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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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The Riches of the Glory of His Inheritance in the Saints

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know... the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18).

You will see that this is just one fragment of the prayer of the apostle for believers: "That their eyes may be enlightened to know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints". I have only one thought for this time, and that is concerning a matter which I feel to be of very great importance.

First of all, I would remind you of the aspect of this whole letter to the Ephesians, and we have several fragments in the letter which indicate that aspect: "The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (1:18). "Unto the praise of His glory" (1:14). "The riches of His glory" (3:16).

"That He might present the church to Himself a glorious church" (5:27).

Do you notice the direction of all those passages? His inheritance; His glory mentioned three times; and then, "to present to Himself a glorious church". The whole aspect of this letter is towards the Lord. Those of you who know it, know that it is the letter of fulness and finality. And in the fulness and in the finality everything is to the Lord, so that we have that all-inclusive word: "Unto Him be the glory in the church" (3:21).

Now that represents something very much greater than you will see on the surface. If you dig down into history with this thought in mind, you will find that this thought is the reversion of all history. I

do not think that there is anyone who would say that the history of this world as we know it is a very happy thing. We know that the Old Testament is the story of a great, unhappy situation in this world, and we know that the New Testament is just dealing with that situation. The history of this world is very largely the history of sin and wrong and suffering, and the older the world gets, the worse it becomes. I don't think I am a pessimist. The more we know and hear of this world, the more hopeless we feel it is. You ask the politicians today what they think about it! Well, I don't think we need argue that it is not a very happy world. Why is it like this? How did it all begin? We are always asking that question.

You know of the little boy whose father gave him a good caning. Holding his sore place he said to his father: "Did your father do this to you?" The father replied: "Yes, my father did it to me." "And did his father do it to him?" And the father replied: "Yes, my father's father did it to him." The little boy scratched his head and said: "I would like to know who started this thing!" Are you asking about all the misery in this world: "Well, who started this? How did it all begin?" There is a very clear answer.

God made man for Himself, and He made the world for Himself. He intended that everything should come back to Him, but man put out his hand to take it for himself. Man reversed the whole order. Instead of holding everything for God, he sought to have it all for himself. That is the spirit of the world, and it is the nature of man. It has now become the nature of man to try to draw everything to himself, and that is why covetousness is ungodliness. Man saw, and man took, and this is the law of human nature and of the whole creation. It is a history of the self-ward direction of life. Self has now become the end instead of God, and we all know well that in some way or another this is true of us. Covetousness, jealousy, envy, and all these things are simply the working out of this law in human nature. A great deal of the trouble in this world is because the 'have nots' have not what the 'haves' have! Putting it quite simply, it is this: 'You have something that I have not and I am going to have it!' Is that not the root of so much of the trouble in this world? It is drawing to self, the self-ward direction of life.

This has always worked out in arrested progress. You can see it right through the Old Testament. When man made a movement saying: "We will have!", something happened and their progress was arrested. You have just had a demonstration of that. When men said: "Let us build us a tower which shall reach unto heaven", they were saying: "We will not trust God in the future. We will find our own way of getting above any flood that may come" - and you know what happened at the Tower of Babel! It was arrested progress in this world.

The law is this: that whenever we try to draw to ourselves, we are defeating God's purpose in our lives. The greatest enemy to spiritual progress is self.

You know that the people of Israel made two attempts to get over the Jordan and into the Promised Land. The first one failed tragically, and it was the end of their progress. That generation went no further, indeed, it turned back and died in the wilderness. Its progress was arrested, and if you look to see why it was, it was because self was the master-principle. When they heard the report about the great walled cities in the land, and the giants who were walking up and down, they only saw themselves and how that would affect them. They said: "The land eats up its inhabitants, and we were as grasshoppers in the sight of the people. If we go over there they will eat us up". You see, it was just self that governed, and the Lord said: "You can go no further."

Now, the second time they went over, why was it that that second generation was successful? Because they listened to Joshua and Caleb who said: "If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it unto us" (Numbers 14:8). Well, nothing matters if the Lord's interests are being served! If it is for the good pleasure of the Lord, so much the worse for the giants and the walled cities! So they went over, and went from victory to victory. When it is unto the Lord there is release of life and progress. While it is the Lord's desire that His people should have a rich inheritance, their coming into their own inheritance depends upon whether the Lord comes into His.

