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Establishment in the Present Truth

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 2 Peter 1:12-21.

So Peter goes on with his commission. His commission was, when he had turned again after his fall in the denial of the Lord, that he should strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32), and these two letters are in the way of fulfilling that commission. This paragraph which we have just read bears that mark very clearly. Peter here breathes the spirit of earnest solicitude that those to whom he writes may be established, confirmed, and he says that he is taking every measure to provide for that, and every precaution against their being left unprovided for in the spiritual life. His first letter very largely circled round Matthew 16 - the Rock and the church built thereon. The second letter seems to circle around Matthew 17 - the transfiguration comes right into view here.

These two things, with quite a large number of others, indicate that many things said and many experiences gone through, many things seen at one time, may not at that time be understood or be of real spiritual meaning. But they sink down into the sub-consciousness, more or less remembered, unto a time when the Holy Spirit begins to make the person or the persons concerned live in a new way. Then all those things begin to come back with a life and meaning which they did not possess for such people at the beginning.

So here we see Peter living in the good of things which at one time did not make any difference to him, although they were the greatest things that could happen to a man. He had that flash of revelation - "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), the revelation which the Lord said was from the Father, but even such a thing did not save him from the terrible denial of that same Lord. He was in the mount of Transfiguration, and nothing could have been a greater experience than that to any man, and yet even having seen Christ in His glory did not save him. It is

almost unimaginable. Those two things, and many others, and yet the crash came until the man passed into a position where he himself was all alive to the things of the Spirit, and then those things began to come up from beneath and became the very things which constituted his ministry, and a very great ministry.

This is a point which may bear repetition in line with what Peter says here: "I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them". In line with that, a repetition is not, perhaps, out of place. You know these things. How much one might say, and you answer, "We know that! We have heard that! That is not new!" There was a point at which some might have said to Peter, "Well, you know the Lord Jesus said so-and-so". He would have said, "Yes, I know. The Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mount. Oh yes, I know that, I was there!" Yet it could be objective and of little or no spiritual power in the life. But Peter has passed through to the real spiritual power and value of things which were once known in that way, and he is saying to these now - "You know them and you are established in the existing truth, the truth which has come in, which now is". (The Authorized Version calls it 'the present truth', the truth of this dispensation). "And yet knowing them and being established in them as the system of truth for this dispensation, you are open even to do what I did in possession of these things. You may fall away, you may be carried off, you may get into scenes and conditions where there is nothing to feed spiritual life; all this may be, after all, of little saving power in the presence of certain conditions and situations". Peter says, "I am not taking risks, I am going to repeat. I want you to understand that what we are talking about and standing in is not cunningly devised fables, whatever that may refer to. It is not all something fictitious, made up, pretty stories. This is something very real, and has become very real in our experience. We have been eyewitnesses of this; we know, and the thing has become tremendously real".

Peter finds the reality, or the need for reality, emphasised by the realisation of the Lord's word about his death, his passing being not far ahead. The Lord said to him, "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not". And the writer adds the note, "Now this he spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God" (John 21:18-19). And Peter says, Well, I am old now so it cannot be long, although that is not exactly what he meant when he said "cometh swiftly". He knew that, so far as time was concerned, it could not be long before he went, and that the form of death would be a swift one. It would be no lingering death in which he could exhort the saints. So he is anticipating the coming departure, which would be quick when it came. And that is making him take this very serious course to see to it that even though people knew things in a way, that they knew them deeply and were really established in the present truth.

The Lord inspired Peter in this way, there is no doubt about it, and the message to us is: do not let us ever settle down and think we know - we have heard it, we have the terms, we have the language, we have the truths, we have got it, and we know. We never can know in such a way, but what we need to know is the same things in new ways, in new depths, with new meaning. And the true course of a spiritual life is that the things most well-known, in a way are the things which are always coming to reveal new fulnesses. We are going back to beginning things, as we could call them so often, and find much more there than ever we knew. We never exhaust the content of anything that is of God. We must never take the mental attitude - "I have heard that so often, I know all about it, I am almost wearied with that truth". No, whatever may be wearisome in the way in which it is presented, the thing itself has much more to divulge than ever we imagined.

And Peter carries this on and says, "Not only is my departure coming soon and swiftly, but remember, for you people there is a crisis - the Lord is coming". It is a marvellous thing. We hardly notice the transition from the mount of Transfiguration to the Lord's coming. Peter says in effect,

"The nature of those two is the same - His power and His coming, or His presence. You see the Lord Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration; you know exactly how you will see Him when He comes again, you will know exactly what the meaning of His coming then will be".

Our word for the moment is the need to be established in what we know, or what we think we know, that it is something in which our feet stand, and that it is not a lot that we hold and then we are just swept away when other conditions are around us.