

A Vessel for the Rights of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the concept of man as a vessel for God's glory, and how Satan's alliance with man is a fact that is deeper than reason, thought, or consciousness.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26

Topics: "Divine Purpose", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the divine purpose behind the creation of man, which is to glorify God through true worship. He explains that man was uniquely created to have a spiritual connection with God, but through disobedience, this connection was severed, allowing Satan to manipulate humanity for his own ends. The sermon highlights the battle between God's rights and Satan's counterfeit, culminating in the victory of Christ, who embodies God's rights and restores the relationship between God and man. Sparks urges believers to recognize the importance of being conformed to the image of Christ rather than focusing solely on outward actions, as true worship and glory to God stem from this inner transformation.

Transcript

I am going to enlarge upon one or two things which were little more than stated in our last meditation on "The Christ, The Antichrist, and The church". We pointed out that there were three things which are common features of these.

Firstly, a particular and peculiar type of creation, namely, man. This, as we have said, has reference to Christ, to Antichrist, and to the church, which is "one new man". It is in connection with this that I want to say a few further words at the outset.

We have to get behind everything with one word and one inquiry, and that as to purpose.

The Worship of God

We ask, first of all, what is the divine purpose in the creation of man? The answer is that God may receive, may have something in this universe which is to His own glory. I know that is a very comprehensive statement, and I can do little more at this time than say that. For some reason, in the mystery of His thoughts and ways, God had an investment, an inheritance in man. There was that which He determined to display, which would bring back to Him glory and honour, and thus, for His own glory, He made man, so that in a moral way, that is, in a responsible way, a creation should be worshipping God, in the fullest

sense of that word "worship". I am not sure that we have yet grasped the real meaning of worship. Sometimes we think of it as singing hymns and praying, or saying prayers; as going through a religious form, maybe in the offering of thanks, praise, or letting the heart go out to the Lord. But I think there is something more than that, much more than that in worship. However, we will come back to that again. The point for the moment is that all that worship means in bringing back to God that which is to His glory, to His honour, to His praise, to His satisfaction, was evidently the object which motivated God in creation, in the creation of man.

Man A Unique Creation

Now, in order that it might be so, man would have to be constituted in a peculiar way. He would have to be so constituted that there was that in him which was also in God, and which formed a link between God and himself, that which was of the same order as God. I am not speaking now of Deity or Godhead, but of nature, of constitution. So man was created and, in the deepest reality of his being and constitution, there was the human spirit, the spirit of man, which was the faculty for communion with God, who is Spirit, and who cannot be communicated with, only in spirit, cannot be worshipped (using that word again in all its content), cannot be worshipped, only "in spirit and in truth". Thus man was a peculiar creation, constituted in this particular way, so that there should be a definite point of relatedness with God, a link of a likeness in constitution. The New Testament word is, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit", and, "There is a spirit in man", is an Old Testament statement. Well now, while that relationship exists, all God's purpose is possible of realisation, and God has the ground upon which to proceed toward His great end. That is man, a peculiar creation, a particular type. It is between man so constituted, and God who is a Spirit, that the Spirit of God moves as the directing, governing, illuminating agent of the purposes of God.

We know what happened with the first Adam; we know the result of his failure in faith and obedience. It was that he became severed from God, which means that the instrument or faculty by which man was in union with God, in communication with God, was severed from Him, and in its severance became dead, in the Bible sense of the word "death"; not nullified, not annihilated, but severed from God, out of union with Him who is its life. But something else had happened, and this is where Antichrist comes in.

