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## The Cry of the Elect

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Reading: Luke 18:1-8.

The common interpretation of this parable is that it is a lesson in, or an exhortation to, importunity in prayer, and it has been generally used in that connection. While undoubtedly there is that element in it, that is altogether too limited an interpretation. If you look at the setting of the parable, you will see that it has a much larger connection than that.

You know that the division of the books of the Bible into chapters is something much more recent than the writing of the Gospel. It has nothing to do whatever with the original narrative. So, looking back into chapter 17 you find there is quite a lot about the Lord's coming.

"There shall be two women grinding together the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. And they answering say unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Where the body is, thither will the eagles also be gathered together." And earlier, you see the chapter is grouped around the day of the coming of the Son of Man; and then you go on into this parable itself. The last verse of the parable is this, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith (or, the faith) on the earth?"

Thus the parable is set right into the coming of the Lord and must be interpreted in the light thereof, not merely and only as a lesson in importunity in personal prayer. It cannot be that, because the elect is in view. "Shall not God avenge his elect, that cry to him day and night?". "The elect" is only the eternal designation of the Church. The word "Church" brings us into time as the called-out company but "the elect" takes you back before time - "chosen in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). It is the Church, therefore, which is in view here, and the Church as related to the coming of the Lord.

Then, again, the avengement of the Church can only take place when the Lord comes. The Church will not be avenged until He appears. We know that, and much Scripture could be cited to support that. He will avenge His Church at His coming.

### **The Increasing Pressure and the Deepening Cry**

Thus it becomes perfectly clear as to what the Lord was really saying. There is an adversary, and that adversary is here set forth as the adversary of the elect, the adversary of the Church, and that adversary is seen to be engaged in a persistent pressure upon the Church, a persistent and growing pressure, which is bringing the Church more and more to the place of crying to be avenged. Now here we have two things, namely, the growing pressure and the deepening cry, and I do not think it necessary beloved, to try to prove that the pressure is intensifying. It is another sign that the coming of the Lord is drawing near. All truly spiritual children of God are well aware of the intensification of pressure, spiritual pressure, from the adversary. We see it and we feel it in many directions. Things are closing in on the Church, pressing the Church in.

We see it in the political situation today, the international situation; that in that realm, no sooner does God begin to do something in a living way than the enemy himself begins to do something. There was a great spiritual movement beginning in China. Many were seeking, inquiring, coming to the Lord; and then came the war in China, to scatter, to arrest, to break up, to hinder. Blessed be God, He is sovereign, and sovereignly takes hold of those counter movements of the enemy and turns them to serve His own end. Nevertheless, it is marked. In Norway again, there was something of the Lord, a real movement of the Spirit; and now, in the very places marked by the twos and threes who were keys to that country for something more of the Lord, the very heat of things is raging today, to scatter, to paralyse. What is true in these two, is true over a much larger area. We have seen it again and again, pressing in.

We recognize it in a spiritual way, apart from anything outside; spiritual pressure, naked pressure from the enemy upon the spirit and the mind of the child of God. It is indeed intensification. And what shall we say about this which is becoming such an obvious thing, this spreading of physical pressure upon the children of God? We have to take account of these things, and that is the point now. Beloved, a very great deal, an immense amount, of the physical suffering today of the children of God, of the servants of the Lord, is pressure from the enemy. It cannot be, in the last issue, accounted for on merely natural grounds, for so often the assault is related to some spiritual interest, is bound up with something that God is doing or is going to do. There is the crippling and paralysing attempt of the enemy in the physical, the bodily, realm of the saints. We could almost say you will hardly find one who is a key to spiritual things who is not assailed in that way at some time or other. Pressure in every way is intensifying upon the Church. I am sure you are alive to that, the fact of it, at any rate; and it is going to intensify, and true spiritual work, the thing that is heavenly and that really counts in relation to God's ultimate and full purpose, is going to find itself under increasing pressure from the adversary.

