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Faithful and True

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins" (Isa. 11:5).

"O Jehovah, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things, even counsels of old, in faithfulness and truth" (Isa. 25:1).

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness..." (Rev. 3:14).

"And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war" (Rev. 19:11).

"Counsels of old in faithfulness and truth." "The faithful and true witness." "He that sat thereon called Faithful and True."

Faithfulness and Truth; Faithful and True. In the Old Testament passage it is the virtues; in the New Testament passage it is the personal embodiment of those virtues. First it is faithfulness and truth. Then it is a Person who bears that Name, the Name derived from those virtues, "*Faithful and True*".

Then there are two other things to be noted at the outset. The first is the application of those attributes and of that One who embodies them, to the wider sphere of the world and its kingdom and its god, and the other the application to the Lord's own people, to the church, to believers. In these Scriptures, both of those directions obtain. In one direction it is the judgment of the world by reason of faithfulness and truth and by means of Him who is faithful and true. In the other

connection it is the judgment of believers or the dealing with the Lord's own people by means of faithfulness and truth through Him who is faithful and true.

Faithfulness and Truth Fundamental to the Eternal Purpose

When you come to think about it for a moment, you realise that these two attributes or virtues are two elements which are fundamental to the eternal issue, the issue which has ever been in view. They are fundamental to God's own eternal purpose, that which He purposed before the world was, and they are fundamental to the whole conflict of all the ages since the world began, and these are the things which head the issue up at last to its climax and to its consummation - faithfulness and truth. There is a very true sense in which we can say that these are the very supports of all that is precious to God. These are the very supports of God's own throne; these things are the strength of His kingdom - faithfulness and truth.

That becomes more clear as we recognise what these words really mean. The meaning of faithfulness, as employed here in these Scriptures, means trustworthiness; and truth, as used here, means reality, genuineness. Trustworthiness stands right over against all that cannot really be depended upon, relied upon, all that is not sure, all that is uncertain, all that may at any moment give way and let you down, disappoint your expectations and disappear. Truth or reality, genuineness, stands over against all that is merely fictitious, all that is unreal, all that is artificial, all that is make-believe. When you think about these things, it becomes very much more clear that this is the issue of the ages, and there never was a time, I venture to say, in the history of this world, when those issues were more clear than they are today.

You can see by way of illustration, as well as by way of terrible reality today, that the two opposites are coming out in a very full measure of expression. Untrustworthiness, that which is the opposite of faithfulness or trustworthiness. What is a word given and a word broken but that? What is a promise made and, when it suits convenience, that promise torn up as mattering nothing, but that? One of the things that we realise today more than anything else is this breakdown or disappearance of a ground upon which you can be sure, a ground of confidence. "Where is truth?" we say. Where is that upon which you can absolutely rely? Faithfulness - where is it among men? With the loudest and strongest and most vehement protestations, declarations, to which men commit themselves even unto death, when they are in a tight corner, they count for nothing, faithfulness disappears. Trustworthiness goes. You do not know on whom you can rely. You do not know who is going to let you down next.

And then, alongside of that, is this other thing, a false, unreal, artificial, pretentious, fictitious kingdom with no reality or genuineness at its heart, a great make-believe thing. Its heart is rotten; it has no sure foundation. We are seeing that today. It is staring us in the face all the time.

Two Kingdoms in Conflict

But what we are seeing today as on the earth, as among nations and men, is only the expression of a great spiritual thing behind, the same thing that has been there all the way through. Now, it commenced in that dateless day when Satan flung faithfulness to the winds in personal ambition, that time of which it is written, "Thou saidst... I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13,14). His faithfulness, his allegiance, his trustworthiness, was sacrificed upon the altar of his own personal pride and ambition, and, as for truth, it mattered not what sort of kingdom he had so long as he had a kingdom. And there is no doubt about it that Satan has been seeking to establish and support and bolster up a false kingdom ever since then, a

kingdom that is not real, not genuine, that is a false thing, and we know that it is a pretentious thing. The people of God know that this is not the true kingdom, that this thing is a lie, it is not genuine. That kingdom of Satan in unfaithfulness and untruth has been projected into God's universe and over against it is the kingdom of God, the supreme features and characteristics of which are faithfulness and truth. That kingdom has been in conflict with the other all down the ages, and that is the nature of the conflict today, and it is coming out glaringly.

The issue of this hour, which is the issue of all time, is the terrific conflict between faithfulness and unfaithfulness, and truth and untruth. These are the issues. We are not to say where on this earth among men or nations truth is in any absolute sense, but we do know that in the heavenlies the thing is clear cut and there are no degrees of truth. Truth is absolute and untruth is absolute. It is no use bringing different nations up and weighing them one against the other on the basis of truth and untruth, faithfulness and unfaithfulness, and saying, 'This one is better than that'. God is not dealing with this world on a basis of comparative good. The issue is higher up. It is in the realm where there is no comparative goodness, but where it is absolute and utter in goodness and evil, in truth and untruth, in faithfulness and unfaithfulness. It is in the heavenlies that the utterness of this thing is to be seen and found, and that is the realm in which you and I are to be associated with the issue.

