Articles and Sermons :: Gaining Christ - T. Austin Sparks

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Filled Unto All the Fulness of God
by T. Austin-Sparks

Chapter 14 - Gaining Christ

Reading: Joshua 14:13-14; 15:13-15; Phil. 3:8-15.

The letter to the Philippians represents a man in the land, eagerly applying himself to the inheritance to make good all th at has been appointed for him. He sees that there is yet very much land to be possessed, although he may have entered into quite a lot. There is still territory beyond his immediate occupation, territory which is full of promise, but which has to be taken by force. This man sees that to fall short of the whole is to be at length one who has missed the supreme objec t for which he was originally apprehended. He has gone a long way, he has occupied much ground, but even now he is speaking about apprehending that for which he had been apprehended, showing clearly that his mind about the whole m atter is that a great deal of possession cannot be regarded as fulfilling the original purpose of his being apprehended. He must go right on to the whole, if that for which he set out at the beginning is to have a full realisation. His word about it is Â“perfectÂ”; the word which in its fuller meaning implies completeness, absoluteness, finality, nothing lacking, no gaps - the thing in its fulness possessed.

Such is the ground here in the land. This man Paul is the counterpart in the New Testament of Caleb in the Old. Caleb, who wholly followed the Lord; Caleb, who would never be content with anything less than all; Caleb, who would go beyo nd the average and not stop short at the point where there is much gained, but would go on to perfection, completeness. There is a wonderful correspondence between Caleb and Paul in the spiritual principles of their lives.

Caleb, with Joshua of course, had known resurrection life. While a whole generation died (and there was a very high de ath rate around for forty years, 600,000 perishing in that time) raging, rampant death all around; seeing numerous burial s in the wilderness every week; yet it never touched Caleb, never laid a finger on him. He never came for a moment und er its power. He knew resurrection life. But that was not enough for Caleb. Knowing resurrection life was for him, after all , more or less on the negative or passive side of things. You might regard it as a positive thing, but for him it was more o n the passive side. What Caleb wanted to know was not just resurrection life, but resurrection power. Resurrection life k ept him in life and kept him above while others were going down into death. Resurrection power for Caleb meant not just being maintained in life, but conquest; the positive side, of bringing down every foe and subduing everything that had to be subdued.

Paul knew resurrection life. There is no question about that. He had known resurrection life in a wonderful way through t hese many years, but when he reaches his letter to the Philippians it is Â“Paul the aged...Â” and he is still speaking abo ut resurrection, but in another way: Â“that I may know Him and the power...Â”. The power of His resurrection means for Paul this extra bit of gaining. Paul saw the superlatives of resurrection power, and spoke of them in his Ephesian letter: Â“He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in usÂ” and t hat power working in us is Â“according to the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when he raised Him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand, far above allÂ”. Gaining Christ in fulness... a place far above all: Â“He that overcomes shall sit with Me in My throne, even as I overcame and am sat down with My Father in His throneÂ”. That wa s the prize, and unto that Paul reached forth, and for that the power of His resurrection was necessary.

We all have resurrection life if we are joined to Christ as Resurrection, but there is something more than that; there is res urrection power, which carries us eventually (if it has its full outworking) to the Throne, and not all will come to the Thron e. It is: Â“to him that overcomesÂ”.

Caleb, like Paul, and Paul, like Caleb, stood against the more general course of things amongst the LordÂ’s people. The majority were content with going so far as to the inheritance, possessing so much, and there staying and settling down. An unfinished course, a curtailed spiritual advance, an accepting of something less than what God had appointed and int

ended. The majority took that course, but Caleb was never content and he stood against the majority just as he had alw ays stood against a majority that did not represent GodÂ's full mind.

With the original company of the spies he and Joshua were in a very small minority, but they stood with every ounce of t heir being against the overwhelming majority. So now in the land, Caleb does not go with the multitude of the LordÂ's pe ople. He is not content with the spiritual attainment which seems to satisfy so many. He again stands against the more g eneral course, the major voice, and the thing which, in modern accents, says: "Do not be extreme! Do not aim at impossi bilities, do not set up impossible ideals... recognise that it is no use trying to get New Testament standards at this time of day. Accommodate yourself to the times; you will only find that you are broken by the sheer force of the overwhelming m ajority if you take this singular line." Well, Caleb took the singular line - if it is to be called a singular line - and undoubtedl y Paul took it.

Paul took a line even ahead of the other apostles. We do not disparage or dishonour Peter, and yet Peter, with his very prominent place in the Apostolate could not quite understand Paul. Some things that Paul wrote were very hard for Peter to understand. This man Paul seemed to leap and bound ahead of the other apostles, so that he could even, when nece ssity arose, withstand Peter to his face, telling him, in effect, that he was failing the Lord.

Here is a man who does not take his cue from the recognised leaders and authorities, but who takes his cue from Christ in glory; who does not allow the more general thing to become the standard of his own life, but he looks to the Lord to ge t his standard. It was costly, but Paul went on. He went on when few could go with him. Â“All they in Asia have turned a way from me.Â” Oh! then I understand the letters to the churches in Asia! Did they turn away from this man, who represe nts the overcomer? Then the Lord must write very severely to them about overcoming, and show them that they are not doing it, they have fallen away from the overcomer position. That position was occupied by the apostle, who wrote these letters to the churches in Asia: Ephesians and Colossians. In this Philippian letter: Â“I have no man like-minded with me Â”.

Spiritual leadership always involves loneliness. That is the cost of it. The overcomers will always be, so far as the larger Christian world is concerned, a lonely company, having to go on, with few able to follow.

Caleb could not accept the popular voice, his heart was too set upon the Lord. He wholly followed the Lord, not the popu lar and general standard of Christian life. We may say that Caleb was the very embodiment of all that God meant the wh ole people to be. When you see Caleb you see what God wished all Israel to be, but all Israel did not come to the standa rd of Caleb. But the Lord gets in a Caleb the satisfaction of His heart. The Lord realises His full thought in a Caleb, in the same way He does in a Paul.

These are types and representatives of a company; an overcomer company, in whom all GodÂ's thought for all His peop le is realised. They may not all go on, but God has those who answer to His heartÂ's fullest desire. He will have a Caleb, He will have a Paul, and He will have overcomers. Such are, for Him, the very embodiment of His full thought for His peo ple.

With all this in view, read again the passages about Caleb. It is worth repeating them, having seen what Caleb does repr esent:

Joshua 24:13: Â“And Joshua blessed him; and he gave Hebron unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance.Â” We know that Hebron means Â“fellowshipÂ”, Â“a leagueÂ”. We know that it was the place where the great king was first crowned, on his way to the final position of universal sovereignty. From Hebron David went to Jerusalem; and it is the ov ercomers that bring the King into His universal dominion.

Joshua 14:14: Â“Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb... unto this day...Â” Â“Unto this dayÂ” means right up to the end, Â“...because he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel.Â”

Joshua 15:13-14: Â“And unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a portion among the children of Judah, according to t he commandment of the Lord to Joshua, even Kiriath-arba... And Caleb drove out thence the three sons of Anak.Â” He undertook to deal with the gigantic obstacles in the way of full possession, and he did it.

Joshua 15:15: Â“And he went up thence...Â” This is the overcomer.

We are left with one issue. It is this: that the fulness of Christ to which we are called, which is realised in sharing His Thr

one eventually, is only by utterness in the realm of conflict and conquest. It is gaining Christ. Whatever may be the force s in the way to be dealt with, within and without, they represent the course of an increase of the moral and spiritual excel lencies of the Lord Jesus.

We must remember that ChristÂ's universal sovereignty is in virtue of His spiritual and moral excellencies. It is not just of ficial, it is not just by appointment. It is in virtue of something; the great Â“wherefore Â” of Philippians 2: Â“Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every nameÂ”. The great words of Hebrews 2: Â“... we see Jesus... crowned with glory and honour.Â” Why? Â“Because of the suffering of deathÂ”. It is in virtue of somethin g. It is in virtue of the spiritual and the moral excellencies, transcendencies. It is because of what He is, not officially, but in nature, in character, having conquered sin, having conquered the world in all its spiritual and moral meaning, having c onquered the evil in the universe. He represents something over which sin and evil, iniquity, wickedness, badness has n o power; it is altogether above that. Now He occupies forever that pre-eminence on the basis of what He is spiritually an d morally, as a result of a battle and a conquest. He is calling us, has called us, to share His Throne. It must be upon the same basis, that in virtue of His conquest, His victory, and by reason of the energy of the Holy Spirit, we also overcome.

