

CHAPTER ONE

THE COMPANY ON MOUNT ZION

“And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth. These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. THESE ARE THEY THAT FOLLOW THE LAMB WHITHERSOEVER HE GOETH. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish” (Rev. 14:1-5).

This passage goes to the very heart of all the divine purpose. There is a sense in which it is the key to everything in the history of God’s thoughts and ways concerning man. If we understood this passage very many of our problems would be solved and our deep questions answered. So vital is the issue that is centred here, that unusual conflict has arisen about it — and not only spiritual conflict, but unspiritual controversy also. We shall not get far until we have our ground clear, and for that is required real honesty, faithfulness, and courage.

There is a phrase here which conveys a very great deal in that realm of conflict and controversy. It is a phrase which is gravely suspect even among evangelical Christians, and, were it

not in the Word of God, I, for one, would avoid it for that reason; but we cannot invest the apostle John with the suspicions which have arisen from a phrase which he has used. We must honestly seek to understand what he meant when he used such phrases. I refer to the phrase “firstfruits”. *“These were purchased ... to be the firstfruits ... unto the Lamb”*.

Perhaps the most helpful and profitable way of coming to an understanding of this phrase would be to seek to identify the hundred and forty-four thousand to whom it refers. Before we do that, however, that is, before we seek to identify this company, it might be as well if we tackled this adverse attitude, for there may be some justification for it. There is always justification for an adverse attitude when a particular *aspect* of truth is so enlarged that it becomes regarded as the *whole* truth, and in this matter that has certainly happened in certain circles. Again, when such an exaggerated emphasis is allowed to divide the Lord’s people and to result in an exclusiveness and superiority of mind, then there is justification for suspecting it and taking an opposite attitude, or at least an attitude of opposition. Further, when the emphasis is laid upon the wrong point, resulting inevitably in an unbalanced state, then the matter may rightly be open to question and in this particular matter that is exactly what has happened. Terms have been coined which at once betray emphasis upon the wrong point, such as the term “rapture” and with it that other word “selective”. That is certainly placing the emphasis at the wrong point. When a phrase like that is used, we are off the mark. The conclusion drawn by those who have created it and who use it is that it represents schism in the Body. When the Lord has taken anyone into His presence in the joy and victory of His grace — and He is doing that almost every moment of our lives — we never charge Him with creating schism in the Body. If we did but know it, at this very moment from numerous places all over the world children of God are being called gloriously into His presence — a whole group is going up at once, so to speak. We never think of the Lord creating schism in the Body by leaving the rest a little longer. The emphasis has been put upon the wrong point. Let us get this thing straightened out, because that is a false premise altogether.

I have no intention at all of seeking to give a specific interpretation to this Scripture or to propagate any particular teaching which would have any of these results. I do really want to get to the heart of this matter, because it is borne in upon me that it is of tremendous account to God and to His people at this time — which is the time of the end. Sometimes it is necessary to suspect suspicions. Some of the most vital things in the interests of the Lord have at times been most suspect, and that is itself suspicious; that betrays something else. There is something there, or there may be something there that the enemy is very particularly against. There may be something there of such consequence as to stir up the depths of the human heart, perhaps in fear, or unwillingness, or even resentment, and that sort of thing can easily be passed on under a label, or it may represent the attempt to get out of something of great account to God because of what is involved in it. So I say, sometimes it is necessary to suspect our suspicions, to question our questionings, to sift our reactions. Let us remind ourselves that the popular is not necessarily the true. History is full of that. Lord Lister was very unpopular and had to fight a terribly lonely battle over his “theory” of antiseptics. He has been universally proved true. It has taken time. Florence Nightingale fought a desperate battle with all those in high places. She has been vindicated up to the hilt, although she was practically alone. The popular is not necessarily the true and the right, and these are things which we must remember when we are facing a matter like this, which as I say has become beclouded by suspicion and opposition.

But let us get closer. Surely all of us are prepared to believe, firstly, that to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” is something of great and solemn importance, and secondly, that it is not everyone who will do it. Does that not settle the whole matter? It is of primary account to God and to us that this should be true: *“These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”*; and that is something not to be suspected nor spurned.

The heavenly Zion

But you see this is said to be true of a particular company.

They are distinguished from others by this very characterization. Look at them, identify them, a company purchased out of the earth, not just from the earth or in the earth; it is out of the earth. Purchased to be firstfruits unto the Lamb, standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and you note the position is before the commencement of judgment. This company is in heaven, there is no mistaking that, and therefore it means that this is not the earthly but the heavenly Zion, this Zion is in heaven. This is the Zion of Hebrews 12 — “*Ye are come unto mount Zion ... the heavenly Jerusalem*”. That is the Zion here. It is necessary to say that because there is another Zion in the book of the Revelation with another company out of the tribes of Israel. That is in chapter 7 and it is not this company. This is a heavenly company and they are singing in heaven before the throne. Heavenliness in signal degree is the character of these people. More than all others and before all others, these embody heavenliness.

