

HEZEKIAH

or, Bible Lessons on Church Truth

by Charles Stanley

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REVIVAL TIMES

It is important to notice, that, at this time in the history of God's people, both Judah and Israel had utterly departed from the Lord. Sad, and low indeed, was Judah's condition, as described in Second Chronicles 28. All was wrong, all apostasy and idolatry. What a hopeless picture! But a picture drawn for us, written for us. Is it not a picture of all around?

A man said to me the other day, as an excuse for remaining in what he knew to be wrong: 'I have read, and compared the Acts, the early days of the Church, with all I see now; and all is so different from what I read, that I have no hope of things being right, and so I go on as I am'.

In contrast with this man, we read of Hezekiah: 'And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord' (2 Chr. 29:2). Yes, in the midst of all that was wrong, he did that which was right; and mark, not in his own sight, not in his own opinion, but in the sight of the Lord. This, then, is the foundation principle of our present lesson: God can raise up a man, can enable His child, to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, in the midst of all that is wrong.

These things were written for our instruction, and how very striking the analogy! Has not Christendom departed as far from the inspired teaching of the Holy Spirit, as Judah had departed from the inspired words of Moses? When the one is seen as a picture of the other, then every verse contains instruction to our souls.

THE DOORS, THE LAMPS AND THE OFFERINGS

Let us notice three things here in connection with the temple, as especially illustrating the present condition of Christendom:

- (1) Firstly: 'They have shut up the doors of the porch'.
- (2) Secondly: 'And put out the lamps'.
- (3) Thirdly: 'And have not burned incense, nor offered burnt-offerings, in the holy place' (2 Chr. 29:7).

If we look at the established Church of God, as found in the New Testament, we find the way into the Holiest open; every believer, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus; perfected for ever by the one offering of Christ; all purged worshippers in the unclouded presence of God. 'Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light'. Delivered from the power of darkness; translated into the kingdom of His dear Son; absolute certainty as to redemption and forgiveness of sins; all trespasses forgiven: sins to be remembered no more, no more; immutable peace with God, according to all that God is; no longer afar off, but so near, in all the fulness of the Father's love (Col. 1:12-14; 2:13; Heb. 10; Rom. 5, etc.).

Compare all this with the state of Christendom for centuries. Read all prayer-books: Roman, Greek, Anglican, and especially the sad, despairing wail of the Ritualists. Listen to the pulpit prayers of all Christendom. Is this the worship of divine certainty — that sins have been atoned for, and, having been confessed to God, are all forgiven? Is this the worship of the Christian in the Holiest, in perfect peace with God? Has not Christendom practically shut up the doors? And, instead of the worship of the purged worshipper inside the veil, is it not taking again the place of the Jew afar off, crying for mercy, just as the Jew did before redemption was accomplished? Is not this

saying we are Jews, when we are not; the sin of unbelief? Is it not like denying that Jesus has come in the flesh, and finished the work of redemption which the Father gave Him to do? Do not millions still pray as Jewish disciples were taught by the Lord before His death and resurrection: 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive them that trespass against us'?

Note in contrast to this the Christian's thanksgivings now: 'We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins' (Eph. 1:7). The Scripture says to all Christians: 'Having forgiven you all trespasses' (Col. 2:13). Christendom says: No, we must keep praying to God as miserable sinners, hoping that God will forgive us. Oh, how sad our unbelief! Have we not also shut up the doors?

This is so solemn, that I must dwell upon it a little longer. If it were sad for Judah to shut up the doors, is it not far more so now? 'Then, verily, the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary', etc. (Heb. 9:1). And there was still the veil that shut man out: no saint, not a David, or an Isaiah, could pass that veil. Now the established Church, as found in Scripture, was the very contrast of all this. No worldly sanctuary, and no veil to shut out the least of all saints: the veil was rent, and there was boldness to enter by the blood of Jesus. The believer's calling and worship now is heavenly. It is very sad, therefore, to go not only back to a worldly sanctuary and ordinances, but practically to hang up again the rent veil, and shut up the doors.

Not only so, they had 'put out the lamps'. What did the seven lamps of the sanctuary typify? Was it not the Spirit of God in the Assembly, or Church? The all-sufficiency of the Holy Spirit? Those seven lamps were to be lighted, 'that they may give light over against it' (that is, the golden candlestick) — the very command of Jehovah, when He spoke the first time from between the cherubim (Num. 8:1-2). And was not that golden candlestick a type of Christ? And in that light stood the table of showbread — the twelve representative loaves, borne on that table, covered with pure gold, and the loaves covered with

frankincense. What a picture! The whole redeemed company of God's people sustained, borne, in divine righteousness, before God, and covered with all the preciousness of Christ. Not now, however, twelve loaves — as there were twelve tribes of Israel. Today there is only 'one body', and therefore only one loaf on the table of the Lord. But as all the particles of bread are chemically one loaf, so all Christians form spiritually the one body of Christ. All borne in divine righteousness before God — all covered with the perfections of Christ — one with Christ, the Head.

But where was the beauty of all these golden shadows of Christ when the lamps were put out? All was darkness. Can this be a picture of Christendom? If such was the place and importance of the seven lamps of the temple, what is the place and importance of the Holy Spirit in the divinely established Church of God? Did you ever notice how much this occupied the thoughts of Christ that last night He spent with His disciples? 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive' etc. (John 14:17). Again, the promise is repeated in John 14:26: 'He shall teach you all things'. Again, John 15:26, and much of John 16, is occupied with this all-important assurance of the coming and presence of the Spirit. It was even expedient that Jesus should go away, that the Spirit might come. And just as the typical lamps gave light over against the candlestick, so the Holy Spirit 'will guide you into all truth'. And 'He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and show it unto you'.

When redemption was accomplished, and Jesus received up to the right hand of God — Pentecost being fully come — the Holy Spirit was sent down to take His place and form the Church of God. Thus, as when the lamps were lit, all was light in the sanctuary: so when the Holy Spirit had His place in the Church of God, all was light. What a reality this was! Take just one instance. The Church was gathered together, and the Holy Spirit said: 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them'. And these beloved, honoured

ministers of Christ were sent to that special mission by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-4). And His divine place is fully recognised in the Epistles. See First Corinthians 12 and also chapter 14: 'Dividing to every man severally as he will' (1 Cor. 12:11).

