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The Sanctuary of the Throne

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Jer. 17:1,5-6; 9-10,12; Rev. 11:19.

"A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary" (Jer. 17:12).

You will have gathered from the intimation in the fragments read from this chapter, that the setting of verse 12 is a very dark one indeed. You know that Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of several kings, and the point at which these words were uttered, that reign of Josiah in which there had been a very blessed work of revival and returning to the Lord, had come to a close and with it that promise of better things had faded, and the course of evil and iniquity among the Lord's people in Judah had returned in full force. Darkness had set in, and here in these words at the opening of this chapter you have the statement of how terrible was the state of the Lord's people - the sin of Judah written with a pen of iron, with a diamond. And then this description as to their state again - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?" So the setting of verse 12 is one of great darkness and gloom, the outlook and the prospect very serious indeed, judgment is drawing near. It *must* be; the inveteracy of sin and of the people's clinging to sin makes that prospect for them one full of dark promise. Well, that is how things are, sin and inevitable judgment that is all around and that lies before, but in the midst of that there is this great declaration - "A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary."

In that upward look, the prophet who knows all about the state of things around and what is coming, finds his own deliverance. The outward look is full of depression; the upward look is full of assurance. He looks above.

I want that we should just dwell for a little on that word 'sanctuary', our sanctuary, in such a day. You know that that word 'sanctuary' is always used in connection with the temple, both in the Bible and outside of the Bible. It is a word which is associated with God. The heathen had their sanctuaries in their temple, but we know the word "sanctuary" to be always connected with the temple, the House of God, and therefore it carries in the first place the feature of something holy. For us who know our Bibles, that is quite clear.

The sanctuary is always the holy place, the *place of holiness*. And then it is the *place of aloneness*, getting away, of detachment, retirement, retreat. And then it is the *place of refuge*, of safety. Those three things come out quite clearly in the Scriptures about the sanctuary. We speak of seeking sanctuary. We want to get away from something, we want to escape from something, we want to be alone, to be quiet, to be at rest. Security, safety, refuge - these are the thoughts always connected with sanctuary.

Now here is the word: "our sanctuary", in a day when sin is working out to judgment and the outlook and the on-look is one full of darkness, where is our sanctuary, our place of escape, our place of retirement, our place of rest, of assurance, our place of safety? A glorious throne on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. That throne then, being the sanctuary, means in this connection that the government in which we find our place, the authority, the administration within which the true children of God have their sanctuary, is one which has to do with perfect holiness and the issue of everything must be that.

You notice in this passage in Revelation the sanctuary of God which is in heaven was opened and there followed lightnings. You cannot open that sanctuary of the Divine government, but that you will have the elements of judgment for sin with a view to clearing it up, to bringing an end. The two great things about Jeremiah are the extreme notes throughout his prophecies. One is the awfulness of the outlook, the despair, the tragedy - he goes to the very depths in that way; and yet, on the other hand, there is no prophet in whom you find notes of stronger hope looking beyond. Here is the darkest vision presented in Jeremiah, and yet here is the brightest prospect opened up, but in between the judgments, and God is here seen as in His throne judging. Ah, but with a view! He is going to bring out something better. There is going to be a new situation, there is going to be a purging, there is going to be the bringing of the kingdom of this world to be the kingdom of our God and His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. And when that sanctuary is disclosed, then judgment unto the ridding of the kingdom of this world of its iniquity is seen to be at work. That is Jeremiah in essence, and our sanctuary is this. We get away from this when we take refuge in the fact that God is not dealing with this world, with men, as He is, just with a view to destruction, but with a view to purging, with a view to having things better. And who shall not say that the present is not a part of the judgment of the world? I am not saying that it is the final judgment, it may be the beginning of that, but it is in line with God's dealings with sin.

You and I ought, after all, much as we shrink from it, ought to be grateful that God allows sin to come to judgment. Supposing all this iniquity went on, and there was no element of judgment in it so that men came to hate this thing and ask their deepest questions. I find in the deepest questions that men ask in a day like this is the hope of the situation, the fact that they ask questions. Why? A

soldier said to me in the train the other day, "Why does God allow it?" That is the greatest hope when men ask questions. What is the answer? God has done the biggest thing that God can do to stop this thing. If I or men in government were to do the greatest thing to stop this sort of procedure and it would most certainly stop it, and men said, "We will not have it!" then it must come back upon them, and God has done the thing. The fact that sin comes back upon men under the laws of God is a declaration that that sanctuary of holiness is in a throne, that a throne of holiness is governing and bringing sin back upon its own head with a view eventually to bringing an end.

And what we see in Israel is some foreshadowing, some symbol, of the great world truth. You know that this sin of Judah written with a pen of iron resulted in that judgment that Judah went into captivity and Judah and Israel were never again guilty of the sin for which they went into captivity. They did not go into captivity for sins, they went into captivity for one sin only, and that was idolatry, and after the captivity you never find idolatry in Israel again. The Lord finished it by judgment and that is a shadow of His greater judgment, that He is going to clear up sin, not just the sins that men are doing, but *sin*; the heart of sins which is sin. The glorious throne on high is working judgment in relation to that.

It all comes back, of course (we cannot stay to examine the whole meaning) to the sin question, and what is the sin question? It is a personal matter of God's Son. We ought to find sanctuary in this. God is bringing sin to book. His throne is governing, and things are not going on with impunity, they cannot go on with impunity. It is a terrible outlook, I know, but then it is the best thing for you and for me and for all men that God brings us up short when we are going headlong into sin. The fact of God is in that, the fact that God governs is there. If you and I can see God governing, how terrible His government is, we ought to be fearful. It says, "This universe is in the hands of One who is holy." He has got hold of things with holy hands. The throne is a sanctuary and the sanctuary is a throne. That is, it is holiness that is reigning.

I wonder if it means anything to you that a holy God has hold of the situation. If He had not, sin would not be sin, and sin would not be a terrible thing. Today, after all these centuries of education, of scientific discovery, of supposed progress in civilisation, you have this which is scientific murder on a wholesale scale. Yes, you see a holy throne is governing, and education does not rule out sin. Sin is sin, however high we may get in the scale of civilisation, sin is sin and sin comes back, but for those who are in touch with the Lord, like Jeremiah, that is something about which to feel recovered confidence, assurance, sanctuary. Draw back into that. God has got hold of this thing. He is making it known that sin is sin. You cannot depart from God with impunity. It would be an awful thing if you could. You would say, "There is no God in this universe." God is not outside, He is not letting things take their course. The dark outlook is a declaration that God is on the throne and He is a holy God. That is a sanctuary to us. It should be a place of retreat, reassurance and safety.

Well, a glorious throne on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary, our rest, our reassurance, our retirement, in a day like this, our safety. From the beginning, it ever has been. This world has never gone beyond that throne at any time in its course of iniquity. It has never failed to find, sooner or later, that that throne set on high is from the beginning; that is, it is eternal, it is established through all time. But, blessed be God, it will not be ever as it has been. That throne will bring an end to this, and that is what is in the passage in Revelation. A sanctuary is seen in heaven, the last judgment. The seventh angel sounded, that is the last, the seventh angel, and with that "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for

ever and ever." The sanctuary of God which is in heaven is disclosed - and there are thunders, lightnings and an earthquake.

Now may the Lord give us the light we need to bring us to rest.