

# Gather My Saints Together

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of a deep, inward, living knowledge of the Lord and the need for a gathering of His saints together in prayer-fellowship, spiritual food, and ministry.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 15:17, Genesis 22:12, Psalm 50:5, Malachi 3:16, Romans 4:3, Ephesians 4:16, Ephesians 5:18, Colossians 2:19, 2 Thessalonians 2:1, Hebrews 10:25

**Topics:** "End Time Movement", "Spiritual Intimacy"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the end-time movement and the importance of a deep, inward spiritual knowledge of the Lord gained through personal experience, as seen in the Psalms which represent permanent spiritual gain. The end-time instrument will be those who know the Lord intimately through a history of deep experiences. The sermon emphasizes the covenant with God by sacrifice, illustrated through Abram's life, as the basis for the gathering of His saints. It highlights the need for a gathering unto the Lord Himself, prayer-fellowship, spiritual food, and a ministry that feeds the hungry souls seeking true spiritual nourishment.

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## Transcript

"Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" Psalm 50:5.

"Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him..." 2 Thess. 2:1.

"Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh" Hebrews 10:25.

In all the above passages there is one common factor: namely, that an end-time movement and feature is dominant. It must be remembered that the Psalms themselves represent what remains when a history of outward things, as to the general instrumentality, has ended in failure. The history of Israel in its first great phase closed with the book of Kings in a calamitous and shameful way. Weakness, paralysis, declension, reproach, characterized the instrument in general. But out of that history now so concluded the Psalms are carried forward, as that which represents permanent spiritual gain.

This is pre-eminently a personal, inward spiritual knowledge of the Lord, gained through experience. That is why they always reach the heart and never fail to touch experience at every point. To them the saints

have turned in times of deep experience. They are the ministry of experience to experience - the only ministry which is permanent. The end-time instrument will always be that which knows the Lord in a deep, inward, living way, through a history fraught with much experience of the heights and depths.

What David gave to the Chief Musician for the wind instruments and the stringed instruments touches the highest and deepest notes of a mortal's knowledge of God. Worship, Salvation, Sorrow, Appeal, Victory, Battle, Faith, Hope, Glory, Instruction, are great themes interwoven with the mass of matters touched; but the point is that all came in REAL LIFE - he passed through it all. It is this, and this alone, which can serve the Lord when what He first raised up has failed Him as a public instrument. So the Lord would take pains to secure this, and this may explain much of the suffering and sorrow through which He takes His chosen vessels.

The Psalms form only one of the four books born of the history of Israel, each of which has its own feature to contribute to that which represents the permanent work of God, but especially as relating to an instrument of Divine reaction. But the Psalms show clearly where God begins and what in principle is basic to the first and most abiding work of God.

It does not need pointing out that, in the other two passages with which we commenced, the end-time is in view; they definitely state it. There is a further common feature of the three, however, which is more particularly the subject before us. They all definitely refer to GATHERING TOGETHER as something related to the end-time.

A history of a religious system, born out of something which the Lord raised up in the first place, has ended in weakness, chaos and shame. Therefore, there is to be a re-gathering to the Lord of His saints.

The Lord is coming, and there is a gathering to Him.

The Day is drawing nigh: therefore there is to be a "so much the more" assembling together.

#### THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GATHERING

Before we deal with the nature of this end-time gathering, we must have clearly in view those that are concerned in it. The passage in the Psalm would embrace and include those referred to in the other two passages.

"My saints... those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."

It need hardly be remarked that, when all has been said and done through type, symbol and figure, the covenant means an entering into what the Lord Jesus has done by His shed Blood. It is an appreciation and apprehension of Him in His great work by the Cross. But we need to be reminded of what that involves as a covenant of God into which we enter. It is a theme which demands a book to itself. In order to reduce it to a few lines, let us consider a concrete instance. We find a conspicuous illustration of this matter in the life of Abram, as recorded in Genesis, chapters 15 and 22.

In chapter 15 we have the basis of a covenant concerning Abram's seed. Firstly, there is the comprehensive inclusion of the offerings which came in later in Leviticus: a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtle-dove and a pigeon. These - with the exception of the birds - were divided in the midst, and laid one half on this side and the other half on that side. These were the two sides of the covenant, God's and Abram's. Later we see a flaming torch passing between the two halves (verse 17).

