in Him! He endured 'to the end'. What a different quality there was in Jesus from other men! It was the quality of the life that was in Him, the very life of God, divine life, eternal life, that explained everything as to His character.

Dear friends, you and I are supposed to have that same life. It was released from Him at the Cross and has been brought to us by the Holy Spirit. Now do we see what it means? There ought to be something about us that is different. Anybody who has any intelligence, like the master of the feast, ought to be able to say: 'These people are different. They have something that we have not. There is character about them.' We as Christians ought to be marked by a spiritual dignity. We ought not to be going about with our heads hanging down, ashamed to be alive! We ought to have our heads up in a right sense. There ought to be real courage about us and endurance of suffering in us. Yes, there is a quality about this life.

I wonder what the verdict of this world is upon us! Does it say - is it able to say: 'Well, our kind of life is poor stuff in comparison with theirs. Their life is different, and it is better. You have kept the best wine till now'?

That is sign Number One. How rich, how challenging it is! It comes home to our hearts with a big question. But, dear friends, if we have the life, and if we allow the life to have its way in us, that is what it will do. We may naturally be poor wine, but when the Lord Jesus comes in with His life, it will be the best wine.

## Chapter 4 - Divine Life, Unlimited by Time and Space

Before we go on to the next of these signs I just want to put in an important word. This does not mean that anything else that is said is not important, but this must be important as the beginning of anything that we say.

When we say so much about this divine life, we are not just thinking about it as some abstract element, but in its true relationship to the Lord Jesus. Jesus Himself is this life and we cannot have the life without having Him. It is not something separate from the person of the Lord Jesus, and I would be very sorry if there should be any thought that we are speaking of some *thing* called life as apart from the person of Jesus Christ. *The life is the way in which the Lord Jesus manifests His person - it is the expression of the divine person.*

That is a very important thing, for it would be quite easy for some people who want to find fault to say: 'You put life in the place of the person.' Well, we have safeguarded ourselves against that accusation. It is the person of the Lord Jesus who is in view, but we can only know that person by the Spirit of life, and the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus, is the Spirit of life. It is not that some abstract element called life is Christ, but Christ personally is the life.

Now, having said that, we can come to the second of the signs chosen by John.

Reading: John 4:45-54.

The key to this incident is in verses 52 and 53: "*So he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. They said therefore unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth.*"

There are several features to note in this story, and the first is that this man of Capernaum was a king's officer and was no doubt a Gentile.

Then we note his courtesy toward the Lord Jesus. He called Him 'Lord' - "*Lord, come down ere my child die*" which was a title of honour and courtesy.

Then we notice his refusal to be offended with the way the Lord Jesus answered him. It did seem sometimes that He answered people in a not very kind way. We saw how He answered His mother at the marriage in Cana when He said: "*Woman, what have I to do with thee?*" (John 2:4). On another occasion, when a Syrophenician woman came in her trouble He did not seem to answer her very kindly. And here is this man coming in a very courteous way and in great trouble, and Jesus just says: "*Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.*" But if you look more deeply into these answers of Jesus you will see why He did it. Sometimes the Lord seems to be very unkind. He is not really so, but He sees that something is very necessary before He can show His kindness, and that is that it is necessary for us to be perfectly clear that it is not just the benefit that we want, but Himself. It is not just faith in what He can do for us, but faith in His own person. Do we want the blessing, or do we want the Lord? The Lord Jesus

is always trying to get us to want Him, and that is exactly what happened here. The man said: 'Lord, come down. It is You I need. I cannot go on without You. This is a matter of life or death.' The Lord Jesus saw that that was his spirit - that he was not going to argue about motives or discuss signs and wonders, but was saying 'Lord, it is You I need' and He always responds to that. Sometimes He seems to be unkind, but it is to find out whether our hearts really want Him or only a blessing. And with this man the result was that "*Himself believed, and his whole house*".

You notice that the word 'believe' is used twice here. When Jesus said "*Go thy way; thy son liveth*", it says that "*he believed the word that Jesus spake*", but it is quite clear from the second use of the word 'believe' that that was a belief with some reservation, or difficulty, or question. I expect the man stood still for a moment and had to ask himself a question: 'Now, if I don't do what He tells me to do, then I am in a desperate situation. I had better believe what He says. I will go, and believe that what He says is all right.' But he was not wholly committed. There is a kind of belief which is not a wholehearted committal. At the end, however, it says: "*Himself believed and his whole house*" and this is complete faith, the kind of belief which commits himself with all that he has.

Well, these are things that we take note of as we go on, but we are really dealing with this matter of life and its nature. It will not take us long to get to the heart of this particular sign. It is a very important feature of this divine life, but it is very simple.

Just look carefully at the story again. We have said that the key of this sign is in verses 52 and 53, and it is the time factor. It was one o'clock in the afternoon when Jesus said: "*Go thy way; thy son liveth*" - and the servant said: "*Yesterday at the seventh hour*". The man knew that that was the time when Jesus said those words. The Jewish day began at six o'clock in the morning and ended at six o'clock in the afternoon, so the seventh hour was one o'clock in the afternoon.

You will remember, perhaps, other time marks in the Gospels. When Jesus yielded up His Spirit to the Father on the Cross, it says: "*A darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour*" (Luke 23:44). That was three o'clock in the afternoon, when the sun ought to have been shining most powerfully.

This time factor is very important, especially in this sign. The Lord Jesus said these words at one o'clock in the afternoon, and the man had to journey, perhaps on foot, all the way from Cana to Capernaum. He started on his long walk. Probably when the sun went down at six o'clock he did not continue his journey, for they did not travel after dark in that country. So he went in somewhere to stay for the night and started again on his journey in the morning. His servants came to meet him. We do not know exactly what the hour was when the servants and the master met, but there was the whole of the rest of the first day, the night, and some of the next morning between his meeting with the Lord Jesus and this meeting. And there were many miles between - a lot of time and a lot of distance; a lot of time and a lot of geography: and the life disposed of all that in an instant. All the time and all the miles disappeared when Jesus spoke His words. The thing happened at the very time Jesus uttered those words away there in Cana - the life came in.

Apparently death had been at work in this child for some time. The Greek word which describes his condition is in the imperfect tense, which means that he had got nearer and nearer to death. It had been coming on for some time. When the man came and said: 'My child is at the point of death', it was just about to finish its history in this child. So the time factor is here as well as the geography factor. Jesus spoke the word and time and geography were no more. It would not have mattered if that child had been six thousand miles away, or if he had been on Venus!

This divine life is a timeless life. It is eternal life, because it is in the eternal Son of God.

John has told us, as we have seen, that all this was to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. How do we know that He is the Son of God? Because He gave us eternal life.

Try this out on someone else - on the Hindu Krishna, for instance, or any other god in this world, and see if it will work half a mile away. And see how long it takes to work. It never works, even right on the spot. But we in this place today are in the benefit of prayer hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles away. If we are knowing something of the presence of the Lord Jesus and His life, it is largely due to prayers many, many miles away. Of course, that is only a human way of putting it. There are no miles nor hours where the Lord Jesus is concerned. His presence means that all those things go. He is God, and one of God's characteristics is omnipresence. He is everywhere, at the same time.

This is something that we can put to the test. Why do we pray for people on the other side of the world? Because we believe that Jesus is more than time and distance. And His people who are knowing the working of death can receive life by our touching the Lord Jesus here. I feel that we, the Lord's people, and the Lord's Church, have not used this great value of life enough. We must believe that people on the other side of the world are as near to Him as we are. And how near to Him are we? He is nearer than hands and closer than breathing.

And He is the same to all His people, wherever they are. I said it would not take long to get to the heart of this sign - but what a wonderful sign it is! Jesus has only to speak a word and all time and distance disappear. This nobleman's faith touched the Lord Jesus and He drew it out. He put that faith to the test. He really said: 'Do you mean business? Do you really trust Me? Or is it signs and wonders that you want? Do you really believe who I am?' All that is in this test, and when this man believed Jesus, even if it was in a weak way, He took that faith, which was only like the grain of mustard seed, and through it the mountain of his trouble disappeared.

The point is that faith always touches the Lord Jesus, and so it touches the eternal Son of God, the universal Son of God, the Son of God who is greater than all time and all distance.

