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Take Your Share

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 1 Chronicles 15:1-2, 2 Timothy 2:1-3.

And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever. (1 Chronicles 15:1-2).

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 2:1-3).

The Levites are a very interesting people and their history is full of valuable things for the Lord's people at all times, but the thing which we are concerned with now is that they were the men who took responsibility for the Lord's testimony. David's decision about their task was the sequel to a tragic experience. One of the very many snares set by Satan against God's testimony in the life of David had succeeded when the king thoughtlessly ordered a new cart to be made for the transportation of the ark. It was a violation of divine law; it produced the death of at least one man; and it brought the whole testimony to a halt for a long time. After the chastening experience, David corrected his mistake by reference to God's Word and a new spiritual movement was made possible. So in accordance with the Scripture which David now remembered, the ark was brought out and committed to the Levites, as David affirmed: "None ought to bear the ark of God but the Levites, for them hath God chosen...". Theirs was a peculiar responsibility among the Lord's people,

and they had to take up their responsibility and not leave it to other means. It belonged to them, and if they did not shoulder this burden then everything went wrong and was held up.

Maturity and Responsibility

These men are a reminder to us in our day that God calls us to take up our responsibilities and to play our part in His testimony. The Levites could not enter upon their ministry until they were thirty years of age, and then they had to give it up when they were fifty. While the age for going to war was twenty, the entering upon this Levitical ministry in fullness was not allowed until they were thirty. This represents real maturity. The Levites then had to retire at fifty before their strength began to wane. It is a spiritual thing which is represented, and what it seems to say to us is that for this carrying of the Lord's testimony, full strength is required. Levitical ministry was the expression of the best years of a man's life. It does not apply to us in the matter of age, either for beginning or for laying down our work for God, but it does remind us that spiritual strength is required for the bearing of this responsibility. That is why God calls us to be strong.

This brings us to the reference in the message to Timothy: "Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" and then: "Take your part...". What was Timothy's spiritual strength needed for? It was that he might take his part in suffering hardship for Christ. So far as others were concerned he was to commit to faithful men those treasures which had been committed to him. The whole background is levitical. Timothy and the other faithful men were having responsibility committed to them by the Lord, and so they needed fresh grace to be strong in the Lord. In our day there is a tremendous need for people to take their share in the Lord's testimony and not always to think of others being responsible instead of them. The Lord calls for His people to grow up spiritually, not always to remain babes, demanding that they be carried and nursed, nor being immature youngsters who childishly complain or avoid responsibility. Such can never be entrusted with the work of Christ, they will never take their share in its hardship, never be good soldiers of Jesus, and the testimony will not be safe in their keeping. Perhaps one of the greatest spiritual tragedies of our time is the fact that so few seem to be sufficiently strong spiritually to shoulder the interests of Christ in a mature fashion, preferring rather to follow and let others take the lead.

I feel quite sure that it was because Israel had not recognised spiritually the meaning of the Levites in their midst that they failed so constantly in the wilderness. The Levites had been chosen to take the place of the priestly firstborn in every family. The firstborn was the natural priest who was to take responsibility in household affairs, but the Levites had been chosen to substitute for the firstborn and had become the tribe of the firstborn ones. If all Israel had recognised this, and abode by the spiritual truth, there would not have been that detachment which meant so much weakness and which found the general company constantly drawing back, wavering in uncertainty. They let the Levites carry the ark as though it was something separate from themselves, never realising their own responsibility, and so they were often murmuring and complaining, not giving any sort of loyal support to their representatives.

It seems that today we have something very similar. A large number of those who belong to the Lord are just in the camp, content to be lost in the throng of God's people and leaving the main responsibility to others. They like to see things going on, but for themselves they do not want to carry any responsibility. To all such the Lord says: 'Take your share, take your part in the sufferings as a good soldier. Do not be always babes, carried about by every changing wind or impulse. Do not

be those of whom the letter to the Hebrews complains that when they should have been teachers they were still needing to be put right over the simple elementary principles of the spiritual life.'

