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Anointed for Battle

by T. Austin-Sparks

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A brief word at the close of the Whitsun Conference.

We have been occupied in these days with the nature and effect of the fulfilment of the Promise of the Father. A promise made to the Son, and then fulfilled *through* the Son to the Church, which is His Body. Thus the promise was ultimately revealed to be a corporate and not only a personal one as such. We have before pointed out that after His Baptism it is expressly and immediately affirmed that "He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." The Baptism was in type His acceptance at the very commencement of His ministry of the Cross — death, burial, resurrection — and all His teaching and working from thenceforward was on that ground and in that light. It is most significant and suggestive that the first activity under the anointing should be a deliberate encounter with the "Prince of this World." The battle of the ages is joined, the Eternal issue as the ultimate purpose of "The Promise" is taken up at once. The point with which we want to stay is this, that the express purpose and outworking of the anointing with the Holy Spirit is conflict — warfare.

What was true in His personal case has to be made true in His corporate case — that is, in the experience of the Body-instrument of His abiding outworking of victory. No one can ever come into a living spiritual experience and knowledge of the Cross without being immediately precipitated into this conflict. The essential issue of Calvary is the anointing with the Holy Spirit. The primary purpose of the anointing with the Spirit is the establishment of the sovereignty of Christ through His Church over the entire system of spiritual rebellion, revolt, anarchy, and hostility. Let it be a settled thing that identification with Christ implies and involves a warfare of increasing tensity from which there is no discharge in this life. So many there are who think that if only they can receive the Divine

anointing they are going to have such a wonderful time; how rich and beautiful their lives will be; what power will be at their command, and what an end of all spiritual trouble.

Truly there is a blessed side to it and with all the conflict it is well worth while. But it will be as well to settle it at the outset that there is a sterner side where personal blessing, enjoyment and comfort become secondary to the great interests of the Body of Christ. John Bunyan was given wisdom to put Hill Difficulty not far from the Cross. Pilgrim didn't get very far beyond the Cross when he met Hill Difficulty, and there is a suggestiveness to one in that which is full of rich and valuable significance, for it says in effect that the very nature of our Christian life is one of conflict, of battle, of warfare, and that our life absolutely depends upon it. You take our physical organism and you discover that the whole organism of our bodies is planned and arranged and constituted upon a basis of warfare, and real health and real life in our physical being is simply on the basis of triumphant warfare — a battle going on all the time. Our organism creates its own difficulties which in their overcoming constitute real health and real life. There are those difficulties in our organism which are pathological — that is, disorder — and they work death. Now you take that into the realm of the Body of Christ, and you find it is very like this. Its very health depends upon its conflicts, and the organism of the Body of Christ is designedly constituted by the Lord Himself upon a basis of conflict, and the Church is never vigorous without warfare.

The unfortunate thing is that there are the pathological difficulties which create a warfare which ends in death and arrest in the Body of Christ. We find ourselves occupied far too much with those disorders which create difficulties and which we do not get the better of, and are all the time throwing us into a state of sickness and weakness and infirmity. The Lord would have us — and He has constituted His Body as a spiritual organism — upon a basis of essential conflict for Life, and Hill Difficulty meets us immediately we have faced the Cross and accepted it and stepped across it. It is not far, we meet it in the very ordering of God, not as some misfortune that has befallen us, but in the constitution of the thing to prove and try our Life, and to give our Life this supreme opportunity of demonstrating its reality. And here again is this wonderful insight of Bunyan, that there are those in his allegory who come to Hill Difficulty and never get past it. Formalist comes to Hill Difficulty. He is the man who has put creed and theory in the place of practice and experience. He never gets past Hill Difficulty — he gives up there, it is not the genuine thing. Hypocrisy comes to Hill Difficulty, and he likewise gives up. Hypocrisy is not the man who has put the creed or the theory in the place of experience as we often think, he is the man who is a parasite who lives on the spiritual energy of someone else and has none of his own. He finds his stimulus in someone else's triumph and when he is put to the test he has nothing of his own. Now we must be very careful that we are not spiritual parasites in word or deed. Hypocrisy cannot face Hill Difficulty. Timorous comes there, and Mistrust comes there, but they give up. It is only this reality of the thing, this genuineness of Life which proves itself there and demonstrates its nature and comes through, and is infinitely better for the difficulty. You see the wisdom of God in that; that we come immediately into difficulty, into conflict, into warfare, but that is the very thing for which we were born from above, and that is God's wise way of securing an increase of Life.

The real spiritual effectiveness is that which takes the enemy at his full value into account, and is not ignorant of his devices, and knows exactly what the real business on hand is, and as being alive to that situation stands all the time in the Christ Who is a match for it all. That is the practical ground where the thing has got to be demonstrated. It would be quite an easy thing to say we will never say anything more about the devil. Now let us sing all about the Lord and be happy together, and we will forget there is such a thing as the devil. That is not the way. You may have a happy time in a way, but the range of your spiritual effectiveness is considerably narrowed when you get there. We have all

had that temptation. We would all love to rule the devil out of the universe, and, thank God, we are going, in Christ, to have a share in it, but it cannot be done like that.

Now the fact is that that is the background, and we are thrust into that immediately we really recognise the meaning of the Cross and the Body of Christ, and accept it. Do recognise that, beloved, because you are going to meet it, and therefore do not think it strange as though things had gone wrong when you meet Hill Difficulty immediately after your great surrender, and your great acceptance, when you have put everything over for that. That is the proper order — "Then was He led of the Spirit into the wilderness," into battle. We must be watchful against the devices of Satan whereby he would get us to settle down and stop fighting. We receive blessing and then our tendency is to hug our blessing, dwell upon it, seek more, instead of turning it into munitions of war. The Holy Spirit has to come in and pitchfork us into the battle again. He knows that our very life depends upon it.

We often think that if only we could get out of the conflict, if only the conflict would abate a little, or cease, how much more life we would have; how much more joy we would have; how much more power we would have; how much richer and fuller everything would be if only we could get out of this awful battle for a bit. No, it does not work that way. One has, at times, tried for a spiritual holiday, and how the spiritual muscles sag, everything goes to pieces! Afterwards we have got to recover the ground, and we have got to redouble our spiritual energy and activity to get back again. You cannot take spiritual holidays. You cannot go on leave in this business. It is vital to your life, and that is true not only of the individual, but of the Body. You must not have a lull, unless the Lord gives you a lull. There are gracious respites given of the Lord from time to time — "Then had the Church rest," but it was not a long one. Bunyan put an arbour on Hill Difficulty, but Pilgrim went to sleep and lost his book. That is where the trouble began. It was not put there for him to go to sleep; it was put there for him to get more strength. To wait upon the Lord to renew his strength to go... oh, that is all. The Lord gives us a gracious respite here and there, but we must not think He has given us a discharge. No, and it must be the Lord's doing and not ours. Don't let us take ourselves out of the fight. Don't let us run away and think we are going to get more strength by getting out of the conflict. The Lord will check such a course. He will do a work which will bring us back into the fight. The enemy may say to us that the fighting business is the wrong line; it isn't really what the Lord means you to do, He wants you to stop that and go on in a quieter way, but somehow in the Lord's way you find you are fighting again. Yes, the Holy Spirit in the church is a militant Spirit to carry the battle right through to the final issue.