



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

An Instrument of Recovery as Set forth by Gideon

by T. Austin-Sparks

Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.

"Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east assembled themselves together; and they passed over, and encamped in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet" (Judges 6:33-34).

"The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet".

The Enemy's Movements Timed by the Lord

The first thing that we should note in this chapter is the movement of the Lord sovereignly, and in the sovereign movement of the Lord we see that one word is very significant, the word with which verse 33 commences - *"Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east assembled themselves..."*. Then. This coming in, as it does, seems so clearly to indicate that it is a part of a plan, it is a part of the Divine movement. This mighty gathering of adverse forces, the enemy rallying all his reserves and power moving out, taking up position - the Lord had anticipated it, prepared for it, and now brought it about. Everything leading up to that point is a Divine movement, Divine preparation. The Lord has chosen His instrument and equipped him, cleared a way, and then He brings up the enemy in full force. It is very often like that and it is as well that we note this and seek to keep it in mind always, that the enemy coming in like a flood is often timed by the Lord, governed by the Lord, in a sense brought about by the Lord. It is just a part of the Lord's way, the Lord's plan. It looks pretty serious, it feels serious, but the Lord has got it in hand.

"Then the Enemy..." - "But the Spirit..."

"Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east..." When? When the Lord was ready for them; the Lord had prepared the way to deal with them; the Lord had moved in response to His people's cry and yet had moved sovereignly for His Name's sake. "Then... but...". Then - but. Then the enemy - but the Spirit of the Lord. This, set over against that. Then... the enemy with all his power and force and evil intent, thinking that he is just going to wipe the field clean and intending to do so - but... the Spirit of the Lord. The enemy has got to meet that 'but'.

The Trumpet of Testimony to the Lord's Supremacy

"The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet". It is a long time since the sound of that trumpet had been heard in the land, the trumpet of the Lord's people had been silent. If we want to understand the meaning of that trumpet, we find the meaning lying behind the whole of this story. It is the trumpet of testimony to the absolute supremacy of the Lord, and everything gathers round that. All the details point to that - the supremacy of the Lord. The Lord took pains along every line to keep that one thing clear. We will see that in a moment.

The Lord is supreme, the Lord is sovereign. The Lord is the Lord, and it may be a part of Divine necessity in the bringing out of that fact, that the enemy also be brought out to the full measure of his power. In order that the absolute supremacy of the Lord should be seen and known, it may be necessary that there should be something in the nature of an inundation of the enemy. The Spirit of the Lord does not minimise things here; "*the Midianites... and the Amalekites and all the children of the east*". The early part of the chapter says that they were without number and their camels were without number. They were like locusts. Here indeed is an instance of "*when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard*". The two things go together - the enemy coming in like a flood and the Lord allowing that in sovereign purpose in order that there may be this supreme manifestation of the supremacy of the Lord. Such a time is God's occasion, and He even makes occasions for Himself in this way. I feel that we have got to regard these flood-like assaults of the enemy as permitted of the Lord at least for an opportunity and occasion for a fresh manifestation of the supremacy of the Lord.

This trumpet, then, was the trumpet of testimony to the fact that the Lord is Lord. The Spirit of the Lord energised unto the blowing of that trumpet, or the bringing forth of that testimony in the midst of conditions which looked to be overwhelming. That is the centre and heart of things, and there are just a few things which gather around that which may help us if we look at that, or just mention them.

A Day of Weakness and Limitation

Here is a day in which the Lord's people were well-nigh paralysed - in weakness, in defeat, in oppression. There was no clear, distinct, open, full testimony. Things were driven underground or into caves, as the chapter tells us. This was, of course, the result of the Lord's people allowing themselves to be actuated by worldly principles. That comes out very clearly in the prophet who spoke before the Lord acted with Gideon. They, the people, had allowed themselves to come under the influence of the gods of the land in which they dwelt. Well, we know what that is. When we speak of worldliness, we simply mean that the god of this world is actuating to act in such a way as shall bring glory and satisfaction to him, and we call that worldly principles, and all worldly principles bring glory to the god of this world. The result? - weakness, limitation, defeat, loss of testimony; the testimony to the absolute Lordship of the Lord.

The Enemy's Method - The Destruction of Food

The method of the enemy is very interesting and significant. Until we understand this, we do not understand and appreciate the meaning of Gideon. You notice that, in the early part of the chapter, the enemy's tactic in keeping the Lord's people in weakness and limitation was the destroying of all the food in the land. It says that when Israel sowed, the Midianites came down and destroyed the harvest. Everything for food was demolished. The land was desolated along the line of the food question. The people were weakened in that way. We need not dwell upon that because this really does go to the heart of things that spiritual weakness, the loss of full, clear testimony, is for this very reason - the spiritual food question, the real nourishing of the saints upon the finest of the wheat. That is only another way of saying the limitation of Christ as the true Bread, the small measure of Christ in the inward life.