Overcomers

Notice — and this is a point of tremendous effect — that the promises to overcomers in the early chapters of this book are found fulfilled in this company. The Lord had said concerning certain who would overcome that He would write upon them the name of His God and His own new name (Rev. 3:12). Here it is: “*Having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads*”. These are the people who have overcome, and they are distinguished from the rest, even in the churches.

Government in fulness

And then they are mentioned as a specific number, a particular company — one hundred and forty-four thousand. This surely is not to be taken any more literally than is the word “Lamb”. It is a number which carries with it a definition. Twelve multiplied by twelve. It is government, the number of government, and government carried to fulness. But you see again, it distinguishes them. We shall later come on a great multitude which no

man can number, but these are numbered. They are a distinct and particular company.

A virgin people

Notice some other particulars about them. *“Purchased out of the earth ... not defiled with women; for they are virgins”*. In that statement we must not read the literal meaning. It cannot mean that at all. It is in keeping with the whole of that particular meaning throughout the Old Testament and the New where God’s elect people are regarded as a virgin people. Fornication in Israel was that of having spiritual relationship with other nations, the peoples of this world, and this is what is meant — that there has been created and preserved an absolute separateness from that spiritual system which lies behind this world; there must be no link with it at all. That issue is a very live issue today. Go to China and you will see whether it is a live issue, whether you are going to surrender to the great fornication, the great red dragon. It is a life and death issue now, and these are they who have not surrendered, they have kept pure, have not been defiled. They *“follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”*. That is in the present participle, which means they are following the Lamb because they always have been. It has become a habit, it is a disposition which has been born in them, created in them. They did it on the earth and they go on doing it, people who are not spasmodic in following the Lamb, who are not of those who go on one day and go back the next. They are continuously following the Lamb. It is an utterness of devotion to the Lord Jesus. They are the firstfruits unto the Lamb. Note the way it is put — *“Firstfruits ... unto the LAMB”*. The Lamb has in them the first maturity of His Lamb character and work; in them He first sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. It is unto the Lamb, His satisfaction.

“Unto the Lamb”

It means this, that their conception of salvation was not one governed by personal interest, that they would be saved in order to be saved and enjoy salvation for themselves; but their con-

ception was that it was all unto the Lord, it was for Him. That is a higher level altogether, and I beg to suggest that this is a discriminating thing. There are multitudes of people, Christians, who are glad to be saved in order to be saved, because it is a good thing to be saved for themselves; it secures a lot for them and it means heaven and glory; but the primary concern of these others is the glory of the *Lamb*. “Unto the *Lamb*”. They follow wherever *He* goes.

“The fellowship of His sufferings”

Naturally, it might be easier to follow the *King* whithersoever He goeth. There were many in the days of His flesh who pursued Him wherever He went. You would always find them there. Oh, He said, “loaves and fishes”; to see His mighty works. But these follow the *Lamb*, and that means that they have a disposition to respond to the “fellowship of his sufferings”, like the apostle who first used that phrase. For him it was not something to be shunned: “*that I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings*” (*Phil. 3:10*); there was a disposition to share the sufferings of the *Lamb*. That issues in a specific kind of people, a particular company; and if we look at it in that way surely our suspicions and our fears are dismissed. Identify these people and the other ground gives way.

What all this means becomes clear as we look at it in its relation to all that is said about the *Lamb*. That is, you have got to comprehend the whole Word of God in connection with the *Lamb* in order to understand who and what these people are, for undoubtedly they are the people who have embraced, entered into, and become the embodiment of all that that phrase means — the *Lamb*, His life, His character, His work.

What is here is this: firstly, a company marked out and distinguished by a peculiar fellowship with Christ as the *Lamb*. Underline the word *Lamb*, the name *Lamb*, with all that that means, and then see here a people who are in a peculiar relationship with Christ as the *Lamb*, and with what He means as being the *Lamb*. There is little doubt that there is a special honour given to this company. They are mentioned here with peculiar honour; their po-

sition is one of peculiar honour. The very tone in which they are mentioned is that of a people of very sacred and precious meaning to the Lord.

A song learned through suffering

They possess an exclusive secret. They sing a song, and no one could learn that song save the hundred and forty-four thousand. No one else had the faculty. How do they possess this exclusive secret? Oh, the answer goes to the heart of so much in our experience. You know that it is a true principle that you learn secrets through suffering that you learn in no other way. It is in suffering that we learn those things that no one else knows. We cannot explain them, we cannot teach them, or make others understand. We can only say, “When you have been through what I have been through you will understand, you will know; until you have, it is all closed to you”. These people have been a way in which capacity for something has been created.

“Firstfruits”

Again, that goes to the heart of things. They are a people with a capacity, which means something very great for the Lord. That is surely explained or contained in the phrase “firstfruits”. A first thing is always a determinative thing, and it is a principle in the Word of God that the first mention of a thing in the Bible always has in it intrinsically all that comes out afterwards concerning that thing. These people, this company, have the intrinsic value; the capacity for giving has been created. The figure changes in this book of the Revelation at the end. There is the city, and right out from the throne there goes that which is for the health of the nations. The nations derive their values from what is at the very heart of things. The intrinsic values are capable of reproduction over and over again to the advantage of many more who have their centre in the “city”. Firstfruits — oh yes, they are not the only ones but they have the value in the first place, and they have it for the others. It is the power of impartation through capacity created in suffering.