Now, it is clear that Abram knew what this all meant. He realised that it involved him in something. God was saying quite clearly that He was wholly for Abram, that all that He was and had was being committed to this covenant. He would keep nothing back from him, but would, so to speak, place His very life, honour, name, glory, to the good of His word to Abram. This was adequately proved in the long run when He became incarnate in the seed of Abraham for universal blessing. But there were two sides to the covenant, and Abram understood this. He also was handing himself over to God with all that he was and had, to the very dearest possession, and if need be, to death. That burning torch - that Fire of the Spirit - sealed the oneness of the consecration or devotion of each to the other.

Now this explains chapter 22. By that time Isaac was born and had grown out of childhood. He had taken his place, and was to Abraham what a first-born son is to his father in the East. But he was more, because of the miracle of his birth and the long-deferred hope. He was everything to Abraham - more than life itself. All his father's hopes, expectations, vindications, promises and Divine assurances were bound up with him. Accordingly -

"It came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham; and he said, Here am I. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac... and offer him... for a burnt offering..."

This 'proving' was concerning the covenant. Did Abram mean his part of it? Would he stand to it? Did he so utterly believe that God would be faithful to His part that, no matter what happened to Isaac, God could be trusted and His promise would be fulfilled? What a test! But "Abraham believed God" (Rom. 4:3). His faith in God enabled him to stand by his part of the covenant, and "he wavered not" (4:20).

The issue was that, when Isaac had virtually been offered, the Lord said to him: "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son thine only son, from me" (Gen. 22:12).

And then the Lord came in with His oath: "By myself have I sworn... because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven..." (verses 16-18).

Do we now see the meaning of 'a covenant by sacrifice'? Then we shall see who it is that will be in this 'gathering together'. It will certainly be only those to whom the Lord is everything, to whom He is all and in all; those who are all for the Lord without reservation, without personal interest, without anything less or other than Himself. Spiritual oneness is only possible on this basis.

The Lord's word at the end to Abraham was: "Now I know that thou fearest God". Malachi's end-time word was: "Then they that feared the Lord..." (3:16). The fear of the Lord is an utter abandonment to Him, at any cost. It is His will being supreme, claiming and obtaining the measure of a whole burnt-offering.

## THE NATURE OF THE GATHERING

Being, then, clear as to WHO are concerned - and that constitutes a test, even as they constitute a testimony - we are able to look at the nature of the 'gathering together'.

We are well aware that there is a widespread doubt as to whether we are to expect anything in the way of a corporate movement or testimony at the end. Indeed, it is strongly held by some that everything at the end is individual - a conviction that rests, for the most part, upon the use of the phrase, "If any man...", in the message to Laodicea (Rev. 3:20).

Let us hasten to say, then, that we have nothing in mind in the nature of an organized movement, a sect, a society, or a fraternity.

Having said this, however, there are some things which need saying quite definitely on the other side.

The Church of the New Testament never was an organized movement. Neither was there any organized affiliation of the companies of believers in various places with one another. It was a purely spiritual thing, spontaneous in life, united only by the Holy Spirit in mutual love and spiritual solicitude. There were other factors that acted as spiritual links, which we will mention presently. Further, and still more important, there was the abiding fact that a 'Body' had been brought into being. This is called 'The Body of Christ'. You can divide a society and still it remains, but you cannot divide a body without destroying the entity.

Are we to understand from the exponents of the individualistic interpretation that all the teaching of the Lord, in nearly all the Scriptures concerning the House of God, and concerning the Body of Christ in nearly all the letters of Paul, is now set aside or is only an idea without any expression on the earth? Are we to blot out the mass of the New Testament and live our own individual Christian lives with no emphasis upon working fellowship with other believers? Surely not. This would be contrary to all the ways of God in history, and would certainly spell defeat, for if there is one thing against which the adversary has set himself it is the fellowship of God's people. Ultra-individualism is impossible if the truth of the 'One Body' still stands. What is more, the Lord's people are becoming more and more conscious of their absolute need of fellowship, especially in prayer. The difficulty of getting through alone in prayer is becoming greater as we approach the end.

What, then, is the nature of this 'gathering together'?

#### (1) UNTO HIM

It is a gathering to the Lord Himself.

"Gather my saints together UNTO ME..."

"Our gathering UNTO HIM..."

In times past there have been gatherings to men, great preachers, great teachers, great leaders; or to great institutions and movements, centres and teachings. This is not now the Lord's way. Not that men sought to draw to themselves, or that the Lord was not reached through them, but people have a way of making a greatly used servant of God the object of attraction.

