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## The Cross and Higher Ground

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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### **A Message as Spoken.**

Reading: Exodus 24:1-18.

"He said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord."

Verse 12: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up unto me into the mount."

If I were asked to put into a sentence, a phrase, that which I believe the Lord has been saying in my own heart in relation to this season together, I think I should say that it is "The Cross and Higher Ground." I believe the Lord is saying to many of His children, and desires to say, "Come up unto Me in the mount." And when you come to look into it, it is very clear that the Lord's fullest, highest, greatest thought for His people, is that they may occupy high places, that they may in a right sense be an exalted people. All the movements of God are in that direction for His people. The man of whom it is said, in the midst of many others who knew the Lord, that he walked with God, terminated his career here by going up to the Lord. Israel's end of a wilderness journey was going up to possess. Elijah finished his course with an upward movement to the Lord. Israel's later history, when in right relationship with the Lord, was governed by those great seasons of going up to the Lord at Jerusalem, and we have a series of songs called 'Songs of Ascent' or Psalms of 'Going up.' The Lord Jesus did not finish His course on the Cross or in the grave, but going up: and the Church, His Body, is destined to follow in that way, to go up.

All these movements represent God's highest thought for His own. To fail of this means to have failed of God's fullest purpose. The Lord is an exalted Lord. He is represented as being "High and

above all," and He desires His people to exalt Him above all, and it is a remarkable thing that when you do exalt the Lord you always go up yourself. The Lord desires us to have high thoughts about Himself. If we have low thoughts about the Lord we live a low life. If we have high thoughts about the Lord we always go up ourselves. This contains this simple and yet very rich truth, the Lord desires His people to be in fellowship with Himself in high places, an exalted place, in a true spiritual elevation. If the end of the Church's course is to be marked by the Church's going up, then I think we may rightly conclude that towards the end the Lord will be making a great emphasis to rest upon spiritual and moral ascendancy in His people; that He will be calling on to higher ground, for as we, I think, believe, and we have certainly very often said it, the chronology of things is bound up with the spirituality of things. The dates of God synchronise with the conditions of His people; there will be no translation of the Church only on the ground of the Church's preparedness for translation: the fixed time for going up is fixed by God to tally with a state unto which the Church has come. There will be no mere mechanical and automatic translation of the Church. It will be entirely related to the Church's condition and, therefore, there must be a spiritual side as well as what we might call a chronological side, and the going up literally must be bound up with our going up spiritually and morally. The Lord is seeking, I am quite sure, to get His people on higher ground. The higher ground of faith, the higher ground of love, the higher ground of fellowship, the higher ground of spiritual vision and revelation, the higher ground of spiritual power, authority, the higher ground of moral ascendancy; and it is significant to note that the Scriptures contain mountains which represent all these things. That will probably be the realm of our meditation at times during these days.

This afternoon we do not go any further than the first step. We survey first of all, in brief, this fact, for it is a fact, the Lord is calling to higher ground, and then we take into consideration the first and the all-inclusive thing relative to higher ground. But oh! the effect of this, beloved, must be not just more information, more teaching, more knowledge, but it must have a moral effect in us, in our relationships, in the matter of fellowship; we shall have to have a reaction from everything that is low down, small, mean. We shall see that we must take higher ground in the matter of our relationships. The present level is too low, it is not high enough, it is not according to the Lord's thought. In the matter of love for one another there must spring up in us the feeling that the way in which we regard one another is too low. We must take the attitude that it is too low, we must come up higher in this matter. And so on all matters of our life in relation to the Lord there has got to be some elevation; and we must see that it is related to the ultimate purpose of God. This is not some little homily for daily life, that you must try and be more loving and show a greater consideration, and so on; it is related to the great end which God has in view; that we must see as we go on.

