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Knowing the Greatness and Glory of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 1 Sam. 7:1,2; 2 Sam. 6:1-15.

"And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him, from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, which is called by the Name, even the Name of the Lord of hosts that sitteth above the cherubim." (2 Sam. 6:2).

The ark of the Lord, so often called the ark of the testimony, is in the Old Testament a type of the Lord Jesus and represents the greatness and the glory of Christ as in the eye of God; not man's estimate of Him, not man's judgment or conception, but God's thought and God's mind about Him. And that ark occupied the central and supreme place in the life of Israel. Over that ark were the representation of the cherubim stretching out their wings, making a complete covering. Those cherubim are symbols of the jealous protection of God for that which is peculiarly precious and holy to Him, and form for Him that place, by reason of that jealous protection of what is holy, where He Himself dwells, resides, and is enthroned.

And what we have in the ark is God joined with Man, and Man (not fallen man, not sinful man but the Man with Whom we are familiar, the Man Christ Jesus, sinless, holy) joined with God, making one in person, in nature, in life, in work, and all that that means from the Divine standpoint - something exceedingly great, something transcendently wonderful, something without a like and certainly without a peer in the universe. And we read that second verse again in order to be affected by the remarkable thing that is there said: "...the ark of God, which is called by the Name, even the Name of the Lord of hosts that sitteth above the cherubim". That is the name of Jesus. "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him", we are told by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, "and gave unto Him the Name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow."

That is something different from putting out the hand of flesh and taking hold: "...that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". If you break up that statement you will find contained therein all the elements of what is represented by the ark: the Name above every name, the Name in which every knee must bow, the Name with which the glory of God is associated. For when that ark found its resting place in the most Holy, the glory of the Lord filled the house, "to the glory of God", is the New Testament word. Again let us say, this speaks of the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus.

The testimony of Jesus is not some system of doctrine about Him, it is not a whole lot of things which we believe concerning Him, it is not a system of truth at all; the testimony of Jesus is what He is Himself in the eye of God, and to have that testimony demands that that shall be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. So it was with Peter when he exclaimed: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"; instantly the Lord replied: "...flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven". "And no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit." I take the meaning of that statement from the Word to be, not that we may not say the phrase 'Jesus is Lord' without the Holy Spirit, but to be able to say that according to God's mind and after God's heart in any living way demands that the Holy Spirit should have revealed in us the Lord Jesus. The ark of the testimony is what the Lord Jesus is from God's standpoint. He bears the Name of Jehovah of hosts, the Name which is above every name.

We have been saying very much about the need for a new breaking forth into our hearts of the knowledge and understanding of Christ, the revelation of Christ. This lies at the root of everything. Apart from this, no matter how great and comprehensive and exhaustive may be our Christian doctrine, truth, teaching, no matter how many may be our activities in relation to Christ and to Christianity, it will all fall short, it will all fail in its supreme value and effectiveness if the Holy Spirit has not revealed God's thought concerning Christ in our hearts; if we have not come within ourselves to see, at least in some living degree, what God thinks about Christ. But when that does, even in a small way begin to break in upon us, we have found the key to everything, the secret is ours, everything else is in life.

I doubt whether any of us have very much of that revelation, but those of us who may have had just a glimmer by the Spirit, do know what a tremendous difference it makes for life, hope, service, endurance, to know Him livingly by the Spirit. And I would be perfectly content to stay with that fragment. I should not feel that we had wasted our time if we said no more, if we did not get beyond that, if only that could mean for us the stirring of our hearts to a new exercise to know the Lord Jesus in a more living way.

And I beg of you to go back to your Old Testament and read again all that it has to say about this ark in its nature and constitution, in its contents, its place and its varied history, and you will see what a dominating thing it was, you will see what tremendous issues were bound up with it, you will see false gods crashing down before it, you will see unholy nations going to pieces for touching it. You will see the people of God in declension being dealt with because of it, and you will see glorious and wonderful things taking place along the line of miracles in relation to it. It is Christ in figure, and all that can be carried over to our present apprehension of Him, what He is meant to be; and we shall find that the New Testament in its Anti-type is far greater than the Old in its type.

"Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love, and power,
That mortals ever knew,

That angels ever bore:
All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too mean to set my Saviour forth."

The greatness and the glory of Christ is something to occupy our hearts, something about which we should be continually before the Lord that we might know more. For let it be said again, it is impossible to know Christ by any means which we possess of mind, heart or will, unaided by the Holy Spirit. Bezaleel, we are told, was especially filled with the Holy Spirit to make this ark, and he did not design it; the design came from heaven down, by way of the Mount to Moses. No thought, or judgment, or conception, or imagination of man had a place here, neither did man's power of execution, ability or artisanship come in, it was all Divinely provided for, nothing whatever left to man. It was a type of Christ, and what man has ever conceived Christ? Who has ever yet, unaided by the revealing Spirit of God, apprehended Christ? No one.