Let us think of the established Church of the Scriptures! The Holy Spirit revealing the glory of Christ, using whom He will, in the Assembly. The prophets thus speaking, two or three. But the sad and solemn fact is that for many, many centuries, man, as far as lies in him, has shut up the doors, and put out the lamps. The Spirit has been quenched, until Christendom was so conscious of its distance from God, and its darkness, that it was constantly taking the place of the Jew before Christ died, and the Spirit was sent down to abide to the end.

Many prayers are like those of the Jew afar off — cries for mercy; and on all sides, in the dark, may be heard prayers for the Holy Spirit to come, as though the Father had refused to send Him, and He had not come. Is not all this far more sad than the state of Judah in the days of Hezekiah? Yes, for centuries cries for mercy, distance and darkness, instead of incense and burnt-offerings, worship and adoration, in the full, blessed enjoyment of our acceptance, in all the sweet savour of Christ.

HEZEKIAH RESTORES TEMPLE WORSHIP

In the first year of Hezekiah's reign, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. No doubt he lighted the lamps, but this is not recorded. However we may have grieved and set aside the Holy Spirit, He is still here. He has not to come again. We have to own Him, in unfeigned dependence. And has not God, rich in mercy, opened again the doors of the house of the Lord? Has He not restored to our souls, in these days, the discovery, that, instead of saying we are Jews, and standing afar off, we have boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus? Has He not swept away to faith the rubbish of all human, worldly sanctuaries? May we never forget the all-sufficiency of the Holy Spirit. Again, unhindered, may He ever glorify Christ.

It is His wondrous grace, thus to restore the long-lost worship in spirit and in truth! Those words of Hezekiah are very applicable again: 'My sons, be not now negligent: for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him' (2 Chr. 29:11). Yes, the Lord has chosen a feeble little band; may my reader be one of them. And what was the effect when the doors were open, the rubbish taken out, and the lamps burning brightly? 'They brought seven bullocks, and seven rams and seven lambs, and seven he-goats, for a sin-offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah'. (2 Chr. 29:21). All these were killed, and the blood sprinkled upon the altar. Hands were laid on the sin-offering, and reconciliation made for all Israel.

And what has been the case since our God has been pleased to make known the open way into the Holiest, in these days, and to gather again His children in the guardian care of the Holy Spirit? Fuller and deeper discoveries of the infinite value of the blood of Jesus! The glories and perfections of His Person! In each of these offerings the number was seven — the one offering of Christ, perfect in every aspect. The blood was

sprinkled on the altar, before hands were laid on the sin-offering, in identification.

Dear reader, dwell on this — yes, go a little further, for it is the same principle. On the day of atonement see the golden censer, and the sweet incense, beaten small, and the fire from off the altar, and the cloud of incense covering the mercy-seat. That censer had no pattern, its manufacture is not on record. No; in this figure see the uncreated, eternal Son — the Holy, Holy, Holy One! as known only to the Father. And why all this first, before the blood was taken in, and sprinkled before God? Does not God solemnly tell us in this, that no less a victim could make reconciliation for sins? Such His wrath against sin, no other propitiation for the sins of men could be made. And, more, nothing could meet the claims of God but that which is equal to God. He who in the beginning was with God, and was God; all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

Just as the blood was first taken in, and sprinkled before God, and then afterwards sins, all transferred to the people's goat, and borne away, so, in our chapter (2 Chr. 29), the three sevens — the bullocks, the rams, and the lambs were first killed, and their blood sprinkled upon the altar, thus presented before God, and then hands laid on the sin-offering. What, then, is this distinction? and what its lesson to our souls? Surely that the death of Jesus has first met the infinite claims of God, His righteous, holy claims. The blood was taken into the Holiest, figure of the heaven of heavens. Yes, the blood of Jesus must be shed, or how otherwise could God have dwelt in this sin-defiled universe? Precious words of Jesus, 'I have glorified thee' (John 17:4). Look at the glory of the cross! Christ had to suffer and die as the Lamb of God. 'It is finished!' (John 19:30). Dwell on this. God is glorified, so glorified by that one offering once, that Jesus, crowned with glory, is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Three times seven fulfilled in this one offering.

Let us be clear about this point first. The resurrection of Jesus, by the glory of the Father, proves that God is perfectly,

infinitely glorified — immutably, eternally so. For a moment sin had dishonoured God; the death of Jesus has glorified Him through eternal ages. It was not that God only loved us, precious as that is; but He must be glorified, He must be righteous, in justifying us.

But if the death of Jesus has met the greater, the first requirement, the infinite claims of the holiness of God: then is it not manifest that He has met the lesser, the sinner's need? What, then, are those hands laid on the seven goats, killed as a sin offering to make atonement for the people? And mark well, this was for all Israel, not merely Judah, but the revolted tribes of Israel. This is important. The atonement is not merely for those who attain to a certain path of holiness, but for the whole Church of God, wherever found — for all believers who have passed from death unto life; though many such may be found in revolted tribes of men. Think, then of the sins of the whole redeemed Church of God: transferred to the holy, spotless Victim, who died, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God! What a sight! What a sin-offering! Did He fail? God is glorified, we are sanctified, by that one offering.

I now ask the closest attention to the present place and position of Christ. 'But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God' (Heb. 10:12). What do we see here? The One who glorified God on the cross, sat down. The words, for ever, mean in immutable continuity. Nothing can disturb that immutable rest He has, in the unclouded presence of God.

But then these very same words are applied to every child of God: 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified' (Heb. 10:14). Notice, He has done it by one offering. He has perfected, in immutable continuity, them that are sanctified. Remember, all the sins of the whole redeemed family of God transferred to Him, borne by Him. And now, as to all charge of sins, perfected in immutability.

The Holy Spirit also bears witness: 'Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more' (Heb. 10:15) — no more.

Why then should we doubt God? Why say: No, no, this is not true? I must stand and pray for mercy afar off. It is better to dwell for ever on the glory of the cross. Is it not remarkable that God should have restored to our souls in these days the very truths typically set forth in the history of Hezekiah?

But not only do we find the sin-offering, but also the burnt-offering; that is, not only have our sins been transferred to Christ Jesus, and borne by Him beneath the consuming judgment of God, and those sins put away, to be remembered no more, but also we are identified with Him in all the burnt-offering aspect of His death — a sweet savour to God. And when the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began (2 Chr. 29:27). Then 'all the congregation worshipped' (2 Chr. 29:28). All this continued until the burnt-offering was finished.

