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## Oh, the Depth...

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Transcribed from a message given in December, 1958. The spoken form has been retained verbatim.*

In the gospel by Matthew, chapter 13, chapter 13 and verse 5:

"And others fell upon the rocky places where they had not much earth: and straightway they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away."

The letter to the Romans, chapter 11, at verse 33:

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!"

We immediately recognise that contrast, those three statements in the Matthew portion: "not much earth", "no deepness of earth", "no root", and then: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!"

It may seem just a little out of place today not to speak on the season, but spiritual need is always in season, and that is always with us. And I have it on my heart just to say a brief word, a simple word on this matter of depth. "Oh the depth..."

In this parable of our Lord, with which we are so familiar, called the parable of the sower, in this second phase of the sowing and its result, the Lord puts his finger upon something that is nothing less than a tragedy when it is remembered what the tremendous potentialities of the Word of God

are. You come to the end of the parable and you see in what was in the Word that was sown. It was no different Word sown among the thorns or on the rocky ground from that sown on good ground. In every case and instance, the potentialities were the same; no difference in the Word.

Mighty, wonderful things are possible from the Word of God in the heart. And yet, with all those great potentialities and possibilities, here is a receiving, a receiving - it comes to them just as it came to the others, a receiving - and all that was possible was missed.

The tragedy of shallowness... what a tragedy! So the Lord puts His finger upon that which is so contrary to His own nature and His own thought; so contrary to God. Oh, the depth of God! How deep God is! How deep God goes.

Here perhaps there is a link with the present remembrance to what depth the Lord Jesus came down and went! How *deep* God has gone. The breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the knowledge-surpassing love of God! How profound is the love of God! How deep God is! "The depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" That's God! That's His nature. And over against that is this tragic shallowness... contrary to Him... missing all that could have been.

Shallowness is always unsubstantial; it never, never stands the test and goes through - always unenduring - for a time, and then... it's all gone. Always unprofitable; missing what God intended.

Now, you see, if God is like this - and if there is something in what the Lord Jesus says and means in the parable of condemnation, deploring such a state - what should we expect of God? What should we expect? We should expect nothing other than if God really gets a chance and has a way to His end, He will go very deep, and He will take us very deep. And it does prove to be like that. I'm quite sure that there are many here now who know that that is true. It is a word not only that is true to experience, but it is a word that explains so much. The Psalmist cried: "Thy way was in the deep..." and it always is. God's way is always in the deep!

God will always seek to take us down into the depths in order that He might reproduce in us the things that are true of Himself. We have said just now that shallowness is that which is not substantial. Now, the one thing that that Psalmist was always saying about the Lord was that He was his Rock; his Rock. What a lot the Psalmist owed to the fact that he had discovered the Lord to be his Rock - something that could not be moved, could not be shaken, to be relied upon, to be dependable, always there: "Thou art my Rock!" That is the Lord.

Dear friends, the Lord does want to reproduce His own character in us: to make us dependable, reliable, substantial; that we are there, and always there, and always there and can always be found there - not moved! In order to do that, He has to take us into the depths. He is that Himself, because He is so deep.

Enduring... He is the eternal God; He abides forever. There is a word, you know, that brings us right into touch with that: "He that doeth the will of God shall abide forever." *Abide forever!* So easily moved away aren't we? *Unabiding*. The Lord Jesus was ever stressing this: "Abide in Me", abide, *keep settled down!* But you don't if you live on the surface, you know that quite well; nothing that lives on the surface abides, it is carried away so easily by whatever comes along. It is only those who, to use the words of a prophet, twice employed: "dwell deep", "dwell deep". Only so shall we endure and

abide.

Things of greatest value are not found on the surface at all. The real treasures are in the deep. You have to go *deep* for the pearls and the jewels - dig deep. The things that really are of value are not just superficial things found strewn anywhere and everywhere, you have to search deeply for them.

When the Lord was describing the Land for His people, the Land of Promise, the Land of their inheritance, He told them that there were treasures there, but they'd have to dig for them, they'd have to dig for them: "Out of whose hills thou mayest *dig* brass". Nothing that really is of value comes easily. Well, we know that, in every sphere of life it does not come easily, but we have to go deep. The Lord, then, is always seeking to deepen and deepen; He is in quest of depth. And because of the importance to the Lord of all these features of depth, depth is always a costly thing. It's always a costly thing.

The fact is, and we know it so well, that we never do make deeper discoveries of the Lord, only through very *deep* trial, very *deep* testing, very *deep* suffering. *These* treasures are "treasures of darkness"; there are always treasures somewhere in the darkness, there are always precious things somewhere down in the depths where the Lord leads us; it's like that.

This *essential* of God in His people, all that it means of real depth unto the abiding and unto full fruitfulness, it comes only by way of *deep* trial and suffering. That explains the ways of the Lord with us; it really does! We wonder why the Lord does plough so deep, and not allow us to abide in our superficiality.

Now, here's Paul - a great example always of every kind of Divine truth and Divine way and working and method - here is this man, out of very deep ways with God, and God's very deep ways with him, crying, "Oh the depth of the riches... Oh the *depth* of the riches! How unsearchable! Past finding out!" There's really, though sometimes we think we have touched bottom, there is nearly no touching bottom in this matter; there is always something more to discover, but every time, something more of *deepening in us*. It's like that.

Now, the way of man and the way of the world is the shallow way, isn't it? To get things as cheaply as possible, and as easily as possible, and as quickly as possible, with as little cost as possible - that's the way of our nature. We want it like that, and we don't *like* the other way. But that is a mark, it's a mark of something of Divine character missing. It is! It just shows how devoid of the character of God human nature is and this world is. And all God's ways of enrichment demand the countering of our natural desires, inclinations, propensities to have it all so easily. That is our way; it is the way of man.

