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Boundless Heavenly Resources

by T. Austin-Sparks

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For our lives and for our service, our ministry, our heavenly vocation, there are, in union with Christ, resources at our disposal which are heavenly, inexhaustible, and incorruptible. This is the great secret of strength. We have seen something of what those resources are, and of how they operate; of their value for spirit, soul, and body; mind, heart, and will. Not on our own charges are we commissioned of the Lord, but He Who commissions places His own resources behind His commissioned and His commission.

The Blessedness of an Inescapable Necessity

It means, then, that we also must abide in heaven as He abode in heaven. That can be expressed in many different words of Scripture; as for example, Walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh; warring after the Spirit and not after the flesh; or again, that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual. These are only ways of defining what it means to abide in heaven and not to live as of the earth; to allow no dependence on earthly means, no worldly methods, and never to take ourselves as we are naturally as the final word. For Christ in a very real and full way the heavens did rule, and so it must be in our case. The rule of the heavens must decide whether a thing shall be undertaken, and whether we can go through. What is seen, what appears, what is felt must never be the ground of our decisions. It is a grand thing and a source of tremendous strength to come to the same position as that of Christ as Man, where we know that boundless heavenly resources are available. I think we only come there progressively, and not all at once. We only come there by the way of discipline, discipline which takes the form of bringing us to an utter dependence, but which is yet not an emptying and a breaking down as an end in itself, but one which is accompanied by that grace of God, that graciousness of God, which, when we are empty, makes His fulness to abound. There is a

positive as well as a negative side. God is no believer in negatives as being the ultimate goal, but when He breaks, and when He empties, He does something on the positive side which ever causes us to marvel, and we have to say every time: Well, that was the Lord, not ourselves. We come progressively by that way of discipline to know that there are heavenly resources which far outstrip all human possibilities, and these resources are operative. The Lord leads us so far in making that real and manifest to us actively and then perhaps brings us to the place where we have to take up a position upon it, lest we begin to take it for granted.

It is possible, and perhaps true of us sometimes, that after an experience of the Lord's goodness in this way we sit down, so to speak, in the arm chair and say: He will be gracious again like that! We need not bother; we need not worry; the Lord will come in! We are quite empty, we cannot of ourselves meet the demand; the Lord must do it! So we become passive. If the Lord has acted thus with us, He has not done so in order to put us aside, and He does not pick us out of an arm chair and work through us as mere automatons! He has dealt with us thus in order to teach us a lesson, and then He calls for a definite exercise of faith in relation to it. So that, while the truth holds good that it is no longer I but Christ, that is only half of the statement. We have to bear in mind what follows: "the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God..." That is the other half of the statement. "...I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live... I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God..." That is the active side of living by His life. Paul adds the latter half to safeguard his utterance. Although we might not knowingly fall into the error against which he was guarding, that is, we might not fall into the formulated error, yet we might fall into the error itself. Paul was guarding against pantheism. You know that these Greeks were all too open to the pantheistic idea, and the pantheists would seize upon that word, "...it is no longer I but Christ...", and say: Well, then, it is a case of our being merged into the great Divine, and losing our personality, losing our identity, losing ourselves in a great All, so that any distinctiveness of feature about us is lost to sight. Such is pantheism. Now these Greeks might have received what Paul was saying in the light of pantheism, and said: Oh, well, that supports our idea. Thus Paul immediately covered his statement, protected it, and rescued it from that false conception. "I live by faith in the Son of God". I still retain my identity! I still retain my personality! This life of union with Christ is a faith union, not a merging of substance.

We might not ourselves fall into the known error, but we might well fall into the principle and become more or less passive, thinking it is the Lord who is to do it all, and that we have little or no place in it. We have a place, and that place is the definite exercise of faith in relation to Christ and the heavenly resources.

This then is what constitutes spirituality. This is what makes a life or service spiritual. It is the drawing upon heavenly resources, living the life in this way in heaven, living as out from heaven. That is spirituality. That constitutes a spiritual life and a spiritual walk. The resources are not drawn from self or from the world, they are all drawn from above. The government is not that here of men or of the world, but that which is from above. Everything is so utterly from above, and so utterly not from man, that the life or work becomes spiritual as a consequence. Some people seem to think that spirituality is a kind of mystical or mythical "something"; that spirituality is something remote from reality, a kind of frame of mind. Well, spirituality is certainly not a frame of mind in the first place. We speak of a calm and heavenly frame, and there may be something of this kind as a fruit of it, but spirituality is not a nebulous, mythical, or abstract thing. Spirituality is the most practical thing. When men or women are called by God into some piece of Divine ministry, and in face of the demand are conscious to the last degree that they have no ability, no resource, no power to fulfil that ministry; that in themselves the thing is utterly impossible; that for them to essay to do it would be the utmost folly and absurdity; when in such circumstances they recognise that they have a living Christ

in Whom are resources more than enough to meet that demand, and by faith lay hold of Him, and go forward into the ministry with that consciousness, that is spirituality: and that is practical, tremendously practical. The issues prove that it is practical. It is in that way heavenly things are done, and these are the things which cannot be shaken.

