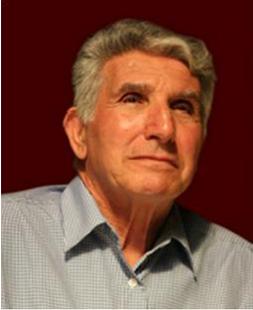


A Compilation of 12 Messages

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1: A Message for the Earnest Seeker

In much the same way as the Shekinah glory lights the holiest place of all, so also are we 'lighted' to the degree that first the natural (open daylight at the brazen altar), and later the 'religious' (the seven-branched oil-fed priestly serviced Menorah) gives way finally to the unaided Presence of God alone.

T. Austin-Sparks in his book, [*The School of Christ*](#)*

"This is stating a tremendous fact. Every bit of real light which is in the direction of that ultimate effulgence, the revealing of the glory of God in us and through us, every bit of it is in Christ Jesus, and can only be had in Him on the basis of the natural man having been altogether put outside, put away, and a new man having been brought into being..."

This "putting away" is nothing other than the death to what we are in ourselves. The 'light' referred to above is available only in His life; any other light, however impressive and well-intentioned, constitutes a false light. Sparks continues,

"We must go down with Him into death, and there, under the act of the Spirit of God (my emphasis), in union with Christ buried, there is a transmission of His Life to us" (p.56).. "The necessity [is] of our letting that life of ours go absolutely."

What is being described here is not our defective life, or even our sin-life, but our virtuous and gifted life, ironically, even that measure that has been obtained through His grace!^¾"Not just the self-life in its most [evident] evil forms, but the self-life in its totality" (p.70). Sparks continues,

My point is this, that you and I must not think of the self-life only as something manifestly corrupt. There is a great deal done for God with the purest motive that is done out from ourselves. There are many thoughts, ideas, judgments, which are sublime, beautiful, but they are ours, and if we did but know the truth, they are altogether different from God's (p.70).

This kind of [Jacob: We have not yet come to our Jabbok "He will empty out"] man dies hard. He does not like being put aside. This requires a Crisis, and I think many of us are at that threshold. If you are not yet experiencing it, Sparks continues,

"expect that you are going to fall to pieces...that the beauty you thought was there will be altogether marred. Expect to discover that you are far more corrupt than you ever thought you were..." "This death of Christ as it is wrought in us breaks up our natural life, it scatters it, pulls it to pieces, takes all its beauty away." (p.58)

We as the church are as presently unfitted for the glory of God as present day Israel. Only those who are satisfied with that nation, hoping for its 'improvement,' will be equally as satisfied with themselves, hoping for their improvement!

"The divide is so utter...unless the Spirit of God wrought a miracle in us, the whole thing would be of another world." (p.67)

There is too much guile in us to see the open heaven and 'the greater thing'! Only those who ascend the holy hill of Zion are those who have pure hearts, and who have not lifted

their souls up to vanity or deceit (Ps.24). Only the 144,000, who are redeemed from the earth, follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and in their mouths was found no guile for they are without fault before the throne of God "the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb." (Rev.14:1-5)

I believe that the redeeming "from the earth" is not the mere arbitrary determination of a God of fate, but that this redeeming is the result of a conscious choice by the believer that enables the death of the 'old man' to be performed. This would constitute the "generation (i.e., kind) of them that seek Him, that seek Thy face, O God of Jacob" (Ps. 24.6). Rather, many of us have resisted sanctification, interpreting it as the unjust work of men rather than the 'strange' work of God and exhibiting in our self-defense or petulant self-pityings and self-justifyings the very evidence of the thing God sought to extirpate. We have missed or misinterpreted the crisis, choosing to remain on 'this side' of Resurrection (having been aided in that misinterpretation by many who stand in the same need of it), and woe betide them for whom it needs be repeated^{3/4}so great is the divine jealousy to spare us eternal dismay.

Whatever the validity of the recent worldwide "revivals," it is clear that we prefer to be acted upon by the power of the Spirit than the hard choosings of the Cross; that we desire "the seasons of refreshing" than the "repent ye therefore and be ye converted" that precedes it. Are we willing for choices [the issue of character rather than the alleviation of personality disorders] that as Oswald Chambers says "are continually in antagonism to the entrenchments of the natural life"?

...this is never done easily, nor does God intend it to be done easily...The warfare is not against sin [but it is] when we have entered into the experience of sanctification that the fight begins...It is done only by a series of moral choices (My Utmost for His Highest, Sept.8).

* [**The School of Christ**](#) by T. Austin-Sparks is available as a Kindle eBook at Amazon.com

2: An Addendum On Righteousness

Thoughts From Karl Barth's [*The Epistle to the Romans*](#)

Karl Barth writes: *"There are [certain] characteristic features of our relationship to God, as it takes shape on "this side" of resurrection [sanctification]. Our relation to God is ungodly. We suppose that we know what we are saying when we say 'God.' We assign Him the highest place in our world, and in so doing, we place Him fundamentally on one line with ourselves and with things...We press ourselves into proximity with Him, and unthinking, we make Him nigh unto ourselves. We allow ourselves an ordinary communication with Him, we permit ourselves to reckon with Him as though this were not an extraordinary behavior on our part. We dare to deck ourselves out as His companions, patrons, advisers, and commissioners. We confound time with eternity. This is the ungodliness of our relation to God. And our relation to God is unrighteous.*

"Secretly we are ourselves the masters in this relationship. We are not concerned with God, but with our own requirements, to which God must adjust Himself....And so, when we set God upon the throne of the world, we mean by God ourselves. In 'believing' on Him, we justify, enjoy, and adore ourselves. Our devotion consists in a solemn affirmation of ourselves...Under the banners of humility and emotion, we rise up in rebellion against God, such is our relation to God apart from and without Christ on this side of resurrection. God Himself is not acknowledged as God, and what is called 'God' is in fact man. By living to ourselves we serve the 'No-God.'

"Men have imprisoned and encased the truth of the righteousness of God; they have trimmed it to their own measure, and thereby robbed it both of its earnestness and its significance. They have made it ordinary, harmless and useless; and thereby transformed it into untruth. This has all been brought to light by their ungodliness, and this ungodliness will not fail to thrust them into ever new forms of unrighteousness...This is the rebellion which makes it impossible for us to see the new dimensional plane which is the boundary of our world and the meaning of our salvation. Against such rebellion there can only be revealed the wrath of God." (pp.44-45)

And so the light has become in us darkness...Dark, blind, uncritical, capricious, mankind becomes a thing in itself. Heartless, perceiving without observing and therefore empty, thoughtless...and therefore blind is our heart...and soulless in the world. When men do not find themselves within the sphere of the knowledge of the unknown God, when they avoid the true God...This is the cause of the night in which we are wandering: this also is the cause of the Wrath of God which has been manifested over our heads...That God is not known as God is due not merely to some error of thought or to some gap in experience, but to a fundamentally wrong attitude to life. Vanity of mind and blindness of heart inevitably bring into being corrupt conduct (pp.48-9)

3: At the Age of Twelve

At the age of twelve, Jesus is giving us a lesson in the making of a son, and the episode reveals an insight into the definitive principles of sonship that are applicable for sons (and daughters) of God in every generation.

