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The House of Bondage

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place... And it shall be, when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that opens the womb, being males; but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem" (Exodus 13:3, 14-15).

There is a very significant reiteration in the Word of God of the above passage. It will not be strange to your ears as I recall the fact that very frequently in the Word of God we come upon this reminder where either the Lord or His servant reminds the people that He was the Lord who brought them out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. That reiteration is of value inasmuch as it always occurs with a special connection; that is, it is not always with the same connection and application, but the position changes with the various restatements of that great inclusive fact. That is, the Lord reminded His people of the great basic fact in connection with different and various positions to which He had brought them, or was bringing them. Those positions represented phases and stages of their calling, of their life in relation to Himself. It is concerning several of those restatements of the basic fact that I feel the Lord would have us to be occupied.

But first of all let me remind you that this word so frequently reiterated, "the house of bondage" does not just mean the house of captivity. Perhaps that hardly needs stating and yet we do not weigh words sufficiently to give their full value. We could just read it and mentally conclude that it meant that Israel were prisoners in Egypt, they were tied up, they were locked up, they were in bondage. Listen to the word again "bond-age", under bond, under a regime of bondage. The word

really meant they were in slavery. It was servitude. That is the pre-eminent element in the word, not just as prisoners put into a cell so that they could not get out, but put to servitude to bring gain to Egypt, to Pharaoh. We shall say more about that shortly, but let us be quite clear as to the meaning of the word that we are using. They were in servitude, and I think the margin of your Bible will show you that that is what is meant.

Now here we have the first of these many reiterated statements, *"I am the Lord which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."* If you look again at the context you will see that there immediately follows the consecration of the firstborn in Israel to the Lord. The firstborn in Egypt had been slain, consecrated to judgement and death. The firstborn in Israel were taken by God, consecrated to redemption and life. Here you have the matter of sonship; the firstborn sons in Egypt under condemnation, judgement, death; the firstborn sons in Israel in redemption, in life, consecrated to God, God's own possession, and the firstborn standing to represent the whole nation, thus making the whole nation a nation of firstborn sons.

So that in the first place this first passage concerning the Lord's bringing out of the house of bondage brings before us the contrast between sons and slaves; out of the house of servitude, out of the house of slavery, out of the house of bondage to be sons. That is the Lord's thought for His people, not slaves but sons, not in servitude but in liberty, the liberty of sonship, *"If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"* (John 8:36). *"And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father"* (Gal. 4:6). It is the spirit of emancipation.

Now, coming back to what we were saying, Satan's great aim is to make men serve his kingdom, to build his dominion, to bring them into servitude for the sake of his world, and thereby to rob them of their great, noble calling and choosing as in the will of God to be sons.

You see that fact all through the Scriptures. It stands out in very clear relief at certain points. You remember in the days of Daniel and his companions how the satanic principle and idea comes out from Nebuchadnezzar in the building of his great domain, *"Is not this great Babylon which I have built..."* (Daniel 4:30). The great and glorious kingdom of this world in alienation from and in hostility to God. Nebuchadnezzar set up his image and called to all nations and kingdoms to bow down to his image, and whosoever would not bow down and worship the image should be cast into the fiery furnace. Now that is the satanic principle, to bow down, to render homage, worship; to give service to his dominion, his kingdom; to spend themselves and to give the worth-ship of their lives to the serving and constituting of something not for or of God.

Satan came to the Lord Jesus with the very same object, presenting to Him the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, and said, *"All this will I give thee if thou wilt bow down and worship me."* In some way - and the ways are countless - the enemy is always seeking to bring those whom God intended to be sons in that full, glorious, heavenly sense, to render him service and to get from them the value of their lives, their strength, and their resource for the building of his kingdom. He is set on defeating God's end in Christ which is sonship; not slaves, but sons.

