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The Battle Which Is Not Yours

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 2 Chron. 20:1-27.

"Then upon Jehaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite, of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the assembly; and He said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat: Thus saith the Lord unto you, Fear not ye, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the ascent of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem; fear not, nor be dismayed: tomorrow go out against them; for the Lord is with you" (2 Chron. 20:14-17).

"Having despoiled (or, having put off from Himself) the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (the Cross)" (Col. 2:15; A.S.V.).

While it is true that in the New Testament the Lord's servants are designated "soldiers," and while it is also true that there are battles to be fought, there is one big fundamental and all-inclusive battle in which the Lord's people have no part whatever. To engage in it is to write over all the work of our Lord Jesus in His Cross, Failure! - to write it off as something which does not hold good. There is a battle in which you and I have no fighting place. It was the Lord's battle, not ours, and it is over the recognition and settlement of that fact that most of the trouble arises in the experience of multitudes of the Lord's people. There has been a battle which includes all other battles, which has been fought by the Lord Himself for us. It is important for us to know both that fact, and what that battle was.

A Victory To Be Appropriated By Praising Faith

The story in the Old Testament which we have read is an illustration of it. I am not saying that it fits into Col. 2:15 in doctrine, but in principle it does. The principle is this - that in both of those passages of Scripture a battle is set forth as having already been won.

The next thing is that the victory which already exists has to be entered into by faith. There has to be a stand taken in relation to that, and not a fight for it. If you begin to take up that fight you are destined to defeat, because you have put God's ground away from under your feet. We shall see that when we come to the nature of the battle. But it is very serious, and we should recognize it. Here is something in existence, and upon that something as an accomplished fact in the realm of hostilities a stand has to be taken by faith, and no conflict allowed.

In the case of the people of Judah of whom we have read, their faith as to what had been said - "The battle is not yours, but God's... ye shall not need to fight in this battle" - was demonstrated by song. You do not need that I stay to show how necessary faith was, and that it was genuine faith and not mere optimism. No, it was faith that was required. It was a very desperate situation naturally, but faith was demonstrated, and it was demonstrated by singing. Their song was the evidence that they believed God and His Word; they believed the thing that was declared to them, and they proved it by singing. And it was not the kind of singing of the little boy walking along the country lane in the dark, who sings to try and keep himself cheerful in the midst of terrible fears. There is no doubt about it, it was a song of assurance and confidence.

"...Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem: believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper." And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed them that should sing unto the Lord, and give praise in holy array, as they went out before the army, and say, "Give thanks unto the Lord; for His lovingkindness endureth for ever." And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set liers-in-wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, that were come against Judah; and they were smitten" (2 Chron. 20:20-22).

The Battle Already Won In The Cross

And then - this is where we begin to get near to the heart of the nature of this battle - the song was governed by the priestly and Levitical side of things. You will see at the end of the previous chapter how the government was put into the hands of the priests; and then the narrative in chapter 20 shows that it was the Levites, whose it was to praise, who spontaneously broke into praise (v. 19). Praise expressive of faith was governed by what was priestly and Levitical - which shows the nature of the battle at once. This was the question, the whole question - on whose side was God? and God has no favorites. God is not on one side just because He feels inclined to favour that side. God is only on the side of righteousness, on the side of holiness - "in holy array." God is on the side where salvation is already implicit by reason of priestly government, or the government of priestly principles - that is, the Blood, the Cross, all that redemption means through the work of the Lord Jesus. And so the answer to the question, On which side is God? is this - He is found where that is represented and implicit which is the work of His Son on Calvary. That is the nature of the battle; and that is not your battle nor mine; that was God's battle!

So we come over to this well-known passage in the Letter to the Colossians. It is a wonderful passage. I have been looking at several different versions, and, although I do not often trouble you with the technique of different translations, I think it worth dwelling upon two or three.

“Having despoiled the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (His cross).”

“The dominions and powers He robbed of their prey, put them to open shame, led them away in triumph through His cross.”

“He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in His cross.”

