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## Coming into the Fulness of Christ

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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*Reading: 1 Chron. 15:1-15,27; Ex. 32:25-29; Deut. 33:8,9; 10:8,9.*

We have been much occupied of late with the things that are in the Scriptures concerning the ark of the Lord. We have been seeking to say what we believe to be the truth about all this, that what is here in relation to the ark of the Lord has a very clear and definite message for our time, inasmuch as the ark is the Old Testament type of the Lord Jesus - the Lord Jesus in a very special and full sense: the centre and the sum of the life of God's people in relation to God.

Their life, as we know, was governed very much by that ark. Their relationship to the Lord was very definitely governed by that ark and its history, and its course very largely meant the ascendancy or weakness and defeat of the Lord's people. When that ark was in its place and they were rightly related to it, then they were in the ascendant and there was no nation or people that could stand before them. When that ark was not in its place, or when they were not rightly related or adjusted to it, then their history was one of weakness, defeat, failure and tragedy.

We have said that it was the focal point of God's attention and interest. It was there upon that ark that the Divine eye rested, and it was there that the Divine jealousy was seen as the cherubim covered it - the symbols of that custodianship of what is peculiarly of value to God - and to touch that central object with the slightest degree of violation from the Divine ordinances and prescription meant immediate judgment and death. And we have seen that on three occasions outstandingly that took place. The Philistines looked into it and were smitten, the men of Beth-shemesh looked into it and were smitten, Uzzah put his hand upon it and died there before the Lord. So that the ark represents the Lord Jesus in His greatness and His glory as seen by the eye of God, and not merely as estimated by man, but according to God's estimate of Him.

Now to look at it just a little more closely by way of analysing and summarizing its spiritual meaning. We have said it represents the fulness of Christ as in the midst of the Lord's people. That is the point at which we may well make our beginning. The fulness of Christ concerns us. That is the thing in which we are interested, that is the matter about which we are really concerned; the fulness of Christ is a very vital matter to our hearts. We want to come to the fulness of Christ in our lives just as far as that is possible for us here. We are bent upon that. I trust that we are moved with the same spirit as that with which the apostle was moved in reaching out that he might "...gain Christ and be found in Him".

Then this ark has something to say to us as to the fulness of Christ, not only in its composition, where God is so clearly committed to Him in the gold overlaid, not only the Man Christ Jesus as seen in the acacia wood, but God joined with that Man making Him into the God-Man in a sense in which no other ever has or ever will, a God-Man. Not only in that, not only in the fact that He is there set forth as the Mercy Seat, and no man or class of men whatever claims they may make, or titles they may take, will ever be in the place of Christ as the Mercy Seat. He, and He alone, is God's Mercy Seat: that in which God meets with sinful man in virtue of shed Blood to atone, to remit, to blot out sin. That is in Christ only, but in the content of the ark we see other features of the fulness of Christ.

We remember that the first thing put into the ark was the law written on the two tables, the mind of God inscribed upon those stones; two tables of stone, the number of fulness of testimony. It was called the ark of the testimony because those stones were in it, the stones gave it that title, they were the testimony of the Lord, the covenant of Jehovah. The mind of the Lord had been disclosed, revealed and inscribed on the tables. When Moses, coming down the Mount with those first tables, beheld what had taken place in the setting up of the golden calf and the worshipping thereof by Israel, led by Aaron, those first tables were dropped and broken; the revealed mind of the Lord for that people could not become enshrined in their midst. It was not until that sin, that iniquity had been purged and judgment had been wrought as we saw through the Levites, that the Lord gave a second revelation of His mind upon the second two tables, and instantly it says: "...make thee an ark".

You see, the revealed mind of the Lord, the disclosed will of God, can only be enshrined in the midst of a people who have had their sin judged and put away, and who have been dealt with very definitely along the line of separation unto the Lord. That is a principle that governs, but we will come to that presently.

Into the ark (first that ark, and then the final ark) there became enshrined that complete and full revelation of God's mind for His people for that dispensation, and we know from the New Testament that it was a type of a dispensation to come; not of law, but of grace. And that ark, being a type of Christ, when Christ came He was the shrine of the revelation of God, that in Him the mind of the Lord was fully revealed, "... he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father". That was a momentous claim to make, that He was the personal embodiment of the mind of the Lord, that in Him God is revealed.

Later we are told in the New Testament that when the Lord Jesus, like the ark, comes in to dwell in the believer's life, then the believer comes into the way of knowing inwardly the full mind and will of God. Christ within reveals God's thought to the believer's heart. That is a part of the fulness which is our blessed inheritance, that we may know the Lord by the indwelling Christ; that the Lord's heart, mind, and will may be revealed in us; maybe not all at once, but we have it all there when we have the Lord Jesus. And as we grow in the knowledge of Him, in the apprehension of Christ, so we grow in oneness with God's thought as revealed in Christ. It is a part of the fulness of Christ for us.

