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Taking the End by Faith

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-12.

We are here in the presence of the great transition, the great change, which had taken place in the case of Peter and the Apostles and of all who had believed. Before the Cross all their hopes and expectations, their entire mentality and horizon were on this earth. They were looking for the realization of a kingdom, a Messianic kingdom of a temporal kind centred in Jerusalem and bringing with it all manner of temporal benefits and advantages, with God working along that line, concentrating His power to show His favour in a temporal way, all the blessings being temporal blessings. The Cross had changed that entire outlook and swept it all away as in a flood for the dispensation. With the resurrection of the Lord Jesus it was shown that God's intention was quite different from what they were expecting, for the time being, and that everything for this dispensation is of a spiritual and heavenly character, requiring a complete transformation of their conceptions and judgments and outlook.

Before the resurrection it was a devastating experience for them. Everything had gone with the death of the Lord Jesus, but Peter says, "God... begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead", proving that the afterward which came in with the resurrection was far beyond and transcendent over what they had lost. The terms of this Letter are very clear. "Ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory", showing that they came to see that it was not loss but really gain through the Cross. That, then, is the background of this Letter: the tremendous change of realm and of form of Divine blessing. According to verse 5, the power of God in this

dispensation is through faith.

We need to note the link between several fragments here: *"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls, concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you"* (verses 9-10). Which salvation? "The end of your faith... the salvation of your souls." The end is the salvation of your souls. "Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently" to discover the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

That may not be very clear as it is stated like that, but just lay hold of it for a moment. The statement is quite definite. The prophets sought diligently to know, to discover something, to discover a salvation, and Peter says that salvation is "the salvation of your souls". And he says further that that is not the beginning of your faith but the end of your faith. We place salvation right at the beginning, Peter places salvation right at the end. That does not mean that we are not saved now; it does not mean that we are not being saved now; but it does mean that full salvation, salvation in its full meaning, is future. Soul salvation is the end of our faith. That is one thing.

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you... wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (verses 10, 13). That does not mean that we have not received grace, nor that we are not receiving grace. But there is a grace intimated to the prophets by the Holy Spirit who, as it says here, "was in them", a grace that is to come at the end, at the revelation of Jesus Christ. "Set your hope...". "Hope that is seen is not hope" (Romans 8:24). Hope relates to something future. "Set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The apocalypse, the presence in manifestation of Jesus Christ, that is the grace that is to come to you.

Now the third thing which brings us right into touch with that is this: *"Searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them"* (verse 11). The Spirit of Christ in them testified to the sufferings of Christ that should follow. It is remarkable how Israel, the Jews, the Jewish interpreters and teachers, almost entirely overlooked and failed to see that the Messiah was to be a suffering Messiah. All the hopes of Israel concerning the Messiah were hopes of glory, but of temporal glory, glory on this earth. They seem to have entirely missed all that the prophets were saying about the sufferings of the Messiah.

But the prophets found two things going on in them by the Spirit of Christ. In the first instance He was making them know that the Messiah would be a suffering Messiah and He was making them know, not only by informing them, but by their own experience. You cannot read those Messianic prophecies and Psalms without knowing that the writers went through experiences which had to be interpreted, not as the common experiences of man in everyday life, but as something prophetic, something with fuller, further and future meaning. Hear David speak: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). There is something more in that than just the ordinary experience of a man. The Spirit was making them know that the Messiah would be a suffering Messiah. The Jews missed that and fastened upon the other side, the glories. The Spirit was making the prophets know what the glories would be and the Jews fastened upon the glories alone. There would be the glories, but they would follow the suffering, be consequent upon the sufferings.

The glories are coming with the manifestation or revelation of the Messiah who suffered. That manifestation of the suffering glorified Christ is the grace that is to come to us. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (Romans 8:17). That is the consummation of grace.

This whole Letter of Peter, as you notice, focuses upon the trials and sufferings and afflictions of Christians in this dispensation. Now in this dispensation it is partnership with Christ in His sufferings and a Divine government of those sufferings in the salvation of our souls. Through trial and testing and by way of faith our souls are brought to complete deliverance from the grip of Satan and self over them, bringing them into fellowship with Christ and out of fellowship with Satan, bringing deliverance from the self-principle which was brought into the soul by Adam's decision. That is the salvation of our souls.

It will be a grand thing and this is what these scattered believers to whom Peter was writing had grasped. The language may sound extravagant - "ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory" - but they have grasped something. What have they grasped? They have seen that the time is coming when all this wretched, horrid, beastly self-principle that is in the creation, causing all this trouble in every one of us, will have been finally rooted out and replaced by the Christ-principle of utter selflessness where we are never affected or influenced by our own feelings, our own interests and how things touch us, but where we shall be completely delivered from our own souls, these souls which are a curse to us every day, our feelings, our ideas, our wants and our wills. If only we could be completely oblivious of ourselves, be completely free from ourselves, how happy we would be! These people grasped that the time was coming when it would be like that, their faith had laid hold of it and they rejoiced with joy unspeakable. That is the grace which is coming with the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is the prospect, and the trials and sufferings of the present time are working toward that - to get us free from ourselves, to turn us out from ourselves. They had grasped that and they laid hold of the end of their faith. By faith they received the end of their faith and they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

If we are oppressed by our own souls and bothered by our own souls, let us at least turn our thoughts and praise God that the day is coming when we shall be completely emancipated from ourselves. It might be that if only we could take that attitude of faith and lay hold of that by faith, the joy would spring up now. This is not just eschatology or optimism. The Holy Spirit did this in the prophets and in these believers of the dispersion to whom Peter is writing. He said to them. "Ye see him not", 'you never saw Him in the flesh, you have nothing to go upon; the Gospel has been preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; you have nothing of material evidence to prove this; we saw Him - you never had anything like that, but you received it by faith when it was preached to you and the Holy Ghost ratified it and you rejoice.' It is a wonderful picture of what taking by faith, taking the Gospel by faith, taking Christ by faith, taking the end by faith, can do. They rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

In the meantime, "the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire" is working the salvation of your souls, to bring in the fullness and finality of the grace of God, the glories that do follow. I do not know what sort of glories you are expecting. For me, there is very little appeal in the idea of having literal material thrones and crowns, or anything like that. But what does appeal to me is the prospect of being freed from this accursed self, then I shall be happy. That will be a kingdom that is worth everything. Well, that is the end of your faith and that is

the outcome of your trial of faith. You have to read the whole Letter in the light of that, but there you have it summed up in the first chapter.