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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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"For the Glory of God"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (John 11:4).

"He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44).

"But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus" (John 12:10-11).

We know quite well, but it may be as well if we remind ourselves, that in this Gospel there is brought out the one thing which governs all the interests and activities of God - namely, His glory, and His glory in the face of Jesus Christ: so that the one thing in view, giving meaning to everything, is the glory of God through the Lord Jesus. Let us keep that in mind, because if we detach anything from that we lose both its meaning and value, and probably lose our way. God is doing everything for His glory, and that particularly in the lives of those who are His.

God's Glory Manifested Against a Background of Suffering

Let us now come to the first of these three fragments in this wonderful illustration. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God". The statement is the explanation and the interpretation of a very mysterious providence, a providence which lifts things which otherwise could be regarded as the common happenings in human life on to another level, and clothes them with majesty, with glory. It is not an uncommon thing that a man should be taken ill and die, and there are literally countless things which just happen like that, making up the sum of human life and experience, every

one of which can be regarded as the common lot, the everyday experience; but here is something which, by the illumination of the Lord, has to be seen in another way - and another way which almost startles us. It is that the sovereignty of God, moving toward that great object of His own glory in His Son, acts to make a man ill, to bring sickness upon a man; and providence stands back and lets that sickness take its course, until the man dies and is more than dead, and all the features of an earthly human tragedy are there, of bereavement, of sorrow and heartbreak. They are all there - and yet God is in this thing, involved and implicated by His own act in a most remarkable way, and it is made known that this thing was determined by God Himself with a tremendous object in view, the greatest object in the heart of God - His own glory.

Now you see the far-reaching possibilities of such a consideration, and the tremendous range of application. We shall be content just now to take the fact that when God is seeking to glorify Himself, to bring His Son into His rightful place of recognition, of Lordship, those things which we may naturally regard and interpret as the haps and chances of human life, to which all are subject, may be something predestined of God, under God's control, to bring out something greatly to the glory of God, to God's satisfaction.

Now, friends, this is something to which you and I have to seek quite diligently to adjust ourselves. Let us widen and enlarge the application from just human indisposition or sickness, even if it does culminate in death. Let us view in the light of this perhaps a lifetime of difficulty and adversity and suffering, perhaps something that has come to us for which we have more than thrice sought the Lord that it might be removed, and the Lord has in effect said, 'No': there has been no removal; it is something that we are called upon to experience and endure. It may be something in our lives as a whole, or it may be some event in our lives of great distress. Oh, look at it, whatever it may be in your case that you would have removed, to which you would take the attitude that Mary and Martha took - This is a tragedy, this is a misfortune, this is a great adversity, this is an overwhelming sorrow, this is all against us, all contrary to our good and to our blessing and to our joy. The Word of God makes it clear in more than one place that there is a sovereignty behind the lives of His own, "the called according to His purpose", which may have not just let that thing happen, but actually ordained it, and made that very thing, ordered by the will of God, the means by which something should come from our lives very much to the glory of God. I know that it is not easy to take that attitude toward things when you are in them - it is the most difficult thing; but here is something which is concrete as a statement, and it says in a general way to us, "to them that love God... that are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28): 'You who love the Lord, there is some tremendous possibility for the Lord's glory, the Lord's satisfaction, wrapped up in that which you are inclined to regard as a trouble, suffering, adversity, a setback, a tragedy, if not a catastrophe, a strange and mysterious providence which has reversed your hopes and expectations - all that and much more. That may be something that the Lord has not only allowed to take place, but has arranged Himself.' In the end, of course, we recognize that and acknowledge it, and we shall not be sorry that we went through that thing. I do not think Mary and Martha were sorry afterwards that they went through it. I think there was tremendous gain there, but the point is that in the lives of those who love the Lord there is in suffering something for God's glory, and if our hearts are set upon His glory, we shall share it. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17).

That is just the first brief but quite real message to us, and it must be taken by every one of us according to our own hearts' secret bitterness and sorrow. You know the Lord has dealt with you in a strange way, upset all your plans, suspended all your expectations, reversed all your hopes, brought everything to a standstill, whatever it might be. Now "this sickness is not unto death". If Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, is involved in this, it is unto life; it cannot be unto death, but for the glory of God.