That is the meaning of this sign. You see, when we are really 'in Christ', to use Paul's phrase, we are always regarded as being together, though we may be thousands of miles apart. The Lord Jesus does not look upon us as being in this country, in that

country and in another country. He Himself is the only country in this universe, and so we leave our country and our own nationality when we come into Christ. I think perhaps this is found in the fact that this man is a Gentile. The Jews were exclusive and said: 'We are the only people and our country is the only country.' Jesus went outside those frontiers and touched the world outside. This man was a representative of all the nations, for he was a Gentile. In the Lord Jesus every earthly division is removed. There are no British, Swiss, German, French or Indian in Christ. He is only one nationality and that is a heavenly one. He is only one language and that is a spiritual one. He is the heavenly country. No matter what we are here, in Him we are all together as one man in Christ. All the earthly distinctions of place and time disappear in Him. It may take us a long time to travel about this world, though men think it is a very wonderful thing to travel at so many hundred or thousand miles a minute and get to the moon in no very great time! But, dear friends, in this very moment in Christ we can touch our brethren six or seven thousand miles away.

That is a miracle. But here is the sign of that miracle. This life is eternal life; it is timeless; it knows no space; everything is present when Jesus is present.

Let us just go back for a moment before we finish. John tells us that Jesus did these signs "*in the presence of his disciples*" (John 20:30), and we have already pointed out that in Matthew, Mark and Luke the word 'disciples' is in Aramaic and means 'apprentices'. To learn Christ is to learn this great secret. We are apprentices in the School of Eternity and we have to learn what Christ means in this way. Of course, we do know something about it. Some of us have had very real experiences of prayers being made for us many, many hundreds of miles away and being answered for us at the very time they were made. It is a wonderful thing to learn that! That was what Jesus was teaching His apprentices. They were able to say: 'Well, that is wonderful! Here in one place Jesus speaks a word, and it is discovered the very next day that at that very moment the thing happened many miles away.'

I am quite sure that this is one of the great things that came into the Church at the beginning. You can see it at work in the Book of the Acts. There, up in Caesarea, is a Gentile man who is praying. Down here, on the coast of Palestine, at Joppa, is another man who is praying. The prayers of both are answered at the same time, and the result is that they come together, and Jesus is glorified. Dear friends, what does this mean to us? Surely this is something that the Lord has put into our hands? If He is the carpenter and we are the apprentices, He has put this tool into our hands and is saying: 'Now go and make things out of this wonderful power of divine life which is ministered through prayer.'

There is much more in this story, but we have just sought to get to the heart of it. I think the Lord has revealed His secret to us, and it is a wonderful secret to possess. We need not be alone, wherever we are. Oh, what some of the dear, suffering servants of God far away are knowing of help from the Lord because we are praying here! Let us believe this and use it. Let us bring glory to Him in this way.

We are going to leave it there, but if these have been only a few words, not taking a long time to say, it is one of the most wonderful things that have been revealed by the Holy Spirit. How great the Lord Jesus is! No time, but from eternity to eternity. No limitation of place, but everywhere.



## Chapter 5 - Divine Life and Deliverance from Bondage to Sin and Death

Reading: John 5:1-18.

We have pointed out that the key to these signs is to be found in the reaction which took place toward them, and that is true in this case. Let us look at a few of the features.

First of all, we must note the Jewish setting of this sign. It was at the "feast of the Jews", and most likely that was the Feast of the Passover. In that case it would be the greatest of all the Jewish feasts and would account for the multitude being in Jerusalem at that time, for while it was not necessary for the people to go up there for the other feasts, it was imperative that they went up for the Passover. So there was a great multitude in Jerusalem at this time, and this sign was performed there, that is, at the very centre of Israel.

And then it was performed on the Sabbath Day. You will have noticed that the Sabbath is mentioned four times in these few verses. It was that which governed the whole life of Israel, and all the laws of Israel were gathered into it. It represented everything in the life of Israel.

I hope you are collecting all these features, because we are going to find our key to this sign in them.

One more feature. The man upon whom this sign was performed had been in his place of helplessness for thirty-eight years. That prepares our way toward the meaning of things, so we turn to have a look at this man.

He was an earthbound man. His bed was only a very thin mat and there was not an inch between him and the earth. He was well down on the earth, and was a fixture. But he had not accepted that position; he had been struggling with the earth and against his situation for thirty-eight years. It does not need much imagination to visualize him: every so often he made an effort to get up, struggled to get away from his bed. And then he had to fall back again - and he always came back to the place from which he started. Every effort to leave that bed only resulted in his having to fall back on it again. He was a prisoner of his bed. It was his master and he was completely helpless there. The thing which was supposed to give him rest gave him no rest at all. And he was in that position for thirty-eight years. That is long enough to show that the situation was hopeless!

Now we will look at the background. What is it that lies behind this? You will see why I spoke about the Jewish setting, for this is a picture of Israel under the law and Israel in the wilderness for thirty-eight years. The first generation that came out of Egypt reached the border of the land and then, because of unbelief, were turned back into the wilderness for thirty-eight years, and there they struggled under the burden of the law. They wanted to get away from their position but they never could. They wanted to get into the land, but never arrived there. If their own effort could have got them there, they would have been there, but the fact of the matter was that they were going

round in a circle and were always coming back to the place from which they started. The bed of the law was only making them know the weakness of the flesh. It gave them no rest - it only showed them how helpless they were.

Of course, those of you who know your New Testament are already thinking of the Letter to the Romans, and especially Romans 7. Do you remember that chapter? Here is the poor man struggling under the law. He says: "*The good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise... O wretched man that I am!*" (Romans 7:19,24). That is the man at the Pool of Bethesda: 'What I want to do I never can do. What I do not want to do (that is, stay here), I am having to do all the time. Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this dead body?'

Let us go back to Israel. You remember that the Letter to the Hebrews always speaks of the land of promise as 'God's rest'. It says of that first generation that they never entered into 'His rest', and that "*there remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God*" (Hebrews 4:9). Now the land of promise is shown to be a type of Christ in heaven: Christ risen from the dead. You see, Israel had to go through the Jordan when it overflowed all its banks. The swellings of Jordan were a type of death, and they had to go through death on to resurrection ground. Then the word to Joshua was that he should go *up* and possess the land. It is resurrection and ascension. It is Christ in heaven, victorious over death, and His people with Him there. As Paul says: "*And raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:6).

Well, now where are we in our New Testament? It is quite true - we are in the Letter to the Hebrews, but with this man at the Pool of Bethesda we are somewhere else, very distinctly: we are in the Letter to the Galatians, and you have to put the whole of that Letter right into these eighteen verses of John 5. What is the Letter to the Galatians all about? First of all, it is about the bondage of the law and the law making nothing perfect but bringing everybody into bondage. The people who are under the law are in this Letter spoken of as being in bondage. The Apostle says that the Jerusalem which is below, or beneath, "*is in bondage with her children*" (Galatians 4:25). That is where the poor man was, in Jerusalem, but in bondage in the Jerusalem which is beneath. So Galatians first of all speaks about bondage under the law.

Then the second thing that the Letter to the Galatians speaks about is the spirit of sonship in Christ. You will recall that the great words of this Letter are 'sons' and 'the Spirit'. We are all sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ. It is sonship in Christ, and the spirit of sonship is the Holy Spirit.

Now we come back to John and hear the Lord Jesus saying: "*If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed*" (John 8:36); "*ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32). What is the truth that makes us free from the bondage of the law? It is the great and glorious truth of our sonship in Jesus Christ.

Need I turn you to the Letter to the Galatians? The idea of liberty, 'liberty in Christ', is mentioned eleven times in that Letter, and that is more often than in all the other

Letters put together. "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage*" (Galatians 5:1 - A.V.). And again: "*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty*" (Galatians 5:13 - A.V.). It is the liberty of the sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

And note again: the name 'Christ' is mentioned forty-three times in this little Letter. That is tremendously impressive. If it has a lot to say about the law and about liberty, it has far more to say about Christ. The law is broken in Christ, and all its bondage is destroyed for the sons of God. They are free by grace, and Christ has made them free.

