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## Coming to Zion

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

*Reading: Psalms 122, 125:1-2; Isaiah 25:6-9.*

*"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Hebrews 12:22-25.*

*"Now this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother." Galatians 4:25-26.*

*"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised" Hebrews 10:28.*

We have on our hearts to say a little more along the line of the city of God. In this message we are to be occupied with "Coming to Zion". May I just at the outset make this inclusive statement, that the Lord has His heart set upon securing for Himself a people in whom all the Divine features of Jerusalem in the Old Testament are represented. One stresses, of course, the *Divine* features. There are a good many features in Jerusalem in the Old Testament that the Lord does not want to see reproduced, but He has His heart set upon having for Himself a people in whom all the Divine features of Jerusalem are represented.

We have recently said that the history of the Jerusalem beneath, the historic Jerusalem, the literal Jerusalem, that history contains spiritual principles and which spiritual principles are the components, the elements, the features, the characteristics of the Heavenly Jerusalem that is the

heavenly and spiritual counterpart, the New Jerusalem, or in other words, the church, the Bride. Now, that is a general statement and gives us a good sphere in which to move round and we are able, therefore, to come with a certain amount of spiritual awakening and enlightenment as to much that is said concerning Jerusalem in the Old Testament. We are in the advantageous position of having the New Testament as our interpreter of the Old, and if the Lord's people would only use their Bibles in that way and really get down to the New Testament to explain their Old, they would be full of spiritual riches. That is, of course, of necessity by the enablement of the Holy Spirit's enlightenment.

Now, in these Psalms which we read, as you noticed they are called "Songs of ascent" or "Goings up" and some of these songs or Psalms of ascent were sung by the returning remnant coming back from captivity, moving back into the land which had been desolated and the city which was in ruins. And yet as they came within a certain range of the beloved city and began to make the ascent towards Jerusalem, their hearts welled up in song and they gave these poetic expressions, these sublime expressions to their heart conception of, and feeling for, their beloved city. The state of things was anything but in keeping with what they said about Jerusalem, but they had in their hearts their ideal, that which they had seen, that which they yet believed to see in a day of ruin, and so although Jerusalem was very much in ruin, you have these bursts of praise about the glory and splendour and perfection of Jerusalem. They go up singing their songs of ascent. And that represents something in the nature of a spiritual principle that we must lay hold of. It is a thing of tremendous importance and significance for us.

We, beloved, are going upwards to Zion - I hope we are. I hope you are marching upwards to Zion, really in the ascent, Zionward, going up. You will understand that one is not speaking literally, but spiritually. We are moving higher and higher in that upward calling unto the end, the object which God has in view as a state, a condition to be reached, to be arrived at. Surely it can be said with truth today that it is but a remnant of the Lord's people who are in that state, who are in that attitude, who are so definitely, positively, strongly and exultantly full of faith amidst many discouragements, disappointments, and setbacks, yet definitely with set purpose, of heart aflame, moving upwards with the Lord towards His ultimate object and end. Only a remnant comparatively, and we are in a day of small things. We are in a day of remnant movements and I am quite sure before we are through this message you will agree with that statement more than perhaps you are able to do just at the moment.

But the object in view is Zion. What is Zion? Well, we know historically concerning the Jerusalem that was and is below, that Zion was that last final stronghold to be captured in Jerusalem. Zion and Jerusalem are not identical or synonymous terms although very often it looks as though they are used for the same thing, but truly they are not the same.

Jerusalem is the chief and the all embracing and all-inclusive, Jerusalem is the city in its full expanse and whole content, but Zion is the uppermost place and the stronghold. As we were covering this ground in a recent message, you will remember we spoke of David and his mighty men. We referred to the tribe of Judah and Benjamin in the days of Judges trying to take Jerusalem and they could only take the lower city, the Jebusites held the upper stronghold against every attempt at their dislodgment and so it remained until David's time. Although the lower city had been captured, this stronghold was still in the hands of the Jebusites who considered it to be so impregnable that they fortified it with the blind and the lame and sneered at David.