Is that not true to principle? You know it surely, most of you, in your own experience, that if you have been able to help anybody, it is because you have gone through something to create in you the capacity for helping them. It is not that you are passing on information. It has come out of something that God has deeply done in you through experience, and, moreover, painful experience. That is the way in which these first govern. They govern by capacity and ability to give, to impart. They have an exclusive secret, which no one but these can learn. The implication here is that they have gone a very utter way and are in a very utter position to serve the Lord.

God's satisfaction first

We are not told here what they fully represent as to God's purpose, but we are left to view them in the light of His fuller revelation. When we take up the fuller revelation of the meaning of the Lamb, then we shall begin to understand what this Lamb company is, these who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. We may do something of that later, but here we may mention one or two things. These people, in the first place, represent God's satisfaction in a peculiar way — God's satisfaction first. They have given God the inheritance that He seeks in the saints, they have answered to God, and that is something. It is no small thing that He should have that upon which His heart has been strongly set. God finding His own satisfaction — surely they represent that.

But here is a remarkable thing. They sing — and note how their singing is described. *“As the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder”*. What a volume! *“The voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne”*. What is there remarkable about that? These are people who have known suffering in no ordinary way. These are people who have gone with the Lamb — always meaning suffering and sacrifice — and they are singing their very heart out in such volume, such impressiveness, that the apostle finds it difficult to discover words to convey this singing. What does it mean? Oh, they have come to

see that all the suffering was infinitely worth while. They have come to see that after all the Lord was not against them as they were tempted to think. After all, it was not this and that and the other thing which the enemy tried to make out to be the meaning of their sufferings. No, there was something in this of unspeakable value and significance. I know there are some people who sing to keep their courage up; there are some people who sing, well, perhaps, without any specific purpose — but these people here are not singing without meaning and purpose. They sing now because they are wholly gratified with the ways of the Lord. It must mean that. They follow the Lamb, they have gone the way of the Cross in a very deep way, and the people who have gone most deeply into the Cross and the sufferings of Christ are the people who sing loudest in eternity. They have discovered the love of God through suffering, in a very full way. They sing before the throne. We have often been before the throne complaining, murmuring, despairing, perhaps in bitterness and rebellion. At the end — for those who will follow *the Lamb* whithersoever He goeth — is a song which is unique, something altogether beyond the knowledge and understanding of others.

After all, there is no room for suspecting this. It is something very precious to the Lord. As we said at the beginning, it would solve so many problems. One of the problems besetting many of us is why it is that the Lord takes us such a peculiarly difficult way. The Lord does not seem to take other Christians that way, and they seem to have an easy time, comparatively. Why should we have such a difficult time? That is one of our problems. Others can do all sorts of things and still be Christians and be saved, but the Lord will not allow that with us. Others can get away with quite a lot and remain happy Christians, but somehow or other the Lord does not allow that with us. He is leading in a very hard way indeed. Here is the explanation. It lies right at the heart of these verses in Rev. 14, something that the Lord's heart is set upon. If only we could by grace find the right attitude to take toward the peculiar, the unusual dealings and ways of God with us, and the sufferings through which the Lord leads us. If we could take the right attitude, that attitude would be this — the Lord is after something of peculiar value to Himself, we should then see some

new meaning in Paul's word — "To you it hath been *granted* in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf". "It has been given to you to suffer". Perhaps it is a trust with which the Lord cannot trust many. It is doubtful whether the Lord could trust many of His own children with suffering beyond a certain measure.

We must leave it there for the moment. If what has been said is true, if the Lord has something of peculiar value represented in these people, will that not explain all the prejudice, all the distortion, all the fear? May that not be the reason? May the Lord give us grace to accept nothing less than that which will most fully satisfy Him.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LAMB

Reading: Rev. 14:1-5; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:4-11. “These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev. 14:4).

In our previous meditation our time was occupied with identifying the one hundred and forty-four thousand followers of the Lamb. Without going over the ground then covered, by way of retrospect it does seem perfectly clear that that particular company represents something distinct and different from other companies of the Lord’s people mentioned in the book of the Revelation. They are marked out by this characterization, that they “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”, and have consequently come to a place of peculiar value and service to the Lord in glory.

Christ the eternal Lamb

Now we pursue that matter in order to try to see what it means, or at least something of what it means, to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”, that is, in unreserved utterness. So we allow the very designation to lead us — “the Lamb”. And when we look into the Scriptures to find where the first glimpse of the Lamb is given — I do not mean of lambs but the Lamb — we find it here in Rev. 13:8 — “*And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain*”. You will see that there is an alternative rendering — “*written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world*”, and I think that is

the more correct order. *“The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”*. That is really the first glimpse that we have of Christ as the Lamb. A remarkable statement — *“slain from the foundation of the world”*. Probably you know that the word “foundation” there could be more literally translated “the laying down of the world”, that is, the setting out of the whole scheme of creation. We speak of laying down a plan, a scheme, a project, and when God laid down the plan, the scheme, the project of the creation, at that time the Lamb was, in intention, slain, which, of course, in the very first instance means that the Cross is no afterthought. The Cross is not something brought in as an afterthought because of certain emergencies. The Cross was in the foreknowledge of God, as we have read in Acts 2:23 — *“being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”*: *“delivered up ... by the foreknowledge of God”*: *“The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”*.