Yes, there can be no real worship until the Holy Spirit reveals to the soul the immutability of the work of Jesus, and our immutable perfection by that one offering — complete identification with Him, in all the unchanging perfections of His Person, for a sweet savour before God. Will this lift up the heart in spiritual pride? 'The king and all that were with him, bowed themselves, and worshipped' (2 Chr. 29:29). We are thus brought to bow ourselves, and joy in God. 'And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped' (2 Chr. 29:30).

Is it not even so? Instead of standing at a distance, uttering prayers of unbelief, have we not been brought to own again the presence of the Holy Spirit? Has He not brought before us the glory of the Person of Christ, and boldness to enter the Holiest by His precious blood? And instead of cries for mercy, has He not put songs of praise in our lips, and worship and gladness in our hearts?

'Then Hezekiah said: Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord, come near' (2 Chr. 29:31). What is consecration? The margin reads, filled your hands. Yes, if the Holy Spirit reveals the immutable Person and work of Christ, the effect is, we are filled with Christ; and that is consecration. If

this is not so, we shall be taken up with men, and things, and so-called churches of men. But if the doors are open, the lamps lighted, Christ revealed, He, He will engross every thought and desire. What a blessing to live on account of Christ, as He lived on account of the Father!

And if we are thus consecrated to Him, thus filled with Him, then the consecrated things will be in abundance. Six hundred oxen, and three thousand sheep (2 Chr. 29:33). Indeed, we are not our own. Burnt-offerings in abundance, with the fat of peace-offerings, and drink-offerings! What untold delight of heart, filled with all the fullness of Christ! 'So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order' (2 Chr. 29:35). When Christ by the Spirit has His true place, then the house is in order. All else that man calls order is simply the house in disorder.

'And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly' (2 Chr. 29:36). What God did then in Judah, has He not done now in Christendom? Is it the hand of God, or another sect? Has God, during the last fifty years, opened the doors, and revealed the way into the Holiest? The believer, by the one offering of Christ, perfected, as to the conscience, in immutable continuity? — and all this in direct contrast with the Judaism into which Christendom had sunk.

Has not God, by the Spirit, awakened His people in all parts of the world — in Java, in Russia, throughout Europe, America, Australia? The thing is of God, and done suddenly. Souls are being brought from the dark regions of unbelief to the unclouded presence of God, with joy and gladness. Is there a doubt that this work is of God? To Him be all praise! Oh, what grace and mercy to us in these last days!

HEZEKIAH KEEPS THE PASSOVER

We shall now find some very important Church truth typified in the next chapter (2 Chr. 30). The order is very striking. We have had the doors open — the full Gospel of God; the grace that brings the prodigal right into the presence of the Father. Then, the lamps giving their full, perfect light; the Holy Spirit taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us; the infinite value of His one sacrifice; our immutable perfection by that offering, accepted in all the sweet savour of the burnt-offering, the Lamb of God — the joy, gladness, and worship.

Now the invitation goes forth to come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel. And in wisdom and counsel, both of the king, the princes, and all the congregation, this must be, not in the appointed time, the fourteenth day of the first month, but in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together at Jerusalem (2 Chr. 30:3).

If we read carefully Luke 22, we see how the Lord's Supper took the place of the Passover. 'With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer' (Luke 22:15). The last Passover before He suffered: Himself the fulfillment of it. He then presented Himself to faith, no longer the body of the lamb, or the cup of the Passover. The Passover looked forwards — the Lord's Supper is a remembrance. 'This do in remembrance of me'. The blessed Lord Himself, our Passover, is slain. It is no longer the wine of the Passover, but the cup, in remembrance of His blood shed for us.

But they were to come to Jerusalem, to the house of the Lord. Is there any such house of the Lord now? any place of worship, or earthly sanctuary? No, there, is no such place now. All this belonged to the first covenant, or to Judaism. 'Then,

verily, the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary' (Heb. 9:1). What, then, have we now, if all the system of worldly sanctuaries, called the house of God — places of worship with divine service; all this is simply Judaism; not a vestige of which have we in the New Testament. What have we, as the true centre of gathering? Have we not Christ Himself? Jesus said: 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20).

I know that in millennial days to come, Jerusalem shall be the city of the Great King. But let us remember that at present He, as their King, is cut off, and has nothing; and that now the only place of gathering is to Him, the rejected One.

But why did they keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month? If we turn to Numbers 9:1-12, we shall find a very distinct reason given there. The keeping of the Passover in the first month is confirmed: but there were some men who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the Passover on that day. The question was brought before the Lord; and the answer of the Lord was, that if any were unclean by reason of a dead body etc., they should keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month. Thus Hezekiah acknowledged the defiled state of Israel. Is it not so with the Church of God? Is it in its first condition, or second? Has it become defiled by the dead body of the world? Oh, does it not become us thus to own the sad, defiled, ruined state of the Church as a testimony for Christ?

Now we come to a very important point. The invitation and responsibility to keep the Passover was as extensive as the atonement. The sin-offering, the reconciliation, was made for all Israel. All Israel were invited, and responsible, to come and keep the Passover. So they resolved to 'make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even unto Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written' (2 Chr. 30:5).

This deeply important principle as to the Lord's table, also, is little understood. The analogy is striking: souls everywhere, who have been led to own the Holy Spirit in the Assembly, like the lamps in the sanctuary; have been also led next to remember the Lord's death, in the breaking of bread. And still more, they have learnt from Scripture that God's people had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner. I am not aware of an instance for many centuries, where Christians broke bread as it was written, until within about the last fifty years. There was always something omitted, or added, to what was written. I need not dwell on the Mass. But what were we doing? Take one thing added, which we all thought right — a minister administering the sacrament. Was this written in the inspired Word? Where? The disciples came together to break bread (Acts 20:7).

In First Corinthians 10 and 11, is there a thought of such a person at the Lord's table? This is not a question of the gifts of Christ: the evangelist to preach the Gospel, and the teacher to teach the Church of God. But at the Lord's table we enjoy a common privilege: 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread'.

Place a man unscripturally to administer, and the communion is lost sight of! It is the expression, essentially, of equal co-partnership in that blood, and in that one body. Blessed fact, every redeemed sinner has equal partnership in the reconciliation; every washed soul whiter than snow! Fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Where it is service, then all are not alike. Just as in a firm — one servant may have a pound per week, whilst a foreman may have three [written in the XIXth century]. But co-partners are all equally alike. In the equal co-partnership, fellowship, communion of His blood, communion of His body. There are no

servants, and no foreman, in Scripture to administer the sacrament.

