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## The Threshing Floor

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Transcribed from a message given in February 1959.*

Will you turn to several passages of the Word, firstly in the gospel by Matthew. The gospel by Matthew chapter 3 at verse 12: "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing-floor; and He will gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire".

Back to the Old Testament in the second book of Samuel, chapter 6. Second book of Samuel chapter 6 and verse 6: "And when they came to the threshing-floor of Nachon, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God".

In the first book of the Chronicles, first book of the Chronicles chapter 21, verse 15: "God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as He was about to destroy, the Lord beheld, and He repented Him of the evil, and said to the destroying angel, It is enough; now stay thine hand. And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite".

The prophecies of Jeremiah chapter 23, at verse 28: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat? saith the Lord".

It is impressive that so many turning-points or crises in the Bible had threshing floors as their basis. We have noted one or two of these and they were turning-points.

As you know, in the first, David was now being brought to the throne according to the Word of the Lord and the anointing - moving up to Jerusalem. Saul was dead. David would bring the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. It was a turning-point and a very vital one in the history of God's goings with His people.

In the second place, the Temple was about to come in, that great symbolic representation of the House of God was now immediately in view and the whole thing turned upon this threshing floor; for that very threshing floor of Ornan became the site of the Temple - a very big development in the goings of God.

In the case of the passage in Jeremiah, this is a tremendous crisis because it is the doom of the false prophets who had led the people of God so far astray as to make their exile and captivity necessary. The Lord speaks of *their* word as 'chaff', as 'straw', and makes this great difference by this question: "What is the wheat to the chaff said the Lord". It's a big turning-point in the spiritual life of God's people.

All this comes to the threshing floor. We know the general purpose and action of a threshing floor or, as in these days, a threshing-machine; we know what it means, what it represents.

In the first place, it speaks of *discrimination and separation*; discrimination between the true and the false and the action of separating those two things. You look at all these passages that we have mentioned, you'll see that is what is in view - making this necessary discrimination between what is true and what is not true; what is *the* thing, and what is not the thing; and, in so discriminating, putting things in their right place, in their right category. "That belongs there; and this belongs here; and these two things are different, altogether different; they belong to two different realms." That is the first action and meaning of threshing; it is taking up this whole matter of the difference between what *looks* to be, but is not, and what *really* is.

You might write over the door of any threshing floor or threshing room, or inscribe upon any threshing instrument, just one word, God would inscribe it - reality, *reality!* That is the effect: to secure reality; to establish reality; and to deliver *reality* from all make-believe and all falsehood - between appearances, what *looks* like it, but is not it. Appearance and reality; between the outward, the merely outward, and what is really inward. That is what goes on on a threshing floor. Or again, between what is just flimsy and will not be able to stand up to any adverse winds, and what is substantial and abide the test. Of course, in the East even right to this day, it is a very simple form of threshing. The threshing floor is placed in some position where there's a draught, where the wind blows, or where they can make a wind - an open space, exposed to the elements. And then, with this simple 'fan', like a carpet-beater with prongs, the whole thing is beaten and thrown into the air, and away in the wind goes the chaff, and the solid corn falls to the ground and heaps up. Now, of course, modern methods are different, but the effect is the same: it's to let go what can go; to get rid of what cannot stand, stand up to the elements and to secure that which is substantial.

Dear friends, the Lord lets His wind blow on us all. Threshing is not a soft and kind thing; it may be very hard, it may seem very cruel, but you all agree that it's very necessary. Supposing what you eat that is made of wheat, had never been separated from the chaff! There would be a lot of trouble, wouldn't there, with the merchant. Indeed, you would complain and ask: "Why has this not been properly threshed? Why has this been allowed to come in like this?" Oh yes, we all agree that it's a very necessary thing; it is essential. But it's a hard thing; it's a painful thing, this beating out, this

exposing to the elements, this carrying away of much, this reducing to solid reality. But we will say, "It's right; it's necessary." We know, we do know as to ourselves, that there's a lot that cannot pass with God, that cannot stand. We don't want it to stand; we want it to go, but we know that there's a great deal that is like 'chaff' in our lives; perhaps 'make-believe', 'appearance', flimsy, unreal... we don't know how true that is until we get on to the Divine threshing floor, and begin to discover how much reality there is in us. We sometimes wonder if there is going to be anything remaining at all, but there it is; the Lord knows. The Lord knows.