That leads us right to the heart of things. God brings His full end right into His first statements or movements. God does not begin with fragments and work bit by bit, piling up until He reaches His full thought. He crowds His full thought into the first statement, or the first step, and then begins to work its unfolding. So here you find right at the beginning the significance of God's full thought. What is the full development of sonship? What is sonship leading to? What is God's thought as bound up with sonship? It is dominion. He is bringing many sons to glory, and His thought is that the sons in the Son shall reign and have dominion. That is the end, that is the full development of

sonship, that is the destiny of the sons, those who are in Christ; and right at the beginning it is a question of who is going to have dominion, where dominion is to be vested. Pharaoh is as a type and representation of that other dominion, that spiritual dominion of Satan is seeking to bring those who should be the sons to reign, into bondage to serve his dominion, to establish his kingdom. That is a very serious reflection, that any man or any woman who is not consecrated to God in the terms of the firstborn, wholly God's, is in some way being used to bolster up, to perpetuate that other dominion. There is no midway, there is no neutral tone in this, we are either serving the Lord or we are serving the Lord's enemy. You see, there is another dominion which is set against his dominion, the dominion of the Son, into which we are called through grace, which is the destiny which God has fixed for us in His mercy through redemption, and the full end comes into view right at the beginning.

What is salvation? Salvation in its fullest meaning is the throne of dominion. "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" "*Thou madest him to have dominion.*" If you look at the quotation of that passage in Hebrews from the Psalms, you will see that the immediate context has to do with the sonship. Firstly, "*Of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever...*" (Heb. 1:8). And then what? "*...in bringing many sons to glory to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings*" (Heb. 2:10). "*Wherefore, holy brethren...*" (Heb. 3:1). It is a family matter. It is the sonship principle governing in relation to the throne. That is the end of salvation.

Now you see it is a question of dominion. Well then, if that is the full meaning of sonship, dominion in relation to God, then we look at Israel as a type, first of Christ, the Firstborn Son. Israel is a type of the firstborn, and in the one Firstborn all the family is gathered up and represented. But then Israel is also a type of the church as the church of the firstborn ones. The Lord said to Pharaoh, "*Let My son go.*" What does Israel stand for, then, in relation to sonship? Firstly, a testimony to God's power. You notice that is the thing connected with this statement. In Exodus 13:14 an emphasis is laid upon, "with power" the Lord brought us out. The bringing of Israel out of Egypt is always set forth as the paramount miracle of the old dispensation, the supreme example of the exercise of Divine power. Israel stands to testify to the fact that God is equal to this task of overthrowing one mighty dominion to secure His sons that they may have dominion.

The testimony to the power of God is found in living sonship. Against that testimony all the power of hell is directed. Anything to cripple that. You will notice that this passage and every similar passage or reiteration of this main statement is given as a warning, "*Thou shalt remember... lest...*". It is a bringing of it home, and it is as though the Lord was saying, "Now look here, this is what you are called to, this is the end in view, all this is bound up with what you are, but remember there is an enemy always at hand to prevent you reaching that end, to spoil you in the way, to rob you of the meaning of this." When you remember that this fundamentally sets forth the testimony to God's power in living sonship, you will know that there is an enemy always at hand to rob of the living value of such, to make our Christian lives just professional things, formal things, a written thing so far as creed and ordinance is concerned: going to meetings, saying prayers, reading the Bible. All that becomes a part of the Christian order, but to lose the throbbing testimony of a life which is expressive of the supreme power of God is a terrible thing.

Satan does not mind how many Christians there are of the dead kind. They are very useful to him. He is always working to deprive of the living element in the Lord's people, to bring that life into bondage and to once again make even Christians serve his dominion. Oh yes, it is quite true that you can be a Christian, and, losing the living element, the vital element in your testimony, the Christian life may become a kind of servitude, verily a laborious thing, a drudgery, a disappointment, and that kind of thing is very useful to the enemy. Remember that it is that kind of thing which is a most

useful thing to the enemy. One thing that hinders multitudes of people really coming to the Lord is the cold, dead formality of Christians, the lifelessness of multitudes who bear the name of Christ. And they themselves are not happy and not satisfied, and the devil is sapping their lives; to all intents and purposes they are back in the house of bondage. It is the living element in sonship that matters, and against that the enemy is set.

But Christ and His church, as typified in Israel, also set forth the fact that Satan's world is plagued to death on behalf of sonship. The Lord plagued Pharaoh and plagued Egypt right to the death for the sake of His son. Paul says, "*For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain...*" What for? "*...for the manifestation of the sons of God*". The creation is plagued to death until God has got His sons out of it, and then the creation itself will be delivered from bondage.

