

Oneness With God in His Purpose

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"That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

"But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:4-6).

"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed" (Romans 9:6-8).

We are now to consider oneness with God in His purpose, but before we come to that I want to say a general word.

I think it must be very clear to everyone that what we Christians have been brought into is a very great thing. I do not know what is your conception of the Christian life. It may be just a matter of having your sins forgiven and being given the promise of heaven, or it may be something more than that, but we ought to be realizing that this into which we have been called is something immense, something which the longest life here on this earth can never exhaust. Abraham lived well over a hundred years, but he never came into the fulness of all that unto which God had called him. He is included with the large number about whom the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews said: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (Hebrews 11:13). Many of those referred to in that chapter had a long life and walked with God, but at the end of their long lives they had not exhausted all that unto which God had called them.

You may wonder why I am saying this, but there are many young Christians in this conference, and I feel that one of the greatest needs amongst young Christians today is to know how very great is the thing into which they have been called in Christ. Those of us who travel from Far East to Far West in this world are really shocked by the little knowledge that Christians have of the full meaning of Christianity. It is quite the exception to find anyone who knows more than the elementary things of Christianity. If I said nothing more than this, it would be important.

This is not just extra Bible teaching. This is the living provision which God has made in His Son, Jesus Christ, for every one of us. I could desire nothing more than that you should go away from this conference saying: 'Well, what I have come into is something bigger than anything I ever imagined it to be!'

So we proceed at this time just to look at a little more of this great meaning of our calling.

If you were to try to sum up the whole meaning of the life of Abraham, you would have to do so in one thing. Why did God call him out of Ur of the Chaldees and deal with him in the way He did through his long life? The answer is found in one thing: The purpose of God was to secure a heavenly people on the basis of sonship. Abraham was the first of a new race of heavenly people. God said to him: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18), and that was to be realized through his son Isaac - a people of a heavenly nature in terms of sonship. Here again we touch perhaps the greatest thing that has ever been revealed to man: God's intention and purpose to have at last a race of people who are His sons. There is nothing greater in all God's revelation than this - that He would make us into His sons.

We have said that in Abraham's case this was to be realized through Isaac, but those of you who know your Bibles know quite well that Isaac was a natural impossibility. If Isaac was to be at all, an absolute miracle had to be worked by God from heaven, and when he did come Abraham was more than ninety-nine years old. Sarah was just ten years younger, and that speaks for itself. The Apostle Paul put it in this way: "He (Abraham) considered his own body as good as dead" (Romans 4:19). Isaac was impossible - but Isaac was born. It was a miracle of God - and all the sons of God begin there. It is absolutely impossible to be a son of God unless He works a miracle.

That brings us to our well-known Scripture. Well might Nicodemus say: "How can a man be born when he is old?" But Jesus just brushed aside that word 'how?' and said: 'Nicodemus, it must happen. You must be born again. You, Nicodemus, are thinking of the natural, while I am speaking about the spiritual. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and that is what I am talking about. That is a miracle of the Spirit of God. Therefore it is possible for you to go right back and start life all over again like a

little child.'

Every child of God is a miracle. Nothing, and no one, can make you a child of God but a miracle of the Spirit of God. You will not become a child of God by going to church every week, or by adopting the sacraments of the church, whether that sacrament be the sacrament of baptism or of the Lord's Table. Those things do not make us children of God. They are in the New Testament as things which children of God do when they are children of God, but you can accept all the sacraments, you can go to all the services and may know in your head all the doctrines, and not be a child of God. A child of God is one that is born by a miracle of God. All these other things to which I have referred may, after all, be things of the flesh. The first phase of a true child of God is supernatural, spiritual birth. It is one of those wonderful things of God which lie at the very foundation of the Christian life.

So the first phase of sonship is spiritual, supernatural birth. You see, it was in Isaac that Abraham came to sonship, for Isaac represents the spirit of sonship. "God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Galatians 4:6), and the receiving of the spirit of sonship is a divine act: not a process, but a crisis. There may be a process leading up to it. You may be a long time on the way to it, but when you do come to it it is a definite, positive experience. Abraham was a long time coming to Isaac, and Isaac was a long time coming to Abraham, but when Isaac was born he was not a process - he was an act. I suppose it happened within twelve or twenty-four hours of one day: this morning Isaac is not - this evening Isaac is.

