

T. Austin-Sparks:

From "The Work of the Ministry" - Volume 2

Reading: Revelation 3:7-11.

You will notice that the words of our title are linked with the Lord's coming - "I come quickly". And with His coming imminent He addresses these words to His children. The issue, after all, at the end, in the coming of the Lord, will be that there is that which draws out His own heart and makes it possible for Him to say this kind of thing - "I have loved thee!" And this is a discriminating statement. We must place an emphasis upon the "thee" because that represents a certain condition that does answer to the heart of the Lord. The Lord loves ALL His children, but there seems to be something special here.

Straitness at the Time of the End

From this message to Philadelphia, which has the Lord's coming in view, we know how a faithful testimony may find itself at the time of the end. Undoubtedly the terms of this message indicate that the Lord's testimony will be in straitness, in limitation, hedged up, shut in. These words "key" and "door" surely indicate that there is something that is locked up, something that men would shut out, lock out, something men would hinder and frustrate and curtail and limit; doors that men would close and lock. Over against this, though it may be like that - and it will be like that to the end for a faithful testimony - the Lord says: 'I have the key. And no matter what doors men may close, I can set before you a door which no one can close. Keys and doors ultimately are with Me, in the presence of the severest straitening, curtailment and difficulty'.

The True Testimony and the False

And then we have this word which says there are those who "say they are Jews, and they are not", but are "of the synagogue of Satan", implying that there is something which seeks to simulate and represent what is of God, but which is not true and not pure. That is why the Lord introduces Himself as the One that is holy and the One that is true, in contrast to that which is false and impure, which is not transparent, which will not stand up to the scrutiny of those eyes of flame, with which He is presented to us at the beginning of these messages to the churches. He is looking through and exposing the false. But a true testimony will find it is based upon something that is true, as over against the seeming true which is false, savouring of that which is a lie - a synagogue of Satan, a legalistic system in antagonism to a pure, clear, full, free testimony of the Lord Jesus. That is how it may be in any expression in fullness of the Lord's mind towards the end. It is not going to be popular and have all the doors open in all directions, with everyone acclaiming and sponsoring. It is going to feel very much shut out and find many doors closed. 'Never mind', says the Lord; 'I know, I have the key. The issue is with Me'.

The Divine Approbation of Faithfulness

But what is it that brings out this divine approbation? 'I am going to make them know that I have loved thee'. There is a partiality of God - not just for persons, for people, as such; it is not a selectiveness among people which draws out His partiality. But there is a partiality of the Lord towards faithfulness itself. It is that which draws out this word, "I have loved thee". I am sure it must have been very heartening to the saints at Philadelphia to get a message like that. It must almost have startled them in their difficulties, in everything that seemed to say that the Lord was not with them and was not prospering them. There is so much that is against them; there are so many difficulties. Then suddenly a letter arrives, and in it the Lord says: "I have loved thee". Almost startling! Why? Here are the oppressed saints at Philadelphia, and the Lord says, "thou hast a little power". They themselves are more conscious of weakness than of power, seeming to be very much weaker than otherwise, and yet there is that there which speaks of the Lord, something that the Lord can light upon and say: 'In all your consciousness of weakness, in the seeming overwhelming insufficiency, there is that there which is My foothold, which speaks of Me'. "Thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word" - 'you have been faithful to My revealed thoughts and mind' -, "and didst not deny my name" - the Name of absolute supremacy and honour and glory -, and "didst keep the word of my patience".

"The Word of My Patience"

"The word of my patience". A strange phrase. What does it mean? Surely just this - that, all down the ages, God

"I Have Loved Thee"

spoke a word to His servants, gave them something from Himself, and then it seemed He went away and left them, and they had to wait and wait and wait. They were tested by the word, having to pass through a long period of waiting for the word to be fulfilled, for God to honour His word. "The word of the Lord tried him", it says about Joseph (Ps. 105:19). He evidently had something from the Lord at some time, and now he is in a dungeon. His soul enters into iron. "The word of the Lord tried him". Here in Philadelphia they had the word, and had not given it up; they had held on through difficulties, through the darkness, till the word should be fulfilled. "Kept the word of my patience." Upon all that the Lord comes back and says: "I have loved thee".

We see a grand illustration and embodiment of all this in Daniel - the man who was so conscious of his own weakness, who had to be helped up on to his feet by stages, first to his knees and then to his feet, so conscious was he of his weakness (Dan. 10:8-11). "O man greatly beloved" (vs. 19). His strength was in God and not in himself. Daniel was one who 'kept the word' of the Lord. We recall how he came to know "by the books" - he had read Jeremiah, he had the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah - that 70 years should pass over Israel in captivity, and then they should be restored. Seventy years is a long time. He had discovered the word of the Lord and he did not let it go. He kept the word through all that time in Babylon: he held the word - THE LORD had said it.

And if ever a man had 'not denied His Name' it was Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was a great name in Babylon, and every thing is now between the Name of Jehovah and the name of Nebuchadnezzar. And he did not deny His Name. He and his brethren held to the Name of "the God of heaven", Jehovah.

And as for the 'word of His patience', well, it was a long-drawn-out business for Daniel and his brethren. He was an old man when these later scenes of his prophecies were enacted. All the time his patience is being tested. If this happens or that happens, what about the Lord? And how many things could have happened! The fire could have devoured, the lions could have destroyed. The word of the Lord - where is it? Knowing God, neither fire, lions, nor anything else can upset that word. It is going to be fulfilled. "O man greatly beloved". "I have loved thee". Oh the faithfulness of Daniel in all these ways. He held on to His word.

It is so easy to say, 'Well, you see, everything has gone to pieces, and there is no hope now for a real testimony. I will make the best of things as they are. Jettison Ephesians, jettison Colossians. It may have been all right at one time, but give it all up now.' "Thou hast kept my word". Still holding on, if only it be in a remnant, a small representation of the whole, to see something that answers to the word of the Lord. Still holding on to the absolute supremacy of His Name over every other name, cost what it will and may. Still enduring many difficulties, many frustrations, knowing many closed doors and all that, and yet the word of His patience kept. 'The Lord is going to fulfil His word - He is going to fulfil His word sooner or later'.

That is faith, and that is the ground. It is a simple word, but that is how we may find things. The Lord is coming soon, and He wants to find, even if in a small way so far as numbers are concerned, a faithful people like that. He wants to be able to say, 'Your vindication will come', and the greatest vindication that you could ever desire or hope for is that He should say through it all, "I have loved thee". Do you want more than that? None of us wants more than that the Lord should say, "I have loved thee", "O greatly beloved".