For a long time the Lord's Supper had not been kept as it was written. Oh, the grace, the love our Father has, to have restored it in these last days before the coming of the Lord. But have we understood the heart of Christ in this? The invitation, and the responsibility to gather to His name, to break bread as it is written? Is not the invitation to do so as wide as the atonement? The responsibility reaches every reconciled child of God on earth. Not only Judah owing allegiance to Hezekiah, but to every Israelite in the revolted tribes. Not only those gathered, and owing allegiance, to Christ, but every redeemed soul in every revolted sect on earth, from Beersheba even unto Dan. As there was the perfect substitution offered, the seven goats for all Israel — we must understand here Israel as a type of the whole redeemed Church of God, whatever their outward position. And this is a great truth, that every believer, passed from death unto life, stands in all the immutable perfection of Christ, accepted in the Beloved — sins and iniquities to be remembered no more, no more!

Is not the Lord's table, as it is written, the true place for every one of them? Yes, the basis of gathering to Christ to break bread, our Passover, is as wide as the atonement. Does not Jesus say to every reconciled soul: 'Do this in remembrance of Me'? And would He not have each one enjoy communion with Himself? Other questions will arise, but the basis of true fellowship is seen to be equal to the extent of the atonement.

So the runners passed from city to city, but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Oh, when did not men despise the message and the messengers of the Lord? It was so in the days of Noah, and of Lot, and also when the Son of God walked in the midst of men. And even so now, the present work of God in love is despised of men. Nevertheless, some humbled themselves and came. Also in Judah, the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king, and of the princes, at the word of the Lord (2 Chr. 30:12). And is

not the hand of the Lord seen now gathering souls to Christ, and giving them one heart? If it is not this, it is only another sect in selfwill. Yes, it is the hand of the Lord. Dear reader, are you asleep, or awake; can you discern the present heart and hand of the Lord? If so, it is a little thing to be laughed to scorn.

The next point in order is this: when the Lord had thus gathered a company to keep the Passover, it led to public reformation: 'They arose, and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron' (2 Chr. 30:14). Thus, where the Lord has now gathered a company to break bread, as it is written, the first thing, is to put away from themselves everything inconsistent with the holiness of His presence. Just as when the doors were opened, the cleansing away the rubbish began in the very Holiest. The Holiest we enter in perfect peace with God. There, surely, holiness becomes that holy place. This is a solemn point to all whom the hand of the Lord does gather, to keep the Lord's Supper, as it is written.

THE TRUTH OF SANCTIFICATION

The effect of killing the Passover was, that the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves (2 Chr. 30:15). It is very important rightly to divide the Word of life, as to the subject of sanctification. There are three kinds of sanctification in Scripture:

(1) Firstly, the absolute, immutable sanctification of every believer by the one offering of Christ. Immutably perfect, this can never change. This, as we have noticed, is abundantly seen in Hebrews 10:10-19. This is what He has done; and what He has done must be perfect.

(2) Secondly, there is sanctification in wickedness; separating ourselves in wickedness — abomination in the sight of the Lord. 'They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens, behind one in the midst [or, one after another], eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the Lord' (Isa. 66:17).

'But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my Word' — in contrast with those who 'have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions' etc. (Isa. 66:2-4).

No doubt this applies to the Jews, and their cleaving to the man of sin. But it also has a solemn voice to us in these last days. It shows the very last and worst marks of these last days. Can anything be worse than pretentious separation from others, but only to worse evil? Beware of these mockers of the last time: 'These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit' (Jude 19).

(3) Thirdly, there is 'sanctification in holiness'. This is not what we are by the work of Christ, but practical sanctification —

sanctifying ourselves. Have you noticed how much there is in our chapters on Hezekiah about this, over and over again? 'They could not keep the Passover at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently' (2 Chr. 30:3).

This is not merely a question of gross sins, but defilement by touching the unclean. This we noticed in Numbers 9. Those who had touched a dead body were unclean. You could not say it was gross sin to do so. Neither could you say: 'True, that dead body is unclean, but I am alive, and not unclean'. This would be to deny the Word of God. All these types show that before the Lord, contact with evil, is evil. To touch the dead body is to be unclean.

But then, what is to be done in the present defiled state of Christendom? If the true ground of being gathered to the name of the Lord to keep the Passover, the Lord's Supper, as it is written, be equal to the reconciliation, as we have seen; and if the invitation is also equal, does it not follow that all ought to be together, no matter what defilement? Is there an express word of the Lord to us on this, in the midst of all the circumstances of these last days? There is, and it is very plain: 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house, there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood: and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work' (2 Tim. 2:19-21).

And then, after describing the very corruptions of these days, of that which bears the name of Christendom around us — 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof' — what is the mind of the Lord? Does He say: Keep in it, try to mend it, use your influence for good in it? No, but 'from such turn away' (2 Tim. 3:1-5). This is to sanctify ourselves, to purge ourselves, to turn away from all known evil. But let it not be to a worse thing, but in holiness. The Lord search our hearts, and, by His precious Word and Spirit, enable us to sanctify ourselves from all iniquity. Let us test ourselves by the precious words of

Jesus: 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world'
(John 17:14).

A SEEMING DIFFICULTY

This brings us to a seeming difficulty. There were many that had not sanctified themselves, had not cleansed themselves, yet they did eat of the Passover otherwise than it is written (2 Chr. 30:17-18a).

How was this difficulty met? Hezekiah prayed for them, saying: 'The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people' (2 Chr. 30:18b-20). This is very beautiful, and important instruction to us. When we think of those balances of the sanctuary, the words of Jesus above, who is really cleansed according to this purification? Not of the world, even as He is not of the world.

Suppose a Christian to be in such a place in the world, as a bishop of the Church of England. As a Christian, he is a priest — for all Christians are priests. But he has not sanctified himself. He touches the dead body of this world. He is linked with the state, and defiled with all the defilement of this world. And he never kept the Lord's Supper as it is written.

But he earnestly desires once in his life to obey the Lord, and break bread as it is written. Does he thus prepare his heart? Does he seek to do the Lord's will? Is this really the state of his heart? Who are they, then, whom the hand of the Lord has gathered in mercy and grace, to hinder him from obeying the Lord this once? Surely there is blessed instruction for us in this. And then, as it was with the priests, so would it be with this bishop. Would he not, when he found the blessedness of the Lord's Supper as it is written, be ashamed of the link with the world, and cleanse himself? We ought to expect this. Let us not forget our precious Lord looks at the heart. Surely it would be altogether different with those who are deceiving, and being deceived, who do separate themselves, not having the Spirit.