Now, I know that many of you older Christians are not at all interested in this, for you know all about it. But while we all need a fresh realization that our Christian life begins with a miracle, and that our very existence as Christians rests upon a supernatural basis, the young people need to understand this very clearly. I feel that I must take time over this, because the Christian life is being made all too easy. All too often the tremendous thing of new birth is not made clear. To become a child of God is not to put something on the outside, even the name of Christian, but to have something done inside that no one but God Almighty can do. That is the beginning of sonship, and Abraham's experience with Isaac, his son, is the great illustration of this truth.

You see, God took very great pains that it should be like that. As we have seen, Abraham tried to do this in other ways, but it was a tragic failure. God pushed this thing so far that it was absolutely impossible naturally; and if we have not seen that to become a child of God is a miracle, we have never understood what Christianity really is. All that, and much more, is in this simple word that we know so well: "You must be born again." There is no substitute for new birth.

When we have commenced the life of sonship, then we commence the life of the training of sons. There is one chapter in the New Testament which especially deals with this - the twelfth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. There it says: "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art reprov'd of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. It is for chastening that ye endure; God dealeth with you as with sons" (Hebrews 12:4-7).

I think we have a wrong idea of that word chastening. We think, perhaps, that it represents God as having a big stick in His hand and knocking us about all the time. You have only to make a mistake and down comes the big stick! That, of course, is a wrong idea of God, and is not what the word means. The word 'chastening' just simply means 'child training'. It is not a sign of love for your child if you never train him. If you do not train him he will not be liked by anyone later on, so it is not kind not to train him. While training does, of course, mean correcting, and sometimes using the stick, the idea is to do anything and everything to make that child a responsible man or woman. It is a poor kind of man or woman who can never take any responsibility, whom you can never be sure of, who is not reliable and who always has to be told what to do, not having any intelligence in himself or herself. The idea of sonship in God's mind is to have people who are absolutely reliable and responsible, who know in their own hearts what is right and what is wrong, and do not have to be constantly told.

You see, dear friends, God is going to put very big responsibilities upon us in the coming ages. The Word says: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12 AV), and what do you think 'reigning' means? Do you think it means sitting on some kind of a throne and doing nothing for all eternity? Well, if that is the idea, I'm afraid I don't want it! I want to have something to do that is worth doing. There is a word near the end of the Bible which just says: "His servants shall serve him; they shall see his face" (Revelation 22:3,4 AV). There is a great work of government in the eternal kingdom for which we are being prepared; the greater part of our experience as Christians in this life is training for eternity. There are many things which cannot be explained if that is not true. Here is someone whom we think is indispensable to the work of God. We cannot do without him! He is so useful and so necessary... and then God puts His hand on him and lays him aside for months, or

even years, or He takes him right out of the work to Himself in heaven. We cannot understand those things. We would say that that person was absolutely necessary. We cannot get on without him - but God has greater service in His presence than He has here.

You see, there is this phase of sonship which is childtraining. I wish we could always look on our difficulties in the light of this! It does seem that the life of a Christian is more difficult than any other life, and more troubles come to us than to anyone else. God does not protect His children from troubles, but, whether we recognize it or not, and whether we like it or not, these difficulties and troubles which come to us are to train us for something and to develop in us the spirit of sonship, that is, to develop spiritual intelligence and spiritual ability in us.

Now I must come to the third phase, which will not take very long. It is what the Apostle Paul calls: "The manifestation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19 AV). Here are his words: "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God... for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:19,22 RV).

Here is a very wonderful idea. No one will question that the whole creation is groaning. The Apostle pictures it in a state which is saying: 'Oh, I wish it would happen soon! Why does it wait so long? When will this thing happen that I feel is going to happen? I am just in agony about it all.' That is how the Apostle explains the conditions in creation, and it is like that, isn't it? This poor creation is in a very bad way. It is groaning and travailing in pain and then the Apostle, with the light which God has given him, tells us why it is in that condition. God has a purpose hidden in the history of this world, and in the history of the nations, hidden from the eyes and the understanding of men: God is doing something through the ages which men of the world do not understand. What is this thing that God is doing secretly? He is securing sons, who are hidden from the world, but the very existence of the world demands that this thing shall come to light one day. This secret purpose and work of God must be made manifest, and Paul says: When that happens the whole creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption (Romans 8:21). What is this thing for which the whole creation waits? Here it says: "The manifestation of the sons of God." The sons of God are going to be the explanation of all the groanings of the creation, and when they are manifested the whole creation will say: 'This is what I have been waiting for!'

The Apostle John says: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). That is the full meaning of sonship - we shall be like Him, God's Son.

I think you will agree that what I said at the beginning is right: It is a very great thing that God has called us unto in fellowship with His Son.