It is no use, for instance, our coming down on to this earth and trying to head this issue up to a conclusion, a victory, for this nation or that on the ground of it being somewhat better, even a good deal better, than another. We will never get through on that level at all. We have got to get behind this comparative level of things into the realm where it is not more or less good or bad, but where it is the utter righteousness, goodness and faithfulness of God, and the utter iniquity and abomination of Satan. That is the battle that we are in, and it is only as we come into that realm that we shall have a clear issue and a way right through.

So these two things are seen to be elements, factors, which are connected with the eternal issue - faithfulness and truth, and we must remember that the Lord Jesus is no mere time factor. That is, the Lord Jesus did not come on to this earth at a certain time in its history to deal with things at that time, or to be a time factor in any sense. He came out of eternity, He came from before the world was, He came out of that issue which was with God from the beginning - faithfulness and truth, and He took it up in relation not to some time in the history of this world, but in relation to the whole course of this world right on to eternity to be. He becomes the embodiment of something which was before the world was - faithfulness and truth; and, when He comes into this world, it is to take up that issue with the other world powers - faithfulness and truth.

Then, in Revelation 19, right at the end, things are heading up now, and the order of this world is about to be wound up, the new heavens and new earth are about to come in, and He that rides upon the white horse is Faithful and True. He has bounded all the ages, and, while He is a living Person and the embodiment of these things, He represents faithfulness and truth as the only things which can characterise an eternal, divine, heavenly kingdom.

How big, then, are matters like these! How great and important is faithfulness and truth, trustworthiness and reality! Oh, we talk about human character, virtuous people, people who are trustworthy, people who are genuine. When we so speak, we mean something so much smaller than we ought to mean if we really saw it. We are speaking of things which go right to the very root of the history of this world. I always feel that it is very important for us to get the adequate setting to things. I think people sometimes imagine that I get out in big ideas and big visions and talk in large realms and perhaps do not deal enough with detail and come right down to practical points, but I believe there is a tremendous practical value in getting an adequate setting to things. I feel that, if

you deal with things just as things in themselves, you have not got a sufficient motive, an adequate dynamic, for those things. If I say to you, 'Oh, be good, don't do this and don't do that', well, you might react in any kind of way, but if I say to you, 'Beloved, upon your doing this and being that there hangs a tremendous issue for all eternity and no less a matter than the whole purpose of the incarnation and cross and throne of the Lord Jesus,' you begin to sit up and say, 'There is some reason then, why I should consider a matter like this'. Get the setting and you have got a motive. If we speak about trustworthiness as from the divine standpoint, well, we can speak of it in the merely human realm and it may or may not appeal to us. When we are put to it, we may give way, we may not have sufficient support at certain times for being absolutely faithful, absolutely trustworthy, but if we were alive to the issues bound up with our faithfulness, how immense, it would pull us up at that time and make us think twice before we gave way. There is a great deal involved.

Well now, to get nearer to this. You see, here you have Christ as the embodiment of these things. He is the Faithful and True, and He is the faithful and true witness.

But we must remember that it was on those very things that the whole ground was given away to Satan, on those very things that Satan gained his first, his initial advantage in this world to capture the kingdoms of this world. Trustworthiness in Adam was destroyed, it was broken down and was surrendered. Faithfulness to God was let go under pressure, under trial, under temptation, under subtle manoeuvre and subterfuge and deception. Faithfulness, trustworthiness, was surrendered. Truth, the true thing, the real thing, the genuine thing, the genuine kingdom, the real kingdom, the dominion which was for him in relation to God was let go, sacrificed, for a false kingdom. Satan offered him something which looked better than that which God was offering him, something extra and without the limitations that it seemed God was putting upon him. He inflated his kingdom and offered him this false thing and the true was sacrificed for the false, for the unreal, for the fictitious, and Satan gained his advantage. That is the explanation of the history of this world as we know it.

Faithfulness and Truth Established in the Lord Jesus

Now, the Lord Jesus comes onto the scene to take up those two things - faithfulness and truth, but it is not battling for something which is objective to Himself. He came into the conflict for the establishment of those things and the perfecting of them in Himself. I do not mean that the Lord Jesus by His birth as a man was not virtuous in these respects as faithful and true, but I mean that these two things, faithfulness and truth, these virtues, which were there had to be established in Him through fiery trial. He had, in these respects, to be made perfect through sufferings, and the first encounter with Satan in the wilderness, if you go to the root of the thing, was on these two points. The temptations differed, but the issues were the same, and right through His life, it was always these two things, and right up to His cross and in the cross, it was these two things that were the issue.