And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. And His parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; And as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. And His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him. And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. And when they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" And they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:40-52).

There is a remarkable conflict between two things here: the legitimate and natural understanding of parents with regard to a son, as against the particular and peculiar calling of a son to be about His Father's business. The reason we have not experienced the kind of conflict that this episode describes is that we have not been as avid and as intense as Jesus in the way that He went about the Father's business.

The parents represent all that is legitimate, natural, sound, and respectable in their concern for the well-being of a lost son, who had somehow disappeared from their sight. On the other hand, Jesus felt not a twinge of conscience to stay behind in the Temple area, where He could dispute and reason with the teachers of the Law. The thing that astonished Him was that His parents did not understand His action: "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" In other words: "Why are you surprised and astonished? Why are you alarmed and concerned?"

He could not fathom that this could be any source of perplexity to them. They did not seem to have the most rudimentary understanding that He had to be in His Father's house, and that He had to be about His Father's business. To Jesus it was as elementary as breathing. This is the jealous insistence that characterizes sons, and will also put them in conflict with the things that are traditional and legitimate. A son has a priority of such a kind, that if necessary, and if it is required, he may have to offend his own Jewish parents.

If we are going to be sons of God, we are inevitably going to be brought into conflict with the things that are legitimate, and that make every just demand upon us. Jesus as a

twelve-year old had to totally ignore that, in order to fulfill the greater passion to be about His Father's business. When His parents found Him, they were amazed, which indicates the depths of the propriety that was offended in a Son, who was failing to observe what are the unchallenged and uncontested values that prevail in the world. He violated something that was almost sacrosanct, namely, the willful knowledge that He would make His parents anxious.

There is a tension between a passionate Son in the insistence that He be in His Father's house as opposed to parents who 'fulfilled' the customary thing and were returning home. The Son had another intention and design. They supposed Him to be in the caravan, but He had a higher priority than their religious and domestic conventions, and a son will always be a threat to those worldly conventions and traditions that intimidate and impede the full response to the Father that sonship requires. The rebuke that came from His mother, full of intimidating matriarchal power, is classic: "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

The intimidation is always aimed toward guilt, and how you have injured them: "Why are You doing this to us? How could you?" The ingredients are timeless, and there always will be this friction and intimidation to keep us away from the full consecration to God that sonship requires. It will not be something carnal that prevents our coming to consecration, but the things that are legitimate and right. There is a certain kind of ruthlessness that sonship requires. The Kingdom of God has a higher priority, and it must, by its nature, always be a cause of offense.

The answer of Jesus is very instructive. In His guileless way, He said: "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" He elevates the urgency of the heavenly over against the earthly, and His astonishment is that they did not know it. There are two fathers here, the earthly and the heavenly, and it is clear who has the higher priority.

The fact that His parents did not understand the statement He had made to them is even more astonishing^{3/4}and is probably the heart of the text. Knowing that they did not understand, and would not likely ever understand, He went down with them to Nazareth. This 'down' is more than just the decline that one experiences from Jerusalem to the flat lands. He went down at the age of twelve. He intuited and understood that sonship, as intense as it is for the glory of God the Father, yet requires a kind of humiliation of an extraordinary kind of having to submit to parents who do not understand, who will not understand, and who cannot understand. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He remained there the next eighteen years. He forfeited the solace and satisfaction that would have been His had His parents been one with Him, and could understand Him.

Jesus submitted Himself to parents who did not understand, and it reveals something of what it means to be a son of God. The heart of why it was that He kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man was because He had obtained the favor of God in going down to Nazareth with His parents. It was not a grudging kind of compliance where He patronized them in a condescending way. In that submission was the key to the elevation of a Son who grew in stature and in favor with God, and it is our key also. God favors that disposition of spirit, for it already prefigures the whole mystery of the Messiah, who laid aside His deity in all the humility that characterized His life and death, and it was

out of that that God exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. There is something in this precious submission to unknowing parents that warms the heart of God. It is the way of God; it reveals the character of God; and to find favor from God is to receive the impetus and the encouragement and the enduing that make for wisdom and growth in stature.

This is the pattern also for our growth and maturity. The very contradiction of not being understood by those closest to us, and the tension of it, are the Divine ingredients that really have a wonderful power to keep us from false spirituality. There is a Nazareth for each one of us³⁴if we would understand and receive it. The willingness to uncomplainingly embrace the thing that seemingly opposes our spiritual desire is at the heart of this incident in the life of Jesus as a boy. This is how one grows in maturity and stature. It is in that tension that God's grace is given, and that makes for the growth of sons. It is the very thing that we have resisted as being contrary to our spirituality, and even draining to our spirituality, and a threat to our spirituality that sons are formed. We want to flee from it, yet it is the very ingredient given by God for the obtaining of true spirituality!

4: Born from Above

I am reading an entry by Oswald Chambers about the birth of Christ:

"His birth in history: 'Therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' [That is the angel's announcement to Mary.] Jesus Christ was born into this world, not from it. He did not evolve out of history; He came into history from the outside. Jesus Christ is not the best human being; He is a Being who cannot be accounted for by the human race at all. He is not man becoming God, but God Incarnate, God coming into human flesh, coming into it from outside. His life is the Highest and Holiest entering in at the lowliest door. Our Lord's birth was an advent.

"He (Jesus) was born in a stable, and it is a debatable question to ask if He will come and have an advent in any person, except in that same way. He will not enter through any other door but the lowliest door, coming in as the Highest. So if we try to open a door to Him from the level of our own superiority or self-esteem, as if we deserve a visitation, He simply will not come. He will only come into a stable, the lowliest place. His advent is a paradigm and a pattern. It is a statement, not just once but always. For every advent of Christ, every birthing, the Highest has got to come into the lowliest, and not just at the commencement of our spiritual life, but at every event and occasion of our spiritual life. If He is to be a participant and bring the Highest, we have got to open to Him the lowliest."

I love the way Chambers writes; leave it to him to strike that great note: *"His life is the Highest and the Holiest entering in at the lowliest door."* He will never enter into a proud place. His birth was remarkable—there was no room for Him at the inn, so they had to employ the expediency of a stable. Then He was laid in a manger. I do not know how many years I went on hearing that as a kid, and then even as a believer, not knowing what a manger was. A manger is a feeding trough for animals. The place where the animals slobbered over their food is where He was laid. It is exquisite if you can see it from the point of view of God's design and the expression, not only of His wisdom, but necessarily of His nature. This is not expediency for the lack of something better; this was God's divine intention from eternity, that His advent would come in such a way, in such lowliness, or it could not come at all. We need to continually be reminded that if we are not experiencing the Highest, then we are not providing the lowliest.

Chambers goes on to ask,

"Have I allowed my personal human life to become a 'Bethlehem' for the Son of God? I cannot enter into the realm of the Kingdom of God unless I am born from above by a birth totally unlike natural birth. 'Ye must be born again.' This is not a command; it is a foundation fact. The characteristic of the new birth is that I yield myself so completely to God that Christ is formed in me. Immediately when Christ is formed in me, His nature begins to work through me. God manifest in the flesh: that is what is made profoundly possible for you and me by the Redemption."

