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"The Lord is Greater Than All"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"THE LORD IS GREATER THAN ALL..."

That is the motto which we have taken to govern this year 1954. Under that all-embracing statement we have gathered three other aspects of His superior greatness.

The inclusive declaration - for such it was (Exod. 18:11) - related to the emancipation of an elect nation from this world. All the forces of Satan and men were fully extended in that conflict. The battle seemed to sway nine times between defeat and victory, and there was plenty of room for a day-to-day despair as to the triumphant issue. But God was drawing out the power of the enemy to its final limit in order to show the *exceeding* greatness of His power. The final exclamation in the presence of the accomplished fact was: "...the Lord is greater than all...". It requires no deep knowledge of the Bible to see that what we have in the letter to the Ephesians corresponds to Exodus in a spiritual and still greater way, and that for a similar heavenly purpose the transcendent greatness of the Lord is in operation.

The first aspect included is: "*God is greater than man*" (Job 33:12). The setting is in the drama of Job. Over a long period, and with a volume of arguments, three 'friends' of Job had exhausted themselves in trying to prove that Job's suffering was due to his sin. Job, on the other hand, exhausted both them and himself in proving that they were wrong. An *impasse* is reached, and neither side can move the other. Then a fourth, hitherto a silent listener, begins to speak. He takes neither side, but takes position with God. "God is greater than man", he says, regarding the three, for God knows what they know not as to the real background of what is happening. They talked and argued in utter ignorance. God understood all. It is ignorance and folly to attribute all suffering to the sin of the sufferer. There is a mystery behind much suffering, and it may amount to the very

vindication of God, as in Job's case, but supremely in the case of God's own Son. There is such a thing as "the fellowship of *his* sufferings". This is far beyond man's wisdom.

But Job thought that he had vindicated himself, and stood four-square upon his own righteousness. Yet God's standard, both of wisdom and holiness, is greater than that of the most perfect man. Man, at his best, cannot stand equal to God. The end of the conflict sees God standing alone in His transcendent wisdom, power, and grace, and man at His feet worshipping.

The next statement, in 1 John 4:4, is: "*Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.*"

The context shows that "he that is in the world" is inclusive of "that wicked one", "false spirits", "false prophets" (Antichrist), false brethren, "the world".

That constitutes a fairly formidable situation for the children of God. But "greater is he that is in you". "In you"; not outside, but *inside*. The balance of power, no, the outweighing power, is within, when He is within. "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Finally, "*God is greater than our heart*" (1 John 3:20).

The passage is admittedly a difficult one. "Heart" here must be regarded as synonymous with 'conscience'.

The heart, or conscience, acts accusingly or excusingly. But in either case our consciences are not infallible. They are still trammelled by tradition and other things of the past.

If our hearts condemn us, there is in God a way of dealing with and removing condemnation. (See the context of the whole Letter.) If we justify ourselves to our own satisfaction we must still bring everything into the presence of God, for He may see that to which we are blind, and we may still see that there are hidden things which would undercut all self-righteousness.

"God is greater than our heart" is a blow struck at introspection. Our hearts - either way - are not the final criterion. It is also a blow struck at spiritual pride. Finally, it is a blow struck at despair because of our own sinfulness.

So the "all" is a very great and many-sided all. Perhaps our need is to see that the Lord is much greater than we have thought.

May we all have our hearts enlarged to the greater dimensions of the one who is *our* God.