These may be easily known by their murmuring spirit, fully described in the Epistle of Jude. Many dear souls are only, it may be, deceived; and the Lord would have us so tender to these — 'and of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh'. The Lord fill our hearts with love to all His own, who have been turned aside by men, and give us constantly to remember them in prayer. Surely we would fully own that none but the Holy Spirit is able to take care of the Church of God in these last days.

Well, they kept the feast with great gladness, and made confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And all that came, even the strangers out of Israel, dwelt in Judah, and rejoiced. So now, seldom does a stranger Christian come from any revolted tribe or sect of men; but it is his joy to dwell, to abide, gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus. Rarely can one ever go back that comes with a true heart, seeking the Lord. It is altogether so different. Oh, how little the children of God know what deep, sweet communion of soul they miss. Truly it makes one ashamed — and well we may be — but all is pure, free grace, unclouded and unbounded. And if we confess, it is only now to feast again in His love. What a privilege, to really meet the Lord Himself! to sit at His feet! — the Holy Spirit present to glorify Him. Deep, deep the joy. Great joy in Jerusalem; untold joy in His presence.

NOW THE HAMMER AND THE AXE

'Now when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves' (2 Chr. 31:1). As with the Thessalonians, they turned first to God, then from idols. We must be purged worshippers first within the veil, before there can be power for testimony without. This is God's way. Then Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests, and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service. And did not the ascended Lord give gifts, every man according to his service? (Eph. 4). The Holy Spirit distributing to every man severally as He will (1 Cor. 12). Is He not the same Lord above? Is He not the same Spirit here below? 'Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning' (Jas. 1:17).

How serious the Church may have failed — doors shut and lamps put out — have not as many as have been gathered to Christ found the Father the same; the Lord, the Holy Spirit the same? 'No variableness, neither shadow of turning'. Let us, then, in faith wait on the Lord, and He will put both priests and Levites in their courses, every man according to his service for worship or service.

NOW THE TIME FOR FRUIT

This brings us to the question of fruit-bearing (please read 2 Chr. 31:5-11). How beautifully the order is still brought out! Now is the time for fruit. And what abundance did the children of Israel bring; of corn, wine, and oil, and dates. And the tithe of holy things consecrated unto the Lord their God, and they laid them by heaps.

As all fruit must be in the power of resurrection to be perfect, so in this type: 'In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month'. The number three points to the third day, the day of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:4). What a principle this is, and so little understood. We are 'dead to the law by the body of Christ: that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead: that we should bring forth fruit unto God' (Rom. 7:4). 'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection' (Phil. 3:10).

The Holy Spirit could not be given to dwell in us until Christ was risen from the dead and glorified. And if the Spirit could not be given until then, how could we have the fruits of the Spirit? What a contrast this is to man under law! But is it not a universal fact, wherever the doors are shut, and the lamps put out? For wherever men are not led by the Spirit, they are invariably placed under the law, for fruit-bearing. Just as the opposite is also true, even as it is written: 'But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law' (Gal. 5:18). How little is this true, only resurrection-foundation principle, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for fruit-bearing, understood!

We might meditate on this with great profit. Has anything occurred answering to these heaps, heaps of fruits? The doors have been opened again by a full Gospel. The Holy Spirit is again owned in the Assembly; the immutable perfection of the believer, by the sacrifice of Christ again revealed. Joy and

worship, the result. The Lord's Supper taken again as it is written. The Lordship of Christ owned; and the blessed fact again enjoyed, oneness with the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit known and owned as sent down to lead and guide. All this, not the work of men, but the hand of the Lord.

Now, can it be denied that the blessed Spirit, now owned again, has poured forth such a stream of Christ-exalting ministry, by tongue and pen, as the Church never knew since He was set aside at the close of the apostolic age? This, not for money, or worldly applause, but the Holy Spirit, leading the children of God thus to serve in consecration to the Lord. Spiritually, we may say with Azariah: 'Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store' (2 Chr. 31:10).

Now this is a notable fact, that since the Holy Spirit has been known, and oneness with the risen Christ believed, the most astonishing numbers of tracts and pamphlets, books and periodicals, have been sent forth, without any sectarian motive, but 'unto the Lord', and for the food and edification of His people. 'Tracts, periodicals', said a brother to me the other day, 'I do not know what to do with them; it is impossible to read them all'. I dare say it would have been impossible for Hezekiah to have eaten all the oxen, and rams, and heaps, heaps of fruits. But was that God's intention? And, my brother, you may have mistaken the Lord's intention; it may not be that His only thought is, that you should eat all the heaps of precious fruits, thus laid up in the chambers, or depôts, of the treasuries of the Lord.

THE DUTIES OF THE DOORKEEPERS

This just brings us to the question: What is the situation of the porter or doorkeeper today? Observe, in this business of the fruits, each name is known to the Lord, and registered; enough for the servant of the Lord. This passage tells us: 'And Kore, the son of Imnah the Levite, the porter toward the east, was over the freewill-offerings of God, to distribute the oblations of the Lord, and the most holy things' (2 Chr. 31:14). Let us examine the Scriptures on this deeply interesting subject — the trusteeship and responsibilities of the porter. The first thought generally as to a porter in any establishment is, that it is the lowest situation. And it is true here also; if any man would serve the Lord, he must take the lowest place.

Will you turn to First Chronicles 9? Please read verses 17-32. These Levites were keepers of the gates of the tabernacle, keepers of the entry, porters of the door of the tabernacle, porters in the gates. And mark, wherever you find the word 'office', the margin reads, 'trust'. We shall find this is not truth for officials, but for every child of God, as a trustee of Christ. What is the door now but Christ? Their first service was to keep the door; and have we not now to guard the door; and, not only seek to keep Satan and men from closing the doors again — but maintain the Gospel of Jesus, the way into the Holiest?

Mark, they were placed by wards. In four quarters were the porters — toward the east, west, north, and south. In the same way each beloved servant of the Lord should know his appointment of the Lord! Then we find four chief porters in their trust, 'over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God', and their place was to lodge near the house of the Lord. And their charge, or trust was to open these chambers of treasures of the Lord every morning. And some had charge of the ministering vessels — the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil,

and the frankincense, and the spices. And some in their trust over the things made in the pans. And some over the showbread.