I do not know whether this was in John's mind, but I do see that he had a great deal in his mind which we do not always notice. What I mean is this: Why was it that when John spoke about the Pool of Bethesda he said that there are *five* porches there? Was it the artist giving a little touch to the picture? Well, John was an artist in words, but the Holy Spirit was writing this thing through John, and five is the number of grace. Wherever you look in the Bible five is the number of grace. You and I carry that very number on both hands and both feet, if we are normal people; and more than that, we have five physical senses. Why, we are made up of fives! God meant us to be people of grace. This poor man was in bondage to the law, but "*the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*" (John 1:17). And right there, in the presence of the bondage of the law, was this testimony to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

What is this sign, then? It is a wonderful sign! This man is a true picture and representation of what it means to be under the law. Jesus stood and cried: "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden*" (Matthew 11:28). What did He mean? The burden of the law was upon the people, indeed, it was a heavy burden for them. The Pharisees gave more than two thousand interpretations to the law of Moses, and said: 'The law of Moses does not mean that you have only to keep ten commandments; it means that you have to keep two thousand.' There was not a point in all their human life where this law was not applied and made their lives difficult. And all this was gathered up into the Sabbath: 'You must not make your bed on the Sabbath! You must not carry your bed on the Sabbath! You must not poke your fire on the Sabbath! You must do nothing on the Sabbath - you may not even walk more than three miles.' Two thousand regulations for their lives! The one thing that they were meeting every day, and especially on the Sabbath, was 'You may not'.

"*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). What has happened? Jesus has appropriated the Sabbath to Himself. It is no longer a day of the week - it is a divine person. (If the Seventh Day Adventists saw that, the whole of their system would go in five minutes!) No, Jesus is God's Sabbath. He is the end of God's works, and in Him God has entered into His rest. This is the 'rest which remaineth for the children of God' - not a day of the week or on the calendar, but a divine person, the Son of God. In Him we come to rest, and that which was our bondage is now our servant. In Him that against which we were always struggling is now our victory. Oh yes, Jesus is the Sabbath, and if we live in Him we shall not spoil the Sabbath. Every day should be a day of rest to our souls. Oh, this is a mighty thing that the Lord Jesus has done!

Now note: the Lord Jesus looked upon that which He did for this man as a very great and serious thing. When He found him in the temple He said to him: "*Thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee*" (John 5:14). Now back to the Letter to the Galatians: "*Ye were running well,*" said the Apostle, "*who did hinder you?*" (Galatians 5:7). 'You are returning, or are in danger of returning, to the old bondage. You are listening to those Judaizers who want to bring you back under the bondage of the law, and if you go back there the last state will be worse than the first. It is a worse thing to fall away from grace than never to have been in grace.' That is what the Word says - 'a worse thing'. Oh, dear friends, we have been liberated from this whole law through faith in Jesus Christ. Let us walk, and continue to walk in our liberty. "*Ye were running well*" - that is better than walking. Let us not stop running.

To return to the Letter to the Hebrews. There are two phrases in that Letter which run right through. One is: 'Let us'... "*Let us press on to full growth*" (Hebrews 4:1 - R.V. margin). 'Let us', says the writer, 'go right on in Christ in the new position that grace has brought us to.'

Then there is the other word that is constantly recurring in this Letter: 'Lest'... "*Lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God*" (Hebrews 12:15): "*Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*" (Hebrews 4:11 - A.V.). It is a word of warning and precaution - the alternative to going on is going back.

Now, you see, all this is an explanation of the life which we have in Christ. It is a life which makes us free, delivers us from bondage, brings us into rest and opens up a grand and glorious prospect before us.

Let us hear the warning: "*Sin no more*". It is a sin to turn away from grace and to turn back to law. It is the sin of turning from liberty back into bondage. It says of this first generation of Israel in the wilderness: "*And turned back in their hearts unto Egypt*" (Acts 7:39). And the Lord says of such people: "*My soul hath no pleasure in him*" (Hebrews 10:38). It is a terrible thing to lose the pleasure of the Lord! That is sin indeed.

Well, that is the dark side of the sign. But what a lot there is in this incident of the man at the Pool! What I have said about it is not just my own imagination, for all the New Testament afterward proves this to be true. See those disciples again. How defeated they were before the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost! They were always trying to do the right thing and were always failing. They were always trying not to do the wrong thing and say the wrong thing, but they were always doing it. You are very sorry for them, are you not? You hear poor Peter saying: 'I will go with Thee, even unto death.' Well, that is a good resolve, a good intention. He meant well, but when it came to the test, did he do it? Oh no, he was in bondage to his own weakness. But look at that man on the Day of Pentecost! He, with the other eleven, are men who are set free. Oh yes, they are men at liberty. No more bondage! And the New Testament goes on to show this wonderful truth of deliverance in Jesus Christ from all bondage.

John was right in choosing this sign, and the Holy Spirit was right in choosing it. He knew all the wonderful doctrine and reality of grace that was in it. "*Wouldest thou be*

*made whole?*" This is what it means to be made whole - to be taken out of the kingdom of the bondage of the law and to be put into the kingdom of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

I hope this appeals to your heart and that it is not just some interesting teaching! Oh, I am quite sure that if you were seeing it in the spirit there would be a smile on your face and a song in your heart. You would be singing: 'Free from the law, O happy condition!' That is what this man sang. I don't suppose he knew our hymn, but that was what he was singing - 'Free from that bed, O happy condition'!

May the Lord bring us into the blessing of the liberty which is in Christ!

## Chapter 6 - Divine Life: All-Sufficient and Inexhaustible

Jesus said: "*I came that they might have life*" (John 10:10). Paul said: "*That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God*" (Galatians 2:20). "*It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me*" (Galatians 2:20 - R.V. margin).

We put the emphasis upon the word 'liveth' - 'Christ *liveth* in me'.

And so we are occupied with Christ living in us as the Life; and we are seeking to understand something of the meaning and nature of that life. For that purpose we are looking into the seven signs which the Apostle John chose. He called them signs, because they were works with a meaning, and it is the *meaning* which is the important thing. I trust that we are seeing that these things have a deeper meaning than we had thought. We can take these miracles of Jesus and just conclude that He worked miracles, or we can go further and say that He still does work miracles, and then we can take these different miracles and say: 'This is what Jesus can do.'

Well, that is all quite true, but there is very much more in it than that - there is a whole life education in every one of these signs. Each of them contains a secret for the whole life.

We have already considered three of these signs in the Gospel by John, and perhaps you have noticed the progressive nature of the signs.

The turning of water into wine at Galilee set forth the different nature of this life. The wine that Jesus produced was altogether different from and better than the other wine, and the life which comes in Christ is of a different quality altogether.

Then we went on to the healing of the nobleman's son, and we saw that this life which comes from Jesus is an eternal life, over which time and distance have no power. He spoke in one place and many miles away, at that very moment, something happened. Time and miles were set aside. it was timeless life, and that is the nature of this life. Dear friends, that is not only a statement of truth. It ought to be very comforting to old people. We get old - our bodies and minds get old, but the life of Christ in us never gets old. Oh, this life has a wonderful power of overcoming time!

Then we went on to the healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda, and we saw the power of this life to set a man free from bondage. This life is a life of glorious liberty. I think Paul's word describes that man's experience perfectly: "*I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live: and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me*" (Galatians 2:20). That just fits into the man at Bethesda - there is a great power of liberation in this life.

There is just a further word to say before we come to the next sign. It is only a technical word, yet it must be noted. It is important to remember that in John's Gospel we do not have an ordered arrangement of the works of Jesus, nor of His teaching. There are many things in the other three Gospels which are not mentioned by John, both as to His teaching and His works, and as to the places where He went. Therefore, a great

deal of time has to be fitted in between the things which John does record. As you read this Gospel, it looks as though things follow closely, the one upon another, but that is not true. Take, for instance, the beginning of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6: "*After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem*" (5:1). And: "*Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand*" (6:4). These were two different feasts, and very likely both were the Feast of the Passover. If that were so, then there would be a whole year between, and a lot of things would have happened in that year which John does not mention. You just have to remember that when you are studying this Gospel.

Well, having prepared the way, we can come to the fourth of the signs chosen by John.

Reading: John 6.

(You notice that Philip had said: "*that every one may take a little*" - and the end was that they all had as much as they wanted!)

To arrive at the meaning of this sign it is necessary for us to know the time and setting of it. At this point Jesus had reached the highest peak of His popularity. You notice that verse 15 says: "*Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king*". As far as the multitudes were concerned, He had reached a point of very great popularity.

Next, He had entered upon the second phase of His ministry, which was a time of controversy, with increasing antagonism so far as the rulers were concerned. Popularity with the people: unpopularity with the rulers. And immediately after this sign that antagonism sprang into life and He found Himself in an atmosphere of positive controversy. This had two causes: one was the claims which He made for Himself, for they would not accept His testimony concerning Himself, and the other was this very popularity. Later it is said that "*for envy the chief priests had delivered him up*" (Mark 15:10). It was the jealousy of the rulers which provoked them to this antagonism.