But then there is the other side. What is this to result in? In what way will the sovereignty of God govern this? What does the Lord intend to be the issue? The deepening and strengthening cry of the Church, "Avenge me!" - the Church as one man, "me"; not us, but "me". "Avenge me of my adversary!"; and that, according to the way in which the Lord puts it, is to become a continuous cry at the end: "which cry day and night unto him".

There are implications in this parable, and one of them is this, that the coming of the Lord, the avenging of the Church and the destruction of the work of the adversary is bound up with this cry,

and the cry *must* be. The Lord has put the two together. Until there is the cry, there cannot be avengement, and that means there cannot be the coming of the Lord in intervention for the Church, and there cannot be the destruction of the adversary. The cry is essential.

### **Present Responsibility**

Well now, in the light of that, where are we? What does it mean for us now immediately. It means this, that we have to take account of what lies behind things. We have to take account of what lies behind this world situation, what the implications of it are, so far as the Church is concerned, and we must not just accept this present world conflagration, this international situation, this war, as merely a bit of the history of this world, the course of things here on this earth. No, there is something at the heart of this thing which is eternal and which is heavenly, and the adversary is prepared to throw all the nations into conflict and carnage in order to get that "seed royal", that "man-child", to injure that "elect", to defeat God's purpose as bound up with the Church. If you have spiritual eyes open, that is the focal point of your present observation; not simply the fact of a war between this nation and that, these and those, but that which lies behind it, and so in every other connection. What is behind this pressure and assault upon the bodies of the Lord's people, and especially where spiritual interests are the more bound up, this seeking to put out of action, to render incapable of functioning because of physical conditions? What lies behind the spiritual pressure and the circumstantial pressure, pressure coming in all these different ways? Oh, beloved, ask the Lord to open your eyes to that, to get you engaged with that, for it is in that realm that the Church's effectiveness is seen to obtain. When you get back of things to the adversary and bring that adversary up before the Throne of God and the Church cries, "Avenge me of mine adversary", you have touched the realm of spiritual effectiveness, you have got behind things. My longing, my craving, is to find the Lord's people seeing this and acting accordingly. Oh that, while not always occupied with the Devil and talking about the Devil and demons and so on, and getting that kind of mentality, we were nevertheless alive to this great reality, that back of things is an adversary, and that we went behind things and did not just pray for the things themselves. You see, you may pray for the Lord to heal, for the Lord to raise up, to make better, and oh! you have not really touched the realm of effectiveness in prayer. What is there of the adversary in this? Until you have touched that, you have not really touched the issue. We have no real ground for effectual prayer over these situations in the world until we have got behind them to the adversary who, in his own interests, for his own ends, is bringing them about, precipitating them. Oh for the day when our prayer gatherings will be more characterized by this seeing, and acting accordingly, in the heavenlies! That is the thing. We shall recognize what this pressure is meant to produce; a cry, a united cry, a one-voiced cry in the saints: "Avenge me of mine adversary!" The Lord bring us into that.

### **All Will Centre at Last in a Cry**

Unless I am mistaken, this parable of the Lord is intended to lead us to one or two other conclusions. In the first place, that the Church, the spiritual Body, will be so pressed that it has no other cry than this. It has only this one cry. I mean that it will be gradually and definitely centred in this, that all its other praying will be recognized as of little avail, and its one great heart cry will be this, perhaps not in these words, but with this significance, with this meaning - "Avenge me of mine adversary!" That means that the people of God will be pressed into recognizing that they are not up against some human situation, and therefore their cry will be in relation to this ultimate issue, being avenged of the adversary - pressed into crying.