Now, David being such a one as he was, with all the Divine counsels and assurances and sovereign activities behind him, determined that the stronghold should not be kept in the hands of the enemy

and he challenged his mighty men who made their attack, and Joab first scaled that height and wall and was made captain of the host. Then David took possession of the stronghold of Zion and it became known as the city of David. A city within a city, a stronghold within Jerusalem. A fortress, the city of the great King. So that Zion represented the uppermost stronghold, the place of supreme ascendancy in the city of God - that ultimate place of authority out of which the enemy has got to be hurled, and in which the people of God have got to prove their testimony to the full. That is Zion in brief.

Blessed be God, our Greater David already occupies that place. I believe that that is the meaning spiritually, the meaning of those very familiar words in the Ephesian letter, "The exceeding greatness of His power which is to us-ward who believe, according to that energy of His might which He energised in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand far above all rule and authority". That is the far above place of Divine ascendancy in the exceeding great power of God, and David's Greater Son occupies that place. He speaks of His occupation of that place to the church at Laodicea, "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me in My throne even as I overcame and sit with My Father in His throne." It is a place of ascendancy through the tremendous conflict in virtue of a Divine calling and appointment now held by the Lord Jesus but, as we shall see, to which position He desires to bring His people. They also shall share that position with Him, far above all rule and authority. That is Zion spiritually. That is something more than the, shall we say, lower ranges, even of Jerusalem. It is the ultimate end of sovereignty, spiritual ascendancy, and authority; and let us go back to our first statement - He is seeking to bring a people into that position in whom the features of Zion are developed. Not only of Jerusalem in general, but of Zion in particular, in whom, through the mighty exaltation of the Lord Jesus, is displayed His conquering power made manifest against all His foes who occupy high or heavenly places, even principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness and so on.

That being the object in view, the end that God has in His eye, that being the end He is seeking to bring about in us His people, that being the desire of His heart concerning at least a company, what is coming to Zion? "We are come", says the apostle. We are come to Zion. How are we come? Well, we are come in the Person of the Lord Jesus, and spiritually we are there in Him, but as we have so often put it here, the necessity for us is to come to where we are - to get to the place where we are, and it is just that, that while positionally in Christ we are in the heavenlies, we are there far above all rule and authority, experimentally; and so far as our state is concerned, we may have a long way to go. We may have yet some ascending to do. Some going up, some journey. We may have yet some mount of discouragement, you may have many set-backs and difficulties, conflicts, and find the way hard, but the Lord is seeking to bring us to the place where we are. You understand that language by now.

Now, coming to the place to which we have come is a spiritual movement and development within our own hearts and that is the meaning of these Songs of Ascent. You see, these people were in one sense already there, they were already in the city, they had already come to Zion - in spirit their hearts were there - I can imagine that when they literally got there, in their case they were disappointed. Blessed be God we shall never be disappointed. They found what they did not expect to find. Their vision of Jerusalem intact, such as they had known, was destroyed after they had been carried away. Their mental pictures, their chambers of imagery disappointed them very much, but their hearts were already there, or Zion was in their hearts before they were in Zion. What the Lord has got to do with us is to get Zion into us; to get the spirit of ascendancy into us, to get a spirit of elevation into us, the spirit of Divine sovereignty into us, the spirit of rising above and taking a place of triumph in Christ.

We shall never come to Zion literally until Zion has come to us spiritually. For so long before they reached Zion, their hearts were full of Zion. That is, the spirit of going up was in them. They go up and their going up was in the strength of Zion having already come into their hearts, taking its place there. Now, believe me, if I understand aright, if I am not mistaken as to the Lord's dealings with His people and the meaning of our experiences, it is just this: that every difficulty, adversity, opposition, trial, provocation, and every bit of pressure, every bit of down-pull and down-press is permitted of the Lord in order to develop in us the spirit of Zion, to develop the spirit of ascent, the spirit of going up, taking the upper position. And every day that we live we have a hundred opportunities of either coming under or coming over and yielding to the pressure down, or resisting it and taking the overcomer position in spirit. Every day we have that opportunity and the nearer you approximate to the ultimate truth, to the ultimate revelation, the full supreme purpose of God, the more you will find the continuous, insistent necessity for exercising this spirit of ascendancy.

