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The Servant and Service of the Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Exodus 21:1-6; Deuteronomy 15:12-17; Leviticus 8:14-28; Isaiah 50:4-5.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." (Revelation 3:20-22).

The Servant's Ear

You notice the common feature in all these passages is that of the ear. We are occupied with the matter of the servants and the service of the Lord, and it is not a little impressive to note how in the Word of God the ear has such an important place in the service of God. We need, of course, always to get an adequate background for any subject under consideration. It is very easy to make a Bible Reading of "ears," to gather up the "ears" of the Bible and form them into some ordered arrangement, but that is not sufficient. We want to get the range of things from the Divine standpoint and see how these things, are not just things in themselves, but they fit into something which is tremendous in its contemplation and application.

We might be helped to get this great background by reminding ourselves that the ruin, wreckage, all the misery and wretchedness, sin and sorrow, pain and suffering of every kind, all that has struck home to the very heart of God, all that has been a hand against His throne, all that has stood in the

way to arrest His great eternal purpose, all that necessitated God giving His only and well beloved Son, all that made essential the Cross of Christ, and much more, is the direct result of an ear operating wrongly; all that was brought about by the capture of an ear by the enemy. The enemy in laying his plans to capture the race and the world and the place of authority for himself decided deliberately that the point of attack which would serve him best, would ever serve his interest most, would be the ear. And so he assailed the ear and made his insinuations by way of the ear. "Hath God said..." and all the rest followed. The ear was lent to the suggestion, to the insinuation; the ear was surrendered with these far reaching terrible consequences.

Now, beloved, that is only half of the story. The other half is this, that in the redemption of the world, in the redemption of mankind, in the re-capturing for God and for man of the government of the universe, in the overthrow of all that power and the destroying of all those works, God does it by capturing an ear. And these passages which we have read this evening, in type, relate to the ear of the Lord Jesus, that God had His ear. It was because God had His ear as He *did* have it that the rest followed.

You see you have got a tremendous principle there in this service and servant of the Lord, the Servant, greater than Whom there has never been a Servant of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Himself fulfilled His marvellous service, commission, His wonderful work, firstly by a surrendering of His ear to the Father. It was the law of the ear in relation to God that governed this Servant to begin with. Other things followed, as we shall see another time, but this was where it began, and while in His case it is so much more than it could ever be in the case of any other, yet the principle holds good for all the servants of God, that God is going to accomplish His heavenly purpose firstly by way of having an ear in His charge, under His control, in fellowship with Himself. And, if you and I are going to understand the nature of priestly ministry, we have got to come to know what it is to have our ear held by and for God. Now, of course, having established the background, or seen the range of this thing in principle, we can come down then to the illustrations of it, and can get the meaning of these various passages which have to do with the ear.

In the first of these passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy, the servant, the bondsman is brought in. Note one or two details. He is a Hebrew. He is not a stranger, he is a member of that race that has been delivered from slavery and bondage, whose covenant rights were liberty, but within the compass of a liberated people he is in bondage. He is a Hebrew. He is owned by a master. He serves that master for six years and then the seventh year, the year of jubilee, is the year of liberation. This bondsman comes to the day when his master is compelled to release him and let him go; he can hold him no longer so far as the law is concerned, and the bondsman is given his liberty. The master says to him, "Well, so and so, the time has come for you to take the liberty which is yours by right, to go out free, I can hold you no longer, there you are."

The bondsman turns to his master and says, "But there are stronger ties than law, there are mightier bonds than legalism, there are such things as heart ties, and it is those ties that hold me. I have long since ceased to be bound by law, I have become bound by love and I do not want to be released from that, I will not go out free, I choose deliberately on the basis of a heart relationship to be forever, not for another six years, not for another term of the law, not for twelve or eighteen years or any number of legal terms, I choose forever for the whole length of my life, to abide in this house and serve." That declaration must be formed into a covenant, sealed in blood. The master takes him to the threshold of the house and with an awl bores through his ear to the door-post and

the blood falls upon the threshold, and that threshold has become an altar with blood sprinkled on it, and in that covenant of blood the master and the servant belong to the one household forever.

Now that is all very simple, all very beautiful, but you see it brings in the true nature of the servant and of service as represented by the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus was under no legal obligation to come and fulfil that service, but He fulfilled it. He did not come because He was legally compelled or judiciously bound to it. He did not come in a spirit of independence, that He would do this thing but, of course, He would do it if He liked, but could resign. No! He came on this basis - for love's sake, on the basis of love. He was the bond slave of Jehovah to carry out this work in relation to the House of God, and that service and servant was sealed in His own blood. The shedding of that blood was the outpouring of His life, the token that life and death were bound up with this fact. It was a matter of blood, a matter of life and death, and love led to that, and that was the nature of His relationship to His Father.

Now there are two things, beloved, to be noted. One, the significance of the ear in this matter. Why could it not have been anything else? Why not first of all let us give our hand upon it? When we make a pact we say we give our hand upon it. Why not some other member or some other instrumentality, why should the ear be the basic thing in this? Well, the answer I think is obvious. That you can never do anything with the hand, that you can never express your service by any other means until you have come into an intelligent apprehension of what is in the heart of the one to whom you are giving your service, whose servant you are. The working of the hand is dependent upon the knowledge of his will, and this ear coming into evidence in this connection is simply saying this - forever, voluntarily, utterly, on the basis of the strongest possible tie, the basis of love, I have no ear for any one else, my ear as the gateway of intelligence is yours.