And it's a very necessary thing for us individually, and for us as a company of the Lord's people from time to time and it's a recurrent thing, we wouldn't like it to be 'year by year', every year as in nature; but it is a recurrent theme, the Lord from time to time brings everything to the threshing floor and there, through an ordeal, a painful ordeal, He begins to get down to this matter of *reality*. Many questions begin to arise: How did we come to be where we are? Is it a solid background or foundation to where we are? How much of what we think we have, do we really have? How much of all that we have received of teaching and what not, is our very life, and able to carry us through in times of adversity? The adversity is allowed to find that out, to find it out. But whatever may be the effect, or however many may be the effects, God is after one thing, and we agree with Him: everything must be *real*, one hundred percent real, not wrapped up in some husk of profession, pretence, unreality, mere form, mere teaching as teaching. Nothing. It may be a small corn, but it's a corn - it is REAL! The Lord is reducing to that.

And so it is said of the Lord Jesus: "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor."

Now, in these instances that we have cited, it is very evident that there was this confusion and this mixing up of things, which the Lord was not going to tolerate. I say again, it's impressive that the issues were settled at threshing floors. Take this matter of the bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, bringing the testimony to its Divinely chosen and appointed place; bringing it to the end of its journey and getting it established. Take note of all of that: the Testimony of God where it ought to be, and there settled so that they can draw out the staves (the symbols of progress) and reach finality over this matter. David assays [attempts] to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, but David had spent some time, some months in the Philistine country, by failure in faith. Failure in faith: David said: 'I shall one day die by the hand of Saul; it is best for me to escape to the Philistines'. Although anointed, he broke down under pressure, and went and dwelt in the land of the Philistines. And there he saw how the Philistines did things and been reminded that amongst the many things that the Philistines did, was to make carts, make machines. When they captured this Ark, and eventually, having suffered so much because of it, they sent it back; they made a new cart and put the Ark thereon. David knew something about Philistine machinery, the ways of the world. He came back and when he would bring the Ark to Jerusalem, he made a new cart, and put the Ark on it. Disastrous consequences!

We know that in the end the discrimination came home to his heart as he looked at the Word of God, and eventually he said: "The *Levites* ought to bear the Ark of God". The difference between a mere mechanical contrivance, worldly machinery, worldly methods, organisation according to the business standards of this world - the difference between all that of the natural, uncircumcised mind of the Philistines - and *living* men, *living* men: Levites, whose very origin is the blood; is the blood, whose very life is the blood, whose very service is the blood. Living men who by the blood have been cut off from all that natural way of going on, circumcised by the Cross of Jesus Christ. God is very

particular about His spiritual principles in all ages. So when they reached the threshing-floor of Nachon, no wonder it was that the oxen stumbled! The whole thing broke down; the procession was stopped; the Ark was turned aside; for many months it remained there until the lesson was learned.

What is the chaff to the wheat? The Lord will not have this sort of thing: a mixture of the world in the life of His people, the methods of this world, mere machinery, to carry on His testimony. No! The whole thing will come to a standstill in confusion till we have established this thing: *God's testimony must be in the lives of living men!* Living men! Everybody related to this Testimony of God must be *livingly*, as a *person*, related to it.

There is one other thing that, of course, arises out of this: "Uzzah put forth his hand and took hold of the ark." Dear friends, it can be *fatal* to become too familiar with holy things! It can be disastrous for these holy and sacred things of God to become so common-place and cheap, that you and I can take charge of them, manipulate them, and have that kind of familiar association. Well, Uzzah learned that you can't do that; and all Israel learned that you can't do that. It sounds, it sounds hard, doesn't it; one does not like talking in this way, but the 'threshing-floor' is like that. It is necessary. It's necessary.