Responsibility Means Strength

There is a sense in which those who take responsibility have to feel that all will fail if they fail. The important thing is to realise, in a right and humble spirit, that the Lord's testimony does depend on us individually. Each one is fully justified in taking the attitude that this is his business, that he is not just one of a crowd, but a responsible member. The real difference between the Levites and the rest of the people was that this tribe had been called to bear the Lord's burdens, to accept responsibility in His name, and in this sense we are all Levites. When these men accepted their responsibility and took up the ark, we are told that they received special help from the Lord (I Chronicles 15:26). Timothy was assured that God's grace would supply him with new strength as he took his share.

I do believe that if we recognised the responsibility resting upon us and took it up, however conscious we are of our weakness and inadequacy, we would have a new incoming of divine strength. If, for the Lord's sake and for the sake of His testimony, we reached out to Him, He would give us more strength. The way to get strengthened is to take on more than you can of yourself carry. Perhaps you are working the other way round. You may be thinking that when you are stronger you will be able to accept more responsibility, that when you feel more of His power in you, then you will be more serviceable to Him. I ask you if it has ever worked out like this with you yet? What is your experience so far? Has the Lord ever come to you, given you a new sense of His power within, and then appointed a new task? Or has He not called you to something which is quite beyond you, and then given you the strength and enablement as you have moved forward in faith. Your experience differs very much from mine if it has not been in this second way. I have always found that the Lord makes demands upon me, calling for an exercise of new faith in Him, and then has met the demand as I have been willing to take my share.

So we must not wait until we have become such wonderful people that we feel competent to carry the load, but must shoulder our responsibility and prove the strength and enabling which the Lord will give us. It is as though the Lord said: 'Take your responsibility and then take your strength'. Strength comes not merely along the line of consciously feeling the need of it, but of appropriating it because of a specific need. It is the object in view which brings the strength. We tell the Lord that we are willing to take our share, to accept responsibility for His interests and yet feel quite unequal to the task, and so we can have a new experience of His strengthening grace.

The Nature of Responsibility

The fact that none but the Levites should bear the ark does not mean that in our day there is a special class of worker, but it reminds us that all of us are called to a priestly ministry and should have our lives altogether bound up with the Lord's interests. The tabernacle was the place where the Lord was known as King. This means, then, that all that relates to His majesty, to His honour and glory was put into the hands of the Levites. They were a sort of bodyguard here on earth of the King invisible. They had to keep things for Him, to watch His interests and to maintain His testimony in strength. This is our calling. The Lord is in the midst of us, and things must be maintained in accordance with His presence. This is not just a latent and passive truth, but a challenge to our spiritual energy to care for His interests. He is holy; then the responsibility of holiness is committed to us, His Levites. He is a Being of power and majesty; then that power and majesty are our

responsibility. We have to be faithful, and that is why the charge to Timothy was concerned not with clever but with faithful men, men who by life even more than by words were able to teach others and bring them into taking their share in the testimony.

The Levites were divided into three sections. They had three departments of responsibility. One section had the vessels of the sanctuary, all the holy vessels; another section had all the curtains and the coverings; while the third had the boards and the bars. We may have our different aspects of work, some in preaching and more obviously spiritual work and others in different spheres, but it is all the same testimony. The Levites were divided into sections of different kinds of work. Some had the rougher work, the heavy bars and boards, which was more strenuous physically than the carrying of the pots and pans; but it was all Levitical work, they were all one people, one tribe. Responsibility rested upon all equally, for the totality of their labours made one ministry. The great thing was - and still is - that each should take his own responsibility seriously and give himself to his ministry.

I am sure that the Lord's heart must long for that. I am sure that at times in looking at me, He has had to say: 'Oh, I wish that I could trust him more; I wish he were more reliable, more responsible'. And I know that, as I have looked at many of God's people I have sometimes said that I wish that they did not need so much looking after. If only they would begin to stand on their own feet and take responsibility, so that we need not worry about them any more because we know that they can be trusted! They need urging and encouraging and all the time to be followed up, put right, and pacified when they get touchy and take offence. We all need fresh grace from the Lord to take our share in the labours and the sufferings as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. His grace will give us the necessary strength if we put our shoulders to the burden and take our share in the testimony.