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"Let Us Press on unto Full Growth"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"*Let us press on unto full growth*" (Heb. 6:1).

I have divided these words into two parts. The first is: "*Let us press on*", and the second part: "*to full growth*". That means that we are not just to go on being Christians. I am not speaking to you about just continuing to be Christians in the sense that you just do not give up being a Christian and go back. That may be very important, but is not what this passage in Hebrews is talking about.

We may just go on being Christians, or Christian workers, or being missionaries, but that is not what is meant here. My boyhood home was in Scotland and out of my window I could see some mountains. When I was quite a little boy, I looked out of the window and saw those mountains. I was up there two weeks ago and am an old man now. I looked and saw those same mountains and they had not moved or grown or changed shape. There was no difference between them then or now. That is like some Christians. They have been Christians for many years, but they are just the same now as at the beginning. Yes, they are still Christians, but they have neither moved nor grown in all the years. That is all right for mountains, but there must be something very wrong when Christians are like that.

So our passage says this: "*Let us go on...*" not just being Christians, but "*unto full growth*" - that is, unto the purpose for which we are Christians. For when the Lord brought us to Himself that was not the end of everything, but only a beginning. It is a wonderful thing to be a Christian. God had to put forth very great power to make us Christians. But there is a still more wonderful thing for us in being Christians.

You must first see where this letter to the Hebrews fits in. It was written to Christians, but where were these Christians to which this letter was written? They were in the position that the children of Israel were in when they were brought out of Egypt. Do you remember what a great miracle it was to get the Israelites out of Egypt? Read the story of it again. It is the story of the exceeding great power of God. For ten times everything sought to stand in God's way. God did one great thing, but Pharaoh would not let them go. Then God did a second, but still Pharaoh would not let them go. And so nine times God did great things and when you get to the ninth, you say surely he would let them go this time, but Pharaoh said 'No!' What a tremendous resistance to God's will this was. And then God did it a tenth time and that time He broke Pharaoh's will. He broke the power of Egypt and later had to drown the whole Egyptian army in the Red Sea. All this was necessary to get His people out of Egypt. What great power that was!

Well, I was saved with an exceeding great power; and God has exercised His exceeding great power in saving each one of us. He has broken the whole power of Satan to save us. It is a wonderful thing to belong to the Lord. *And yet* when all that had happened in the case of Israel, all but two of the whole nation died in the wilderness. That is not what God had brought them out for. God had worked by His mighty power for something more than having people saved. God's purpose was that they should go in and inherit the land. When they were out of Egypt they were in figure and in type 'In Christ'. But God's thought for them was entry to the land - a type of the fulness of Christ. They did not come into the fulness of Christ because they did not go on. They were in type Christians; they were saved people. But God had a great purpose in saving them. And that is what this letter to the Hebrews is all about. It is not only about people being saved. I would say to everybody here today who is not saved that you are missing the most wonderful thing that God has done for man. For it is a very great thing. But when we have said all we can say of that, there is this message to those who are saved. There is something much greater for you than you at first imagine in your salvation and it is what God has called you unto. When God's Word says: "*Let us go on to full growth...*", then there must be something very much more in God's will for us. If He says "*full growth*", then full growth is His will for us.

Now, if you take up your Bible, you will find that that is what the Bible is all about. You begin the Bible with the story of Adam. Although Adam was a wonderful creature when he was created, he was not perfect, but was capable of development. He could become a very much greater man than he was. So God put him to a test. Would he believe and obey God? Everything depended on that. And because he did not believe and obey God, he never came to be the man God intended him to be. Do you want to know what kind of a man God intended Adam to be? Well, we have two pictures of that man. The first is on the mount of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus. Jesus is called by Paul the "Second Man". The Last Adam, Paul says, took the form of a servant. And He called Himself the Son of Man. Now look at Him on the mount of Transfiguration. This is the Son of Man glorified, the Last Adam as God intended the first Adam to be.