Take one little illustration of this. You are familiar with what the Bible teaches about the tithe, that is, the tenth part of all. The Lord commanded that the people gave to Him the first tenth part of all their increase, but that tenth was never regarded as something in itself. I think some people have the idea that if they give the Lord a tenth, then they can do what they like with all the rest, but that is not the meaning of the tithe in the Bible. When the man in the Bible brought his tenth to the Lord he said: "Lord, this is a token that it all belongs to You, not only the tenth, but the ten tenths. This is the token that it is all for the Lord." And when it was like that, God had got His people. He made everything for Himself, and when that law was observed, great blessing came upon the people.

You know that tragic little book at the end of the Old Testament, the book of the prophet Malachi. There the people were labouring day and night, but all their labours were proving to be in vain. They expected a large harvest, but they had only a very little one. It says that they put their money into bags with holes, and when they came to look for the fruit of their labour, there was nothing there. Do you remember the remedy for that? The Lord said: "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse... and prove Me now... if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). 'You have been living and working for yourselves. You have been using your lives for yourselves. Everything has been in the wrong direction. Now turn round and let everything be for the Lord, and then there will be release and progress in your lives.'

Now we come back to our text. The Lord has interests vested in His people, and He has vested interests in the church. They are called: "The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints". The Lord can come into a great inheritance in us by His grace. It says here in this Letter that we are to be for all eternity "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6), and grace is an investment. If the grace is manifested in our salvation, then that is to the glory of God. If the grace of God is manifested in us in suffering and adversity, then that is to the glory of God. It is difficult to understand how we can enrich God, but, even if it is a mystery, it says that we can. God has an inheritance in the lives of His people.

There is a lot that I would like to say about this. I would like to speak about how that inheritance was taken away from God, and about how the Son of God came into this world to redeem that very inheritance. He spoke parables on this principle, such as the one about the treasure in the field. The man found this treasure and went away and sold all that he had to buy that field in order to get that treasure. The world is the field, and in the field is the church, and the Son of God let go all the glories of heaven in order to get that treasure. He gave up everything in order to get this inheritance back to His Father. Then there is the parable of the precious pearl. He spoke of a merchantman seeking goodly pearls. This time it is not in a field, but in the sea, and when the merchantman finds a pearl of great price he sells all that he has to get that pearl. If you know anything about the pearl fishers of this world, you know that it is a very difficult business. I have seen these pearl fishers out at work, and the terrible havoc that their work makes upon their bodies. Not many of them live to be old

men and their bodies are marked by the sea in which they are constantly at work. It is a very costly thing to find pearls, and it cost the Son of God everything to find this pearl of great price. It is the elect in whom God has His inheritance. Well, there is a lot more about that in the New Testament, but let me come to the point and close.

The Lord's blessing in our lives depends upon this one thing. Take the blessing of answered prayer. How many of our prayers are answered? How many things the Lord has to withhold from us! Why is it? Because it is, "Lord, bless me. Lord, I want this. Lord, I want to go there. Lord, I do not want this, or that. Oh, Lord, bless me!" Now, that has many applications, and the Lord keeps silent. It may be something quite serious, like someone's salvation. We are very concerned about the salvation of that person and we say: "Oh, Lord, I do want You to save that one." The Lord waits, and nothing happens. We have got the wrong direction. It should be: "Oh, Lord, it will not matter to me, if only You get glory in that salvation... Lord, it does not matter to me whether I go there, or do not go, it is just how it matters to You. I will go there, or I will not go, just as it pleases You. Lord, my life must be governed in every detail by this law: what are *You* going to get out of it?" It is a matter of the Lord being glorified, whether by life or by death.

You see, this is a reversion of everything. Is it unto ourselves? Even spiritual blessings - do we want them for ourselves? If all is for the Lord then He is free. His hands are free to give us the blessing if it is only for His glory, but He may test us on this. We can talk about: "Yes, the Lord's will, I think it is the Lord's will - and it is just what I want!" So often, after all, the Lord's will is what *we* want.

Do you see this principle of blessing? What have you planned to do? Where have you planned to go? Have you really been to the Lord and said: "Lord, I don't want to go unless it is going to be something for You. Lord, I will not have this thing unless You are going to get something out of it". It is "*His* inheritance in the saints"! How wrong it is for us to be always seeking to draw things to ourselves! There are people who are always trying to draw attention to themselves, and they will get up to any trick in order to do so, but it is all against the Lord. I think I learnt a lesson in this, and I think I made a discovery. I was seeking earnestly to know how the Lord could be free in my life, and I think He said: "I will be free when you yourself get out of the way. Do you want this for yourself, or do you want it for Me?" You see, that is a very searching question! But it goes right to the heart of all spiritual progress.

May the Lord open our eyes to see the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints!