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Witnesses of These Things

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send forth the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high" Luke 24:48-49.

Now we are going, as He helps, to give our attention to the commission here in Luke - as you notice, in a very different form than that in Matthew, nevertheless quite as important as the other.

You will remember that we laid considerable emphasis upon the fact that the New Testament is 'topsy-turvy' as to chronological arrangement; it is all over the place chronologically. Matthew in chronology does not occupy the first place, but our emphasis was that it is perfectly right when viewed from the spiritual standpoint, and the rightness is nowhere more clearly represented than in the fact that Matthew does come first in this present arrangement which has held for so long. That is, that Matthew strikes the first note of the gospel for the world, the note of His Kingship, Jesus, King and Lord; for with the very first Holy Spirit pronouncement on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36). Jesus crucified, Lord and Christ. That is the first great pronouncement in the history of the church under the government of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the note of Matthew - the Kingship of Christ in its first application, challenge and demand to the house of Israel - is right.

Now we have left Mark for the moment, not deliberately, but I found myself doing this and had to conclude that it was the Lord's way to go on to Luke, and not to consider the point of chronological order at all.

You know that Luke wrote his gospel and the book of the Acts to his friend, Theophilus, a Roman representative, a Greek, and that his object in writing to that representative Greek in high office was to meet the great Greek demand, and more than meet it: to overwhelm it. We will not stay to speak of the great place that the Greek regime had established in New Testament times. We do know that its language was the greatest of the media for worldwide communication, and that the rise and expansion of the Greek order had paved the way marvellously for a language which would be international and be understood almost anywhere where the gospel was to go in the first place. The New Testament, from Acts onward, is written in Greek; that is one aspect of it.

But the Greek ideal was what was governing with Luke. It was a great power, a great order, a far-reaching influence, and with it went this Greek ideal which was the perfect man, the perfect humanity, what we today would call the superman. That was the Greek ideal, that was worshipped by the Greeks. They were always out to find the perfect man. When they found a man of great stature according to their ideal, they represented him in their halls of arts by a bust or statue, and when they found another better than he, that was pushed a little aside, and the new one put in its place. They had gone on like that till they had halls full of men representing their ideal man. Theophilus was an outstanding representative of that world in quest of that man, and so Luke's writing was with the intention of saying in effect to his friend, "Here is a Man who will break all your methods, who will make all your giants small - mere puppets!" So he wrote the life of the Lord Jesus as he wrote it, and his great title for Christ is Son of Man, and he writes the life of Christ with a view to keeping Christ in view in the magnificence of His human character, His human life, His human nature, and he heads Him right up to the Mount of Transfiguration and presents Him glorified, and in effect says to Theophilus, "Find anything like *that* if you can, match *that* if you can." He simply spoiled everything for the Greeks in his presentation of that glorified, transfigured Man.

But then he does not hesitate to come down from that Mount immediately and take that Man to the cross, knowing full well that in doing so he is going to offend and scandalise every sensibility of the Greek mind and ideal. He takes his great Man upon that high peak of glorification, down to the lowest depths of shame, dishonour, degradation, and he does it very deliberately, knowing all that time that in the eyes of his friend, he is smashing his own great representative, he is breaking his own idol to pieces in the eyes of his friend.

But he does not leave Him there. He brings Him down and takes Him through the depths, then brings Him up in resurrection, and in resurrection he shows that the cross was no undoing of the ideal, but only the establishment of it; it was not a weakening of this Man, but a strengthening of Him still more; it was not taking from this glorified Man, it was adding to Him. It was really the great seal and proof and vindication of the fact that this is something more than just a man, "You are looking for a man; I have presented you with a Man who eclipses all your men, but He is more than a man; in resurrection He is the Divine Man".

Now in resurrection he records certain things said by the Lord Jesus - not what Matthew said, because this is not his idea, his purpose; he records other things. He records the words: "Ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send forth the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high." The commission is bound up in this: "Ye are

witnesses of these things" to the world. Do you see it is to the world? It is down here where men are needing all that is represented by Christ as Son of Man, that glorified Man, the Man who can answer to all the cravings of manhood, all the needs of men, the Man who satisfies, fulfils all ideals, and goes beyond all human ideals of manhood. "Ye are witnesses of these things." Can we stand up to that? Do you see the point? The commission to the world of men is this, that you are people who have found the Lord Jesus to be that, you have proved Him to be that, more than a man, meeting all the needs, longings and aspirations of your humanity; the deepest longings of which you are capable as people, as human beings, the highest aspirations and desires and thoughts - you have found Him to be that. That is the ground on which you are commissioned, and the only ground. "Ye are witnesses".

But it embraces more than that, or that embraces several other things. "Ye are witnesses of *these things*". What things? Well, go back to verse 44: "And He said unto them, These are My words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning Me." "All things written concerning Me in Moses, the prophets and the Psalms". You have come to realise that all that is in Moses and the prophets and the Psalms about the Lord Jesus is fulfilled, is true, is real, and has come into your life in a living way.