### **All Advance is Connected with Elevation**

But I want here to point out how striking it is, and impressive, that in the Word of God all increase and advancement of the Lord's people is connected with elevation. In fact, we may say that all connected with the positive side of the testimony is brought in by an eminence. When the Lord is going to do something on the positive side of adding to and increasing His people, or advancing them spiritually, almost invariably, if not invariably, it is connected with some high place. That is striking, that is impressive. This 24th chapter of Exodus is one great outstanding example of that. We make the observation now in order that we might be arrested by this. I emphasise the word "positive" because there is a negative side, and that is the Cross side. We are speaking about the Cross and higher ground. There is that wilderness level where the Cross operates in order to make possible the higher ground. The wilderness is not God's positive ground, that is the negative side; that we must be crucified is not God's end but God's essential method. The setting aside of man by nature is what we might call the negative side, the positive side is to bring up that which is of God on to a level of God's purpose and God's power.

## **The Pavement of Sapphire**

And so we see that all that is related to the positive side of the Lord's people and of the Lord's testimony is bound up with some high ground. But before we go on with that we want to see what is all inclusive, that in which all else is bound up in this matter, and that is, to see God's pavement, that upon which His feet rest, so to speak, the highway of God in relation to His people. Come to Ex. 24 and you have it (verses 9-10): God's pavement, that which was under His feet, as it were a sapphire stone, as it were the very heaven for clearness. We see that as the thing upon which the feet of God rest, that, so to speak, on which the Lord walks up and down, the basis and the foundation of all that follows, and you know what follows. "As it were a sapphire stone." I do not propose to turn to all the passages in Scripture where the sapphire stone is mentioned, you can do that when you desire to make a little study of the Word. All I desire to do is to point out what this means. The sapphire stone has a great place in Scripture. You will find it in relation to creation, in relation to grace, in relation to government, and you will find it in relation to glory, both heavenly and earthly glory. Here it is in Ex. 24 beneath the feet of God. In Ezek. 1:26 and 10:1, you have it seen as above the crystal-like expanse of the firmament. Lam. 4 you see princes of Zion spoken of as sapphire stones. In the Song of Songs, chap. 5 the beloved is spoken of as a sapphire stone; and then in Is. 54 the metropolis of the earth is seen to have its foundations laid with sapphire stones, and then in the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21 the second foundation is a sapphire.

What is the sapphire? I think if you look into the Scripture you will find that the sapphire stone undoubtedly represents Christ in universal glory. "As the very heaven for clearness." You know the sapphire is the stone of heavenly blue, transparent blue, as the very heavens for clearness. Do you notice what is happening here? "Under His feet as it were a sapphire stone and as it were the very heaven for clearness," for transparency; and immediately following this chapter, coming out of this chapter, the instructions for the tabernacle. That tabernacle is to be a representation of the Lord Jesus through and through, from centre to circumference, it is Christ presented. The predominant element in the whole thing is the heavenly blue. The high priest is the central figure, he wears an ephod of heavenly blue; and every man, woman and child throughout all their generations is commanded to have a bit of that same blue upon the fringe of their garments. The predominating element throughout this whole thing which is to be a revelation, unveiling, representation of the Lord Jesus is the heavenly blue. It is something that has come down out of the mount. It is a reflection here on earth of that which was under God's feet, the feet of the God of Israel. Earth and heaven are united in that blue. Heaven and earth joined, and joined to reveal the Lord Jesus in universal glory.

That is the nature of everything in the Word of God. That is where you arrive in the revelation of the eternal purpose and thought of God, heaven and earth united in the revelation of the glory of Christ. That is well known, that is perfectly clear, but do not let us make a common-place of it. Familiar as we may be with the truth of it beloved, it is no small thing that when God reaches His end this whole universe, heaven and earth, will be united in the display of the glory of His Son Jesus Christ. That is no small thing. God has fixed that, and God will reach His end. But for the moment the thing that is before us is this, that everything is related to that in the activities of God. God has that in His view all the time and all that He is going to say and do and require is bound up with that, the glory, the universal glory of His Son Jesus Christ. So that before ever a hand is put to work to realise that representation in type, before ever there can be a movement in the practical realm of accomplishment there has to be a vision and a revelation of Jesus Christ in glory.

