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Living by Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And Elisha came again to Gilgal. And there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and boil pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage; for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot" (2 Kings 4:38-41).

With the sons of the prophets, we have the matter of the preserving of the Lord's testimony, the knowledge of the mind of the Lord for His people. With the pot, we have the preserving of that testimony, sustenance for that testimony and its vessel. With the wild gourds or vine, we have that life of nature which lies under the curse, for with the curse, thorns and briars and all such things came into the world, wild foreign lawless things, the life of a fallen creation, the life of nature, and you cannot preserve the Lord's testimony by the life of nature. There is death there, and no official position can save you from those consequences, if you resort to, or try to draw in, the life of nature. In the meal which Elisha had cast into the pot, we have clearly, unmistakably, that which speaks of the Lord Jesus in His Divine humanity. The word which so evidently explains the meal is in John 6:50-51.

"This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; yea and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world."

Now, while there are many valuable lessons in this little incident in the life of Elisha, the uppermost lesson and message for us is just this. You and I will never be able to preserve a testimony to the Lord unless we know what it is to continually feed upon Christ's heavenly, divine and perfect humanity. That is a difficult thing, I know, but it means this. If you and I, as the Lord's people with whom the Lord's testimony is supposed to rest, as in the case of the sons of the prophets, in any way or at any time, revert to ourselves in our natural condition, the testimony will at once pass from us, that is, death will intervene. The testimony will be at an end, it will only be as we continually transfer by faith from ourselves, what we are, to the Lord Jesus, and live as on Him by faith, that the testimony will be kept alive, will be a living testimony. That is a very simple lesson and yet the most difficult lesson for anyone to learn, the most difficult thing for anyone to continually do. Of course, the doctrine is all right, we believe in the doctrine, and we are ready to say it at any time, that the Lord Jesus is our life. We say that with great emphasis, but the point is, Do we live there? Is that our abiding position? A little later in John 6, the Lord Jesus says, "*He that eateth My flesh... abideth in Me, and I in him*", and the word there - "*eateth*" - is the continually active word. 'He that keeps on eating My flesh abides in Me and I in him.' Something to be maintained continually.

Now, for the livingness of the testimony, we must abide in Him in this way: that we refuse to live on our own ground of what we are by nature. We have discovered, and everyone here will agree, that in that field there is nothing but wild gourds and thorns and briars and all that sort of thing. Have you ever known any beautiful things in your own nature? Some people seem to think that they are finding them, and they are talking all the time about living in their better selves and their best selves, but that is the fullest possible evidence that they have never had their eyes opened, that they know nothing whatever about the Cross of the Lord Jesus. People who have no place for the Cross, the Cross in its real meaning, talk like that, but to those who have had their eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, the field of their natural life is just full of these poisonous berries, these wild things, and that is a field of death, its fruit is death. We had better get out of that field and keep out of it, and there is a fruitful field of living things, and that is the Lord Jesus.

I do wish that I could convey to you that inner thought in this matter, that the Lord Jesus has really come, sent by God the Father, right into our midst, and God says, "You are one thing and He is an utterly different and altogether Other! You are that, and naturally in your own natures, you will never be anything other than that, so it is no use your trying to improve that!" The only hope for you is that by faith - by living, continual faith - you transfer your centre of life to Him, and, as you take your bread for your body, you in faith and in spirit take Him to be that upon which your hope rests, your confidence rests, you rest on what He is! "*This is My body which is given for you.*" This loaf, this heavenly, Divine, sinless humanity, is our humanity *by faith*. We by faith are identified with Him as we put our faith into act. You see, you are in need, you are hungry, you may die of hunger. Someone comes and puts bread in front of you and says, "That will save your life, that will be life to you; that is what you need, you will find in that everything for your salvation!" And you look at it; "Yes, I believe what you say, I believe that that will save me, that will deliver me from death, that will be life unto me!" - and you leave it there, and you die. That is doctrinal apprehension, you see, but if you really believe according to New Testament ideas of belief, you do not only say, "Yes, I believe what you say!", you take it, you act upon your belief, and you take it and you live.

We must have something more than a doctrinal faith, we must have an appropriating faith which says, "I am this, and the Lord Jesus is that, altogether Other, and God says that if I will but transfer my basis of life from myself to Him deliberately and continuously every day, I shall be delivered from death and I shall live", and the testimony will be there! Let us ask the Lord more and more to strengthen us in this matter of our continuous living upon what the Lord Jesus is from God to us,

and to cause us to cease forever from hunting in the field of our accursed fallen nature for some good.

I know what it is you want as you are searching. It is to be good yourselves, to be altogether free from nature, from that nature and all its marks, to be free from that, and really what you want is sinless perfection in yourselves. Well, if ever you do get it in this life, let me tell you, you will be in a deception which will mean that the whole door to spiritual development and growth will be shut, because the consciousness of our own utter unworthiness and sinfulness as in ourselves is an essential to our growing appreciation of the Lord Jesus. You come to finality in any of these matters as in yourself, and that is an end of your spiritual development.

How will we come to know the Lord in ever-growing fulness? How shall we have an enlarging revelation and a deepening appreciation? We shall come to that as we more and more, by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, recognise how much we need the Lord. When you have got finality in any matter, you have ended need and need is essential to growth. So the Lord says, "Stop hunting in that field! This is the fruitful field, this is the living field - My Son! Live in Him, abide in Him by faith!"

I know the problem that arises at once. Is there to be no change in us at all? I am naturally very bad-tempered. Am I to say, "Well, I am bad-tempered by nature, I always shall be bad-tempered by nature, but the Lord Jesus is very good-tempered, and I believe His good temper will be accepted by the Lord for me!"? That is the kind of problem. I use temper as an illustration, it may be any other thing. That is not the point at all. The point is this, that you and I will never be changed in ourselves, but as we live on the Lord Jesus, what He is takes the place of ourselves, and if at any time after fifty, sixty or seventy years of Christian life you leave the ground of the Lord Jesus, you will find your old bad temper there. You never do get to the point where you can cease to be bad-tempered if you leave your ground of Christ, and our only way of escape from what we are is to live on Him. He becomes that, He gets on top of these things, but we are never other than we are in ourselves. But here, of course, arises the great difference between soul and spirit which we will not go into now. The point is the way of sanctification, is faith in the Lord Jesus. It is a case of bringing in the meal where death is and death is turned into life through faith in what He is. The Lord help us to see and know the meaning of *living* by Christ, not existing, not dragging out a miserable existence in doctrine, but *living* by Christ.