Now you notice that is all in the past tense; that is something done. The ground has been taken from the enemy - that is the first thing; and when an enemy's ground is taken from him, he is in total confusion. Note the confusion back there in 2 Chron. 20 - they are all killing one another. Why? - their ground upon which they trusted has been taken from them. In Colossians it is the same confusion: “put to shame.” What is shame but confusion? If anybody is in confusion, they are very much put to shame. In confusion they are helpless, you can take their prey; and that is what Judah did in the story we have read. That is why I gave you those different versions. He took their prey, prey from the principalities and powers. Why? - because their ground was taken away.

The Enemy's Only Ground Of Hope

What was the ground upon which the principalities and powers rested their confidence, and upon which they found their strength? Now, follow closely here; let us look at it.

“And you who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us in legal demands; this He set aside, nailing it to the Cross. He despoiled the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing openly in His cross. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food, drink, festivals, new moons, sabbaths; these are only the shadow of things which were to come.”

You see the point - handwriting in ordinances and legal demands. ‘Thou shalt!’ ‘Thou shalt not!’ - the whole sum of law written in ordinances against us. Where was and is the strength, the solidity, of the principalities and the powers? It is here - firstly, that whole range of legal demands; and, then, the weakness of man. All the power of Satan is upheld by those two things against us - ‘Thou shalt!’ ‘I cannot!’; ‘Thou shalt not!’ ‘But I am always doing it, I cannot help myself!’ The demand, the law; and our weakness. Oh, what a playground for the devil! All his strength is there, all his confidence is there, all his solidity is there. Take that ground away, take away the handwriting in ordinances against us, take away from him all the legal demands, and he has nothing to stand on, he is in confusion; he is made a show of openly, put to shame, to confusion; he is broken up, he is helpless.

You stand, and then you take. Listen, friends - immediately you, as a believer in Jesus Christ, admit the slightest suggestion into your heart or mind that there is a question about your salvation, you have capitulated to the devil and undone the work of Jesus Christ in His Cross; you have strengthened the devil's power to spoil you, immediately you admit anything like that. Satan must recover ground in order to have power, and his ground is that. What is it? - our weakness over against legal demands; that is his ground, and he will never, never, to the last breath of our bodies, cease to try and get that ground back in his hands.

The Enemy's Suggestions To Be Repudiated

But, listen again. You and I are not to fight that battle. That is the point - *we are not to fight that battle*. We are to take the attitude that the battle has been fought and finished - that is all there is to it. Let the suggestion of doubt be presented - our attitude must be that there is no place for such a suggestion; it is not our concern at all; God has undertaken that, God in Christ assumed responsibility for that, and settled it once and for all! Admit the suggestion, and see what a mess the devil will make of your life! You know, as well as I do, that the song goes out at once. What then are we to do on that matter? We have to stand in faith and rejoice - that is all. Oh, if ever a Christian, or even a servant of God with long experience, says anything to you indicating that he or she has some question, some doubt, about his or her salvation, you say at once, 'You have absolutely given the ground back to the devil and he is robbing you of your life.' I cannot be strong enough about this. I know the enemy in this matter, and what he is trying to do, and how many lives are being turned by him right in upon themselves and made to go round this whole matter of whether God is with them, and to question their own salvation. They are always bringing up again this basic sin question, looking at it, talking about it. Their consciousness seems obsessed by this matter of sin.

If there is some specific thing that has arisen as a ground of controversy between the Lord and yourself, and you know it, your attitude toward that must be to take it right back to this fundamental and inclusive ground and put it there, and not bring into question this whole matter of Calvary's immense triumph. "If we confess our sins" - not to one another; do not go round confessing your sins to people - "If we confess our sins" - to Him - "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Why? Because already He has secured the complete ground for so doing.