Gideon Threshes Wheat in a Secret Place

Well now, recognising the state and how the enemy brought about the state, we are able to discern the significance of Gideon. The first thing that we note about Gideon is that he is threshing wheat in a secret place to hide it from the Midianites. But in the secret place is fought out the food battle for the Lord's people, for his brethren. That is God's strategic point, and the Lord stands and takes note of that. It is that that draws the eye of the Lord. It is as though the Lord saw there in Gideon that which He could take up as wholly in keeping with His thought and use it, so that this man was, single-handed, in a secret way, combating the whole method and effort of the enemy, in preserving food for his brethren.

The Problem of the Situation

Gideon was acutely conscious of the problem of the situation. When the angel said, "*The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour*", Gideon instantly answered, "If the Lord is with... me?" No. "*If the Lord is with US, why then is all this come upon us?*" I mention that for a reason I will indicate in a moment.

He was acutely conscious of the problem of the situation, alive to what it meant - a situation, a state of things, which seemed to indicate, if not to prove, that the Lord was not with them, the Lord had abandoned them, forsaken, given them up to their enemies. There was no evidence to the contrary. It was a great problem. He was really alive to the situation, but the point is this. Alive, acutely alive, to the problem of existing conditions, how the Lord could Himself be associated with His people and allow such a state of things to come about, to be at all interested and yet permit this condition. While he was so acutely alive and had the problem in his heart, the big question about things, the difficulty, he was not paralysed by the personal problem to the extent of doing nothing. You see, he could have taken up the problem and gone round and round in an everlasting circle with this problem of the meaning of the situation. The problem was there, he was alive to it, but it did not become such an obsession as a personal thing, that he was unable to do anything.

What the Lord Takes Account of

Let us put that round the other way. Although the problem was a real one to Gideon, nevertheless he laid himself out to do all that was possible on his own part to meet the situation as he found it. The Lord takes account of it. We must note what the Lord takes account of. The story is written, is given to us, in order to indicate what the Lord takes account of. Here is a man who is secretly engaged in countering the work of the enemy in a day when very little of a public nature was possible; he was secretly fighting out this whole battle, although himself acutely conscious of the problem of that situation, unable to explain, to give any reason, to answer the question,

nevertheless giving himself to do all he could to meet the situation and not surrender to it. Now, the Lord comes in at that point. It may have been that Gideon was the only man in all Israel who was doing this thing. The Lord came in at that point and took account.

The Securing, in a Dark Day, of the Bread of Life

So now, note what is the point, the strategic point, of the Lord's movement in a day like that, to save the situation, to turn the course of things, and to bring deliverance. The point is the food question. It is what we have of Christ, the Bread, for our brethren, that which we have secured in a dark day, under cover in a sense it may be, when everything outside was not possible, when, because we could not fulfil a public ministry and get on with our work, circumstances did not allow us to do things where everybody could see or hear, we did not give up but in the secret we went on with God. We got to know the Lord in the dark day and the secret place, and, as the result of that secret exercise, we got something. Now, this does come right home to our hearts in this way. You know it is possible, and in many cases it is actual, that when nothing public is possible, if we cannot have work to do in the ordinary way, we cannot do things outside, the situation does not allow of our becoming a worker in the recognised sense, to be taken account of, and to do our work amongst people to be seen, then we do not do anything, we let go, which means that everything depends upon what is public, what is recognised, what is taken account of. And if all has got to be hidden and in secret where no one knows anything about it at all, but all we can do is to have a secret walk, exercise, with the Lord, it is a very paralysing situation and very often we are at least tempted to let go and do nothing, to wait for the day when a call comes for something public, then we will do our work. The question is whether, when that day comes, we will have anything with which to do it. What the Lord is looking for is those who have got it without the impetus and stimulus of public recognition, of being taken account of, but who have got a knowledge of Him right down there deep in the dark, in the winepress.

Gideon was of the tribe of Manasseh, and Manasseh was one of the sons of Joseph, and Joseph got all his power to meet Israel's need in the matter of bread, in the dungeon. It was in the dungeon that Joseph got to know the Lord in such a way that he could come out and give bread to his brethren, and here is a son of Joseph going the same way - secret exercise with God in a dark day when nothing outside was possible, getting to know the Lord and the Lord taking account of that, and saying, "This is the man for Me!" "*The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour*". Who is a mighty man of valour? Gideon will repudiate that, so far as he is concerned! "My family is the least and I am the least in the least family" and needing every kind of Divine support and reassurance, because of the consciousness of his own weakness, and the Lord saying, "*The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour*". Ah, yes!

What is might in the eyes of God? It is not our feeling that we are something, or that we can do something, or that we are doing something, but it is having a measure of the Lord to give to others; having something of the Lord which we have got in the winepress, in the secret, that which we have got of Him altogether apart from any public demand, for which we are all ready to get a lot of the Lord, when there is a great opportunity, an open door, public demand, but to have to do this thing when no one sees, when no one takes account, learning of the Lord without anything whatever of a stimulus from the outside. Well, it is so easy then to sit back and wait until there will be some call for it.

