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## Spiritual Death and His Risen Life

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Message given on April 1, 1934. Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

Reading: Numbers 17:1-13.

The Scriptures throughout reveal an abiding and deep seated antagonism between God and this world, and that that antagonism passes into every instrument which is brought into living fellowship with God, and it becomes the expression of God's antagonism, and also the means by which the antagonism in the world is dragged out into the light. So that all who are in spiritual fellowship with God know that from God's side there can be no reconciliation with the world in that spiritual sense of the word in which we are using it, and they also know that there is toward them, as toward God, this strong, deep, relentless spiritual antagonism on the part of the world. It is also true that in the true nature of fallen man there is that element which has an affinity with the world, and which causes man to spontaneously gravitate world-ward.

The Word of God reveals the existence of a great system of spiritual intelligence which has as its business the maintaining and stimulating of that antagonism, and all its might is bent upon keeping that affinity between fallen man and this world. So that that whole system of spiritual intelligences is all the time seeking to keep man world-bound spiritually, and to bring about some kind of involving again, even of the Lord's people and the Church, in this world, spiritually. The whole history of the Church's gravitation world-ward in numerous ways is just the history of the success of those spiritual intelligences to again entangle the people of God in the toils of the world spiritually.

Now we come to the next thing in this connection, spiritual death, which is the law governing that relationship of man with the world. Spiritual death is the many-sided and master-hold of those spiritual forces. In our second analysis, you will remember, we pointed out that the very essence of the working of the Lord Jesus by His cross was to destroy that affinity and break the power of that law of death, and to introduce, on the ground of separation from the world, the law of Life, a counter law to the law of gravitation toward the world, the realm of spiritual death. So for a brief time we shall be occupied with the law of Life in Christ, that which comes by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Just how to lift out enough for a little while is my problem. The Lord will no doubt help. We may find our helpfulness by reverting to the portion of the word from which we were reading in Numbers 17, the account of the taking of the twelve rods of the twelve tribes of Israel, and then of the sequence in the budding of Aaron's rod. You will notice, if you have the Word open, that this 17th chapter has its setting in a scene of death. The chapter before gives the account of the rebellion of Korah and his company, the disputing of the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the calling into question of God's appointment. You must ever remember that Moses and Aaron are one, that in principle they are not two men, they are the two halves of one. Moses is that side which represents government, administration; Aaron is that side which represents priesthood, mediation. Two sides of one ministry, which are clearly seen in the anti-type of Moses and Aaron, the Lord Jesus Himself; King and Priest, Ruler and Priest, Administrator and Mediator.

Korah with his company rose up and questioned the Divine appointment and its absoluteness. You know the issue. The Lord took up that matter. Moses did not take up that matter; Moses did not turn a hand for his own vindication, he fell on his face before the Lord, and his meekness is brought out at that point as never before. But the Lord stepped in and called for Korah and his company to be brought to the door of the tent of the congregation. The issue was that the earth opened and swallowed up the company of Korah, and if you look you will see it was a very large company. Death engulfed all who were touched and tainted with that thing. Chapter 17 is set in that background of death, terrible death. Korah and his company have touched something which was death, and which worked out in death. There has been a contact in spirit between them and that realm which is death, and spiritual death always precedes the literal carrying out of it, just as spiritual life in resurrection precedes the resurrection literally. There will be no resurrection unto life for anyone who has not already been resurrected spiritually. And when eventually the judgement of death has its literal consummation, it will simply be the fulfilment of what has already been taking place in spiritual death; and in principle Korah had already touched a realm which implied and involved death, and the literal judgement was but the consummation of that.

Now we pass into this part of the story where the big question is for the Lord's people - there being a realm of death, and we seeing how possible it is for us to become involved in that, to touch that, and the awful consequences - how can we live; who can live? You see that is what comes up at the end of chapter 17, but it is the issue of chapter 16. At the end of chapter 17 you have: "And the children of Israel spoke unto Moses, saying, Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. Every one that cometh near, that cometh near unto the tabernacle of the Lord, dies; shall we perish, all of us?" Question followed question. Death is working, death; a realm which can be touched spiritually. How can we live? Can we live at all? The content of chapter 17 is the answer. Aaron's rod that budded.

I think it well-nigh impossible to fail to see in that rod the type of the Lord Jesus. All those rods, even Aaron's rod, when brought to the tabernacle were dead. Aaron's rod was amongst the rest, apparently like them, in death. Judgement has taken place, sin has been judged and dealt with, and death through sin reigns universally. That is sin, as you have it at the end of Good Friday, as we call it. Even the Lord Jesus, who has voluntarily entered into the universal judgement of sin, taken His place amongst sinful men, and has received the judgement of God upon the sin of the world, looks, at the end of that day, as though He is like all the rest - dead. Laid up through the night, the dark night. But then we hear Paul's ringing shout: "*God raised Him from the dead*", and what we call "Easter Day" is Aaron's rod that budded, it is Christ in resurrection. These rods, or at least Aaron's rod, was an almond rod, the stick of an almond tree. In Hebrew the word "almond" simply means "awakening", and it is given that name because it is the first of the trees of spring to break the slumber of winter. The first blossoms of spring are the blossoms of the almond tree, and the almond gets its name in Hebrew simply from the fact that it breaks the slumber of winter first. It is the first to show the new life. A very poor type of Christ, the Firstfruits of them that are asleep, awakened; breaking the slumber of death.