Manifested Glory Limited by an Earth Touch

The second passage - "Jesus saith... Loose him, and let him go". Do not forget that the glory of God is still governing, though that glory may be partially under arrest. The glory of God is found in the uncreated life of God, or the risen life of Christ, the life of the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. The glory is inherent in that Divine eternal life. Lazarus has got to the point where he has the life, it is in him, he has come forth in the power of that resurrection life, but it is in limitation; therefore the glory is in limitation, and the full realization of the Divine intention, the full display of glory, requires that that life shall be loosed, shall be freed. From what? We say, Grave-clothes. What are the grave-clothes? Well, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). The grave-clothes are just the 'earth touch'. That is a very very full phrase. It is some link with old mother Earth, it is some still remaining tie with that cursed creation where nothing can go right through to fullness. Here it is the question of fullness of life, full release and resultant full glory; and, in any realm where the curse still rests, we know that the mark of the curse is that things go so far and then they fade out, die away, nothing really comes right through to fullness.

Here is Lazarus; he has got so far - but what is the good of this man tied hand and foot? Even though he has life, he cannot do very much, he cannot be of much use. He is not going to walk about and display the glory of God as a living corpse, always speaking of the grave - his one testimony being, even though he has life, the grave. He speaks of the grave, bears marks of the grave on him all the time - there is an earth touch. You see the comprehensiveness of application. We have to learn under the instruction of the Holy Spirit what and where is the earth touch in our case. It may be some ambition, natural ambition, some personal craving, something that we ourselves want for our own satisfaction. It may be any one of a thousand things that is still an earth touch, that means that we are not completely released for God, we are not really free for the Lord, still some ground of controversy, still some ground of bargaining with the Lord - If You will do this, then I will... There is still some earth touch somewhere, some bit of worldliness - oh, anything that touches that earth realm; and therefore, although we may have this wonderful life and have heard the call of the Son of God, we are still in limitation, still in straitness, still tied up, still not absolutely free and emancipated that the glory of God should be served in fullness. "Loose him, and let him go"; cut the earth ties.

I know, of course, that there is the dispensational outworking of this thing and that these grave-clothes dispensationally speak of the law, the Jewish law, because it is here, right in the midst of Judaism, that the testimony is borne. This is Galatians. The whole letter to the Galatians is in the words "Loose him, and let him go". Get rid of the legalism of the law and let this raised man go free. But there is a spiritual interpretation, and it is a wider one. There is this more extensive application, and the principle is universal - have an earth touch, and your life comes under arrest, the glory of God is limited. What is your earth touch? Well, let us ask ourselves, are we free? Are we really living in the fullness of this life and the effectiveness of this life in service? If not, why not? Are we still clinging to something for ourselves, still holding on somewhere to that which is banned by God, which cannot live? It is the death touch because it is the earth touch. The word is: "Loose him, and let him go".

Satan's Opposition to the Manifestation of the Glory

And the third passage - "the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death; *because* that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus". Anything that is in the full way of the glory of God, loosed for Divine purpose that God may be glorified in it, becomes the object of Satan's malice. That is a third truth, which perhaps we need not emphasize, for we know it well, that if God does something in our lives out of which He gets glory to Himself

through His Son, it is not long before the hate and spite of the enemy is directed against us. That is a part of our fellowship with the Lord. If they are going to put Jesus to death, they are going to put Lazarus to death as well, because these two are one. We are bound up with the Lord in this, and we shall find that if the Lord is after getting glory in and through our lives, and yet more glory, then the enemy will make us the targets of his real venom and he and his will take counsel to put us to death.

But how far can he go? He cannot go any further at any time than the Lord of Life permits him to go, because now His Son has been offered at Calvary, and for us it is our privilege, not to be killed, but to lay down our lives of our own free will.

Well, three things - "not unto death, but for the glory of God". What is it that you and I are wrestling with? See in it the possibility of Divine glory: it may be something ordained of God - tragic as it seems to you - ordained of God to be in the long run for His glory. Get free from that which limits the glory and frustrates the purpose of God in your adversity and trial - that is, any earth touch, any personal clinging; and remember that, even when you have done that, you are not going to escape the attention of the enemy - you are going to be an object of his consideration; and if the devil thinks anyone or anything is worth his consideration, it must be of value to the Lord.