The third thing to notice: It is quite evident from this story that there was a large group of those who went by the name of 'disciples'. Look at verse 60 in this chapter: "*Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?*" And verse 66: "*Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*" So it is evident that there was a large group of people who went by the name of 'disciples'.

We find ourselves, then, in the presence of three groups of people. Firstly, there were the twelve disciples, then there was this much larger group of disciples called 'many', and then there was the great multitude of people.

That is the setting of this sign, and you have to take all that into account in order to understand the meaning of it. It is quite clear that it was intended to do three things.

First of all, it was intended to be a test of everybody. It was not just something done, but something projected to test everybody. Everybody was going to be challenged by this, and there had to be some kind of reaction to it. Jesus meant it to be that.

In the second place, it was intended to sift out all these people. You notice that when Jesus perceived that they would come and take Him by force to be king, He "*withdrew again into the mountain himself alone*". He is not taking all this at its face value - He has seen through it all. Presently He will say: "*Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves*". Oh no, this whole crowd, all these people, have to be sifted out.

The third thing is that it was intended to confirm those who really did mean business. Like Gideon's great army of twenty-two thousand, He was bringing it down to a very small company of people who really did mean business.

Now note: the means that He employed for this threefold purpose was life in the form of bread. The mind of Jesus ran far ahead of His acts and beyond what He did to what He meant by what He did. Of course, there is abundant evidence that that was true: you have already seen it in this story - "*Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*" Already He had thought this whole thing out: it had a meaning that was more than the act, and by the act He was moving toward that meaning.

What was the test by which they were going to be sifted out? You have the answer in this chapter. Jesus only wants those as His disciples to whom He is as necessary as their daily bread. If it should come to the choice between daily bread and the Lord Jesus, He wants the people who say 'the Lord Jesus'. That is why He said: "*I am the bread of life*". This is a matter of living or dying: 'Whether you have Me is a matter of life or death. The people that I want for disciples are those who know that their only life is to have Me.' You see, He was sifting out. Notice this: "*Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.... Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? ...Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*" This is the ultimate issue, and that is exactly why Jesus performed this sign. He tested the multitude. He said: "*Work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life*". To the professing disciples He said: "*Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.*" Presently that great multitude which would have taken Him by force and made Him king will cry: 'Crucify Him!' Where was the voice of the multitude when Jesus was on trial? It was quite silent. No, they had not come to see that He was necessary to their life.

So He sifted out the many disciples, drawing a broad line between professing disciples and real disciples. And when they answered Him: "*To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life*", He had got where He wanted to get with this sign.

You notice that there were three things here. One was that it was a matter of their perception as to who He really was. Did they really see that He was the Bread of God



come down from Heaven? It was because the majority did not see that that they went away. How important it is for our very life that we should have an inward revelation of Jesus Christ! That was the very thing that kept the Apostle Paul going right to the very end. Oh, what a lot of trouble that dear man went through! Think of all his sufferings, all his persecutions and all that he had to meet of opposition! Think of him at the end of his life saying: "*All that are in Asia turned away from me*" (2 Timothy 1:15). What was it that kept that man in victory right to the end? The answer is in his own words: "*It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal his Son in me*" (Galatians 1:15,16). It was the inward revelation of Jesus Christ that became the life of that man.

I think we can say that that was true of Peter and John, and of many others. It may be true of some of us here today. We have seen who Jesus is by revelation of the Holy Spirit. He is the very Bread of God come down from Heaven and is as necessary to our inward man as natural food is to our outward man. That is so often proved by our choices. If, on the one hand, there is an opportunity for some spiritual food, and on the other hand there is an opportunity or invitation for some natural enjoyment, the true disciple always says: 'I am for the spiritual food! That is more important to me than all natural pleasures.' This is the kind of disciple that Jesus must have: those to whom He is the only life. That is gathered into this word which He used: 'Except'... '*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man... Except ye drink His blood ye have not life.*' There are no alternatives to this. There is nothing that you can put into the place of this. It is this, or nothing - or, it is this or spiritual death.

Yes, He wants disciples to whom He is the only life, not just life and something else. There are whole multitudes of disciples who want Christ and something else, to whom Christ is not all-sufficient, the only life, and the Lord is going to sift out this large body who carry the name of 'disciples'. He has always done it. He did it in New Testament times. The mighty persecutions which came upon the early Church were His means of sifting out, and through the ages He has done this thing by many means. He is doing it in the world today. Oh, what a tremendous sifting is going on amongst Christians! It is already beginning in the east and is going to develop in the west - the western world is not going to escape this. The great multitudes who may call themselves by the name of Christ's disciples are going to be found out. Let us be quite clear and certain on this point. If Christ is not our only life we are going out, for sooner or later we shall not be able to stand up to the test.

But we come to a happier note to finish with, and that is the wonder of this sign. He began with everything very small. In our translation it says: "There is a lad here", but in the Greek it is: "There is a little child here". The probability is that this lad had been sent out by his mother with a basket of loaves and fishes to sell for her support, and that the multitude away from home presented to him a good opportunity for business. So he got as near to the front as possible, offering his wares, and at the same time, like all boys, full of curiosity as to what was happening. He got a big surprise! When I was sitting downstairs yesterday I saw someone come in with a huge basket in which there were loaves about a metre long. Now, don't think of loaves like that with this boy. They were probably just little round pieces of baked dough, and only a few of them.

And the fishes were very small. And Jesus took that into His hands, and after He had prayed He began to give to the disciples. He gave, and gave and gave, and still He went on giving until every one of the five thousand people had had all that they could eat and were filled. And then there was a lot over afterward. How inexhaustible is the life that Jesus gives! There is no end and no limitation to it.

Dear friends, this is not just something that we are saying. It is very true. Again and again we have been the doubtful optimists like Andrew. We have faced a situation and said: 'Well, whence will there be bread enough for this?' But the Lord has met the need and there has always been something over. We need never, never come to an end when we have this life, for it is an inexhaustible life. There is always something more. We may be filled today, but there is more for tomorrow.

Now that is very practical. If you go back to your own life, you know that every day will make demands upon you, and sometimes the demands may seem too big for you, and you may say: 'I wonder how I am going to get through! I wonder how I am going to meet this situation!' Remember, you have the Lord of Life in you, and He is inexhaustible in His life. You may have fullness for today and then for tomorrow when it comes, and right to the end.

I am asking that at the end the Lord Jesus will be glorified in this way - that I have more than when I started. That is the kind of life that has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

May we learn to live by Him! And when I say 'live', I do not mean just exist. I mean *live*, in a way that naturally we could never live.

## Chapter 7 - Divine Life: Triumphant Over Natural Forces

The matter with which we are occupied in these days is the training of disciples. One of the passages which was at the foundation was: "*Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name*" (John 20:30,31).

Jesus did many signs in the presence of His disciples, and John says that out of those many he selected a few, that they might lead the disciples into faith through which they would receive life. So the training of disciples is unto life. We have been seeing something of these seven signs that John chose for that purpose: seven signs given by Jesus in the presence of His disciples and intended to result in life.

We are the Lord's disciples also, and He would train us in the same way, so that the result of His training of us might be His own life in us.

We now come to the fifth of these signs.

Reading: John 6:16-21.

This is not a very long story, but it is very full. It is one sign which John selected out of the many, and if he decided, out of so many, to include this one in his seven, he must have regarded it as being very important.

You will have noticed that this was something for the disciples alone. The multitude had gone away, and Jesus was going to deal with the disciples alone. It was therefore something very important as to their training.

Both Matthew and Mark record this incident, and they have more to say about it than John has, which means that John had just his one object and was reducing this whole thing to one purpose. But in Matthew and Mark it says that Jesus *constrained* the disciples to enter into the boat, and that word 'constrain' is a very strong word. It means 'to make necessary' - Jesus made it necessary for them to get into that boat. That word 'constrain' is translated in several other ways in the New Testament, and they will give you some idea of how strong the word is.

You will remember the incident when the woman with her infirmity pressed through the multitude and touched the hem of the Lord's garment, and Jesus knew that virtue had gone out of Him. He looked round and said: 'Who touched Me?' The disciples said: "*Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?*" (Luke 8:45 - A.V.). That word 'throng thee' is the same word in the Greek as this word 'constrain'. Have you ever been in a multitude? How helpless you are when you get into a great crowd of people! If they are all moving in one direction, it is no use trying to go in the other. They *constrain* you to go their way. As you see, it is a strong word.

