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## Devotion to the Testimony

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

*Reading: 2 Samuel 19:40 - 20:1-10, 16-22.*

We have been of late occupied with what we have termed "the trumpet of testimony". We have had the book of Numbers as our foundation where the trumpets are first mentioned - two silver trumpets. And we saw that the two silver trumpets in the hands of the priests under the government of the Holy Spirit represent that by which the people of God are governed, the movements of the Lord's people are directed - that from that time that the trumpet in Israel is [sounded it is] that which governs the goings or stayings of the Lord's people. And it's these two silver trumpets that represent the Lord's testimony in fulness and completeness. Silver: redemption. Two: completeness, fulness of testimony. And the fact that they are trumpets: that which is made clear to the Lord's people. And that they are used by the priests is that they have the mind of the Lord inasmuch as priests are those who are closely in touch with the Lord. From that time we find, not these silver trumpets necessarily, but trumpets coming in to govern and order the Lord's people.

We went to 1 Samuel 13 where Saul blew a trumpet and we found there a trumpet in the hands of man's chosen leader which resulted in confusion, chaos, disorder and a very great deal of shame and reproach and that which is deplorable. Here this morning we have the trumpet again brought into view. The historic setting of course, is full of interest, a far bigger field than we can dare to touch now, but we will just note it as quickly as we possibly can. You know these books of Samuel represent the transition period and within the great transition period you have the transition from Saul to David. And David is in these books being established as the Lord's anointed, and he represents in a peculiar way what is of God here on the earth, what represents the Lord in the Divine anointing. Of course in himself there are faults and weaknesses, but nevertheless he is the man after God's own heart and he is peculiarly the Lord's anointed and he does represent more

than any other what is of and for the Lord here, and everything that is taking place is circling around David.

You have this very unhappy state of things, the two houses, the house of Saul and the house of David in conflict and it is a very sad and unhappy story. Ishbosheth, Saul's son, has become, by the men of Israel, Saul's successor. An attempt is made to appropriate the kingdom and the house of Saul through Ishbosheth, entirely out of keeping with the Lord's plan, and with him there is Abner - in many respects a good fellow, much to be admired about him. Of the two brothers he is better than Joab, but Abner has unfortunately come into league with Israel and is found in this way trying to appropriate a kingdom against the Lord's order and against David. On the other hand, there is David, and Abner's brother Joab who is with David. Then you have these conflicts, these battles, these terrible things: it is that the Lord's anointed is not in his place. Then you have parties and jealousies and rivalries and you have all the unhappy incidents and conditions which are associated with these rivalries. It is a sad thing when you remember these are all mighty men. Joab was a mighty man.

We have recently spoken of the mighty men round David. Abner is this mighty man taken unawares and smitten by his brother Joab. Instead of these mighty men being together and meeting the enemies of the Lord as a company, they are proving their might and prowess by slaying one another. I do not know whether you are able immediately to make the interpretation and application of this, but the history of the Christian church is full of this: rivalries, parties, jealousies and men's names coming up and circling round groups and companies who have shown how mighty they were by their attempts to get the upper hand of one another. That is how it was here in these days of Israel and such are not uncommon experiences in the history of the Church. Perhaps in our own day it is all too true, and the main cause is because the Lord's anointed is not in His place of universal recognition by the Lord's people.

See how the men of Israel come and speak of Judah, "our brethren" - they recognise the family link, but here is this spirit of rivalry and jealousy because the Lord has not His object and is not universally in His place, and because the Lord's order is not recognised or universally accepted and established. When that is so, you have lesser things coming in all ways and you get these systems and deviations which are so sad and terrible. This has something to say to us. We must have an understanding of why, in the history of the work of the Lord, things have been which have been. One thinks back over many years passed, the history of the Lord's people, and you see a dividing up into sections. One man arising and another rising up against him and these parties and jealousies, so that so much of the strength and spiritual might of the Lord's people has really been poured out and exhausted in controversy and trying to cut out every other party and every other man.

A beautiful thing of God has been instituted and projected representing some movement of the Lord and then personal interest has come in, personal names come in, jealousies, individuality in its extreme form; these things have come in and before long you have found a very unhappy state there in that which was very beautiful, according to the Lord, and which the Lord was after. It was a very unhappy state of things and instead of the common foe meeting the impact of the might of Israel, the foe has been able to carry on his awful aggression while the Lord's people have been occupied with one another to mutual annihilation. What has been can be. We need to recognise the laws by which these things are prevented, because they are so common without representing a continuous effort of the enemy and we do want the Lord's testimony to be saved in these days. We want to take this personal interest in the testimony.