Compare this to the more mainline evangelism, which is more a decisional Christianity. The preacher makes an altar call, the person comes forward, makes a confession, recites a

prayer, and he commences his Christian life. It is a good question whether an actual birth has taken place if it is initiated by man, however well-meaning his intention, however moved he is by the message, however much he now desires to be a Christian or to forsake sin. Can man initiate that birth that has got to be wholly given of God? It is clear that there are untold numbers, maybe millions of people, who have entered Christianity decisionally; it was their decision, but it was not His birthing. It is good to be reminded that this birthing is from above, and we cannot commence this life and obtain this nature, except that it is actually birthed in us. We need to insist upon this divine prerogative, and look for that, and believe for that, and wait for that, and trust in that, and not religiously process people into a kind of evangelical Christianity by virtue of their decision.

I am taking note of Chambers' conclusion here. If that birthing has taken place and is the birthing of the nature of God, the divine nature into an earthly vessel, the incarnation again, then there should be evidence. Such a phenomenon cannot take place without there being some expression, some outworking of that new nature, that divine thing. If one of these decisional Christians has gone on now for 10, 15, 20 or more years and is not showing evidence of the divine nature, notwithstanding the ongoing struggle between flesh and spirit, we need to ask if indeed the new nature has been imparted. If there is no evidence of a new nature, then it is not too extreme to raise the question of whether there has been a new birth. We should even encourage the one who is not evidencing that nature, and is acting contrary to it, to put that question to the Lord: Have I really ever been born from above? If not, Lord, I implore You that that birth might come.

5: Holiness – The High Calling of God in Christ Jesus

Today's selection from Charles Spurgeon's devotional [*Faith's Checkbook*](#) (July 24) smote me in my inner man. It is entitled *Perfect Purity* and is a quote from Revelation 3:5 "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment." And then his statement is:

Warrior of the cross, fight on! Never rest till thy victory is complete; for thine eternal reward will prove worthy of a life of warfare [struggles]. See, here is perfect calling, purity for thee! A few in Sardis kept their garments undefiled, and their recompense is to be spotless. Perfect holiness is the prize of our calling; let us not miss it.

I have never heard anyone else equate perfect holiness as being the mark of the high calling of God. Usually "high calling" would be some final and ultimate expression of ministry in the bringing of the Word, but in Spurgeon's view, which we need to soberly consider, the issue of high calling is the issue of holiness. "Perfect holiness" sounds like a redundancy; if it is not perfect it is not holy. If there is any imperfection, holiness is invalidated. That is just the nature of it. To be holy implies something perfect, and that is why it is a struggle to obtain this completion, this perfection.

Spurgeon continues:

See, here is joy! Thou shalt wear holiday robes, such as men put on at wedding feasts; thou shalt be clothed with gladness, and be made bright with rejoicing. Painful struggles shall end in peace of conscience and joy in the Lord.

Do you notice the adjectives he uses: joy, gladness, bright with rejoicing, peace of conscience and joy in the Lord? I wonder if he was even conscious of what he was composing, but he touched on all the inexorable signs of holiness, namely, joy, perfect peace of conscience, rejoicing and gladness of heart. In other words, something accompanies this condition of heart when it is finally attested and attained in the life of a believer.

Let's take joy. The attempt charismatically to obtain joy through feigned and manipulative means is the cheap effort to obtain what can only be obtained through holiness. When your mind, your heart, your thoughts, your dispositions and your motives are righteous, you have come to a certain place by the sanctifying work of God where the joy and the peace of the Lord set in. It is a remarkable state of being, and this is what I believe Spurgeon is getting at here. This is not euphoric writing or Spurgeon taking his literary liberties; he is one of a smaller company of souls who have known this and who can therefore write out of the reality of his own life.

Maybe he had the advantage of being saved at the age of fifteen. He did not have to overcome years of dissolute living, in sex and drugs and alcohol; he came virtually as an unblemished young man, and yet, he was still convicted deeply of sin. His whole Christian life had brought him to a place where he could make a statement like that. He is making a case for the issue of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus as being the issue of perfect holiness. For when it will come, here will be the signs:

He says *here is joy*. Something happens when there is the joy of the Lord. You have overcome and come to a place of union with the Lord Himself where you can be "clothed

with gladness." None of those nagging things that cloud our joy or rob our gladness will be there to function. They will have been taken care of in the process of the struggle of overcoming. The mind battles, the questionable motives, the evidences that we are not in the right place will be gone. We will be able to say, in some measure, with Jesus, "The prince of this world has come but he finds nothing in me." There is nothing that he can single out, a habit, a disposition of heart or mind or spirit that is critical, or jealous or envious or fretful or anxious. When we attain to that, there is a joy, a tremendous peace and a gladness, and we shall be made bright with rejoicing.

He speaks of vessels of brightness – a continual brightness where there is no sullenness or moodiness. *"...and be made bright with rejoicing. Painful struggles shall end..."* because the purpose of the painful struggle was your sanctification. The struggle is between the flesh and Spirit, but the contest is now over, the Spirit has prevailed, the Lord has given you a white garment. "The painful struggle shall end in peace of conscience." Paul speaks of having a conscience undefiled before God and before men. When you've covered both those bases, there is no other base to consider. If your conscience is clear and free between men and God, there is no issue with God and no issue with men; you are walking with impeccable righteousness. Then the struggle has ended. And there WILL be a struggle until you come to that end, but only if you are serious about this. If you are not serious about this, and in fact, you find it normative to be moody and sullen, or live on the periphery of Christian life as an inactive participant, then there will be no struggle for you. It is only a struggle for those who want a garment, who want to be at the wedding. They want to be a privileged guest; they want to enjoy a conscience free and clear from all blemishes and from inward conflict of motive and from all self-seeking. They have walked this out with God; they have fought this out; the Lord has allowed the enemy to play upon the flesh, but they are fighting that problem through; they are not making their peace with it; they are not compromising and learning to live with it; they are fighting the good fight because they are concerned to attain to that place in the Lord of triumphant victory; they are willing for the pain of the struggle. But it ends in peace of conscience and the joy of the Lord. Can you imagine a church like that? Imagine its witness both to the Jewish community and to the Greek. Just the presence of such a people will be validated by the brightness out of which the testimony comes.

See, here is victory! Thou shalt have thy triumph. Palm, and crown, and white robes shall be thy recompense; thou shalt be treated as a conqueror, and owned as such by the Lord Himself. See, here is priestly array! Thou shalt stand before the Lord in such raiment as the sons of Aaron wore; thou shalt offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving and draw near unto the Lord with incense of praise.

I think it came up once in the class that the Levites are okay for the outer court. They can toss the sacrifice and hack the animals and deal with the public. But only the Zadok priesthood can minister unto the Lord in the holy place. The others are okay for the outer court, but the Zadokite priests, those who have kept their garments so to speak are the ones that shall draw near to the Lord.

Who would not fight for a Lord who gives such large honors to the very least of His faithful servants?

Now this is an interesting thing: "Least of His faithful servants." Here is a challenge that is put before the whole welter of the entire body of Christ. No man is excluded in the possibility of the Zadokite priestliness because of lack of right upbringing or unhappy circumstances of life or lack of character or lack of parentage or heredity or environment. There is no excuse. Any believer can obtain to this if he is willing for the struggle. So Spurgeon concludes:

Who would not fight for a Lord who gives such large honors? Who would not be clothed in a fool's coat for Christ's sake, seeing He will robe us with glory?