The Things in Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms

Moses? Well, Moses means the whole realm and range of types and symbols of the Lord Jesus, and what a realm that is, and what a range, what a fulness, in all the types and symbols of Christ. We dare not start on it, but we do know a fair amount of the typology and symbolism concerning Christ in Moses: the great system of the tabernacle, the tabernacle itself, its priesthood, its services, its sacrifices, and so much more in Moses. All the men in Moses; the first five books of the Bible which are called "the books of Moses," from Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, "all in Moses concerning Me". It is all now fulfilled and you know it. It is no longer just a story, it is no longer just symbols, it has become a living reality to you. You know Christ as the sanctuary of God, the dwelling place of God. You know Christ as the whole tabernacle itself and its system, you know Christ as the sacrifice and the sacrifices, the offerings and the feasts, you know Christ in a living way spiritually as all that. You know that Christ answers to these men as they represented Him. It is all there. This is not an Old Testament story, this is present spiritual experience. That is what the Bible is written for, not that we should have wonderful stories of men who lived long centuries ago and did certain things, it is very wonderful how God was with them, but there is something more. The Bible is not written just for that, to be helpful stories of the past. It all pointed to Christ and was to have a fulfilment in Him, which is gathered up and becomes our possession, that Christ is the living store of all that wealth in Moses, and what God was in all that, Christ is now to us.

The prophets take the story of the failure, the breakdown, the disappointment, and the hope. Out of the ruin and the wreckage of Israel's life, the hope arises with One - "There shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1) - the hope in the ruin. All that is written in the prophets of a new hope when everything seems to have broken down. Christ is that, the hope in desperately tragic and disappointing conditions.

The Psalms have their real strength for us in the fact that they are the out-breathings of human experience, the cry of a soul passing through the many-sided experiences of spiritual trouble and of spiritual deliverance, of spiritual exaltation and worship, all borne in a man's life and in men's souls.

Men cry out of the anguish of their hearts, they long... for the Psalms are full of longings. It is the picture of one man in the main, and others who are going through deep places, many trying experiences, whose history is full of vivid experiences of need, peril, sorrow, suffering, adversity, persecution, and out of it crying and longing and reaching out to God. That is the Psalms. "In the Psalms concerning Me". The Lord says, "I am the answer to every cry of the human heart"; in every situation in which the human life can be placed, the answer is in Christ. "Ye are witnesses of these things"; that is, that Christ is the answer everywhere to everything, and He has become the Answer in your life, and that is your missionary commission.

You need not go to any particular part of the earth to fulfil that commission. "Ye are *witnesses* of these things". It is not here preachers of these things. It does not say officially set-apart workers to go and proclaim these things. Ye are just witnesses. A witness is one who says, "I know". You know quite well that nothing short of that will be accepted. If we were to go to court as witnesses, and say, "So-and-so told me this," or, "I believe that this is the case," or, "I happen to have heard," or, "I suspect," or, "My interpretation is," or, "My judgment or my conviction is so-and-so" the president of the court would say, "I do not want to know what your interpretation is, I do not want to know what you have heard someone else say, I do not want to know what your conviction is. I want to know *what you have seen firsthand*, what has come within the range of your personal knowledge, that is all." You know that here in the Greek is just the word *marturion* from which we get 'martyr', one laying down his life for his testimony. 'Witness' and 'martyr' are the same word - one with whose position his or her life is bound up; there is nothing second-hand about that.

"Ye are witnesses of these things", and, summing 'these things' up, it is just this - your commission, our commission, is to be personal firsthand witnesses to all the sufficiency and satisfying fulness of Christ, bearing witness to that, being witnesses of that, representing that in life. You know quite well that the failure of Christianity today is very largely due to the fact that the majority are not living in the satisfaction of Christ. They must have other things to make up for what Christ does not mean to them, so life becomes mixed: Christian profession and some of Christ, but some things of the world to make up because they do not know the all-sufficient sufficiency of Christ.

Well, at the beginning it was not like that. People had nothing to live for, nothing to talk about, but Christ. For them He filled all things. It is very simple, very elementary, but we have got to come back there. There is no doubt about it that this is the need, that there shall be a mightier power of the satisfying fulness of Christ in the life of His own in order to fulfil more effective ministry.

You see the upshot of this whole thing. You are dealing with men. You have dealt with the fact that Christ is your Lord and you have to proclaim Him as Lord, but now you are going to get down to men and deal with men, with people, the world in its need. What have you really got? How far is Christ so fully satisfying and overflowing in His fulness that there is no doubt about it, when others see you or meet you, they know quite well that Christ means a tremendous amount to you?