Then, when Jesus was arrested to stand His trial, it says: "*And the men that held Jesus*" (Luke 22:63). That word is the same as is here translated 'constrained'. I hope that no one here has ever been arrested by a strong policeman! But if that has ever been your experience, you know it is no use trying to get away. He just takes hold of you and says: 'Come with me', and it is no use resisting him. He *constrains* you to go - and that is the word. Jesus constrained His disciples to get into that boat. It was not just a request - He did not say: 'Now, I would like you to get into that boat.' He said: 'I want you to get into that boat and go over to the other side.'

You may think that is just a lot of words, but you will see before we have finished that it is very important to this sign.

Now if Jesus knew what He would do about feeding the five thousand when He asked Philip: "*Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do*" (John 6:5), He knew quite well what He was doing when He constrained the disciples to get into that boat. That is, He had a plan and a purpose already in His mind - it was a deliberate part of their training. Jesus was always putting these disciples into situations which would make it necessary for them to make a new discovery of Himself. We saw how true that was in the case of the feeding of the five thousand. He deliberately put His disciples into a situation which made it absolutely necessary for them to discover something new of Him. And that is exactly what He was doing on this occasion. The storm that took place on the lake was no surprise to Jesus - He knew all about it before it happened. He knew it was going to happen - and He constrained them to get into the boat.

So we come from the story to the sign. I think there are four signs inside this one sign, but let us remind ourselves of this - that a sign is something more than an actual event. It implies that the event has a deeper meaning than itself. John does not call this a miracle: he calls it a sign. He says that there is a meaning hidden inside this event, and we are going to see what a very great meaning there was in it. For we must remember that Jesus knew all things. He was always teaching and working in the light of the future, and the whole future was inside this sign.

Now look at the details. Jesus at this time was up in the mountain praying, making intercession, and you know that mountains in the Bible always have a spiritual significance. They speak of the high places. So the first thing we have inside this sign is Jesus exalted to "*the right hand of the Majesty on high*" (Hebrews 1:3). The Psalmist, in prophesying about Jesus, said: "*Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led thy captivity captive*" (Psalm 68:18). "*He raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all*" (Ephesians 1:20). And what is He doing up there? The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us: "*He ever liveth to make intercession*" (Hebrews 7:25). He is praying, making intercession for the saints, up in the heavenly mountain. "*Thou hast ascended on high*" - 'Thou art making intercession.' That is in this sign. Jesus was working with the future in mind and was foreseeing the time when it would be true that 'all authority had been given unto Him in heaven and on earth' - and, we may say, on the sea as well.

That is the sign in general. Jesus is up on high making intercession, and He was already, by this sign, telling the disciples something about what it would be like in the future.

Then, next, note the sign of the sea. I expect you know that the sea is often used in the Bible as a type of the world and the nations of this world. When Jesus called Simon, the fisherman, from the sea He said: "*I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19) - in other words: 'I will send you into the nations to be fishers.' The Sea of Galilee was only a type of the world and its people. And Peter did get a great multitude of fishes on the Day of Pentecost. Read again the description of the people who were in Jerusalem on that day. It mentions a whole list of nationalities represented there, and sums it all up: "*Every nation under heaven*" (Acts 2:5). And this great spiritual fisherman let down his net on the Day of Pentecost and got a draught of fishes. The sea is quite clearly a type of the nations of the world.

But how restless the nations are! The sea is a very restless thing. It is always changing, and you can never be sure of it. Sometimes it is in a tempest, and then sometimes it seems to be quiet and placid, but it is a very uncertain thing. When the disciples set out that evening the sea seemed to be quite quiet, but it was not long before it changed its face. You will remember, on Paul's last journey to Rome by ship, the sea was very calm when they set sail, but it was not long before the whole situation changed. How quickly the sea can change! How restless the nations are, and how uncertain are the situations in this world! Perhaps that was never more true than it is today - the nations are in a tumult!

Now Jesus deliberately sent these men into the sea, and that is the sign of the sea, or the meaning of the sea.

What about the storm? What is the sign of the storm? It says that a great wind was blowing - 'there arose a *strong* wind'. There are evil forces at work over and around the nations of this world - the very atmosphere is full of them, and these forces, like the wind, are stirring up things against the people of God. That was never more true than it is today. What a mighty wind is blowing against the people of God! In so many nations, in Russia, in China, in Congo, and in many other places, the evil forces are against the Lord's people, stirring things up against them. But we do not have to go to those countries to prove it. If we are the Lord's people we are all conscious that there are evil forces against us. There is a strong wind blowing and it is contrary - it is hard work to row against it. The Lord had told His disciples that it would be like that, and that the time was coming when 'they would be hated of all men for His sake'. He said: "*In the world ye have tribulation*" (John 16:33). Yes, He had told them that it would be like this - that, as they went into the nations, they would find everything against them. He knew all about it a long time before... but He sent them into it.

Next, the sign of His walking on the sea. We note here in this story that although Jesus was away up on the mountain, and they were away down on the sea, He knew all about their situation. He was not out of touch with them. He knew exactly what was happening. That is, of course, simple, but it is very comforting. If He is in Heaven (and

I do not know where that is), and we are down here on this earth, even if there is a long way between the two, He knows all about our situation. He is closely in touch with the position that we are in.

The natural thing was that they would be overpowered and forced under by this sea. There was an occasion, you remember, when they were on the same sea and the same kind of storm arose. That time they awoke the Lord Jesus, saying: "*Master, we perish*" (Luke 8:24). This was another experience like that, and it was quite the natural thing that these adverse forces should drown them, should prove to be too strong for them. Naturally they would go under. And Jesus came to them walking on the water.

What did the disciples learn that night? That if Jesus is present all the natural course of things is reversed. Natural laws are just turned round the other way. He has ascendancy over all the natural forces. His life is more powerful than all the forces which are against it. And that is what He was trying to teach these disciples.

Now, of course, we can interpret this in our own experience, for we know something about adversity in this world and the tremendous spiritual forces that are against us. But perhaps many of us know the other side of the story - that naturally we should many times have gone under and these other forces would have proved to be far too powerful for us. The natural forces in our own selves are far too strong for us. It is not difficult for us to go down under the natural forces in our own make-up, in our circumstances, in other people, and, yes, even in other Christians - Paul had a real battle with the natural forces in the believers at Corinth. And then there are the natural forces in this world - but all these natural forces are reinforced by super-natural evil forces. There is something more than ourselves and other people - there is the devil working in and through us, working through other people and creating circumstances. I confess to you that one of the problems in the New Testament which I have never solved is something that Paul said: "*We would fain have come unto you, I Paul once and again; and Satan hindered us*" (1 Thessalonians 2:18). I have never been able to explain that! But, you see, the enemy is right up against what is of the Lord in this world, and his power reinforcing the natural things is far too much for you and for me. Surely we have all proved that! We do not have to go outside ourselves. Do we not know that there are forces inside us which are too strong for us? If we were left to ourselves they would overpower us and put us under.

Yes, this storm on the lake has a very real counterpart in the spiritual life of the Lord's people. But what I began to say was this: that we have not yet gone under. We who are the Lord's people are not under yet! The enemy has had a good try to put us under; people have had a good try to put us under; and the world has had a good try to put us under - but so far we are not under. Why is that? Because we are so strong? Oh no, never that! Because we have such a determined will? Because we say: 'I am not going under!?' That is a challenge to the devil which he will quickly take up. Oh no, it is nothing like that. It is because this same Jesus is inside, this One who can walk upon the water. He is not struggling with the water or the Wind - He has them under His feet: "*All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations*" (Matthew 28:18,19). 'You will find plenty of storms there, but

"*lo, I am with you all the days*" (Matthew 28:19).' It is the power of His life that is stronger than all the storms.

Jesus taught the disciples this in His act, and they lived to prove it in their own experience and history.

Note this last thing. When our life is committed to Christ we are not always kept from trouble. He very often deliberately leads us into it. He *constrains* us to get into that boat. Of course, we do not know what is going to happen, but we do know that the Lord is making us go in a certain direction - and then we meet trouble. We have to say: 'Well, the Lord has brought us into this trouble. He is responsible for our being in this situation.' We may be wholly committed to the Lord, but that does not mean that we are going to be kept free from trouble. If you think that by being thoroughly devoted to the Lord you are going to be saved from trouble, you are going to find that that is not true. A lot of young Christians think like that. When I was a young Christian I used to think: 'If only I am out and out for the Lord, He will be out and out for me and I will never have any trouble.' I have lived to see that that is a mistake. No, wholly committed people are not saved from trouble, but they are made ascendant over it, or they are kept through it by His power. The trouble does not destroy them. It becomes the means in the Lord's hands of teaching them some very valuable lessons, and afterward they say: 'It was worth all the trouble.' "*All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous: yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit... of righteousness*" (Hebrews 12:11).