Please dwell on each of these types of Christ, and then say: Have you ever understood the porter's trust — all the treasures of the house of the Lord? The opening of those treasures every morning. The fine flour — the perfection of Christ in His blessed humanity. The wine — the joy of heart in God. The oil — the anointing with the Holy Spirit. The frankincense and spices — the infinite preciousness of Christ. The meal-offering in the pans — the Person and walk of Christ, as a sweet savour to God. The showbread covered with the frankincense — God's people covered with Christ, and borne before God in divine righteousness. Now also fulfilled in the Church, as presented in Christ, in all the sweet savour of His Person — one Spirit with the Lord. All these glories and perfections of Christ were committed in trust to the porter.

Still more, turn to First Chronicles 15:18-24. Will you notice Obed-Edom and Jeiel? Now it is highest praise with harps, in the Sheminith, or eighth, to excel. The worship of the eighth, or new creation — I heard harpers harping with their harps. What a trust is this, thus to worship in Spirit and in truth. Lowest, as to self, is the porter's situation — highest in Christ, with songs of praise. And these same porters were keepers of the Ark. And was not that Ark a type of Christ? This shows us that our duty is to make known the very heart of Christ. As He lived on account of the Father, surely the porter is called to live on account of Christ.

Now read First Chronicles 26:1-19. Strong men do these porters need to be. Such were the sons of Obed-Edom — 'able men for strength for the service, three score and two' (v. 8). These porters were placed in their wards by lot, the then way of appointment for every gate. Now the Holy Spirit appoints to the servants of the Lord every man his work (1 Cor. 12). Some have service in the gatherings, as it says: 'To Obed-edom, southward, and to his sons the house of Asuppim' (margin,

'gatherings'). Others have service in the causeway going up, ward against ward. Eastward, six Levites; northward, four a day; southward, four a day; and toward Asuppim, two and two. At Parbar, westward, four at the causeway, and two at Parbar.

So now each porter or servant has his appointed place and service. Some in the gatherings in fellowship, two and two; others in the open air, the causeway going up; well for each one to know his own appointed Parbar. That service which is of the Spirit will be going up, waiting for the coming of the Lord. That which is of the flesh will be going down to the world.

In Second Chronicles 23, we find the porters were the royal guards of the hidden king. Here they were divided into thirds: 'A third part of you entering on the sabbath of the priests and Levites, shall be porters of the doors. And a third part at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation'. What a trust here again for Christians during these days of the hidden King, whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution! To guard the true rest of the saints in Christ; to guard the person of the hidden King of glory; to guard foundation-truth. 'And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the Lord: that none which was unclean in anything should enter in' (2 Chr. 23:19.) This is a great trust, and questioned by many. Many do practically deny this, by maintaining that contact with those that hold false doctrine does not defile.

Let us now return to Second Chronicles 31:14. This verse is the key to the whole subject of the porter's trusteeship and responsibility. Whatever may be the precious treasures committed in trust to the porters, it is that they may distribute the oblations of the Lord, and the most holy things. Yes, dear brother, if you do not know what to do with the heaps upon heaps of tracts, and publications, and precious truths, given unto us by the Holy Spirit, distribute them. Does the Lord thus commit to your trust some fine flour, wine, or oil, or frankincense — some unfoldings of the preciousness of Christ? It is not

merely for your own eating, important as this is; no, but distribute it to others.

But I think I hear a porter saying: I have no gift. I might, perhaps, tell of Jesus to an infant class in a Sunday school. So it was with these porters in their trust, to give to their brethren by courses, as well to the great as to the small, their little ones and their wives, their sons and daughters. Thus were they to give to everyone their daily portions. If you can only speak to the Lord's little ones — three years old and upward — let Christians thus love to distribute. Did not Jesus say: 'Feed my lambs'?

Do not say this belongs to an official class. All believers are priests to worship, and Levites, porters, to serve. I saw the arrival of the prince at St. Pancras station; not a porter was there but would have felt it a high honour to carry a parcel for him. Will you not rejoice to be a parcel-carrier for Christ? To carry, to distribute the precious truth He has committed? Surely the precious treasures of Christ, committed to His saints in these last days, are for the whole redeemed Church of God. Is not every Christian responsible to distribute according to the grace given to him? Is not this the principle of Romans 12 according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith? 'For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another' (Rom. 12:4-5). Then follows a list of different gifts, but each one responsible to use that he has. So, in Peter: 'As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God' (1 Pet. 4:10).

Such, then, was the porter's trust: 'For in their set trust they sanctified themselves in holiness' (2 Chr. 31:18). 'And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good, and right and truth before the Lord his God' (2 Chr. 31:20). And whatever he began in the service of the Lord, he did it with all his heart. Is He not the same God now — can He not lead His children now thus to do that which is good, and

right, and truth before the Lord? Oh, that we may have faith in God, to seek only thus to do His will, and to do it with all our hearts!

THEN THE TUG OF WAR

Well, and after these things, and the establishment thereof, then we get the tug of war (2 Chr. 32). What after the doors were open, the Holy Spirit owned in His true place; the infinite value of the blood of Jesus; the worship and the gladness; the Lord's Supper in its true place; testimony against all evil; abounding fruits of the Spirit; the porters' vast range of trust and responsibilities; hearts fully awake to distribute the precious things of the Lord; sanctified, separated to the Lord in holiness; serving the Lord with purpose of heart.

Is not this the end? No, indeed, now Satan comes with all his power: 'Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself' — or, as in the margin, to break them up (2 Chr. 32:1). Such is the fact, and it is well to know it; wherever God has gathered a little company to Christ, it is Satan's object to break it up. In Isaiah 36 we learn that Sennacherib took the cities of Judah — sad havoc, and at such a time! But was it more terrible than the havoc Satan has made in the professing Church of God? So early as the third stage of its history, we find, even in Pergamos, Satan's seat was there (Rev. 2:13). In Thyatira, or Rome, we find the depths of Satan spoken of. And at this moment, the Lord says: 'Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie: behold, will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee' (Rev. 3:9). 'That I have loved thee'. But this is very solemn. My reader may be of the synagogue of Satan, or loved of Jesus: which is it? What a question!

Now, as Hezekiah was delivered, we shall do well to study carefully how he met the power of the adversary. The first thing he did, when he saw the purpose of the enemy, was this: 'He took counsel with his princes to stop the waters of the

fountains which were without the city; and they helped him'. Then, also, they stopped the brook that ran through the midst of the land (2 Chr. 32:3-4). It is very easy to see the wisdom of this on the part of Hezekiah; but not so easy always to see our path in this matter. Our safety is in dependence on the Holy Spirit — lowly dependence. The moment we act in independence we are exposed to Satan and we give him a handle. He succeeded with the first Adam, he did not with the Second.