Trustworthiness, faithfulness. He had abandoned Himself to God; He had taken a stand for God; He had, shall we say, espoused the rights of God; He had declared an allegiance to God. "I come to do thy will" (Heb. 10:7). Now then, can He, by any means, by any trick, by any fiery ordeal, by any suffering and affliction, by any enticement, by any means whatsoever within the scope of Satan's diabolical resources, be made unfaithful? Can He be turned a hair's-breadth from faithfulness to His Father? Can His trustworthiness be broken? That is the point, and upon that all the fury and all the malice and craft of the whole Satanic system was concentrated - upon His faithfulness to His Father, and that is the issue with the cross. Even under the dire necessity, while being made sin for us, that His Father's face should be turned away - here is the last bitter and most terrible point of the testing - will He deny His Father, will He repudiate His Father, will He turn away from His Father in that

hour? No, right through, while He cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?", He holds on in the dark, and at length comes through with the cry, "Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit." Triumph! But heaven only knows the bitterness of the ordeal from Jordan's banks to Calvary's death, along the line of being tested as to faithfulness.

And as to truth. Could He be, by any means, drawn out to accept another kingdom, the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof, some other position, something which, for the time being, would bring temporal gain, ease, relief and popularity, something in this world? Yet all of this world is vanity, unreality, not genuine. Can He be enticed or driven to part with truth in the sense of reality? He saw through this world, He saw through Satan's kingdom. He saw how transient at best is this world's kingdom and glory and popularity and all that it can give. He saw right through to the true thing, the genuine kingdom, and, whatever it cost, He stuck to that right to the end, although it seemed that, in holding on to that heavenly, eternal, divine thing, He was losing everything. There were times when it seemed - and in that hour of the cross above all other times, it seemed - that He had not only lost this world's kingdoms but He had lost everything else. He had lost His Father. The test was driven as far down into His being as it could be driven, but, blessed be God, in the book of the Revelation, we find not now attributes but a Person who embodies them, who is that.

Oh, there may be about some people a measure of faithfulness and truth, trustworthiness and genuineness, but who can say among men that that man is that, the embodiment of that, nothing else but faithfulness and truth? But the Lord Jesus is that, and He is that now because the thing has been wrought into His very being by the fire and perfected in Him and He has been perfected in it. He is faithful and true. Through testing, He is triumphant in these things, and that is why He is where He is, and that is why He can administer the eternal kingdom. We find Him therefore, in the book of the Revelation, as the administrator of judgment in every realm, the administrator of the kingdom of God, and His administration is on the basis of what He is - Faithful and True. He has a right to reign, and that is His right - what He is. Through all the tests that can be applied, He has established in His own being the very kingdom of God, which is faithfulness and truth.

What a kingdom that will be! What a kingdom that is! Oh, today, think what a world it will be when everywhere its nature is faithfulness and truth, trustworthiness and reality! What a different system of things! Think of the revolution in industry and business, commerce, when everything is trustworthiness and genuineness. Think of the difference in society when everything is trustworthiness and genuineness. What artificiality in this world! Ah, yes, and think how things will be in the church when everything is like that. That is God's kingdom and that is all gathered up in God's Son.

Faithfulness and Truth to be Established in the Church

Now then, there is the other side of this. The church is brought into this, and what God has done in His Son, He is seeking to do in the Body of His Son, the church, because the church has to come to the same position as is occupied by the Son, to administer the kingdom in the ages to come. That is familiar truth to us. But the church can never come to that position nor to that vocation only on the same basis - faithfulness and truth.

Do you recognise the tremendous significance of these words in the book of the Revelation? It is to Laodicea.

"He that overcomes, 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" (Rev. 3:21).

The throne in union with the Son is what is in view. If that is what is in view, the faithful and true witness is introduced as dealing with the church to that end. He that is the faithful and true witness is dealing with the church with the throne in view. That surely means, not that He simply comes out to His church with His title as the Faithful and True Witness, but He comes out in the virtues that are represented by that title - faithfulness and truth - and in effect it means this. 'If you are going to come to the throne with Me, to overcome as I have overcome, and sit down with Me in My throne, as I have sat down with My Father in His throne, it can only be as I have come there on the ground of faithfulness and truth.' Therefore, what is of supreme importance with the Lord is to have these attributes established and developed in us, and to have us conformed to the image of His Son in this sense of faithfulness and truth.