I wonder what these disciples said when they reached the other side! I expect, if they had an opportunity to talk together, they said: 'Well, that was a terrible experience! I really wondered what was going to happen - but I have learnt a mighty lesson of Christ's power and I would not be without the experience for anything.'

So, you see, our spiritual education rests upon this word 'necessity', for that is the real word for 'constrain'. He made it necessary for the disciples to get into the boat, and it is necessary for us to have experiences like this, because it is only by such experiences that we discover what a Christ we have, and what a wonderful thing is this eternal life.

## Chapter 8 - Divine Life by Spiritual Sight

Reading: John 9.

We have pointed out that with the sign of the feeding of the five thousand Jesus entered upon a new phase of His ministry, that is, upon the phase of conflict. There arose a great deal of conflict out of that work, and from that time He was in an atmosphere of controversy.

When we come to this incident we see how the conflict is intensifying and the division is widening, and the end of this incident is complete division. The emphatic statement concerning this man is: "*And they cast him out*", and that made the division complete.

The two sides were becoming increasingly distinct and definite. On the one side there was religion, and over against that was spiritual sight. On the one side there was tradition, and on the other side there was revelation. On the one side there was the historic system, and on the other side was spirituality. On the one side there were disciples of "Moses" - you notice what they said in verse 28: "*Thou art his disciples; but we are disciples of Moses*" - and on the other side there were the disciples of Christ. And these two sides were getting further and further apart - the distinction between these things was becoming more manifest. On the one side religion, tradition, historic system, "Moses": on the other spiritual sight, revelation, a spiritual state and disciples of Christ.

The whole of this conflict and division focused upon one thing. John had opened his Gospel with these words: "*In him was life: and the life was the light of men*" (John 1:4), and that was the focal point of all this controversy: Light through life. And you see the difference in the prospect or outlook of these two sides. So far as the opposition was concerned the situation had become quite hopeless. You have only to read the whole of this story and you will see how hopeless was the Jewish situation. The words at the end of the chapter we have just read indicate that quite clearly. The verdict of the Lord Jesus upon that whole side was: "*Your sin remaineth*". It is a great thing to say that religion, tradition, historic system and disciples of "Moses" create a hopeless situation, but that is not my verdict: it is the verdict of the Lord Jesus. And you have only to read through these chapters of controversy and come to that which we shall be considering in the next chapter, and you will agree that that whole situation was a hopeless one.

On the other side was this man, the representative of another class. I trust that we all belong to this man's class - the class which is able to say: "*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*" Over against this hopeless situation was this wonderful hopefulness. A new hope had come into this man's life, and he had come into a new hope.

We were saying that the whole conflict focused upon this one thing: light through life. Jesus said that they were all blind, and to begin with there was no difference between this man and all the others. Of course, his was physical blindness, but it is quite evident that that was only a sign of spiritual blindness. All these others were just as



blind as he was in a spiritual way. But the thing which made the difference between hope and hopelessness was just this: he knew he was blind and they did not, and hope or hopelessness turned upon that. There is no doubt about it - this man knew he was blind: "*One thing I know... whereas I was blind*". There is no question about that. However, these people were just as blind, but they did not know it. The difference was this: that there was in this man a terrible natural limitation of which he was conscious. He knew all about his limitation. Every day that he lived he was made aware of it. He had to be led by the hand and put in the same place every day to beg for his living. The picture of this man is of one who is every day aware of his dependence.

Over against that were these other people, and they lived every day in their own sense of self-sufficiency. Natural limitation and natural self-sufficiency were in conflict, just look at this man again.

The disciples asked a mysterious question, and we are not going to try to explain it: "*Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?*" That only means they had the idea, which was a common one, of the pre-existence of spirits, and that people had a history before they came into this world. That may have been pure superstition, but we are not going to try to wrestle with that one, as it does not concern us very much. They asked the Lord that question and He just disposed of it: "*Neither did this man sin, nor his parents*". All it amounts to is that the man was born with a handicap, and, of course, that is true of everybody. It is just as true of us as it was of this man - the handicap with which we are all born is spiritual blindness.

Whatever form our handicap may take, it is meant to be an opportunity for the sovereignty of God. Here it is spiritual blindness, but we all have various kinds of handicaps with which we are born. What has been one of your greatest problems in life? Is it not that you feel yourself to be quite unfit for that to which the Lord calls you? You find that the Lord makes demands upon you and are conscious that it is not in you to meet them.

You remember Moses. When the Lord met Moses and gave him the command to go into Egypt for the deliverance of Israel, he tried to get out of it, and at last he resorted to his handicap. Perhaps he thought: 'This will beat the Lord, anyway!' He said: 'I cannot speak. This job needs an orator, a man who can preach. I am not the man for the job. Lord, You have chosen the wrong person for this. Lord, You don't know what You are doing.' And you can carry it on and on like that. 'The fact is, Lord, that I am not just fitted for the thing for which You have called me.' What did the Lord say to Moses? 'Who made man's mouth? If I made your mouth I know what kind of a mouth I made. And if I made your mouth so that you cannot speak, that will provide all the greater opportunity for Me to do it through you. Have I not taken forty years to empty you of your own ability? And all that I may have glory and you have none.'

These people said: "*We are disciples of Moses*" - but how false to Moses they were! They would have said: 'Oh, *we* can do it!' No, they were not true disciples of Moses.

You remember Jeremiah. The Lord called Jeremiah and gave him a great commission to Israel - and he did exactly the same thing that Moses had done. He tried to get out of it and his argument was: "*I cannot speak: for I am a child.*" The Lord said: "*Say not, I am a child: for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak*" (Jeremiah 1:6,7).

These are examples of men born with a handicap but providing the Lord with a great opportunity to show what He can do. If the Lord requires of us that we should be righteous, we will at once say: "*In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing*" (Romans 7:18). And how often we turn to that side: 'Oh, I am no good. There is no good in me. In this matter of goodness I am perfectly hopeless.'

Well, the Lord has given us quite a lot in His Word about that. We have had the Letter to the Romans for so long! "*The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ*" (Romans 3:22). We know all about the doctrine, and yet so often we just come down under this natural handicap. I could go on speaking about many handicaps with which we are born - most of us do truly know that we in ourselves are not fit for the thing the Lord requires of us. We have discovered that we were born that way and it is not in us naturally. We have this handicap. Well, the Lord Jesus has much comfort for us in this sign.

This man had a terrible handicap - he was born blind. He had never seen and did not know what it was to see. He had to have everything explained to him, having no faculty of his own. And Jesus said over against that: 'This is just the greatest opportunity for the glory of God.'

Now, dear friends, look at this in the training of disciples. It will not be long - only a few days - before these disciples discover that side of the meaning of this sign. Peter will say: 'Though all men forsake Thee, yet will I not forsake Thee. I will go with Thee even unto death.' And it says: "*Likewise also said all the disciples*" (Matthew 26:35) - already, 'We can do it.' Can you? Let us put it to the test - and you know what happened when the test was applied. Those two poor disciples on the road to Emmaus give us a very good idea of their disillusionment. Everything had gone for them, and all they could say was: "*We hoped that it was he which should redeem Israel*" (Luke 24:21), meaning to say: 'All our hopes are gone.' Oh, these disciples were a very sad picture. And they had to discover their handicap - they had to be brought there. It was necessary that they made this discovery that it was not in them at all, but that discovery was the ground of subsequent glory. We have seen the tremendous change in those men on the Day of Pentecost. Glory had just come down upon all their handicap and covered it. The life of the Lord Jesus had provided new capacities. This mighty life in Christ had taken possession of them by the Holy Spirit, and they were men who could do what they were never able to do before. All the spiritual blindness of those three years had gone. They were men with their spiritual eyes wide open. Read what they said on the Day of Pentecost... "*Peter, standing up with the eleven*" (Acts 2:14). I do not know whether the whole eleven were speaking at the same time! If not, Peter was speaking for them all. And that discourse is a discourse of wonderful revelation. They were now seeing what they had never seen before as to the Lord Jesus.

Many years ago I made an analysis of that address of Peter's, just to see how many subjects he touched upon. If you do that you will be surprised at the large number of subjects included in that sermon. Indeed, his eyes had been opened! Not only were the disciples seeing, but they were able to do what they could never do before, and the life of the Lord Jesus had effected this.