Now, dear friends, this, this matter of depth, this matter of depth and of deepening into God and by God, constitutes a feature of the great battle that the Lord's people are always in.

As an illustration and an instance of this, remember the Lord Jesus as He stepped across that line from His thirty years of private, hidden life, into the public vocation and mission for which He had come. And the enemy, clearly discerning with that intuition common to spirits, recognised quite well why He had come and for what He had stepped across that line that day: to become *the* Lord of Creation, *the* Prince of this world, *the* Ruler of the kingdoms. He recognised that and offered that prize to Him along superficial lines; superficial lines... compromise: "Take this easier way, You can

have it; You can have it *all* if You will only take this way that I suggest. You are going the hard way! You are going the deep way, You are going the costly way; but You can have it all without that!" Superficial... see? The superficial way for a kingdom. But what a Kingdom it would have been! It would not have lasted; it would not have endured; it would not have been of that substantial order of eternity. And that's what the enemy wanted: to rob of that deep, deep reality that God meant.

And the Lord Jesus saw the snare and accepted the *deep* way - and oh, how deep it was... that way of the Cross, to the very depths, to the *very* depths. But what a Kingdom! An everlasting kingdom, an enduring kingdom; He has it! It will endure throughout all generations, forever and ever. The deep way is the real way. The enemy is always *trying to rob of depth*, that is the point - to make things easier. He is *always* trying to make things superficial; all so happy, and so pleasant; so nice, all on the surface, all looks so lovely and so enjoyable, and seems to be so good; but the point is: At what cost has it been secured? And is there a peril that something of the depth is being surrendered? For that's the realm of value and of conflict: depth!

For this reason (and it's striking I know what sounds like a melancholy note) for this reason the Lord does have to bring His own things, His own Divine, sacred things, into a realm of tremendous suffering in order to preserve and increase their depth. Make no mistake about it! The question will always arise: At what *cost* did you come by that? That determines whether it is *real* with you.

I was thinking much about that incident (and with this I'll close) in the life of Elisha. We know and have heard many things about it. One thing has impressed me as I have been thinking over it again recently. When the Lord sent him to the woman, you remember, and the child was given by Divine act. And the prophet went away and it fell upon a day, the child was stricken and died. The woman asked her husband to saddle the ass for her to go and fetch the prophet, and off she went.

She found him, told him her trouble, and he sent Gehazi with his rod, back. Gehazi... his servant, with the rod. And I never can help my imagination from getting to work as I see Gehazi... a man for which I have the *utmost* contempt from all I know of him in Scripture: taking that rod and in some professional way, conceited way, going to the situation, entering into the death chamber and putting the rod upon the child; and nothing happened. Trying it perhaps at some other angle, and still nothing happened; nothing happened. But the woman saw through Gehazi, and she said: "I am not going with Gehazi; I am not going without you! You've got to come." She had come to Elisha. He went, and you know how he entered in and stretched himself upon that child: hands to his hands, eyes to his eyes, and lips to his lips. Stretched himself.

Now, you know the whole story, but what has impressed me is this: the Lord, the Lord in this scene was sovereignly at work. And the principle there undoubtedly was this: that here in this child was represented the very fruit, meaning, and value of that woman's life, if you will allow her to represent the church. And the child: the very meaning of her life, the very fruit of her life, the very testimony of her life, the only thing for which now she had to live - something that was a matter of life or death with her. And the Lord touched that, touched that in order to bring out this great, this wonderful, this *profound* truth: that *everything in the church has got to become a matter of life and death*. No play-acting by any Gehazi's! No merely formal, professional conduct with the rod; no mere words, no mere performances. Only the man, the man who is brought right into the thing in *heart*, so that this matter is with him a matter of his *own* ministry, of his *own* life, of his *own* testimony... brought into the agony and the anguish of this thing; *not* standing aside like a Gehazi and acting objectively, but this thing involves his very *life*, his very *ministry*, his very *testimony*, and his very *anointing*. If God

doesn't do this, then Elisha had better give up everything! He is brought into the agony and anguish of this situation.

God has touched something that is not just a matter of his professional ministry, it's a matter of the justification of his *life*; he is brought into it like that. God is going deep. And dear friends, God does that; make no mistake about it. Make no mistake about it!

In the church, in the church that is according to God, God will touch something in the individual life. He may touch a husband; He may touch a wife; He may touch a child - a beloved child - in order to get us out of this merely formal, detached kind of association with His things, and make everything an *agony*! An agony! If the church doesn't come in on our behalf now, well, you see, the dearest thing in life is threatened.

God has wonderful ways of making things real, making things real; of destroying superficiality. Do you follow? I feel it is a very solemn word from the Lord, but a word that we all need to recognise. The Lord is not, *not* going to have shallowness and superficiality; He is going to touch the depth until it is a matter of anguish.

Everything is in the balances in this issue whatever it may be, whatever it may be - a business situation, a home situation, a personal situation, a church situation - everything is in the balances now: how *this* goes. The Lord simply draws us in. And I have a feeling the Lord is going to do things like that, to *save* from the matter-of-course kind of things, taking things for granted, and to bring about a more deadly, solemn reality with us all. It will be by *deep* ways, but oh, it will be worthwhile afterward.

That lad became the *embodiment of the power of His resurrection*. And it's something, you know, to have that testimony enshrined and embodied, something indestructible and abiding there, substantial there: the power of His resurrection! Who can undo that? That is forever; forever! But it comes by this way: "Thy way, oh God, was in the *depths*..."; "Oh, the *depths* of the riches..." is the point: the riches. Listen to the word; it will explain things that are going to happen to you, perhaps soon, and it may be a saving word.