

**T. Austin-Sparks:**

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against Me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out My hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord Jehovah.... Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My wrath upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast; though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they should deliver neither son nor daughter; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness" (Eze. 14:12-14,19-20).

"Then said the Lord to me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth" (Jer. 15:1).

**God Takes Account Of Those Who Have Power With Him**

It is a remarkable thing that the Lord is doing when, in this way, He selects certain names and brings them to the fore over against such a very dark and hopeless situation, and says of them: 'Although these men were there, and although these men stood before Me, it would make no difference; they alone, by themselves, would be saved.' In doing this, He has selected from all the men who had ever prevailed with Him those who, more than any others, had power with God. If anything could be done, if God could be influenced, persuaded to intervene, to change the situation which was so desperate, these men would do it, and would be the ones who would have power with God. The very first thing that strikes us is just that - God taking account of men who had power with Him. The Lord carries that a very long way. He says, in effect: 'I take that right to the very limit of possibility - where possibility ends these men go; if anything could be done, however desperate the situation, these are the men who will bring it about.' It is something to note that God takes account of men who have power with Him. God knows them; He knows what He has had to do, what He has been compelled to do because of such men.

**God Puts Himself Into The Hands Of Men**

By inference, this carries the truth that God puts Himself into the hands of men. God is not going to move unless there are those who prevail with Him, and the inference is: 'I am your hands, if you will press the matter far enough, if you will learn how to prevail.' God will, or will not, move according to knowledge of how to prevail with Him in a situation or a matter. That is something to think about. If a situation could be altered God says: 'Such and such are the men through whom I would do it.' Of course, I am not dealing with the situations in the contexts of these two passages in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. That is not the point. I am not taking up the situation in Israel, which had become an impossible situation, and its handling and solution was one which could only be done through judgment, and the terrible judgment of the seventy years' captivity. God would deal with it in that way. But He had reached the point where no man could ask the Lord to deal with it on the spot, and it would happen. That is not our concern at the moment.

It is this: That there are situations which do go a very long way, as we shall see, which are still open to be dealt with by heaven, but which never will be dealt with unless there are those who know how to prevail with God. God offers Himself to be prevailed with, to yield Himself in all His sovereign power, in all His grace, in all His mercy, to men and people who know the secret of prevailing.

Now let us note at this very point, lest our hearts begin to lose assurance and hope, that the men here mentioned as being the most outstanding examples of prevailing with God were not taken account of for what they were in themselves. There were two things which made it possible for the Lord to take account of them.

**A Heart Relationship With The Lord**

One was their heart relationship to the Lord. Look at the men: Noah, Daniel, Job, Moses, Samuel. Well, there are some grand things about those men. The Lord has not covered up the other side. You are sometimes a little surprised at what the Lord does say about some of them. If you read the whole story, you do feel that there may be some ground of contradiction here in these men. You know the end of Noah - a very sad picture. You hear a New Testament Apostle saying: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job" (James 5:11), but when you read the Book of Job, you sometimes feel that if ever there was a man without patience, it is Job. We know about Moses, and even Samuel seems to have passed out almost under a cloud. Well, I think it is clear that in their case, as in the case of so many of the others who are held up by God as examples of this or that, it was not because of

what they were in themselves that God singled them out, but in every case you do see this: that in spite of their humanity, their weaknesses, their failures, their lapses, there was a heart relationship to the Lord which cannot be questioned, and when you look at the context of these very passages, that is the thing which first of all is impressed upon you - the heart of these people. God is troubled about the heart of this people. The prophetic word about Israel at this time was: 'The heart of this people is turned away from Me, and turned to idols.' "This people draw nigh unto Me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me" (Isa. 29:13). It is a heart question, and it was that state of heart which at length brought about this impasse - that God could do nothing. Over against that, men are mentioned who, despite their human weaknesses, were men whose hearts were in a very utter place with the Lord.

But that is not all. That is a beginning point, but there is another reason why the Lord singled out these men. It was because of certain spiritual factors which were the great characteristics of their very life, factors which do count with God. When you look at each of these men, read their story and sum it all up, you have to say: That is the thing that marks that man's life, and that, and that. Each one of them is the embodiment of something, and it is that thing which counts with God and which was the basis of their having power with God. That is what we are after at this time - that which makes for power with God.