Spirituality is not Remoteness

Christ's spirituality was not that He was remote from what was practical in every day life. It was that He was bringing heavenly forces and resources to bear upon the practical matters of every day life. You can wash doors, or clothes, or floors, or do any of these ordinary domestic things, in spirituality. People seem to think that spiritual work and ordinary work, household work for example, are two different things. They talk about the spiritual work and the other work. Now, you can bring heavenly resources in to do anything that is legitimate, and the doing of those things may be a testimony. The majority of people have no occasion to draw upon heavenly resources for a platform ministry. For the most part their work is of some regular, daily kind, and very often they feel utterly unable for it, and they are tempted to think that if they had some spiritual ministry to fulfil, if they had to go and take a meeting, or speak to some souls about spiritual matters, they could make a claim upon the Lord for help and He would carry them through. For the trivial round and common task such a thought is all too often wholly absent from the mind. Now, exactly the same resources have to come into the ordinary work as into what we call spiritual work. It has all to be done on a spiritual basis, and therefore to be a testimony. To get through an ordinary day's work often requires something more than ordinary human resources. Spirituality consists in our doing everything as out from heaven. Let us be careful how we draw a line, lest we make a distinction between the spiritual and "the rest".

The Divine Resources are for the Divine Purpose

Christ never took things for granted. That is to say He never took these heavenly resources for granted. He never allowed the thought that they would operate mechanically, irrespective of certain conditions on His side. His was a life of exercise in relation to them. Before He chose His disciples He spent a night in prayer. I think we are right in saying that the two things were in some way related. Of the occasion He said later, "I know whom I have chosen". That was said in connection with His having deliberately chosen His betrayer, Judas. To do that surely demanded Divine government, Divine help, Divine assurance, as well as His choice of the rest. In the light of the repeated breakdown and failure of those men, in the light of the final scene before the Cross where they all forsook Him and fled and everything seemed lost, did Christ make a mistake? Is there indeed room for our remonstrance: Well, Lord, You would have done better had You chosen a different set of men; You made a mistake in Your men! His reply to that would be: "I know whom I have chosen".

This choosing was governed by a night of prayer. He evidently found prayer to be a necessity. I do not think we are right in saying that prayer to Him was just a case of getting away and having a quiet talk with the Father for fellowship's sake. I think it was a necessity; I think He required it. I think prayer was an avenue for the communication of resources, and if so, His prayer life, rich and strong as it was, makes it perfectly clear that He took nothing for granted as to Divine resources. Only on certain grounds could He take His Father's help for granted, namely, on the ground of His own maintained exercise in relation to those resources. You and I must be careful lest we fall into a snare in this very thing. While these same resources are at our disposal, are ours in Christ, and are intended to be expressed in our lives; while it is true that the sovereignty of God secures them for us, yet these resources will not be ministered to us irrespective of the conditions that obtain on our side. We cannot presume upon them. We cannot take them for granted. We cannot neglect prayer. If

we do, we shall find that the resources are not forthcoming, but that weakness, loss, and need supervene. The Lord Jesus must be our pattern in this matter. That, then, is a brief summary of the question concerning His resources and ours, when joined to Him in resurrection life.

I want to add a further word with reference to the fact that all this lay behind the purpose of His life. There are two things to be said in this connection. One is that there was a secret strength for Him which lay in the fact of a Divine purpose, a heavenly vocation. He knew that He was on this earth for a purpose of tremendous significance, and from the fact that He had come for a purpose, and that a purpose was bound up with His being here, He drew a great deal of strength. The other point is that these resources of which we have been speaking were definitely related to the purpose, and that the strength of those resources would have immediately failed if He were found at any time not in the line of that purpose. Those are two things which we want to follow out a little more fully for a few moments. They touch us very deeply in our own experience, in our own lives.

Firstly then,

The Strength Derived from a Sense of Divine Purpose Marking our Lives.