The second picture is in 1 Corinthians 15. This is one of the most wonderful chapters in the Bible. There we see what God intends man to be like and what He intended the first Adam to be. There we are told what we are going to be like in Christ. The moment is coming when the body of corruption is going to be put away and we are going to be clothed upon with a body like His glorious body, just like the body of the Lord Jesus when He was transfigured. That is a very wonderful thing. Is it too wonderful for you? It is not so wonderful to you as you think it is. You look at any born again child of God. Before they were saved, what miserable faces they had! Now look at their faces. Now look at your own faces! I have never seen faces like this in unsaved people. So something of the glorifying of our mortal bodies has already begun. Isn't that just what you say about Christians? What a glory about this one! Something about their very looks is different! Something of the glory is in their faces.

Now that is only the beginning. It is impossible for us to describe what we shall be. John writes: "*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God... It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him*" (1 John 3: 1-2). That is, we shall be like the Lord Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration, like Jesus with His glorified body.

But we have got to go right back to the first Adam. That is what God intended for him and he missed it all because he did not go on with God. He stopped, he did not go on to full growth. The Bible, right through, is all about that. God is trying to get His people to come on to maturity. He sent them priests whose work was to bring the children of God to full growth. He sent them kings for the same purpose. And when these too failed, He sent them prophets. Their work was to bring God's people on to His full thought for them. And then He sent His Son and Jesus represents God's full thought for us. The purpose of God is that we should be transformed, conformed to the image of His Son. There are going to be a lot of people who come to that. God's purpose cannot be defeated. And when God has things as He intended them to be, what will things be like? Everywhere we look we shall see the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone will remind us of the Lord Jesus. We shall see nothing but Him in people. Won't that be a wonderful time? The Word of God says that Jesus is going to fill all things. We shall not meet all the unpleasant things we meet in one another now. We shall only meet the Lord Jesus in one another. God's whole universe will be full of Him. Now, He has commended to do that in you and me.

When we meet now we meet something of the Lord Jesus in one another, but I am afraid it is true that you don't meet only the Lord Jesus in me. There is very much of me still there and very much of you still there, very much that is not Christ at all. But, thank God, He has begun to do something in us and He says: "*Let us go on to full growth.*" Never be satisfied with having a little of the Lord Jesus, with being just saved. "*Let us go on.*"

There is a need of this word to be said to us. When Israel was in the wilderness there were many things to stop them going on into the land of promise, things outside and things inside of themselves.

This little phrase "*Let us*" appears often in the book of Hebrews. Twice in chapter 12 we find: "*Let us lay aside every weight... let us run with patience*". The writer sums it up in the picture of a race. Now, young people can appreciate this. You all know what is necessary to win a race. If a man came to run a race with all his clothes on and a bundle under each arm and another on his head, you would say that he could never win. There would be no hope for him. We would say, "Now young man, you get rid of those bundles and all the clothes you can spare". You "*lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset you.*"

That is what the apostle is talking about. First, let us go on and in order that we do that, we must lay aside every weight. And then, let us run. When people run, they usually have a reason. If you saw a young man or woman running, you might wonder what it was all about. But if you saw an old man or woman running, you would think that there must be something very important or serious. And when the apostle says, "*Let us run*" he means that there is something very important and we have got to realise how important it is. It is a very important thing that we should come to the fulness of Christ. So we must be like these people who run and who say that they are going to let nothing prevent them from running.

It is a sprint - the sprint of people who mean business. We will have nothing less than all God means by our salvation. Now this is a very serious matter and I think I can illustrate how serious it can be.

We have a big and sad illustration in the world today. We look at the great land of China. There were very many Christians in the land of China when the Communists came in and the persecution of Christians commenced. Many were thrown into prison and a large number killed. Almost everywhere the Christians were made to suffer. And it is like that now. Well, what has happened? The sad thing is that a great number have let go their love for the Lord. On the other hand there are those who have gone right on and have stood firm. What made the difference? Those who have gone back from the Lord are those who were not going on with Him. At a point they said that they were not going on with Him any further. They loved their own lives more than the Lord. But the others said that it did not matter if they lost their lives; they would go on with Him.

It does matter whether we are going on with the Lord. Such a day may be very near for us, when it may be much more costly to belong to the Lord than it is now. That is exactly how it was when the apostle wrote this letter. These Christians to whom he wrote were suffering because they belonged to the Lord. The reproach of Christ was coming upon them.

