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The Supreme Vocation

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Daniel 10:1-21

From the tenth chapter of the Book of Daniel I want to take just this fragment from the nineteenth verse:

"And he said, O man greatly beloved, fear not peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong."

And I want to add to that, for later purposes, two fragments from the New Testament:

"Withal praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3).

"We would fain have come unto you, I Paul once and again; and Satan hindered us" (1 Thess. 2:18).

An Expression Of The Heart Of God

"O man greatly beloved." The actual and implied content of that declared approbation of Daniel comprehends a very great deal of the whole revealed heart of God. There is no doubt that it is a heart expression, and it is the expression of the heart of God. "O man greatly beloved." "Thou art greatly beloved" (9:23). Three times was that said to Daniel, and when we have the Lord speaking like that there must be a very great reason for it, and very great content in it. It is not just some emotional overflow of sentiment. God does not waste Himself like that, however kind He might want

to be. If God says a thing like that, there is much behind it and very much in it. This declaration gathers up many of the major features connected with God's relationship with man, and man's relationship with God. If I indicate just two or three of these features, it will be immediately seen how true what I have just said really is.

Vocational Love

For instance, we have in the statement the tremendous truth that it is possible for a man - or let me use the larger term - for *man* to advance beyond the wonder of redeeming love, which is no small thing, to something even more - a vocational love, where, because of man's fellowship with God's purpose, Heaven may attest him in such language: "Thou art greatly beloved." Now, that is not peculiar to Daniel. That is a great Bible truth - it is something in the Bible. It is positively immense that an archangel, right out from Heaven, should be battling his way through to reach this man, and be saying, in effect, 'Heaven's estimate of you, Daniel, is a very great one. In Heaven you stand in a position of very high value. "Thou art greatly beloved." ' I say that is something beyond, much beyond even the wonder of redeeming love. We feel that redeeming love itself is more than we can grasp. It is beyond us; it gets us out of our depth. Redeeming love is our theme, our song, and we say it will be so for eternity. And yet here is a love of God and Heaven toward a man which goes beyond redeeming love. It is what I have called vocational love: the love which lights in a peculiar way upon that which serves God's ultimate purpose.

We say: 'Can there be anything more glorious than redeeming love for man - anything more wonderful than man standing in the love of God redemptively?' That you and I, knowing even the little that we do know about ourselves, should be compassed about by redeeming love - that man, such as he is, should be in such a position - is nothing short of marvelous. And yet there is something more, after redeeming love. It is a love which relates to the purpose of God served, God satisfied as to His purpose. Notice that it is *man* again; this is the word that we shall emphasize and underline all the way through. And Heaven is declaring, angels and archangels are speaking for God concerning man: "Thou art greatly beloved", "O man greatly beloved". Is that a theme? That is only one thing included in the statement. We may see much more of what that means.

Intelligence As To God's Purpose

We note another feature gathered into this declaration - the immense importance and value of being a part of God's heavenly intelligence system. Perhaps that sounds strange, but that is what is here. Notice how repeatedly the thought occurs of Daniel knowing, understanding, having understanding, being in the knowledge of things, in the intelligence of Heaven about things, having intelligence as to God's purpose and the meaning and portent of the present situation. If God finds someone like that in that position, that someone or that instrument is of tremendous value to the Lord. It was that intelligence, that knowledge, that understanding, that spiritual insight, which led to this - "thou art greatly beloved". It was because of that that all the other followed. What a tremendous thing it is to have spiritual understanding and intelligence, to be in what I have called 'Heaven's intelligence system', being 'in the know' as to God's thoughts and intentions. It must be noted here that, in the case of Daniel, this included light through the Word of God. He had been studying the Scriptures, and he received light through the Word. We shall perhaps see more of this later.

Heaven-Affecting Prayer

Take a third thing included in this declaration - the basis and nature of that kind of prayer which reaches beyond temporal things and touches the whole spiritual order, setting in motion the powers of Heaven, celestial and diabolical. If we read the whole chapter, we shall see that that is what is there. That goes beyond our temporal affairs and matters, our personal and private things, the things of everyday life. They are very important, those requests which relate to the details of life; but this goes beyond the temporal and beyond the earthly. It touches the whole spiritual background of this world, and sets angels in action and Heaven on the move - and Satan, furious to combat, resist, withstand, frustrate. Is that a small thing? But that is a great Bible subject, not peculiar to Daniel.