That takes us back to God’s counsels from eternity. A purpose, a purpose framed, a purpose projected, initiated. There we find ourselves once more in the presence of those counsels of the Godhead to which Paul so much refers; wonderful, great, glorious counsels. How full, far-reaching, and glorious were those counsels before times eternal. It is a matter about which we can truly be in contemplation and meditation and consideration all our days and never exhaust it. How many times have we come back to those parts of the Word which speak so much about God’s eternal counsels, God’s foreknowledge, God’s predestinating purpose, and still we feel we have not touched the fringe. There is always something more. Yes, it was all there before, and when God, so to speak, drafted His great, universal, eternal plan and purpose, He at the same time anticipated its disruption. He foresaw what would happen as a mighty spiritual reaction against His intentions. He took the whole situation in, knowing that the very nature of the purpose must leave the door open for voluntary obedience and committal and acceptance. The very essence of it all, which is love, must leave the place for option, and He foresaw the side on which man’s option would move, He foreknew the tremendous activity of spiritual forces against His purpose. He foresaw all that has happened since man gave way to the great spiritual foe of

God's intentions concerning His Son Jesus Christ. Having projected, and having foreseen, He provided, and redemption was forthwith established.

The work of the Lamb

It is eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). That is the name of it. It is the timeless Cross because the purpose is eternal. We are brought, then, right into the presence of the timeless Cross and the eternal purpose. This introductory designation, the Lamb, is tremendously impressive when you see that already, before anything has happened, Christ is called the Lamb. Christ is the Lamb; and His being called the Lamb before all that terrible tragedy and havoc had taken place, itself indicates the full nature of the work to be done. The *LAMB* — the title is an implication. It implies just what will have to be done. We are in the presence of a tremendous thing, if only it would break upon us. There is that vast purpose of God which, in its realization, is to obtain throughout all the ages of ages to come and to give character to His universe. Then there is this terrible, terrible sin, which is so utterly contrary, the disruption of everything through these present ages: And then you say that it is a Lamb that is going to put all that right — what do you mean? Why, you want something more than a Lamb for that! You must have a very limited grasp of the situation if you say a lamb can put it all right! But that is just what the Bible does say, with a significance beyond our comprehension. Because, you see, as we have said just now, it indicates the nature of the work to be done, which is this — an entire and utter reversing of the nature and constitution of things as they are now.

Will anybody look at the world today and man's ideas of running it, and say that it is just like a lamb? You see how absurd that sounds, how ridiculous. Anything and everything but the Lamb is in the present constitution of things. Everything that is a complete antithesis of the Lamb pervades this order of things, in its very constitution. You see the point. The whole constitution has got to be changed. Another constitution needs to be given to this universe and it must be the constitution of the Lamb. Yes, this universe has got to be reconstituted upon the basis of the

Lamb-nature, and the wonderful thing is that all these tremendous forces — these simply terrific forces, in this universe, of iniquity, evil, wickedness, sin, hatred and malice — all these forces are gathered up, and the Bible tells how a Lamb can deal with the whole thing. There is something here which is a mystery.

The triumph of the Lamb

And so you find this whole set of paradoxes and seeming contradictions. In the book of the Revelation there is the book sealed, and the apostle says, “*And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain*” (Rev. 5:4-6). Always remember that in the twenty-nine occurrences of the word “Lamb” in the book of the Revelation, it is always the diminutive, “a little Lamb”. “Behold, *a little Lamb* hath prevailed”. Strange contradiction! The Lion, the Lamb — identical! The Lamb is the Lion in strength in prevailing; yet a lamb is the very symbol of weakness. Nothing would speak more of weakness than a little lamb; you would not want to put much weight upon a little lamb.

But look at what it says in this book about the little Lamb. These terrific forces make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them (Rev. 17:14). You could believe that, perhaps, of the Lion; but the *Lamb* shall overcome them — weakness and might in one object. Yieldedness as a lamb to the slaughter, no resistance; and authority. They flee before the face of the Lamb. Strange contradiction: subjection, submission, and dominion, dominion given to the Lamb — to the *Lamb*.

Meekness: what do you mean by meekness? No standing up for personal rights, no seeking of self-vindication. But what about this wrath of the Lamb? It is terrible. There is a mystic infinite power in the Lamb which is not to be accounted for on any natural ground at all. Take the natural aspect, and you have every-

thing that speaks of weakness and helplessness, submission and meekness. But there is a mystic something about this Lamb that is not natural, it is divine. All the mighty forces of God's heavenly universe are bound up with, centred in and expressed through this yieldedness, this weakness, this meekness, this submission.