But it may be said: Surely it is right for the water of life to run through the land. Surely it is right for the fountains to gush out anywhere, even without the city. In the unity of the Spirit, and in dependence, perfectly right. But would not that be wrong, however right in itself, if done at the bidding of Satan, or in independence of will, without the guidance of the Spirit? Let us look at the Lord, the dependant Man, who was of quick understanding in the fear of Jehovah. 'And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread'. Now, if the Father had commanded Him to turn all the stones on the rocky shores of Gennesaret into bread, would that have been wrong? Did the Holy One listen to the tempter to do that which was right in itself? Did He act independently of His Father's will? Impossible! He answered him: 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'.

We do not find this quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, even in the beloved Paul — well of living water as he was. 'After they were come to Mysia, they essayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not'. Jesus never essayed to do anything that the Spirit suffered Him not. On another occasion, when Paul and other servants of the Lord, were together in the assembly, the Holy Spirit said: 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them'. And so they were sent forth on a special mission of service by the Holy Spirit. Satan may say to us: Are you not sons of God, porters of Christ? Then open a fountain of blessing, or form a gathering here or there, outside the unity of the Spirit. Send

forth a running brook through the land — turn the stones into bread. You are wonderful folks, cannot you do as you like? Brethren, is there not special danger here? That which would be most blessed if done in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit, in lowly dependence, may it not become pride and self-will? The Lord lead us in His own lowly steps, in unfeigned dependence, lest the very truth be used for Satan, like the water for the kings of Assyria. I see great danger in this independence of action. We cannot too much seek the guidance of His eye. Separation to the Lord is a sacred and special thing. Human reason cannot understand it; and it must be maintained.

The next thing was the building of the wall that was broken down. Hezekiah 'raised it up to the towers' (2 Chr. 32:5). Ah, those towers! 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd' (Hab. 2:1). Man would say: Come down from the watch-tower, use your own judgment; break down the wall of exclusiveness, and be one with all the false doctrine of the land. Satan hates that wall, and hates to see you sit watching before the Lord, to know His mind, and only do His will. How much depends on this — waiting on the Lord in the watch-tower, or doing our own will!

But not only must the wall, the hated wall, be built up, but we must put on the whole armour of God. Soldiers of the Lord, young men, chosen to stand before Him in these last days, study the Word. Take the whole armour of God. Be well equipped with the Word of God, spiritual weapons and shields in abundance. It is the last conflict, before we rise to meet our Lord. It is well to be informed of the enemy's intention. Satan is specially occupied with, and determined to destroy, the assemblies gathered to the Person of Christ.

Such was the object of Sennacherib to take the cities of Judah. Give all diligence, in dependence on the Spirit, not to help the enemy in his work in any one thing. But Hezekiah encouraged the people, saying: 'Be strong and courageous, be

not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight our battles' (2 Chr. 32:7-8). At such a moment, how important to know with certainty that we are with the Lord, and He with us. No doubt, to some, all this will be utterly unintelligible. But we are meditating on the position of those who desire to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, in the midst of all that is wrong: wrestling, not with flesh and blood, but with wicked spirits in the heavenlies.

Now we will sit down in our watch-tower, and wait before the Lord. See there the hosts of the foes encamped around, even in the heavenlies. Now, if we look within the enclosed walls of separation to the Lord, what a feeble few! But is the Lord there — is the Holy Spirit there? Yes, He who has conquered the adversary is there. The Holy Spirit sent down is there. All is well, more than all against us. Take courage, be strong in the might of the Lord.

It is a remarkable sight, this look from the watch-tower. You see that city enclosed in the walls of separation to Christ. That feeble company has been besieged for nearly forty years [written in the second half of the XIXth century]; and, sad to tell it, Satan and his hosts have so deceived Christendom, that nearly all Christendom has besieged that little city. Professing Christians have been notable captains in the attack. Captain C., Captain R. — even noble ladies, through ignorance, have taken service — and not a few runaways have heated the balls red hot. Some of these have become the veriest Rabshakehs.

Now what is all this rage against? A feeble little company, who desire to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, and, whilst answering not a word, place their entire confidence in the Lord. And thus, through His loving care, they abide in the siege. Now, as we sit in the watch-tower, is not this little city a study? 'Thus saith Sennacherib, king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem?' (2 Chr. 32:10). Yes, in

what do you trust? Dreadful has been the destruction of many nations; their gods have not been able to deliver them.

In like manner Satan can point to the churches of Asia. Where is the church which was at Antioch, at Ephesus, and all the assemblies in Greece? Rome also? And all the churches of the Reformation? What is their condition now? And are you the feeblest of all; are you stronger or better than they? Whereon do you trust, that you abide in the siege? Solemn questions. But did any of the assemblies of Palestine, Greece, or Europe — or have any of the churches of the Reformation continued in lowly dependence on the guardian care of God the Holy Spirit? No; an arm of flesh, poor puny man, took the place of the Holy Spirit in every one of these — and hence the overthrow. Be it episcopacy, or the popular will, all was of man, and the Holy Spirit set aside.

Now, as we look from our watch-tower on that little besieged city, all depends on unfeigned dependence on the Lordship of Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Mind, all the wall that was broken down must be built up. Is it not wondrous grace to gather the weakest saints to the Person of Christ, separated to Him by that wall, and kept in peace, amidst the rage of Satan, and hosts of deadly, and some, perhaps, only mistaken, foes?

So useful to us is the study of this siege, that the Spirit has given us a long account of it in Isaiah 36 and 37. As we have noticed here, many cities of Judah were taken. This is humbling. We have known it. Many gatherings were gathered years ago, which had not built the wall of separation up to the watch-towers. A most determined attack was made — first, to displace the Holy Spirit, and set up clericalism; afterwards to introduce and allow, to refuse to judge, heretical doctrine. Being a young soldier during that early war, I just remember how many gatherings were taken. I believe every one, where clericalism had got the least footing. I believe every gathering that really trusted the Holy Spirit stood the siege, and Rabshakeh could not deny it.

What baffled the Assyrians was this trust in the Lord. And now they cry, and lie, and threaten, and blaspheme. 'But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not'. What dignity in quiet faith! No spirit of defiance and boasting. But rent clothes and sackcloth; deep humility. And that little prayer-meeting: 'And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven' (2 Chr. 32:20).

