

A Peculiar Treasure

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a peculiar treasure to God through voluntary commitment and the willingness to bear the cost of discipleship.

Scripture: Nehemiah 11:1

Topics: "Commitment to God", "Sacrifice for Faith"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of being a 'peculiar treasure' to God, drawing parallels between the voluntary commitment of the people in Nehemiah's time to dwell in Jerusalem and the faithful remnant that fears the Lord in Malachi's prophecy. He highlights that true devotion often comes at a cost, as those who choose to live at the heart of God's testimony may have to sacrifice comfort and relationships. Sparks encourages believers to willingly offer themselves to God, becoming part of a select group that He treasures, and reminds them that their names are recorded in His 'book of remembrance.' Ultimately, he calls for a deeper commitment to God's purpose, urging the congregation to recognize the intrinsic value of being part of His peculiar treasure.

Transcript

"And the princes of the people dwelt in Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts in the other cities. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem. Now these are the chiefs of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants" (Nehemiah 11:1-3).

"Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Malachi 3:16,17).

As we come to the last of this series of messages, it is necessary to have the whole background before us in order really to appreciate the setting of this final word. We have been led, as we have considered the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem by Nehemiah and those who were inspired by him, to see again that, as that was a movement of God at the end-time of the old dispensation (Nehemiah being the last historical book of the Old Testament), so there is a corresponding movement in our own time, as we move toward the end of this dispensation: that God would seek to complete, make full, the testimony of His Son, our

Lord Jesus Christ. We have looked at that testimony, as to what it is; we have taken account of the work, and the workers related to it; and we have also given some consideration to the conflict, the warfare, in which the workers in such a work are involved.

Now for a brief and simple word arising out of the two passages which we have just read. More than once in the course of these messages we have reminded ourselves that Nehemiah and Malachi were contemporary, that what we read of in the book of Nehemiah should be placed alongside of that which we have in the prophecies of Malachi. Malachi tells of the conditions in the days of Nehemiah, and here we come to what may be regarded as a final word in the matter. In this eleventh chapter of the book of Nehemiah, there is mentioned a peculiar offering to the Lord, and in Malachi 3 a peculiar treasure of the Lord.

A Tithe of the People

The peculiar offering, as you notice, was now not a tithe of things. Tithing of things was dealt with, but here was a tithe of the people, a tithe of the whole people, a tenth part of those who had come back and who had engaged in this work of rebuilding the wall, and that tenth part became a peculiar freewill offering to the Lord. Let us put a line under the tenth part for the moment: because, whether we like it or not, whether we are prepared to accept it or not, the fact remains that it always has been, and, so far as the forecast of the New Testament goes, it will be to the end, that there are only a certain few who go the full length with the Lord in His whole purpose. After all the sifting that had taken place - the first great sifting in Babylon when there came back a company, and then a second sifting when a few more came back - after the siftings, here we find ourselves at a kind of final sifting, when the number is still further reduced and it is only a tenth part who will voluntarily abide in Jerusalem by their own choice - just a tenth part. It seems that they correspond to Malachi 3:16,17, that company that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name: because you notice that it goes on to say: "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure". and He has made a record of them - "The Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him", - a record was kept.

The Lord's Book of Remembrance

Now in Nehemiah 11:4-24 you have the names, the record, of those who were a freewill offering. The Lord kept a record, the Lord composed a "book of remembrance," the Lord entered the names of these, and concerning them He says they are "a peculiar treasure," something He specially treasures. The Lord is looking for some who will be to Him "a kind of firstfruits," a kind who will be in the vanguard, following Him "whithersoever he goeth". He does look for a nucleus who will mean the satisfaction of His heart in the first place and in the essential way. As He looks out on a great multitude - and He has a great multitude who are His in the earth today - it cannot be said that all who bear His Name, all who are the Lord's, are utterly following and wholly going on, or meaning to do so. No, it is not so. But He looks for this tithe of His people, this tenth part representation answering to His own heart desire. They to Him are peculiarly precious. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure". That is the final issue of this matter of the whole testimony: who will voluntarily go all the way with the Lord, no matter what it costs?