There is something more than that. The marvel, the miracle of this particular rod was that simultaneously it had buds, blossoms, and fruit, ripe fruit. You have never found that on an almond tree in spring. You have seen the bud and then later the flower, and later the fruit, but here you have them all at once. Christ in resurrection is initially the break with death, and at the same time the full fruit of resurrection, and there is present all the beauty of that in the flower. It is a matchless picture of resurrection. Christ does not rise progressively in a bud, and later on the flower, and later on the fruit, it is all there in a moment; and that is why we can live, for in Him is the fullness of resurrection life. Do they ask, "How can we live? Who can live?" The answer is here - Christ lives, all is possible. Even in the presence of death and judgement, in a world where death rages, to touch which, spiritually, means death, it is possible to live in the triumph of His resurrection. I take the simple and the superficial lesson of this almond rod and of the resurrection.

Much more there is, but we will ravish our hearts with the first beauty of this thing. You and I know quite well that death is all around us in this world - spiritually, I mean. We know by painful experience that it is all too possible and all too easy for us spiritually to touch that realm and to have the touch of it upon us, to feel that cold touch of spiritual death upon our hearts by reason of in some way out of a thousand ways just getting a contact. It may be conversation. It is so easy to touch death by not watching your conversation. How often, after a holy time with the Lord, frivolity has come in in your conversation, and you know in your spirit that you have come into a realm of death, it may be by something said about a child of God; you have come down to earth levels in your relationships, your criticisms. I could never, if I tried, touch all the ways in which it happens, but I mention these simply to give point to the truth. There are innumerable ways in which the spirit of one who has been touched by the Lord, with His life, can just be involved in that spiritual realm of death. It is a reality to us - we know it. That new law which He has put within us, which gravitates toward the Lord, makes us revolt and recoil from even compulsory dealings with many things in this world. We have to go back, because of the conventions of this world, because of certain duties which have to be performed; we have to go back into the world sometimes to ungodly relatives or associations, but we want to get away as soon as we can, we recoil. That to us is death spiritually.

Now, we live in that realm, in that world. How can we live triumphantly in a world where death is, and not perish in it? And there is something more than that. How can you and I, as the Lord's people, seeking to live a heavenly life in this deadly world, live, not only in the presence of men and

women and things which are dead, but in the presence of all the spirits of death which are with increasing intensity coming upon the children of God to register death upon them, and seeking to make them accept death, and to put up a real conflict spiritually with something. The only word which expresses it is death; this which is active, malicious, wanting to crush the life out of you and bring you down and under. How can we live in that? We need a very full victory. That rod declared the fullness of the victory, going right on to the end - ripe fruit. It covers the whole field of resurrection life. Christ risen answers the question, "How can we live?" Because He lives we live. He, risen, is our life, even in the midst of death.

I know how very simple, very elementary that statement is, but it is not too elementary for me. That does not set the standard, of course, but for me that is a message, and because it is a message to me, I give it to you. Beloved, we cannot live as children of God in this world, only in the power of the risen life of the Lord Jesus. We *can* live, even in this world in the midst of the full force of spiritual death, if we know Christ in risen life, the fellowship with Him in His resurrection. We can live, and it is what we have got to learn to do. We have to learn from day to day how literally in our hearts to lay hold of the Lord as our Life, to make it possible for us to go triumphantly through this world, this living tomb, this realm of death.

Now, all that is according to the truth: all that can have the Word of God throughout brought to its support. You probably realise that more or less. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus has got to become to His own a daily reality. It is not something that happened so many years ago. We do not celebrate something that happened centuries ago, we celebrate something that is real now in experience. I cannot sing a hymn about something that happened so many centuries ago. I can only enter into this thing if it is a reality to me now. I want the value of it to my own heart now, and then I can sing. This matter of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus has got to become an increasing reality to us in our life, to live in triumph in the midst of death.

It is so real and true to experience; very often it is wrapped up so carefully and so cleverly by the enemy that the whole tendency and peril is to put things down to the account of something else; to put it down to the fault of people, to the accidents of life, to the mere converging of circumstances, to blame somebody or to blame something. And so it is wrapped up to really divert us from the source of it, so that, being occupied with something which is not the original occasion, but merely a means of it, we shall not get right to the source and be able to tackle it there. If your spiritual death comes about in measure through some means seen or known, and you become occupied with the means, the channel, the instrument, the person or the thing, you have no power to deal with the matter at its fountain-head. You simply get up against people and things, and blame them and feel sorry about them. But if you recognise that that is only the wrapping of the enemy, and see that the issue is a question of Life and death, and you get right to the source of it, and say, "Now, although So-and-so may have been unwatchful, unwise, and in measure responsible, I see that the enemy is back of that, and the effect of this thing is intended to be that I am spiritually put out of action, brought down into death"; then you are on the way to being able to master the whole situation. And how often when we get back of the thing or the person, and deal with the thing in its spiritual realm, the other thing of itself clears up, and you find that that is taken out of the enemy's hands. It is very true! It is important for us to recognise the ultimate matter, and that is the one of spiritual conflict between the prince of this world and our spirits, to bring us again into the bondage of spiritual death.