This is the kind of training that disciples need. The disciples of Christ are like this, but not the disciples of Moses. They are under the law and have always to say 'I cannot'. The true disciples of Christ can say: "*I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:13). It is the power of His life within and means that we have gifts and abilities that we never have by nature. This is the beginning of the Gospel. I do not want anyone to think that this is something advanced in the Christian life. It is the very beginning of everything. The commission to the Apostle Paul was in these terms. The Lord said: "*Unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light*" (Acts 26:17,18). That is the beginning of the Gospel, and this sign ought to have been fulfilled in us right at the beginning of our Christian life. The very first thing that a true Christian and disciple ought to be able to say is: 'I was blind, but now I see. The Lord has opened my spiritual eyes and has removed my natural handicap.'

But while it is the beginning, it is only the beginning. Everyone has noticed the progressive feature in this man's case. They asked him: 'Who opened thine eyes?' In verse 11 he says: "*The man that is called Jesus*". That is a very simple and elementary beginning. Later on they said: 'What have you to say about Him?' In verse 17 he says: "*He is a prophet*." That is quite a long way on from 'a man'. But in the end, when Jesus met him - or shall I put it in another way, for this is what it really means - when Jesus knew that they had cast him out and went to find him and said: "*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*" he answered: "*Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?*" Jesus replied: "*He it is that speaketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*" Worshipping Him as God is a long way beyond calling Him just a man.

You see, this is all in the sign: it is in the meaning of things. This life which we receive in Christ has a simple beginning, but it is a progressive life, and the progressive nature of that life is a fuller and fuller discovery of the Lord Jesus. We "*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18 - A.V.). We just detach words like this and separate them from their context. Of course it is quite true, but where do those words come from? Oh, Peter has told us - "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3). How shall we grow in grace and in knowledge? By the power of resurrection life in us. This life is a life of spiritual progress.

Now we must come back to where we started. Have you recognized one thing that is so important? We have spoken of the great division, of how things were dividing into two classes, and that division was because a man had received spiritual illumination. That is the factor which always causes the trouble. Dear friends, we can divide professing Christians into two classes. The one class may believe all the Scriptures as being inspired by God; they may believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God;

they may believe in the deity of Christ and all the fundamentals of the Christian religion; and they may still be people without spiritual revelation - they may still be unspiritual people. Is that true? Yes, the division there was just as distinct as between believers and unbelievers. And if the Lord really does open someone's eyes and give them spiritual revelation, they are in for trouble - and their trouble will come from the religious world.

Well, here were these orthodox Jews. They believed in the Bible and in all that the Bible taught so far as the words were concerned. But when one man in their midst received spiritual sight they cast him out. Spiritual revelation always provokes hostility - tradition never does. Orthodox religion never does cause trouble, but if you are a man or a woman living in the power of resurrection life, with your eyes wide open, you will meet trouble, and, as I have said, that trouble will come from the religious people.

What are you going to do about it? Well, we have already pointed out that many of the Lord's disciples said: "*This is a hard saying; who can hear it?*" and "*Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*" (John 6:60,66)... "*This way of spiritual illumination is too hard. We are not prepared to pay the price for it. We are not going that way.*"

And so the Lord sifts out on this one thing, and the true disciples are those who have really had their eyes opened. The Lord make us true disciples!

It is a costly way and it does provoke a lot of opposition, but it is a very precious thing to have had our eyes opened - just to be able to see because the Lord has made us see. Those who have counted most for the Lord have been men and women who have come to see with spiritual eyes.

So here in the training of disciples is the sign of the opened eye. May we be able to learn the meaning of this sign!

## Chapter 9 - Divine Life: Overcoming Death in its Fullness

Reading: John 10:40-11:57.

You will recognize that with this story, or incident, we are at the last stage in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He had left Judaea because the Jewish rulers were planning to kill Him, but now He boldly returned to that district, and the result of this last sign will be that they definitely take counsel to kill Him. The disciples knew quite well that for Him to return to Judaea meant death: "*The disciples say unto him, Teacher, the Jews were but now seeking to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?*" Jesus knew, and the disciples knew quite well, that Judaea meant death.

We have been seeing that Jesus had been meeting the meaning of death in many forms, and had overcome every form of it with life.

Firstly, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, where the wine faded, He met that aspect of death which is disappointment and failure - and death always means that. He overcame it with life.

Then, later, He was back in Cana again and the nobleman of Capernaum met Him because his little child was sick unto death. Jesus just spoke the word where He was, and at that very moment, away in Capernaum, the child was healed. Death always speaks of time - it is a time matter. The time we die is the end of our time on this earth. But in one moment Jesus spoke and many miles away the child was healed. It would have taken Jesus many hours to have gone from Cana to Capernaum. It took the nobleman from one o'clock in the afternoon until the sun went down, and then he had to start again the next morning. But Jesus spoke the word and in that moment all time was dismissed. The time factor in death was overcome in His life.

Then we had Him at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem with the poor man bound to his bed for thirty-eight years. His bed had tied him to the earth all his life and, as we saw, he was a picture of Israel under the bondage of the law. And the Lord Jesus lifted that man out of his whole bondage in a moment with His life. Death is bondage. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of those who "*through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" (Hebrews 2:15). Death in the form of bondage to the law was overcome by the life of Christ.

Then we went back to Galilee with Him and saw Him feeding the five thousand, and those few little loaves and fishes were multiplied till everybody was filled, and there was much left over. Death always means limitation - it puts a limit to everything. But Jesus, by life, overcame all limitation there in Galilee. We could say that there was no end to this life that He gave in that bread. If there had been twenty thousand people, or fifty thousand, it would have been just the same. Death is limitation, and that is more true spiritually even than physically. Spiritual death is a great limitation, but the life which Jesus gives removes all limitation.

We went on to see Him walking on the sea, and we saw His ascendancy over natural laws. Now the most natural law is death. It is certainly something very unnatural if you never die! But on the lake in that storm Jesus triumphed over all natural laws. Where the disciples were threatened with death by the power of nature Jesus by *life* set aside the natural forces.

And then we came to the sixth sign, the giving of sight to the man born blind. Death is always blindness - and that is more true spiritually even than physically. Spiritual death is spiritual blindness, and in this matter we are all born dead, because we are spiritually blind from birth. But Jesus gave sight to the man born blind, and the sign was that the life that is in Jesus sets aside the blindness of spiritual death.

So we have seen Jesus meeting the meaning of death in all these different forms. Every one of these incidents sets forth as a sign, or as a type, some form of death, and Jesus, by the power of His divine life, the life that was in Him, met all these forms of death. And He changed death into life with His life.

Now we come to the seventh sign, and in this one all those six are brought together. This is the way in which to read the story of the raising of Lazarus. It is all-inclusive - all the forms of death are gathered together and dealt with fully and finally by Jesus Christ. This is why the Holy Spirit of Wisdom led John to conclude all his signs with this one. True to spiritual principle, seven includes all the others, for, if you know anything about Bible numbers, you know that seven is the number of spiritual fullness. You reach spiritual finality when you come to seven. We have only to turn to the last book of the Bible, for that is the book of the final things. Everything there is coming to finality and to fullness. And the number which is most prominent in that book is number seven. There are the seven churches, the seven lampstands, the seven spirits of God, the seven last plagues, the seven last trumpets - and so you go on through the book with number seven, because in it everything is brought to fullness and finality. All the Bible is gathered into the last book. It begins with the book of Genesis - "*the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God*" (Revelation 2:7) - the river of life flowing out.

So number seven is the number of spiritual fullness. And, true to that principle, the Holy Spirit led John to put this sign of the raising of Lazarus right at the end, because in this sign we have death in its fullness overcome by Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus was moving in an environment of death in its fullness. Everybody knew that His coming back into the vicinity of Jerusalem meant death for Him. He knew it; the disciples knew it; other people knew it; and the rulers were waiting for Him to come back to put it into effect. The whole atmosphere was full of death. And here, just a little way out of Jerusalem, was Lazarus dying and dead.

But look at Jesus! His attitude toward the death of Lazarus signified His own attitude toward death. He was told that Lazarus was dying; and then He knew in His spirit that Lazarus was dead. He also knew in His spirit that He, too, would be dead before long. How did He face this situation? Look at the quiet way in which He met it all. There was no panic, no sense of emergency, no fear, no despair and no hurry. He was completely master of the situation, and as He was master of the situation with Lazarus,

so He was master of His own death. There is no suggestion here in the case of Lazarus that death was a victory, nor that death was the master. Jesus was not worried about it for one moment. He could just move serenely in the midst of it and toward it.