It does look as though Joab was really very much concerned for David, certain things he does do speak of a kind of concern for David, but if you will carefully read all you can about Joab you will come to another conclusion. You will find that Joab did not slay Abner because he was jealous for David, but because of Abner having slain his other brother; Joab was going to avenge his brother. If you look closely you will find there was personal jealousy. You cannot read that story about Abner's break with Israel and his declaration for David and his coming to David and telling him he was going to turn the men of Israel to David without feeling it was genuine, but when Joab had come back and found David had made Abner a feast and Abner had gone away in peace, Joab was angry and slew him because he was jealous of his place. He feared that Abner would take his place with David, and in that jealousy for his place he committed that thing for which vengeance came down upon him in the days of Solomon. Joab met the result under the sovereign government of God of that which was done out of a heart of jealousy. God knows the heart. Abner represents a man who is attached in a way to what is of God, but in a personal way. He was apparently so devoted to the Lord's interests, but in whose heart secretly there is personal ambition, personal place, and that stirs to this jealousy so that conditions like these are brought about in a day of crisis when the Lord's testimony, the Lord's anointed is, as it were, in the balance; in a sense David is not established yet. We know quite well that in the Lord's presence the Lord Jesus is established, but in this earth there is a sense in which He has to come into His place. We are in a day of crisis when the Lord and His testimony yet have to be vindicated in the earth.

It is so clear that today you have a condition like the house of Saul in Christianity; something that is not God's first thought but which is by the choice of man. Call it what you like - tradition, organized Christianity - not absolutely under the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, but a man-chosen and man-appointed regime. The Lord blesses just as much as He can, but there are limits to the Lord's blessing. He has to wipe out the regime of the house of Saul, things are in a sense in the balance, there is a fight for the testimony, it has got to be established. What is of God has to be recognised, accepted. We are in that conflict between the two orders of things, God's supreme order and that which is the thing not wholly according to God. In a day of crisis, the thing which jeopardizes the interests of the Lord's testimony, that brings about such a state of shame and chaos, is when you get the truth as represented by Joab which attaches itself in devotion to that which is of God and yet has a personal place. And none of us perhaps know how true, how real, how strong that thing is until we are tested out on this testimony. It is so easy to say we are out for the testimony, we stand for what is of God, and suddenly somebody threatens to get into the place we want to occupy, something seems to threaten our interest in the testimony, then it is discovered that there is some Joab in us: we begin to make mischief, make a mess, something which is personal comes out. And beloved, the Lord has to root out of us the Joab principle. That is a principle of building up. It is not enough for us to say we are devoted to the testimony, the thing is to prove that we are so devoted to the testimony that we can be absolutely set aside without being ruffled, that our personal place in it counts for nothing. It is the testimony. That is the way to prove it.

I feel the Lord would search our hearts in this matter, He has tried to search us out in these things. It is one thing to say we are abandoned to the interests of the Lord's Anointed, to the Lord Jesus, and it is another thing to stand for that testimony if we are going to lose everything that is personal. It is an important thing to begin with. Joab was that man attached to that which is of God in a personal way.

Another thing, he is exceedingly clever, and he is the clever man in relation to the things of God. That is a very dangerous thing. The man who brings a great deal of natural ability, his business acumen or power of getting things done, and brings that to bear and gets that off by a little scheming, by cleverness; it is really a desperately dangerous thing. This thing is of the Holy Spirit or it is nothing, and no human cleverness or ability or acumen must be brought alongside of it to try

and manipulate. When the Lord is tarrying to try to get something done, how this flesh, this natural man likes to get things done and have a place in the getting of things done. Joab, the clever man in relation to what is of God, makes difficulty.

David cried out of a burdened heart, "Oh, these men are too strong for me", speaking of Abner and Joab. What a thing for a man like David to say, "The strong, natural drive of these men is too much for me." The men who brought in their own efforts to bring things about and did things as natural men, they made it too hard for David, he wanted to be abandoned to the Lord all the time. It would have been so much happier if, for instance, when Joab came back and found Abner had been to David he had said "I am only too glad that there should be a strengthening of your hands; I have no personal interest in this thing". If it had been like that, how much happier. But he did not; jealousy arose.

Now, we have not said much about the trumpet. Read these chapters in connection with the blowing of a trumpet. Joab blew a trumpet in coming back from the pursuit of Abner - the trumpet was in the hands of Joab, that is, the people were being governed by a man who had personal interests. That is the meaning of the trumpet. The testimony was in the hands of a strong-headed natural man who had his own interests in view.

When you come to the blowing of the trumpet in the next place - the wise woman of the city - you have another thought. But get a clear apprehension of this one principle: that the testimony is at stake today. There can be a state of confusion, rivalries, factions, divisions and so on, but the thing is for the saving of that work done in us by which everything that is represented by Joab is eliminated. All these enemies represent a party broken off from an original party and round these names circle little companies and all are trying to annihilate one another. There are elements of personal jealousy or ambition or self-assertiveness. We must be so devoted to the testimony that we would rather die than that anything personal about us should jeopardize the Lord's interests. We must be there.