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Joy Out of Travail

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in 1958.

One or two fragments of the Word, firstly in the book of Genesis, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."

The letter to the Romans chapter 8 at verse 22: "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also..."

The gospel by John, chapter 16 at verse 21: "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but when she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for the joy that a man is born into the world."

The letter to the Galatians chapter 4, verse 19: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you..."

It's not the first time that we have spoken on this matter here, but I feel quite sure in my heart that it is the Lord's word for this time. This law of travail is written deep in creation and perhaps mostly in human history. It is one fact which no one can deny. It is there. We cannot get away from it. It is forcing itself upon our consciousness and recognition all through our lives.

The Bible, as we have seen, begins with the establishment of this law, both in human life and in the natural order. The Bible ends with the abolition of that law; its complete removal from every realm

of creation. It can be traced through the whole Bible. In almost every book of the Bible, this law of travail can be found. And in the last book, the book of the Revelation which is the culmination of *all* the things that are in the rest of the Bible, we find that the outstanding feature of that book is this law of travail. In every connection and direction, it's a book of travail. The Church is in travail. The overcomers are in travail. The nations are in travail. All the heavenly bodies are in travail. It is the culmination of this law which has been operating all the way through history. It began with the birth of the first child; it ends with the birth of a new heaven and a new earth.

It is therefore a very important thing that we should understand the meaning attached to this law - why God introduced it and established it and has never lifted it and never does; but holds all history of individuals, of families, of society, of nations, and peculiarly of the Church, to this law. I say its very important that we should understand the divine meaning attaching to travail. What did God mean man to learn by it?

Of course this morning we are not so concerned with man in general, or even with the world, although it would be instructive were we to see what God is doing in nations and in society and in industry and in science and in every other realm by this law, for it's there; but that is not our present object. If the Church is what we are given to understand that it is, the central object of God's concern, of God's interest, the center of His concentrated activities, then the Church has something to learn from this law because there is no doubt about it that however true it is in every other realm, the Church has at the very center of its history the working out of this law of travail. There is a concentration, it would seem, of this law in the Church.

Whenever God has done anything that had the Church in view - that is, an elect, a people for His Name - on every occasion of His fresh movements in that direction it took place through travail. I have only to hint at some of the experiences of the men of God in the early phases of history. What travail they went through in relation to the purpose of God, individually I mean: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Moses and all the others. And the people of Israel, the Lord said "I have seen the affliction of My people, I have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, I am come down..."

It was out of travail that Israel was born as a nation; deep, terrible, anguish. The same is true in the recovery of the remnant from captivity. You know that this is the word that the prophets used about Israel in that connection, they were always speaking about Israel's travail, Zion travailing. The birth of the remnant from exile came through the terrible travail of the seventy years.

In some degree I think it was true when the Lord Jesus was born. There was Simeon and Anna and others waiting for the consolation of Israel. The indications are that they were in this state of the birth throws of a new age, and it was not out of relation with their prayers and their faithfulness and their sufferings that Christ was born into this world. We know what happened when He was born, the prophecy fulfilled: the voice of weeping... Rachel weeping for her children that were not. It was a state of travail through which He came.

But of all these instances, perhaps the greatest was the travail of the Cross. What an anguish was the Cross to the disciples, to those believers! They were not a small company altogether. The Cross was a terrible experience of pain, of anguish, of suffering. Out of it came the Church. The Church was *born* out of that suffering. And so we go on to the end and we find that the same thing obtains in the final emergence of creation and Church and nations by the coming of the Lord.

What does the Lord mean us to learn? *Why* did He introduce that law at the beginning? Well, briefly and simply and yet, dear friends, with such depth of meaning for us here, as well as for all the Lord's

people, the main lesson as I see it is this: The Lord introduced and established that law of travail in order to bring about a deep and an adequate appreciation of divine values.

Man was given everything that the heart could desire at the beginning. He was blessed with every blessing! He was surrounded with everything that he could wish for and he seemed to take it so much as a matter of course, so much for granted. And he held it so cheaply, so lightly, so superficially as to forget the greatness of the love of God in the giving and in His creation; to forget how wonderful it all was that God had done that and what God had done. And to be ready at the slightest offer of something for his own gratification, to just let it all go... You can see quite clearly that that was the trouble: no *real heart appreciation* of God and God's love and God's greatness and of all this that God had given... he took it so easily. Easy come - easy go. I think the heart of that sin and wrong and tragedy was just that ease with which man can turn from God, from what God had said. "God said this... well, what does it matter?" God said it! The ease with which he can turn away from it and let it go for some bribe, some way that would be to his self pleasure. And the Lord brought in this law of travail to recover the sense of values and you can see exactly how that works out.