That is not all, but I must close. I want to remind you that it is not only a matter of living. Chapter 18 carries this thing further. It carries it into ministry. The answer of the end of chapter 17 works two ways. It works, on the one hand, toward living in the presence of death and being delivered from death; but then it works in the other way in the matter of spiritual service, it is a glorious thing to notice that it is not only a matter of being able to maintain yourself in Life, or being maintained in Life, but a ministry in resurrection comes into view. Chapter 18 brings the whole matter of spiritual ministry in resurrection in a new way before the Lord's people.

Aaron, his sons, and the Levites, on the ground of this great miracle of resurrection come into a spiritual ministry. It is not necessary for me to remind you that the Levites are, in representation, all the people of God; all the people of God, in consecration, in separation unto the Lord; and their ministry is the ministry of all the Lord's people, and all the Lord's people have their ministry in the Levites. In the New Testament you do not divide the Body literally. Here it is a principle, a type, an illustration of a spiritual reality. In the New Testament it is Christ and His own. If you want the proof of that, read your Letter to the Hebrews again, and you will find in the very first chapters of that Letter the Lord Jesus, Who comes in as the greater than Aaron, speaks again and again of His own as being brethren, children: "I and the children...", "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren...", "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus...". And there Christ is seen as *"a Son over God's house, whose house are we"*. It is a priestly family that comes in with the New Testament. The letter to the Hebrews makes it perfectly clear that that is all on resurrection ground. He, through death, has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered all those who all their lives were in bondage through fear of death. On the ground of resurrection this priestly family comes in with Him as its Head. That is Numbers 18 quite clearly. And so, spiritual ministry comes in, not for a class, but for all the Lord's people. If there is any difference between the sons of Aaron and the Levites it is only a measure spiritually, and not a class. It is approximation to maturity, as represented by the sons of Aaron, but the ministry of the House of God is spread over all the Lord's people. Every one of you, take it to your heart - every one of you stands now, in the New Testament day, in the position of the priests and the Levites of Numbers 18. That is a privilege and also a responsibility.

Now, of course, your mental difficulties will be as to the nature of ministry, and you will perhaps be asking questions. You may ask, "Have I got to preach, have I got to be on the platform, taking meetings?" No, it does not mean anything of the kind. It does mean that you have spiritually a ministry, by your very relationship to the living Lord. Oh, that we could get delivered from this mechanical idea of ministry. The Lord has taken tremendous pains with some of us in this matter. Ministry is not someone getting Bible addresses ready, Bible readings and subjects, and preparing them and getting up and giving them at meetings. That is not the ministry. The Lord has shown to us that it is impossible to minister in the power of the Holy Ghost, in the Word of God, in truth, unless we have the fruit of Christ's resurrection in us. You have got to come, not only to the initial experience of the bud, being raised together with Christ; you have got to come to the place where the beauty of Christ in the flower is there; and then the fruit of Christ is there in ripeness. I would not come to you to minister at any time simply because there is in the Bible a good deal of interesting matter that I have seen, and I would like you to know it. My cry to God is: forbid me to speak to this people unless You give me a word in my own heart that is meaning something to me. Ministry flows out of living union with the Lord Jesus, and if ministry is not that, it is not the ministry of God. Do not take on ministry in that mechanical, organised way; it will kill you sooner or later. This ministry is only possible in the power and fruit of His resurrection.

Are you knowing the fruit of His resurrection in your own heart, in your own life, so that He is really causing you to partake of the fruit of His resurrection - ripe almonds? It may be in a simple way, but you are knowing that beauty, that unction, that fellowship with the Lord in your own heart. If you are, you need not worry about ministry; that will show itself. The Lord will find ways for you. I have no doubt whatever but that when the Lord gets a child of His into a place where they are really in their own hearts enjoying the fruit of the risen Lord, the Lord will make contacts with that life which will be fruitful, and that will be ministry. He knows where there is someone who is just longing for a taste of the fruit of His risen life, and He will make the contacts. That does not exempt us from being ready, anxious to be used as the Lord will, on stretch to be of service to Him, but all eagerness to minister will be in vain if we are not in resurrection with the Lord Jesus, but, being given that, ministry follows, it comes out of that.

Numbers 18 comes out of Numbers 17. The ministry of the House of God is spontaneous when there is union with Christ in risen life; the fruit is there at once.