"Whither the Tribes Go Up"

T. Austin-Sparks:

(Psalm 122:4)

"Gather my saints together" (Psalm 1:5).

It was a beautiful thought in the mind of God when, in His Divine economy, He prescribed for the periodic convocations of His people. Away back in the time of Moses He commanded that all the males in Israel should journey three times in every year to some place of His appointment (Deuteronomy 16:16), the details of which are worth noting. It is clear that David laid great store by such convocations. Psalm 122 is (by its heading) attributed to David, as were other "Songs of Ascents", or Pilgrimage. It was due to division resulting from spiritual decline that such gatherings ceased for so long, until Josiah had a great recovery celebration (2 Chronicles 34:18-19). It was therefore a sign of spiritual recovery and strength when the Lord's people so gathered from near and far.

We can briefly summarize the values in the Lord's thought for such convocations:

1. They were times when the universality of God's Church, or "Holy nation", as on the basis of the Passover (the Cross) was preserved in the hearts of His people. "They left their cities"; that is, they left exclusively parochial ground. By the gathering from all areas they were preserved from all exclusivism, sectarianism, and the peril of isolation. They were made to realize that they were not the all and everything, but parts of a great whole. Thus the ever present tendency to make God in Christ smaller than He really is was countered.

2. Thus, they were times of wonderful fellowship. People who belonged to the same Lord, but had either never before met, or had been apart for so long, discovered or rediscovered one another, were able to share both "their mutual woes, and mutual burdens bear", or tell of the Lord's goodness and mercy. Loneliness, with all its temptations and false imaginations, was carried away by the fresh air of mutuality. New hope, incentive, and life sent the pilgrims back to their accustomed spheres with the consciousness of relatedness.

3. They were times of consolidation. The Psalm says: "For a testimony unto Israel." The testimony of the great thing that the Passover (the Cross) means in the heart of His people. A testimony to the unifying power of the blood and body of Christ. The gatherings held a spiritual virtue in the livingness of the presence of the Lord. If they had been assailed by doubts, fears, and perplexities, they went away confirmed, reassured, and established in their common faith.

4. They were times of instruction. The Word of God was brought out, read and expounded. They were taught, and they "spake one to another". In a word, they were fed. There was spiritual food. The initiation of these convocations was connected with three "Feasts" (Deuteronomy 16). Eating and drinking in the presence of the Lord. They returned fortified, built up, enlightened, and with vision renewed.

5. They were times of intercession. Possibly not every individual was able to "go up". For various reasons - infirmity, age, responsibility, or some other form of detention - kept some from the blessings of joining with the pilgrims. But God's idea of the gatherings was - as put into later words - "My house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples." The New Testament is clear and strong on this point, that the representation of the "Body of Christ" in any place CAN, and SHOULD have real spiritual values for all its members because "the Body is one".

So, let the lonely, detained and isolated ones realize that when the Lord's people are together, they are being supported. And let those who are not so deprived of the 'gathering together' realize how vital it is, and what a necessity there is in expressing this Divine thought.

Would to God that all our gatherings were after this sort!

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