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The Importance of Being in the Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

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The phrase "in the Spirit" occurs several times in the book of the Revelation. It represents the way of escape for the Lord's people from the oppression of the earthly conditions which surround and beset them. John, being so oppressed on the island of Patmos, found deliverance from earth's limitations into the much larger realm of things as they are in heaven. The book of the Revelation shows, as perhaps few other books of the Bible do, how real and absolute is heaven's government. In the matter of the whole Church (represented by the seven churches), the nations, the great world systems (represented religiously by Babylon and politically by the Beast), and even to the hidden warfare with spiritual evil, it was made clear to John, and so to us all, that it is really the heavens which rule.

Emerging from this truth of heaven's absolute dominion is that fact that through the adversities and sufferings of His people, God is providing a fruitful ministry of spiritual fullness and wealth.

So heaven came in on Patmos, and turned what would have been misery and crippling limitation into something tremendously fruitful for the Church throughout many generations. There can be no question as to the untold value of John's ministry which resulted from this Revelation of Jesus Christ.

What was true in the case of John himself is revealed to be also the case for many of the Lord's servants. Those of us who have even a small experience of being shut up and hemmed in by difficult circumstances will perhaps realise a little of what the great apostle must have felt. He had so much spiritual wealth; he was the sole survivor of the apostles; he could realise how greatly the churches needed him; and yet he was, banished to a lonely island, cut off from all opportunity either of fellowship or service. In some way Paul before him had gone through a similar circumstance in his Roman imprisonment, and could also at times have felt singularly frustrated as to useful service to Christ. Yet how much poorer the Church would have been without his 'prison epistles'. So he and

John had this in common, that the seeming limitation of being prisoners for Christ had produced unlimited spiritual helpfulness to many generations of Christians.

It may well be that what was true of them will be found to be valid for the whole Church. The vision at the end of this book is of a Church of such vast measurements that its dimensions seem to have been grossly exaggerated. The simple implication is that heaven will have overruled the earthly trials and tribulations of God's suffering saints and made out of them a fruitful means of dispensing Christ's riches to the whole universe for all eternity. This is the significance of being "in the Spirit".