It is true again that as you read the story of His time here on earth you cannot miss those emphatic marks of Divine purpose. Go through John's Gospel, for instance, and underline the occurrences of the word "sent". You will first come upon the word in chapter 4 and verse 34. You pass on into chapter 5 and find it repeated four times. In chapter 6 it is again found four times; in chapter 7 four times; in chapter 8 four times; in chapter 9 once; in chapter 12 three times; in chapter 13 once; in chapter 14 once; in chapter 15 once; in chapter 16 once. All these have reference to Himself. Then there is the word "gave", and its cognates, in such passages as John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave..." There is purpose in it. "That" governs the giving. Again, trace through the Gospels the usage of the word "come" with reference to His advent. "The Son of Man is *come* to seek and to save that which was lost". "Come" is related to a purpose. "I am *come* that they might have life." Then His use of the word "works" provides a further instance of this feature. "I must work the works of him that sent me whilst it is day"; "My Father worketh even until now and I work". He is engaged in something specific, definite. He has come with a purpose. There is an entire absence of what is of merely incidental value in His life, and an equal absence of what is of merely general meaning. The immortality of Christ is not to be thought of in mere terms of His doing a work which others would take up after Him, and that in the ultimate His part would be seen somewhere in the mass, would have a place. In His case the purpose of His life was clear-cut, unique, and He with His work will be found at the end abiding for ever. He was not here merely to start a movement which was to continue when He was gone and forgotten. He was not here for an enterprise, a campaign, which others were to take up and assume; He was here to do something with which He personally would be associated through time and eternity. He was here related to a definite, predestined, and undefeatable purpose, clear-cut and rounded off.

For this cause He was called in the book of the prophets the Servant of Jehovah. That title meant that He would come to fulfil a purpose of God. He was the Servant of Jehovah, the Servant of a Divine purpose, and when you come into the realm of service in the case of the Lord Jesus, you find everything very precise. We are familiar with the outstanding note of Mark's Gospel, for instance. Mark's Gospel is the Gospel of the Servant of the Lord. Without any introductory particulars of His birth, or childhood, the Lord Jesus is there immediately presented as a Servant. The language is precise. Precision characterises everything in Mark's Gospel. "Straightway," for example, occurs nineteen times. That is the characteristic of a true servant. The Servant of the Lord is here on business; not here to play, not here for interest, for diversion; He is here with a purpose, and to that

He is given. If He summons into relationship with Himself it is for service - "and straightway they left the nets and went after Him." There is business on hand. There is the element of a Divine purpose governing His life. From that consciousness He drew a great deal of strength. It meant strength to Him.

There is a great deal of strength to be drawn from the realisation that things are not incidental, not general, but specific, with regard to our being here on this earth; that we are related to an eternal purpose, are called according to His purpose. Wherever we are, provided we are there after having subjected our lives utterly to the Lord, and definitely sought to be in His will, we are not to mark time, not to stand and wait, but to recollect that we are there in relation to a purpose. A great many of the Lord's people are standing about waiting, marking time. They think that they are in a kind of hiatus, in some place where the real thing has no bearing upon their lives. Now, let us leave such thoughts behind us. There is a treachery about that mentality. It may be true that we have not yet come into our ultimate calling, but we are in it relatively now, and we shall never come into that unless we are making good all the possibilities that are present where we are. This is preparatory. If the Lord were to come to us and say: Now, look here, this present time which seems to be unmarked by anything very special in the character of the work is nevertheless intended by Me to fit you for a large work that I have in store, which will develop in a certain given year, and on the first day of that year you will move out into a tremendous piece of work! we should begin at once to use the time between for preparation! But God does not do that, and yet it may all the time be true that at a given point in the Divine ordering of our lives there should be a moving into something very important. But He would not have us to be exercised toward Himself simply because of a piece of work that lies ahead; He would have us to be exercised toward Himself for His own sake.

It is so easy to get people to be very earnest, when you give them definite work to do, but so often, apart from that, there is no personal spiritual initiative in them which takes this attitude: Well, it may be that God has something on hand! I do not know, but I am going to use this time for Him, so that I shall be ready if He should call. If we were but to take that attitude, to recognise that in any case we are bound up with the purpose of God, and if only we applied ourselves with all our hearts, we should find that that purpose was already present! There is something relative to our present position which is tremendously related to God's purpose, and were we to take that line, that attitude, we should derive strength from that definiteness of objective. Where there is no vision the people go to pieces. That is but another way of saying that if we lose, or fail to have, a sense of purpose we lose strength.