A Freewill Offering

Now it was a freewill offering, this tithe. Each one of the tenth made it voluntarily. They submitted themselves voluntarily to this casting of lots. You might object that if a lot was cast they had no option,

they had to accept it whether they liked it or not, but the point is that they willingly committed themselves to that method. That was a willing, a freewill, offering unto the Lord. No compulsion here, no law here, no legality here - it was just willingness. Are you prepared, out of your own heart, to make a response and say, without any bribery, without any fear of the consequences if you do not: 'Yes, I am going all the way with the Lord, I am going to see that the Lord gets all that He wants so far as I am concerned'? That may mean a lot, that may involve a lot. But the Lord does not ask you to do it. He just waits for it - a freewill offering, a peculiar treasure to Him because it is freewill.

But what did it mean, this living at Jerusalem - this living at the very heart of the testimony, in other words? For since the wall represents the testimony, people coming into residence within the wall in Jerusalem really represented a spiritual movement - that there are those who are prepared to live right at the heart of the testimony. It was necessary, and it always is necessary, to the Lord that some do that - come right into the heart of it, to be there in the place of responsibility concerning it. There is a need that the testimony should be taken up with a sense of responsibility for its maintenance, that it shall be kept whole, that it shall be guarded, that it shall be served, that it shall be ministered to. If you look at the details concerning those who came within, you see their various ministries. I cannot take up the detail now, but you will see the various ministries which were represented by those who came into Jerusalem. They came in to fulfil a ministry, a spiritual ministry, on the inside, and take responsibility there. It was a need the testimony required.

A Great Cost

But there was a great cost attached to it. Not everybody was prepared for that, not at all. There were many who were ready for it, who accepted the method of choice to live inside, who were not called upon to do so, but there were those who, in the sovereign overruling of God, found themselves called upon to do so. The lot fell out in their direction. God sovereignly saw to it that that was how things went for them, and it represented a real cost. It was very much nicer to live outside Jerusalem than inside. These men came into the city, on that day when the lot was to be cast, ready to accept the result as the will of God for them.

And then the lot was cast, and it fell to them to come and live in the city. I can imagine some of those men going back to their suburban dwellings, wondering what the reaction was going to be at home about this; saying to their wives: 'My dear, we have to go and live in the city, we have to move into Jerusalem - the lot has fallen to us.' Well, of course, the right kind of wife would say this: 'My dear, it was a matter of prayer, was it not? We prayed about it, that if it was to come our way the Lord would overrule, that if He wanted us He would let the lot fall on us. It was before the Lord; it is all right, the Lord wants it. Of course, it means giving up our nice little country house and our nice garden. It means losing that circle of friends we have out here. But still the Lord has laid it on us and we do not do it with any murmuring. But there are the children - perhaps that is the hardest part of all, the children. They have to lose so much - this free life out here, this life with all these others out here in the larger scale. They are involved in this.' And then they would turn to the children, and say: 'Listen, children: we have got to go and live in the city. We shall have to leave the country, and the garden, and all these others out here, and go to Jerusalem for the Lord, because the Lord wants it.' They would be very happy parents to whom the children said: 'Yes, we realize that your devotion to the Lord is costing you something, it is meaning a lot for you; and if we are involved in it, well, of course it means a lot to us - but we are with you in this.'

I do not think that is all imagination. I am quite sure that it was a costly thing to move into Jerusalem - and it always is costly to live at the heart of the testimony. Those who do so must forego many things that other

people may have. You lose the large circle of friends when you go right to the heart of the Lord's interests. There are many people who do not understand your doing that; they call you foolish, you lose their confidence. They cannot believe that the way you are taking is right, and they would argue, 'Surely that is not the Lord's will for you'. Yes, you lose many friends, and you may lose many other things; you may involve your children too - they may lose much if you are going wholly with the Lord.

But listen - "They shall be... a peculiar treasure". To be a peculiar treasure to the Lord surely balances the account - nay, outweighs that. If you are going on with the Lord, it means that there are many things that you would like to have, many things quite legitimate and right, many things about which there is nothing wrong, but which, because of your utterness for the Lord, you will have to let go. And if you involve others in the suffering and cost of it all, that is a very bitter draught from the cup. There is nothing to indicate that these people who were chosen to move into Jerusalem did not have a bit of a struggle about it, that it did not cost them something, but the fact is that in their willingness to go on with the Lord they triumphed over all.

