

T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: Acts 3:1-21.

This is the first recorded miracle in the history of the church, and parabolically it embodies a good deal of what we have been considering, and I am going to take it in that parabolic form as an illustration of some of these matters.

We begin at the end, that is, so far as this man is concerned, with what God is aiming at, what God is after, what the result of the work of God in a life is. The man leaps up, stands upon his feet, praises and glorifies God, and goes in and goes on with the people of God. That is very simple, but it represents a work that God would do and which needs to be done in the case of so many. What the Lord wants in the case of all of us is to have us on our feet, standing upright, praising and glorifying Him, and going in and going on with His people; a very different story and a very different situation from what was; no longer a liability but an asset, no longer one to be carried every day, but one who now is at least taking his or her own weight, and going on by the inward momentum of the Spirit and power of God. That is what the Lord wants with us all.

It immediately resolves itself into a challenge, an interrogation. We have each one now to ask ourselves quite honestly and frankly: In relation to the things of the Lord, am I a liability or an asset? Am I counting or am I having to be accounted for? Am I a positive factor or am I negative? Am I amongst those who have to be carried all the time, needing to be borne up, borne along and put where I am, or am I going on in the Lord on my own feet, on top of my infirmities? Am I a responsible one, or otherwise? Well, we must each one answer that question before the Lord now, and see what the Lord would have, what the Lord would bring about. He would have us all in the place or condition of this man as we see him at the end, leaping up, standing on his feet, praising and glorifying God, going on and going in; and more than that as we shall see presently: but that is a good beginning. Are we there?

The Hindrance to Entering in

Well, we must go back and take the man up at the point where we first find him. He is carried and laid at the Beautiful Gate every day. There are those who are going in; but he does not go in, and he cannot go in. "So we see that they could not enter in..." (Heb. 3:19). The man could not enter in. Let that gateway to the house of God beyond represent in our parable that life of rest in the Lord, that entering-in life, that life of attaining unto God's purpose. "And we see that they could not enter in." This man could not enter in, but why could he not? Was it the gate that kept him out? No. Even if the gate had been closed, that was not the inevitable hindrance, and it was a big gate. I understand that it took ten men to open the Beautiful Gate, so massive was it. But even so, if it had been closed, that was not the obstacle.

Let that gate in the story and in the parable as we are regarding it, represent the law, that bond of Judaism which says: Thou shalt not, or, Thou shalt, that forbidding of the law. But that is not the obstacle now. Christ was made under the law, to fulfil the law and put it out of the way. The law is no longer an obstacle.

"Free from the law, O happy condition!
Jesus has died, and THERE is remission.
Cursed by the law, and bruised by the fall,
Christ has redeemed us once for all."

The law is no hindrance now.

But was it the man's infirmities that kept him out? Let his infirmities, all wrapped into one, represent his sins. Was it his sins and his imperfections, his faults, that hindered that entering into rest? Again no. Our sins, our weaknesses, our imperfections, our temperamental and constitutional difficulties, all the infirmities of our fallen natures, these are not the hindrances. The Lord Jesus has dealt with all sin and all sins, and all our weaknesses and infirmities He has borne. All that is dealt with. They are not the hindrance. Oh, you may say, it is this sin and that sin that keeps me out, or it is that weakness, this imperfection; it is the way I am made, my temperament, my constitution, my make-up; I am so different from others; and all this is the thing that binds me in infirmity so that I cannot! If you are saying that, whether as one who has never known Christ or whether as a child of God still needing to know the entering-in life, it is a great mistake to put it down to sins or infirmities and say that it is these things in our nature that keep us out. No, no! That would be to deny the Cross of the Lord Jesus. That would, in its outworking and in its logic, make God very unjust, because it would work out like

this, that people who had better temperaments would stand a better chance of getting in, and people who had a worse make-up would be at the end of the queue. God is not like that. We are not nearer or farther from Him because we are better or worse in our natures. Not at all!

Entering in by Faith

What was it that kept the man out? “We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” Faith destroys the mightiest gates of brass, faith removes the mountains of sin and human weakness and failure. The easily besetting sin which has to be laid aside is this sin of unbelief, and it was at that very citadel that the Holy Ghost, through these servants of God, directed His blow. Infirmity in itself was nothing, the gates were nothing, closed or open, but the man’s attitude and response of heart to a challenge from God was everything. He could have reacted antagonistically or cynically, or with utter carelessness, and stayed where he was. But there is some response, some reaction, which we must interpret as the quickening of faith in his heart: and you know and I know perfectly well that we shall stay where we are, go on in our infirm, helpless state of spiritual liability, until we come to this point where we exercise, deliberately and definitely, faith in the Lord Jesus. Everything waits for that. That is elementary.