You know, if you don't suffer for a thing, you don't value it. If it costs you nothing then it means little to you. If you have really suffered agonies and anguish for anything, for anyone, over any matter, that thing is of infinite preciousness to you. You're going to fight for that, you're going to watch over that with keen jealousy. That is something very precious. And is not that just how the law of travail works? Yes! It's like that. If it comes without travail, without any cost, well it's taken too lightly isn't it? Far too lightly. It doesn't mean all that *that* means which has cost you almost your very life.

The Lord introduced this factor that in every birth it's a question of life or death. Life and death are in the balances every time. The governing question: how is it going? You're held in tension... and when it's alright how the heart goes out: thank God! Thank God... Worship. God comes into His place. God comes into His place, very often with those who have never given Him any place before, at any rate there is a spontaneous: "Thank God!" You see the principle, you see how true it is. And so God established this, ah yes, this *painful way*, this *suffering way*, as the only way in which He could recover and establish the law of values, of preciousness, and save man from his superficiality with regard to the most costly things.

He did it in order to secure a *heart* relationship with Himself and with everything that comes from Him. A *heart relatedness*, that is love! Love! A love that is far removed from despising the Lord or anything of the Lord. A love that involves the very life itself; that if its object is lost then life itself goes with it. See? It's like that.

Every divine deposit, every divine deposit is on that basis, dear friends. Sooner or later, every divine deposit will take on this value. Anything that comes from God will sooner or later pass into the realm of suffering, into the realm of travail, to find out how much value we put upon it, how much it really means to us, how much we have seen of God in it. It will become a matter of life or death. Under this law *all* divine things have been put upon this basis.

Take the matter of fellowship with God, our very union with the Lord, this relatedness that He has brought about between us. I venture to say, dear friends, that there is nothing, nothing in all the range of our lives as God's people which causes us *so much* exercise and sometimes so much travail, as this matter of our communion and fellowship with God. Lose the consciousness of the nearness of the Lord, the consciousness of fellowship with the Lord just for a moment, just for a day, and what anguish it brings; that lost consciousness of the Lord. The Lord does not depart and does not

forsake, He's promised never to do it, but that does not mean that the Lord does not allow us to go through times when we have not the consciousness of His presence, when the clouds gather around and He seems to have gone, to be far away and left us alone. Then what happens? Does it matter? Does it matter? Can we go on just the same? Oh no, everyone who is *really* in union with the Lord goes into travail over that and can never, never come to rest until that's recovered and the Lord is saying: "This thing has got to be kept upon the basis of preciousness". And that's the only way of doing it, through suffering, is it not? Our very fellowship with God has to become at times a matter of life and death.

If only we could take the time to illustrate... You know Moses and the Lord, having that controversy with the Lord over Israel. It seems to me at times the Lord does play a part, play act. And the Lord said to Moses, "Stand aside! Let Me destroy these people, let Me wipe them out and make another people." What does Moses do? Oh no! He's not having that. He reasons and argues with the Lord: "Blot me out of Thy book if You don't forgive them." What was the Lord doing? I believe that the Lord was only doing this in the place where He got that man Moses in union with His own heart and I think in His own heart the Lord said, when Moses uttered those words, "That's where I wanted to get you! That's what I've been after, to find out *how* precious My people are to you, *how* precious My interests are to you, *how* precious My investment in this people is to you. I must have somebody with Me in My travail that gives a due value and that will not, *not* let go easily. With whom it is a matter of life and death." Blot me out - life or death. You see? That's the heart of God, the heart relationship.

It's a matter of the values of the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Oh, are you tired of the Cross and hearing about the Cross? Shortly before he went to America brother Harrison told me of the time he had spent with a group of students in a retreat. He had spoken on the Cross and they had said, "Oh we're so tired of hearing about the Cross, haven't you something else to talk about? Talk about something else; not the Cross." Are those values of the Cross a matter of life and death to us? Do we hold them lightly? Is it just a teaching, a truth? Or of infinite value and preciousness?

What about the matter of divine Life? Divine Life! Is not the Lord trying all the time to bring us to the point where we recognize the *infinite value of divine Life*? Physically? Yes! It may be that behind much of our physical suffering is this secret: the Lord seeking to bring us to the place where divine Life is everything to us and we lay hold on it. We have a tremendous appreciation of divine Life for spirit, for soul, for body. So the Lord throws us into situations where if it isn't His Life then there's no surviving. If we do not now prove the tremendous value of divine Life, we are finished! We're finished, this is the end if we do not know Him again in the power of His resurrection.

It's not a theory, a teaching, it's something that has come right into our very history, as a part of our being: divine Life! Yes, without it we'll not survive. It is that or it is death. But you see, the Lord works in relation to that to make it real. Oh, that you realized that dear friends, and rose up on this matter and saw the infinite value of the Life that He has given because so many, so many Christians just say, "Yes, I have received eternal Life in Jesus Christ." But what does it *mean* as a practical, everyday reality for the whole man: spirit, soul and body? Divine Life! God meant it to be so for us all.