### Two Ways Of Estimating Men

May I just stay here, after what I have just said, to add this. There are two ways in which we may estimate men, by which we may judge them and their history and arrive at a conclusion about them. There is the natural side, the way in which men naturally look at men. When the world reads the story of some of these men, such as David, and others, well, they sum it all up with a sneer and pass it all out as utterly unworthy. It is the natural way of judging men and appraising their value, and that was the point upon which the Lord came down with Job's friends. They judged Job naturally, by the sight of the eye, by what appeared on the surface, and summed him up as a bad lot. You can look on men of God like that, just taking account of the flaws, the weaknesses and all that human side, which is, after all, poor stuff in the best. Very few men, if any, have ever come out of the judgments of men completely free of that sort of thing. But there is another way, and that is as to their spiritual values, to judge spiritually. It is just here that the Lord says: "Touch not Mine anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm" (I Chron. 16:22). Why should they touch the Lord's anointed? Only because they have misjudged them and had come to wrong conclusions about them. The Lord will not let us touch any one of His, however much they may be at fault in our judgment. It is a very solemn thing to remember that: that our hand must not come down upon any of the Lord's own in judgment; that has to be left with the Lord. It may be that there is plenty from our point of view and to our judgment that would justify our taking such an antagonistic or opposed attitude, but the Lord will not have it. That comes out in the case of Job. Moses was a frail human vessel capable of making mistakes, but see what the Lord will do with those who assail Moses, and touch his acceptance with God, his standing before the Lord! I do feel it is necessary for us to remember that, because who belongs to the Lord is very precious and must not be touched. There are always two ways of looking at and judging men and people of God. There is this natural side which has plenty to criticize, but the Lord will disapprove if we do it. There is the spiritual way of judging, and it is necessary to look further and see how far these count for God, whether there is not something there that is of the Lord.

### Noah Singled Out By God

Having said that - and it is only introductory - we can come to the first of these men, Noah. This is not a study of the life of Noah, and certainly not of the deluge, but just this particular point - power with God. God singled Noah out from amongst a great host of men and said: 'If I could be prevailed upon, if I could be persuaded, Noah would do it; of all men, he could do it.' Noah is amongst the few. Perhaps you have not thought of Noah as being so important as that, and all that you know about him is that he made an ark. You always associate the ark and the deluge with Noah, and that is all it amounts to. But here the dispensation is closing, the whole existing order of things is passing, the antediluvians, patriarchs, the Mosaic economy, the whole monarchy, the prophetic ministry in the old dispensation are coming to a close. God looks over the whole and sees men who have prevailed with Him, and brings five out from amongst them. The first one He mentions is Noah - a man who stands over a great extent of time. God says: 'If I could be moved, Noah would move Me. I would have to yield to him.' Well, that surely forces us to look to see what it is in Noah's case that represents that which prevails with God.

I think the key is in Hebrews 11:7: "By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." That is the summary of it, but it wants breaking up.

## Noah Stood Alone For God

First of all, we go back to Noah's time. You read chapters 6 and 7 of Genesis and this whole situation concerning Noah is introduced. The statement is that God looked and saw, and what did He see? A whole race of men, in every imagination of their hearts corrupt, evil, a universal state of iniquity and departure from God, of godlessness and of positive iniquity so utter, so terrible, that God repented that He had made man on the earth, and He said: "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground; both man, and beast, and creeping things, and birds of the heavens; for it repenteth Me that I have made them." God has said that, and then the next sentence is: 'But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.' "But Noah..." - the exception. Then at the beginning of the seventh chapter you have the reason why: "... for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation".

Well, the first thing about Noah is that: that he stood true to God as one solitary, lonely man in a universe of iniquity, one man amongst all men, distinguished from them by righteousness over against utter unrighteousness. One man true to God when all others had departed. How easy it would have been for Noah to have been carried away, not only by the sin and the atmosphere and the general course of things, but by this: "Well, everything has gone. God has not got anything, and what is the good of trying to stand true? What is the use of MY trying to hold on when everything has gone?" So often the Lord's people have given up, not because there were no other people of the Lord on the earth, nor because there were no other righteous people, nor because there was not another Christian in all the world, but because things have gone so largely astray, have departed so extensively from the Lord's revealed mind, and have got into such an appalling condition that they say: 'Is it any use trying to stand for what is of God in any full sense? We may as well accept things as they are and capitulate, and make the best of a bad job.' - the kind of argument which is the result of the seemingly impossible situation, prospect, and outlook. Death and departure: what is the good of our trying to stand up to this? Probably you, as an individual Christian, placed in a setting of so much that is contrary to God, often ask your heart: Is it any use trying to hold on, to stand for God? You see, the question of power with God does immediately arise. It is a tremendous thing that God is saying: 'Here is one man in the whole human race, one man in the whole world, alone who will not capitulate, and that is the basis of power with Me. If anything can be done, that is the kind of man who will bring it about.'