Now I know what you are thinking. You are thinking: 'All this sounds very high, very exalted and beyond us. This is not the simple Christian life.' But, dear friends, listen. The fact is that this is *the* very nature and explanation of the Church's existence. We have failed, utterly failed, to grasp the real significance of our calling in this dispensation if we have not apprehended this fact: that, just as much as Daniel, in another dispensation and another relationship, but with the very same setting, was called into this realm of things, so are we. This is definitely shown to be the case in Ephesians, and it heads up in chapter 6:10-20.

Now, if these things which I have mentioned are examples of what is contained in this phrase: "O man greatly beloved", I am sure you will agree that there is very much in it. If all that was true, then Daniel certainly stands for something.

Let us then consider *the basis and nature of Heaven-affecting prayer*. I believe that this is a key to everything. Everything hangs upon and circles around this whole matter of Heaven-affecting prayer - the prayer that really gets right away and touches things at their ultimate source, gets right through to the throne, to the place where "the heavens do rule". That is a phrase, as you know, peculiar to this book of Daniel.

The following passages indicate something of the estimate placed upon Daniel because of his prayer influence:

"Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to humble thyself before thy God, thy words were heard: and I am come for thy words' sake. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me: and I remained there" (the margin says "was not needed", because the other one had come to help) "with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days; for the vision is yet for many days" (Daniel 10:12-14).

"When a land sinneth... though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.... Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they should deliver neither son nor daughter; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14: 13-14, 20, A.R.V.).

What is the basis and nature of such prayer? Well, to begin with, as we have already intimated, it is intelligence as to God's purpose, and as to the meaning and portent of the present situation. That is essential as a basis to this kind of prayer.

The Place Of The Word Of God In Daniel's Understanding

Now notice first of all the place of the Word of God in Daniel's understanding. If you look at chapter 9:2 you will grasp it. "I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet." As I said earlier, he was reading what Bible he had, reading it prayerfully, thoughtfully, devotedly; and as he was seeking, not to get Bible knowledge as such, but seeking to know what God was really after, what God really intended, what God's purpose really was, and how the immediately present phase of things stood in relation to that - as he sought, in and through the Word, intelligence and understanding were given. It is not my intention at this point to spend time on how to read the Bible or how to study the Bible. What I am seeking to indicate is this: that before you can touch the powers on high, you must know what God wants to do. Before this kind of prayer - whether it be of the individual or of the company, or (would to God it could be!) of the whole Church - before this kind of prayer which had the effect that Daniel's prayer had, can be made, there must be this intelligence and understanding as to God's purpose, God's intention, and where we stand at this time in relation thereto.

Dear friends, I cannot be stronger. It would be, I think, impossible to be too strong in emphasis upon the importance of this matter. I must leave you to consider it in the light of the whole situation. Here it is. Tremendous things issued from Daniel's prayer, things in heaven and in earth, but nothing at all would have happened if Daniel had not known what he was praying about, if he had just flung out petitions and requests and longings and desires into the air without knowing quite clearly and definitely what God was after, and therefore what he himself was after. It is strange that, while so many will devote themselves to the subject of the fulfilment of prophecy - Daniel's included - so very few will seek to discover what God has revealed concerning His eternal purpose and the character of their own dispensation - the meaning of the present condition of things in relation to God's eternal purpose.

Yes, there are many, many, who will study the Bible along the lines of prophecy and its fulfilment, and yet there are very few who devote themselves to the understanding of God's eternal purpose, and the peculiar character of the dispensation in which they live. Fulfilment of prophecy lies so very largely, although not exclusively, in the future, in what is going to be; and there are many such related subjects, but they all belong to the future. The most important thing of which we can conceive is: What is God after *now*, and what does the present situation say as to that? You see, there can be a wonderful knowledge of prophetic truth without in the first place the spiritual life of the student being affected at all; and what is the good of that? Though I know all about prophecy, if it does not come right home to my own spiritual life and make tremendous differences in me now, it is nothing. That is the estimate of all your prophetic study. It is possible to have this great knowledge of prophetic truth, and yet for the great purpose of God in this present dispensation not to be served at all.

Oh, how many side-tracks there are, side-tracks of secondary interest; whether they be true or whether they be false, they are side-tracks. British Israelism is a very fascinating subject. I only mention it; I am not going to discuss it. Universalism is a very likeable idea, sweeping like fire across Europe, carrying away multitudes; and so I could go on. What effect do these things have upon the spiritual life of those occupied with them, and what effect upon the present aspect of the eternal purpose of God do they have? *Nil!* They count for nothing in the spiritual life where there is a touching of things heavenly. For the most part they are either future or earthly.

Now note: Daniel knew God's thoughts for His people, and he knew what was characteristic of the dispensation in which he lived. And that is where we must begin. What is the characteristic, from God's standpoint, of the dispensation in which you and I live? What is the nature, object, purpose, of this dispensation, the day in which you and I have our time on this earth? What does God mean? Daniel knew quite well what was characteristic of his dispensation, and he knew further that, until that dispensation was finally closed, that purpose of God held good.

Now, why do we say that? What is the point? It is this. There are many people today who are giving up the revealed character of the dispensation as unattainable, hopeless. But God does not change the character of any one dispensation in itself. If God has said that a given dispensation or age is to serve such-and-such a part of the eternal goings, He does not change that. He neither goes back upon it nor alters it to fit into the conditions which arise.

Listen! If what we have in the Letter to the Ephesians is the sum, the substance, the comprehensive and conclusive revelation of God's eternal purpose, and God saw it worth while to take a man away from his world-wide activities - from all his visitation of churches, all his personal contacts with believers the world over, all those affairs with which his whole life had been occupied - to take him right away and shut him up for a period where all that was cut off, and cause him to write the full revelation of His purpose as centred in this age: if it is true that the Letter to the Ephesians is the consummate presentation of Divine revelation, centering in the Church as the Body of Christ of which He is the Head, and that the securing of that, with all *its heavenly nature and heavenly vocation* for the ages to come, is the Divine characteristic given to this dispensation, then God will not depart from it, no matter what we find as to the state of the Church on this earth.

There are many who have despaired of there being any realization of an 'Ephesian' revelation of the Church in a practical way in this dispensation. Things seem so hopelessly confused and divided that they turn to evangelism as the only way of any effective work.

We cannot dismiss the New Testament as easily as that. The answer is not in trying - however devotedly - to realize the ideal New Testament Church, but, having the vision clearly and strongly before us, to keep the *fullness of Christ* as *the* object of all spiritual attainment and exercise, and the Cross in its fundamental and continuous power as the Holy Spirit's way of realizing the true fellowship which is the meaning of the Church. We must work from the inward, not from the outward; the spiritual, not the temporal.

Daniel knew the characteristic of his own dispensation, and he knew that, while that dispensation continued, and until it finally closed, God would not change; and that led him to pray as he did. A man never prays for a thing about which he has lost all hope, given up all expectation, sees no prospect. Certainly he does not pray like this. But because Daniel knew, because he had intelligence on this matter, he set himself to pray it through - and he prayed it through. When Paul came to the close of his great letter to the Ephesians, he concluded with: "praying at all seasons in the Spirit for all the saints..." (6:18). We shall only pray like that if we have in ourselves the sum of what is in that letter, and spiritual apprehension as to its meaning.

Daniel Knew The Meaning Of The Present Situation

Further, Daniel knew the meaning of the then present situation. The existing situation of the people of God was not according to God's original thought. Of course, it was obvious in his case because it

was so much in the realm of temporal things. It did not need a great deal of insight and perception to recognize that Israel in Babylon was not what God intended. Nevertheless, the principle holds good. Daniel knew the difference between what was and what ought to have been, according to God's mind. That is the principle. However it works out, either in that dispensation of what was temporal, or in this dispensation of what is spiritual, the principle is this - having knowledge and understanding of the difference between what God intended and what is.

