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God's Call to the Life Above -sparks - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/1/29 2:58

God's Call to the Life Above
by T. Austin Sparks

"They that trust in the Lord
Are as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever.
As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
So the Lord is round about his people,
From this time forth and for evermore." Psalm 125:1-2

Psalms 120 to 134 form a little volume of their own, called the Psalms or Songs of Ascent. They tell of the climb up out o f the deep, dark valley on to the sunny heights, which is where the Lord always desires His people to be.

Psalm 84 speaks of passing through the valley of weeping, but in that connection we ought to underline the two words "p assing through", for this valley is never meant to be the dwelling place of the people of God but only a passage through which they pass. Zion, the mountain home, is where God wants His people to abide. It is surely instructive to note that th e Lord established periodic ascents as an ordinance in Israel; all their males had to go up to Jerusalem three times in ev ery year. God meant these going-up ordinances to be governmental in nature; that is, the people of Israel were not to be governed by the plains or valleys, but to be a people of the mountains. They might have to spend time, perhaps much ti me, down below but their normal life was continually interrupted by the command to go up. Their life, their real life, was u p in the high places. If we could have joined their caravans as three times a year they made ready and got on the march, leaving the valleys and the plains and going on the upward way to Jerusalem, we would have found that these journeys had a tremendous influence on the life of the people. These songs, for instance, became songs for all time; they were pr ovided for the ascents of those particular occasions, but they were not reserved for the three times a year, becoming the perpetual songs of Israel in which we ourselves find much of abiding value. This is because the Lord's mind for His peop le is that they should not abide in the deep and shadowy places, though from time to time they may have to pass throug h the valleys, but that they should be a people of the heights, with their lives governed by that which is above and not by what is below.

I have been very much impressed with the large place which mountains had in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, as may be verified in Matthew's Gospel, which begins in chapter 5 with the Mount of Instruction and finishes in chapter 28 with the Mount of Commission. It can be noted that all through the Gospel the peak events were associated with mounta ins, as though these found an answer, a response, in the very heart and nature of our Lord. Is it not true that Jesus cam e down and passed through this valley of weeping in order to meet us and lift us up out of it?

His whole life, in every aspect and activity of praying, teaching and working, was a life on a rising plane, a lifting, returnin g move to heaven which would take back with Him as many others as possible. There was nothing in the low level of thi s world's ways to give Him any pleasure, so it is not surprising that He loved the mountain heights. The very nature and spirit of the Lord Jesus was a complete contradiction of the natural course of human movement which is steadily slipping lower and lower. The Lord Jesus is in direct contrast to this; the whole effect and influence of His presence anywhere bei ng to lift upwards. He only came by way of this valley of tears to lift us up out of it.

ASCENDANCY

Mountains suggest and represent elevation, ascendancy - "I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains". To take our eyes off what is here - self, circumstances and the rest - and to set them on the One who is the Lord over all, high and lifted u p on the throne, is itself an elevating experience. "Looking off unto Jesus" is the one thing which will bring us up out of th e valley of despair, for where our vision rests affects the course of our lives. It is in every sense an uplifting experience t o be joined to the Lord in heaven; it is morally elevating and spiritually emancipating.

Perhaps what most of us need is a higher level of life. We are too small. Our valley is a hemmed-in place, it is narrow an d limiting. We must get on to the mountains to find enlargement, with a sense of being liberated from the littlenesses of li

fe, freed from its smallness and pettiness. If this is true naturally, it helps to interpret a spiritual truth, reminding us that God has "raised us up together with Christ". Individually and collectively in the Church, a very great deal of the trouble, weakness and even paralysis which we suffer is due to our failure to maintain our true position in the heavenlies in Christ. If we could get up higher, move on to higher ground and leave behind the things which belong to the shadows and miasmas, we should find ourselves living in the good of the mighty will of God in us.