Nothing destroys strength more than to lose a sense of purpose. Nothing demoralises more than to lose a sense of definiteness of purpose. If the enemy can come in and make us feel that, after all, we have been mistaken in our calling, in our lives, in our work; that when we thought that God had something for us it was not really the case; it is all a mistake, and He has no such thoughts, then the enemy has destroyed us; we are weak; we are impotent; we are demoralised; we are unable to stand up to anything. That is a thing which we have to avoid. We *are* called according to His purpose. Let us watch against that pernicious habit of postponing to a "tomorrow" which never comes. Oh, it is coming! but it does not come, and our minds are ever fixed upon a calling that is future - Perhaps next week! Perhaps a month ahead! Perhaps two months! Perhaps next year! We must be careful. The Devil wastes our lives. Today is the day in which to know the Lord as much as we can, and today's increase in our knowledge of the Lord in its measure is our equipment for a larger ministry tomorrow. The Lord Jesus moved day by day with such definiteness because He was aware that there was a great purpose bound up with His life, and no day was wasted. "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day..." "I work today and tomorrow, and the third day I am perfected".

His law of life was day by day to its measure, and every day as a day bound up with the great purpose of God. There is strength in such an attitude.

In the first book of the Chronicles, chapter 17 we have the Lord's word to David through the prophet with reference to what He was about to do for and through both him and his seed. In verses 7 and 8 the Lord said:

"I took thee from the shepcote, from following the sheep, that thou shouldest be prince over my people Israel: And I have been with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off thine enemies from before thee; and I will make thee a name, like unto the name of the great ones that are in the earth".

Further promises follow: "I will subdue all thine enemies"; "...the Lord will build thee an house"; "I will set up thy seed after thee"; "I will be his Father"; "I will not turn my mercy from him". The Lord has come in with the assurance of a purpose in David's life. He has shown David that a Divine purpose has governed his life throughout; that God is bound up with it and related to it. Then we mark also how chapter 18 is closely related to chapter 17:1-2. And now David is on his feet, with tremendous energy. What has happened? The sense of Divine purpose marking his life has come to him, and in consequence he is a strong man. All these enemies existed before, but they were unbroken, undestroyed. Immediately David became conscious that his life was no mere casual thing, but that it was bound up with God's sovereign purpose, he was a man full of strength to do battle. There is a tremendous strength derived from a sense of purpose in life, Divine purpose. The Lord Himself drew strength from that.

With regard to our union with Christ risen we have much to assure us of a Purpose, and that we are bound up with it. "As the Father hath sent me... even so I send you". Here again is the word "sent". It would take us far too long to gather up all the evidence we have that everyone who is livingly related to the risen Lord is brought into an eternal purpose though it be by different ways, in different spheres, along different lines. Oh, if the Lord would bring us to the place where we realise that we are not just to live our life in a general sense as Christians, and then go to be with the Lord in glory, but that there is tremendous purpose bound up with it. There is a mystery in the purpose. We cannot always understand how the Lord achieves His purpose, but somehow He does so in these lives of ours. That is the fact of purpose.

Effectual Service the Fruit of Spiritual Resources

The other thing is that the service was the fruit of spiritual resources. That is to say, it was not merely official. It was official; Christ was chosen and appointed for a work. In that sense He was elected; He held an office, and in it He was fulfilling a special end as appointed, ordained by God; His particular work no one else could do. But it was not merely official, or only official. He did not fulfil it simply because He was One set apart to do that work, and that was all that there was to it. Although He was the chosen and appointed Servant of Jehovah, His service was also the result of spiritual resources and not merely of official appointment. The two go together, but they must be kept together. The one cannot obtain without the other. What was official never went beyond the spiritual. It could not. The Lord Jesus could never have fulfilled His purpose, His office, but for the spiritual resources. That is just where the disciples in their ignorance were in danger.

We recall the occasion when the Lord was in the mount and a man brought his child in a grievous state. The Devil had a good foothold in his life. The man first brought his child to those disciples who were left at the foot of the mount, and they attempted to cast out the demon. The narrative implies

that they made an attempt, and failed. When the Lord was come down the man brought the child to Him and said: "Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit... and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not." And when they were alone, the disciples said to Him, "Lord, why could we not cast him out?" Evidently they had tried and failed. The Lord says in reply: "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting". Had they attempted it, then, as officials? They were disciples; the man had recognised them as Christ's disciples. They were in the official position related to Christ and so on the official basis they had attempted to do it, not recognising that the office must be accompanied by the resource, the spiritual resource. No office can be fulfilled, even in relation to Christ except on the basis of an accompanying spiritual resource. The office must not get ahead of the spiritual power. If it does it will break down. The office is never a mechanical thing. You may be chosen before the foundation of the world; you may be elected; you may have been marked out from eternity for a special work; the sovereignty of God may single you from the multitudes of earth for a purpose, but you will never fulfil it except on the ground that there is the accompanying spiritual resource; not mechanically, but governed by a relationship with heaven. There is always the difference drawn in the Word of God between vital faculty and vital force.