### **The "Cry" and the "Coming"**

Then it seems to me that the Lord intended that we should take account of this too, that, when the Church really does reach that point and position where it does cry like this, that means that the end is just at hand. "He will avenge them and that *speedily*." Now the Lord said those words many centuries ago, and if we reasoned according to man, we should say, Speedily? Well, of course the Lord dwells in eternity and there is no time with Him. A thousand years is as a day with Him. With Him it may be speedily, but for the poor Church it is two thousand years - we cannot call it speedily. But that is not what the Lord meant by "speedily". He meant that, when the Church really cried like that, it would be speedily. Has the Church done it? When it really becomes one cry from the Church, you may take it that God's hour synchronizes with the cry. We have always to recognize that principle in God's Word, that God's time is always made to synchronize with something else. He may fix His time, but He fixes it in relation to something else; and the time of His coming may be fixed, it may be appointed, but it is a related time, and His appearing to avenge His Church is bound up with the Church's cry day and night: "Avenge me!" If the Lord by the Holy Spirit were to produce that cry in the Church, we can take it as settled that His coming is near.

Now, is He working toward that? Is there today an activity of the sovereign government of God to hedge the Church up to this cry? Some of us can say that, for our part, we have no doubt about it. As we look out, we can see movements in that direction. Yes, inability to do a very great many things, inability to be occupied with much that has been occupying the Church; a cutting off, a shutting in, and this sense of the adversary withstanding, obstructing, hindering, limiting, and all efforts to break through seeming to be unavailing, until almost in despair, the cry which is focused upon the enemy, the adversary, breaks out of the heart. Well, that is what the Lord is doing, I am quite sure. We must ask the Lord to keep us very much alive to what lies behind things and to bring us strongly into this cry which is for the Church's deliverance, the Church's emancipation, the Church to be avenged of the adversary, the adversary cast down from his place of accusing the brethren. "Avenge me of mine adversary this adversary which accuseth the elect before God, day and night".

### **The Essential Ministry**

We should ask the Lord that we may be so much in the Spirit when we come together for prayer that we are not found dealing with things on the surface, as they appear, but touching the throne in relation to the adversary and what he is doing behind things. Oh, do ask Him to interpret this to your hearts, to give you the meaning in every matter. There is no doubt that there is today much that is locked up, that is hindered, that is limited, much of the Lord's interests brought well-nigh, if not altogether, to a standstill by the work of the adversary. You say, Can that be? Yes, even such a one as Paul who was not ignorant of his devices and who knew something about union with the sovereign Lord said, "...but Satan hindered". "We would fain have come unto you, I Paul once and again; but Satan hindered us". You say, That is a problem: here is a man anointed, laid hold of by God, and yet that man has to say "but Satan hindered"! Satan succeeded in stopping something, preventing something, something of value. Are we to say that the Lord never intended the Apostle to go? No, not at all, not in that case. Where, then, are we to find the solution? There are many servants of the Lord and many interests of the Lord locked up like that, not able to function, to fulfil their ministry, by reason of the hindrances of Satan, because the Church is not prevailing for that ministry, for those interests. There is not a company of the Lord's people who know how to take hold of the throne for the release of those Divine interests. That is borne out more than once by things that Paul said when he appealed for prayer from the Church; for example, "...that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel". He appealed for united prayer, for corporate prayer, that he might fulfil his ministry; and I say again, there are many things being limited, held down, paralysed by Satan, the adversary, the release of which can only be brought about by this prayer, this cry; and, if it is true that the Church's

final deliverance is coming through its own cry, the Lord's response to that, it is true in the details of the Church's life. If the whole thing is an issue like that, then the principles are the same in every detail.

There is a ministry here. There are multitudes of the Lord's people who need light, revelation, spiritual reinforcement, in order to bring them through to God's full end; but Satan has come in between them and the resources and the ministry, the stewardship, and they will not get it unless there is prevailing over the enemy on the part of spiritual and enlightened children of God. It is a Divine way, Divine order. Here is our responsibility. Do take it to heart. Very much more could be today if there was a prevailing instrument, a vessel with God's cry, a vessel that saw through the situation, saw the adversary, and knew the meaning of touching the throne to bring Haman's great campaign of death to an end, to turn it from death to life, for the children of God. Well, the Word of God is shot through and through with this truth that, while God wills, God's will is brought into operation by the co-operation of those who are one with Himself. This is a basic truth. Oh, may He bring us there, for the large interests which are at stake today!