

## Art Katz:

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 The eternal wisdom of God, demonstrated through the Church,  
 as the necessary prelude to Messiah's parousia  
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(Delivered in Kent, England; September 1995)

There are two great English Hebrew-Christian scholars: David Baron and Adolph Saphir. Both are outstanding and sensitive men of God whose writing is eloquent and contains an extraordinary depth of perception. I'd like to read to you this morning from David Baron who lived in the latter part of the 19th century and was involved in the White Chapel Mission to the Jews in East London. This book is called *Israel's Inalienable Possessions*. The introduction mentions that many of Baron's books and writings were destroyed in WWII when East London was bombed, so there are very few things of his that remain. When you see the things that are available you realize how precious a man he must have been.

His first article in this book is based on the Scripture that opens Paul's statement in Romans on the mystery of Israel:

"I could wish that I myself were cursed or anathematized from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (9:3). It is a remarkable introduction to a subject wherein a man would exchange his salvation, willing to forego what he has already tasted and the eternal benefit of it, that his people might know Christ. Baron makes some remarkable statements about that opening that I want to share. He says: "The feelings to which he [Paul] gives utterance are no mere natural sentiments such as a Jew might be supposed to have for his nation... " And here is the remarkable thing as it pertains to the Church.

There is something about the nature of the subject of Israel or the mystery of Israel for the Church that is so intrinsic, so central for its own sake, that the omission of it (which has been unhappily its historical experience), condemns the Church to a decrepit condition. There is I believe, something—a missing, crucial dimension—that God intended as normative: and that is the centrality of the people Israel who are out of the Way, out of the faith, blasphemous, and nevertheless yet God's people to whom (through their fathers) he has made great promises of a destiny still to be fulfilled. But not before they pass through the severest of final testings known as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), to be brought out of it—as a surviving remnant—through the mercy of God extended uniquely through a non-begrudging Church.

And this, the concluding historical act of God, by which human history itself ends and the Millennial age commences! Everything hinges on the whole issue of this nation's restoration. And the remarkable thing is that the Church, God's agent towards them, is essentially a Gentile Church. That is to say, there is no natural reason why a Gentile should have any affinity or interest in this people, who are not comely and are stubborn, stiff-necked and having given God all kinds of fits, and even to this day deport themselves in a way that apparently does not honor God but defames His name, even in Israel! And it will get worse before it gets better. Yet their redemption is central to us as the Church in the wisdom of God! That is why Paul uses the word "mystery." It is something that has been concealed and hidden but is now being revealed, that defies all rational understanding—as if God had gone out of his way to choose the most prohibitive and unlikely factors to succeed in His own coming as a King, first over that restored nation—that "the law can go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3) to all nations—in a way which seems impossibly hopeless with an Israel who has no willingness to be chosen, a nation which has no apparent interest in fulfilling its own destiny—and in fact does not even seem to know it! And the principal agent in bringing this about? An essentially Gentile Church!

It is a remarkable scheme of God; and in order for it to succeed, this Gentile Church must itself become transfigured. In fact, it is the challenge of Israel to that Church, the crisis constituted by Israel, that compels it to come on to that ground; to find God in a way that it would never otherwise have sought Him. And to live its life so heroically, in such an apostolic quality of faith, that is altogether sacrificial, restoring the centrality of the

Cross, the primacy of the Holy Spirit, the issue of true relationship of the saints, the issue of truth itself—in ways that it would never have had a stomach to pursue being so costly. The only explanation of a Gentile Church willing to embrace a calling so demanding as this is that the issue is not Israel alone, *per se*, but the glory of God that is obtained through Israel's redemption. Can you understand that? That is why what David Baron is saying about Paul is so remarkably important. He is saying that Paul's cry—that he would wish himself accursed for his kinsman—is more than one can expect even from a Jew for his own people. This cry is not coming out of Paul's Jewishness; it is coming out of Paul's spirituality.

The point is that we can't dismiss this, saying that this is just some Jew pleading for his own; this is the apostolic man whose proximity to the heart of God and whose knowledge of God are so deep that he is expressing God's own heart! And if the apostles and the prophets are the foundation of the Church, and if we are built on that foundation, God can reasonably expect that we too should see as Paul sees, cry as Paul cries, take Paul's apostolic heart for our own, in having as much access to God as Paul himself had!