May we not be tested by the situation in which God places us, so difficult, so contrary, as to whether we are going to stand with God so that we come to a place where we do know the secret of prevailing with God and are able to say: 'I have been in very difficult situations where the whole thing seemed hopeless and impossible, but I have learned that it is possible to prevail, to triumph, to bring God in, and I have seen those hopeless, impossible situations touched by God and dealt with by Him. I have come to know the Lord over against a very dark and seemingly impossible background.' God needs men and women like that. Alone - yes, desperately alone!

## Noah Had No Precedent

"Moved with godly fear, prepared an ark." He built an ark, as the context shows, without a precedent. That, I think, is the point here. "Things not seen as yet." First of all, it is fairly generally concluded that rain had never been seen up to this time. "There went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground" (Gen. 2:6), but rain was an unknown thing up to Noah's time. They had never seen it, so he had not a precedent for this. Probably there are other things covered by that little statement: "Things not seen as yet." The point is that nothing in history up to this point gave any ground of justification for taking the course that he did. He could never say: 'You see, this happened at such and such a time; this happened there; we have examples of this.' We, today, have examples of almost anything and everything that may come, but Noah had no examples, no evidence, no precedent, nothing to give point. He was simply told by God that it was going to happen, and he could not in the realm of his whole knowledge say: 'Well, I know what that means!' There was nothing like that at all. It was going to be something altogether new, something that had never happened before.

Every individual life with God is something so much by itself. Ten thousand, or a million, may have gone that way before, but when it comes to us, we always feel that no one in all God's universe has ever had this experience before. We feel that we are the only one who has ever gone this way. People can say to us: 'I know all about it. I have been that way.' 'Yes,' we say, 'but you don't understand. You have never really been in my position.' That is our immediate reaction. It is like that - the utter loneliness of a personal walk with God. Noah had no precedent, nothing to go upon. Faith is tested like that. Noah, "moved with godly fear" - and you know what that word means in the Scriptures: fear of the Lord, that is, just believing God and obeying Him because He is God; not because of any proofs or evidence, but because He is God - "prepared an ark".

## A Prolonged Test Of Faith

But then, remember the duration of it. He did not start this thing, get so far and say: 'Well, I have been at this for a good long time now. Month passes into month, the months are mounting up and it is getting into years now and nothing has happened. No one takes any notice, no one is influenced and I am making no impression at all. I think there must have been a mistake. Surely there ought by now to be something that indicates that I am on the right line and that I have not taken the wrong course!' One hundred and twenty years! Of course, that was not much out of his whole life of nine hundred and fifty, but a hundred and twenty is enough to test faith. Now the point is that for one hundred and twenty years he went on with it without anything coming in. He went the whole of that time of required, demanded activity with nothing whatever to prove that he was right or to support him in his way, with nothing that looked like some effect of his message (because one writer speaks of Noah as a "preacher of righteousness" (II Pet. 2:5)), with nothing happening through all his preaching, whether it was by word or act - but what was happening really? There was something happening, but it was one of those things that you and I do not ever feel happy about. It says that he condemned the world. By his faith and his works of faith, he put everybody else in the wrong and prepared them for judgment. In Paul's words, he was "a saviour unto death" (II Cor. 2:16). There is always that effect of faithfulness. It is not ineffective and neutral. It does have an effect, although it is a very disheartening kind; nevertheless it counts, is effective, is tremendous. His work of faith just prepared the world for judgment. God has to do that to be justified.