SECURITY

Then, as the psalmist indicates, it is not only ascendancy which comes from the mountains but also security. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round about His people...". The heights are the places for strongholds, for refuges. And our strength, our safety is to get away from the low things, to leave behind what is mean and contemptible, and to get up into fellowship with the Lord on high. On the low levels we become the playthings of bad influences and cross currents - there are always evil powers which are at work down there in the dark. We will find deliverance and security by rising on to higher ground.

The devil and the evil forces are tremendously concerned with getting us down and holding us down, so that they can harass and play havoc with our spiritual lives. Down... down... that is the drive and direction of the evil one, who plans to get us down and keep us down in the place where he has the strength. Our refuge is not to fight on that low ground, but to flee to the heights, to escape to the Lord in the secret place of the most High.

I think that the Lord Jesus did just this. At the time when He was aware of all the pressure and down-drag of earthly conditions and disappointments even with His own disciples, He said: Let Me go away for a while and go into the mountains to My Father. It was thus that He was able to return marvellously fortified, and we can do the same, finding our way of escape by fellowship with God in the heights.

VISION

There is a further point about mountains, a fairly obvious one, and that is that they are places of vision, places where one can see the far distances. At the end of the Bible we are taken to an exceeding great and high mountain and shown the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, so that the last scene in the Bible is a mountain scene, and the mountain is truly one of vision, showing the Church in the full expression of its heavenly glory. Surely it is of supreme importance that God's people should have their vision enlarged. Our vision is too small, our purpose in life is too small; our conception of our salvation is often too small. We tend to narrow our thoughts so much that it is important for us to ascend into the Mount of Vision, for the loss of vision always brings about a falling to pieces. Those Christians who have no great sense of God's purposes and of His ability to reach His end and fulfil His intentions will find themselves at the mercy of the doubts and fears which defeat men down here on this earth.

GRAVITATION UPWARD

The reader may agree with all that has been said and yet still be puzzled as to how such elevation to the heights can be realised. The answer is that it is already a working power in the new nature of the Christian. The beginning of the Christian life is the discovery that Christ has come from heaven to take us back to heaven, and so has given us life from above. From the day that a man really comes into vital union with our risen and ascended Lord there begins within him a process of gravitation upwards. He now discovers that he does not really belong to earth, but has a heavenly nature which responds to God's call to the life on high. As he progresses, he finds that his new life leads him further and further away from the world in which he lives, and although this involves him in some difficulties and even embarrassment, he cannot find himself at home here as he once could. This very inward pull is evidence that he is a child of the heavenly country.

The consummation of the believer's life is certainly upward - for he is to be caught up to be forever with the Lord. So the life is a constant movement upward, from its first beginnings to its glorious end. This means that, like his Lord, he must learn to respond to the heavenly gravitation, not clinging to earthly interests and possessions, not being bound by earthly considerations, but giving always an inward answer to the call of heaven.

So far as Christ was concerned even His physical going up into a mountain illustrated how eager He was to respond to this call. And I believe that when at last He ascended to the Father, His heart was filled with the deepest satisfaction at home-going. It will surely be the same with us. We shall not go reluctantly and with regrets; no, we shall be rising to where we belong and what we were made for; we shall be rising to the final ascendancy, and in doing so we shall be answering to everything in our new constitution. Spiritually we are a mountain people. Let us now seek grace day by day, so that

we may repudiate all earth-boundness and refuse to dwell in the valley. We may often have to pass through it, but we m ust never settle down there, for we belong to the heights in Christ. "Here we have no abiding city, but we seek one to co me" (Hebrews 13:14).

Re: God's Call to the Life Above -sparks - posted by enid, on: 2007/1/29 5:36

Quote: Perhaps what most of us need is a higher level of life.

We certainly do.

Whilst it's ok to go through the motions, prayer, the word, church etc, where is the higher life, the normal Christian life, th at we are supposed to see on a daily basis?

We are not as spiritually minded as God would have us to be.

I don't doubt most of us still major on this world and what it temporarily offers, but we should see it as fleeting, as passin g.

While we might not live on a mountain, we can still have that mentality.

God bless.