Please do not think that I am promoting this subject because I am Jewish: I would promote this subject if I were a pygmy! I'm promoting it because this is what God himself has elected. Of all the things he could have chosen to promote his glory in the last days, he chooses the most untoward and difficult things, things that are so contrary to success and makes that his choice. Because the issue of Israel is really a great moral issue; it is a struggle between the opposing powers of darkness and God that reflects two 'wisdoms' (Eph. 3:10), two moral ways in conflict. God wants to exhibit something as a demonstration calculated to the powers of the air in that "God has created all things in order that, through the Church, the manifold wisdom"—that is, the moral character of God—"might be demonstrated to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." And that this is the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus!

Now you, dear saints, in this little nook of a room with the kids crying and the dogs barking and all of that, represent here this morning the nub of the entire matter: Can God succeed in an endeavor of this magnitude to make a demonstration of an eternal kind to his ancient and historic enemies, the principalities and powers of darkness through a band of souls such as we represent? He must succeed through the raw material that he has chosen, for that itself is the mystery, that itself is the wisdom, God taking us off the dung heap and fitting us to sit with princes (Ps. 113:8)!

Which of us has not experienced various trials and troubles, even or especially in struggling to maintain some kind of reasonable spirituality? And yet to us is given this enormous task? And in succeeding in this, we ourselves will be fitted for our own eternal destiny? Now listen, dear saints: there are very few Christians, of even the better kind, who even give a remote consideration to the subject of eternity at all. Everything that is in the world is calculated—by the world and its wisdom—to fix us in time, to wonder if the kettle is on, and have we met this need and that need, and what about our holiday, and this financial need, and what about these personalities, and this and that. Everything is rooted to fix us in time and place and culture, and to rob us of the enormous inspirational tug that would bring us up out of ourselves if we were to embrace the things that pertain somehow to God's eternal purposes! I've been a believer for 31 years now, and it's been my observation, all over the world, that there's nothing more dreary than a Christianity that is nominal, shallow and predictable. We would be better off virtually as atheists. In fact, one of your greatest poets, Wordsworth, said he would "rather be a pagan suckled on a creed outworn... looking for a Prometheus rising from the sea" because, "getting and spending we lay waste our powers, little that we find in nature that is ours." It's a cry that says we would be better off as vital pagans loving nature and looking for a Prometheus coming out of the sea than to be mundane, ordinary, slack Christians.

This, unhappily, is a description of too much of the Church. And here is my contention: We must remain in that unhappy condition if we have not glimpsed and taken to our hearts the eternal purposes of God. This is God's normative intention for his Church, and we do not have it any more than we have been persuaded of His purposes towards Israel, for the issue of Israel is his eternal purpose, is his eternal mystery, is the demonstration of his moral wisdom because it rests upon this principal thing—the willingness of Gentiles to extend themselves on behalf of the Jew! There's nothing natural about that; it is totally unnatural and unreasonable. We would hardly extend ourselves for our own flesh and blood; why should we extend ourselves for a people who have been a bane to us and an irritant and an object of jealousy and resentment? The willingness to do that, at sacrifice, is the demonstration of the wisdom of God and the ultimate evidence of the triumph of God in Gentiles whom he has taken off the dung heap to make sit with princes! And if they will succeed in that, indeed they will sit with princes, ruling and reigning with him, millennially and eternally, from his throne!

So that's why David Baron's insight is so remarkably precious: "The feelings to which he [Paul] gives utterance

are no mere natural sentiments"—and they cannot be that for us either; because we have only an affinity for Israel that is natural, because they're "cute" or winsome, or they remind us of David, or we've been to Israel and we think it's lovely. That kind of natural thing will go up like a puff. We are now at the threshold of the last days, and we are going to see such furies, such conflicts, and such epochal movements of opposition, tugs and tensions that natural things will not sustain us. And that's why the last days are marked by "a great falling away." There is an apostasy in the Church that is taking place even presently. What will it be when things become tough, when we have to pay something for being a believer, when we open ourselves to opposition and persecution by virtue of our faith? Now it's a snap; now we're not experiencing what they are experiencing in China and Viet Nam and other places of persecution. But the day will come when the Anti-Christ spirit will be global, and to meet like this will be perhaps at the risk of our lives, when the doors could be broken in at any moment by the police or by the authorities because what we are about is illegal—society has determined that. How many of us will stand then? Do you see why it's so critical that our faith not rest on natural things, on pseudo-spiritual things, affected spiritualities where choruses or catch-phrases sustain us? We need to become increasingly authentic in God.

