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The Cross Prophesied by Simeon

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-12; 2 Peter 1:2-10; Luke 2:33-35.

There are, quite clearly, three things present in the last statement of Simeon in the passage in Luke; three things which embrace a very great deal when we see them in the light of the fuller revelation of the Scriptures and of history.

In the centre of the three things is the cross. There seems to be no doubt but that it was of the cross that Simeon was prophesying when he said: "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul." He, whether he actually saw all that that meant or not, undoubtedly by his words brought into view that day, that scene, when Mary would stand by the cross and see this Child in Manhood crucified. It would be then and there that the sword would pierce through her own soul. The centremost thing in the statement of Simeon, therefore, relates to the cross.

Then there is something on either side. On the one side: "A sword shall pierce through *thine* own soul." On the other side: "thoughts out of many hearts... revealed".

That statement taken as a whole clearly sets forth the great truth that the cross made real in the heart is the way by which the cross is made effective in other hearts. One heart is pierced, and many hearts are opened. It is the cross that, piercing the one heart, opens the many other hearts. The cross is the divine instrument. All that that cross contains and represents is God's standard of judgement. These many hearts are represented as having come under the examination, the interrogation, the uncovering, the judgement of the cross. In the light of the cross the many hearts are laid bare.

The more we understand and know the meaning of Calvary, the more we are made aware of the

hidden depths of evil, of sin, of iniquity. The more there is divulged as to what lies buried deep in the nature of man, the more we are brought to the place where we smite upon our breast in the consciousness of our worthlessness. The cross is intended to do that. Nothing but the cross can do that. On the one side the cross speaks of the unspeakable depth and awfulness of sin; and no one can spiritually apprehend the cross and lightly regard sin. Sin is shown in all its depth and awfulness when the cross is truly revealed. That revelation must surely lead to one of two things. Either to a deep, and, shall we say, terrible repentance, a cry for mercy; or it will provoke terrible resentment, a violent reaction. It is strange that it should do that, but it does it.

On the other hand the cross is the revelation of the unspeakable love of God. When you and I are so often found occupied with the cross, so often that perhaps it might be thought that there is very little else spoken of, our danger, our supreme peril, lies in the direction of the cross becoming something less than the means by which the depths of our being are opened up, and we are led to cry out against sin and long for holiness. The only justifiable reason for the cross being continuously brought into view is that we become more intense haters of sin, more intense longers after holiness; and then, on the other hand, that the love of God amongst us should be the unspeakable wonder of this universe.

The first meaning of this word is just that, that our familiarity with the phrase "the cross", and all that is said about it, should not be allowed for an instant to fail in these primary matters as to sin's awfulness. Perhaps one of our weaknesses is an inadequate sense of sin, conviction of sin. Not conviction of sins, for not one of us who is in any way walking with the Lord can be guilty of a sin without becoming convicted of it. But sin is something bigger than sins. Sin is the nature of the thing. Sins are the expression of the nature, the nature showing itself in specific forms. We may hate our sins because we suffer for them inwardly or outwardly, but, oh, to hate sin! To hate sin is only one way of saying, to love holiness, to have as *the* passion of our hearts that holiness: "Be ye holy, for I am holy..."; "Be ye... holy in all manner of living."

The cross is the instrument for bringing into view the sin of man, and the holiness of God, and creating a tremendously deep movement in the heart in relation to those two things; and, on the other hand, the cross is the instrument by which the love of God is shown forth as in no other way in this universe. If you and I have much to say about the cross, I feel that you and I must approximate more and more fully to the love which that cross represents.

You notice how Peter brings these two things together. He is speaking about this holiness in all manner of living. That is one side of the cross. It is connected with redemption, with precious Blood, as of a Lamb without spot. There is the Cross brought in in relation to holiness, and then Peter says so much about love: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently"; "And in your goodness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love". This is another aspect of the cross, "the love of God... shed abroad in our hearts...".

The only true apprehension of the cross is holiness and love working out in the heart. The cross is the means of that, and if our familiarity with the cross does not work out that way, then there is something very seriously defective with our apprehension of and association with the cross.

Taking the two sides: on the one hand there is a heart pierced. Perhaps we should not dogmatise, or be too emphatic, because it is very largely surmise or deduction, but you notice in this second chapter of Luke wonderful things were being said about the Lord Jesus, and wonderful things being said to Joseph and Mary. *Perhaps* they were, up to a point, marvelling, (the Word says that they were

marvelling), and perhaps they were full of the glory aspect of this, their privilege, what they had been chosen for, what this was going to mean; this One born into *their* home, committed to *their* care. A wonderful vision of possibilities was opening up before them, and it is probable that their hearts were just almost too full for words as to the glory of it. Then suddenly Simeon seems to smash their beautiful vision, and bring a shadow right across. "Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel (Well, that is all right); and for a sign which is spoken against; yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul..." It looks as though the whole thing has suddenly become beclouded. It is like a dark cloud crossing the sky on a summer's day, and it seems to say: Yes, the coming of this One is *primarily* not for your gratification, pleasure, satisfaction; not for any personal glory and benefit to you; but the coming of this One is unto the most serious purpose, the laying bare of human nature, the hearts of men, to bring those bared hearts under the full blaze of divine judgement. "And a sword shall pierce through thine own soul" that that might be; or, "In the sword piercing through thy soul that will be."

