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"The God That Doest Wonders" (1953)

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Thou art the God that doest wonders" (Ps. 77:14).

"Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things" (Ps. 72:18).

"Abraham... under utterly hopeless circumstances hopefully believed" (Rom. 4:18 - Weymouth).

"Thou art the God that doest wonders." First of all, we have the statement that our God is the God of wonders. "Who doest wonders." The other Psalmist goes further - "Who only doeth wondrous things". One of the things that you and I have to learn in our relationship to the Lord is that, when we come into a living relationship with Him, we have come into the realm of infinite possibility. We have been placed upon a basis and set in a realm that is altogether above the realm with which we are familiar. We have been taken out of that realm, and put into another where the possibilities are just infinite and where the word "impossible" does not have a place. That is a thing basic to our relationship with God. We have come into the realm of infinite wisdom, which has no problems whatsoever in respect of questions - mental questions, intellectual questions; and into the realm of infinite power, which has no problems in the matter of doing things; and it is a part of the education of a child of God that that is the realm into which such a child has been born. Our whole education, viewed from one standpoint, is to discover that we have come into another realm where we may never close down with man's wisdom or man's power and say, 'Well, we have come to the end of all understanding, all knowledge, all wisdom, all strength, and so that is an end of it'. We are never allowed in our new realm to close down like that. The Word of the Lord is very definite about this - that the Lord begins His wisdom in a very simple way just where man has reached the very highest and fullest development of his.

That is a great statement in 1 Corinthians 2, where the Apostle is speaking about the wisdom of this world and the rulers of this world. He is recognising this world's wisdom. He was writing to Corinthians, and Corinth was a great city in a country where wisdom was the object of worship - wisdom and power embodied in man. In Greece wisdom and power were brought to their fullest development. The philosophers were there: they were there in strength; and they were out for one object - to answer every question and problem relative to man's life, his origin, his destiny, and everything to do with him, and they had developed their philosophy, their wisdom, their love of knowledge to a very great degree. Then the Apostle says that this world, in its wisdom developed to the full, did the most foolish thing that creation has ever done - it killed the Lord of glory; and finally he points out that, just where man's wisdom reached its highest development, its greatest magnitude, God commenced in a very simple way with His wisdom and made all that wisdom very foolish. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Cor. 1: 20). God begins where man exhausts his resources of wisdom.

It is the same as to power - man's power, developed immensely to solve problems, the problems of the universe and human life. But man's power is exhausted and the problem is not solved. And then God begins in a very simple way and does it: showing that, between the fullest development of this world and of man's life in wisdom and power, and the very beginnings of this other Kingdom, there is a great gulf fixed, and that the very foolishness of God is greater than the fullest wisdom of man, and the very weakness of God infinitely transcends the greatest power of man.

Education in the Realm of Infinite Possibility

This has many practical bearings, and I have specially in mind the younger folk who have to meet the world. Some of us have to meet it, and we know what we come up against in these matters in this world, and the peril of surrendering to this world in the matter of its wisdom and its idea of strength. If we do surrender, we have surrendered the Kingdom of God, we have abandoned the Kingdom of God, and we have lost the immense inheritance of being related to God - in the sense that being related, livingly related, to God brings us into the realm of infinite possibilities to which this world cannot attain. I was saying that God makes this our education, and we are learning this all the way along. Again and again and again in our lives, the Lord allows a situation to arise where that is the end - there is nothing more possible; you have exhausted all the avenues of enquiry, you have pulled all the wires that can be pulled, you have gone to all authorities, you have done everything. No, it is a closed door, it cannot be. And then the Lord just does it! At the last moment it is done in such a simple way.

Here is a simple instance. On a certain day the answer of the railway companies is that it is impossible for you to have a sleeper - you will be lucky if you get on the train at all. 'What do you say about it, Lord?' That is their verdict, and they repeat it almost up to the last minute. Then you get not only a sleeper but a first-class sleeper! - and that happens repeatedly in different ways all through the days.

That is the education of our life. You get to the end of what is possible, the world has nothing to offer you, and the Lord does it in a simple way, with no trouble at all. He hardly has to speak, and there it is, and it is so simple. It works out in big ways as well as little. The education of our life under the hand of God is to know we have come into another realm where we need not close down at all with human possibility. God is other than that; He has everything in His hands. He can snap His fingers and every barred door can open. It works in so many ways.

You come up against the intellectual side of things in this world - intellectual problems, problems of science and philosophy - and you will be tempted to say that all the big brains are on one side: the scientists in the mass take this view and you cannot ignore it; you have to recognise that those who take the Bible view are in the minority. That is only saying in another way that Christians are fewer than unbelievers.

Take such a question as the biological question, evolution. Well, you say, all the scientists are on one side over that. Not admitting that, but admitting that the majority probably are, is that to be the end of such a matter? The world's wisdom brought to its highest point of development, and taking a view which is directly contrary to what the Bible says - are we to close down with that? Is it not strange how, again and again, God has slipped in with some very simple thing, and capsized a whole position that had been built up for centuries and established as final, and the whole structure has collapsed just with the Lord slipping in some little thing.