To gain Christ, to gain that place with Christ, is not possible by mere appointment, office, being put there; it is only possi ble by spiritual and moral conquest in the energy of the Holy Ghost. Thank God we are not left to do it in our own strengt h, but there is the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven to be the energy in us of spiritual ascendancy, spiritual conquest, an d it is the changing of our being into the very moral and spiritual likeness of the Lord Jesus which is behind every bit of c onflict which comes into our life.

That is the inclusive objective. Within that there are all the details, the things which have got to be overcome, within and without. We and we only, know what those things are. You know in your own make-up what has got to be overcome, an d I know what is true in my case. We differ, the conflict is many-sided, the gains are to be in various directions.

The book of Judges sees the uprising or the ascendancy of certain specific forces, and how the judges which were raise d up from time to time to deal with those forces were peculiarly suitable to meet the situation.

Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram, speaks of the double-dyed iniquity of pride. Â“AramÂ” means Â“exaltationÂ”; Â“Cushrf iÂ” means Â“blacknessÂ” of pride; Â“rishathaimÂ” means Â“double iniquityÂ”. And Othniel, raised up by God to meet tha t foe on the basis of an utter dependence upon God, was the only way to destroy pride. Those two things cannot exist to gether. You can never have pride and utter dependence upon God in pre-eminence together. If pride is up, then depend ence upon God has gone down. Dependence upon God is only saying that pride has been destroyed.

The next menace to Israel was Moab, and Moab was a kinsman of Israel after the flesh, a child of Lot, but not related by the spirit. And so Moab represents mere profession, not spiritual relationship. And then you have Ehud raised up to deal with Moab, and Ehud means Â“confessorÂ”. There is all the difference between being a professor and a confessor. The one is simply occupying a false position, professing to be something, but if you are one of the confessors of the faith you are a living testimony, a witness.

Jabin, king of Hazor is the next, and he symbolises Â“natural understandingÂ”, intellect over against spiritual knowledge. And to deal with Jabin both Deborah and Barak were raised up. Deborah means Â“the wordÂ”, and Barak means Â“livin gÂ”. So that you have the power of the Word dealing with natural understanding. If you have the Word in the power of th e Holy Ghost then your natural understanding is put out.

That is enough, without going further through the judges and the battles of the judges, to indicate that what is in view is t hat there are certain things which arise to destroy the LordÂ's people in their make-up. It may be this natural understandi ng business, this intellectual activity in the things of God, which is merely intellectual. It may be pride. It may be any one or two or three or more of a large number of things which are out to destroy the real spiritual knowledge of Christ, and re al spiritual position in and gain of Christ. Those things have got to be destroyed, or else they will destroy the LordÂ's peo ple.

You see Gideon, and the lesson that comes in so wonderfully with Gideon, who deals with the Midianites, and Midian m eans Â“strifeÂ”. When you trace the thing through you find that Midian always represents the encroachment of the world upon the things of the Lord. It was the Midianites who carried Joseph to Egypt; that which is of the Lord is taken into the world by the Midianite. Midian worked through Balaam to try and bring Israel into the bondage of the world. And when th e world gets into the church, and the church gets into the world, there is always strife. All the trouble in the church is bec ause something worldly has got in. Well, Gideon is raised up. And what is that which overcomes the world? Â“This is the

victory that overcomes the world, even our faithÂ". Is not Gideon the very embodiment and personification of faith? Â"The people that are with you are too many... lest Israel vaunt themselves, saying, My own hand has saved meÂ". Bring them down until, against this mighty host of Midian, the three hundred men are set. There is faith! Â"The sword of the Lord, and of GideonÂ". You have no difficulty in adding that last clause when you remember the dream of the Midianite. When in that night they heard the shout of the enemy, as Gideon led his three hundred men, the very association of ideas was enough to upset their morale. It was a question of faith in the Lord which brought the Midianitish domination to an end through Gideon. This is the faith which overcomes the world.