If you are content with the lower ranges of the land round about, or if you are content only with the lower parts of Jerusalem, then you will not know the tremendous resistance and down-push, and opposition, and you will not have half so many occasions and demands to rise up in the Name of the Lord. But when you come to see Zion, and your calling is in relation to Zion, when God has given you a revelation of Zion, that is, the place of supreme authority, sovereignty, administration in the very Throne of the Lamb, with Him, then you will discover that your life is almost an unbroken continuous demand for not allowing yourself to go down under and to be pressed out, but of exercising your spirit in the strength of the great Overcomer to get above. In certain realms it is comparatively easy; in certain spheres of Christian activity of life, the simple, more elementary realms of Christian life and experience, you do not know anything about that, but if you are coming into touch with God's ultimate thing, if that is what you are called unto, well, you immediately come up against this violent resistance of the enemy and this atmosphere and state of pressure; all of which is to send you down. It is, after all, one great challenge to come to the place where you are because of your heavenly calling; that is, to have the spirit of Zion, of ascent in your heart, in your soul and recognise it is a challenge of those forces which still occupy the upper reaches against the Lord and against His end.

It is so necessary in reading these beautiful Psalms of going up the pilgrim way, to come back to this practical everyday application of it. You may read this message and five minutes later something may trip you up spiritually, the same tomorrow, something to bring you down, to cause you to slip up, to lose your vision of ascendancy and exultance and to bring you flat on your back. It is important to remember that this is a practical thing, applicable to the things of everyday life. And the challenge is: are you going under, or are you going over in the Name of the Lord! The Spirit of Zion must be in us.

Where are you at this moment? Are you out there with your harps hung upon the willow saying "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land" or are you marching upward to Zion singing the hymns of ascent? There is a great need for us, the Lord's children, to do more of the singing of the songs of Zion; we will see why later, but that is where you begin. Zion has got to get into our souls, the Spirit of Zion to bring us up to Zion. Zion has got to get into us before we get into it. It is perfectly patent from these beautiful psalms: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand (are standing) within thy gates, O Jerusalem." We are there although we are not there. It is a spiritual position.

Now we must hurry on and notice one or two specific implications of this.

First of all this is the testimony. Psa. 122:3,4: "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." For a testimony, you see. We speak a lot about a testimony. What is a testimony? Bringing it all down to simple, practical meaning, what is testimony? Let us strip our minds now, once and for all, of any conception or idea that we have that the testimony is a teaching. It is nothing of the kind. The testimony is not the full message of the Cross and the testimony is not the full message of the Body of Christ. We may testify to the principle in that way. The testimony is what Christ is in us as the Overcomer, manifested as "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." The testimony is not the thing I *say*, or the thing that you say, the testimony is what we *are* when hell is let loose on us: what we are in the time of provocation, and annoyance, and opposition, and thwarting, and disappointment, in the down-break and down-thrust of the enemy. That is the testimony.

"Whither the tribes go up for a testimony". When I see somebody spoken to as they ought not to be acted towards, and having good occasion for flaring up and answering back, and I see an instant conflict within and then victory reached without a word that passed, without any fleshly reaction, that is the testimony. That is the message of the Cross wrought out. That is the principle of the Body in manifestation. Let the flesh react and the body will be torn to pieces. That is the testimony.

When in suffering of any kind there is that wonderful drawing upon the Lord of His strength to be maintained in spirit above, and the spirit does not yield and go under, but is maintained - even when God seems to be contradicting and denying and everything seems to be the opposite of what we feel we have a right to expect - yet we maintain in spirit, and are strong in the inner man, that is the testimony.