So, it is not by natural sentiment that Paul expresses himself; he speaks as a man in Christ. In fact, the phrase "in Christ" is one of Paul's favorite phrases. I don't know how many times he uses it: "in Christ, in Christ, in Christ." And it's not a mindless phrase; it's a statement that is the foundation of Paul's whole apostolic life. There's a way to be in Christ that God has made available by our identification with Him in his death and resurrection, through baptism, that God intends as the root principle of the authentically spiritual life. There is a kind of Christianity in which we can embrace principles, quote Scripture, sing choruses, but we are living our lives essentially in ourselves and through ourselves; we are living a Christian life naturally. It has become a Christian form, and perhaps that is what has prevailed in Great Britain in recent generations, and particularly now. And every great move of God in this nation that has prevailed through men like Wesley, Whitfield, Fox and giants of that kind was a cry to bring people out of a Christianity that had degenerated into a mere culture, and to bring it back again into its apostolic and prophetic configuration, that is its vital power, by living in His life.

You say, "How is it that we can lapse into making the faith a culture?" Because there is not a sufficient demand put upon us; it's too tame, it's too predictable. It's only a matter of services, of Sunday gatherings. But once you embrace the eternal purposes of God, particularly as pertaining to Israel's restoration—so profoundly resisted by the powers of darkness—you'll know that you're in a contest! There is a conflict on, and you are marked. The enemy knows that you know. He knows that you're one to whom he must give serious credence; you're not just another cream-puff that he can pass by and yawn at. Remember when the demons said, "Jesus we know and Paul we know about, but who are you?" The powers of darkness can discern who is formidable for God and who can be safely ignored by them. And I'm saying this morning that the critical factor is that the ones who are dangerous to the powers of darkness are the ones who know the underlying foundations of the faith, why we have been saved, what we are called to, what we are asked to embrace as mandate to fulfill the eternal purposes of God, to make a demonstration to the principalities and powers of the manifold wisdom of God through the Church! That God has created all things in order that through the Church—think how important this must be to God! That Great Britain and all nations, nature itself and the cosmos, the seasons, the whole operation that sustains life on this planet is not for any other purpose (though there may be the benefit of others) other than that the Church might demonstrate to the principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God! It would take a three-day seminar to begin to do any kind of justice to so deep and pivotal and central a concept of the faith as this. I commend it to you in Ephesians chapter three. In fact the whole book of Ephesians is devastating, and the Church has allowed it to go right over its head. It has not taken it seriously but has allowed it to become a kind of rhetorical flourish, a certain kind of Biblical language that sounds inspirational but practically doesn't really mean anything. You cannot believe the depths of what it means. When we start to take God seriously to fulfill his word and recognize that our primary and first purpose in life is not our career or our family or our physical well-being nor our retirement, but to fulfill the eternal purpose of God—at that point we are on another kind of ground. And when the enemy sees that, you're marked.

Who would be willing to embrace that, knowing that it's going to put you in greater conflict with the powers of darkness? Who wants that conflict where we would have to wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of the air, the rulers of this world's darkness? Notice: we wrestle, not I wrestle. It's only the Church in its totality, the Church in its "corporality", in its corporateness, in its togetherness that can in any way wrestle with powers of darkness. It's not an individual matter. But I know as an American that we who share a common language and culture are very individualistic. It's the genius of the British and American system, individualism; you know, "my home is my castle" and we come out of it for a while for a Sunday service, but we are very quick to get back into it. And so long as we maintain that individualistic mentality we are of no consequence for the Kingdom of God. What will it take to break the habit and the historic power of this individualistic bias and bring us into a sense of the Church as something more than a Sunday morning service,

for our benefit? God is calling us to apostolic heroism, to the Church, to the dignity and the glory and the reward of the true faith that has been historically lost in exact proportion as we have lost the issue of the Jew. The two things are so intrinsically bound together; if you've lost the issue of the Jew and have only a sentimental feeling about Israel and no more, you have lost the apostolic faith. The two things are inextricably bound together.

So Paul is not speaking as a Jew, he is not speaking naturally; he's speaking as a man in Christ. That means there is hope for us, that we can speak as Paul, we can live as Paul; we too can be in Christ, and have the mind of Christ and the character of Christ, and the ability and the strength of Christ. That's the genius of the faith: God has called us to things that are patently beyond ourselves. Yet how many of us as long-term Christians have ever said in our lifetime, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Perhaps it's because we have been sufficient; for our present level of sainthood we can be sufficient. But when we embrace the purposes of God, we are no longer sufficient. Then it's either in Christ or we are out of it! I want to encourage you that there is such a valid and available place in Christ.