Then other things were in that ark. There was a pot of the manna, the miraculous provision of God for the sustaining and maintenance of the life of His people in a wilderness way, and that was to be put in the ark in a pot as a memorial, as a testimony to the fact that when God's people are in a desert where all natural and ordinary methods and means of sustenance are denied, the Lord provides and maintains. The Lord becomes the strength of their life and their portion for ever, that they come to know miraculously in the cutting off of all that which would come up through the ordinary channels of nature, or by their own effort, when all that is rendered impossible by some dispensation of Divine Sovereignty, they need not die or suffer want, the Lord provides. And that is a part of the testimony stored up in the ark; again pointing on to the Lord Jesus, that in Him in a wilderness way when so often natural resources and human effort prove to be utterly inadequate, unavailing, and impossible of providing for going on in God's way, or going on with the Lord, or providing that spiritual support that we need to finish the journey and to finish our course to come through to God's end, that Christ is God's supply to bring us right through to the fulness, to the end. He is our maintenance, our sustenance and support. That is a part of the fulness of Christ.

And the other object in that ark, as you know, was the rod of Aaron that budded, speaking always of Life triumphant over death on the mediatorial ground, the Priestly triumph of Christ over death. Dead rods were stored up in the dark place over night, separated from all chemical influences of nature which would cause them to show signs of life, and by the act of God, that one rod in the place of death and of darkness was quickened to live instantly; that is Christ: "...brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant", the Lamb triumphant over death. God raised Him from among the dead and He ever lives to make intercession for the saints. His victoriously living priesthood which has conquered death and fulfils itself in a deathless life on behalf of you and me, that is a part of the fulness of Christ.

We only mention these things. Each one of them could hold us for a long time as to their own fulness, but you see all this is gathered up into the ark, into Christ, and speaks of His greatness and His glory, and that is the fulness of Christ, that is the testimony of Jesus. It is the testimony of what Jesus is; the fulness of Christ. This is for us by reason of Christ in us through grace, to come into a rich and ever growing knowledge of the Lord; the unfolding of the Lord to us in Christ.

I hope this does not strike upon you as some mere thing said. When we come down to our own spiritual lives, what is the thing you and I need and crave for? "Oh, to know Him more!" That is it; to know the Lord. He has made it all possible by the Lord Jesus being within.

Now, how are we going to know the Lord in growing fulness, until we come to the fulness at the end? It is by faith's appropriation of the Lord Jesus, by faith's apprehension of Christ, by faith's walk with Him, by the Holy Spirit revealing Christ in our hearts as the way of the fulness of the knowledge of the Lord. All the knowledge of God is enshrined and bound up with the Lord Jesus, and God has given Him to you and to me. All the support and sustenance that you and I will ever need for our pilgrim way, to meet all the demands of our spiritual lives, it has all been given to us in Christ.

By the form of our English text I think we miss a good deal, or fail to grasp the real meaning of a fairly well-known passage: "...my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus". Let me put that in another way: "My God shall supply every need of yours in Christ Jesus according to His riches in glory". Change it again if you like: "In proportion to His riches in glory, He shall supply every need of yours in Christ Jesus." The meaning is that all the measure of His riches in glory are in Christ Jesus for all your need. That is the pot of manna. What do you want more

than that? The fulness of Christ which amounts to knowing the Lord Jesus and apprehending Him. That is all; it is what Christ is to us.

And what we owe to His living and victorious priesthood and intercession! What that is for us! He ever lives to make intercession for us there at the right hand of God. He intercedes for us, and He can perfect His priestly work there because death can never bring an end to it. He has conquered death, wherefore He is able to save to the uttermost, right on to the end. When is that? Where is that? Saved right on to the end; He lives to make intercession. The fulness of Christ - God's fulness - in Christ for us. That is the testimony of Jesus. That is the ark of the Lord, the ark of the testimony. Life victorious over death - in Christ - power, strength, the energy of a heavenly manna. And when we might faint in a wilderness way and be weak in the midst of our foes, it speaks, upholds, sustains, strengthens, and becomes the energy and the might of an onward triumphant march. That is His fulness. It is for us.

Notice that the thing that has been uppermost in our readings this evening is the place of the Levites in this: "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites", that is the Word. According to the ordinance, only the Levites shall bear the ark. David's failure and the awful thing that happened when he assayed to bring the ark from Kirjath-jearim, was because of prayerlessness and disregard for God's Word, or neglect of God's Word. Prayerlessness and neglect of God's Word brought the arrest, death, and long delay. You have got it stated in one fragment here: "...for that we sought Him not according to the ordinance". "We sought Him not..."; that is prayerlessness. "According to the ordinance"; that is neglect of God's Word. I am glad that David is saying that; he has discovered where the weakness was, where all the trouble was. He has been disciplined of God and, like a son chastened, he has come to see and so now he acts according to the ordinance.