Confidence Essential To Victory

But mark, there is no contradiction here. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourself, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord"; "tomorrow go ye down against them." Does that sound like a contradiction? Oh no, there is no contradiction. You must express your faith. Yes, there is fighting to be done, but there is a great difference between fighting *in* a victory and fighting *for* a victory when it is a matter of our salvation. Oh, please, dear friends, do not be amongst those who talk much about the devil and the Lord's victory over him, and have in your own hearts a dark shadow about this matter. The only people who dare face the enemy and take an attitude against the evil powers are the people who have such assurance in their hearts on this fundamental matter that they are in joy. Do not go out against the enemy with a cloud of doubt in your heart. This enemy cannot be faced with a doubt. We have to take a heavenly position, a position on an established fact. Immediately we come down on to the position of nature - what we find here on this earth and in ourselves - we are undone.

To maintain our heavenly position we have to recognize that the whole question of progressive sanctification is another and entirely different issue, and there is no hope for us - we shall make no progress in sanctification and conformity to the image of Christ - unless this one fundamental issue is settled all-inclusively. We must have a vantage ground from which to move, we must have a position on which we stand and stand fully assured in all the will of God.

Introspection Leads To Defeat

Now, with one further word I will close. Dear friends, if any truth has the effect of turning you in upon yourself, making you introspective, self-occupied in a spiritual way, that truth has been wrongly apprehended. You may assume the position of the most spiritual, but you are all wrong in your apprehension. This great work which Christ did in His Cross was never intended to make

anybody miserable. Of course, that goes without saying; yet there are multitudes who are miserable after trusting the Lord, miserable over the sin question in their lives; and the number, I am afraid, is increasing. Always keep a very distinct and broad line between fuller revelation, deeper truth (whatever you may term it - all that going-on-to-full-growth realm of things) and this whole matter of introspection. Some people seem to think that to become more spiritual we must become more intense and tied-up and occupied with this whole matter of the spiritual life, and really they are the most unbearable people, the joy has gone out of them. I am certain of this, that nothing will ever come to you, however deep, however mighty, however tremendous, *by revelation of the Holy Spirit*, that will make you miserable. The revelation of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit - and there is no other revelation - will never make a soul miserable. There is something wrong if a Christian is miserable on spiritual matters, and it is either failure to apprehend the one great, absolute reality that the victory was God's and that He won it in Christ, fully and finally, and we are not called to share at all in that battle; or the truth which has come subsequently has been misapprehended and has become something that is a burden grievous to be borne. The Lord Jesus said, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).

And what was the yoke? Well, listen again; you will get it in various places in the New Testament where the very word is used. "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger" (Matt. 23:4). What was the yoke, the burden? - the law, ordinances, 'thou shalt,' 'thou shalt not'; the enforcement of this. "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." He "despoiled the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in (His Cross)." How? He nailed to His Cross the whole list of ordinances against us and took the ground of the enemy's strength and assurance from him. You know quite well that the enemy has no abstract power over anybody. It is always concrete, it is always positive. The devil must have something to make his power felt. It does not exist, in effect, unless he has got moral ground, and the thing with which he lashes and drives and harasses is this law of carnal ordinances which was against us, against us, against us!

Listen! The enemy is always saying that God is against you, His Word is against you, things are against you. That is his ground and strength. But - "if God be for us..." (Rom. 8:31). Oh, that is another side - "for us"! How? Not abstractly. "He despoiled," "He made a show," "He triumphed." It was not simply a clash between spiritual forces in the unseen; a moral issue was involved. It was taking ground and robbing the enemies of their strength, their coherence. Confusion resulted. They in effect, say, 'What can we do now? All our weapons are gone.' Then they begin to blame one another, to kill one another. There is no love among these evil forces, they have no coherence of love. It is all hatred there, and immediately they find the ground taken from them, they turn upon one another.

Well, we will stop there; but do get this matter settled. Any introspective Christian is useless as a servant of the Lord. Your days, weeks, months, years, go, and all that might be for the Lord is devoured by that canker-worm of uncertainty as to your own spiritual life. Life is thrown away, the devil is triumphant, he is spoiling everything. If you want to know effectiveness, then do not fight in that battle at all. The real power that overcomes in this matter is faith. So believe God, and, if you will, believe His prophets - the thing which is declared unto you, which is the very truth of God.