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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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The Watchword of the Son of Man (1928)

by T. Austin-Sparks

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We are being led to consider briefly that solemn watchword of our Lord's life on earth by which the stages of His advance toward His ultimate purpose were governed and marked: for He went toward that ultimate purpose by stages governed by a consciousness which found its expression in a familiar phrase, "Mine hour." That was the solemn watchword of our Lord's life and progressive movement into and unto His ultimate purpose, and we shall look at some of those movements as defined by that expression.

The Sign of the Ultimate Purpose

In the first place let us turn to John 2. You know this is the account of the miracle of turning water into wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the thing upon which everything turned was this utterance, "Mine hour is not yet." Mary, His mother in the flesh, had come to Him saying, "They have no wine." Whether she was anticipating a miracle on His part or not, we need not stay to discuss. Probably not, for His answer is illuminating. It is very harsh in our English language, which does not convey a certain softness that really was in His own words. Our language simply bluntly puts it this way, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet." Literally He said this, "What is there in common between you and Me," which being expounded means this, You are thinking of one thing and I am thinking of another. Your mind is in one realm, My mind is working in another; you are wanting one thing, I am after another. What is there in common between thee and Me, we are in two different realms of thought, of inclination, of intention, of desire. That, I say, is very significant and very suggestive, as the original language makes it perfectly clear that that is what He

said, and therefore you come to this conclusion, that He had a mind, a very clear mind, a made-up mind, a settled mind as to what He would do.

What He was after and the thing that was going to happen had a significance in His mind which far transcended anything that was in the mind of anyone else: that there was really no comparison or relationship between these other thoughts and His. He had something in mind which they did not discern or perceive, and when you realise that this was the beginning of His ministry, and that this was the first manifestation of that Divine Sonship in its sovereignty, then you have a clue, you recognise that He is making this first thing a very, very significant thing indeed, that in His mind this is full of eternal significance, and no one saw that, but He knew, and He was moving in a definite and deliberate act and stage toward that ultimate thing which He was now projecting in this positive and definite way. Now you break the thing up, and you find that the key-words are, "Mine hour," and the last word, "manifested His glory." Then the miracle, or the sign, as you notice, had wine as its occasion and basis. As we have often pointed out, wine is a symbol in the Word for blood and life, very often interchangeable words, and very often synonymous terms. As we gather around the Lord's Table we recognise that the wine is the symbol of the blood which contains the Life, and this symbol was the basis and the occasion of this sign, or act, which issued in His glory relative to His hour, and marked a definite stage toward an ultimate purpose.

Here He ceases to be a private person, and crosses the line into public life, and from that moment He was a marked man. On the one hand, sought after because of certain benefits which He was considered capable of bestowing; on the other hand, sought after for His destruction; but from this moment He was out in the open, and it was this deliberate stepping across the line with this thing which was in His mind relative to "the hour" that committed Him to the battle which had its consummation in the last declaration of this watchword. "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be delivered into the hands of wicked men and should be crucified." He crossed the line in Cana of Galilee and related this to the first expression "Mine hour," "the hour," and in between you mark the stages, the progress toward that.

Now what is the thing that is in His mind? Everything that the Master did was deliberate, beloved. There was nothing casual; there were no side-shows in the Master's life; there was nothing that was merely incidental. Everything was in the direct line of His ultimate purpose, and He would not accept an invitation to a marriage festivity just on sentimental grounds. This thing was not a social incident in His life, it was brought right into direct line with His ultimate purpose, and that is why the whole thing was made to centre in this "Mine hour." This beginning of signs related to His glory. Then if He takes hold of this thing and turns it thus to be a sign, the meaning of this is that He projects, as it were, upon the screen, all the purpose of His coming, a marriage relationship upon a basis of Life, and that Life as found in His blood, and the ultimate Purpose looms into view.

The hour in which He is glorified is that when He gets that which stands in relationship to Him as a bride, and it throws you right on into that unveiling through Paul, "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her." That is the end of this. His hour is related to that, and His glory is related to that. In simple words, it is this, the Son of Man requires for the manifestation of His glory that church which stands in this relationship to Him upon a basis of One Life for which He gave Himself. He takes hold of this which otherwise would have been an ordinary occasion of social festivity, He turns it to account and makes of it the occasion of the sign of His ultimate Purpose. "This beginning of signs" - that is what it signifies here, and the miracle of death and resurrection by which He gets His church is foreshadowed, foreseen in this - the Life poured

out, a basis of a union. "Mine hour." That is "the hour," and He has, as we have pointed out, deliberately stepped out to that.

As we pass on, let us take with us this central thought. It is a Life which is in question which is to be shared by a corporate company in a marital union with the Lord Jesus in His Resurrection; a Life, a triumphant Life, by which the church is secured triumphantly over death. Now we cannot stay for anything more about that, but we take up the clue and pass on with that in our hands.

The Security of the Ultimate Purpose

The next is in John 7:30: "They sought therefore to take Him: and no man laid his hand on Him because His hour was not yet come."

