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"Thy Way Was in the Sea"

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in December 1957.

We continue with Thy blessing upon the remaining moments of our being together. And say something to us Lord, which will be a real help at this moment, and in the days which are before us, in the name of our Lord Jesus.

In order to get the real value of the word this morning, I have to read to you twenty verses comprising Psalm 77. Psalm 77:

"I will cry unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and He will give ear unto me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my hand was stretched out in the night, and slacked not; my soul refused to be comforted. I remember God, and am disquieted: I complain, and my spirit is overwhelmed. Thou holdest mine eyes watching: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart; my spirit makes diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will He be favorable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies? And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will make mention of the deeds of the Lord; for I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate also upon all Thy work, and muse on Thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: Who is a great god like unto God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: Thou hast made known Thy strength among the peoples. Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. The waters saw Thee, O God; the waters saw Thee, they were afraid: the depths also trembled. The clouds poured out

water; the skies sent out a sound: Thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of Thy thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. Thy way was in the sea, and Thy paths in the great waters, and Thy footsteps were not known. Thou leddest Thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron."

Verse 19 particularly, "Thy way was in the sea, Thy paths in the great waters, Thy footsteps were not known...". You will see by the heading that this is one of the psalms attributed to Asaph. Asaph, as you know, was David's choir master or choir leader - the leader of the singers. Quite a number of the psalms are attributed to him. Here in Psalm 77 he is in trouble; a man of music who has lost his music, and lost his song for the time being. He is in real difficulty. The difficulty, the cause of it we do not know, but it is perfectly clear from the psalm the nature of it was that the signs, the manifestations of the Lord's power, the Lord's glory, were under eclipse. Asaph could see nothing that indicated that the Lord was concerned, interested, to say nothing of being *active* in concern for whatever the situation may have been. He could not see the Lord, and he could not see that the Lord was doing anything at all about this matter, whatever it was. And so, cast down and depressed, he contemplates the situation and the circumstances, and the more he is occupied with that, the deeper he sinks into the mire, into the slough of despond. And he goes on like that for a time, and we all know where that leads. But thank God, that if we are the Lord's people, if we really are the Lord's, and we have a history with the Lord, there comes a point where we can't go along *that* line and down *that* road any further; we get a reaction from within.

And so we find right in the midst of this sad outpoured complaint: a turning-point. At verse 10, "This is my infirmity, *but...* I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High". That "but" is the turning point. From that point the dark night will begin to give place to the rising sun of a new outlook and a new trust.

What does he do, this man? He begins to think again, and perhaps he does not have to think back very far, when he says, "I will remember my song in the night" which does not mean that he would remember that there was a time when he sang in the dark, and there was a time when he was more cheerful than he is at this moment - it does not mean that. "I will call to remembrance, not that I did sing once and am not singing today, I will call to remembrance what I *did* sing; what it was that I sang that night. That night I could not sleep, and so I occupied the time with composing a song for the choir. I composed a song for my choir that night, for the people to sing. And what was my song that I composed? It was about the way in which the Lord got His people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. I made up this song or this psalm about that mighty work of God in delivering His people. I provided this, this song for the people of God. And now, I'm just there where I need my own song; where I need to take a dose of my own medicine, where I need the very thing that I had talked to others about, where my doctrine must become personal. I made it up and gave it to the choir for the Lord's people, now it's come back on me. I must remember what I told other people in times of difficulty, what I had said to them. I must bring that right into my own present experience." And that was the point at which the streaks of dawn passed over his dark sky, and heralded the coming day, and at the end of the psalm as you see, he is out in the light. He is out in the light.

But there is one phrase here, that's why I picked it out from the nineteenth verse, that seems to me to be the focal point of the whole psalm on both its sides, "Thy way..." The trouble with Asaph was that he *could not see the way*. He could not see a way at all! The situation was such as to be like a siege around his soul; the dark forces had compassed him about and he could see no way out, and no way through. "There's no way, this is the end. There's no way through; I see no way at all". That

seems to have been the trouble with Asaph; if you read the first verses, it's just that, it's just that: no way out, no way through. "Then I recalled my song..."

Israel; *how* could they get out of Egypt? There was no way out! Later, the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army behind in pursuit, desert and the mountains on either side, and that deep and terrible sea straddling the path ahead? Everything spoke of death and the grave; shame, reproach, and calamity marking the end of the road. No way out, no way through. "Thy way, oh Lord, was in the sea, Thy paths in great waters; I said that for other people to take up, but God is never without a way when we are! He led them through the deep! God was in no quandary, God had to make no detours and bypasses, He went straight through." Straight through! "Thy way..."

That little clause or line, "Thy footsteps were not known" indicates everybody was saying, "Where, where can the Lord put His feet? Where is a way for the Lord to tread? We can't *see* what the Lord can do, we just cannot see which way the Lord will go or *can* go." "Thy footsteps were not known... no-one knew what you would do, Lord! But, it happened! Thou leddest them through." They went through, they came out on the other side, the Lord knew what He would do, the Lord knew the way that He would take! The sea, or be it mountains, these are no obstructions to the Lord, He goes through as though they were not there. Now Asaph said, "I put that into a psalm at one time in the night, but now, today, I've got to believe what I myself have preached and said before: there's a way for the Lord. The Lord in heaven *always* has a way when we can see no way, when a way seems an impossible thing."

Well, that is the truth isn't it? That's history in the case of Israel. And here is this man bringing it right up to date in his own life and experience. In such a time it seemed like that: "No way, no way. No way, an end of everything. Ah! But the God who made a way through the sea and brought His people through, has a way for *me* today! He has a way for me!"

This sort of thing has occurred more than once, as you know, in Bible history, they, when Sennacherib's armies encompassed Jerusalem, a mighty army and Hezekiah with the people inside, could see no way, no way! Humanly speaking there *was* no way out or through! Hezekiah with Isaiah went to the Lord about it. Well, let Sennacherib with his mighty hosts be spread over all the plain, the Lord can take a very simple way through, as He did. One angel, from heaven, and heaven had the answer to the lockup, to the deadlock, to the impasse. Heaven has the way.

And I lead you from that to the gospel by Luke and you will recall those words in the Lord's description of how things would be at the end; chapter 21 of Luke's gospel. Such, such a prediction and such a prevision as could never possibly have been exhausted in the siege of Jerusalem; it's carried right on to the end of the age. A marvelous description, the things as we today see them in every way. And right there in verse 25 we have translated these words: "distress of nations..." distress of nations. That in itself is descriptive of our time, but get behind those English words to the original words, and what have we? The original simply says: "No way out for the nations." No way out for the nations. Was ever anything more accurate of a description of how things are today than this? "When you see these things come to pass, lift up your heads, *your Way out draweth nigh!*" Your redemption, your way out; that's what it is, drawing nigh.

Yes, looking around we might well be like Asaph, contemplating the situation and the circumstances, the ominous signs of our times, we might go down that street called "Despair". But there's a way out, heaven has the answer right at the end. And dear friends, if this chapter means anything at all, it

means this: that so far as things down here on this earth are concerned, that is how it *will* be; there will be no way out and no way through. And it is becoming very, very much like that now for the nations. BUT, it says, when down here it's like that, you lift up your heads because heaven has a way out for you, the church will go out that way, lift up *your* heads, *your* redemption, *your* way out draweth nigh.

Yes, God is never at the end of *His* resources, heaven always has the answer. When it seems there is no way, He has the way, "Thy way was in the sea, Thy paths in great waters." Yes, great waters, sometimes dark and terrible waters, as on that night through the Red Sea, but it is a way that God has for His own.