Remember that God's servants, His most greatly used instruments, have been those trained in the darkness, in the school of outward inaction. They have had to learn the Lord in the secret. That is Gideon. The Lord took account of this - the man who, in his own consciousness and his own

estimation, was nothing; of whom it would be perfectly true, "*My strength is made perfect in weakness*". "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man who art so weak!" That is what it means. Mighty man... so very weak. Mighty in the Lord, weak in himself.

What is the Lord going to do? Well, if it is true that the whole issue is that of the absolute supremacy of the Lord, it will be necessary that there shall be nothing whatever in the instrument used, but what is the Lord Himself. You notice the Lord presses that principle. First of all, in the case of Gideon, then later in the case of the mighty army reduced to three hundred. The Lord is working on this line: no flesh to glory in His presence, no man to be anything. The testimony of the Lord's supremacy is to be everything here, and so the Lord followed that up right the way through. And I always think that there is a great similarity between Gideon and Paul; a weak man knowing the Divine strength, bringing up a testimony to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, sounding the trumpet: Jesus Christ is Lord! Necessitating one thing: a secret knowledge of the Lord, a knowledge of the Lord gained in secret history and secret exercise without anything whatever on the outside to draw it out or to encourage it. I believe that may be one of the things that the Lord is doing just now.

As the public thing is cut off and the things of the Lord are driven more and more, there is little, growingly little, that can be done in organised effort, in movement on the outside. Are we going to say, "That is an end, we can do nothing, we just give it up!"? Now a very critical time has arrived, for if there is one thing that is going to be needed amongst the Lord's people, it is the testimony to His absolute Lordship, His absolute supremacy. How will that testimony get out, what will be the Lord's strategy so far as His means is concerned? Well, just this: a knowledge of Himself, a measure of Himself, the beaten wheat, gained in secret, in all the perplexity pressing home to the heart, in all the problem of things - why this, why that, why does the Lord allow this, and so on - all that acutely registering itself and yet, and yet, not becoming paralysed by the situation and the problem, but a giving of oneself quite definitely to secure that knowledge of the Lord for the sake of our brethren. And the day will come when that which we have gained in the secret dark place by winepress exercises will be the Lord's strategic means of meeting the larger situation. It is this food question, this measure of Christ. I am not talking about truth as fact. I am talking about the measure of Christ as our Life. This is a battle of Life and for Life against the flood of death.

Life Triumphant over Death

I want to ask you what is your registration at this time about things? I wonder how many of you can agree with me in this matter that there seems to have come about recently an intensification of the power of death. You can almost feel it at times, death descending to simply overwhelm and press you out. I am not talking about physical death.

You can only say that this is death seeking to paralyse everything, to paralyse your prayer life, death coming upon prayer, death coming upon your life in the Word, death coming upon everything, and it is there in the atmosphere. Well, if that is true, what the Lord will need more than anything else is those who, in the winepress, in the secret place, have come to know Him as their Life. That is going to be the answer to the situation. The Lord's strategy in meeting the last enemy, for death is not going to be overthrown from the outside, it is going to be destroyed from the inside, it is going to be destroyed as in the Church, the body of Christ.

I am perfectly sure, I have no doubt about it, but that we are in the last phase of the battle with the powers of death. We have started upon that. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. I believe that the devil is going to use the power of death so far as ever he can to destroy this earth. He has the hold of death, "*him that has the hold of death*", and we who are spiritual are sensing it already in a

new way. How will the Lord meet it? He is going to meet it and answer it in the church which is His Body, and it is going to be destroyed. It is not going to destroy, it is going to be destroyed, and he that has the hold of death is going to be destroyed as well as death. But I say again, that is not going to be by a Divine fiat, a word spoken and it is done. That is going to be done in the spiritual experience of the Lord's children. And the thing in which you and I are to be found now is in the secret place learning the Lord as our Life, secretly countering that whole force of the enemy, secretly knowing Life triumphant over death. The greatest thing that is possible at any time is for saints to learn to know the Lord as their Life for themselves, secretly, personally, and as they know that, they are already potentially meeting that whole power on the outside.

That is where I want the emphasis to fall. Gideon secretly exercised himself against the enemy, and then was brought out and used to destroy him in virtue of what he had done and known in secret. You and I are being driven into the secret place more and more in our own history to know the Lord as our Life, and that is going to manifest itself soon against the whole power of the enemy, his wave of death. "*The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet*" and He came upon him because He had already taken account of the exercise in a man's life which was directly against the enemy. The Lord find that exercise in us, personal, secret triumph, to bring out a company, nothing in itself, but mighty in the power of His risen Life to overthrow "the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east", the mighty inundation of the powers of death!