It is a good way to turn things round and see it from another angle, because so often we think only in this one way, that the Lord's people are suffering terribly at the hands of the devil and the world. But it is also true that the devil and the world are suffering terribly because of the Lord's people. That whale will be glad to spew out Jonah, and get rid of him. With Jonah inside, the whale is having a bad time. With that which belongs to God there will be no ease until it is out. The word here is "...brought them out". God is getting a people out of the nations, and He is going to get them out of this world as He has already in Christ got them out of the authority of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. And God is judging in relation to His people, God is plaguing in relation to His people. The enemy is not having it all his own way. He is not comfortable. He is having a bad time with the Lord's people.

Now, we are to be a plague to the devil. We do not speak lightly or say these things frivolously, but the Lord would make His people a plague, in a certain sense, to the enemy. Their presence must set up such a condition that either the world is going to bow to God or it is going to eject the saints. True sonship can never sit down and have a comfortable time in the kingdom of Satan or in this world. The very nature of sonship is to set up irritation in this world, to set up conflict and to bring home judgement. The Spirit of God has come in order to convict the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgement, and in the church the Spirit of God should be so active as to bring home to the world the judgement of God and to, in that sense, plague the world until it either yields to God's authority or parts company, gets the saints out.

What does our sonship count for here? Is it a registration against the enemy, so that we are a nuisance to him and a nuisance to the world, or is our Christian life something so passive that it does not make any difference, or very little difference, to those around us who are not the Lord's and who are against us? The Lord is with His people, but that means that while they are here the issue is with Him and not with the enemy.

"I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

This passage has to do with the giving of the law, and that is a part of the whole bringing of Israel under the government of God's Word. It is what is called the old covenant. Commandments are given here; they are a part of a much larger revelation of God's will and God's mind, God's thoughts concerning His people, so that the people shall come right under the government of Divine thoughts. In the same passage you are taken back to the beginning. First of all it is as the Lord said, "I brought you out to be this full testimony to My power in sonship, this full expression of My attitude towards the dominion of the enemy." Then He goes on, and it is as though He said, "I brought you out to be My sons, and as such you are to be wholly under the government of My

thoughts." "Thou shalt not..." that is the one side of this, and all those "not's" have to do with the natural inclinations, judgements, preferences, likes, dislikes of man. "Thou shalt". All those "shalt's" have to do with the supremacy and dominion of Divine thoughts, Divine judgements, Divine counsels, Divine wishes. That is sonship.

Now when we turn over to the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians chapters 3 and 4 we have Paul telling us the nature of the new covenant. Now we have come out of the type into the reality, out of the foreshadowing into that which was foreshadowed. We come now into the realm of sonship as really and truly known spiritually. The apostle tells us what sonship means here as to the terms and character of the new covenant, and he says it is not commandments written with pen and ink on tables of stone, but it is the revelation of Jesus Christ in our hearts written by the Spirit of the living God; the Spirit of the living God writing the revelation of God in Christ in our hearts. That is sonship.

God's thoughts for us as sons are that we should, by the indwelling Holy Spirit and His inward activities, be acquainted with the mind of God in an inward way, in a living way, and come under the government of that Divine mind, those Divine thoughts. It is something inward. It is not external, conforming to a set of rules and regulations. It is the Spirit of God witnessing in our hearts as to what God thinks about things, what God desires for us, the way God wishes us to go, and bearing witness against our judgements, our thoughts, our preferences, even when we think that our judgements are good, even when we think that our motives are pure and our intentions are worthy. Even when we think that this is the right way, the Spirit of the Lord may register, "No!" and say, "But God's thoughts are higher than those, and other than those". It may be like that. It is the government of God's thoughts in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and that is a part of our sonship, not something extra in the Christian life. This is not 'the higher life', some special kind of advanced spirituality. "I brought you out for that!" The initial thing is in relation to that, and that is in relation to the final thing. The very becoming God's sons has bound up with it this glorious privilege, this glorious blessing of having the Holy Spirit dwelling within, and not only dwelling within, but writing God's thoughts in our hearts; that is, making us acquainted with the Lord, bringing us to an understanding of Him. That is our privilege.

If you have not entered into that, do not go and ask the Lord to do it for you. He has done it. That is your birthright. As a child, as one in whom the Spirit of sonship dwells, it is your birthright to know the Lord in your heart by the operation of the Holy Spirit. You go on knowing, and the more you know the less you feel you know, because you discover that there is so much more to be known, but it is blessed progress. You are getting to know the Lord in your heart. The new covenant is bound up with sonship.

"Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Deut. 6:12).