Satan's Adaptation of Man to His Own Ends

Here is another in God's universe who has set his heart upon being worshipped, who has set his heart upon universal dominion, and who also recognises that he can only get his end through man. Moreover he recognises that, just as God, to reach His end, must have a man, or man peculiarly constituted, in relationship with Himself spiritually, so he must also have man peculiarly constituted to be in relation with him for his ends. Thus, behind the understanding of Adam, Satan operated to constitute man in a different way for his own purpose, or to interfere with God's man, God's type. The result was that, just as Adam before his disobedience was, by his spirit, in union with God for divine purposes, now, through his soul, he is in union with Satan for his purposes; because it was the soul that Satan captured. If reason, desire and will are the components of the soul, all these three were captured by Satan, and the result is that there is in the Adamic race now a type of being which has been adjusted to Satan's purposes, and with which Satan is allied. That is the tragedy of this creation now, as outside Christ. It is not only a fallen creation, a broken thing, an impaired thing; it is not only a sinful thing, a weak thing, and a thing in which are the seeds of corruption, but, more than that, the positive aspect is that Satan is allied to it. There is an alliance; not by man's conscious consent necessarily, but the fact is there. Oh, the fact is there, and, deeper than reason or thought or consciousness, facts lie right down at the root of the nature of things.

We need to remember that this applies just in the same way in the other direction, and that when there is a new creation in Christ Jesus; when God has recovered that union with us through regeneration; when that spirit lying in death has been quickened and raised together with Christ and "joined to the Lord... one spirit", the union is deeper than reason, deeper than thought, deeper than feeling. It is a fact in the very nature of things. If only the people of God would believe that!

Now, you ask any respectable, decent, unconverted man of this world whether he is in alliance with Satan, whether the Devil is really bound up with him and there is a union between them, and what will he answer? You hardly dare suggest it. You will be a bold man if you do. Why? He does not feel it, he does not see it; it never occurs to him, never enters his head; nevertheless, it is a fact. It is deeper than his consciousness, deeper than his belief: and oh, how often, I fear, it is like that with the saints; that the union which is deeper than everything sometimes gets even deeper than belief. I mean the saints are sometimes tempted to disbelieve or to doubt that the union holds good because of the absence of the sense of it, because they are not able to see or to feel it: but it is there. Well now, I have gone a little aside, and we must turn again to our main consideration.

For the two things, God's end and Satan's end, there must be a type which is suited to those ends, adjusted to those ends, and with which the one concerned with dominion is in relationship, vital relationship; there must be a union. We saw in our previous meditation that all the rights of God are bound up with man. That is but using another phrase for worship -- all the rights of God in this universe. So all that Satan would claim as his rights is also bound up with man.

The Embodiment of Rights

That leads us to the second thing. There must be an incarnation or embodiment of those rights, or those assumed rights, as the case may be, an incarnation. Well, Adam was made. But that is not enough. Innocence is one thing, triumphant moral responsibility is another thing. God can never be satisfied with having so many innocents. If He were, He would have made us all little tiny babies and never have let us grow up! But that is not God's thought. God's thought is moral responsibility; that is sonship as over against childhood. So Adam must be tested on this principle of responsibility for God's rights, inasmuch as they are vested in him, and he is the custodian of them. God has an inheritance in him, and he is put to the test and fails, and drags down the race with him. Satan thus captures that race for his own kingdom, his own dominion, his own ends, his own worship. Oh, how he craves that worship. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." That, to the Son of God! If only Thou wilt worship me!

Then a second man came to the rescue. To the rescue of what? Man? Yes: but more than that, He came to the rescue of God's rights to redeem the purchased possession, the inheritance. What a marvellous fragment that is of Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "What the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints". We have never been able to cope with that. We look into ourselves as we are and all... draw back from such a word. The riches of His inheritance in the saints -- in us? But take a wider view. See God's original thought, and you will see a creation which ultimately, in oneness with God, will embody all the divine thoughts; where, through that creation, God is getting in this universe all His rights and worship -- His inheritance in the saints. I think that is what Paul means in that glorious burst of doxology in that same letter, "Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever". Glory in the church and in Christ Jesus! That requires an incarnation of the divine rights, and that brings us to where we were in chapter one.

The Issue Fought Out in Christ

The last Adam, coming to the rescue of the inheritance in man, becomes the embodiment of the divine rights and moves out into the arena of the universe to be assailed by all the wild, anarchical, lawless powers of him who is against the purpose of God, and has his own kingdom in view, and by him this last Adam is put to the test. In a full and universal sense, He is tried out as to the rights of God. The issue is brought down to one terrible, though simple, issue -- Myself or Thyself? That is all it amounts to, if ever you can fathom or range that. But that is what it is: Myself, Thyself? My will, Thy will? It is a question as to whether He would, for any reason, in any circumstances, on any condition, move away from the ground of utter and absolute loyalty to God. That is the question. Can He be driven from that ground? Can He be pressed off that ground? Can He be tricked to forsake that ground? Can anything that Satan can do -- and that is saying a terrible thing -- can anything that Satan can do, with his wide, deep range of resource, get that Man to move off the ground of loyalty to God, and God's rights? If so, what has happened? The very Christ has in principle become the Antichrist. He has been turned round on Himself to defeat Himself. Antichrist has scored. It seems almost inconceivable that Satan should ever think for an instant that he could capture the last Adam and make Him the instrument of serving his ends; and yet why should he offer such a bait, such a bribe, and make such an appeal so persistently -- If only Thou wilt worship me! What a lot there must be in man, if the kingdom of God throughout countless ages is bound up with man, and if the kingdom of Satan, with all that it means, is bound up with man! Well might the question be asked, "What is man, that thou makest mention of him?" What a lot there is in man!

Well then, no wonder there is a big battle for man. No wonder that there was a terrific, universal, eternal battle fought out on the ground of the soul of "the man Christ Jesus". But what a victory! A victory for all time, and for eternity, and for all the universe; a victory for all God's purpose. What a victory! And if it was of such a range and of such consequence, then how bitter it must have been. Who will ever know the depth of that conflict, the awfulness of that darkness? We can never exaggerate what the Son of God went through. Thus the rights of God have become eternally incarnated in "the man Christ Jesus". He not only came in the flesh, He came in flesh. I want you to notice that in John's epistle. Strike out the word "the"; it is not in the original at all. It is not that He just came and took flesh form to serve a purpose and then abandoned it; He is yet the Man. "There is... one mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus." You notice in the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself, or presents Himself, as "I Jesus". Jesus is always the title of His humanity, and here in a Man the rights of God are embodied, incarnated, secured triumphantly.

Satan's Counterfeit of Divine Purpose

But still Satan has his kingdom in fallen man. He has his kingdom, has his connection, and is getting what he desires. But this is the point: he is also steadily moving and working toward a concentrated embodiment and incarnation of his rights; and so, as we saw in our previous meditation, we have these three stages in John's first epistle, concerning Antichrist. We have Anti christ as a spirit: "Every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the antichrist." Then it is said, "...there are many antichrists." That is Antichrist corporate. (You will see that links us with the church on the other side.) Then we have the definite statement, "This is the antichrist..." So that it is all heading up into one supreme incarnation and embodiment of the spirit of Antichrist. If you have any doubt about some of the things I have just been saying with reference to relatedness, read again 2 Thess. 2:3-9: "...whose coming is according to the working (energising) of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders". According to the energising of Satan! Antichrist is energised by Satan, just as the Christ (as is the meaning of the

anointing) is energised by the Spirit of God. Just as the church, which is His Body, is energised and actuated by the Holy Spirit, so the Antichrist is energised and actuated by Satan.

What is the first object of Antichrist? It is, as John says, to nullify Jesus Christ. I want you to have this; this is precious. 1 John 4:3, "Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus...". The margin renders it, "Every spirit which annulleth Jesus". There is some dispute over the actual words in the original, but I think the significance of this marginal rendering is altogether in favour of its being the more correct one -- annuls or nullifies Jesus, rules Him out, discounts Him, puts Him aside. You look at the context, and you see, of course, that it is not merely a question of Jesus as an historic figure, but of who Jesus is; that is the point at issue. The context makes that perfectly clear, and you will see by the other references to Antichrist in this letter that it is a question of the Father and the Son. The second chapter very plainly shows that to be the occasion. Now, it is an annulling of who Jesus is, that is the first work of Antichrist. Just what does this mean? Well, Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. That is who Jesus is, God manifest in the flesh. To nullify all the meaning of the incarnation is the first object of Antichrist. Why? What are the elements of that?

Well, obviously it is first of all God reacting to the fall, God reacting to what Satan did at the beginning, God coming out in Christ. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." It was God manifest in the flesh, reacting to all that had come about through Satan's interference. Very well then, the only way to counter that is to nullify who Jesus is. But it goes further. It is not only the annulling of God in His reaction, but it is the annulling of the issue that is bound up with that divine reaction: and what is this but the heirship and kingdom of God's man. Man is the heir: the kingdom is his inheritance. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." We are "heirs of God... joint heirs with Christ." "Thou madest him (man) to have dominion." The man after God's own heart is the heir of all things; the kingdom is his inheritance. Well, to annul Jesus is but another way of saying, "This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." Therefore, nullify Jesus.

Now perhaps you wonder why I was so happy a moment ago in calling your attention to this. It is because of what we see in 2 Thess. 2:8: "Then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume (or annul) with the breath of his mouth." Antichrist's first business is to annul Jesus, and the last thing that happens is that, in the appearing of Jesus, he himself is annulled. That is great, is it not? That is divine reaction.

The Outworking of Divine Purpose in the Church

Where in all this does the church come in? The church is Christ's Body: we are members of Christ. In this connection we have that utter statement by the Spirit through Paul, "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is the Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). The article is there in the original, "the Christ". Now, we have seen that Antichrist is a spirit: Antichrist is also a corporate body. There are many antichrists, many incarnations under one spirit; an imitation of God's one Body, all heading up to one great supreme manifestation. "So also is the Christ": a Body, many members, and every member of that Body is called into the purpose of God for the incarnating of His rights, in vital union with Christ as the Head of the Body. So that the church is chosen in Him before the foundation of the world to be the ultimate vessel and instrument in which all God's inheritance is secured; to use Paul's words, to be "the fulness of him that filleth all in all" -- God's inheritance in the saints. Beloved, this explains exactly what is happening to saints; and oh, that saints recognised this one thing a little more clearly, that the supreme thing with God now is not what they do for Him, their work in this world in the sense of activities and enterprises, but the supreme thing with God now

is their conformity to the image of God's Son, the inworking into the saints of that which has been made perfect in Christ. "He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one" (Heb. 2:11), and that which has been consummated in the Head, in that representative, first-begotten Man of this new race, has to be wrought into every one of His members. That involves, on the one hand, triumph over Antichrist as a principle, as a law, as a nature, as a power, and, on the other hand, the manifestation of God's glory: and that is what is going on.

I said that I wish we recognised more clearly how much more important it is to God that we shall be conformed to the image of His Son than that we should be doing all sorts of things for Him. We seem to put the greatest value upon what we are doing, so much so that, if the Lord cuts us off from the doing and shuts us up to testings and trials in an inward way, where every divine virtue is made necessary, and all our own virtues are proved worthless, we revolt and want to be doing something.

Let us get out of this and do something, be at work! It is so often the case when we are laid aside in suffering, and the Lord is trying to produce something more of Christ: patience, forbearance, love, sympathy. We want to get out of that quickly, to be doing something. That is not doing anything! Yet it is true that, when the Lord really gets a purchase upon a life, He occupies far more of His time with the changing of that life into His own likeness, than He does in trotting that life around the world doing all sorts of things.

What is it that God is doing? He is preparing the church for dominion. He is making the kingdom an inward thing, before it is an outward thing. He is doing a secret thing, before displaying it to a wondering universe. He is building Christ within unto the day of the manifestation of Jesus Christ. If you doubt that, there is one Scripture that will prove conclusive: "...when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1:10); not by all them that believe, but in all them that believe.

That is the day of the manifestation of the sons of God; not the children of God, but the sons of God. Upon that deepest, and, from our standpoint, most difficult work, God is diligently and painstakingly engaged now. If Paul is a type for the dispensation, the most fruitful part of Paul's life was not when he was running about the world, but when he was shut up in prison and wrote letters. The greatest revelation that has come to us of Jesus Christ has come through those final letters of the imprisonment.

We are taken back into the "before times eternal", taken through the ages, taken on to the ages of the ages; we are given marvellous unveilings. The wonder of those prayers of Paul is enough to leave us breathless. "That ye may know what is the hope of his calling..." (Eph. 1:18). Sit down with that. That is only one of the petitions. We can gather an enormous amount in that fragment, "the hope of his calling". But that is only one thing, and upon that there follows, "what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints..."

Think of that! David would say, Selah! Then further we have, "and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all..." (Eph. 1:19-21). Three fragments of one prayer! Can you comprehend that, can you fathom that? What a revelation! What a concentrated essence of divine thought! But Paul had to be locked up and stopped from all outward activity for that revelation to come through. Yes, I believe he had to be.

The Reversal of the Antichrist Principle by the Cross

I am going to close by reminding you again of one thing in connection with this that is going on in us. I would put it in this way, that God is seeking, definitely, deliberately, persistently, to undercut Antichrist in us, by working out the principle of the cross; because, until the cross has been wrought into us, we are energised by a soul-life with which the adversary is linked up. Our reason is so energised. All is just soul activity in the mind and the reason. The natural man is altogether estranged from God and cannot know the things of the Spirit of God, and thus all the reasonings of the natural man fall short of God's thought.

It is, therefore, antichrist in principle. Something has happened: it cannot get through to God; it is missing the way all the time. Yet men are bringing the power of their own reason to bear upon the things of God and the result is rationalism and the nullification of Jesus. Is not that the fruit of rationalism; the nullification of Jesus, as to who He is? Even in the realm of religion Antichrist operates, through an uncrucified human reason taking the place of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

In every way, not only in the reason, but in the emotion, in the will of the natural man, God is seeking to undercut the principle of Antichrist. And even the children of God can lapse grievously and lamentably there, so that in spirit that principle can get an advantage; because the spirit of Antichrist has such a range, from that of simple and ignorant desires or acts, right on to the positive expression of a fully developed policy, a creed, a philosophy, or a science. That is what we are in today.

The spirit of Antichrist has produced a policy, a creed, a philosophy of life, a science. You see it developing in the world; the potentialities and destiny of man, man as he is, without God, without the necessity for God, without a need for the Spirit of God, without any need for regeneration. Man -- what a wonderful creature he is, and what he can do! That is the creed that today is rising and gaining power in this world. The whole trend is towards the gathering of the dominion of this world under a few supermen, and then heading up into the one.

It is a conception of man as having all resources in himself, the root of the matter in himself, and all that turned into a creed, and into a policy. That is where it ends; but, beloved, it begins very often in something very simple and it very often manifests itself in the simple or ignorant desires or acts. In one case that very thing leads to murder, in the case of Cain. It is all one spirit, one principle. You see Cain set aside the blood, the atonement, the need of a death by substitution.

All that the Christ means for reunion with God, Cain set aside, and brought in his own works, his own resources, his own potentialities, and thought that God could be communicated with on that basis. That is the spirit of Antichrist, and when that met the judgment of God, it issued in murder; that is, when it was found that God rejected that, the spirit of Antichrist went out in murder.

You say that is very terrible; no saint would ever be caught there. I am not thinking that you are likely to go and literally slay some brother because of this thing. But the principle and the spirit is this, that some child of God, some servant of God, some Christian worker, begins to assert himself and to employ his own resources and strength and wisdom in the things of God, and, coming sooner or later to a deadlock, finding that is not getting through and the blessing of God is not there, a spirit of resentment and bitterness rises into the heart and someone is going to suffer for that, some simple child of God is going to come under the lash for that. We see it. This false assertion will at some time or other involve other people in malice, in hatred, in a spirit of murder. If you cannot accept that, let me remind you of David. Yes, David was a saint; David was a man of God, David knew the Lord from his childhood. But you remember that painful, that terrible, tragic episode in David's life when he numbered Israel. Even Joab, that carnal man,

saw the danger and pleaded with him not to do it. But no, in strength of will he put Joab aside. "I have made up my mind to do this; let it be done." It was done as he desired, and then the angel of the Lord said, "Choose one of three things, famine, war, or pestilence." A sword of judgment was unsheathed, and the scourge went over the land: the inhabitants of Israel were mown down by pestilence, till David, heart-broken, cried to the Lord: "O my Lord, I am the responsible one. What have these sheep done? Let your wrath be turned against me." That was a terrible occasion. Why? What was wrong with numbering Israel? For one thing, the numbering of Israel had always been according to the state of redemption. They were only numbered on redemption ground, that is, regarding their value to God as redeemed ones. That is the only valuation that ever rests upon anything; what they are to God as redeemed ones. David had taken no account of the shekels of the sanctuary, the redemption money. What he was after was to know his own resources of man-power, how great a kingdom he had. That is Antichrist in principle. A saint is trapped and caught in a snare with most tragic consequences. How necessary it is then to walk in the Spirit. How necessary it is for the Lord to keep the cross operating against this flesh, lest ambition arise, self-assertiveness, strength of nature; and all that is Satan's ground, on which he encamps: and to do what? To dishonour the Lord, take His rights from Him, and that through the saints.

One of the greatest tragedies is that the church has served Satan's purpose so well, because it is not a crucified church. Oh, there must be a subjective state of circumcision, if He is to get His end and have the glory. I mean subjective state of circumcision, circumcision which is of the heart, which Paul says is the putting away of the whole body of the flesh. Well, you see, Antichrist moves a bit nearer to us. We have only thought of Antichrist as some person arising at some future date according to prophecy, and of certain things happening. Yes, quite true, but John says Antichrist in the first place is a spirit, and then he says that Antichrist is constituted a corporate body. This latter is Satan's imitation of the Body of Christ: a corporate thing by one spirit, in order to bring in his kingdom, to bring in his man. When that man comes in and has his short season of reigning, dominion, it will be a very terrible and very real one, as is made quite clear in the Book of Revelation. But the matter comes nearer than prophecy, and I think that any prophecy which has no immediate spiritual application has missed its object. Prophecy has to come right home to us now. Antichrist is very near to the nature of every one of us.

Well now, what is to be the issue of all this? It must bring us at once to the point where the Lord Jesus started: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God"; "I delight to do thy will"; "Not My will, but thine, be done." In a word, it is abandonment to the Lord; not abandonment to the Lord for service, in order to be used, that is, not abandonment to the Lord for blessing, to get anything, but just abandonment to the Lord for His glory in any way in which He sees He can get it. All that matters, or should matter, is that the Lord is getting the glory. If by my doing nothing the Lord can get glory, all right; or if the Lord wants me to go at great cost to the ends of the earth and can get glory in that way, all right. It is not whether it is here or there, this or that; the consequences do not matter. The thing that matters is that the Lord is getting what He is after in me. That is the spirit of the Christ, and anything other than, or contrary to that is Antichrist in spirit.

Now you understand what the Body of Christ is, and is for, and what the Lord is seeking to do in it. Well, that brings it right out of the realm of mere doctrine, teaching, theory, and makes it an immediately practical thing, and I trust it will be fruitful in us at this time.

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