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When We Cannot See the Way

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Thy way was in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters" (Psalm 77:19).

You will notice that the above words are taken from one of the eleven Psalms bearing the name of Asaph. You will also know that "Asaph the seer" (2 Chron. 29:30) was one of David's leaders of music; he was both choir-master and composer of words and music as well. But in this Psalm we meet the choir-master in doleful mood. He has lost his song and his music.

Asaph is deeply and heavily depressed; he is having a bad time. As he looks out on the situation (whatever it was), and contemplates his predicament, he goes deeper and deeper into the Slough of Despond, and begins to ask questions about God Himself - His mercy, His faithfulness, His kindness. The lights are all out along that street, and there is - apparently - no way out.

But, as is always the case with a true servant or child of God, there comes a point at which a reaction sets in.

The Sun will be found shining again and the song will return; but, as in the natural, so in the spiritual, the new day is first heralded by faint streaks of dawn, declaring that the turning-point between night and day has been reached. Verse 10 seems to be that point of crisis: "I said, This is my infirmity". 'This is really not the Lord. This is not the beginning and the end of the story. This is myself! I am making God after my own miserable image. I am reducing God to my own temperamental complexion.' We, too, may do that sort of thing, and indeed we often do. It may be very real. But,

however real, we must always take account of our "infirmity", our constitutional or temperamental or dispositional limitation.

But even before that lifting of the eyes from the earth to a larger horizon, Asaph had taken a step toward the sunrise. "I call to remembrance my song in the night" (v. 6). By that, he did not mean that he would call to mind the fact that he had been more cheerful in the past, and would remember that he had sung even in the night. It was not just the fact that he had sung; it was *what* he had sung. There was a night - either literal or spiritual - when, his eyes being held waking (v. 4), he had composed a song for the choir. What was the song about?

Well, what is all the *trouble* about? The focal point of, and the key to, the whole situation was this matter of a "way" (vv. 13,19). No *Way*!

Asaph was saying, 'In my song in the night I portrayed Israel's dilemma and predicament at the Red Sea. Behind them the pursuing army of Pharaoh. On either side desert and mountains. Before them the deep and dark waters of the sea straddling their path. There was no way! The question was: 'Where can God place His feet? There is no way, even for God.' "Thy footsteps were not known" (v. 19).

'Then', says the leader of song, 'I said that, sea or desert or mountains notwithstanding, God knows no embarrassment; He has to make no detours: He goes straight on and through, and the sea is as if it were not.' "Thy way was in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters." The Israelites knew no way for His feet, but He knew! The song that Asaph had once composed for others, now became the way of deliverance for the singer-poet himself. How often our 'doubting castles' have to be broken out of by applying to ourselves lessons that we have passed on to others - by believing our own beliefs! To call to remembrance - "I will remember" - may be the first streak of light for a new day.

How often has this same issue of a 'way' arisen in the history of God's people, God's servants, and God's work! And Heaven - only Heaven - has had the answer. A prophet was confronted with such a situation, and his servant cried: "Alas, my master, how shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15). But Heaven had the answer. So it was with a king - Hezekiah - when a mighty host compassed the city and cut off every way. Heaven had the answer! (2 Chron. 32:21,22).

We are told that, just before the Church goes out, the nations will have no way out. In Luke 21:25, the Lord Jesus speaks of nations being "in perplexity". The most literal meaning of the word is 'without passage', 'having no way through'. How appropriate are those words to our time! But then the Lord said: "When these things begin to come to pass, look up... your redemption draweth nigh" - i.e., '*your way out is near*'.

It may be the sea of tribulation in the nations; it may be mighty waters of testing for the Church but -

"Thy WAY was in the sea, and thy PATHS in the great waters".