It is so easy for us to have all the doctrine and all the system of teaching and yet for this flesh of ours to be so much in evidence. That is *not* the testimony.

The testimony is the exemplifying, the expressing, the manifesting of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus over against all the fury of the oppressor and the opposition of men. That is coming to Zion.

I do not know if we shall not hesitate the next time we sing "Marching to Zion". *Am I?* It is so easy to sing lustily and before we reach the door someone has slighted us - just to have a day or week of the blues because we have not been dealt with in the way that we ought to have been. This is a practical thing, this spirit of ascendancy - Zion, the strength of the Lord within - a testimony.

But it is more than that. I was going to say that that is the lowest level of this thing, in being upset and yet showing good spirit. That is very elementary. I want to get you far beyond that.

Isaiah 25 linked with Hebrews 12 and 11: "In this mountain shall Jehovah destroy the face of the covering that is over all people and the veil which is over all nations. He hath swallowed up death for ever." It is said of Abraham in Hebrews 11 that he looked for a city which hath foundations, and then it says, "By faith Moses... kept the Passover that the destroying angel, the destroyer of the firstborn should not touch them." He kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood against the destroying angel so that when the firstborn were destroyed the firstborn in Israel were not touched. He swallowed up death for ever by the blood of sprinkling, and - "we are come unto the general assembly of the firstborn" - what is the testimony? It is the ascendancy over death.

The Lord shall destroy in this mountain - mount Zion. Death has been met and Zion is a testimony to the fact that death has been conquered. We go back to Ephesians again: "Raised Him from the dead,

set Him at His own right hand". This Ephesian letter is the mountain of God, the heavenly places, the church in the upper realm, it is Zion - and there death is said to be conquered - "which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand". In this mountain, death is swallowed up for ever. What the Lord is trying to bring into us in order to bring us into it, is a testimony to the fact that He has conquered death, that death has lost its power in the case of this company caught up to the throne to sit with Him there.

Revelation 12: there is the dragon waiting to swallow alive this man child immediately it is born, but God intervenes and it is caught up to the throne and at that moment the greatest thing in the history of the people of God is the arrival of the man in the throne because at that moment Satan is cast down - "Wherefore, rejoice O ye heavens...". That is when the testimony comes to its fulness or when that company of the Lord's people comes to Zion, but before they come, that testimony has to be wrought in them.

Why should we meet so much death? You know something about it spiritually. Death plays upon the body and soul and spirit in order to get Zion into us; that we will not accept death; the spirit and testimony of Zion is: death is swallowed up for ever. Oh, that the Lord would draw you into that, get me into that more in the hour when the supreme test is coming on and we shall have the Spirit of Zion to take our place of ascendancy above, over death. That is the testimony.

You see, when God gets people on that way, spiritually located in Zion even now, there is a tremendous thing that takes place: He destroys in that mountain the face of the covering of all peoples. How are people's eyes going to be opened? How are they going to know? There is a covering over all people; there is a veil over all the nations. How is that going to be stripped off so that they shall see? Well, when the Lord gets His people adequately into that real testimony of Zion where they know experimentally the complete victory, ascendancy and sovereignty of their Lord and are in complete fellowship with Him in it, when the nations can look and say, "Here is something that you cannot explain naturally", only on the ground of a miracle, that destroys the face of the covering. You can go and speak to people until you are blue in the face - but if God takes you out as a personal representation of the thing - here is a man or woman in whom the victory of the Lord Jesus is manifested, wrought out - then principalities and powers lose their power to blind eyes. It is the display of the Lord Jesus in us. That is the testimony; that is the thing that impresses.