What is needed is to pull the plug on ones natural life. Baron says this is not Paul speaking out of his natural life; this is the man in Christ speaking. That means we have to let go of what we customarily depend upon: our confidence in our own natural ability, and trust that God, when he sees that death, will allow the resurrection to be made manifest in you and through you. I believe that's what's happening right now in this speaking from the moment I opened my mouth. I had a lousy night, naturally speaking. I went to bed at midnight or later, I was up at a quarter to three till nine o'clock when Ken knocked on the door. I feel foggy and out of it, and this is almost my habitual state, whether I like or not. Because in the natural I am a strong man, and I had always been impressive before I came to God. But the Lord is not allowing me to succeed on that basis at all, but only out of weakness is His strength perfected. It is humiliating, because we like to have the confidence in our own ability and in what we can do, and the Lord says, "No: this is my battle; this is my demonstration". This is the moral issue: that there are people who are willing to forfeit and to "foolishly" forsake their confidence in themselves and living from their own natural ability, even religiously, and—this is where the trust comes in—believe that out of death comes His life, newness of life, another quality of life? And I'll tell you this, saints: however timid you've been till now, and proper in your English Christianity, you are going to find yourselves saying things that will stagger you. And I mean publicly, or confronting an individual, or taking the bull by the horns in ways that you would not have done, it's not like you to do that. Your prayers will have another tone to them. There's a difference between religious, well-meaning prayer and the prayer that God himself issues out of His own life.

In a word, we will never be God's saving agency to Israel in the last days except on the basis of being in Christ. Can you see the genius of God? He is not only concerned for Israel's restoration, He is concerned for our transfiguration! He's not content that we should just be proper, that we should just be "respectable" Christians. He gave his life for more than that: His call to us is to being formed in him and to being Christ-like, being giants in the earth, particularly in the last days when men's hearts will fail them for fear when they see the things that are coming upon the earth. That we will be islands of sanity and people of such faith that we are not at all moved or depressed or defeated by external circumstances; that we'll be in a place in Christ that is triumphant. That's more than "whistling in the dark" to keep your courage up. And when Jews see this, they'll be astonished.

I said last night before an Arab congregation, "I'm standing before you and speaking tonight because in the crisis of my life as an atheistic Jew, 32 years ago, I saw the glory of the God of Israel as the light that lightens the Gentiles. I saw it revealed in a Gentile face. There's nothing more powerful for a Jew. Do you know the historic way that they have looked upon Gentiles? Do you know how they spit out the word 'Goyim', the Hebrew word for "nations" or "Gentiles"? And I shared with them that my mother, going to school in London (all my family is English), who is now 91, remembers that as a girl she was thrown into the pool by her gentile teacher who said to her, "Sink or swim, you fat Jew." This is what my mother remembers as being an angry, anti-Jewish attitude expressed by her gentile teacher in London, how many years ago? And my mother still remembers it and she yet bristles, "Gentile, Goyim". I grew up with this. "The Goyim". If I mispent my money, "You have a goyische Kopf", (you have a "Gentile mind"): that's what they do; they don't save, they're not careful like us. They. It's them and us. And there have been frictions for centuries; Did you know the Jews were expelled from England in 1215 or something like that, out of York? And though we may not know the historic particulars, the spirit of it yet resides in the air and we've taken it in with our mothers' milk. There's an historic enmity between Jew and Gentile, and that is exactly fitting the purposes of God. For people to transcend that—both from the Gentile side and the Jewish side—is demonstration of God's wisdom, that he could make of the two one new man in Christ thus making peace. That is staggering when you think of the deep-seated and historic enmity.

And it's only the beginning and the model and the paradigm of a yet greater mystery—the reconciling of all

things unto Himself, both in heaven and on earth. The work of the cross was the work of atonement "at-one-ment" of oneness with God and reconciliation: ourselves with God, ourselves with ourselves, and ourselves with our natural enemy, the Jew and the Gentile as one new man. And then that as a model for all the world and then for all things, both in heaven and earth, to be reconciled unto Him. This is salvation, but it's more than just "how to get saved" and "Are you saved, brother?" We've reduced salvation to a little formula, a little cheap thing, and we've missed the grandeur of what God was about through the death and the burial and the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ.

So Paul speaks in Christ as a man whose whole being is renewed and illumined, and a man who at the very time of writing is conscious of being under the direct operation of God's Spirit. This is God's own cry. It is not as a natural man but as a spiritual man; it is not as a Jew but as an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile; it is as an inspired apostle that he speaks. And it is as an inspired apostolic people that God would have us to speak, and to be and to have our being. Our whole vision for the faith and vision for the Church needs to be greatly enlarged, and brought back to God's original intention because it is degenerating into a formula, into a Sunday culture, into a Sunday afterthought.

And the world likes to have it so.