Spurgeon is saying that if you are going to take this seriously, you are going to be looked upon as a fool. You are making yourself a candidate not only of the opposition of the powers of darkness, but even for the ridicule of the saints who are content with something much less. Such will always find ways to flaunt and to taunt. If you are willing presently to put on the fool's garment, you will be ultimately and eternally robed with glory.

6: On Adolescence

Generalities inspired by Eugene Peterson's devotional April 30: *Adolescence is a Gift*.

At what stage is the church-at-large presently? Infancy is the discovery of itself in thumb-sucking egocentricity and fascination over its own body and that which supplies it. Adolescence is the awareness of "deeper [biologically] currents" from within and the excitement of things without that gratify new longings. A new awareness also of a larger world and a desire for significance and recognition within it in the meaning of one's own person. An intensive relationship with peers at the expense of parents whose authority now is questioned if not rejected, as is that of the adult world itself. A delight in one's own opinions and the ability to form them as constituting the definitive truth of a matter. A remarkable skill in "lawyer-type" argumentation that stupefies and silences parents and gives suggestion of a wit whose source is supernatural, but is not God's.

A time of indulgence of appetites for "junk" food and sugar-coated things without regard for health or body which seem to them invincible and not lacking in energy. Characteristically loud, lazy, undisciplined, self-indulgent, headstrong in enthusiasms, fickle and changing in affections and loyalties, inexplicable in moodiness from depression to elation.

Generally contemptuous of substantial authority figures while adulating the scummiest of subculture heroes as objects of swooning adulation and near worship. Late hours, much sleeping-in, messy rooms, trails of towels and clothing left on the floor to be picked up by mother or climbed over to reach one's bed! Inordinate attention to one's complexion, hair, body and appearance. A studied and affected "poverty" of ragged sloppiness whose factory-torn jeans and other accoutrements command an exorbitant price. Easily manipulated by current fads to the point where one would rather be seen dead than not be seen in them.

Shallow and opinionated, with long intensive hours on the telephone to peers and no more than monosyllabic grunts to teachers or parents. Capable of profuse emotion, sympathies, excessive kindness and cruelty. Self-justifying and incapable of reproof and admonition. Not disposed to receive instruction or correction. More disposed to talk than to listen. Easily hurt, offended, slighted, agitated, misunderstood, unfairly accused, and whose favorite phrase is: "It's not fair." Full of turbulence and discord with every petty thing heightened and exaggerated and every redemptive thing slighted, rejected or ignored.

A painful season enough in teen years but tragic when protracted into adulthood. What is the spiritual correspondence to this as it is found in the body of Christ? What solution?

7: One Thing You Lack

"A certain ruler" (Luke 18:18), rich, accomplished, noble, Torah observant, full of "great possessions" asked Him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" That question is undeniably great—not only as the question of what lies beyond death, but for our purposes, the critical enablement for a sustaining, overcoming, last days' life of discipleship, service and worship.

It is the same life of which Jesus spoke when he said "I have come to bring you life and that more abundantly." It is the indescribably precious life of God Himself, and it is evidently not given until we also comply with the same requirement made of him: "sell whatsoever thou hast." For whatsoever we have, however accomplished, is of man and keeps us from an absolute reliance on Jesus for our life. That 'whatsoever' is inclusive of our spiritual insights, ministerial ability and even the best of our motives in serving the purposes of God. What we have not fully grasped is that "there is none good but God." Oswald Chambers (My Utmost for His Highest, September 28) writes, "*The only 'good thing' from Jesus Christ's point of view is union with Himself and nothing in between*" (my emphasis).

"What must I do..." indicates the premium this young ruler puts upon man. Do we know what it means to relinquish, let go, abdicate, cease from ourselves, surrender, renounce, and abandon ourselves to the Lord? There is that 'one thing' we lack, and when that is deficient everything is inadequate! Therefore, "go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast"—talent, ambition, spiritual attainment, commendable preaching style—what-so-ever! And thou shalt have treasure in heaven, exceeding the best we have known, that waits upon this totality of renunciation that few are willing to make! Therefore, we don't enter into the Kingdom, that heavenly dimension of reality and authority, though we prattle about it profusely, because we "trust in our riches"—make them our confidence and our dependence. The eye of the Lord is fixed upon us, beholding us and loving us as He did him; "and Jesus looking upon them saith, with man it is impossible—but not with God"! When will we really believe Him? "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

He yearns for the infusion of His Life for us that comes with union with Himself:

The believer can each day be pleasing to God only in that which he does through the power of Christ dwelling in him. The daily inflowing of the life sap of the Holy spirit is his only power to bring forth [enduring and eternal] fruit...That same Spirit that dwelled and still dwells in the Son becomes the life of the believer; in the unity of that one Spirit and the fellowship of the same life that is in Christ...it is a life union that makes them one (from Andrew Murray's [Abide in Christ](#), p.36).

This is that Shalom spoken of in Hebrews: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (4:9)—that ultimate hallmark of biblical faith to which too few have come. This is that spoken by Jesus, "If any man come to me and hate not his father, mother, and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26)! You (preachers especially) must "sell all" you have; your impressive soulful verve, your picturesque affectations, your calculated stylisms—all that comprises your "riches"—your own life also, if you would follow Him in the same totality by which He followed the Father, taking up the cross. Murray enjoins us to "meditate on this until your

soul bows to worship in the presence of [this] mystery”—it is that very act of bowing that breaks the soulish powers that have had too long sway. Here perfect union between Christ and the believer is found.

8: Righteousness in the Old Testament

An article with innumerable quotes from *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* pp.80-85, E.R. Achtemeier, and liberally interspersed with thoughts from Art Katz.

Righteousness as understood in the OT (Old Testament) is a thoroughly Hebraic concept, foreign to the western mind and at variance with the common understanding of the term. The failure to comprehend its meaning is perhaps most responsible for the view of OT religion as "legalistic"...but thanks largely to recent German scholarship, this important motif of biblical faith has been clarified.

Righteousness is not a behavior that is in accordance with an ethical, legal, psychological, religious, or spiritual norm; neither is it conduct that is dictated by human or divine nature. It is not an action appropriate to the attainment of a specific goal; neither is it a ministry to one's fellow man. Rather, righteousness in the OT is the fulfillment of the demands of a relationship, whether that relationship be with men or with God...Each of these relationships brings with it specific demands, the fulfillment of which constitutes righteousness...There is no norm of righteousness outside the relationship itself. When God or man fulfills the conditions imposed upon him by the relationship, he is, in OT terms, righteous.

Etymology: "Tzadik" means "straightness or "firmness." It is employed for justice, right, equity, uprightness; a concept of relationship that he who is righteous has fulfilled in the demands laid upon him by it. David was righteous because he refused to slay Saul with whom he stood in covenant relationship (I Sam.24:17; 26:23).