The Word of God. Well, I say much about the value of the Word of God, but oh, do we not get tremendous exercise about this? Have you never travailed for a word from God? Never been on your knees, and on your face... oh, that the Lord would speak out of His Word for me in this situation? And has not His speaking out of His Word to you been *birthed* out of travail? Has He not brought you into a situation where only if He speaks can you get through? Only as He gives you a word can you go on! It just doesn't come easily. You know quite well it isn't just a matter of opening the book and

reading. No, you have to travail for something from the Word, it's got to become so precious as to be of the value of *Life* without which you'll die. "Man shall not live by bread only, but he shall *live* by the Word of God." Live! Live! What's the alternative? It's to die, but for the Word of God. Our life hangs on the Word of God! That's what it's to be to us.

And what about the Church? Oh here, dear friends, we touch something that we all need to be very, very clear on and very strong about; this matter of the Church. Oh, we have so much teaching in the Church, we've got all the Church truth and doctrine. Perhaps you're tired of hearing about the Church and the Body of Christ and relatedness. You know, dear friends, there are believers, there are children of God who would give *all that they could, all that they possess*, and all that this world could give them if they had it, in order to know something of the fellowship which is so cheap with us. "Oh, for an hour with the Lord's people! Oh, for a day within the communion of the saints! Oh, to be able to be there amongst them!" Yes, they know through travail something of the value of the Church. And in our experience, and we do speak out of experience, we have learned, we have learned the truth of the Church not only from the Bible but in this way: the absolute *necessity* to our very life of the people of God. Had it not *been* for the people of God we should not have got through. You know it's like that, and so the Lord takes us into experiences where only the Church can save us (if I may put it like that) only the Church can be our salvation, only relatedness can be our life. Don't hold this lightly. Don't throw it away easily.

Believe me, dear friends, I'm not a prophet, but believe me that if you have been brought in any vital way into relation to the truth of the Church, sooner or later in your life that's going to be a matter of life or death to you. God grant that it may never be too late, to come to the end and say, "Oh! If only... if only I had more valued and cherished the great *gift* of the Church and all the values bound up with it of covering and help, I would not be today where I am! I am here now because I have held too lightly the precious things that God gave." I say again, sooner or later (God grant it may not be later or too late) you're going to come in a very practical way up against the truths that God has given you and then it's going to be your life or your death.

God has given you much. Oh, be not like Adam and make it necessary for the Lord to take you into deep anguish and suffering in order to teach you the value of what He's given you. Suffer that word, it has cost Him everything to bring us where we are. Let us not put too little value on it.

Well I won't stop there, I referred to John 16:21 and the two sides there, a woman when she's in travail and so on. The other side: but! The issue! When it's all over, the child is born, she forgets about the travail in her joy that a man is born into the world. The Lord never meant suffering to end with itself. He never meant travail to be the last word. He never intended that the end should be death, though death is always in the balances of this thing, He never intended it to be like that. He took the little family in Bethany into anguish, into deep anguish, but He said "Not unto death but for the glory of God!"

There is written in the very law of travail the law of hope, the law of a new prospect. And all I'm going to say about that this morning is this: we, individually or as a people, may go through times of deep suffering, trial, and everything seems to be in the balances. How is it going, how's it going... is it life or death? We're in the grip of this crisis. Oh, let us believe with all our hearts that although we come this way again and again in our history, under the hand of God it's unto something new! It's unto something better! it's unto a new hope with a new expectation! Don't you believe that the end is shame, is remorse, is disappointment. God never established the law of travail that that should be the end, but that there should be a birth of something *infinitely* precious. And it happens again and again doesn't it?

Every new emergence of something of the Lord is more precious than what was before, but it's costly. *It's costly*. If I may say so, dear friends, it may be that we here have been going through travail, we're in the time of suffering and perhaps we're inclined to feel that it's an end, there's going to be loss. No! That's not the Lord's way. The Lord has so worked that, isn't it strange, we come into experiences in life where it's the most terrible experience you've ever had and now, and now of course, this is the end. This is going to put the finish to everything. And it *is* the most terrible suffering! And when it's past, the strange thing about human nature about some things is that we forget; we forget the anguish, that is, it passes. But what it has brought is the thing that governs and dominates everything isn't it? The values that have come. Supposing we were always living in all the anguishes that we have ever had, life would be unbearable. But that passes, but we *are* living in the values.

Well I think that's all I've got to say, do remember that cheapness in relation to the things of God will only end in disaster. Unbelief will end in despair. The faith in God in a dark and difficult day will produce something new and something better. If we are too easy-going about our spiritual values, nothing substantial will be effected.

The Lord give us a due sense of the value of everything that He has given us and brought us into, that we will not be able just to discard it and throw it away as though it didn't matter. May we be saved from that and have this law of love, infinite love for Him and all things that are in Him, written deep in our hearts.