## For A Time To Come

But over it all there is this element - and you see we are getting at the question of faith and analysing it - this element of the future aspect of ministry, of service to the Lord. It was for a time to come, and I think there is nothing so testing as that. If only we are going to live to see the result of our ministry! If only it is all going to come about in our lifetime! If only we are going to know here our vindication! If only something is coming to us before we pass from this scene to prove that we have been right, well, we can go on. But note: This, with all the rest, is summed up by the writer to the Hebrews in this: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (Heb. 11:13). Oh yes, Noah saw the flood, he went through it and came out on the other side, and made a sorry mess of things afterward. Is that all? No, not a little bit of it, really, there is something very much deeper and greater than that about this whole matter.

But I want to emphasize that it is this 'for a time to come' feature which is so testing to faith. We are told, and as frankly as Jeremiah was, that we give our lives, spend our strength and go through all the travail and sorrow and suffering and see very little. We go home to the Lord and do not see all that we hoped for. There is the ultimate test. How far do we come into the picture? What place do we have in it all? Can we eliminate ourselves altogether and go right on without any reservation, and give ourselves for that which we shall never see, for a time to come?

There is a lot of that in the Old Testament. You remember that Jeremiah gave his prophecy. We read in II Chronicles 36:22: "That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished," but Jeremiah did not live to see it. His word was fulfilled, and people did go back from Babylon according to his word, but he did not live to see it. He worked for a time to come in which he had no place, so far as this earth is concerned, other than a spiritual place. The spiritual values of his life and work were there. It is a test of faith, because we do, humanly and naturally, crave so much to see something for it all before we pass hence, just to know that it has been worth while. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." Noah was really living and working for a time to come.

Now let us get right to this thing. By this kind of faith which, to begin with, would not capitulate to what was practically universal departure from God, but, in effect, said: 'Although I may be the only one left standing for God, and for God's full rights, and God's full place, I have that faith in God that it is worth my standing alone for Him. God has something bound up with my aloneness for Him.' That is faith, tremendous faith, the faith which would not surrender, to begin with, a faith which was not passive in standing in a world which was so contrary, a faith which was active, and went on, seeing nothing, with no precedent to work upon, went on building for one hundred and twenty years, and a faith which believed that, although he saw no converts or anyone coming over to the side of righteousness, something was happening. 'This is not all for nothing. Something is happening even now. These people are being brought under the effect of my stand and my ministry and my preaching, even if it is to take all ground from under their feet and leave them condemned, without an argument, without an excuse.' That is something which God must have before He can judge, and that is why He has sent us to preach. He is going to judge the world, but He cannot judge those who have never had an opportunity, those who have had no light and have had no witness. He must be justified. That was Noah's faith. It was not a happy

side of faith, but again the faith which believed that this thing related to something very much more somewhere ahead in the future. That was the kind of faith that Noah had, and it says: "he... became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith".

'He became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.' Now we can link up with that Hebrews 11:39-40: "And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (the word is 'complete')." Here is the great, future, prospective factor in Noah's faith. He, with the rest of these men, was not made complete. Why? Because completeness belongs to our time, to this dispensation. It is the whole argument of the Letter to the Hebrews: "nothing perfect" (Heb. 7:19). But now that which is perfect is come. This is the age of completeness, perfectness. Noah's faith looked on, and he had to die in faith, not receiving BECAUSE this perfectness, this completeness, belongs to OUR dispensation, the day in which we live.

You come over to Hebrews 12:22-23: "Ye are come... to the spirits of just men made perfect" (complete). Noah's spirit is amongst them. What has happened? The Lord Jesus has perfected the work of righteousness, the Son has fulfilled all righteousness. Noah's faith linked him with Christ, with this dispensation, with us, in perfect righteousness. Peter talks about Noah and the flood in chapter three of his first letter: "The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." John the Baptist would have refrained from baptizing the Lord Jesus, but Jesus said: "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). The flood, the deluge, says Peter, is a figure of baptism in which all righteousness is fulfilled. But all righteousness stood AGAINST the men of Noah's day, but all righteousness stood FOR him through his faith. Baptism was not his doom, but his way into life, a new creation. "All righteousness"; "the spirits of just men made perfect." So Noah in faith came right into this age of perfect righteousness and inherited it. We are come to the spirits of these just men, Noah and all the rest, made complete.

Now what does it amount to in this particular connection? His life work, after all, was not just that incident of the flood. It ran right on to Christ, and on to the Church. "They"; "we"; these are the two words here. 'They without us.' "They", "us", brought together in the perfect work of Christ in fulfilling all righteousness.