God does act sovereignly and when He finds hearts that are really reaching out to Him He does respond with the aid of His Holy Spirit. There is not one of us who could ever believe in, or accept the Lord Jesus by our own decision, by our own determination; not one of us is in the position to say: "I will accept Christ tonight", "I will believe in Christ tonight." You cannot do it. That is the infinite and unspeakable folly of putting off till tomorrow and saying: "Some other time", when the Holy Spirit is urging now.

If the Holy Spirit were not here to make Christ known to our hearts, and to enable us to believe, to receive, we are in a hopeless position; but that is why He is here, and He is here for that. But oh, the decision cannot be postponed because we cannot do it when we like, it is not in us. The only hour of salvation for us is when the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts, and we can never claim the return of that hour, or that moment; we can never presume upon that and say: "Tomorrow". No! The apprehension of Christ is by the Holy Spirit solely and only.

Now that further word about Him and what the testimony of Jesus is.

Then we come to see our relationship to Him, to that testimony, in a practical way after (by the Spirit of God) we have believed and received the Lord Jesus. Then we are called through grace into God's intention for the testimony of Jesus. And God's intention is that His full, complete thought about the Lord Jesus should be established in this universe. We have a multitude of ways of talking about Christian work, and service, and ministry, and enterprise, and activity, but when we have exhausted all our different terms, the whole thing from God's standpoint has to be gathered up into one concise statement of truth: all service, all ministry, all activity in Christianity, religious work, no matter how you like to put it, from God's standpoint resolves itself into one thing and one thing alone: the establishment in this universe of God's full thought concerning His Son. It is not preaching about Christ, but preaching Christ. It is not giving out Christianity, but it is ministering Christ. It is not projecting our thoughts and judgments and conceptions about Christ, it is speaking out what the Holy Spirit has revealed in our hearts concerning Christ. That comprehends it all. In God's thought there is nothing outside of that. You may call it "Home Missions", "Foreign Missions", you may call it what you like, but it all resolves itself into one simple thing: Christ in His greatness and glory from God's standpoint. And God is never going to rest until He has His full thought about the Lord Jesus brought out, revealed, and established.

And so what we have here is a movement of God by way of getting this testimony concerning His Son advanced. Not merely advanced as a movement, as a truth, as an enterprise in the earth as we speak of advancing Christian activities, but advanced in the matter of growth, development, to come

to a full measure of expression. Christ is complete in Himself and in God, but He is not full and complete in the experience and the knowledge of His people. They are constantly going astray, falling from the fulness of Christ. That is the history of things, and I think we should cease to speak about the recovery of the testimony, and speak more about the recovery of the people of God to the testimony. It is not the testimony that has gone wrong, it is not Christ Who has diminished, it is the Lord's people who have constantly lost, fallen from, and deviated from the fulness of Christ, or who have not come up to the measure of Christ, which was God's thought.

There has been a movement of God in the bringing out of this testimony in greater fulness, and then a falling back, a retarding, an arrest and again God has come in to bring back His people to the fulness, or the greater fulness; and so things have advanced to a greater measure, and then again, retrogression or arrest. And what we have in these chapters and in these books is a typical, a representative movement of God for the recovery and re-establishment of His people in the fulness of the testimony, and of the fulness of the testimony in the midst of His people.

And it is equally important that there should be a knowledge and an intelligence with regard to the Lord's way of advancing in the saints, of developing and advancing His testimony, as there should be a right apprehension of the testimony itself. It is equally important that we should know how God goes to work over His testimony, as that we should have a right apprehension of Christ. It is of course fundamentally important that we should have God's thought about His Son. It is equally important, when we have come into relation to Christ, to know how God goes to work to bring that testimony into its full place, and to advance it. That is what comes out here in 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13.

There was a movement by which God constituted and raised up an instrument, David, towards this recovery, this fuller establishment, this leading on to finality and fulness in the House of God of the testimony. There was a testimony, but that movement was checked because there was a lack of intelligence as to how God goes to work to make that advance. I shall not deal very much with it, but it is clear that there is a right way and there is a wrong way, and that in this matter spiritual intelligence is a very important thing. And when God is out to have things wholly according to His own mind, any instrumentality in that connection will have to be dealt with and disciplined deeply and thoroughly so that it moves according to God's mind, in God's purpose. That is David. That is Uzzah. They went to work the wrong way. They were not governed by the Word of God, but they were being governed by human judgments and ideas and thoughts about this matter.

I am tremendously impressed with one thing which comes out here; it almost strikes you with stunning force when you see it. Do you notice we read from 1 Samuel 7:2: "And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years." "...It was twenty years". At the end of that time two men who had lived with it all those years seem to be as ignorant as to its meaning as they were at the beginning.

Now, would you not have thought that in that house of Abinadab where the ark was resting, Abinadab would have gathered his family together with his sons and they would have looked into the Word of God about this thing and he would have taught his sons the history of the ark, and its meaning, and what God had said about it, and what God had said should be the method and the manner of procedure with it? For God had made it perfectly clear. And yet his two sons, after all that time, had no more idea of God's expressed and revealed mind about this thing than they had at the beginning. They had lived with the testimony for twenty years and were still without spiritual understanding as to that testimony. It was a terrible thing. And yet it is not for us to condemn, to pass judgment, for what, after all our close association with Christ and His things, do we know today

of an adequate nature about the Lord Jesus? And may it not be true that some of us have been closely associated with a very real expression of the testimony of Jesus, and yet we have very little intelligence both as to Christ Himself, and as to God's way for the making that testimony full in the universe? It is literally amazing sometimes to find the still infantile ignorance of so many who have been for years associated with the things of Christ, as to how God goes to work in relation to His testimony, the testimony of His Son. And oh, I do feel that you and I need intelligence about this matter. We want to know what the Word of God says upon this and come to the Word of God about it.

It is true that God has blessed, and He does bless anything that is in a right direction; He blesses it as far as He can. The Philistines' cart and the milch kine bore a right direction although there was a fundamental wrong conception. The Philistines saw that for looking into the ark they were being judged and plague was upon them, and so by their diviners they came to see that for them, the thing was to take hands off that ark and let it go back to its own place. That is a right direction, and so we find that the cart went with the oxen lowing as they went to Beth-shemesh and the oxen do not stumble. There was a measure of success in that because it bore a right direction, not because God could accept the conception. But when it comes into a realm where God has a right to expect greater intelligence, then He cannot accept that lower level of things, He must call to account on this matter. And when you bring a Philistine cart among the Lord's people, you are doing a thing violently opposed to God's revelation.

God's instructions about the ark were made perfectly clear. It was first of all to be covered with the veil of separation, the veil between the holy and most holy place, the veil of separation upon which were inscribed the cherubim, closely guarding its sanctity, and then over that there was to be a covering of badger's skins, or seal's skins, or porpoise skins, and that was a type of protection from all worldly elements. Do you get that? And over that a covering of blue, showing that this thing was not an earthly thing and that it was cut off from everything earthly; it was a heavenly thing, it belonged to the heavens. And then that ark, covered with the clear prescription of God's thought, was to be put upon the shoulders of priests who had, through shed and sprinkled blood, been separated unto God, and those priests were but representative of all God's people. So that the figure is a consecrated people separated unto God through precious blood, bearing in their consecrated lives the testimony of Jesus. That is God's way. No mechanical contrivance or organisation. That is not God's way. This is God's way.

It is not schemes and programmes, plans, and what not; it is a people wholly, utterly separated unto God and consecrated unto God, with the revelation of Jesus Christ in their hearts, carrying the testimony of God's thought about His Son. That is God's way, and that is the Word. All that was there those twenty years. Abinadab could have known that; he ought to have known it, he ought to have taught it to his sons, but at the end of twenty years they are still in the dark as to the thing which has been right in their very household all this time. Christ has been amongst you; do you know Him? What is your relationship to the Lord Jesus? A hazy one? An indefinite one? A merely theological one? A curtailed one? A doctrinal one? An ecclesiastical one? A church one? Or a *living* one? Do you know Him after all? Perhaps He has been in your home perhaps since infancy, He has been closely associated with your life for years; do you *know* Him?

Mark you, what came out in Uzzah's case will come out in yours. That is, judgment, if after all the opportunity, the association, we have not come to God's thought about His Son and we cannot stand up to God when He has given us that opportunity. Oh! Do you know Him in a living way? Let this search your heart.

Christ has been preached to you, Christ has been brought before you, you know about Christ, your association with Him and His things may have spread over a long time; but that is not enough, that may only mean judgment from God, there is no salvation in that. Life, eternal life, does not rest upon any kind of traditional form or historical, external knowledge of Christ; it rests upon the living, vital, inward, experimental knowledge of Him in the power of God. And going beyond that, once we have come into touch with Him and known Him, our service is taken up on that ground by the Lord.

The issue of service will be in life or in death, in glory or in shame, just in so far as it is according to God's way and not according to our way; just in so far as His Word governs it and not our ideas. There is so much history bound up with these truths, things for centuries past have just demonstrated this. Something instituted by God and a movement, and then arrest and death, division, break-up and disintegration and long delays. Why? Because man has come in in the flesh to touch the things of the Lord, because the human judgment, the human mind has operated in that realm, because human force and energy have reached out in the Lord's things, because there has been failure to recognise that this thing can only be done in the energy and wisdom of the Holy Spirit and that is only possible in and through those who have been cut off from the life of nature by the Cross of the Lord Jesus. We need to have that intelligence and to put that intelligence into operation.

God may bless in certain realms as far as He can, but when His heart is bent upon the ultimate thing, then discipline has to be very definite to keep things according to His own mind. It is all unto the fullest expression of His own thought about His Son. There is a right way and a wrong way and He is anxious to have things right.

The Lord convey His Word to our hearts to bring us, on the one hand, into a living knowledge of Christ, and on the other hand into a living fellowship with Him in His purpose to have His testimony concerning His Son established in fullness.