Generally, the righteous man in Israel was the man who preserved the peace and wholeness of the community, because it was he who [preserved] fulfilled the demands of communal living. Like Job, he was a blessing to his contemporaries. He cared for the poor, the fatherless, the widow...even defending their cause in the law court (29:16; 31:21; Prov. 31:9)...He was a good steward of his land and work animals...and his servants were treated humanely...he lived at peace with his neighbors, wishing them only good...When he was in authority the people rejoiced, and he exalted the nation (Prov.14:34). He lived in peace and prosperity because he upheld the peace and prosperity. He upheld the physical and psychical wholeness of his community by fulfilling the demands of the communal covenant relationship (Cf. Ps.15:2-5; Isa.33:15).

For this reason, Tzadik (righteousness) sometimes stands parallel with shalom, "prosperity" (Prov.8:18). At other times, it stands for "truth," for right speech, which upheld the covenant relationships existing within a community (Isa.59:4; 45:19) it is. The "wicked" rasha who exercises force and falsehood, who ignores the duties which kinship and covenant lay upon him, who tramples the rights of others...with whom he stands in relationship...destroys the community itself.

Righteousness is the fulfillment of community demands, and righteous judgments are those which restore community (Ps. 82:3; Prov.17:15). Thus the constant plea of the prophets is for righteousness within the gate, for a restoration of the foundations of community life (Jer.22:3, 15; Ps.72:2). In such contexts there is no difference between ethical and legal standards. They are one...The king's covenant duty was to preserve righteousness, and in so doing, he himself was righteous. When the Messiah comes His Kingdom will prosper through

righteous judgments (Isa.9:7; 11:3-5; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-16). Yahweh's station within the covenant relationship was that of Lord...its initiator, its defender, its preserver. He alone upheld it. Only He could break it. Israel could reject her God and thereby bring His wrath upon her, but she could not escape her relationship with God...God initiated the covenant. He alone could nullify it (cf. Ps.89:28-37). Yahweh was not dependent upon her righteousness...Yahweh had chosen her; that was the basic fact of her existence. All else followed after.

Thus in the OT there is nothing legalistic about this relationship with her God. It is not based on law but grace, on Yahweh's loving choice...as his peculiar treasure; a relationship received with joy and gratitude...Celebration, joyfulness and praise – these are the primary notes of Hebrew faith. Within this relationship of grace, law is given as a guide by God to his covenant people...as also an act of his grace, for all the people of the earth. He who does not in faith accept the context of the law, the Lordship of Yahweh, cannot be righteous...The relationship to Yahweh, the relationship of faith, is primary. This is evidenced in the law itself providing [as it does] for a day of atonement (Lev.16) ... [so that there is] a constant provision for restoration of right relationship with God and with community.

The OT equivalents unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit as rebellion against His lordship, lack of repentance, faithlessness, the failure to acknowledge Yahweh's lordship in humility and repentance and the failure to accept in faith his provision for restoration to communion with Him. For they constitute a faithless rejection of Yahweh's grace, and the law without grace is useless. Faith [i.e., the recognition of God's grace in the giving of the law and the enablement for its keeping] is the fulfillment of the relationship to Yahweh and is thereby righteousness. Yahweh is righteous...the witness to God's person as He reveals Himself in his actions...not in works that conform to some norm or standard of right outside and above Him...Yahweh's righteousness is His fulfillment of the demands of the relationship which exists between Him and His people Israel; His fulfillment of the covenant which He has made with the chosen nation...Only he who stood within the covenant could speak of Yahweh as righteous...The purpose of His judgment[s] is the preservation of community, of His covenant with Israel (Ps.89:94).

Thus Israel constantly appeals to Yahweh's righteousness for deliverance from trouble (Ps.31:188:12;143:11), from enemies (Ps.5:8; 143:1), from the wicked, for vindication of her cause before her foes (Ps.35:24). His righteousness consists in His intervention for His people, in His deliverance of Zion (Ps.50:15; 102; Isa.35; 54:14-17). [The church's identification (Ps.102) and participation (Isa.35; Ro.11:25b), the statement of their righteousness, are the key to Israel's final redemption! In short, Yahweh's righteous judgments are saving judgments (Ps.36:6), "a righteous God and a Savior" (Isa.45:21). Yahweh's salvation of Israel is His righteousness, His fulfillment of His covenant with her! Israel's righteousness consists in the fact that she is oppressed or afflicted and deprived of her right (Isa.54:14). Those who are righteous are those who are victims of oppressors...of violent men (Ps.140:13). And their hope is the Lord...who saves those who are bowed down (Pss.116:6; 146:8). His judgments always favor the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoner and the blind, the widow and the fatherless, the alien and the poor (Amos 2:6).

These facts seem strange that often in the OT he who is called "*tzadik*" is at the same time sinful. The OT consistently portrays Israel's persistent sin before God. Ps.143:2 declares

that "no man living is righteous before Him." The Psalmists witness to God's salvation despite their sinfulness...and unhesitatingly number themselves among the righteous. For Yahweh's righteousness is the source of their forgiveness (Ps.51:14; 103:11-12,17)! His righteousness consists not in ethical or moral blamelessness. He often openly confesses his transgressions. The poor and the oppressed have a further righteousness, and this righteousness is their faith, their fulfillment of their relationship with Yahweh...characterized by a complete dependence upon God. They trust in Yahweh, crying to Him in their distress, bowing before His judgments (Ps.94:12; 118:18), acknowledging their sin, offering to him a broken and a contrite heart (Ps.51:17). Such faith is the righteousness of the afflicted. Because she repents of her sin she throws herself upon His mercy (Isa.1:27-28; Ps.37:39-40). Her faith is the fulfillment of her relationship with Yahweh...not because of her merit or moral blamelessness, but because she believes God is her refuge. He alone is righteous who has had righteousness imputed to him. In this sense, righteousness is justification by Him, a "being-declared-righteousness" by the Lord of the covenant (Isa.60:21)!

Those judgments that bring salvation to Israel at the same time bring destruction upon her foes (Isa.11:4; 61:1-2; Hab.3:12-13; Mal.4; Hag.2:22-23; Zeph.2:8; Zech.14). In the Day of the Lord, His vengeance and righteousness go hand in hand. When Yahweh saves, He also recompenses (Isa.35:4; 40:10; 62:11). However, Yahweh's righteousness is never solely an act of condemnation and punishment...His punishment is an integral part of His restoration...His righteousness is His restoration! The gift of such righteousness is announced in the great eschatological witness of Deutero-Isaiah. Israel is a sinful folk, sunk in idolatry (44:9-20;50:11), full of transgressions (53:5-6,8,11), who is unable to confess her God rightly (48:1), who has burdened Him with her evil (43:24), who has refused to call upon her Savior (43:22). For this reason Yahweh has given her into the hand of her captors (42:24-25; 47:6) to suffer double punishment for her sins (40:1), to drink the full measure of the wrath of the Lord (51:17-20), to be refined in the furnace of affliction (48:9-11), and to be bruised (53:10) and forsaken (54:7-8).