What was the ordinance? "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites". That was the ordinance of Numbers 3; Levites only. What are they? They are introduced to us in that passage in Exodus. When Israel, misled by Aaron, set up that calf and were caught by that wile of the Devil, the god of this age, to draw away worship from the Lord, then Moses stood in the gate and cried: "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me", and all the Levites, the sons of Levi came to him. And then in referring to that in Deuteronomy 33:8,9, those strange words come from the lips of Moses, difficult to understand if you do not just see the connection: "And of Levi he said, Thy Thummim and thy Urim are with thy godly one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father, and of his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew he his own children: for they have observed thy word, and keep thy covenant." It simply meant that natural relationships, when they cut right across faithfulness to God, were ignored. The sons of Levi took the attitude towards their parents and their brethren, and their own children, that those natural relationships in so far as they are opposed to God, are not going to influence them. Natural affections, natural attachments, the thing which in the natural would appeal to our hearts, would make us their slaves, those things which in the natural might be very dear to us, very precious to us, in so far as those things do not correspond with the will of God, then we set them aside, we count them as not existing.

Oh, here is a searching word. Do you want the fulness of Christ? Do you want to know Him better, day by day? Do you want to know His risen life? Do you want to know the value of His work for you in the presence of God? Do you want to know His wonderful support and sustenance? Do you want to know the fulness of Christ? That is the way. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Oh yes, it may mean that something in your voluntary relationships which would hold you back from going on wholly with the Lord, will have to go to the sword.

"None but the Levites ought to carry the ark." They are men who, without any compromise or reservation or consideration for their own natural interests, even for their own heart affections, are going to range themselves on the side of the Lord utterly. They are going to be for the Lord to the last drop, and if a precious thing comes up here on earth, in the natural realm, which would draw them away from the Lord, then the sword is taken to that and the eyes are closed to its preciousness if that preciousness means a limitation of devotion to the Lord. For them a greater preciousness, the preciousness of Christ, has taken the place of every other thing, however dear here on this earth.

They said in their act, even to their natural fathers and mothers: "I do not know you"; to their own brethren and children: "I do not know you." It is an Old Testament illustration of New Testament spiritual principles, that those who are going to come into the fulness of the testimony of the Lord Jesus, to know the fulness of Christ, have got to be on the ground of the Levites: wholly, utterly for the Lord.

Oh, may I plead with you to consider everything in the light of the fulness of Christ. That is what you have a being for. That is why God has brought you into this world. For that God knew you before the world was. For that He had His eye upon you from eternity. God's desire for you is that you should eventually come right into the fulness of His Son, and that the fulness of His Son should be in you, and be displayed through you throughout all ages for ever and ever. To fail of that, to fall short of that, means to have missed the very object of our being, and yet we may - because of some sentimental association, some earth love of a voluntary character, some relationship, something we hold dear here - risk the loss of that. Do not run that risk. It may be the Lord is challenging you and saying: "Who is on the Lord's side?" This is the test. Are you on the Lord's side? In so far as this is not your attitude and your procedure, in so far as some other thing draws you from full devotion and consecration to the Lord, you are on the side of the Lord's enemy, you are on the side of the molten calf.

Oh that you may seek grace to take the sword, that you might go down before the Lord and say: "The dearest idol I have known, Whate'er that idol be, Help me to tear it from Thy throne, And worship only Thee." "The Levites only shall carry the ark". What is it of human affection or object of desire, that is taking the Lord's full place?

Now, the Lord has spoken. There are many terrible, terrible tragedies strewn along the road of history because a challenge like this was presented, and was not accepted and followed out. Many a young man has lost his spiritual life which has gone to ruins, lost the calling which God had for him, a great life vocation, and lost even the joy and satisfaction in the thing which he held on to instead of accepting all God's will, by allowing some relationship of human affection of a voluntary character to take the Lord's place in his life. Many a young woman has done that, and it is always the same old argument, the same old answer: "Oh, but it is to win the other one for the Lord." You go halfway with them in order that they may come halfway with you, and you are hoping to win them for the Lord. Don't you be fooled by the devil if there is anyone here like that. The Devil has fooled multitudes in that way into everlasting loss. God's Word is there. David had God's Word, and he sought not the Lord according to the ordinance, with most disastrous and tragic results. You have it: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

God's Word is there, that for you, whatever the cost may be, it is the Lord's will right up to the hilt, and you can leave the rest with the Lord, the Lord will look after the rest. He may give you back that which you yield up to Him (but don't do it with that thought in your mind) or He may give you something infinitely more valuable. The point is: "Who is on the Lord's side?" and who will take the sword to sever and slay, so far as they are concerned, all that which is in another direction than the

revealed will of God? "Only the Levites shall bear the ark"; only those shall come into the fulness of Christ, only those shall know in their own hearts the testimony of Jesus, and the greatness and the glory of Christ.

The Lord speak this very deeply.