You see this bored ear, beloved, stands right over that freelance, lawlessness of the Adam man who yielded to Satan. It was the lawlessness of the ear in Adam that brought the trouble, and when you take the awl and put it through the ear, the ear has become sealed in blood to another, and it is the taking back of this ear from the realm of lawlessness which has brought about all the ruin and all his power to do his work, taking it back completely and utterly, and putting it into the hand of God that the works of the devil shall never again have a chance along that line; from that moment the ear is God's ear.

Now, of course, we understand that we are not just talking about the physical ear, although that comes in. The believer must be careful about what the ear shall listen to. It is just that in the ordinary every day kind of way with the physical ear that the devil does get so many advantages. The gossip which we talk, the rumours and reports which, in themselves are so often mistaken and distorted by the people who spread them, believing that they are very truth, and we believe them to be the truth, and when the whole thing is sifted out there is very little truth in them at all, and the whole thing has been mistaken. The Word of God tells us to "take heed how ye hear."

In the physical sense it is true that our inner man is affected by our outward ear, but we are not only speaking of that, important as it is for us to safeguard our ears, the real service of the Lord is not just that physical realm, it is in that deeper inner ear which is open to the Lord and which is the Lord's. I mean that the Lord is given His place in the inner life to be allowed to speak, and other things are being shut out that the Lord may speak; and that is a thing which is basic to priestly service.

The man or woman who has no inner ear, no inner silence, no inner place for hearing the Lord is never going to be of much use in the service of the Lord, and mark you, it must be the Lord, and we must be very careful that we do not give even good men and good writers the place that the Lord ought to have.

There is a time when we must sweep our books aside, when we must shut ourselves up from the voices of men, when we must get quiet with the Lord and listen, and more, we must seek to cultivate, by the grace of God, the ear that is always open to the Lord even when all the other sounds are around us. It is difficult, yet not impossible, that in the raging of the street and the rush of business life the Lord should say something; but He will only speak to those who recognise the value of listening to the Lord and who are giving Him His place of silence to speak when possible. The ear to hear the Lord when all other sounds and voices are around us is prepared and trained in these times of detachment which the Lord demands, and against which the devil is eternally active to capture the ear again.

Now, that is elementary (we are not seeking to be profound), but tremendously important. You and I know, never mind how spiritually mature we are - the one object of the devil is to capture our ear from God, to make it impossible for us to have the silent hour and the silent ear for God. The pressing in, and all the things which happen just when you have decided to have a little quiet time; then it is you have to fight for the ear - you know it is true. Do you see, there is something bound up with that; the undoing of the work of the devil, the registration of God's mind upon this universe, everything which is meant by priestly ministry, which is bringing God in, is bound up with this: God having the ear.

There are two things to note, this is one. The other is this: with this Hebrew servant it was a crisis. There came the day when he made a decision, the thing reached a point of decision and that decision was one which involved him for all time. A crisis. The voluntary decision. Now, beloved, the point is this. We have got to come, we shall be compelled to come, to the place where we decide once and for all whether we are going to serve the Lord under compulsion, under a sense of legality, under a sense of duty, under some sense of conscience and we go on day by day and year by year, but if only we could be exempt, if only it need not be; the groaning under it, the groaning in the service of the Lord. We have to decide whether it is going to be because we must, or whether it is going to be our delight to do His will, our joy. That is a crisis, and this crisis represents the position of appreciation of the Master to which we have come. Are we bondslaves in the sort of conscientious legal sense, yes, that we are afraid to do otherwise, we must do it, we are compelled to do it for various reasons, it would be a disastrous thing to draw out and give it up. Whether that is the spirit or whether it is "I love my master, I will not go out free," represents a point of our estimation of the Lord, our appreciation of the Lord, our sense of indebtedness to the Lord, our recognition of the value of the Lord; and, beloved, the service that the Lord is seeking is not service which we have to be coerced to do, the service which we will not render unless we are invited to do it, the service which is not spontaneous but which is organised, and unless we are asked to take it up we do not do it.

Oh, that we should get some better idea of what the service of the Lord is than that it is platforms and pulpits and open-air meetings. Beloved, service for the Lord is just as important when it is rendering some kindly act of helpful service to some rather depressed child of God in the ordinary domestic things of daily life; just as valuable as getting on the platform and giving a message. You see it is strengthening the hands of the Lord's children, it is coming in to check the crushing

overweight of the adversary, coming alongside to lift up the testimony in some life or home where the enemy is trying to crush the testimony out - and the testimony is something maintained in domestic relationships, in family life, private life. There are too many who want to give up their domestic service and go to Bible College, failing to recognise that that service there may be just as valuable to the Lord as their going out to the mission field. It is spiritual, not technical, not organised, and you may be as much a priest of the Lord in going round to some home tomorrow where the enemy is pressing in, and giving a practical hand in helping with the washing, as you may be a priest in standing on the platform. Let us revise our ideas of priestly service and not think it is bound up with public ministry in the service of the Lord. Not always, very often perhaps for the majority it is otherwise, for more are called to fulfil priestly ministry in that realm than in this realm. Do not neglect it. Let it be the spontaneity of love for the Lord, not the compulsion or sense of duty, not merely for conscience sake, for when the heart is rightly related to the Lord these things become spontaneous. They are not forced, they simply flow out. Find the person who has most of the love of God in their heart, that person is most concerned for the other children of God.

There are many priests of God whose voices have never been heard in public, who have never been seen in a public way, who are unknown, hidden very often in the assembly and yet in secret history fulfilling a most valuable ministry. Get adjusted over this thing. We have to come to the point where we deliberately decide as to whether the Lord is worthy of this, and abandon ourselves to it because of our appreciation of Him, the Master. You see, this servant abandons himself freely, voluntarily, for all time to the service of his master because he has come to love his master.