## **A Representative Instrument**

If the Apostle Paul in a special way was given the ministry concerning that revelation of Jesus Christ in the mystery of His Body, before ever he can utter a word in that connection he must have a revelation of Jesus Christ in glory; that is basic to all the purpose of God, and we can neither do anything, nor endure anything until we have that. See God's end and that upon which God's eye is resting. Why had Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel to ascend the mount and see the God of Israel and that which was under His feet? In order surely that there might be an adequate representation of what was according to God's mind. This was a solemn responsibility that was being conferred upon these. They were being brought to see what was under God's feet in order that they might be charged with the responsibility of having everything constructed and maintained in accordance with that. Seventy of the elders; that is a representative number of the people of God. In the New Testament seventy is a representation of the whole Church. Seventy is a combination of ten and seven. Ten is the number of responsibility and seven of spiritual perfection, and the responsibility that was being conferred upon these men was for the spiritual perfection of God's thought in relation to the Lord Jesus. They had got to have God's perfect thought about the Lord Jesus and see to it that everything was constructed according to that thought. God's thought from eternity is the universal glory of His Son. The Lord must have some people to come into His thoughts about His Son in order to take responsibility in relation to others, and so He says - in effect - to them "Come up into the mount, your coming up is related to a great many more. Your coming up is that you might receive a revelation which will put you in a place of great responsibility, but also of great privilege unto a ministry which has no lesser object and end than the universal glory of the Lord Jesus. Come up into the mount." Surely these are days in which there is a very great need to come into the fulness of God's thought concerning the Lord Jesus. These are days when God's glory in Christ needs to be known, a recovery of the full testimony of Jesus. Unto that the Lord must take some at least and bring them into a special fellowship with Himself in His thought. That is a place of elevation.

### **The Way of the Cross**

Oh, but do you notice what had to happen before ever that could be? "And Moses built an altar under the mount." That is sacrifice. There was no ascending the mount until the altar had been built; sacrifice and the blood shed. In other words there is no coming up into those higher altitudes of Divine revelation, Divine apprehension, Divine vocation and ministry only on the ground of the Cross doing its work to set nature aside, to set man aside, because man by nature cannot come into God's thought. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God neither can he know them," he has to be set aside, the Cross has to cut in there and put man by nature out of this thing before he can come into the fulness of God's mind and God's purpose; and Moses built an altar. The Cross is always the gateway to the higher levels of spiritual life. The Cross is always the way to the tablelands of God, and the cross is not a thing, so far as we are concerned, done once and for all, only in the matter of our justification and our acceptance. On the objective side it is finished once and for all, but on the subjective side there is to be a daily dying, a bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. But that is the way up. We sometimes think of it as the way down, that this pulling down, destroying, crucifying, when shall we get to the end of this business? Beloved, if we knew it we are going up all the time, it is the way up. The Lord Jesus came down. He existed in the form of God but He counted it not something to be held on to, to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient, unto death - and the Apostle does not stop there - became obedient unto death even the death of the Cross - there was nothing that the world would applaud about that death, it was not one of those deaths that men would take account of and say it was a noble death. It was a most shameful, degrading death, the death of deaths. Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him.

We have nothing to give up like that, but the principle works, that the Cross is applied to the pulling down of the life of nature. It does not like being set aside. How many of you like to be thought nothing of? How many of you take pleasure in people just treating you as nothing? The flesh is not made that way. The Cross is applied to set man by nature aside, and as that Cross is applied there is a spiritual coming up all the time: this is ascendancy, coming up into a new place, and many people never reach very high ground because they never go down very low, they do not know much of the fulness of the Lord because they know so little of the emptying.

Beloved, a new application of the Cross is in the Divine thought - and intention - to bring us on to higher ground, and if the Church is to finally reach its highest ground, just prior to that it will know the deepest application of the Cross. What is true for the Church is true for the individual member. The altar always leads to the mountain in the intention and determined purpose of God. It always does. It is not the exaltation of ourselves, it is the exaltation of Christ in us, and in that we find our fullest satisfaction. We shall ever feel less and less, but if it is a right state that is produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Cross, in God's sight there is a wonderful increase, a wonderful gain. We shall see later that there is a mountain in Matthew to which the Lord brings His own and says "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" - you see the connection?