We have to come to that response of faith, and then mighty gates, whatever those gates may be in our lives, keeping us out, no longer constitute a hindrance. Infirmities in ourselves, defects and weaknesses, faults and failings, sins and depravities and everything, from inheritance to what we have brought on ourselves, nothing is enough to obstruct our way when once we have come to this point of a deliberate and positive trust in the Lord Jesus. “We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” But the positive is that you can enter in by faith.

Concentration upon a Definite Issue

But then something else was necessary with this man; not in addition to his faith but as a part of it, as heading up to it. Peter and John were going up to the temple and this man saw them coming. I do not know what his look was like, his gesture. We can only imagine, a sort of wonderfully pathetic glancing hither and thither. And Peter looked on him, and said: Look on us. There must have been some reason for that. And he fastened his eyes upon them, of course expecting to receive an alms. But the effect was that they got what they needed and wanted as a necessary factor in this man’s deliverance. “Look on us”, and he fastened his eyes upon them.

What, in parabolic meaning, does that stand for? It means this: you and I, if we are in any condition like this, needing to be put on our feet, needing to be made a factor that counts, needing to be delivered from this infirm state spiritually, from this state of being a liability; if we are in any need like that, we shall never get anywhere until we have concentrated upon a definite issue. He was expecting to receive an alms. What are you after? Do you want pity, sympathy, to be made a fuss of? Do you want that which is, after all, only going to leave you where you were? Are you looking to be nursed, coddled? Is that what you are after, an alms? Do you really want to get out of that position? Do you mean business? Is it nice to be one of those who are always being carried and nursed, and secretly, down in the deceptive heart, do you really like it, and want to be ministered to? Your infirm condition, you like being there because it draws attention to you, brings you into the sympathetic area. Oh, these hearts of ours, how they play with spiritual things for their own gratification!

He expected to receive an alms. But Peter and John are saying, Look here, we are going to face this issue right out: look on us! We are going to concentrate in this matter. The moment has come for this sort of thing either to end or to be indefinitely confirmed!

May I say to you, dear friends, if you are anywhere in this realm at all, you will never get anywhere until you have come with both eyes to look this thing straight in the face, and say, It is going on no longer; I am going to have this thing settled, I am going to bring this thing to a head; God helping me, it is going to be finished. I am going to play with this no longer, I am going to minister to this no longer, I am going to allow this to cripple me no longer, I am going to allow this to make me a liability no longer; tonight I look this thing in the face, God helping me, and it is going to be settled. So far as I am concerned, not another day shall pass until I have had this thing out to a conclusion with God!

Look on us! That is only saying the same thing as we are occupied with now, and which in Hebrews is put this way “Give diligence to enter in” (Heb. 4:11). We must deal with that want of downrightness with God which allows things to drag on and to rob God of that glory which ought to be there, and that testimony which is to follow. We are now getting to it. Look on us!

I need not say more. God help us if we are there, weakened, put out, not counting, God help us to focus upon this for a swift issue and to play no longer with a state like that for our own pleasure, to get sympathy or anything like that. Not an alms: no, it is not an alms we need; it is a deliverance we need, not a ministry to our infirmity, but a deliverance from it.

Look on us! And he fastened his eyes upon them, and Peter said, “Silver and gold have I none — and after all, that is not what you want — such as I have, give I thee.” There is something infinitely more than the treasure of this world. Supposing we had it all and still had our infirmity, what have we? “Such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up.”

