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The Lord With Us

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-12; 6:1-4.

"And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: and he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you, while ye are with Him" (2 Chron. 15:1-2).

In these passages which we have read, there are several very important factors which we, as the Lord's people, do well to note.

The Lord With Us, and Our Being With the Lord

First there is the matter of the Lord being with us, being willing to go with us. I take it that Elijah at that point does stand to represent our Lord finishing His earthly course and going up into glory and Elisha as the continuation of His ministry here in the fulness and power of the Spirit. We noted that Elisha said to the sons of the prophets, in answer to their request that he would go with them, "I will go": the Lord's willingness to be with us. Then there is also the matter of our being with the Lord. They may sound very simple matters, but everything is gathered into that: the Lord being with us, willing to go with us, and our being with the Lord. But there is something basic to the Lord's being with us which is: our going on, for the Lord is going on.

Then the next thing is that this going on with the Lord is quite definitely related to spiritual enlargement. That is quite clear here. The Lord being with us, we being with the Lord, a going on, and the end in view which is enlargement. Through the ascension of Elijah and the falling of his mantle upon Elisha, the double portion of his spirit, there was enlargement. Indeed, Elisha was an

enlargement of Elijah in a certain sense; a great spiritual enlargement, a double portion. The sons of the prophets came into enlargement. It was about that that they were exercised. "The place where we dwell... is too strait for us." There must be enlargement. And that was according to the good pleasure of their master, and with this object of enlargement in their hearts. He said, 'I am going with you.' There was no hesitation on his part, no reluctance, no saying, 'You go and get on with it!' No - 'I am with you, I go with you.' Now, you see, those are simple, quite concise factors.

The Lord's Presence With His People

There are two aspects of the Lord being with us. On one side, there is no 'if' at all. There is no 'if' as with Asa, "The Lord is with you, (if, or while) while ye are with Him." On one side of this, when it is a matter of the Lord's relationship to us as His born-from-above children, just as His children and as His people, His born-from-above children, there is no condition for His presence. He has, with a categorical affirmation, said, "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). That is the heritage of the children of God. The Lord says, 'I am with you, and I will never leave you.' "I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20). On the ground of our relationship to the Lord, there is no limitation, no 'if' or 'while' in His being with us, and we are bound to discover the grace of God in that way. We may wander, we may seem to lose the Lord, the sense of His presence. Many things may happen which would argue that the Lord has left us, but those times pass; they come, they go, periods of testing, of trial. But again and again we come out of those times and we find the Lord has not left us, He has not forsaken us; He is there. Clouds have intervened, but He is there. That is the very life of grace, and we shall have that confirmed to the end.

His Conditional Presence With Us in our Service

But there is another aspect. When it comes to our being His servants and the whole question of service and the work of the Lord, or for the Lord is in view, there is a condition. The Lord is with us as His servants while in the work, in what we are doing, in service, we are with Him. That is, the Lord cannot commit Himself to anything that we do and everything we take up, even in His Name. He cannot bind Himself up with all our choices, whims and ideas, even though they be strongly religious ones and we may have good arguments for the decisions we take. Nevertheless, the Lord cannot just be committed in that way. There is this sense in which the Lord is with us only when we are with Him in what He is after, what He wants. We shall only find Him with us then.

So there are these two aspects. Do not let them stand in your mind as a contradiction, that the Lord at one time says, 'I will never leave you' and another time says, 'I am with you, if, or, when...'. It is no contradiction, only two sides of one matter: as His children or as His servants. Now having said that, let us go on with this matter here before us.

Spiritual Enlargement the Lord's Object

The *object* of the Lord is spiritual enlargement. That is why He goes on with us, and He can only go on with us if that is what is in view where we are concerned. There are many things of a religious kind and Christian activity which do not lead to spiritual enlargement; they are ends in themselves. They are quite good, but they do not result in real spiritual enlargement. There are multitudes of Christians today who are in Christian work who are not spiritually growing. The Lord's object, and that to which He will commit Himself, and concerning which He will say, 'I go with you,' is spiritual enlargement and that is growing ability to cope with, and master, greater spiritual situations, and to turn them to account for the Lord. That is the definition of spiritual enlargement: growing ability to

cope with larger situations, to master them, and to turn them to account for the Lord. You remember that the Lord would not drive out the inhabitants of the land for Israel except in the measure in which they were able to occupy, to subdue and to turn it to fruitfulness. He said He would not do it (Ex. 23:29). Their occupation of the land was governed by their measure of ability to turn it to account.

Spiritual Enlargement Through Delayed Answers to Prayer

This may very truly touch upon the whole matter of seemingly unanswered prayer, or delayed answers to prayer. We have all prayed and prayed fervently and definitely, and brought to the Lord His promises about hearing and answering prayer. We have really gone out to the Lord in requesting and asking for certain things, that the Lord would do certain things and the answer, as far as we can see, has not been given, and perhaps it has not. But may not this lie at the heart of that problem? Supposing the Lord were just to give us, as something wrapped up in itself, answers to prayer. Are you quite sure - now, be honest - that that would result in your real spiritual enlargement? You do not find that little children, when they ask their parents for things and get them, immediately develop very much because of this.