And in the middle of her exile, Israel thinks herself to be lost, her way hidden from the Lord (40:27), rejected forever (49:14;50:1)...But Deutero-Isaiah's glad message is that the covenant still stands. Yahweh cannot forget His child...He has not divorced His wife Israel (50:1;cf.54:5-6). His relationship with His people endures. His word, His promise and agreement stand forever (40:8;55:11). This is Israel's hope! ...If she seeks deliverance, let her look to the Rock from which she was hewn, to the promise to Abraham and the covenant with the fathers (51:18). There is Israel's hope. For the word of the Lord endures forever. Without such a word Israel has no hope, for she has no righteousness of her own...she has no faith and therefore ultimately no righteousness of her own but Yahweh will save Israel, for Yahweh has chosen her!

His covenant stands despite Israel's unfaithfulness. God intervenes for the cause of his afflicted folk before all the peoples of the earth (51:22). He will deliver her from exile (43:14), He will forgive her sin (43:25; 44:22 cf. 54:9), He will care for her as a shepherd cares for his flock [i.e., Abel, David] (40:11). In short, Yahweh will fulfill the demands of the covenant...He will do so by justifying Israel, by imputing righteousness to her who has no righteousness...and this will be Israel's righteousness before all the world (50:9 cf.52:13-53:12). In God's righteousness Israel will be established (54:14; 45:24-25), "for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

9: Some Thoughts on Romans 10

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" —that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved (8, 9).

Both the issue of believing "unto righteousness" (v.10) and confessing Jesus as Lord "resulting in salvation" is the truth of His resurrection. For by his resurrection the Father in raising Him from death attests to His acceptance of that sacrifice as fulfilling every requirement as propitiation unto righteousness. That exaltation in being raised is the statement of the Father's acceptance of the son's humiliation [a foundational principle that underlies every subsequent action of the Church performed in His name in power!].

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:8-11).

"Calling on the name of the Lord" is no glib incantation, some vocalization to which someone may be coaxed or some mindless 'decision' made. It is the taking for one's self the absoluteness of the Lordship of Christ in the forfeiting henceforth of all personal autonomy over one's own life. Is it any wonder then that we see so little evidence of this transaction in the multitudes professing to be 'saved'? That is why He must necessarily be 'alive', that is, raised from the dead so as to exercise that Lordship or the transaction is fraudulent and vain!

And all this to be required of the till then unbelieving Jew? The whole phenomenon of belief and confession after millennia of obdurate rejection must itself be by resurrection power! We as Jews personify the skeptical, unbelieving character of the modern rational and empirical mind! Resurrection, by its very nature, is the supreme calculated offense to human incredulity! It will take the very power of resurrection to overcome every resistance to its truth and that only as it is demonstrated and exemplified in those who preach! "Just as believing is logically prior to calling, so hearing is logically prior to believing. What kind of hearing, however?"

Stott argues, that "unless they hear him, they will not believe the truths of his death and resurrection". In a word, Christ is so formed and present in the preacher, so much the issue of the preacher's own life, message, voice and being that to hear him is to hear the resurrected Christ all the more as the words are not that of the speaker but His! In that, is His Lordship attested in the submission of the preacher not to speak his own words or formula for salvation but that of the Risen Lord himself! Little wonder that in the text of Isaiah 62 from which in v.7 Paul draws "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news" do we read in the verse that precedes it:

Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day I Am the one who is speaking, Here I Am.

The one who "announces" peace, "announces" salvation in fact pronounces it, that is, establishes their reality as event by his speaking for in being a "sent" one those who receive him receive Him who sent him (Mt. 18:4; Mark 9:37). Furthermore in speaking Christ's own words and not his own, the messenger in his obedience attests to the fact that "Your God reigns". Even though his hearer is unaware that an obedience is being rendered, still the spirit of Jesus' Lordship is being attested and confirmed! So it is not only the words of the servant but his servanthood itself that testifies that Jesus is Lord!

Israel unbeknownst to themselves waits upon such "sent" ones; but what do the sent ones themselves wait? Nothing less than that which constitutes apostolic sending, namely an expression of the body constitutive of that reality as typified by Antioch in the first instance of such a sending in Acts 13. Here again, in the mystery of God, the issue of Israel's restoration is the issue of the Church, but Church of an ultimate kind. Until such preaching comes, until such preachers can be sent, how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard and how shall they call except they believe? And what are the eschatological implications if they don't?

We are not talking here only about the issue of salvation for yet another ethnic group nor even the long-desired redemption of Israel per se, however justly and passionately desired, but of the fulfillment of God's redemptive program for very creation itself, the cosmic implications of His coming and Kingdom that hinges entirely upon Israel's restoration! Israel is inert and is acted upon as we ourselves once were dead in our transgressions and trespasses. The whole premium rests upon the "word of faith" which we preach as sent ones, messengers, who are ourselves the evidence of His resurrection, ascension and authority and speak exclusively out of the power that raised Jesus from the dead!

So long as resurrection remains for us merely an article of faith and creedal affirmation, so long does Israel continue to remain in the unbelief of death. So long as we are unwilling for the sacrifices of self-denial of cruciform lifestyle that alone fashions apostolic bodies out of charismatic-evangelical fellowships, their death remains. It is more than a 'formula' for salvation that Israel requires [where in fact have they even heard that?]. Not only Israel's ages-long apostasy but her prominent position relative to the powers of darkness as central and brilliant in promulgating, explicating and promoting its worldly 'wisdom' makes that people especially difficult and resistant to the message of a competing Kingdom. All hell strains to keep them subservient to the kingdom of darkness where the remarkable gifting of this nation, subversive of their endowment, serves its interests. To touch the Jew in the power of the Spirit is to confront the powers of darkness at their nexus. Therefore, do they of all peoples require the demonstration of apostolic authority described above and for which reason, the priority of God "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" makes preeminent sense!

Again, it is the issue of the Jew that compels the Church to become the Church. For in becoming the Church, Israel becomes Israel and God (becomes) God to a long God-rejecting world! May our faith for this come by our hearing, and our hearing by the word of Christ. For "of Him, and to Him, and through Him, be all things to whom be glory forever. Amen."

10: Some Thoughts on the Nature of Sin

As Karl Barth noted, “the very fact that we are sinners incapacitates us to recognizing ourselves as sinners.” We are not in a position to estimate and evaluate our own condition. Therefore, if there is going to be any revelation and understanding of the truth of our condition, both as individuals and as a nation, then it has got to come from a source outside of our own subjectivity. We need categories that have not been ours, and they are not categories that a sinful man will naturally seek.

Sin is the transgression of the Law, but not in some narrow, legal sense of failing to comply with the legal requirements. The Law is the summation of God; it is what He is in His righteousness as is expressed through His ordinance and commandments. To transgress His commandments is to transgress God. We are not talking of simply running a red traffic light. A commandment is a statement of God, and it encapsulates all that God is—His mercy, goodness, wisdom, righteousness, etc. These are all caught up in the words, “Thou shall not...” To disobey the Law’s requirement is an astonishing affront against God; it is the repudiation of His authority.

For God to allow sin to go unrecognized, and for Him not to respond to it, renders Him ‘non-God’—certainly not a God who is holy and righteous. It is not that He is an egotist requiring that recognition, but what would be the consequence for mankind if God were not God? And if man is going to see himself as a sinner, then something is required, namely, a confrontation with God as God in His majesty and awesome proportions. That revelation is alone contained and given at the crucifixion of Jesus, at the place where our unbelief refuses to consider it. It is there, in the depth of darkness and judgment, that the revelation of man as sinner is given.

