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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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"The God That Doest Wonders"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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

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

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

"Thou art the God that doest wonders." First of all, the statement of the fact, that our God is the God of wonders, "Who doest wonders". The Psalmist goes further and says, "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 the realm 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 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.

1 Corinthians chapter 2 is a great statement, where the apostle is speaking about the wisdom of this world and the rulers of this world, man by wisdom. He is recognising this world's wisdom. He was writing to Corinthians, and Corinth was a great Greek city where wisdom was the object of worship; wisdom and power embodied in man. In Corinth wisdom and power were brought to their fullest development. The philosophers were there; they were there in strength and they were out with one object: to answer every question and problem relative to man's life and destiny, his origin, his object, 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 ever creation has done: it killed the Lord of glory. And then the apostle says 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.

The same as to power. Man's power developed immensely to solve problems, the problems of this universe and human life, and man's power is exhausted and the problem is not solved. And God begins there in a very simple way and does it, showing that between the fullest development of this world and man's life in wisdom and power, its fullest development and the very beginnings of this other Kingdom, there is a great gulf fixed, and 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 had 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, and 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 this sense, that being related, livingly related to God, brings us into a realm of the 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 the Lord just does it. At the last moment it is done in such a simple way. Some of us have been seeing this in very simple ways this week. On Tuesday the answer of the railway companies was that it was absolutely 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 within the last few minutes." Then we get not only a sleeper but a first-class sleeper, and that 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 that 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 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 it 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 a matter like that? 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 with all that, again and again God has just slipped in with some very simple thing and capsized the whole position that has been built up for centuries and established as final? And the whole thing has had to go, with just the Lord slipping in a little thing.

Certain views about things in the Old Testament - well, the investigators all spent their years, and generations of them, upon that and came to a conclusion, a final conclusion, which denied the truth of the Bible statement about that. 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, found some writing on them, and piecing them together, found that it was the establishment in its own day of the very thing that was in the Bible. God only used a workman's spade to turn it up and capsize generations of finally settled conclusions about the Bible. The whole thing had to be abandoned, but the scientists did 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 they have established the matter and then a little thing will happen and that 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 where we touch infinite wisdom, and the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, especially when it sets itself against God over this whole thing 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? He is becoming so clever he is having to burrow into 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 towards something perfect, or is it patching up a thing breaking down all the time? I think it is the latter. It is trying to keep something from collapse; the whole tendency of which is to collapse. The medical profession has its hands full to keep this thing from collapsing. 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 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, 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 a 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.

The child of God will go repeatedly until the end 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, the way out or the way through, 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, to do anything, simply paralysed by the situation, and, so far as the situation is concerned, it will be a perfectly hopeless situation. If we close down with the situation, 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 does it." But that is the normal Christian life!

Take Abraham as a specimen of education, for that is what he is, spiritual education. Well, who "in utterly hopeless circumstances hopefully believed," and God did it. He hopefully believed that he might be the father of many nations, and it happened in utterly hopeless circumstances.

You see, the background must be that for it to be wonderful; or, in other words, for us 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, and 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 this place - "This requires a miracle, this requires a wonder, this requires someone altogether outside of 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 such a serious crisis.

All the wonders that the Lord did in the past did not remain 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.

Wonders are Never Given to Unbelief

But then there is another thing. This kind of knowledge of the Lord is reserved for people of faith. There are two things which the Lord will not do. Firstly, He will not do His wonders to destroy unbelief. He has done wonders before those who were not believers, but never before those who were positive unbelievers. There is something between being a believer and a positive unbeliever. A whole world of people who would believe, and the Lord does wonders before them and He helps them that way. Bring the Lord up against a man or woman who is a positive unbeliever, and the Lord will not do anything to destroy that unbelief, He never does. So if in us there is some unbelief, the Lord is not going to do anything wonderful to destroy that unbelief. The very minimum that He will ask is, "Do you believe that I am able?" and our response will have to be, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief (Mark 9:24). I believe you are able to do this." When a man says, "If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2 Kings 7:2), that man is doomed, he does not come into the thing the Lord does. You remember the story; it happens and he is out of it. The Lord's wonders are reserved for the people of faith.

Wonders are Never Given to Selfish Ends

There is another thing that the Lord will not do. He will never do His wonders for our pleasure and satisfaction. The Lord does not lend Himself to us to be used by us. There is a great tendency that we should be constantly going to the Lord to ask Him to do things for us, to get us out of our difficulties, because we want to get through; we want the result of the Lord's help for ourselves. The Lord does not do that. The Lord will work His wonders when our lives are in line with His purpose and our hearts are bound up with His interests, and in that way He often tests us to find out whether it is ourselves or His interests and glory that we have at heart.

He does not seem to be coming in, and the test is searching in this way: are *you* in this, do you want this for *yourself*? If you get it, what will it mean as to your life with Him? Is it really going to be to your spiritual strengthening, or are you just going to be happy you got through? Now you go on and when you get into difficulty again you will come to the Lord and ask for further help, but it does not work out to the strengthening of your life with the Lord.

So the Lord does not do His wonders for us, for our gratification. He will do it in relation to His own purpose and interest, and when we are bound up with those, we are in the way of the Lord working His wonders. That is very simple, but let us remember it, lest we are found just trying to use the Lord and only coming to Him when we are in desperation and there is no real relationship to His own glory.

Well, He is the God Who doeth wonders. That is the realm into which we are brought, relationship to another order. Wonders require a background of utterly hopeless circumstances. That requires a new knowledge of the Lord, and the wonders of the Lord are never given to unbelief and never given to selfish ends. They are for the Lord's ends, the Lord's purposes. This is our God, this is our Lord, this is our heritage in Christ.