

A Tragic and Instructive Episode

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the tragic episode of Uzza's death as a cautionary tale about the importance of adhering to God's instructions in our spiritual endeavors.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 6:1

Topics: "Obedience to God's Word", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks reflects on the tragic episode surrounding the Ark of the Testimony, emphasizing its significance as a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ and the vital relationship believers must maintain with Him. He highlights David's sincere intentions to transport the Ark, which ultimately led to disaster due to his disregard for God's prescribed methods. The sermon serves as a warning against human ingenuity in spiritual matters, stressing the importance of adhering to God's Word and the consequences of neglecting it. Sparks encourages the church to learn from this incident, recognizing the need for spiritual maturity and divine guidance in ministry. Ultimately, he points to the hope of recovery and restoration that follows such failures.

Transcript

Reading: 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13, 16.

In tracing the history of the Ark of the Testimony we have been deeply impressed with its foreshadowing of the Testimony of Jesus in the New Testament. What a varied and instructive history that has been! In its journey from its formation to its ultimate and final rest in the House of God and glory, what deep and important lessons it has taught! As it sets forth the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus the way of that Testimony has been seen to touch the life and history of God's people at every point in their pilgrimage. Both as positively for them when their life was in keeping with it, and as against them when it was otherwise. That is a first lesson of which we must take notice in our relationship with the "Lord of Glory". The Testimony of God in Jesus Christ is not just a doctrine, a system of truth, the fundamentals of the Christian faith; but a vital relationship with a living Person; a relationship jealously watched and checked by God the Holy Spirit Himself. The greatness and glory of Jesus Christ is something given to the custodianship of the Spirit of God, who has "the seven eyes" of perfect spiritual intelligence and discernment, and who never eventually overlooks any details which affect that Testimony, for good or evil. This is what we have been seeing in these messages thus far.

In this present message we come to an episode which contains some of the most vital, solemn, and instructive lessons for God's people personally, and His Church universally and locally. Upon the lessons of this incident hang - for our own time - issues as serious as was the case when it actually happened. This is indeed a very real example of the words: "The things which were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4).

Let us, then, come to the elements of this episode.

David, after his chequered history, discipline, troubles, in preparation for his anointed kingship, has at length been made king after the tragic death of Saul - man's choice (note) - and Saul's sons, including that fine man, Jonathan, who was caught between the two regimes, a victim of divided loyalties. Upon this confirmed anointing of David it is not long before his thoughts turn to the ark of God, which still lingered on its way to fulness and finality. He had the right idea as to what was due to that sacred figure. His motive was sincere and true. The question was how to realize the Divine intention. Let us pause there and look forward to what eventuated from the point of that question. We will return there presently.

There has been a tragedy. Disaster has overtaken the enterprise and venture. The ark is turned aside. One man closely associated with the proceedings is dead, smitten by the hand of God. The people are in consternation and confusion. David is dismayed and "angry". The whole process has been cut short, and for a long time the atmosphere of frustration hangs over everything. Arrest, death, abortion, frustration, suspense, disappointment, confusion - these are the features which hang over the life of the people of God. They had, with one accord, "made David king", first in Hebron, and then in Jerusalem. That was a right and excellent thing, and the portents and potentialities of that were very great. It was as God meant it, and that was accompanied by much Divine favour. Hebron was "Fellowship". Jerusalem was "His Foundation of Peace". But now "the radiant morn has passed away, and spent too soon her golden store". Shadows have descended. Disintegration of hearts, and bewilderment of purpose have overtaken.

David is somewhere, first nursing his grievance and fretting his spirit; murmuring against the Lord's non-co-operation with his good-intentioned purpose. The spirit of unity and responsibility, as symbolized by David, is disconcerted and paralysed. "And the time was long."

I wonder whether, thus far, we are able to discern corresponding features in the Church and the Testimony in our own times. Let us pause, think, and ask the question!

Now we return to David where we left him before the tragedy. He is thinking out a scheme, a plan, a programme, a method, a means, for advancing the Testimony. It ought to "get a move on". Something must be done to remove "stalemate". 'It has been in the house of that man Abinadab too long.' So, to action to release the Testimony! 'Let's have a committee. Let's confer with some men of substance.' 'I have an idea,' said David. 'Do you remember how the Philistines returned the ark after they had captured it, and God had so honoured it with judgments? Why, God was in that. They were quite respectful and made a perfectly new cart for the ark. They had common sense and used their own good judgment. That's an idea for our work for God!' So David instructed the carpenters and wheelwrights to make a new cart such as the Philistines made. Best wood, well put together, wheels well oiled, ornate coverings; some well-chosen beasts to be the power and volition; and when we get going, let Ahio go in front, and - in case of difficulty - let Uzza be nearby to steady things. Yes, man's idea, man's creation, organization, technique; man's leadership, man's custodianship, man's enthusiasm! Very well. Off we go! The shouting and the singing and the dancing begin. The make-believe and artificiality. There is something hollow in it all. But,

isn't it all for God? Isn't the object and the end that we have what God wants? Surely that is the guarantee of prosperity and success! Well, was it? And is it?

All seems to go well for a time and everyone is enjoying the "New thing".

But, oh, why are there such things as "threshing floors" in the Bible? They have always been such testing places. They search for reality as against make-believe, grain and chaff. They stand for the ultimate issue, what is of God and what is of man. At such a place David's oxen stumbled, the new cart rocked, the ark was imperilled, and - you know the rest, for we have told it.

Here we return to David - the spirit of responsibility.

Such a man as David could not remain indefinitely with a controversy with God. God is waiting for him to come out of his cul-de-sac. So David begins to run through the Bible which he had (which had been there all the time) and his eye is directed to:

"And thou shalt put the staves into the rings on the sides of the ark, to bear the ark withal" (Exodus 25:14).

"And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the furniture of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch the sanctuary, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting" (Numbers 4:5).

"But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonged unto them; they bare it upon their shoulders" (Numbers 7:9).

As he looked he was startled, shocked, amazed, ashamed. Here was God's own prescription and ordination for the transit of the Ark of Testimony! As David read these Scriptures he must have called up his knowledge of the history lying behind God's unchanging order. The new cart faded from view, and in its place were some men who, through a most testing and searching history with God, had qualified for this so sacred ministry.

Although David did not have the prophecies of Malachi, God's speaking there (Malachi 2:4...) was retrospective to Exodus 32:26-29, and Numbers 25:12,13. God's covenant with Levi and his sons, which governed their service, and gave them responsibility in relation to His Testimony, was because they were proved and approved men. In New Testament terms they were 'spiritual' men, "approved of God, workmen needing not to be ashamed". Yes, approved of God, and of His people. Not chosen, voted for, appointed and given office by men! Men of spiritual measure, "pillars of the church". In Christianity one of the most sacred expressions of the Lord's Testimony is His Table. "The Table of the Lord" is characterized as most holy: dangerous - like the ark - to what is not wholly suitable to it, and most blessed to those rightly related. Surely it is here that Levitical service is to find its true expression. Those who serve at the Lord's Table ought to be true "Levites" in the sense that they have - under extended or intensive trial and proving - shown to the Lord and His people that they are men of spiritual measure and quality! With reference to "overseers" Paul said: "Not a novice." "Novice" means "one newly planted". Surely this ought to apply to so sacred a function as serving at the Lord's Table! To put an untried and unproved 'novice' into such ministry is to put him into a false position, and even a dangerous one, and also making the church and its elders very responsible. Levites may not now be an ecclesiastical class or a ritualistic "Order", but the law of spiritual approvedness and quality born of experience surely holds good for every ministry in the

Church!

No, not a "new cart"! Not a man-conceived technique! Not - with the best of intentions and motives - man's arrangement! It is possible for man to get too close to the Lord's Testimony with his own hand, like Uzza, and consequently find himself out of the living fulness of the Divine goings and purpose. He may even be responsible for arrested, retarded, and confused conditions in the work of God. To put a hand on something that is of God as to purpose is surely - sooner or later - to meet God in stern disapproval, and to forfeit His "Well done".

Of the various instructive things which arise so evidently from this episode, not by any means the least is the solemn government of the Word of God. David's disastrous course was due to his overlooking, ignoring, and consequently violating the clear Word of the Lord. His act - if unintentionally - implied superiority to the Scriptures. This is always dangerous! It is particularly incumbent upon any who are in a position of responsibility to familiarize themselves with God's Word in relation to any course of action in which they may be involved.

We have written the above out of very long and wide experience in the Lord's work, and we are sure that to give serious consideration to the Bible's teaching in this episode would be to have the explanation of much tragedy, would be a strong warning and corrective, and see the Lord's Testimony freed to proceed.

Thank God, David recovered himself and had a happier end. This we shall see in our next message.

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