Do not forget this: our safety is in prayer in every time of conflict. Some in the siege might not know what to do, when another furious pamphlet cannonade is fired. 'Why', say you, 'this is full of the grossest falsehoods'. What did Hezekiah? 'Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord' (Isa. 37:14). And how he pleaded with the Lord that dwelt between the cherubim! It is written: 'They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 12:11). It is true, the mercy-seat between the cherubim is our place of victory. The enemy, with all his power, was entirely defeated.

And as we plead there, let us never forget to plead for our dear mistaken brethren, who have been, and are, so sadly deceived by the enemy. Should these lines reach any such, let me ask you to search the Scriptures, and pray that God, by the Spirit using that Word, may lead you into the path that is right, in the midst of so much that is wrong — if even that path leads to the little besieged city within the re-built walls.

The doom of the Assyrian army only illustrates, or foreshadows, the certain doom of Babylon the great (Rev. 17 and 18). Thus, step by step, how remarkably this history finds its answer in the events of these last days!

THE QUESTION AS TO THE OLD MAN

This now leads us to the following point, the unsettled question of Isaiah 38. You may have thus been blessed. The doors opened. The Holy Spirit known and owned in the assembly. The immutable value of the precious blood known. Joy, and bowing, and worship in public. Gathered to take the Lord's Supper as it is written. Testimony in the world. Abundance of fruits. You may know the privileges and responsibilities of the porter — the parcel-carrier for Christ. You may have been preserved through long years of the siege of the city, within the exclusive walls. Great victories of faith and prayer. And yet there may be the unsettled question of Isaiah 38.

'In those days [days of such victories] was Hezekiah sick unto death'. We now come to the inner experiences of the soul — a soul that has not yet learnt the death of the flesh. What a sentence on the old man: 'Thou shalt die, and not live'. But Hezekiah prayed: 'I beseech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth'. Very sorely did Job try this, but it would not do. Neither would it do for Hezekiah; no, there he lay, with his face to the wall; and he wept sore.

The Lord is very pitiful. He heard those prayers, He saw those tears, and He granted a new term of life. He also assured him of full deliverance of the city, and He gave him a remarkable sign, that the Lord would do this thing which He had spoken. 'Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees which is gone down in the sun-dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward'. 'He restoreth my soul'. 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me'. We speak of the sun rising, or going down; as to fact, it is the earth that has turned from the sun. So with our souls. Our constant tendency to depart from the Lord is like the diurnal motion of the earth. The Lord is ever the same, as we always find, when He restores our souls.

Will you read Hezekiah's own account of his experience in learning this unsettled question (vv. 9-20)? His heart almost sank in despair. Is it not very striking, after such public testimony for the Lord? He said: 'I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living'. Indeed, at such a time, such is the sense of the vileness of the flesh. And Satan now suggests the terrible thought, that afflictions prove that God is against us. Hezekiah said: 'He will cut me off with pining sickness; from day to night wilt thou make an end of me'. The dreadful working of unbelief. 'I reckoned till morning, that as a lion, so will he break all my bones'. Oh, what chattering, and what mourning! 'Mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me'.

Was it not just so with Job? 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'. Is not this the very condition of a quickened soul under law? 'For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin' (Rom. 7). However earnest the desire of such a soul to keep the righteous requirements of the law, yet it has no power. 'For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not'.

Hezekiah said: 'Behold, for peace, I had great bitterness'. Behold, reader; until the question of the old man is settled, for peace what bitterness of soul you have had. Yes, bitter herbs indeed. You love the Lord and you long for holiness; but, oh, the bitterness, the loathsome flesh. Did I not hear you saying: Surely I must be a hypocrite. What did that deep groan say: Shall I ever see the Lord? Are not all these afflictions a proof that He is against me? How I loathe, abhor myself! I am oppressed — undertake for me! Oh, wretched man that I am — no better, no better — who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

This lesson must be learnt. And what is the answer? With Hezekiah it was: 'What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it'. With Paul it is the eye turned from wretched self, the old man, to Christ, and then the joyful

exclamation: 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord'. What a deliverance, when we learn the answer to the unsettled question, as to the old man! He has both spoken Himself, and He has done it. Christ has been fully judged for us, made sin for us. In the likeness of sinful flesh, and by a sacrifice for sin, God has condemned sin in the flesh. Thus we accept the death of the old man, as crucified with Christ and buried with Him in death. Judicially there is the end of I. No longer I, but Christ. I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has spoken it — He has done it.

There is generally a little more sobbing at the funeral of the old I. 'I shall go softly all my years, in the bitterness of my soul', said Hezekiah. No, not so, Hezekiah! Not so, deeply exercised soul! You will have higher thoughts. Sweetly now the Spirit whispers in the heart: 'But thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back'.

Dear reader, it is true, quite true — rest in it. Oh, think of the love of God in delivering you from the pit of corruption. Had He left you to your wretched self — ah, the pit, the pit. Thanks be to God. Now a little further discovery for you. It is blessed to be brought to the foot of the cross — yes, to the very grave of Christ — dead and buried with Him. This is the answer to the old man: death, and the grave of Christ.

But do not be too sure that that is all — that you are to remain there. No. 'For the grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth'. Is not this also most true? If Christ be only dead for us; and if we are only dead, and even buried with Him; all is in vain. 'If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:17).

Hezekiah exclaimed: 'The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day'. Yes, we are not only dead with Thee, Lord Jesus, but risen in Thee. 'The living, the living, shall praise thee, as I do this day'. Thus, through the death of Christ, we have passed through death into life. Old things are passed

away, all things new, and all of God. What a new creation! It is not now bitterness of soul, and doubts, and misery. No, said Hezekiah: 'The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs all the days of our life in the house of the Lord'. Oh, that is far better; yes, let us sing His praise with adoring hearts.

A FINAL WARNING

Then there is the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon. If we are left but for a moment, to prove us, alas! all is failure again. What a danger, even in much blessing and prosperity! 'Hezekiah was glad of them, and showed them the house of his precious things' (Isa. 39:2). 'Mine house', 'My treasures' (v. 4).

Yes, if left to ourselves, it will be: 'our precious truth', 'our testimony', 'our table', 'our treasures'. Rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. There is only a step from Laodicea to Babylon.

We cannot praise our God and Father too much for the precious truth He gives, for the treasures of His Word, for the restored table of the Lord. But are these treasures to be boastingly shown as ours to the princes of Babylon?

If Hezekiah humbled himself, surely we ought to take the lowest place; indeed, not take it — it is ours. The Lord keep us near Himself, in lowly dependence, and enjoying the discernment of the Holy Spirit. Thus may He enable us to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, in the midst of all that is
wrong.