The Object of Faith

That is the object of faith. It is not that we have somehow to conjure up something called faith. It is the object of faith that is vital, and that is what we have been saying, and as the letter to the Hebrews so forcibly sets forth, even Jesus Christ, Who He is, what He is, the place He occupies, and His capacity. It is all in Him. The focal point of faith is Jesus Christ, and the value, the virtue, the power of faith is derived from its object, it is not in itself. It is not until you get the right object of faith that faith is a potent thing. You can have all sorts of imitation faiths and they do not affect the work of God in a spiritual way. You can have a psychological faith, but it does not affect your Christian life. You can have a Christian Science faith, and it may do something for your physical life, inasmuch as the mind and the physical are related, but it does not make you a spiritual factor in the house of God. To become a positive spiritual factor in the house of God means that there has to come a vital link between your spirit and Jesus Christ, a living union by faith with Jesus Christ, and it is that taking hold on Him in faith that provides the channel, the vehicle, through which the energy of God comes. The energy of God, the Holy Ghost, comes along the line of Jesus Christ as the object: not something that we call faith, which may, after all, be something that we have worked up to make ourselves believe. Oh no, what matters is the object of faith, the Lord Himself. God works on the ground of His Son, and you and I apprehend His Son, Jesus Christ, by faith. The Holy Ghost seals that, everything is related to that.

The Outcome of Entering in

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”; and he leapt. Simple in its terms, but very, very drastic and very utter in its action. Immediately the man in himself knew the glory of God. He, leaping up, praised and glorified God. He had got it in his own heart, in his own soul. He knew he was changed, he was in the good of God’s rest.

Yes, and then he went in and went on with the Lord’s people. The corporate element comes in. Hebrews will speak about Christ as a Son over God’s house, “whose house are we” (Heb. 3:6); and so on. The house has come into view and he is going with them into the house. He is going to be something in the house with the servants of God, he is going to be part of that corporate body and a factor in it.

A Mighty Uprising of the Devil

Now you will see how he is a factor, for two things arise. Follow through to the next chapter and you will see. First of all he is the occasion of a mighty uprising of the devil; and that is something! Oh, a great storm arises because of what has happened with this man. Things become tremendously disturbed in the spiritual realm; and that is how it will be, and that is how it ought to be. We do not speak glibly or lightly, but the fact is that you and I ought to be factors of disturbance in the kingdom of Satan, and if we are really in the good of a living spiritual experience, that is, if we are really on our feet as accountable and responsible people of God, not having to be borne and carried and nursed and ministered to in our infirmities, but now on our feet, going in and going on, then the enemy recognizes that here is something to be taken account of, and for such there is always a disturbance.

It was so over Lazarus. When he was raised from the dead, you know what a furore there was, how the rulers at once set to work to destroy the Lord Jesus because of Lazarus, because by reason of him many believed. So it is. I wonder whether you and I really do represent a disturbance in the underworld, or whether the enemy can go on without feeling a bit disturbed so far as we are concerned. Every time something like this happened in the New Testament, you very soon find a big reaction from the enemy. You see, when the Lord Jesus comes in in larger measure, it means less measure for the enemy, less scope, less territory for him. He is squeezed out. Are you squeezing the enemy out? Am I squeezing the enemy out? Am I narrowing his province? Do we count in this way? Well, that is one thing that arose.

A Living Testimony

The other thing was this, this man was a testimony which was the answer to every argument. Seeing the man there in the midst whole, they had to shut their mouths. There was no argument. It is all argument if it is doctrine, theory, teaching, interpretation of truth, but a living witness — you cannot argue against that. Your mouth is shut when you have a living person standing there right in the good of things. Are we closing the mouths of people? We shall not do it by the truth that we hold, teach, interpret, but we can do it by what we are, by being in possession of the goods. Are we that? Are you that? Are you going to be that? A real answer to every argument so that people say, Well, look here, it is not the teaching they have taken on, the associations they have made: no, no, look at them; you know what they were, you know how little they counted, you know what cripples they were spiritually, you know what liabilities they were, you know how much they were without rest: but look now; they have the goods, they are in the good of things, they are counting, they mean something, and they are in rest, they are in joy, they are in satisfaction, they themselves are changed! What can you say to that? You cannot say anything to that if you are going to be honest.

Oh, dear friends, we are not to go out to try and pass over some teaching, some truth, to people. That will never convince. You and I are to be here as those who in themselves convince others because we embody His rest, we embody His peace, we embody His strength, and we count for something. We are responsible people, we are positive factors, we are assets, the Lord is getting something by reason of us. That is how it must be. Is it like that? All this can be if we will go the way of this man, and say, Yes, this has gone on long enough and it has to end, and to end, so far as my giving diligence is concerned, at once, and I do most truly by the grace of God take a deliberate and definite faith attitude toward the Lord Jesus for my complete deliverance and the setting of me upon my feet for His glory, for His praise! I think there will be an issue, and I think it will be — he, leaping up, stood upon his feet, praising and glorifying God. May it be so with every one of us.