The word for the moment, reducing it to one thing, is just this, that the Lord chose that way for making the cross effective; that is, He makes the reality of the cross come very near to the inner life, so near that all its terrible pain and anguish and travail enter into the inner being. To put that in another way, it is this, that neither you nor I, nor any other, can ever preach the cross and minister Christ crucified with any real effect until the cross has become an inner reality in our own case. It is God's way. To preach the cross, says Paul, with the wisdom of words is to make it of none effect. Anybody can get up and preach about the cross and Christ crucified, tell the story of Calvary, and tell it pathetically, tell it with tears, with a sob, tell it dramatically with awful intensity; and even so make it of none effect. To make the cross really of effect requires that that cross should have taken effect in the heart of the one who is called to deal with other lives.

We are all called to that. How shall we be effective until the awfulness of sin as represented by the cross has been struck deep into our very being, our very soul? How shall we be effective until the greatness, the immensity of divine love has touched our hearts as it is represented in the cross? Strangely the cross, when it is wrought in us deeply, creates a condition by which other hearts are made to divulge themselves. If you and I know the cross in an inward way, a deep, inward way, our very activity, ministry (please do not let that be confined to public platform ministry), our conversations with others, our testimony, our lives in relation to Christ, are going to disclose those hearts. Our presence means that what is in those hearts is going to show itself; others are going to be uncomfortable if they are in sin, and are going to be made aware of their sin and that they are in sin. There will be a making known to them of their own hearts. The cross wrought in us brings that about. That is ministry: that other people, by reason of our presence, by reason of our ministry, the many-sidedness of spiritual ministry, which is sometimes silence just as much as it is at other times our speech, begins to make for heart disturbance in others.

The result will be one of two things. "A sign which is spoken against". Yes, it is going to stir up intense hatred and animosity. It will be in this way that those disturbed hearts will say: I cannot bear that person; I cannot bear them near me; I cannot bear to be in their presence; I always feel I want to run away when they are there! Such things may be said for other reasons, but if this is true, that you and I do really know the cross wrought into the very depths of our being, our presence, our influence, should be disturbing to sin and to sinners. It may provoke hostility, but that is a good sign.

We said it is strange that the revelation of the human heart by the love of God should provoke antagonism, but there is an explanation for that. There is that behind the human heart of evil intelligence, which knows quite well that if this sin question comes out into the light, and that the cross with its divine intention is brought up against that sin question, then that power behind is

destroyed. So the devil provokes this reaction against the very love of God in that cross, as represented by the Lord's people.

We must have the cross wrought in us if we are going to enter into the effectiveness of the cross in other lives. Do not preach the cross as something to preach, but if you want your life to be really effective, and other lives to feel the power of the cross, ask the Lord to make it a reality in you ever more deeply. "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul." The Greek word there means "the big sword". It is the corresponding word in the Greek to the word in the Hebrew which relates to Goliath's sword. The cross making a great opening in the inner life; cutting with tremendous effect into our being. The result is the cross made effective in the hearts of many. That is the way.

There is just one other thing. Those who really do know the cross as an inward reality do know the hearts of others, do understand what is going on, are able to see the meaning of certain things in the lives of others. There is nothing like the cross experimentally known in our own hearts to make us very keenly alive to the significance of the gestures and movements of other lives. The one in whom the cross has been deeply wrought is not easily hoodwinked over another life; somehow or other you get an extra knowledge, an extra understanding of human hearts by the cross. Your own heart has been so opened by that cross, and you know yourself by that cross as you would never know yourself by any other means. You have come to understand, by the deception in your own nature, how you also have been deceiving yourself. You have come to know your heart so thoroughly that it is difficult for you to be deceived. When you try to tell yourself something, you know quite well that you are not telling yourself the truth, that you are skating on thin ice. The cross has made you so sensitive to what is true and what is false; the cross has got rid of the greys and made them black and white in your own heart, and you know. Now, because the cross has done that in your own heart, you are able to discern the movements of the cross in other lives, and you are very sensitive to the condition in other hearts. That gives you your ministry. If you keep yourself safe from the perils of criticism and condemnation and judgement, and recognise that that knowledge of hearts which has come to you is not simply to put you in a superior position or make you condemn men, but that you understand hearts and are able to bring the Word of God with effect into others' lives. If you are not there you are simply working blindly. You work with understanding, with knowledge, with insight when the cross has opened your own heart.

This heart of ours is a world, and the cross opens that world and gives us the grip of it, and then, because we know the heart of man experimentally through the revelation of our own heart, we are in a position to deal with others in an effective way.

This last word may only apply in a special way to those in responsibility, although it also applies generally. But the point is this: that the cross has to do its work in our own hearts to bring us into a position to work in relation to other hearts, and when the cross has really done a deep work in us it becomes effective in other lives through us, not only in public ministry, but also when we are just with others. They know that God is dealing with their condition by our very presence. There is a price to be paid; "a sword shall pierce through thine own soul." All effective ministry, all effective life, has the travail of the cross back of it, and the travail of the cross is in the direction of sin revealed, and its consequent agony, a great revulsion from sin, and a wonderful entering into the great love of God in the presence of a revelation of the awfulness of sin.