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The Spirit of Service

by T. Austin-Sparks

*Transcribed from a message given by T. Austin-Sparks in April 1959.
The spoken form has been retained verbatim.*

The book of Exodus chapter 32 and verse 32: "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin-; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written".

And in the letter to the Romans chapter 9 and verse 3: "For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh".

I think, dear friends, in these two utterances are two outstanding - perhaps the two most outstanding servants of God - in the two dispensations, the old and the new: Moses and Paul. We have the very highest point of service to the Lord represented.

We are all concerned with this matter of being of service to the Lord and we are ever seeking to know how that service can be best fulfilled and how we may rise to the highest possible level of service to Him. And I repeat, that this statement, this prayer by Moses (and if you look at the margin of Paul's words you will see that that also was a prayer, the word 'wish' is really 'prayer' or 'pray': "I could pray...") these two prayers of these two outstanding servants of God do represent the highest degree of service to the Lord. And that is because there is nothing beyond these statements, nothing whatever beyond them in the matter of selflessness. You can't go beyond this: "Blot me out of the book which Thou hast written"; "accursed from Christ". There is no degree beyond that. The utterness of selflessness is in those prayers. They represent a greater concern for the people of God

than, not only personal blessing or personal vindication or position or reputation, but life itself. It is only another way in which these men were saying, "Well, my life begins and ends with the people of God and I have nothing beyond that. And if they should lose or suffer, and I in any way could have prevented it, then I have missed the whole purpose of life and the very purpose of my own salvation. That is the sum and the end of everything." What a devotion! What a devotion. That is service.

There were certain things that Paul and Moses had in common which are headed up in these prayers as you see the context of the passages; you see the sin of the Lord's people. This thirty second chapter of Exodus follows the story of that terrible breakdown under Aaron's leadership and the setting up of the idol and the worshipping of it and turning away from God and saying "These be thy gods oh Israel"; the awful sin of the Lord's people. And then as for Paul's context, it's in the context of what Israel had done to his Lord, in the killing of Christ.

This devotion... the point is this devotion was not to a people who drew it out by reason of their goodness, the fineness of their substance, the loveliness of their nature. It's *tremendously* strengthened, this devotion, by recognizing the kind of people to whom these hearts so utterly went out. It's a rebuke to us in our service. It's so easy for us to give and to devote ourselves to labour for those who give a return and who show kindness and who are nice people, we think are worthwhile people... And here, a love to the uttermost for people who were so utterly unworthy of it at all. That, Paul and Moses had in common. But further, they had this in common: that they *themselves* were objects of those people's reproach and persecution. There had been times when Moses was seeking to bring the people out of Egypt when they turned on him, they turned on him and blamed him for their difficulties and situations. And we know that even after this incident many times they railed on Moses, they laid at his door all their troubles. And as for Paul, what a time he had at the hands of Israel! The Judaizers and all the rest, what a time he had! They denounced him as a traitor. And yet, although these men themselves were personally the objects of the opposition of those to whom they had given their lives, this was their spirit and their attitude: Forgive! If Thou wilt forgive... and he breaks off, he doesn't finish that part, "If Thou wilt... but if You don't, if not, blot me out of the book which Thou hast written". "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake." What a spirit of service!

I say again: it's a terrible rebuke to us. Here are these men exemplifying the spirit of Christ; that's the point. We're in Galatians and we've only got to remember He was made a curse for us; "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake". He was made a curse... He carried the spirit of service all that way to being cut off from God, for that eternal moment when the Father hid His face... for the sake of His brethren. Turn to Hebrews and we know that it was for His brethren, "I and the children..." the brethren. Yes, so utter was His committal that He, Christ, actually *suffered for that moment the loss of God*; the loss of everything. What I'm stressing is the spirit of Christ in service, how far it must take us.

Now when you look at both of these passages in their context, there's a lot of instruction. You notice that in each case, in each case, the previous chapter is a most wonderful and blessed chapter. The thirty first chapter of Exodus, Moses in the mountain in communion with God receiving the pattern for the tabernacle, and what a wonderful thing that was! It was the mount of revelation. We can say in meaning, the revelation of Jesus Christ in all the fullness of His mediatorial work; for that is what the tabernacle stands for. This pattern was shown in the mount and Moses was there with God. It's a

wonderful chapter! Presently that will all be taken up again and put into effect but there's a dark chapter between.

Look at Romans eight; everybody knows what Romans eight is about but there are few more beautiful and glorious things than the closing words of that chapter: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". And in Paul's letter there were no chapters. It ran straight on into what is in our arrangement chapter nine. A wonderful chapter is chapter eight, we're lifted into the heights of the marvel of divine love. Presently that will all be taken up and you get to chapter twelve, everybody knows chapter twelve and onward, the thing now is coming into effect, but again, in between: the dark chapter. The dark chapter... Here is that to which we are called. The service of the house of God, the service of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the service of the love of God; all to be brought into concrete form in the Lord's people. But between the revelation and the realization there is a terrible battle.