That is not just a statement. That is a fact, a thing that can be put to the test by any Christian, and many of you know quite well that it is a working principle. When you have sought the grace of the Lord Jesus to suffer wrong rather than do wrong, to accept joyfully the spoiling of your goods, to restrain natural heat and wrath and reaction and to hand things over to the Lord, you have seen the Lord do things that none of your wrath and none of your strength could have done. You have known the Lord to come in then, when you have let go and have got out of the way. That is the way. That is not natural. No, our constitution is not the Lamb constitution at all. We know that quite well. But when God reconstitutes according to the Lamb, the ground is prepared and the way is opened for the exercise of infinite power; for something that is not natural, something that can only be said to be the Lord. See this Lamb, led to the slaughter, opening not His mouth. Behold Him in His yieldedness to the will of God and see whether God has vindicated that nature. Has He? God has indeed vindicated that.

The Cross the way of the Lamb

Now let us go back a little. What we mean by the Lamb is the Cross. The Cross is the way of the Lamb, and the Cross, or the Lamb, links the eternities. One arm, so to speak, of that Cross reaches right back over all the ages and beyond the garden into the eternal counsels, and there takes up all the immensity of those counsels of God, the eternal purpose. The other arm of the Cross touches the ages to come; and by way of that Cross, that from the beginning, which has in the meantime been challenged and upset, is realized: so that the way of the Lamb is the way of the realization of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less than that. That is why I have taken pains to stress the immensity of that

purpose. Our conception of the Cross is so small. Our hymns about the Cross have such a limited view of that Cross. Oh, yes, “the burden of my heart rolled away” at the Cross — quite true and good, blessed; but the Cross is infinitely, transcendently more than our conversion. The Cross has come in not just to get people saved from their sin and secured unto heaven and have the blessings of forgiveness and access to God. No, the Cross has come in to lay right hold of that vast scheme of the divine intention and purpose and to realize it, and nothing less than it. We ought to see that the Cross is a very much bigger thing than we have ever imagined.

When the Lord begins to work subjectively by His Cross in a life, He does a very utter thing beyond conversion. In many lives it often comes to this: that a fuller apprehension of the meaning of identification with Christ in death and burial and resurrection is a far bigger thing than conversion, and that is significant. You cannot make too much of the Cross, for this very reason — that there is nothing greater and vaster than God’s eternal purpose in the creation of this universe, and the Cross has to do with every bit of it, touches it at every point. The things in the heavens are purged by the Blood of that Cross (Heb. 9:23). The Cross is an immense thing because of the immensity of that with which it has to do. So the Cross is retrospective — but not merely to the fall, not merely to the entrance of sin. The Cross is retrospective to before the world was, from the laying down of the foundation. It is retrospective to the very purpose of God in having a world at all. If you can understand and grasp why God created this universe, what His thoughts were, what His intentions; if you can really comprehend all the immensity of His purpose in making this a heritage for Himself, worthy of Himself and satisfying to Him, then, and only then, will you be able to see the greatness of the Cross, the magnitude of the Cross. Yes, the Cross reaches right back to that.

A company in the good of the eternal purpose

What are we to say about these people, these one hundred and forty-four thousand? If what I have said is right and true,

surely they must mean this: they are a company standing in the good of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less. They have “followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth”, not a bit of the way, not more or less, not with reservations, not just so far as forgiveness of sins and no further. Not just that, on such-and-such a day in such-and-such a year so long ago, “I gave my heart to Jesus”. These have come into an apprehension of the greatness of God’s purpose concerning His Son, and have gone right on with it and are standing in it. Surely that is what it means.

I am not saying that these are an elect of the elect. I am not saying that this is not for all, this is only for a few — not at all. But anyone who has eyes to see knows quite well that very few Christians actually do go this way, comparatively few really do go all the way with God’s purpose. Look at Christianity today and tell me if what you see represents all the thought of God; and then enquire into it, investigate it, and see how many are willing to go farther, and you will be surprised. How many care about anything more? It is comparatively few who answer to God in His fuller thought as to His eternal purpose. Indeed, I fear that there are multitudes of Christians who do not know what you mean when you talk about the eternal purpose of God. And so God has to find His satisfaction as to this in a representative company.

Here is the position. Who will accept the fuller meaning of the Cross in order to satisfy God as to the fuller expression of His purpose? That is the issue. And this company has said Yes to the Lord. Not just that I am going to be saved and live a happy Christian life and do a lot of Christian work; no. But I am going to allow God to entirely reconstitute me, from centre to circumference, according to His own Son, conformably to the image of His Son; and that takes a profound work of the Cross, a tremendous operation of the Cross to do that. That is following the Lamb. The figures used may seem strange, but that is what it means, the way of the Lamb — He was made perfect through sufferings. That is, He was brought to completeness through sufferings. We shall come there in no other way. That we should be before Him without blemish, before Him in love. That is what reconstituting us means.

I think the whole matter is clearly before us. Here is a company. (It is clear that, in the book of the Revelation, there are companies of saved people, various and different companies, larger and smaller companies, and here amongst the companies is this one marked out and clearly defined.) It is called the one hundred and forty-four thousand, with symbolic, not literal, meaning, and they stand in a special relationship to the throne, and, as we said in our previous meditation, they are in the good of a special secret that no one else knows or can learn. They have come into something by their walk with the Lamb, by their sufferings together with Him. What do they mean?

Once again, the Lamb takes us back to God's purpose in fulness before the world was. He does not just say that He by His Blood will deal with the sin that has come in — that is a part of the whole — or with the conditions that have resulted from man's disobedience: they are all included. What the Lamb does is right at the point where God lays down His whole ultimate plan for eternity: namely, to sum up all things in Christ, to fill all things with Christ and to make His people the fulness of Him that filleth all things. It is in order to secure that against the invasion of the disruptive forces — to secure that and nothing less than that. So the Lamb relates to the fulness of God's purpose from eternity, and to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" likewise relates to the fulness of that purpose, bringing those who so follow not only to heaven but into that particular position that answers to God's thought in fulness from eternity.

Now you are able to see why it is necessary, before you can come to the church, to have the Cross. You never can have the church without the Cross. The church is that in which God's eternal counsels are to be fulfilled, and the church is based upon the Cross. All that that means just comes back to one thing. Will we "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth"? In other words, will we accept the Cross in all its meaning for the reversing of everything that is contrary to God's purpose, the reversing of the very constitution that is contrary to God's mind? And the reversing is a very practical thing. It is so practical, it is so terribly practical, that it is most unacceptable to any part of our being. The Lord tells you and me that in opposition and affliction and suffering

heaped upon us by other people we are to be perfectly meek, not rising up and reacting in the heat of our own temper and hurt feelings and pride, but in meekness we are to accept it, allow it, commit the whole thing to the Lord and suffer.

That is not our constitution. We have to be reconstituted to do that. But when the Spirit of Jesus Christ, God's Lamb, really does prevail in our hearts and get a victory there, when the Lamb overcomes in us, the ground is provided for God, in His own time and in His own way, to exercise His infinite power in that very situation. It might very well be that these people would come back and say, "Look here, if you had shown resentment, any bad spirit, I should not have thought much of you as a Christian; but because of the way you took it, somehow or other I have had a miserable time ever since!" God has had His opportunity. How many are won that way! Yes, the Lamb *wins*.

The unity of the company

But let us not get some objective mentality about following the Lamb. It is coming right home to us in a new way, any day that we live it is going to find us out all along. Nevertheless at the end there is this company right in touch with the throne, singing their song in such a oneness that the apostle said he only heard one voice. "*I heard a voice ... and the voice which I heard...*" — singular. One hundred and forty-four thousand singing in unison so that it was like one sound or voice. God has done something. How has He done that? How does God bring about an utter unity and oneness, identity, in a disrupted creation? How is God going to deal with all the divisions that the enemy has brought about in this world and even amongst the Lord's people? Only by the way of the Lamb — and He will do it that way, that is His way.

It is a mighty thing. You may try every other means conceivable to the human mind to bring about absolute oneness between two people, and you find there is always some kind of breaking out. It cannot be done. You think you have nicely patched up some matter, but somehow or other it breaks out again; you can never be sure of it. Yet here is something done where a great company is only heard as one voice, only identified

as one person. That has undone the work of the devil; that has destroyed his works.

How is it done? *The Lamb, the way of the Lamb*. The Lord make us followers of the Lamb.

THE PATHWAY OF THE LAMB

Reading: Rev. 14:1-5; John 1:29, 35-37.

This is the second actual view of the Lamb personally in the whole revelation. We were seeing in our previous meditation that the first is of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, taking us back to those counsels of God which were secured against all the subsequent eventualities, the breaking in of adverse forces and of sin. Here is the second view of the Lamb personally. In the fulness of the times God sent His Son. Of course there has been typology and prophecy pre-visioning the Lamb. The features of the Lamb have been set forth in numerous symbolic ways in the Old Testament and prophetic utterances. But this is the second view of Him personally and this is marked by a twofold “Behold!” “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*”

The first is a fuller utterance — “*The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world*”. That seems to have been uttered in public. At that time the multitudes were coming to Jordan to be baptized of John and in a public and general and open way John made his declaration — “Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” This is a world matter.

But the second occasion, where the final clause is not repeated, is apparently to disciples, and now it is John looking upon Jesus as He walks and he says to these disciples, “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*” There is that presentation of the Lamb for the world in relation to sin and sin-bearing, but there is also the presentation of the Lamb to followers as the pattern for their walk — “*He looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold, the*

Lamb of God!” It was not only as the sin-bearer; it was “Behold the Lamb” *as He walked*, and I think that takes us right up to Rev. 14:4. The hundred and forty-four thousand have, of course, beheld Him as their sin-bearer, but they have also beheld Him as One to follow closely all the way, following the Lamb wherever He goes. Whilst we may be rejoicing in the first beholding, rejoicing in the Lord as our sin-bearer, I trust it can also be said of us all that we are beholding as John beheld on the second day. There was a first day in our experience of the Lamb; there was a first beholding. But there is a second day and a day after for beholding, beholding with a view first of all to seeing how the Lamb walks, and then to following. The one hundred and forty-four thousand were those who had done both.