Daniel's Stand For Recovery

And that situation, so contrary to God's mind, was due to lost spiritual and heavenly position. That is another mighty principle. If things are today far from what God intended them to be, and from the condition in which He actually had them at the first, the same reasons lie behind it - firstly lost spiritual and heavenly position, and then the loss of the understanding of the nature, the essential nature, of God's heavenly kingdom. There will be no improvement, no recovery, no getting what God is after until there is a recovery of those two things, spiritual position and understanding. Daniel stood in the reality of that position. Though physically actually in Babylon, he was standing in a spiritual and heavenly position altogether out of and above Babylon. He was just not a part of it. That is a very costly place to be in.

And then the recovery of the essential nature of God's kingdom. You see, the disciples of the Lord had their own conception of the kingdom before the Cross. It was earthly, it was temporal, it was material. The Cross shattered that whole thing for them for ever. The coming of the Holy Spirit gave them an entirely new conception of the nature of God's kingdom. Oh, how revolutionary and transforming was that Holy Spirit's enlightenment as to the true and the essential nature of God's kingdom: not meat and drink (Romans 14:17) but power, heavenly power (1 Corinthians 4:20). These things have to be recovered, and that is what God is after, and that is what Daniel saw that God was after, and that is the meaning of the present situation. Take note of this, friends - *God is more concerned with character than He is with systems and institutions*. Israel, even in Babylon, may have been clinging to their systems, traditions and institutions, but God was transcendently more concerned about character than all that.

The Purpose Of Suffering

Listen now to this very important, particularly important thing. It is, indeed, all-important. Daniel knew that God was using adversity, suffering, disillusionment, to force His people back to His original and primary thought. For Daniel it was perfectly clear that God was using all that was in Babylon, that suffering, adversity, affliction, to force them back - yes, to force them back; not just to call them back, but to force them back - to His original full thought. They were being driven, literally driven, by Heaven to a position where they would just have to make a choice between two things: either a counsel of despair and compromise and frustration, or, alternatively, all that was involved in going back to, and standing for, God's full thought.

There is much of present history in that. Let us go to China, to what has been in China for some generations from the standpoint of Christian activity and endeavor. Now what I am saying is not meant for a moment to under-value or disparage all the sacrifice and all the poured-out devotion. That will find its place in what abides. But when the whole story is read, as we are now able to read it, it is clear that *much* crept in that was not according to God's full and original thought. It came to be very largely something foreign, something institutional, something organizational, something of

man's making. And what has happened? Oh, a deluge of suffering, of adversity, of disillusionment, of break-up and disintegration and scattering. What is surviving? What is coming out of it?

The *things* have gone; the people of the *things* have departed. What is surviving? Only - but surely - that which is heavenly and spiritual. And it *is* surviving, thank God. Something not made with hands; something not of man's making, however well-intentioned. Oh, the suffering, the unspeakable suffering! But what has it done? It has driven believers back to God's original thought, to His full thought, with all that is less and other than that stripped off.

China I have taken as an example. But this is spreading, and it is going to spread. It is going on and coming on. God is doing in relation to His heavenly purpose what He was doing in Daniel's day in relation to earthly purpose. He uses suffering and adversity to *compel* back. That is the explanation of your suffering and my suffering. What is God doing by means of all this adversity and suffering? Just driving us, forcing us to a position which cannot be shaken, to the truth which cannot be destroyed, to the spiritual which will ever overcome the temporal. He is just forcing us; we are under compulsion. And this is going to spread, dear friends. That is a mark of what belongs to the present age.

Have you intelligence as to what God is doing - doing in you by way of suffering, disillusionment, doing in the world, doing in the Church? God has not abandoned what He set out to realize, and if He cannot do it in any other way, He will force to the point of a decision. Either you deliberately accept this situation as hopeless, and you compromise, as the majority did in Babylon, and settle down; or you take the course of the remnant who said: 'All this points clearly to the fact that God is not satisfied, that the situation is not what God intended, and we are going to give ourselves to that which God meant.' Will you be like the few who went back for that? But oh, how costly! You see, Daniel's prayer had to do with that, the bringing about of that issue, the forcing up to that decision - co-operation with God to secure that parting of the ways. Are you going to stay behind, or are you going on with God?