One distinctive of sin is its ability to cover its own tracks. In other words, it does not reveal itself as sin, and that is how perverse the essence of sin is. That is also why it takes something from God to reveal the nature of sin, and if we reject that revelation, we will remain in an unhappy condition. God has employed the statement of His judgment as it was visited upon His own Son as being the revelation of the nature of sin. Sin deserves judgment, and that judgment found its victim in God’s own Son. There is no way to know the exceeding sinfulness of sin except by the means required to expiate it, namely, what it cost God to requite it. Sin is everything calculated against God—in spirit, in tone, in attitude and disposition, and we indulge ourselves in unbelief to defiantly reject the character of God in the statement He has given concerning sin.

When we come to the utter, abject sense of total hopelessness, total futility and total helplessness of anything that we can effect in ourselves or by ourselves, then we have come and are coming to a deeper and truer knowledge of God and ourselves. If we want to know God, then we have got to know Him in His judgments. If we want to see His judgment, then look the Crucifixion of Jesus. That is God judging, and if we do not see God there, we do not see in any true way. If we have complaint about seeing God there, it is the testimony that what He says of our condition is true.

11: The Lord's Coming in the Clouds

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see The Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory (Mk. 13:24-26).

Without in any way questioning the literalness of this eschatological glory, I suspect, as is often the case, that it contains an allegorical and spiritual meaning as well perhaps a necessary principle pertaining to the coming of any revelation of the Lord in fullness: namely, a 'coming' or revelation of the Lord that must, somehow of necessity, be preceded or accompanied by 'clouds.'

But 'clouds' of what kind? Oswald Chambers in his July 29th selection (*My Utmost for His Highest*) suggests that except He come in clouds there cannot be a 'coming'. That somehow such a glory requires a shrouding, that "God cannot come near without clouds, He does not come in clear shining." For him the clouds are suggestive of "sorrow, bereavement and suffering" and "If there were no clouds, we should not have [true] faith."

Is this not suggested in the "darkness over the whole land" (Mk. 15:33) at the crucifixion of Jesus? Luke's gospel describes it as "darkness over all the earth...then the sun was darkened" (obscured margin, 23:44-45. See Gen. 28:11 for when "the sun had set" on Jacob!). Indescribably horrible as that pitiable scene was, it was also at the same time an ultimate revelation of God in both judgment and mercy as He in fact is and not as men had supposed Him to be. Therefore a 'coming' in such fullness must necessarily be shrouded in "sorrow, bereavement and suffering." Is this why Jurgen Moltmann in his book, *The Crucified God*, cites the maxim that "True faith begins where the atheist thinks it should end", i.e., in the mind-boggling contradiction of all we thought to be true about God?

Is that not in fact what may have been divinely intended for Israel through the stupefying darkness of her recent Holocaust? Chambers writes,

There is a connection between the strange providences of God and what we know of Him...Unless we can look the darkest, blackest fact full in the face without damaging God's character, we do not yet know Him.

That is, something is reserved in the knowledge of Him that can only be obtained in the "cloud" of sorrow, bereavement and suffering. But note, not a bereavement or sorrow for the loss of life only, but for the irretrievable loss of one's cherished concept of God, of time-honored religious verities that perish in the furnace of the unthinkable.

If so, was God not judging at Auschwitz (and at all previous calamities) the inadequacy of Jewish 'faith' (to whatever degree it in fact authentically existed or could exist independent of the revelation of the Holy One of Israel)? a 'faith' sufficient for Jewish existence perhaps, for its cultural identity and religious need, but falling far short and in opposition to that saving knowledge of Himself forfeited in the rejection of the Crucified Christ? A pre-Holocaust religious orthodoxy of the kind whose passing Elie Wiesel lamented which having served his youthful idealism collapsed, as it did for Richard Rubenstein (After Auschwitz) as

for many (and never to be recovered), with the dark clouds of the Nazi time and in the anguish which followed.

Instead of the "clear shining" in which God comes, as it were, through the clouds, Israel (not unlike the Church today) satisfied itself with banal sentimentality, rabbinical constructs or a reformed liberal Judaism of a more rational kind in keeping with the secular temper of the pre-world war bourgeois society (embarrassed as we were by the supernaturalism of the Scriptures!). *Yiddishkeit*, folkloric adages and ethical and moral prescriptions, however endearing to men and hallowed by usage cannot substitute for the knowledge of God in righteousness, a knowledge which alone dispels all those idolatries dear to men which serve their purposes in freeing them from the radical requirements of a living God. "O that they might know Me" is ever the cry of God through the prophets, whom to know is life eternal!

Was not Moses required to enter such a cloud and to remain in it for six days (the number of man) before being called up into the very presence of God shrouded until the seventh day?

"Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud." (Ex. 24:15-16).

Of the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration, it says of them (Luke 9:34) "and they were fearful as they entered the cloud." Characteristically, Peter, symbolic of the Church at large, opts to institutionalize the moment in making three booths, "not knowing what he said." So also with ourselves, I would suggest, full of prattle about God whom we do not know as we ought and often serve mistakenly out of an immaturity and carnal zeal. It is only out of the cloud that came over them, "that they saw no man, [even their own seeing] but Jesus only" glorified (Mt. 17:8).

"They feared as they entered the cloud" and rightly so the very fear so conspicuously absent from the contemporary Church that has inevitably trivialized God for the want of it. But how many will balk from entering because of it? The heart of the matter, I suspect, is the fear not of God, but of that loss of the comfortable 'sense of God' fashioned according to our own measure and contingent upon our view of ourselves, our ministries, our categories, of reality itself as we perceive it and would have it to be understood. How many will not enter the cloud for reasons of that kind and compelling God therefore to bring them involuntarily in to the darker, more ominous clouds of inflicted terror and bewilderment? How much, for that reason, is that yet Israel's necessary future experience (Jer. 30-31) and equally that of an escapist Church itself?

Conclusion

For Israel, then, the 'cloud of His Coming' is in their final tribulation. For the Church, is it not the entering into the revelation of God through the stupefying consideration of and identification with Israel's sufferings both her past and yet future Holocaust as being the statement of His mind-numbing judgment—His necessary, justifiable and not at all arbitrary judgment? Will that not be as transfiguring for us as the cloud on the mount when both the Law and the Prophets, co-joined together in Moses and Elijah, "appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31) and would now speak of Israel's and in the same place? We must not especially as friends of Israel balk at

the entering into these 'dark clouds' of dread consideration. The issue of God as God is at stake and the making of Him known as saving God to as many as will before "those days" and "that tribulation" by which alone they will then see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mk. 13:24,26) to their inexpressible joy and not their dismay.

12: Virtue, Power and Healing

The gospel of Mark chapter 5 has intrigued me for the longest time, and something was finally stirred in me that I want to share. It is the episode of the woman with the internal bleeding that no physician was able to heal, but she had a faith to believe that:

"If I am touched by His clothes, I shall be whole." And straight away her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague, and Jesus immediately knowing within Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned about and said, "Who touched My clothes?" And His disciples said unto Him, "Thou seest the multitude thronging to Thee and sayest Thou, 'Who touched Me?'" And He looked round about to see who had done this thing, but the woman, fearing in trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him and told Him all the truth. And He said unto her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace and be whole at thy place."