We ask then, this question which embraces everything else. With God's great destiny for His people in view, what is it that He is giving Himself to accomplish in His people? And I ask my own heart that question. In the light of everything, taking into account all God's ways, God's methods, God's means, all the variety and all the strangeness of His dealings with me, what is God doing? What is God after? What does it all mean? And there filters through this answer. If the throne is really and truly in view, then what God is seeking to do above all other things is to bring about in me faithfulness, trustworthiness, and truth, reality, genuineness. God is seeking, therefore, to get rid of every unfaithful element, everything that will give way, everything that will let me down, everything that will give Satan an advantage because it will not hold out for God; to get rid of everything upon which Satan could find a vantage ground when he comes to offer me something else, some other kingdom, to entice away from the real for the apparent; from the eternal, heavenly and spiritual, for something which looks a very real thing, but is a glorious bubble. And that is what God is seeking to do in you and in me; if I see the meaning of His activities at all rightly, that is what He is after. Tremendous issues are bound up with our experiences.

Now, look at your spiritual experience. Take account of yourself as being in the hands of God. Look again at the ways in which the Lord has been dealing with you, and ask yourself a question about every one of these testings, these difficulties, these temptations. Is it not true that every one of them has a twofold possibility in it? On the one hand, I can be led away from trustworthiness, faithfulness, from the place where God can count upon me, from the place where it is true that God can rely on me. On the other hand, every one of these spiritual experiences and adversities, is a challenge to me to be faithful, not to be one of a hundred other things, but just to be faithful, trustworthy before God, just to be one upon whom God can rest with a certain assurance. These are the issues of every one of our trials.

Then the other thing alongside all the time is this - whether we will accept something other which is not *the* thing but which looks a good thing. It looks a good thing, it looks a right thing, but it is not the thing God has called us unto, and when we miss *the* thing to which God has called us and have something else, we will have at last to say, 'Well, it was not the genuine thing that God wanted us to have, it was a substitute, it was a second best, and therefore, if it was not *utterly*, it was *proportionately* a false thing'.

These are the things bound up with our trials, whether we are driven into a wilderness to be tempted of the devil, or whether these things come to us along our daily course, and it is strange how they come. There are times when we relate special temptations and onslaughts of the devil with certain things we are doing. Probably you know what I mean. A few days ago I was bending down doing something with my hands at a certain place, my hands were occupied with a certain thing, and there came such an onslaught of temptation from the devil to bring me into utter despair that I shall always relate that place and thing to that particular and cruel attack which had nothing to

do with that, but it just happened there - the assault of the enemy upon the mind and the issue was unfaithfulness. 'Will you let go and take another course? Will you abandon this way and take up another way?' And those who know those intense onslaughts, know how bitter and how real they are. There is nothing more real, and the kingdom that Satan puts up at such times is the most real thing in the universe for the moment. It seems that the other for which we have given our lives and suffered fades away into unreality. It does not exist at that moment. We simply have to hold on blindly. This is not from God! There is something about it that is sinister. It passes. You know it was the unreal thing being offered in place of the real, but for a moment that unreal thing was desperately real.

Faithfulness and truth - these are the things, beloved, that God is seeking to constitute in us as the very virtues of His Son. I have a feeling that it is not fully recognised how real it is, but I see that the eternities hang upon this; I see the life of the Son of God hangs upon this; I see His cross hangs upon this; I see the church's destiny hangs upon this; I see the eternal kingdom hangs upon this, and we may take it that these two things can be traced right into every experience of satanic assault and temptation and trial, every bit of our conflict which is permitted by God. We find that two things are somehow bound up with it - faithfulness and truth and the terrible alternative.

So He comes to deal with us on this ground, not upon how much work you have done, not upon how successful you have been in your work for God, no, not upon many of the things that men place as very high in the order of our being accredited, but when it comes to the final issue with God, it is this - faithfulness and truth.

Then comes out that beautiful little word in the Revelation - "and they that are with Him are called and chosen and *faithful*" (Rev. 17:14). "Well done, good and *faithful* servant" (Matt. 25:21). "Be thou *faithful* unto death" (Rev. 2:10). That means, 'Be trustworthy, such a one as God can rely upon'. Oh, the havoc that this very day is causing on this earth through unfaithfulness, untrustworthiness! Ah, we must not judge; we cannot tell the pressures, the strain, which lies behind it all. If we knew our own hearts truly, it would rob us of all right to judge others, but, after all, whether it is others' or our own hearts, the fact is that, as we are seeing it in this small, though very terrible sense of great numbers, probably thousands, of young lives destroyed and homes blighted and darkened for the rest of their days because of an act of unfaithfulness, untrustworthiness, a giving way under strain, under pressure. Oh, that is a small illustration of the much bigger thing - what there is for eternity and for God hanging upon this faithfulness and truth. But, blessed be God, He has got it perfected in His Son, and He is a nail in a sure place and God can hang everything upon Him, and He will not give way because He has triumphed over everything in this universe to make a man give way. There is no power that can now gain the mastery over Him. So may we be strengthened with the strength of the Son of God to be faithful and true!