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Proximity to Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Opening Message at the Easter Conference

Reading: Genesis 43:1-34; Genesis 44:1-12.

In connection with the above chapters, will you turn to the Letter to the Ephesians 2:11-13, and 17-18; Matthew 26:39a.

There is a word on one's heart in connection with proximity to Christ. It is very clear in the Lord's Word that there are differences in the matter of proximity to Christ; that distances from Christ are very different; are greater and lesser. You have but just to take that thought and carry it for a moment into the New Testament on the literal side to see the bearing upon the spiritual side. There is this passage here in Matthew 26:30, and you begin at the most advanced point where the Lord is alone "and He went a little farther." His "little farther," of course, was going all the way with the will of God. That bit just spoke of the utterness, the completeness of His separation unto His Father's will. He went the bit farther than anyone else, He is seen there alone. From that point you get differences of distance from Him.

If you go back (reading backward) you find in the previous verse He has taken Peter and James and John, a little farther than the others. They have gone a little farther than the others, they are nearer to Him than the rest of the company which came into the garden with Him, but they are not immediately with Him. You would have thought, perhaps, and I suppose if it had been us it would

have been like this, "Now let us get down and have some prayer together. There's a great battle on, there's some great thing to be met, we cannot meet it alone, let us pray together." But there was something which made it necessary for Him to forego that fellowship, and so instead of doing the thing which doubtless His own heart was craving for, that is, entering into this thing in fellowship with His brethren, or bringing them into fellowship with it, He went a little farther, and they could not just go that extra bit, but He left them there.

And then, reading back one verse further, you find the eight are left at a greater distance, a distance between the eight and the three and a distance between the three and the One; and then if you go over into the Book of the Acts and read in chapter one, you find one hundred and twenty. These surely were all followers before the Cross, they haven't become disciples since Calvary. They were of the larger company, but they are not in the garden. They are somewhere else; they are not in the same proximity to Him as the eight and then the three. And then if you go further into 1 Corinthians 15:6, you will find there were about five hundred. Paul says "He appeared unto about five hundred at once." Where are the three hundred and eighty when the one hundred and twenty are gathered together? Three hundred and eighty are missing, missing in that upper room in prayer during the days of waiting for the Promise of the Father. The five hundred is split and only one hundred and twenty are there, three hundred and eighty are somewhere else; and so you go on, and you find in this literal way there is the Lord and then a very small company nearest; then a little larger company not so near as those; then a larger company; and then a much larger company, and who shall tell what the company was of those who were on the outermost run of things. But you see — proximity! And I think that is suggestive of spiritual fellowship with the Lord of those who will go a little further; those who will go all the way, those who will go further than most, than some; and beloved, it is my belief that the Lord gathers us here at this season because He wants a company who will go *all* the way with Him, who will come into the Master's own intimate and immediate fellowship.

We know, do we not, of many who will go just so far with the Lord and then they draw the line; some will go a little further, but then they stop short, and it seems that very few, very few indeed, go right into the absolute oneness with Him in His Heart, His Mind, His Will: and He is seeking for those who will be of His own Spirit, who will go a little further than the rest, than perhaps the most advanced of all the others, a little further still, to take them into the innermost secret and suffering of His own Heart.

And it would seem that these differences of approximation to Him would reveal spiritual state. I do not want to make much of that on the literal side, but on the spiritual side, undoubtedly it is true, a spiritual state is disclosed by just how far you go with the Lord. To begin with, you have the matter of apprehension and appreciation; the grasping, the apprehending of the innermost desire and longing and secret of the Lord and an appreciation of Him, of His will, His Mind, His purpose. It does seem that some of these have a fuller apprehension and appreciation than others, and they went further, therefore. He was constantly suffering, was He not, from that lack of apprehension and appreciation? Again and again He gave expression to some feeling, some inner knowledge that they were not grasping it, that they were not getting hold of it, that they were not understanding. "I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them yet." All the time they were just failing to apprehend the inner thing, they were grasping the outer and missing the inner, they were not appreciating His feelings — "Lord wilt Thou that we call down fire from Heaven?" but, "you know not what spirit you are of!" You see a lack of appreciation of His Heart, His feelings, His thoughts, His mind there.

If we are not going on with Him, if we are not going to find a response in our hearts, may it not be that it is because we have not a due apprehension or appreciation of the heart, the mind, the purpose of the Lord? And then the question of devotion and sacrifice would come in, naturally, just whether they were prepared to pay the price of going on. The measure of devotion, the measure of sacrifice, what it was going to cost and then a hesitating because of the cost; and to go all the way with the Lord would necessitate paying the whole price, whatever that price might be, of suffering... suffering!

Now that brings me back to these chapters which doubtless you are wondering about as to what connection they have, these chapters in the Book of Genesis — this matchless story of Joseph and his brethren. Linked with the words we have read in the Ephesian letter is a deep spiritual affinity between these portions of the Word. We have recently seen that Joseph himself stands to represent the Lord Jesus as the great Overcomer, the One Who by Divine right and revelation was to be the object of universal worship, where the sheaves of earth bow down and make obeisance to Him, where the sun, moon and stars of Heaven also bow down and proclaim Him Lord. And that One, that One passing through rejection, sold for thirty pieces of silver, led in chains by His own consent — in the case of the Lord Jesus — and then passing into the dungeon, humiliation, and into the place of darkness where it would seem that all the promises and all the visions were totally eclipsed and impossible, at length exalted to the Throne. The great Overcomer! Wherefore, because "obedient unto death," "wherefore, God hath highly exalted Him." "Who for the suffering of death" is now in the presence of the glory of Heaven. Now that is Joseph here, or Joseph is here as a type of that.