In every case, in these cases, and it's always so, there's a terrible battle between. There's always this that we have in chapter thirty two: the breaking in of the enemy to spoil everything... the outbreaking of the flesh in men... the spirit of idolatry. It is about a wider and bigger thing than just the worship of some idol, this very comprehensive movement to draw away from God, and it's found by the play of the evil forces upon men's nature and that's the realm of the battle. There's something that has got to be dealt with and got out of the way. When Moses and the Levites dealt with it and got it out of the way then they could get on with the tabernacle. Paul dealt with this thing in Israel, he dealt with it very drastically. I think that is *the* point of the letter to the Galatians, I hope I don't trespass and make it difficult for any brethren, but do you know that, if I may say this here, the letter to the Galatians saw a battle fought through which *never* had to be fought through again in that time. *Once and for all*, Paul through that letter settled the matter of the Judaizers in his time. After that it was finished. They were doing just what these people were doing at the foot of the mount. It was a battle, a desperate battle to make the way clear for the purpose of God.

Now that of course provides the very focal point for this message: Devotion. Utter devotion to God's purpose concerning His people is going to make the *utmost demand* upon any servant of God. It's going to test and find out our spirit of service and it is going, dear friends, if we are really going to serve God in this utmost way, it's going to bring us to this point where we've nothing left to fall back upon of personal interest, position or blessing; it is simply a matter of *God and God only*. And if God doesn't do it, we're finished, we've nothing to live for. We've nothing to live for, we've no *alternative*, we've no second line, we are in this matter of the Lord's purpose and interest to the very last drop of our blood. And if not, then there's nothing more for us.

The, *the* purpose of God in His people will demand that. We shall find that, sooner or later, it's no use, it's no use, we can't have any alternatives, we can't have a second course; it's everything or nothing, everything or nothing, and we shall be and we must be prepared to be brought to the place where we are prepared to get *right out of the way ourselves, altogether out of the way in every sense* if the Lord can reach His end, if only He can reach His end; we don't matter. That's what Moses said: *I don't matter! My salvation doesn't matter, my life doesn't matter!* Paul said the same. What matters is that the Lord has His end in His people and if that is not reached then I don't know what I'm alive for. I don't know what I've been saved for!

How far removed this is, isn't it, from being saved to get things for ourselves in time and in eternity, to get heaven and to get blessing and all manner of things. These are the things offered if only we will be saved and we find that we are saved to be brought into the great purpose of God as His servants. And it's no use, it's no use complaining, no use complaining, no use saying well this is too costly, or this is costly, this is hard work and so on; it's no use, we're committed to *death* for this thing, we are just committed unto death. Now the Lord said that right at the beginning: "he that saveth his life shall lose it, he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." It's a life matter. Saving or losing what? Blessing? No, *your life!* No less an issue than that.

Are our hearts, dear friends, are our hearts really so bound up with the Lord's concern not for ourselves but for His people, for His church; *so bound up* with that that we have nothing else for which to live. That is our horizon. That is our beginning and our end. That is all that we are on this earth for, for the Lord to have what He has set His heart upon in His people.

Well that's the word, that's the message: "I'm not seeking something for myself in the work of God or in salvation. I'm not seeking place, I'm not seeking name, reputation; I'm not seeking any gain whatever. I'm committed so utterly to the Lord's concern and purpose *in a people*. And far, far from doing those people an injury, hurting the Lord's people - and oh there are a lot of Christians hurting the Lord's people, doing a lot of hurt to the Lord's people and to the Lord's interests in His people - far from that, we would rather die than that the Lord should lose anything in His people. That's the spirit of these words and these servants. And that's the message, just that: a call to service, to recognize what that service is. It is the service of Christ and the service of Christ was "obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross".

Now this brings to this last very brief word which is in a way a reiteration of something said recently. The peculiar and particular sufferings and trials of the servants of the Lord... we don't suffer for our salvation, we pay no price whatever for our redemption, that is all free and we have it without money, without price. *Never attach your sufferings to your salvation*. Keep those two things always apart but you need not be told that when you *are* saved you enter upon a life of difficulties and adversities and trials and afflictions and suffering. Why? Because you have been called not just to salvation, you've been called to service; you've been called to service. And the servant of the Lord or *servanthood* necessitates these fiery ordeals in which the dross of self interest is removed. That is the effect of our adversities and our sufferings, if they have their right effect, just to completely deal with this whole matter of personal motives and selfish interests and *ourselves* as featuring in the work of God.

The fire, the fire deals with the dross of selfhood which is always *the* menace to service. Look at the Lord Jesus. *The* master servant. *The* great servant. One thing that is clearer than anything else and more outstanding in Him is being yet what He was, the eternal Son of God incarnate, could lay aside His robe, gird Himself with a towel, take a basin of water and wash the disciple's feet. There is the picture of the servant; utterly emptied of all selfhood, reputation, self importance, prestige, standing, dignity and everything else! It's gone. It's the spirit of service. "I came not to be ministered unto but to minister" He came to give His life. That is the spirit of it and it carries us all the way, we have nothing left of ourselves in this service but, I was saying, the explanation of our trials and sufferings and discipline is just this: to make us better servants, make us true servants. What Moses had in that way, until it was possible for it to be said "Now, the man Moses was the meekest of all men upon the earth" and therefore Moses stands a giant over the whole of the Old Testament with one word, one title: Moses the *servant* of God. And we need not indicate Paul, the servant of Jesus

Christ, if ever there was a servant in this dispensation, he was. But look at this man: "I could pray myself to be accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake." That's the spirit of service. The Lord inculcate that in us.