Later the Ark is in Jerusalem on right grounds, by right methods and means; and everything now is established, and Israel is in blessing and prosperity, and growing and expanding. And it says, 'Satan stood up against Israel.' Satan stood up against Israel, of course, with the object of destroying Israel and the Testimony. And how did he do it? He moved David to number the people. What did that mean? Oh, for David to take a census in order to say: "What a marvellously great nation we have! I am king over such a people! Look at this, look at this wonderful thing!" You can almost hear Nebuchadnezzar saying: "See this great Babylon that I have built!" can't you? Ah, Satan, coming back from before times eternal, where, where he said, "I will exalt *my* throne above the clouds!" The pride of self-exaltation; the pride of self-gratification; boasting in things. Just the complete opposite of dependence: humble, meek, conscious dependence upon God however great the thing may have become, however extensive it may be, however much blessing God may have given, never losing the deep, deep sense of absolute dependence upon Him. Satan is the embodiment of independence of God. God won't have that. If He hurled Satan from Heaven because of that, He is not going to allow a man on earth to become governed by that spirit. And so, the terrible, terrible plague passed over the land mowing the people down by their thousands, reducing this whole thing. The turning-point was at the threshing floor of Ornan. You see, the judgment of the flesh, the proud flesh: independent, glorying in things. When that has been settled, then there is a way for the House of God, because the House of God can contain none of that. It is the place of dependence upon God; the embodiment of the house of the *meekness* of Jesus Christ. It is a 'threshing floor' that settles that issue. The Lord does bring us to the threshing floor if at any time we are in danger of boasting in things, and ceasing to be dependent - wholly, utterly and consciously dependent - upon Himself. No pride can come into the House of God. We all agree with that. And so a threshing floor must deal with anything like that.

Well, I think you see from these instances and illustrations, and they can be carried into many other realms, if it was necessary and there was time to do it, we should see from the Word of God, how again and again the Lord just stepped in, and said: "Look here, we are getting confused a bit; we are getting mixed up; things are not just as clear and transparent and single as I would have them; we must do something about this." And then He brings His winds to blow. And they are very, very devastating winds, devastating to all that is not of God, but complementary to that deep, that true

work of God. The Lord is not ever on destructive lines, on negative lines; He is always for the positive. If you are having a bad time; if you are on the threshing floor, and the Lord seems to be dealing with a lot, and you are beginning to wonder if there is anything going to remain at all, do remember that the Lord is not after your destruction, your annihilation, to finish up everything. The Lord is after something solid, to establish you; really to get that which will go right through. Oh, that's the point, dear friends, the Lord is after the thing that will stand, will remain; to get rid of just everything that will not do that, whatever it may be. We have all gone that way. We have learned, we have got a lot, perhaps by birth been born into Christianity, perhaps a Christian home. We have got a lot from your association with Christian things; you may have come into a realm of much Christian teaching and all that, but that does not mean that the whole thing is really *true* in you or in me because of that; the Lord is going to put that to the test from time to time. It is a very necessary work.

Here it is: it is only that which is really worthless that will be destroyed; the wheat will He gather and store in His garner. He is after wheat. He's after wheat. That is what He is after; to have in you and in me the thing that abides. May we have grace! He will not always keep us on the threshing floor, so Isaiah says. Isaiah says: "Bread corn is bruised, but He will not always be bruising it." He will not always be bruising. There are times when it is like that, and they seem to be long-drawn-out, I know; and we wonder if we are ever coming off the threshing floor. But, in the order of nature, that is only one part of the whole of the course of the year, isn't it? And in grace it is the same. It is a thing that has to be done. It has its place; it has its time; if it effects its purpose, it will pass. It may come back again later on when it's necessary, but He will not always be threshing!