The Lord does give to His little children spiritually many answers to prayer, but you do not find that that really means spiritual growth. He has got to keep them going unto a time yet to be, and as we begin to grow up, we find that the Lord does not often answer immediately. He keeps us waiting - not that He is reluctant, but He has another object. We have to grow into something, and when the Lord grants that, we have got to be in a new spiritual position to turn it to account. When the Lord gives it, if He gives it, when He answers, if He answers, we have got to have grown tremendously by the exercise meantime, so that that thing does not become laid hold of by us to turn it to our joy, pleasure and satisfaction, but that we turn it to mighty account for God. We have learned a lot through the suffering, we have been stretched, expanded, enlarged, and now the Lord can trust us with that because He knows that it will count for *Him*, not just for our gratification. The Lord is not saying, "No!" He is saying, "You grow into it, and you shall have it; you get enlarged so that you can make the most of it for Me and you shall have it; I will answer when you are in a position that can be trusted with it for My glory." And remember, "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:8); not that you say a lot of "Thank-You's". You may think you glorify God by thanking Him all the days of your life. And it is good and right to be filled with thanks and praise to the Lord, but solid fruit is that which glorifies God.

Spiritual Enlargement Through Testing

Well, that brings in this whole element of testing. How Elijah tested Elisha, tested him by seeming to put him off. 'You stay here, the Lord has called me to Jericho.' He tried, it seems, to put him off and Elisha would not be put off. They came to Jericho, and then Elisha tried it again. 'Tarry here!' No! He is being tested by apparently being put off. What does this testing amount to? Will you settle down to something less than the Lord's ultimate? Will you or I be content with a certain point of progress, a certain degree of growth? It is good; of course, Jericho is good; Bethel is good; Gilgal was good at the beginning, but are you going to stay at Gilgal, are you going to stay at Jericho, are you going to stay at Bethel or settle down at Jordan? Did you notice that after Jordan they still went on? Shall we accept something less than the full, the ultimate? Shall we say, "This is good," and the good become the obscuring of the best? The point is not that we have the good more or less where we are, in which we have settled down, but *are we going on?*

Spiritual Enlargement by Continually Going On

Fulness here for Elisha and for the sons of the prophets was a matter of steadfast persistence. Enlargement was in the way of continually going on, refusing to accept anything less. The Lord has called you to His full purpose. There are many difficulties bound up with that. All the adversities concentrate upon His full purpose, and one of the great efforts of the enemy is to get us sidetracked into something good, unmistakably good, stopping short with something of the Lord, and settling down and not going on. We are challenged by that. If you and I have a life in really living relationship with the Lord, we cannot do that sort of thing. Why did Elisha not stop at one or other of these places short of the end? Well, he sensed something; he felt that something was going to happen, and he had got to be there, and this sensing of something kept him from settling down on the way anywhere; it kept him going. The Holy Spirit will do that with us, let us feel that we cannot settle down. And His way of doing it will not only be to give us an inward consciousness that we have stopped short, but by trials, by adversities, by sufferings. The Lord will not let us settle down; He will stir us and move us. The upshot of it will be that somehow or other my very life depends upon a fuller knowledge of the Lord, somehow or other I have to get to a new spiritual position, somehow or other I have to master this situation or it is going to master me; somehow or other this thing has got to be made to turn to account for the Lord, or there is no explanation of it. That is what the Lord is after.

The Ultimate Consummation

And so it is by persistence, going on. 'I will not leave Thee, I will accept no Jericho's, no Bethel's, no Jordan's short of the ultimate, glorious consummation.' What was that? Elijah's victory over death at the Jordan, full victory in the realm where full victory alone can be known - in the whole realm of spiritual death. Fulness, in the ascension and exaltation of the risen Lord; and glory. "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" It is the glory of the Lord. You know how that came out afterwards with Elisha's servant in that encompassing, when the servant got up in the morning and he saw the army besieging, encompassing, he cried, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" The master said, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see", and when his eyes were opened, he saw the mountains full of chariots and horsemen. The master had said, "They that are with us are more than they that are with them" (2 Kings 6:15-17). Chariots and horsemen, the glory of the Lord as ascendant over all the power of evil forces. This is the end in view: spiritual fulness; not something abstract which we call spiritual fulness. It is a positive position of spiritual ability to cope with situations, to bring them under. The situations become acute and more difficult, and this is in the way of fulness. We cry to be delivered; the Lord does not answer that way, He enlarges us. That is how He delivers. We ask the Lord, 'Do this, give that!' In that way, He does not do it. He brings about in us first of all spiritual growth, and the thing is then ripe for His intervention, and we will bear it out.

How often the thing which to us seemed to require a most mighty miracle, for which God would have to move heaven and earth, and which no resource here could accomplish, when the Lord's time comes and He has got us into position, it just happens. There is no apparent demonstration of infinite majesty in the thing at all. It happens. Some of us have proved that many times. It is a case of going on to enlargement, and as we go on, the Lord says, 'I am going with you, I am with you.' "The Lord is with you in this matter." He is with us; though we remain little children He is with us, but there is another sense in which He says, "I commit Myself to you, as I go with you in this positive way, related to purpose, when you have My object in view: spiritual fulness."