That is very impressive. You see what it means? Let us just go over it again. Jesus knew that in a few days the Council in Jerusalem would have decided to destroy Him there and then, and He knew that coming back near Jerusalem meant that for Him, but He just came back quietly, without any fear. He was completely master of the whole situation - and that is in the sign of Lazarus.

Oh, everybody was trying to make Him hurry up! They were looking upon this situation as a terrible tragedy, as something terribly serious, and they could not understand why Jesus was not taking it more seriously. He was such a master of the situation that it was almost as though it was nothing to Him.

But we have said that there are one or two things that we must notice. While that is all true where Jesus was concerned, He must let people know that death is death, and death means that everything is put beyond any kind of human ability. When we are dead that is the end of all our ability to do anything. Jesus had to let it be known that death really is death, and means that the situation is beyond man's resource to do anything. It is altogether beyond natural power and natural hope. Jesus took very great care to see that that was how things were and that people knew it. That is why He stayed two days where He was, and then took another two days before He got near the place at all. He let this whole situation go beyond human hope, and He did that quite deliberately because He was teaching the disciples a spiritual lesson: that death is death and only God Almighty can do anything when it is like that. No one but the Lord can do anything. Now, while this was a sign in the case of Lazarus physically, behind the sign there is a great spiritual meaning.

Presently Jesus will be dead, and when that happens only God Almighty can do anything about it. There is no more future unless He comes into the situation. No natural power can do anything at all.

That, dear friends, is what union with Christ in His death means. You know from Romans 6 that we have been "*united with him in the likeness of his death*" (verse 5), and Paul said elsewhere: "*I have been crucified with Christ*" (Galatians 2:20). What does it mean to be united with Christ in His death? It means to be put into the position where there is no hope whatsoever for anything unless the Lord does it. When Paul said: "*I have been crucified with Christ*" he added: "*No longer I, but Christ*". No longer 'I'! What a big 'I' that was with Saul of Tarsus! He was just one big 'I' - 'I' in natural strength. See him in his persecuting of the church! He put forth all his mighty strength. And we all know about the great 'I' of his wisdom. Saul of Tarsus was a man of considerable natural wisdom and he had much natural knowledge. He was a man of mighty zeal and enthusiasm - a very big 'I'. Now that very big 'I' says "I have been crucified and it is no longer I". It is no longer natural strength, natural wisdom and understanding, nor natural zeal and enthusiasm, and whatever more there was of 'I'. It is no longer 'I'

- 'I have been crucified with Christ, and there is nothing more possible unless it is the Lord'.

Oh, the Church has not learnt this lesson yet! We can read the Letters to the Romans and to the Galatians, but it is as it was with Israel. It is said that they read the Scriptures every Sabbath, but they were perfectly blind to what they were reading. Look at the tremendous lot of 'I' there is in Christianity, although we have Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20 in our hands!

We were saying that when Jesus died that was the end of all natural hope; the only hope was that God came in and raised Him from the dead. That is the sign of the raising of Lazarus.

First of all, Jesus had to make everybody know that death is death, and the end of all hope so far as man is concerned. No one could do anything about it. These poor sisters struggled with the situation and tried to find some hope, but they were defeated in every attempt, and they had to accept the situation. Lazarus was dead, and there was no doubt about it. He had died four days before. That is the first thing that Jesus had to teach.

But I hope that you are thinking in spiritual terms and not just natural. Spiritual death is real spiritual death, and to be spiritually dead means that there is no natural hope whatsoever. When Jesus had established that fact, then He went over to the other side and showed that *He*, and *He* alone, was the Resurrection and the Life. The situation was *not* hopeless when He was on the scene. The life that was in Him was superior to the whole situation - and that is true spiritually as it is naturally.

Now we have to run over the six signs again, because we have said that they are all gathered up into number seven.

The marriage at Cana in Galilee: We said that the wine that Jesus made had about it a new and different quality from the old wine, an altogether better quality. The master of the feast said: "*Thou hast kept the good wine until now*" (John 2:10). And the life that Jesus gives has about it a quality that is altogether different. Of course, this does not appear on the surface in the sign of Lazarus, but it does not want much imagination. If Lazarus had been *your* beloved brother and you had lost him in death, and for so long as to mean that there was no hope whatever (in that country four days of death was a very utter thing: they said "*Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days*"), and then he had been raised from the dead and given back to you, would you not find something more in having him in resurrection than you had before? Remember Mary Magdalene. She lost her Master, and then in the garden she found Him again. When He said to her 'Mary', she turned and said 'Rabboni' - 'My great Master'. She used to call Him 'Rabbi', that is, just 'Master', but now she said 'Rabboni', and tried to take Him by the feet. She said: 'I lost You once, but I am never going to lose You again. You are more dear to me today than ever before.' And I believe that is how it was at Bethany. There was a new quality in resurrection, an altogether different



kind of life, more precious than ever before. So Lazarus took up sign number one, the marriage in Cana.

And then this seventh sign took up this matter of the nobleman's son being healed. We pointed out that in this sign all time and all distance were dismissed by the word of Jesus. All the miles and all the hours were simply dismissed in a moment of time. Now look at this story of Lazarus. Oh, what an important thing time was with these people! Why does He not hurry and come? Why does He stay away for so long? And now the brother has been dead for four days. What a factor time was! And what a factor distance was! And the best that a sister can say is: "*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day*" - and only the Lord knows when that will be! Jesus came on the scene and with a word all time and all distance were dismissed. The life that is in Christ destroys time - it is eternal life. So Lazarus took up the second sign.

And then, what about the poor man at the Pool of Bethesda? He was bound to the earth by his bed and his infirmity for thirty-eight years. That was a living death - bound by the law. And Jesus, by life, released that man. Lazarus took that up: "*Lazarus, come forth*" - and the grave had no power to hold him. 'Loose him and let him go.' Here is the liberating power of the life which Jesus gives. So the man at the Pool of Bethesda is included in the sign of Lazarus.

Is it necessary to go on with the rest? We saw in the feeding of the five thousand how limitless is the life which Jesus gives. It can just go on, and on, and on. And how long will it go on? As long as Jesus lives! Just that long and no longer - but what do you believe about that? 'He *ever* liveth' (Hebrews 7:25)... "*I am... the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages*" (Revelation 1:18 - R.V. margin). And the life that Jesus gives will go on just as long as Jesus does. "*I am the resurrection, and the life*". And that is taken up in this sign of Lazarus.

As to the walking on the sea: we saw in Him the power which transcends all natural forces. Well, that is so obvious in Lazarus! What were the natural laws in his case? Well, death, corruption and all that that means. That is the natural law, and Jesus put His feet on top of that. He walked on those waters; He had that under Him, and He brought Lazarus up in spite of all natural laws.

And as to the man who was born blind: we saw that he was a man who was born with a great handicap, and Jesus took hold of that very handicap and made it the instrument of His glory. Here Lazarus has a handicap. You may take it that the sisters did everything they could to stop Lazarus from dying. They evidently were people who had money, and we can be quite sure that they had the best medical advice. They did everything that Lazarus should get well, but he was born with the handicap that he must die some time or other, and now his handicap was at work. And, like the man who was born without sight, it was a hopeless situation naturally. What did Jesus say about it? "*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby.*" Although death may come in, it has not the last word. The last word is with Jesus, and so He turned the handicap into His own glory.

We have to note, as we close, that all this became true in the experience of the disciples. You must go over the seven signs again and see them in a spiritual way in the after life of the disciples. This is what Jesus came to bring us in His own person, for He said: *"I am the resurrection, and the life"*.

Now, dear friends, if we are disciples, and every Christian ought to be, these are the things that we ought to be learning in our own spiritual experience. You go away and sit down quietly with these seven things, and you will see every one of them in the Epistles of the New Testament which were written after Jesus had gone to heaven. The New Testament is full of these things. We are told that we are to have 'the eyes of our hearts enlightened', that 'we can know Him and the power of His resurrection', and that we can be 'set free from the bondage of the law'.

All these are the things which make up the true Christian life. All we have to ask ourselves is: 'Am I learning this in the School of Christ? What do I know about this in my spiritual experience?' I am happy to think that many of you know quite a lot about it. We are not just doing Bible Study or giving addresses on subjects in the Bible. We are speaking of spiritual experience. We can say with John: *"That which we have seen with our eyes... and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life"* (1 John 1:1).

Now this is what we all have to know, for it is the very essence of the life in Christ.

We must leave it there, but we must, every one, ask the Lord to teach us what this means and to bring us into the reality of this great life.