That is gaining Christ. It is all by conquest. We are drawn into the vortex of a great conflict, and there is something in us, or about us, or with which we are compelled to have to do, which is an obstruction to the increase of Christ in us, or in His people, and the battle rages. That thing has to be destroyed, and then there is an increase of Christ.

What a fight Paul put up for this fulness of Christ for the saints. The intense application of himself: Â"strivingÂ" he said. He was fighting all sorts of things that were against their completeness in Christ. His was a lifelong battle with elements that were out to rob the LordÂ's people of that fulness. And it applies in both ways, that we are drawn into conflict over something as to ourselves, which is an obstruction to growth in the Lord; and we have to get into the battle for our own spiritual increase, whatever it is, and apply ourselves, like Caleb, and say we are not going to be content with our present measure of spiritual attainment. If we stop now it will be as though we had failed of GodÂ's purpose altogether, and we are not going to be content until we have reached the full measure of what the Lord means for us, as far as that can be reached in this life.

Then it applies in the direction of our responsibility for other children of God. We have to set ourselves in our position of responsibility, against every limiting thing for the LordÂ's people who are committed to our charge. And that is just where so much of our suffering and our trial arises as those who have the care of souls; that they do not understand and they may not appreciate it, but we are battling for their spiritual fulness. When we set ourselves against some worldly thing, they are not against it, but spiritual fulness. They do not understand, they do not appreciate, and very often they do not take sides with us and wholeÂ-heartedly co-operate; but we have to fight through. Later on they will come to see it perhaps, and enter into the good of our conflict for them. Â"What conflict I have for youÂ", said Paul, Â"and for them of Laodicea. Â"

We close with a little quotation from a book which many of us know, Â"Gold CordÂ" by Amy Carmichael. You will see the connection as you read this quotation:

Â"But neither Afghanistan, nor any other of the big and the unexplored of the high places of the field will look wonderful when the traveller reaches them; nor will he feel in the least valorous. Again and again he will find that he has need to pray for the simple graces of good cheer, courage, patience, persistence; the will to ignore the clamours of the flesh; the will to refuse the softness that would sink to the easy. God give us climbing souls; and to climb may be nothing more romantic than a steady trampling on the lust of comfort, a going on when everything in us wants to stop.Â"

That is simple, but it touches the thing. That is only another way of saying that we get to the heights, not by a leap and a bound, not with a spirit of the romantic. We are there we know, and it is a wonderful thing to be there; there is a great power of command when you are there. But the getting there has been such a conflict, has meant so much of cost, that there is not much glamour after all about conquering this territory.

Is that not true? I can read into that the hidden secret of Miss Amy CarmichaelÂ's life. Probably as a young woman she visualised India, and the romance of saving IndiaÂ's children, seeing IndiaÂ's children gathered in and saved: a wonderful vision - a good deal of stimulus about such a vision - and she saw the peak right ahead and imagined herself on the peak, and oh! the romance of being on that peak! But to get to that peak of seeing hundreds of IndiaÂ's children saved... Oh! the cost! The agony! The suffering! And when at length a Dohnavur Fellowship exists, extensive, far-reaching, something which the visitor and the stranger coming to says: "What a wonderful piece of work!" she sees no romance, no glamour. It is the result of much suffering, such cost, simply to say: "Well, thank God that we are here; but there is nothing very much to shout about."

That is how it will be. We are not going to leap to the Throne in any romantic way. Enthusiasm will soon die out on this road. It will be the steady keeping going by the grace of God. Â"Climbing souls... a steady trampling on the lust of comfort, a going on when everything in us wants to stop.Â" Again and again you and I will find that we want to stop, we are inclined to stop. The Spirit of the Lord in us will say: Go on! And we shall have to get up and go on! The Lord make us Calebs and Pauls... in other words: overcomers!