The thing that intrigues me is the word virtue. Maybe it is an archaic word, used in the times of the King James translators as a synonym for power, but today the word virtue has to do with things ethical and moral. I am wondering if the use of the word is more than just an accident of time and language. Other accounts use the word power. In this translation, the word is virtue, but power is relative to virtue, because Jesus felt something go out of Him. This implies that it is not a fixed, static amount that He bears at all times, being the Son of God, but it is relative. As it goes out, it equally comes in. She took a measure of that power by touching just the outer garment. This led me to consider that maybe there is a conjunction between virtue and power and that the amount of power for healing, in us as in Him, is relative to the proportion of virtue in which we walk.

I even looked up the word in the concordance and in the thesaurus, and it helps to amplify what I am trying to share. The dictionary speaks of moral excellence, perfection, integrity, innocence, honor, saintliness, holiness, virtuous conduct. In other words, virtue means nothing unless it is expressed in conduct. Virtue is an act; it is what you do, how you respond to moral questions that are before you. Virtuous responses build something in a person. Jesus is the pattern Son. Everything that He had access to by virtue of being the Son is what we have access to. By our own moral response to issues that come before us, we have the same opportunity to acquire power as we perform or express virtue.

He felt something go out of Him; therefore, something must have come into Him. When did it come in? I am suggesting, and willing to explore, that it came in with His virtue, with His acts of righteousness and integrity. We are encouraged to practice virtue and resist or rise above temptation, to overcome, to discharge one's obligation, follow one's conscience, to walk humbly with our God. We are continually being charged in the scriptures to a certain conduct, a certain performance, a certain doing. That is virtue.

For myself, I am much more comfortable to think that the release of power is in exact proportion to conduct and character. I have never felt comfortable with the 'magical' charismatic thing that some man performs as the supposed "man of faith and power." In fact, we are learning, to our astonishment, that some of the most uplifted men of our time are now falling in alcoholism and homosexuality, and they are even unwilling to be disciplined for that sin and continue in it. Yet, they were, only months prior, called the

“oracle of the hour.” They impressed people by their power, their charismatic demonstration, but completely out of proportion to character. If I know anything about God, I cannot believe He would allow power to be obtained or expressed independent of character. It would be reckless, and not in keeping with Himself.

Therefore, the Son of God in the earth, as our pattern Son, had to show what the basis for power is. There is a world that needs to be healed, whose blood has not been staunched, and no physician can heal it. It has got to touch the power that is of God, as it is carried in earthen vessels, but only in earthen vessels who have acquired that power in proportion to their virtue, their conduct, and to their right moral responses to the occasions that are before them, just as Jesus did in His walk.

Chambers, of course, always has something to say about the necessity to maintain the spiritual life. He is talking here about health and maintaining a vigorous mental life: “If I want to maintain a vigorous mental life, I have to fight, and in that way, the mental balance called thought is produced.” Even in thought life, there is a struggle for virtue itself. Thinking itself is an exercise and a doing and an exertion. That is why I so much admire theologians, exegetes who exert themselves to struggle through texts and to understand them in the original languages and compare other editions or read what others have said. They exercise their minds through deliberations that bless the rest of the church.

Then, Chambers says, “Morally it is the same. Everything that does not partake of the nature of virtue is the enemy of virtue in me, and it depends on what moral caliber I have [or you could say, what moral caliber you exert] whether I overcome and produce virtue.” Is that not interesting, that he should talk in those lines? Evidently, Chambers thinks along these lines, and I am putting this out for consideration, or for further illumination, because it is a remarkable line of thought—that power is not some kind of isolated thing that takes place magically, but it is given and developed in proportion to virtue. It takes power to be virtuous. It takes the grace of God to act rightly in a world that is inhospitable to righteousness and is contrary to God. That grace is the life of God, and that life is the power of God. Somehow when you receive it in your act of virtue and obedience to God, contrary to what is convenient, it is not only a grace given for the power to act in that moment, but something evidently is retained by the grace that is given and becomes cumulative. Something went out from Jesus that had been built up as a kind of residue from walking in righteousness.

Even if I am wrong in these assumptions, it would not hurt the church to think that this is the way in which power is to be obtained, and to put the emphasis on character rather than power. Power is the consequence of character, not an alternative to it. I may be going out again on a plank, as it were, but this is a fresh sense of something that I have never heard articulated by anyone. But if it is God, then it is critical in this charismatic age to put the emphasis where it rightly belongs: on character and virtue. Virtue is an act, and it is a moral act, an act of free choice. We can choose it, but to perform it requires grace, and grace is the life of God, and the life of God is the power of God.

God is in us in proportion to the quality of our walk. It is not automatic, and it is not fixed. If something went out, and He could measure it, then something comes in. We need to consciously grow in virtue, to grow in power, to grow in authority, to grow in the ability to heal by touch and by word. Power is the key, but the key to power is character, and the

key to character is virtue, choosing and acting rightly, though everything conspires against it.

We hardly ever here the word virtue spoken these days, but a century ago, you would hear people speak of a virtuous woman. We do not talk like that today, because where are the virtuous women today? What is a virtuous woman? At that time, they still had a sense of what that meant. It meant chaste, one who kept herself by acts where she could have succumbed to a kind of temptation of compromise.

Virtue needs to come into our consciousness. There is not an issue of choice that is not, in its last analysis, moral. It is a moral choice; all of our choices are moral, and have an ethical content. I remember speaking in Albania to the teachers of a high school. They were not believers, and they came out of a country in which religion had been forbidden for 70 years under the communist atheist rule. They had no sense of God, but I shared with them that teaching was a moral profession. If your teaching does not inspire and touch and bring to the consideration of your students moral value, then you are failing. Teaching is more than communication of information; it is ultimately a moral vocation, because it stirs things about meaning, purpose and value.

Convenience is always accessible; we can always choose the thing that is easy and that relieves us of responsibility, but what is the right moral choice? It is almost invariably the more difficult thing and requires grace, and because it requires grace, it requires God.

It is not specifically mentioned in the passage, but I wonder if the woman who was healed of the plague of unstaunched flow of blood was also healed in her soul? Was it a total salvation? In so many miracles of Jesus, when they received their sight, they also received their salvation and followed Him in the way. Maybe the power we are talking about is not only to meet the immediate need, as expressing itself as a physical crisis, but the ultimate moral crisis of salvation is also met by the demonstration of power, and brings with it a faith to believe, to be freed of sin and to follow the Lord. That is real power, and it comes with the initial deliverance.

Where there is no humility, there is not that virtue. There may be a form of power, but it does not have this quality that transforms. This is evident in the fallen brother mentioned earlier, who not only will not acknowledge his condition, but he will not receive correction and discipline. What he is revealing now in his lack of humility is not a new innovation; it was always true of him. While he was yet exercising and expressing power, he was in the place of arrogance. It is only now being revealed, but it was always true. What was the source of that power that impressed believers, so that they would travel distances to hear and to receive a personal prophesy from the oracle and man of faith and power? Let us not be mindless, wanting only the effect, so that we do not concern ourselves with its source, or the character from which it issues.

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