What was His own comment upon that later? "I lay it down of Myself, no man taketh it from Me. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This authority have I received from My Father." "No man laid his hand upon Him because *His Hour* was not yet come", *the Hour* of His authority for laying down that Life. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was not just to be murder. The murderer was out, he of whom the Lord said, "he is a murderer" was out to murder the Son of God, and he is seeking all the way through to bring about His untimely death, His destruction, and you notice how varied are his methods. The first temptation - "Cast Thyself down for it is written He will give His angels charge concerning Thee. In their hands shall they bear Thee up lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." You see he was trying to bring about His undoing and His death by not keeping in the way of God. If the Lord had acted upon the basis projected by the devil, the angels could not have upheld Him, He would have been dashed to pieces. That would have been the untimely end. The Master saw through it, and from that first time of temptation onward the devil is out to murder, but the death of Christ is not murder. His death, when it came about, was to be deliberate and in the will of God, and therefore victorious, not defeat.

Now, as you have the sign of the ultimate Purpose in the first occasion, here you have *the security of the ultimate Purpose*: that that Life cannot be touched by man; that Life is a thing which man cannot interfere with. The laying down of that Life is a deliberate act of authority, and in the same authority it will be taken up again, the triumph of that Life in Resurrection, because it is in the will and purpose of God, and neither devil nor man can touch that. It is a very blessed thing, beloved, to know this as a practical thing, that if we possess that Life and are keeping in the way of the Lord, there can be no untimely end. Everything will be deliberate, however it may appear. The murderer is defeated, the Purpose is secured in that Life, the triumph of that Life as it is kept sheerly in the way of the Divine will. Get out of that and deviate, and you have no guarantee of protection from the murderer. Keep in that, and "no man laid hand upon Him"; "His hour was not yet." The security of the ultimate Purpose is in that Life maintained in the will of God.

Pass on hurriedly to the 12th chapter. The Greeks enquired for Him saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus." His response to the enquiry is, "*The Hour* is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die," etc. Perhaps [there is] no more familiar passage to us than that - a corn of wheat issuing in the Resurrection Body; the Son of Man thus glorified; the triumph of Christ over death in a bodily form. It is true that in an isolated capacity and apart altogether, He triumphed personally over death, but that is not the final method of God of demonstrating the fact. The fact of His triumph over death is in a Resurrection Body with all the

members sharing that Resurrection Life. That is the testimony to the fact that He has risen; that is the Instrument by which it is to be proved to the universe that He is alive from the dead.

The Law of the Ultimate Purpose

The law of that ultimate Purpose is here seen - "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die."

The sign of the ultimate Purpose; the security of the ultimate Purpose; the law of the ultimate Purpose. What is that? *Life through Death.*

Now we are so familiar with this truth here that it hardly needs further emphasis or words, but, beloved, let it be said as we pass on that everything to the most minute detail which relates to that ultimate Purpose of God has to be born in the power of His Resurrection. All relationships! Oh, how we are tested upon that! A relationship, and the Lord calls upon you to let that relationship go. The Cross and your position in relation to the Lord Jesus costs you that, and that is to go down into death. The relationships are all tested down there, and then, what is of God comes back, it must survive. What is not of God we become quite content to do without. We come up in the victory of His Life.

If a thing has been sown of God in the grave of the Lord Jesus, it is in the power of a Life that cannot see death, which cannot see corruption; it will come up, but this time on a higher level. That is the history of many a personal experience. It is the history of this thing here at Honor Oak. Two years ago one word which was always being spoken amongst us was Resurrection Life - the Life of the ages; all the time we were beating that out, the truth of it was being presented to us all the way round from every standard. What happened? We have been baptised into death since then, all of us, aye, and we have been baptised into hell, for all hell seems to have been let loose upon this thing, and we pass through the darkness, the bitter agony, and the spiritual antagonisms to a point of almost intolerable pressure. Where are we? We are coming up, and, praise God, we are not coming up on the level of two years ago, we are higher than ever. That is the continual order, the cycle of the law of this progress of the ultimate Purpose, and I think the Church will be baptised into a deeper death just before the Lord comes than ever it has been before, and then it will go higher than ever; it will not be able to get any higher, it will bound to the utmost heights "far above all." This is the law of the ultimate Purpose which is wrought out in individual lives in every relationship, in every thing. It results in this, that you do not come back to the single plane, you come back to the multiple plane - increase - the one corn changed to the many, all sharing One Life.

