

T. Austin-Sparks:**Reading: Exodus 35**

This and the following chapters give us a comprehensive representation of Christ as tabernacling among His people; they are a typical setting forth of the body of Christ, the Church; and they are a most valuable disclosure of the spiritual principles of the life and service of the people of God.

But before we deal with the contents of this chapter we must remind ourselves of the background and setting of what we have in view, and this can be stated as one of those breakings into this world by the God of glory which mark the history of His dealings with men. Reading back we find God descending from heaven, breaking through to the mount, and meeting His servant at a place midway between heaven and earth to disclose His purpose concerning this world. The glory of the God of Israel so fell upon Moses that he brought it down out of the divine presence and had it reflected in his face as he acted as a mediator between God and man. Then the purpose of the breaking through of God's glory was seen to be the setting up of His testimony on the earth. He revealed that He proposed to have an instrument here for His own self-manifesting. This was His purpose, to have a vehicle for displaying His glory here on earth. The tabernacle was, of course, only a type. The reality is in Christ. For the moment, however, we seek to get help from the type, and so consider this mediator of the divine glory, radiant of countenance, as he makes his first utterances to the people.

The Assembly Constituted upon the Sabbath

"And Moses assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel, and said unto them, These are the words which Jehovah hath commanded that ye should do them. Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord: whoever doeth any work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day." We remember that what is in view is God's testimony here on earth, to be constructed and constituted in a tent of meeting, and the first words in connection with this is that the only ground on which it can be constructed is the sabbath. That was because the sabbath represented the end of the works of God and the entering in by man into His finished work. Only a man of rest can build the house of God. Later on we find that Solomon was able to build the temple because he was such a man of peace whereas his father, David, had been forbidden to do this work because he had been a man of war. The vessel of the testimony can only be constituted on the ground and principle that those who have a part in it have come definitely and finally to rest in the perfected works of God. We know that every testimony for the Lord here on earth has to face a fierce conflict. The only hope of triumph for all such is that before they even go into the battle they have perfect rest as to the full and final victory of Christ, with perfect assurance that God's end has already been secured.

One of the enemy's most successful activities against the testimony and those who bear it is to bring about unrest and a lack of assurance concerning the Lord. He has many ways of producing such a condition of uncertainty: introspection, self-occupation, false accusations, feelings of the soul or doubts in the mind. All manner of means are used to upset the restful, confident assurance of faith in relation to the Lord. A principal one is fear, but there is nothing which will so quickly and utterly paralyse the servant of God as fear. In this connection we are told: "And in nothing affrighted by the adversaries". The great adversary works hard to get us unsettled and affrighted, which means that we are not spiritually enjoying God's sabbath. In principle the sabbath is a state rather than a period of time; it is a spiritual condition of heart rest in the fact that God has reached the end of all His works and has nothing more to do, having secured everything finally in His Son. We need to apprehend the completeness of Calvary's work, for without such an assurance we cannot build for God. If we are fretful and worried about our spiritual life, our acceptance, our standing or our fellowship with God, then we are debarred from practical participation in building for God.

It is noteworthy that only one aspect of the sabbath is here mentioned. Elsewhere many other things are said about the prohibitions of the sabbath, but here the only one specified is: "Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the sabbath day". The Holy Spirit knows exactly what He means by singling out this one matter. What is His intention? Well, so far as I can see, the kindling of fire in the habitations represents looking after one's own comfort. It is as though God was saying that those who were going to constitute His testimony must set aside all personal interests and self-consideration. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing THINE OWN PLEASURE on my holy day: and call the sabbath a delight, and the holy of the Lord honourable; and shalt honour it, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure... I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth" (Isaiah 58:13-14). To know what spiritual ascendancy is, to be on the

uplands with God, means first of all to have entered into God's rest in His completed work and then to cease from personal and selfish interests.

The Assembly is for God's Pleasure

As we move on into the chapter we see what a good state of affairs prevailed among the people. The whole assembly moved in response to God's pleasure. It is tremendously impressive to note the recurrence of the word 'willing'. A willing heart, a willing spirit, everyone whose heart made him willing, everyone whose spirit stirred him up - all this represented a glad response to the opportunity to please the Lord. He did not command, but made His desire known, and that was enough. In another place the Lord commanded to bring offerings, for sacrifices were needed when it was a question of fellowship with God, but here God simply expressed His intention of establishing a testimony among them and appealed to their desire to bring pleasure to Him: "Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring...". It was a beautiful thing that there was such a spontaneous movement of the people's hearts to meet this desire of His.

I think that we need to recover this feature in relation to our testimony for Christ. It is sad that we sometimes tend to regard the matter as somewhat onerous, a requirement which is so hard to meet that we almost groan about it instead of counting it a joyful privilege. In the New Testament we recognise Paul as a prominent worker in this matter and as one who paid a very high price in his work of church-building, yet we get no hint that it was burdensome to him, but just the reverse. When he was imprisoned in Rome and superficial observers might have been inclined to pity him, he was able to exhort the Philippians to keep on rejoicing all the time. His experience was that if he was sorrowful yet he was always rejoicing - "rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer".