God's End is Christ, and as we get nearer the end He must take the place even of instrumentalities and become almost immediately the only object of appreciation. Our oneness and fellowship is not in a teaching, a 'testimony', a community or a place, but in a Person, and in Him not merely doctrinally, but livingly and experimentally. Any movement truly of God must, as its supreme and all-inclusive feature, confess that it is the Lord Jesus alone who is the object of heart adoration and worship: not things, themes, experiences, but the Lord Jesus Himself.

#### (2) PRAYER-FELLOWSHIP

This gathering is a gathering together in prayer-fellowship. One of the last things said in the Epistle which presents for all time and eternity the true nature of the Church as the Body of Christ - the Epistle to the

Ephesians - is:

"Praying at all seasons in the Spirit... FOR ALL THE SAINTS" (Eph. 5:18).

If the first thing in spiritual gathering together is "holding fast the Head" (Col. 2:19), or having the Lord Jesus as the centre, the second thing is prayer-fellowship with and for all the saints. "Gather my SAINTS together." This is geographically impossible of full realisation, but it is spiritually possible by prayer. There is no space or time in the realm of prayer. A deep and travailing concern in prayer for the spiritual well-being of all the saints has ever marked an end-time movement of God; not alone for those who were true and faithful, and had gone all the way with God; but for ALL the people of God - although such as were more immediately the objects of Satanic malice, by reason of their faithfulness, might provoke a special cry to the Throne.

What we see is the Lord having a prayer-instrument in every end-time, when total destruction threatens that which represents Him. And the very burden of prayer which He lays upon His own in every part of the world is His way of uniting. If we prayed more for all saints we should find many of the things which divide - and wrongly divide - falling away and ceasing to do so. Prayer is a wonderfully 'gathering' factor.

### (3) SPIRITUAL FOOD

Another great factor in gathering spiritually is food.

The Old Testament brings before us many an instance of fellowship by feasting. Indeed, feasts were the nature of the fellowship, although not the occasion of it.

The New Testament takes up the spiritual principle, and the Lord Jesus makes the 'breaking of bread' not only the remembering and proclaiming of His death and Himself, but the testimony of the 'one Loaf - one Body'. The Lord's Supper is represented as food and fellowship.

In the first years of the Church, Christ was ministered to the saints by the Holy Spirit through ministering servants who moved from place to place. It was thus that the saints were brought into fellowship with one another. Not - let us say again - by an organized affiliation, but by a ministration of Christ through His Word in the Spirit. The ministers were "joints of supply" (Eph. 4:16).

It is all too obvious a thing to say that today there is a very real hunger amongst the Lord's people. They are not being fed. What so many of them are getting is not 'bread'. In every part of the world there are such hungry ones; one here, another there; a little company in one place, another in another, and often unknown to each other. The persistent and perplexing question asked almost everywhere is: 'What are we to do? There is no spiritual food where we are.'

### (4) MINISTRY

Will not the Lord raise up a ministry to these? We are persuaded that He will, and that He is now seeking to do so. A method of gathering together according to Christ will be that a ministration of Christ is sent forth and the hungry will be found gathered in spite of everything. For as there is a dissatisfaction with the religious systems of the day on the part of so many who want to go on with the Lord, so there is springing up in the hearts of many of God's servants a longing to be free to minister to the saints irrespective of traditional ties and distinctions.

There is no mistaking the fact that this matter of food as a uniting factor was ministered to the churches through anointed ministries. In the book of the Acts we see how the scattered churches were held together largely through the ministries of servants of God who were qualified to build the body corporate. They were everywhere recognised, accepted and honoured, and they were in a very large way a substitute for organized affiliation, government and centralisation. As the individual members of Christ form one corporate Body, so the individual churches were like corporate members of the whole corporate Body, and there was great gain to all by corporate ministries passing between them.

This all has its own perils, but we cannot fail to see the movement of God at the present day, and it is a gathering movement - to Himself.

The passage in Hebrews (10:25) specifically has the local assembling in view. No one can deny that this is the Divine order. The Lord desires to have in every place a representation of and a testimony to His House. His will is to have all such constituted according to Christ. But only the Holy Spirit can do this constituting. We cannot take a New Testament mould and pour people and places into it. We must come into it by the Spirit. This necessitates that the Holy Spirit have absolute sovereignty, clearness and right-of-way; and this, in turn, requires that the flesh be crucified and man be absolutely subject to Christ.

We see nothing in Scripture to lead us to conclude that this can never again be. It may be a "day of small things", but in the hands of God such days are mightier than all the great movements of men.

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