Complete Separation

And that prayer was based upon a life, in the case of Daniel, firstly of complete separation from self interest. If you have got interests, personal, private interests, in the kingdom of God, then you will not be able to pray like this, you will not be able to touch Heaven. Secondly, there was complete separation from all worldly principles. They tried to involve him in their worldly principles. He said: 'No, never!' Much ought to be said about that - the Church and worldly principles. Thirdly, there was complete separation from the fear of man. How delivered from the fear of man was Daniel! And, finally, there was complete separation from merely earthly associations. That involved him in something. The den of lions prepared for himself, and the seven times heated furnace for his companions - they were Satan's alternatives to going his way. To Daniel's companions Satan said: 'Either you come my way, or you burn. Those are the alternatives. Abandon your line, your way, your life of separation and your objective, and come my way - or burn.' You can interpret that as you like. You know something, perhaps, of what that means spiritually.

Daniel Was Deliberate

In prayer such as Daniel's, there are four things to be taken account of. First of all, he was deliberate. The angel said to him, when at length he arrived: "From the first day that thou didst set thine heart...." *"Thou didst set thine heart."* There is a man gathering up all the loose folds of his interests,

and girding to concentration on this one thing. "Thou didst set thine heart." If (to anticipate for a moment) we are to fall into the train of the Apostle Paul and his brethren, and take up that which particularly relates to this present age, to bring it through to consummation by prayer, it will not do for us to be diffuse and scattered. There will have to be a setting of ourselves to this thing; it is very practical. Whether it be in our own individual life of prayer with God, or when we come together for prayer as a company, smaller or larger, representing the Church and God's eternal purpose concerning it, we shall have to come in this mind, deliberately setting ourselves to this thing. 'We are set, we are committed, we are gathered; we know what we are after. Like Daniel, we have seen, and what we have seen of God's thought has become a pattern, a body; and we set ourselves.' God characterize all our prayer times by this feature of the man beloved, precious to God, that which God approves.

Daniel Was Persistent

Then Daniel was persistent. The angel said: "From the first day...", and Daniel himself, describing it, said that this engaged him wholly, utterly, for twenty-one days. It is something to pray about the same thing continuously for twenty-one days! How we just ask the Lord for a thing, and leave it there, perhaps, in a false notion of faith. Here is an example of the opposite. Daniel was persistent. He did not let go, he would not let go; he held on until the thing was done. Let us take his example and lay it to heart. Very, very great issues are bound up with such prayer.

Daniel Was Abandoned

Daniel was abandoned. "From the first day that thou didst set thyself... to humble thyself..." Daniel again described it like this: "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth." Here is a man 'all-in' on the issue, abandoned; not allowing indulgences, distractions, other interests, secondary things; just abandoned.

Daniel Was Conclusive

And finally he was conclusive. Daniel stood for and would take nothing less than a verdict. The angel said: "I am come for thy words' sake." He had spoken, and he would take no other answer in this matter from God - yes, but because he knew so deeply that this was what God wanted. Effectual prayer demands such conviction, such assurance, such knowledge. If we do not know what the Lord wants, then we do not know how to pray. But if, as Daniel had, we have made the discovery by revelation through the Word of God, that is tremendous strength. We must be *there* to pray in this way.

The object was of such importance to God that Satan fought it until he could fight no more. It is something to take note of when Satan fights. It is very significant and indicative when hell rises up and is provoked by the object which is in view. And whatever may have been in Daniel's case and Daniel's time, there is a counterpart of this in our own time. The counterpart of this, in this present dispensation, is, in the first place, Paul and his brethren, who understood what God eternally intended in regard to the Church, who abandoned themselves to that with such abandonment, who travailed and who prayed, and through whose travail and prayer there was given to the Church its charter for the whole dispensation. But that charter is passed on to us - to you, to me - for it is the same dispensation, and what was characteristic of them must be characteristic of us, if we are to come to that place of superlative value to the Lord where, not only as accepted in the beloved One,

and beloved for Jesus' sake, but because of our co-operation with God in the thing that is deepest in, and nearest to, His heart, He is able to say: "O man...!" It may be to individuals; it may be to companies just as well. Man is a collective term as well as an individual term. "O man greatly beloved."

We are in the consummation of this dispensation, and it is necessary to know what God is going to have, what He has set His heart upon, and to be with Him in it. The Lord give us a heart for that.