



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.

The Value of Being Pronouncedly the Lord's

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Sep-Oct 1946, Vol. 24-5.

Reading: Acts 27.

"Acts" is a book of principles. This whole story, and a great deal more in the life of Paul, is a commentary upon, and exposition of, verse 23 - "God whose I am, whom also I serve". Paul might have been the Lord's on this voyage and kept silent. The power and the value of his being there at that time was due to his being pronouncedly the Lord's, and letting it be known without any uncertainty. That power and value is recognizable in different connections.

Divine Overruling of Human Mistakes

First of all, it constituted a link with, and made possible the action of, the Divine sovereignty. There were not lacking those things which could have been the ground of some real misgiving in Paul's life at that time, for this whole thing was directly the outcome of his going to Jerusalem, when, in the first instance, the Lord had told him quite plainly that it was no use his going back to the Jews. The Lord had said, "They will not receive of thee testimony concerning me... Depart: for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:18,21). Moreover, his brethren besought him not to go, and warned him in the Lord's Name what would happen to him if he did (see Acts 21:11). But Paul went, and when he got there he was caught in a trap, resulting in his being taken prisoner. Then came his appeal to Caesar, and Agrippa said, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" (Acts 26:32). Paul had all that to reflect upon, and the Devil had good ground to try and bring him under condemnation and to say, You disobeyed the Lord, you flouted your

brethren, you appealed to Caesar - a carnal thing to do, thinking that you would get your liberty that way. Now the Lord has let you have your own way, and you have got yourself into trouble. The Devil does take up anything he can get of our own mistakes, and builds upon that to paralyse us and make us believe that the trouble that is on us is because the Lord has left us. But with all that, if it was a mistake, Paul was so pronouncedly the Lord's that there really was no personal interest at any point in this going up to Jerusalem. He did not go there for something for himself. It was all a way of suffering and sacrifice, even though there was a certain amount of self-propulsion, not the leading of God. He was so utterly the Lord's that, having no self-interest in view, it linked him with the Divine sovereignty so that even his mistakes could be taken hold of by the Lord and turned to glorious account. When barrenness and disaster come in, it is because there has been some personal interest, something of ourselves, governing. There was none of that with Paul, though he made mistakes.

It is something to remember. We are not going to be faultless or infallible. No, but if the life is the Lord's, and we are not keeping quiet about it - if we are pronouncedly the Lord's, He will look after our mistakes, take responsibility for our imperfections, and even use them to His own end. That is what happened here. This linked Paul with the Divine sovereignty, and that got the better of all Satan's accusations and all Paul's misgivings and the results of all his mistakes. Is it not something to encourage us? We look back on our lives and say, If I had my time over again, I would not do this and that. But if we are really the Lord's and there is no reservation about it, He is working good even through those mistakes, and will get Divine ends even by means of them.

Moral Power with Men in an Hour of Crisis

Notice a second thing about the strength and value of being pronouncedly the Lord's - the moral power of this in an hour of crisis. There was no mistake about where Paul stood and what his relationship to the Lord was. For a time the others ignored him. But an hour of crisis came; and now the one man in whom they hoped was this man whom they had rejected. He was the key to the situation.

This is how it often works out today - the moral power and value of being pronouncedly the Lord's. You may have to wait for your day, until things have worked up to a crisis, and for the time being you may be ignored; but if you stand there in relation to God, and it is known, the others will be very glad some day that you let it be known, and they will seek your help because they know that you know God. There is a great power in being pronouncedly the Lord's. Sooner or later the day of such will come.

Divine Sovereignty Acting in Relation to Other Lives

But there is something still more in this story - the tremendous power that lies behind such a position in relation to the mysterious placings of God's representatives by His foreknowledge. God knew, before ever that ship was built, the people who would be on board on that voyage, and He had His eye in foreknowledge upon them for the saving of their lives. From Acts 27:6 we infer that the ship would have set sail for Italy in any case. What would have been the fate of those on board if Paul had not been with them? Would they have been saved from death? The inference is that they might not, for the angel's message to Paul was "God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee" (v. 24). God gave them to Paul. And so it would seem that Paul had to be on that ship and go through

that harrowing experience because in the foreknowledge of God there were lives which were to be saved from drowning.

If you think that is an over-statement, go back to your New Testament. Paul came to Corinth and found an awful situation in that city of sin and worldliness. It must have been a terrible situation, because when writing later he said, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). But the Lord stood by Paul in Corinth and said: "Be not afraid, but speak... for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9); they are not saved yet, but "I have much people in this city". God knows who in the city will respond to the Gospel. He has got them, in effect, because He lives in the eternal present, and the future is now with Him. With God there is not to be another soul added to the Church; He has the total secured already. And on the ship came a similar message: "Fear not, Paul... God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee". What a wonderful thing that in spite of Paul's failures there is the working of this sovereignty in putting him there on that ship! He was not there by accident but in the foreknowledge of God in relation to an issue in other lives.

Sometimes we may be in a situation like that. We do not know why we are in the place that we are in. Everything seems so difficult, so contrary, and then we see things begin to break up. It looks like calamity, and in the end there is something secured for God. But it necessitates our being there pronouncedly the Lord's to secure it. This does not just happen. We can be there and hide our light, and think it will all work out. No; for this, pronounced proprietorship of the Lord is a necessary factor. There is a great deal bound up with our being unmistakably for God on this earth; the foreknowledge and sovereignty of God operate through us, the moral power of that position operates. The strategic opportunities are put into our hands when we are there for the Lord and people know it. So from every standpoint it is a position of strength, of value, of possibility.

Human Weakness Need Not Limit Utterness for the Lord

But you may say, Paul was a superman; I am not. But look again. Why should the Lord have to say to him such things as: Fear not, Paul? Evidently he was very human after all, capable of being afraid. Most of us are capable of being silenced by fear, or by pride - and pride can be just another form of fear: fear of losing something, fear of losing 'face', reputation, influence. More often than not, it has been those people who are very human, knowing weakness in themselves, who, trusting in the Lord, have been the ones whom He has used most mightily. The secret is just this - they are the Lord's, and they are His a hundred percent, and everybody knows it. What He is needing is not just that we should belong to Him, but pronouncedly so, and that those around us should know it; and the hour will very likely come when the Lord will put them into our hands, because they know that we are the only ones who have what they then need. It is a matter of being faithful to the Lord unto such a day. He may hold us in a place and not let us go until that testimony is there established, and then perhaps He will give the situation, or those there, into our hands. We may know nothing at present about them or the Lord's designs in their lives, but they will be delivered into our hands for the Lord. Then perhaps that voyage will be over and there will be another phase of things for us. The Lord help us to be faithful.