God’s Lamb

“*Behold, the Lamb of God!*” We will recall the words of Abraham to Isaac — “*God will provide himself the lamb*” (*Gen. 22:8*). God’s Lamb. He is God’s Lamb before He is ours, God’s Lamb before He is anything else. God had need of a Lamb, for in His Son, in the great vocation and service, or transaction, of a Lamb, the primary thing was accomplished of God’s rights being honoured. God has rights, and those rights are the rights of His eternal conception of what man and the world, the creation and the universe ought to be — seeing that it belongs to God, seeing that it came from God, seeing that it was conceived in the heart of God. He associated certain ideas and ideals, standards and ways, a certain nature, with His creation, and He has a right to all that, and His rights have been taken from Him. He is not having His rights in man’s nature and in man’s life, in the world and in the creation, since that interference, since that terrible diversion from God. The Lamb of God, God’s Lamb, as the very first thing in His work, recovers and establishes the rights of God.

God has the right to absolute, unquestioning submission. That right has been taken from Him, and we know — oh, we know so well; it is the very plague of our hearts — how in our very constitution there is that lack of submission to God. What difficulties, what battles, what agonies, we go through in coming

into absolute submission to God. It is our nature — it is not our deliberate, conscious insubordination, rebellion or will against God, but it is there in spite of ourselves, in spite of all our desires; it is there, this unmanageable something that is in the very nature of the creation which does not submit to God. Utter and immediate obedience to God — that is His right; and disobedience is the very nature of man, it is shot through this universe. Selfhood — we call it selfishness; it is selfhood. It would take a long time to try to compass the whole round of self-aspects. The Lamb — the very designation, the very word, the very idea, is the opposite of all that — it is the very picture of submission, obedience, selflessness. God gets His rights of submission, obedience, selflessness, in the One known as the Lamb.

The Lamb laying down His soul

In Him as the Lamb, as we have previously said, we can so clearly see the complete reversal of the whole course of fallen nature, the thought of God for man recovered, humanity reconstituted on another principle — that of the Lamb; a changed nature. It is not our nature to lay down our lives. Remember that that very phrase about laying down the life can equally well be translated “we ought to lay down our souls for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). We sometimes use the word “life” in that connection so that it means what, of course, it is meaning for many today on this earth — just dying a martyr’s death, laying down our life for the gospel of Christ in a single act. But laying down our soul is a lifelong act, an every day act, a thing which challenges our very disposition, yes, our constitution, for we are immediately affected and influenced by how men of this world will think. They will say it is meek, weak, namby-pamby — you ought to stand up for your rights, you ought to fight for your ends; that is the way of the world. Take a view of the world today and see what that is producing. But the Lamb laid down His soul. When He was reviled, He suffered it, He endured it, He answered nothing. *“As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth”* (Is. 53:7). That takes some doing, that represents a strength that is not in you and in me

naturally. We have another nature. You say that is weak? I say there is no strength like it. You do not know what strength is until you can stand right up against the whole nature of this world and its judgments and standards and take the opposite view and the opposite course. He did that. That is the Lamb, laying down His soul.

To say to these feelings of ours, these uprisings of our souls, these strong hot feelings, these resentful feelings — to say to them, Now then, you get down, you stay under — that sometimes means a real battle when you are taking everything into account, as to what it is going to involve of cost for the time being, until God vindicates that attitude.

“Behold the Lamb”; follow the Lamb. The way of the Lamb may be the way of the Cross and the crucifixion of the natural life continually, but the end of that way is the throne, and the throne is not some merely geographical scene or spot. Do not interpret thrones in the Bible literally. It may not interest you at all to sit upon a literal throne — it does not interest me — but to come to a place of spiritual ascendancy where there are values, where there is wealth, where there are riches, dignity, strength, honour and glory to be dispensed to others, that is something, that is the throne — the end of the course of the Lamb, the way of the Cross.

Beholding the Lamb every day

Behold the Lamb walking, today and tomorrow and the day after.

So many Christians have stopped with the first day. They have beheld the Lamb, the sin-bearer, and they rejoice, as we ought to rejoice, in Him as the sin-bearer. We have stopped with that view, and today and tomorrow and the next day and all the days following we still keep our eyes on day one, forgetting that every day there is to be a beholding of the Lamb in very practical matters. It will require that you and I many times have to withdraw from the scene, as being too much for our natures, and get

away with the Lord for a little while and fight that battle out — the battle of our souls, of our reactions, of our provocation. We may have to fight it out and get clear and come out with the Spirit of the Lamb, leaving it in the hands of the Lord to give an answer in His own time. That is following the Lamb. The Lamb repeatedly withdrew to be with His Father because of the situation, because of what He was meeting. He fought out the battle right to the end. He went a little further. *“He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt”* (Mark 14:35-36). The cost was great. He fought it out and came forth serene, with an amazing serenity, resultant from that secret battle with His own soul. *“He poured out his soul unto death”* (Is. 53:12).