Above all we think of our Lord Jesus, who was Himself the embodiment of God's testimony here on earth. The doing of the will of God was for Him a matter of intense anguish, and yet He affirmed: "I delight to do thy will, O my God". So there were two experiences taking place at the same time, a consciousness of the costliness of pleasing God and yet a glad and willing delight in ministering to the Father's satisfaction. It seems that although the sufferings were terribly real the sting was taken out of them by the assurance that a great and wonderful purpose of God was being achieved by means of them, so that the sacrifice brought deep pleasure to the heart of the Father.

We see this principle in the case of the Israelites. They brought all sorts of precious things, sacrificing their treasures, because their hearts were moved with love of God. I can imagine that when all the requirements had been outlined by Moses, the gold, the silver, the brass, the precious stones and the costly materials, the people might well have doubted whether they could spare their treasures if they had not felt a heart-response to God's call. They would perhaps not have known what they had got or, if they had it, they might have forgotten where it was and decided that it was inconvenient to search it out. It is surprising what excuses we can find if our hearts are not in a matter. Happily they were moved by willing hearts, so that all the material came from their affectionate gratitude. It is wonderful what we can discover that we have in the Lord Jesus when our hearts are aglow for Him and for the Father's satisfaction. People whose hearts are cold will always feel that they have nothing to give to the Lord. To the Corinthians the apostle said: "In everything ye were enriched in him", but it takes love to discover what those riches are and to make them available in the assembly of God's people. In times of worship you will not have to scour through your Bible in an attempt to discover some passage of Scripture which will be a suitable contribution. If your heart is aglow to the Lord you will always have something spontaneous to offer in the hour of worship, and with that glowing heart you will discover that you are richer in spiritual possessions than you had thought, and so you will always have something precious to give.

Features of Christ in the Assembly

If we consider the numerous and various materials we find that every one of them is typical of Christ. There can be nothing satisfying to the heart of God apart from the Lord Jesus. The gold, silver, brass and fine linen, all these things represented some aspects of the person and work of Christ. Find the person who is full of love to the Lord, one whose heart is burning and throbbing with love for Him, and you will meet someone who always has something to convey to you of the preciousness of the Saviour. Such a one is always seeing the glory of the Lord from a different angle and so able to present a different facet of His beauty. This delighting in the Lord made the testimony grow. Before there was any outward expression there had to be an inner response of willing hearts. All outward ministry must be the result of an inward state of heart towards the Lord.

In this case there was such a generous response that they brought more than was required and had to be called

The Lord's Assembly

to stop giving. How wonderful if that symbolic response of old could have a spiritual realisation in our day! The fact is, of course, that every child of God has in Christ an abundance of resources for ministering to the heart of God. "In everything... enriched in him" is to be true of us. We need more love and willingness of heart to make us discover our riches and then release them for the building of His Church. The assembly is set up as a testimony on earth by the bringing together of individual heart exercise and appreciation of the Lord Jesus. The assembly really is not just a congregation, not just the coming together of people for services, meetings, conventions, etc., but the bringing together of individual heart exercise in the appreciation of the Lord Jesus in such a way that the Father can see His Son's features expressed in human lives. That is the true nature of assembly life. One can bring the gold and another the silver, and yet another the brass. Some bring fine linen, some blue, others scarlet and others purple, so that as each brings his own apprehension and appreciation of the Lord Jesus and all are united together in the assembly, the Father can look down and see the various features of His Son. That is the testimony of Jesus on earth: that is Christ tabernacling among us. As each one follows on to know the Lord in private, personal life history, so new discoveries are made of the virtues and values of God's Son, and these are brought together in assembly life. When we have made such new discoveries of the grace of Christ we can come together with other children of God and speak and sing together of what we have proved experimentally in a living way and so we become a collective and corporate representation of the house of God.

I imagine that the Israelites went back to their tents to search out the materials which were required, eager to see if they had some of the treasures which their willing hearts prompted them to offer to the Lord, and that they then gathered together to cooperate in shaping and preparing them. This means that they were willing to work with the materials which others had brought. Not only did people vary in what they could contribute but they also had different work to do with the materials after they had been gathered. They needed one another and they worked together. Even a Bezaleel, specially called and anointed for his task, could not have carried it through without the materials donated by others. And if the women had not done the spinning and weaving, Bezaleel's work would have been without purpose. In the assembly, the Holy Spirit depends upon a spirit of willing and loving cooperation among God's people.

There seems to be a special lesson in the work of the women, for their weaving involved the bringing of things together and binding them into a whole. It is so easy to tear things apart, to pull things asunder and to shred apart instead of embroidering together. We can do this by gossip, by criticism, by letting our tongues run away with us. I am afraid that we are all guilty of such behaviour at times, and it brings weakness into the assembly. There is so much constructive work to be done, spinning and weaving even what other people have contributed, so we should give ourselves to this kind of activity and beware of Satan's temptations to put strains on our relationships and so weaken our testimony. The Holy Spirit can only do His work and perfect the testimony as each one takes personal and individual responsibility, working together toward the common end of God which is the manifestation and glorifying of the Lord Jesus.