The Relation of Grace and Gifts

With that we will draw to a close. We will just refer to two passages of Scripture: Ephes. 4:7: "But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ".

Note what that means, "the gift of Christ"! "When he ascended up on high he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men". The gift of Christ! Grace according to the gift!

Romans 12:6: "And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us..." Grace according to the gift! Gifts according to the grace! Grace given by the gift, that is one side. The other side is the gift given by grace. There is a Divine gift in sovereignty through the members. It may be one of the gifts mentioned in Romans 12, or it may be some other gift for helping, for administration. God has made you a gift to the Church. If He has gifted you to the Church (in office that is) as an apostle, the office is that of an apostle; if as a prophet, your office is that of a prophet. If God has given you to the Church as a gift, you cannot fulfil your office except in so far as the grace comes up to the measure of the gift. That is to say, the vital force must be according to the vital function. It may be, and it should be. But so often when men have thought they were apostles, or evangelists, pastors or teachers, they have viewed the matter in this way: I am an evangelist, I am a pastor, I am a teacher; God has made me that, that is my gift! and they have tried to fulfil their function simply because it was the gift, and were resting upon the gift rather than upon the grace. It is a very dangerous thing to become an official, and not to keep the vital force, the grace, in proportion to the office. That is what has made professional ministry. To express it again the other way, the gift is according to grace.

How can we best illustrate the point? The import of the matter is that the two things have to be kept together in equal measure, gift and grace, or gift and function. If you divorce them, or if you over-rate one of them, there is either a complete nullifying of any fruitful result, or else the loss of balance, and the whole thing becomes lopsided. For instance, supposing you build an electrical station, and you put in your dynamos, your generating plant, and set it going close by a city. You generate tremendous electrical power, capable of lighting the whole of that city and driving all its machinery, supplying that whole city with lighting, and yet you have no wires, and no lamps, and no switches. What is the good of it? You have vital force without vital function; a tremendous amount of power, but unrelated power. Or suppose you go round the city, wiring, with splendid insulated wire,

and fixing switches, and yet have no generating station, and you attempt to switch on. What happens? There is no result. This is the opposite case; you have the office without the power. To make good you must needs have both. And if you overload your wiring and your lamps with power you are going to meet with disaster. The gift has to be adjusted to the grace, to be according to the grace. If you divorce the two you have nothing at all.

That may be a poor illustration, and it may only serve to help us a little, but we must remember that God's resource is according to the purpose to which He has called us. We shall not receive more than that. If we stretch ourselves beyond our measure the vital force will not come through. If we try to step into something for which God has never chosen us we shall lack in resource. If we try to take on something more than the apportioned gift that is particularly ours it will be disastrous. It is God who has appointed, adjusted, and arranged the Body. We can never take it upon ourselves to say what work we shall do for the Lord. It is a most disastrous thing when people decide for themselves how they are going to work for the Lord, and what kind of work they will do. It is a terrible thing for a man to try to fulfil a teaching ministry when God has appointed him to be an evangelist. It is a disastrous thing. We use that by way of illustration. God has sovereignly decided what our work shall be, what our gift is to the Church, and we have to function in that position and keep there, and not stretch ourselves beyond our measure. If we do, the power will not follow. Many take up more than the Lord intended them to, and they break down. To express it in the other way, if the Lord has called us to a work, then His resources are available right up to the fulness of that calling. The supply is there according to the gift, the grace according to the gift, the vital force according to the vital function. It is all there. Blessed be God, that is true. If the Lord calls, then His resources are available for that calling right up to the hilt. But we must be careful that we do not of ourselves manufacture the calling or the appointing.

That is where our union with the risen Lord is of such account. We are to be governed by life, through union with the risen Lord. It may be that some things are not quite clear to you, and you cannot follow. Well, ask the Lord to enable you to understand. Our point is that these resources, these heavenly resources, are related to a Divine purpose. The resources will be forthcoming as we enter into the purpose, keep within our measure, and draw upon them. They are there for the purpose of God. There is strength to be derived from the resources for the purpose, and there is strength to be derived from the fact of the purpose itself.

The Lord instruct us, and teach us still further in the way of life.