You who desire to speak, or hope to minister in the Name of the Lord, do remember this, that the testimony is not what you are going out to say, it is what has been wrought in you, it is the story of that testimony in Zion. We ache to get out to minister - or some do - there is a restlessness about some to get into what they call their "ministry", going about ministering to the Lord's people. A perfectly good object, but do let us adjust ourselves to this, that if the forces of hell are going to be dislodged, and if those who are blinded, over whom the veil of the covering is spread, and that is going to be destroyed and forces of evil are going to be deposed, it will never be by our wonderful addresses. It will be by the working force of the Lord Jesus in His sovereign overcoming power in us, through us - the power of the Holy Ghost by Whom He was raised from the dead. That is the testimony and that is the ministry.

I do see that the most effective ministry is that which has behind it real experience, a real experimental testimony to the fact that the Lord Jesus has overcome and overcome death. That is put into life. That is the most effective ministry; not the scope that is given for speaking, moving about, be it never so little, that which is born out of an inward inworking of the victory of the Lord Jesus. So the Lord is trying to prepare a vessel for that here in the earth and to ultimately destroy

the power of Satan in the heavens. Ask the Lord. Get that into your heart. Do ask the Lord to show you concerning all that.

It is not so much truth that one is trying to give to you, it is the most tremendous factor with which we have to do. A testimony. That is a testimony and that testimony comes down to the smallest thing. You may be assured that God will never give you an adequate ministry until that thing has been wrought into the very substance of your being. That is the testimony; that is why He waits.

Notice that this testimony is set up within. It is an inworking of the Spirit of Zion that sets up a tremendously powerful potent defensive - "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people" - that is defence. Now that is the coming into the life of the strength of the Lord to set up a state of defensiveness. I mean this, when you get into your very being this spiritual strength of the Lord, it becomes a defensive factor against the enemy, that the enemy's assailings are deprived of a very great deal of their power when the thing is in you. Stability is there; defensiveness is there.

What I want to emphasise, to stress, is that the Lord wants to develop in us moral qualities which are defensive, which make the enemy's hope of overcoming us very small indeed. From the objective defensive of the Lord, He desires that there shall be a subjective defence. It is one thing for us to call upon the Lord and say in our hour of trial, "Lord protect me, be round about me" - right and proper, but it is not all that the Lord would have. He would have, in addition to that, that His own strength should be wrought into us so that in an hour of pressure, adversity, opposition, and assault from the enemy, there should rise up in us the defensive of the Lord Himself. So that in that spiritual sense, the Lord should be round about us, this mountain spiritually getting inside, the Lord of the mountains becoming a part of our very being so that there rises up in us the defence of the Lord. Follow that into the New Testament and you will find that you have a tremendous amount to substantiate that, to confirm it. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion etc.", "Lord, protect me from the roaring lion..." "NO" - "Whom *resist*". "Why call you unto Me? What is that in thine hand?" The Lord rising up within - "whom resist". That is the defence of God from within. Follow that out. It is the Spirit of Zion, the city of the Great King, the stronghold. We have to come to Zion and Zion has to come into us.

Finally, the other side, this is the defensive, the other is: the aggressive. Zion is not only a stronghold for defence; Zion is that out of which there come forces of attack. Matt. 16:18: "Upon this rock I will build My church." It is such a commonplace thing I am almost afraid to point it out again. What does that mean? It certainly does not mean that Hades is going to attack, carrying its gates on its back, for attacking armies do not carry the gates on their back. If the gates of Hades are not going to assault, you have to attack them. The counsels of hell have not only to be waited - we wait too often - they have to be anticipated and assailed out of Zion. "Send thee help out of Zion". This is the calling on Zion's assailing power. You dare not issue forth, but having this wrought in you, then in humble dependence upon God, in all weakness, the Lord just says to you, "I have given you authority." There is an aggressive side to this. That is coming to Zion and we are come to Zion.

Now, that is a lot, a great deal for you to remember, to take in, but we must depend upon the Lord entirely to keep what He wants kept in our hearts. I believe we have touched high things of tremendous importance. May they not pass over you and leave you unaffected. God is seeking a people who, with His Son, *are* mount Zion, and that people in a spiritual state in whom the exaltation, the pre-eminence of His Son has become an experimental thing. The Lord bring us there.