The Lamb at Jordan

So God’s Lamb is one that is wholly unto God. We see here two aspects of that: firstly, as He came to Jordan to be baptized of John, and John said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God”*. That is the initial and consummate attitude and committal. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is now declaring publicly, in the world, that that has, from eternity, been His attitude toward God’s interests. *“I am come to do thy will”*. I have not come to debate it, to question it; I have not come to contemplate it; I have come committed to it, fully, utterly committed. And Jordan was but a declaration; it was not an acceptance of the will of God — that had been done before the world was; the Lamb was slain then. Will you just dwell upon that statement — *“The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”*. What does that mean? It only means this: that in the counsels of God, when the great design of God, that eternal purpose, was being “talked over” (speaking after the manner of men), and decided upon, then the Father said to the Son, “You know what is going to happen, you know the challenge that is coming, you know the result of that interference, that it will be an utmost cost to secure what we are talking about now — it will

cost us everything”; and the Son said, “Father, I will pay the price”. That is the slaying of the Lamb. The Father said, “Very good, we will share it together; it will be My cost and Your cost”. And there it was that “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son”. And when the Son came into the world, He was only taking publicly, on this earth, the position that He had taken then, and declaring it. It was an utmost committal, a consummate attitude, declared at the Jordan.

The Lamb as He walked

And then again, it was a matter of beholding Him “as he walked”. The position that He had taken was the position in which He remained every day, meeting the cost of it. Every kind of test came to the position that He had taken. The world tested Him, and I do not mean only the world as a sphere and the people in it, but the spirit of this world, the ideas and conceptions and standards of this world, all so contrary to His. The prince of this world betrays the standard of this world when he suggests to Him that, by falling down and worshipping him, He should receive all the world’s kingdoms. The spirit of compromise — “If only you will drop your level a bit and forsake your utter and ultimate standard, if only you will do a little compromising, you can get so much more; do not be so utter, so absolute, so consummate, it is not to your interests”. That is the world. He was up against that all the time. He was tested by the world spirit, the world’s concept, which is so completely different from that of the Lamb.

He was tested by the evil powers. Very often the evil forces come nakedly, not through men and not through things. They seem somehow or other to break right in upon us, apart from other people and apart from other things, and we sense an awful working of evil. It seems as though the evil powers have got inside of us, ourselves. At other times they are in other people, provoking us; now they somehow seem to be working *within*. “Christian, do you see them, how they work within?” Yes, they do; that is how it seems. I am not talking about demon possession in the case of Christians, but it seems sometimes as though they have their grip upon our very vitals. He knew soul-travail in conflict with

the evil powers; oh, if it were known what a secret history the Lord Jesus had! We only read of His doings and His sayings and see some of the incidents in His life, but there must have been a tremendous secret history, battles and conflicts and sufferings and issues being fought out. He was here for that, but the position taken initially was maintained day by day in His walk, in His going, in His progress, and we must constantly in every situation follow the Lamb.

Thank God, we have not to fight this out alone. The Spirit Himself helps our infirmity, we have One alongside, we have the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we have grace which is sufficient. But nevertheless, it is a bitter fight sometimes — this laying down of the soul, this selflessness. “These are they which *follow* the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”.

Firstfruits unto the Lamb

I close by repeating that these are said to be the “firstfruits unto the Lamb”. That is, in them God’s rights, God’s thoughts, God’s desires, God’s intentions have their first full expression. These are they who have met in an initial way the blaze, the heat, of ripening suffering, spiritual suffering, and have responded. These are they who have passed along that peculiar way where others have not passed. I cannot explain this; I cannot tell you why it is that the Lord does this — the operation of the principle of election seems to be here also. Somehow or other God has laid hold of certain people to satisfy Him in a certain way, and He takes them through certain experiences deeper than others. How sorry we feel for people like that. We cannot do anything about it, we cannot help them. We see them going through unusual difficulties and adversities. Somehow or other, if anything can go wrong, it goes wrong with them: if there is any trouble, they are the people who get it. Of course that may not be exclusive to such as we are thinking about. There are a lot of foolish people about who get into all the trouble that there is going. I am not speaking of those. But there is no mistaking the fact that there are people on this earth who have peculiar and unusual experiences under the hand of God. They are sometimes tempted to cry out against that

hand, cry out with the Psalmist, “*Is his lovingkindness clean gone for ever?... Has God forgotten to be gracious?*” Oh, the agony! Not every Christian goes that way. Multitudes of the Lord’s children have an easier way than that. But here are these in our midst who so suffer. What is the explanation?

I think it is the hundred and forty-four thousand — of course, not necessarily that actual number, but a marked out company, to be unto God’s satisfaction as a firstfruits unto the Lamb. I do not see any other explanation. Maybe we shall be given more light upon it, but I do feel that this touches many of our questions and problems. It is God’s intention to bring near to Himself, by unusual methods and means, some to serve Him and His satisfaction in a peculiar way. That, I think, explains this company, and it may explain something in our experience. The Lord make us in any case those who follow the Lamb — as we have already seen, it is in the present tense — who *keep on following* the Lamb wherever He goes.