But now let us come back and close upon this preliminary word. What is the Lord after in that Cross, with you, with me? What is it that He has in mind? Just this; everything according to Christ, heavenly blue: that is, the glory of Jesus Christ in His people individually, in His Church collectively, and in this universe at large eventually; everything revealing the glory of Jesus Christ. Do you see that that is the movement of the Church? When the Church is perfect in glory it will be the very vehicle of the going forth into the universe of the glory of Christ. That is our destiny as members of Christ. It is to that we have been called and chosen before the foundation of the world, that we should be unto the praise of His glory and that this whole universe through a Christ-impregnated Church should reflect His glory - the blue everywhere. That is the end. God is working towards that end now. His dealings with us are toward that end. Why these difficult experiences, this discipline, this chastisement, why these sufferings? All to the glory; all to bring about the crystal clearness, the absolute transparency, the purity of the heavenly nature of the Lord Jesus in us. The Lord is just doing that thing in us, beloved, by the Cross, which is clearing the film of this natural life, removing the thickness and the denseness of this corruption and pollution, getting a pure state, a transparent state which is the absolute purity, transparency, clearness of the nature of Christ in us. It is a moral thing. This conformity to the image of His Son is a moral thing - I use that word in its highest sense - something that is being wrought into the very moral fibre of our being, the nature of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has taken that in hand. Do not think of being glorified as some time reaching that position where suddenly there will be upon us a cloak of light and we shall be glorified. The glory comes by what we are, shines through from within, not from without. The mount of Transfiguration is not that suddenly the Lord Jesus was given a robing of light, it was the shining out of His Person: and glory is the result of the moral process in us, of the Holy Spirit's work through the Cross. It will be what we have been made by grace, it will be His glory not ours because it is all of grace, because He made it possible and He carried it through.

This universe is to be full of the *moral* excellency of the Lord Jesus, seen everywhere. What a universe it will be. That represents higher ground for us. It emphasises and stresses the call "Come up to Me in the mount." First of all to see what is in view. When you see that you have got an adequate motive for enduring the sufferings of the Cross, you have an object in view in the light of which you regard everything that the Lord does with you and to you. That is the end. We need that. We have often said that Paul got through that terrific life of his because he kept the Lord Whom he had seen on the Damascus Road always before him, and in his last words almost he has got that

vision still there: "That I may know Him, Him whom I saw years ago on the Damascus Road, He is still my goal, my object, my glory, that I may be conformed to Him, that is the only thing." It was that that carried him through. Oh, that the Lord would show us the Lord Jesus as His goal for us, and that He is operating all the time in relation to that end. He is going to have everything constructed with that end in view, according to that. And the tabernacle, while it represents Christ in Person, we know quite well also represents Christ corporate. The Body which has many members, and all the members being many are one Body, so also is the Christ. The Christ personal will be revealed in the Christ corporate in the ages to come, and they must be one, therefore, in moral nature as they will be one in glory, having been, from a certain standpoint along a certain line, one in the Cross. There is a work of the Cross in which we do not share, done for us and apart from us, but there is a work of the Cross in which we do have a place, and it is given to us in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for Him in His behalf. "Filling up that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ." It is unto that glory, that end of God.

Now may the Lord bring us up into the mount to see the glory towards which He is working, that in which He walks up and down. All the ways of God are connected with the ultimate glory of the Lord Jesus. His feet stand upon that and He does not move off of that pavement. God's movements are in relation to the Lord Jesus, to the glory of the Lord Jesus:- the sapphire stone to be revealed throughout the universe. Creation is governed by that, grace is governed by that, government is governed by that. Ezekiel is government. "And above the firmament a throne and as it were a sapphire stone," the glory of "one like unto a Man." Government is in relation to the glory of the Lord Jesus, and the glory is His glory; that is glory, the manifestation of Him in His moral perfections in a people whom He has brought to glory:- the achievement of this One bringing many sons to glory. That will be glory for Him and that will be glory for us. The Lord lead us on to higher ground with a vision of the end He has in view, for that embodies all that the Lord has to say in these days, it is related to that. So may we get our vision adjusted at the outset and see God's end.