Jesus was not loved by the world nor by the Jewish nation, and those who were His were suffering with Him. So, "*Let us therefore go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach*" (Heb. 13:13). But many were saying that they did not know whether they were going on any further. It was too costly for them and they thought they would save themselves a lot of trouble if they did not go on. And it was to those that the letter was written.

Read this letter through and note how many times the phrase "Let us" occurs. "*Let us fear*" (Heb. 4:1), "*Let us... lay aside every weight*" (Heb. 12:1), "*Let us run*" (Heb. 12:1), "*Let us go on*" (Heb. 6:1). Look them up and you will see how much of the book is summed up in that phrase, "Let us".

So, let us go on!

There is another little word that is used. I will not take time to turn to all the references now, but you will find it everywhere in the book, so I will mention it. It is the word 'lest'. Study it for yourself. "*Let us give diligence lest...*" (Heb. 2:1). We have got to be very watchful. This verse is a word picture of a ship coming into harbour. I used to have a boat and come into harbour in it. I used to steer in the direction of the moorings and when I got near them, I would get hold of my boat-hook and try to hook up my moorings. Perhaps the tide would be running fast and the wind would be strong and I would drift past my moorings and not get them. And what a lot of trouble that meant. I had to start up the engine again and go out to sea and come round and try all over again. That is the picture here. Give diligence lest you miss that for which God has called you and have to start all over again. Those who have drifted away from the Lord are the most miserable people, so this word says: don't be the most miserable people. Just go right on with the Lord. And if you have missed the way, come back; He waits to receive you and has not given you up. He says to us all: "Let us go on."

We can say all that has been said in a few words and in a short time, but it will take all our lives to live it out. We go on all our lives, but the fulness is only at the end. But there can be more of Christ all the way along. That is a wonderful thing to say.

May I give you my testimony? What we say ought to be true of ourselves. There was a time in my life when I was preaching a lot and many people were calling me to preach. And the whole thing was becoming a terrible burden. I was working day and night to find something to preach about. I had a library of two thousand books - all the latest ones - and the preaching business was a great burden to me. I felt like the poor Israelites when Pharaoh told them that they would have to find the straw to make their bricks with; I was looking everywhere for the straw.

The day came when I said that I could go on like that no longer. People might have thought me a good preacher, but they never knew how miserable the preacher was. So one day I went into my room and shut the door. I got down on my knees and told the Lord that I could go on no longer, unless He did something for me greater than He had ever done before. If not, I was going to give up the preaching. And I meant it. I should have sent in my resignation for I was a minister of a church.

The Lord did do something. He led me to my Bible, to Romans 6. And I read the first four verses. These were no new words to me; I knew them quite well. As a Bible teacher I could tell you what was in any book of the Bible and I knew Romans and could have quoted the verses. But the Lord spoke to me that day and it was as though He put His finger on those words and said: "Do you know that when I died, you died, and not only as a sinner, but as a man and not only as a man, but as a preacher. It has been you who have been doing all the preaching, and not I who have been doing it. You have been doing it all by yourself. You looked up a certain subject and thought it was a good thing to preach about it and so you preached on it. So I have left you to it. But when I died you died. It ought not now to be you, but Me. I should decide what you preach about; I should give you your messages; I should be your wisdom and your power in your ministry."

Those sound like words, but if you had been in my condition, it would have been more than words. Those verses that I knew so well became new to me. I said: "It can be no longer me, Lord, but it must be You. I will never preach again unless You give me the message!" And the Lord did that. It was over thirty years ago. I have done much more preaching in those thirty years than ever before. My testimony is that never in thirty years have I had to work to get a message. Yes, I have studied the Bible and worked hard with the Word of God, but God has been giving the messages. Often I begin and I could go on and on and it would be a joy to do so. You see, we can have the fulness of Christ all the way along.

In my New Testament there is one part which is more marked than any other portion and that is the epistle to the Ephesians. I have talked more about that letter than any other part of the Bible. Yet while that is true, and I have been thinking about the letter for many years, I feel as though I know nothing about it. Something more comes to me every time I go back to it. And you know that this is the letter about the fulness of Christ. We shall never exhaust that. We can know something more of Him all the way along. That is how it ought to be. Let us go on to full growth. There is much more before us than we have any idea of.