I think it is a wonderful thing that in the arrangement of the books of the Bible there is such a big gap between Nehemiah and Malachi, and that Malachi comes right at the end with: "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure". It is costly in many ways to live at the heart of the testimony. Again I say, you may be deprived of many things - good things; you may lose a lot of friends; you may lose a larger life of opportunity. Oh, how many have stopped, saying: 'How many doors will be closed to me if I go that way! How much wide influence I shall forfeit! I shall narrow my scope if I go that way.' And many have refused on those grounds, thinking that it was a legitimate argument to hold on to a larger scope and larger influence against the whole mind of the Lord - a wrong way of estimating values, because values are not bigness; they are intrinsic and essential.

The Intrinsic Value of the Peculiar Treasure

And so the value that the Lord has here, as you see quite clearly, is in just a very few, comparatively. It is a "day of small things"; it is a comparatively small company about which the Lord says, 'My peculiar treasure'. The value is intrinsic. It is there that the Lord finds what His heart desires, and that which, I believe, leads us to the far greater thing. It is not that the Lord's thought ends there in smallness because the Old Testament ends with this day of small things, this little company fearing the Lord: but that is the link between the end of the old dispensation and the beginning of the new - the coming of the Lord Jesus and all that followed. For, in the four hundred years between the Testaments, there was still that little company holding to the Lord's full thought. When you open the New Testament, and begin the record as given by Luke, there you find that link - the little representative handful. Here is Anna, here is Simeon - here in Jerusalem is a company who wait for the promise, for the Messiah, looking for that day. They are linked with those who "feared the Lord". Ah, but this is something that, though outwardly small, has become so intrinsically great, making a way for the Lord to come.

No, it does not end there, but the challenge lies there. How mistaken we are when we measure things by their bigness, by their numbers. That is the way the world does it. And that is where the world has come into the Church - measuring things by numbers, size, extent, what you can see, how you can appraise from natural standpoints. 'Oh, that must be something for God! Look what a big thing it is!' Not necessarily. It has often been that the greatest thing of God has been very small in the eyes of man.

We return for a moment, in closing, to the long list of names in Nehemiah 11. I expect when you have read the book of Nehemiah you have skipped this - those names, those terrible, unpronounceable names! You have said, 'Oh, let us get on to something more interesting than this!' And yet perhaps this is one of the most interesting things in the whole book. The Lord has taken note of each individual who offered himself in this way, and has marked him down by name and put him in the book; and he is not only here in this book, the Bible, and there mentioned by name for all successive generations to recognize, to identify, but he is in the other book in Heaven for all eternity. That is no small thing: to have your name down not only in the Lamb's Book of Life as one born from above, a citizen of Heaven, but in the Lord's "book of remembrance" as one who has 'followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth', as one of a tabulated company, yes, out of all the saved, all the redeemed - this kind of firstfruits unto God.

Need we say more? What is the appeal of these messages? That is the point at which we arrive. I trust it means comfort to you. We want all the comfort that we can get, but we know something of the cost. How many times recently have people said to me, 'When are you going to retire? So-and-so has retired and so-and-so is retiring' - yes, ministers of the Gospel. There is no discharge in this warfare, no day for retiring, brothers and sisters. I am sorry for you! You are not going to be pensioned off down here and spend the rest of your life vegetating. You have to go on to the last breath, with battle and cost to the end. There is a cost bound up with the full purpose of God, and in many ways we know it.

But oh, the answer! The Lord is taking note; He is putting it down, and He is saying: 'That tithe, that freewill offering people, shall be My peculiar treasure in that day that I do make'. I do not know how that is going to work out, what it is going to mean. Of course, it is a picture statement: that in a great house there is something, amongst all the possessions and all the ornaments, something that is peculiarly precious to the owner, and whenever his friends come he is always showing them that. 'Have you seen this? This is most valuable. I hold it more dear than anything else I have got; indeed it is more to me than all the rest put together - a peculiar treasure.'

That is behind this. How it is going to work out I do not know, but that is what it means. Those who go this way, those who will pay this price, those who will accept these consequences, those who will be after this kind - a freewill offering to the Lord for everything that He desires and His heart is set upon - will be in His House like that. He will be drawing attention to them and saying, 'Look here, have you seen these? These are peculiarly precious to Me. They followed the Lamb whithersoever He went.'

The Lord make us like that.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/a-peculiar-treasure/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net