The Instrument of the Ultimate Purpose

Hurriedly again, let us turn to Matthew 26:18. Here the Master is preparing for the Passover, sending a messenger to a certain man He evidently knows in secret, and He says to this man, "My time is at hand; prepare Me a place where I may keep the Passover." The Passover; here the Blood is again in view, but what is the most conspicuous thing relative to this particular Passover Supper and the shed Blood? It is a covenant. Do we not read, "This is the new covenant in My Blood which is shed for the remission of sins." The blood of the Eternal Covenant. It is a covenant in view. Now in the Passover, as we have often seen before, tracing this thing through the Word, as in the case of Israel and the Passover, it was in that blood of the lamb, a covenant between the Lord of Life and His people as against the lord of death and his authority, and in that covenant with His people made in the blood of the Passover Lamb they were secured from the tyranny of "him that had the power of

death, that is the devil," and were brought out from death into life, from darkness into light, from bondage into liberty, from shame into glory, from desolation into fruitfulness.

That covenant was the basis of their emancipation, and all that is bound up now with this - "a new covenant in My Blood" - is the covenant between Himself, the Lord of Life and His own elect ones by which they are going to be made victorious over death in their union with Him as members of His Body, as seen in the other side of the supper; the covenant with His Church by which death is robbed ultimately, finally, of its power. Here you have *the instrument of His ultimate Purpose*, and, beloved, it will be upon the basis of that covenant in His Life that we are maintained victorious. That is, here you have the thing made in the Blood and in the Life of the Eternal Son of God, Whom "God brought again from the dead by the Blood of the Eternal Covenant," which is the absolute ground of your victory. "He is a God Who keepeth covenant." This covenant is an Everlasting Covenant, the Eternal Covenant of a Life which cannot see corruption, and upon that basis we are bound to go through triumphantly. He will not break this covenant with us. This covenant stands to bring us into that union with Himself which is going absolutely to triumph.

Now you see what He secures here in His covenant is an instrument; that relationship in Life by which He is going to work out all that was wrought in the Cross, and in the Resurrection. We have anticipated this, but here the stronger emphasis comes. How is He going to demonstrate throughout the Kosmos that He has triumphed over death? In those who are in covenant relation with Him upon the basis of this One Life! So He sits down with His disciples, and in this testimony He declares that oneness in His death and in His burial and in His Resurrection - victory! "God says what is true of Me is going to be true of you, and here I make the Covenant which cannot be broken that we together are going to display this victory of this Life throughout the universe." A Covenant in Life. That is *the Hour*. "*Mine Hour is at Hand*."

The Mind and the Method of the Ultimate Purpose

Now let us turn to John 13. Here you have the account of the feet-washing. "Jesus knew that His hour was come. And that the Father had delivered all things into His hands. He came forth from God and went to God." How rich that is! But that is the basis of what is going to take place now. All things delivered unto Him of the Father, knowing that He came forth from the Father and returned to the Father. Upon that basis He rose from the supper and took a towel, laid aside His garment, girded Himself and poured water into a basin and washed the feet of the disciples. Then cometh He to Simon - knowing that the Father had given all, and then this remarkable statement so full of significance, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know afterwards." Then this must be a symbolic act, and mean a sign. It is a sign of Jesus. It ranges the ages, and it ranges the eternities, and could truly be paraphrased in this way:-

"He rose from His Throne; He laid aside the garments of Light; He took the poor towel of our humanity and wrapped it around His glorious Person, and poured His own Blood into the basin of the Cross, and set Himself to wipe from the universe the foul stains of sin."

That is what is signified in this. Oh, you say, "that is imagination taking flight." Oh, no, come again to Philippians 2. There He is in the throne with God. "He thought it not something to be grasped at to be on equality with God;" He emptied Himself; laid aside the garments of glory. He rose from His throne of equality with God and took upon Himself the form of a servant, "being found in fashion as a man." There is the towel of our humanity. He came forth, poured His blood out to wipe the stains

of sin from the universe; and that is why there is this basis. "Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and He came forth from the Father and returned to the Father." You see *that* is the background of this thing. "What I am doing thou knowest not now," but they do know hereafter that all this said to them, this is the way of the highest service, not to be important, not to be high and lifted up above everyone else; for this was a blow at their attitude at this very time, when no one would take upon himself the form of a slave and wash the others' feet, a rebuke; but this is the way.

Now recognise this one central thing. Pride was the source of all human sin. Satan started this awful thing there. "Thou saidst in thine heart, I will be equal with the Most High," he who had no right to it, and sought to grasp at that. He who had the right to it did not think it a thing to be grasped at, and saw a need for laying it down, so He rebukes them thus. Pride was the source of all human sin, and the wreckage of the world; so Christ must needs provide an antidote for the source of sin. What is that? His own humiliation. He reverses the order, and ends all this work of the devil by His humiliation. Now He says in fact to them, and to us, Do you want to destroy the works of the devil, pride must be torn from your hearts, and you must pour yourself out unto death; pour yourself out for the sake of the Name, and for the sake of others. Position, prestige, reputation, these must be of no concern whatever. The spirit of victorious service is this. So here you have *the mind, and the method of the ultimate Purpose*. "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not a thing to be grasped at to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. Wherefore (knowing that He returned unto the Father - this was the way up; this was the way back to the glory - He came forth from God and He was going unto God, and all things are His) God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name."