The connection here is with the inheritance. It has to do with when you have come in, when you have inherited and entered into the realm of all blessings and Divine fulness, into that sphere where all the secrets of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, like the treasures, the metals and the ore in the hills and mountains of Canaan, to be explored. When you have come into that realm, *"Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"*. Here is the inheritance, all the fulness that is ours as a sphere in which to move spiritually as sons. Beware when you have come into that realm and begun to enjoy something of the fulness in Christ. You have entered into the secrets, and know something of the "all spiritual blessings" (Eph. 1:3). *"Then beware lest"* - what? *"...lest thou forget the Lord..."*. Beware, in other words, lest your hearts become set upon the blessings and you forget the Blessor, lest your hearts become bound up with

the things and you forget the One who made it all possible. The "beware" touches a very subtle activity of the enemy. How many people have just lost the glory of the inheritance by becoming tied up with the experience, the experience becoming everything, and talking about their experience of the things, glorying in the things, and, all unconsciously, being edged away from the Lord Himself. The Lord, when He brought us out, brought us out with a mighty hand and in that mighty activity He made all this possible, but we need Him to keep all this living, we need Him Himself. The Lord would constantly draw our hearts back to Himself. We sometimes sing:

"Once it was the blessing, Now it is the Lord",

but sometimes it is the other way round - once it was the Lord and now it has become the blessing. The heart has got away from Him on to things. Beware!

Here is the inheritance, and, we should not get taken up too much with the things. You may think that is a very unnecessary warning. It is not. You can have the great fulness of Christ and His church, the great truths, such things as we have mentioned; called to the throne, called to dominion, called to the glorious destiny of sons. Your whole soul may leap out at these grand ideas and immediately take hold of them, and you may begin to talk about them and make them something as your vision. You may work in relation to them, begin to build up something by truths, using great, grand truths to build up something, constitute a structure. The whole thing soon crashes presently. You are brought through great crises, and your beautiful building is broken down, and you begin to say, "Well, this truth does not work, this testimony is not a sound one". The Lord allows the crash, He allows the devastation, to bring us back to Himself, that He may be our inheritance, not an inheritance in things but Himself, all things in Him, nothing apart from Him. The Lord has to be our life, our wisdom, our strength, our joy; not things. Beware! There is an enemy always near at hand to, even by the things, get you away from the Lord Himself.

"Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and ye shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death..." (Deut. 13:4-5).

Here it is again in a strange connection, a false prophet. Do you notice what the Lord says?

"If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he give thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (verses 1-3).

I do wish the Lord had never allowed any false prophets to come into this world, no teachers of error, no one to lead us astray! Why does the Lord allow it, and why is it that these people are able to produce such signs to verify their statements? Why does the Lord allow that to His children? Why does He not protect them from all that kind of thing, so that they do not run any risk of being deceived? The answer is here. *"The Lord brought you out..."*. What for? Not to make machines of you, not to make you go by being wound up and mechanically reaching your destiny, but to make sons of you with intelligence, discernment, and perception. What is the strength and secret of spiritual discernment? It is love for the Lord. If we have got a little bit of self-love, ambition or self-interest, how easy it is to be deceived. If we need something for our own confirmation or our own assurance; the enemy can offer us many miracles in the Name of the Lord. But if our hearts, searched and purged from self, are set wholly upon the Lord, that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, that

love is discerning love, is a safeguard, and it will mean that the Lord will enable us to discern. Now then, the Lord allows the teacher of error, the dreamer of dreams, the false prophet, the dispositions all round His people to try them, to prove them, to develop and bring out sonship. The deepest thing about sonship is love. "*The son of His love*".

Now you see that with every one of these reiterations there is a warning. At every step, at every stage, in every connection there is an enemy working in the first place to rob of the life, and in robbing of the life, the vital element, to take the sting out of the Lord's people as to himself. He wants to prevent us from knowing the thoughts of the Lord, and to get us to act according to our own judgements and counter the Holy Spirit's clear revelation. All the way along, at every step, the enemy is seeking to strike at this sonship.

And so there is a, "Beware!" a warning. But blessed be God, if our hearts are wholly set upon Him, if we have no ambition but for His glory, if His end, and His full end is that to which we are abandoned, then that "*exceeding greatness of His power, which is to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand, far above all rule and authority...*" - that exceeding great power will get us through and bring us to the place where the Son has come.

Oh, that we may be found faithful sons, devoted sons, truly governed by the Spirit of Sonship, that with *the* Son we may come to glory.