At the beginning in the Acts, when the witnesses went out, expelled into the field, they went everywhere preaching. That is only another way of saying that they went everywhere telling what Christ was to them. The upshot of this whole thing is that, before being officially appointed and set apart workers, we are called to be witnesses. But it depends entirely upon what the Lord Jesus really is to us, whether He not only meets our need and satisfies our hearts personally, but is so much more than that, overflowing so. It depends upon that whether we shall have power with men. Oh, do think again as to whether the first thing for the church, for Christians, is not just to be that in this

world, in any sphere of work where the Lord may call and appoint for the time being, is not to be separated from that and set apart and sent out to special work, for that may prove to be a second best unless there is some very definite and distinct movement of God in that way. It really requires a very special movement of God to separate us from ordinary work for something specific and apart. The movement of God which is His more normal and general is to make us witnesses where He puts us and in the work in which He puts us which may be just work here on this earth, witnesses there. And it may be that the Lord is seeking to get back there, away from this false idea that has become almost universal that to serve the Lord you have to have an official designation of being a missionary and be set apart and sent out and separated from all other things in that way. No, it may be that we have to get a long way away from that and right back to this, that the first missionary activity is of witnesses out in the world, perhaps in ordinary vocations, and the other may follow, for that is the order in the New Testament. From among the witnesses, the Lord put His hand upon certain ones to do particular work.

Power from on High

If only it could be; that is the thing. The trouble is that I do not see how it is possible where I am concerned. If only I could be like Paul was on that ship and really become the captain of that ship spiritually. There is the ship in the storm; there is a master of the ship and a crew in charge of the ship, but before the voyage is over, Paul is both master and crew. The Lord said to Paul, "Fear not, God has granted thee all that sail with thee". Paul was master of that ship before it was at the end of the voyage, but it was spiritual. You say, "Yes, but that is Paul!" But look again at the picture. Humanly speaking, before that master and that crew, Paul was only a little despised Jew, now a prisoner being sent to Rome to be tried for his life. That was all they knew about him. He had absolutely every disadvantage humanly on that ship. He was not even a free man going at his own charge or expense, travelling as a gentleman, paying his fare and therefore able to demand his rights. No, he was a prisoner. He was a despised Jew, and it is believed, from all traditions, a little, ugly man physically. And yet that little despised prisoner with all the handicaps and disadvantages is in possession on the ground of sheer spiritual worth.

I have been aboard a ship and I have looked and watched, and taken note very carefully of what is there, and I have seen a man with nothing about his human personality to captivate, not a big man with a striking, forceful personality, but a comparatively little, delicate-looking man, a great physical sufferer, and I have seen that man as the master of that ship. I noticed how everyone else showed the deepest respect for that man. The Lieutenant Commander in charge of the ship as he passed showed the deepest respect, and from all I gathered, that man has got a grip on that ship. While all are not saved, he has a grip there, he is really the moral force on that ship. If that can be done through a man like that, can it not be repeated? What are we, after all? What are you? What am I? Is it not just simply his life with God in the secret place and his positive stand where he has let it be known where he stands from the beginning? "This is where I stand; I want you to understand so that you will not expect from me what you will not get!" He says he has not lost by that. There are officers around him, compromising in order to get new stripes, men who are Christians but hide it because they think if they take a stand as a Christian in the Services their rise in rank will be affected. He says that in his case he has not found it like that at all; he has just gone on.

It comes back to this: not leaving our work necessarily, unless the Lord very definitely in some unusual way demands that, but being in business, being in work as witnesses and capturing the situation by the sheer force of - "Behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you" - the

power of the Holy Spirit in the life. It is not an easy thing to face, I know; perhaps it is the most difficult thing. It is much easier to be one of these official workers wearing a uniform and being called by a certain name and everybody has to take note of what you are. But just to be a plain man or woman on this earth, doing a job, and there in that place a witness that registers and affects, is difficult. Luke is that; you are dealing with the realm of people, and among them God wants to place His Man in all that that Man is and means, and the placing through you, in you, and that there it is Christ answering to the need, something of the greatness of this Divine Man represented by individuals and, of course, universally by the church which is His Body.

That is the commission anyway, and if our hearts sink, let us remind ourselves that the Lord did not leave it there. "I send forth the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with *power from on high*". Well, if that is true, then the thing ceases to be a great problem or a disheartening outlook. Power from on high; what for? To make Christ a reality where we are. That is the commission as it comes to us through Luke.

Let us ask the Lord as to whether this is not the thing for which He is pressing, and to ask Him whether it may not be that the expansion, the sending here and there, is not just held back because that is not true where we are concerned. We are thinking of going to some place, some foreign country, where we will preach to unsaved people and be there to bring Christ to very needy souls. Are we sure that there are not needy souls where we are every day, just as needy and just as ignorant of the Lord? The Lord is not opening the way and is not going to open the way until He has His witnesses just where they are in His appointment for the time being. If I had not tested that myself, I would not say that to you. I went through that as a young man.

I am quite sure the Lord is seeking to get His people to that position where, not because they are recognized workers and missionaries sent out by a Society with all the advantage of that kind of position, they are just men and women with Christ coming down amongst men to bring Christ to others.