Take certain views about things in the Old Testament - well, generations of investigators spent their years upon that, and came to a conclusion, a final conclusion, which denied the truth of the Bible statements. It was not historical, it was not scientific, it was not true, so the Bible is not to be relied upon in that; science has proved it! One day a man, using a spade away in a foreign country, as he dug, turned up some old bits of broken crockery, with some writing on them, and when they were pieced together, it was found that it was actually contemporary evidence of the very thing that was in the Bible. God only used a workman's spade to turn up evidence that capsized generations of finally settled conclusions about the Bible. The whole thing had to be abandoned. But the scientists do not give it up. They go on to prove something else. In the long run, God is going to prove in very simple ways that all the wisdom of this world will not last long. Men will think that they have established the matter, and then a little thing will happen and the whole view will have to be abandoned.

And something will happen one day about the evolutionary idea. It will be clever - so simple and clever - and the whole thing will be exploded. We come into another realm when we touch infinite wisdom, and the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, especially when it sets itself against God over this matter of the development of man. What are we going to say about it? 'He has been coming up the scale all the time!'? Has he? In recent years he has become so clever that he has had to burrow into the earth to hide himself from his own cleverness and save his very life. What is the job of all our medical men? Are they really at work upon the evolutionary business of reaching a great end, the superman, or are they on the job of patching up a broken-down man? Is all medical science an evolutionary process toward something perfect, or is it patching up a thing that is breaking down all the time? I think it is the latter. It is trying to keep from collapse something whose whole tendency is towards collapse. The medical profession has its hands full in trying to keep this thing from collapsing. And so we could go on; that is a very wide field.

What I am trying to say is this, that we have come into a realm which is above this present realm. Our God is the God of wonders, and that means that the background of wonder must of necessity be the end of human wisdom and human strength, or it is not wonder. You never wonder when you say, "That is easy, I could do that, anybody could do that!" But if you put all others out of court and all their wisdom and strength has been exhausted and the thing is hopeless, and then it is done, you wonder. The background of real wonder is the end of human resource.

The education of the people of God is along that very line of necessity to know the kind of God that is our God. We shall have to be, right to the end, brought more and more to an end of human resource, for every new bit of living knowledge of the Lord will spring out of a deadlock - the

deadlock of human understanding and ability; every rising higher in the scale of spiritual life will be by a fresh crisis of human impossibility. Until the end the child of God will go repeatedly into a position where, with all that they have known and all that they have seen, the new situation is a perfectly hopeless one: they are as blind as anybody could be. "Who is blind, but my servant?" (Isa. 42:19). It means that from time to time we shall be in black darkness as to what the way is, as to the way out or the way through, as to what is going to happen, what the Lord is going to do, the issue of things; as blind as we can be, seeing nothing, and in helpless weakness, unable to bring anything about or to do anything; simply paralysed by the situation. So far as the situation is concerned, it will be a perfectly hopeless situation. If we close down with the situation as it is, we shall close down altogether and say, "That is the end!" But this is the course of education in the knowledge of the Lord, if we will accept it - that the Lord will bring us to positions where we say, "There is no solution to this problem unless the Lord gives it". That is the normal Christian life! Take Abraham as a specimen of education: for that is what he is - spiritual education. Well, Abraham was one who "*in utterly hopeless circumstances* hopefully believed": and God did it. He hopefully believed that he might become the father of many nations, and it happened, in utterly hopeless circumstances.

You see, the background must be like that if there is to be something 'wonder-ful', or, in other words, if we are to know what kind of Lord we have, and those who will go most utterly with the Lord will know this hopelessness of situations more than others. Some people are not prepared to go with the Lord unless He is all the time treating them as little children, explaining everything to them, answering all their questions. He may come down to that childish level and answer those questions, for it is like children to ask questions. But the Lord's way of educating is not to answer like that. When we get to a certain stage of maturity, the Lord does not just come and say, "I am going to do this, and I will tell you why; I want you to pass this way, and I will tell you exactly why: you need not worry at all, I will be with you right through and you will come out the other end all right". When we get on, we find ourselves plunged into situations altogether beyond us, beyond our resource, and the Lord seems to be hiding Himself and standing back and having no interest in it. We are brought to the position - "This requires a miracle, this requires a wonder, this requires someone altogether outside our realm of resource": and we go on quietly, and the Lord does not crash in and deal with the thing in some amazing way. It just happens, and we find that we come through so simply that we wonder if there ever was a serious crisis at all. All the wonders that the Lord did in the past no longer remained with us as wonders in our consciousness when that new situation arose. We have known the Lord to do things which resolved the greatest problems: but today, with a greater problem, that does not stand us in very much stead. We lose the strength of all those past experiences; we have to have something new. The Lord does not want His people to live upon the past. He wants them to have ever present living knowledge of Himself, so there must be new difficulties that call for new interventions. That is the background of knowing the Lord progressively.