The next outstanding figure in this story is Benjamin, and Benjamin represents the believer as the Overcomer. You will be helped by a study of Benjamin. He is marked out, he is distinguished. "There goes little Benjamin." Benjamin is the Overcomer amongst the Lord's people, just as Joseph was distinguished amongst his brethren at the beginning as the son of the father's love, so now Benjamin is called the son of the father's old age, and upon him everything hangs, upon him, for the brethren, apart from Joseph now; so Benjamin is the overcomer amongst the brethren. The brethren were at a distance; all the others are in no proximity to Joseph, the one on the throne. You see the distance? Everything speaks of distance. There is no fellowship. Oh, Joseph yearns, he longs for what is in this fellowship, but he can't have it yet. Benjamin is not there, and so the brothers are at a distance, separated, and he says, "It is impossible for you to see my face, to come into fellowship with me unless you bring Benjamin," and we hear the argument with their father about bringing Benjamin, and they determined they would not go if Benjamin could not go with them because they would not see his face; and then when they took Benjamin the distance was not altogether overcome. Yet Joseph had seen him at a distance, and then he ordered his steward to set the bread for himself apart, for his brethren by themselves, not feeding together yet: the Egyptians are present. You know the meaning of Egypt surely by now, the realm of natural resources, the strength of the flesh.

How is the final distance broken down? How do they all come into the closest fellowship as of one man? He put his cup into Benjamin's sack, and off they went with his silver cup in Benjamin's sack, and then sent his steward for them and brought them back. You know how it happened! That ruse, that trick, so to speak, was the way in which everything was broken down. By that way fellowship was brought in. What was it that did it? It was his cup in Benjamin's sack, his silver cup out of which he himself drank. Have you got it? To the overcomers — one cup, a silver cup. The Master said to these "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" They said "we can"! He said, "you shall"! And that is

absolute fellowship, it is fellowship in the cup, oneness in the cup, the silver cup. That means going all the way in closest proximity — the cost! Have you got it? We need hardly say any more.

That is the story. That which looked like, in the mind of the world, a trick, was that profound wisdom with a love motive in it, that they shall become ONE by that cup. The Spirit writes deeply beyond the wisdom of men, what men would call anything but wisdom and love. The Spirit writes the story of Calvary as the ground upon which perfect fellowship is brought about between the Lord and His brethren. But, oh! there is this other word. Benjamin, the least, the smallest, was brought into that relationship on behalf of all the brethren, the more important ones, according to the flesh, but who are spiritually discounted. The Lord depends upon a little one coming into relationship with Him in the cup. It is the overcomer of the Revelation. You have the brethren in the Churches, but they are spiritually at a distance, and in the Churches you have a little "overcomer" company who come into fellowship with the Lord in His passion and travail. That is the message of the first three chapters of the Revelation. Coming into fellowship with the Lord in His Cross as representative to save the Lord's testimony. You follow on in the Revelation and you find the small company are there first and the larger company afterwards, but they are there in behalf of the rest; the others would never get there if they did not get there first, but they have got through in the cup of His sufferings and the others will come into fellowship with that cup, "for they will come up out of the great tribulation and wash their robes and make them white in the Blood of the Lamb."

Now, I am not concerned with times in this matter at all, but I am concerned with the spiritual facts and spiritual laws. All the way through from Genesis to Revelation is that law that He must have one or a little company, a remnant, an overcomer body, coming into full fellowship with Him by the altar, by the Cross, on behalf of all the rest. We have often pointed out that in the remnant of Israel only two tribes were called "all Israel." It is the remnant who came back and put the altar in its place and built the House, and yet they were called "all Israel." You see it is relative.

Now, beloved, it is that small company which can go all the way which the Lord is after, that little flock that comes into closest fellowship with Him in His suffering, in His passion, in His purpose. There are only a few who can come there. He took with Him Peter, James and John, and then He Himself went a little further; and so you get the ranges; and it speaks of just how far you will go, according to the price you will pay — the fellowship of His sufferings. But too often in the Laodicean age there is that which is sickening to the heart of God about the spirituality of the majority. They are neither hot nor cold. There are those to whom He speaks right in the Laodicean conditions, "He that overcometh will I give to sit with Me in My Throne even as I have overcome and sit with My Father in His Throne." Here is the Throne you see — "If we suffer with Him we shall reign with Him." Now that is the call of the Lord to us in these days, and I believe that will be what the Lord is pressing home in every one of these gatherings during this season.

Are you going further? Are you going *all* the way? The end of the way is the Throne; to get there means to go by the way of the Cross, by the way of the cup. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack, a little one, a little one, a small company. By Benjamin the others were brought into fellowship with the exalted lord — complete fellowship. There are no more separate tables and the Egyptians are gone out, and there is perfect fellowship in the Spirit.

May the Lord get us to be such a company.