### Righteousness According To Faith

'Though Noah stood before Me.' What is the first mighty ground of power with God? It is the ground of righteousness which is according to faith, and you can test it any day that you like, because power with God is not just a matter of somehow persuading God to do something you think ought to be done. Let us get this right over. Power with God is not cajoling God into moving, getting a God, who is reluctant to come in and help, to change His mind and to be kind and intervene. That is all wrong, completely wrong. We have a magnificent picture of this whole thing in Zechariah 3: "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary." Satan has established himself there in the place of power, which the right hand always represents. Christ is now at the right hand of the Majesty in the heaven (Col. 3:1), the place of power and honour, but here Satan is getting honour and has power because Joshua "was clothed with filthy garments." One who stood by said: "Take the filthy garments from off him... I will clothe thee with rich apparel... let them set a clean mitre upon his head." Now the scene has changed. Righteousness like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) have been put away; righteousness which is power has been placed upon him, and: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." Satan's rebuke, his dethronement, and his removal from the place of power and getting the honour is related to a change of condition from unrighteousness to righteousness. It is only this that can move God.

That is the background of those passages in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Why did there come deadlock and impasse? God said it was because unrighteousness had become so universal and absolute that 'I cannot do anything. I just cannot. Even though these men stepped in, it is only righteousness that would save THEM. If there was righteousness here, they would be saved, but there are none righteous and I can do nothing. Remove unrighteousness and I am released. I can repent and come in. You who want to prevail with Me must provide Me with a ground of righteousness.'

That is very practical. We are paralysed so often and Satan is so often getting the glory, the honour and the power, because he gets us to move off this ground of the righteousness which is according to faith, bringing us under condemnation, bringing us back to that old ground outside of Christ, nullifying all this wonderful work of perfect righteousness fulfilled by Christ and our appropriation of it by faith. So often it just heads up to a

situation like this. The enemy has got possession, he has fastened upon us and has made all kinds of suggestions and accusations. 'I do not know whether I am right or wrong, whether I have grieved the Lord, or not. I do not know whether the Lord is for me or against me. I do not know where I am.' Satan holds us there until we take positively a position of righteousness in Christ by faith, and put that to the enemy. 'I do not know in what I am' - and neither did Noah, nor Job, nor Daniel, nor Moses, nor any of them. Their faith was counted unto them for righteousness. 'I do not stand on the ground of what I am; I stand on the ground of Christ's perfect righteousness.' It is the only way to begin to have power with God, and we are nullified while we have a question on that matter. Oh, for a beginning, a foundation of a mighty settled faith in the righteousness of Christ as ours through faith in Him to put us in a place of power with God! Because it is not just persuading God, it is moral power with God. He must have a moral ground for all He does. If there is a question of unrighteousness, He cannot do it. That unrighteousness is dealt with in the Blood of the Lord Jesus: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Therein is our power with God. It is moral power. He is not a reluctant, unwilling God. He is a God who is only too ready, but He is bound by His own nature of righteousness. Have you that ground? Show Him on the ground of righteousness that He should do this, and on the ground of His Son why He should do it. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isa. 1:18). How are you going to reason? Not like Job in the transition stage, reasoning about your own righteousness and why God should do it for YOU. No, let us reason together - on what ground? What is the issue? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." How? On what ground are you reasoning? In what way are your sins made as white as snow? We know it is by the precious Blood. That is the reasoning ground with God. It speaks, it works with God. Oh, plead the Blood and you have the greatest argument with God and against Satan, the adversary and accuser. I know this is elementary. It is the beginning of things, but, dear friends, it is a thing that follows us through to the end. What is the fear in your own heart that arises so often as to whether right at the end you will be able to hold out and get through triumphantly? Yes, it is the battle right through to the end. The enemy will never leave us alone, but are we just going to be under this condemnation of Satan, with the hand of God paralysed, because we have taken Satan's ground instead of God's? God's ground is righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Satan's ground is unrighteousness through doubt, through unbelief.

Well, if Noah begins the great line of examples of power with God, it is that: righteousness which is according to faith, but what a faith! - tested, tried, proved, but faith. I feel that we are in the great test of faith in this day as much as ever the Lord's people were.

As we close this first chapter, let us be reminded that, for power with God, there must be conduct, behaviour, and "walk", which is the EXPRESSION of righteousness. If there is practical unrighteousness in behaviour we shall be in weakness with God.