

# Born of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The new birth is a Divine intervention in human life that brings into us an inherent potency and power to overcome the world, making us fundamentally and constitutionally different from all other beings.*

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 21:27, Luke 1:35, John 1:12-13, John 3:6, John 16:33, Romans 12:17, 2 Corinthians 4:2, 1 Peter 4:17, 1 John 3:1-2, 1 John 5:4

**Topics:** "Divine Intervention", "New Birth"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound nature of being 'Born of God,' drawing parallels between the unique birth of Jesus and the new birth of believers. He highlights that the new birth is a divine intervention, not a result of human effort, and that it brings about a fundamental difference in the believer's nature, making them children of God. Sparks warns against the dangers of misunderstanding this transformation and encourages believers to recognize their inherent power to overcome the world, as well as the inevitable spiritual antagonism they will face. He concludes by stressing the importance of grace, simplicity, and submission in the process of spiritual growth, using Mary as an example of the vessel for divine intervention.

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## Transcript

"The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

"As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).

"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world" (I John 5:4).

In bringing these Scriptures together, that about the birth of the Lord Jesus and those about the birth of believers, I am not failing to recognize a great difference. One has always to safeguard this matter of the Person of the Lord Jesus. He was Very God of Very God; 'God manifest in the flesh'; 'Emmanuel, God with us'. In that He stands alone, unique; there is not another like Him. His birth was different, even, from the new birth of every child of God: it was different in kind; it was different in degree.

#### The Correspondence Between Christ's Birth And Ours

Nevertheless, there are factors in His own birth which constitute the nature of the birth of every believer. Deity apart - Godhead left with Him - there is yet something in these passages about the believer's new birth that corresponds to His birth. It is to some of these features that we are now to give attention. You will not confuse the two, I trust, at any point, on that matter of His uniqueness. At the same time, and on the other side, I do trust that you will be able to recognize what John said, that that which is true in Him is, in its own realm, and after its own kind, also true in us (I John 2:8). And, in this matter of the birth and the new life of the children of God, we shall be able to understand better if we recognize some of these features in the birth of the Lord Jesus. For His birth does, as I have said, hold all the factors which go to make up a true child of God.

#### The New Birth A Divine Intervention

The first thing, which is quite patent, is that the birth of the Lord Jesus was a Divine intervention in human life: and that is true of the new birth of every believer; it is nothing less than a Divine intervention in human life. We do not stay with all the minute details of Christ's birth, but it is perfectly clear in this way, that out from Heaven there came a Heavenly Visitant, making an announcement; and, from the same heaven, the Holy Spirit came into human life and intervened, and did something - something that we shall see, I trust, in a minute. The point is that here is a breaking in of Heaven into human life.

Perhaps you wonder why this should be stressed, and given such emphasis. But let us be clear that that is not what is very largely conceived and taught about the new birth. Even with the best intentions the new birth is so often placed to man's side - it is what man does. Man has got to do something - either raise his hand, or make some statement, or sign some document, or make a decision, make a profession, accept certain things that are being stated, and so on. Perhaps such things are meant to open the way for God; but, even if we allow that, people are often left with this idea that it is something they have done. They have accepted Christ; they have accepted Christianity; they have made a gesture; they have done something; they have become Christians by what they have done, by their own act.

#### Born Not Of The Will Of Man But Of God

Now, being fully generous, and not critical at all, it is very important to recognise that the new birth never necessarily takes place by anything that we do. It never really is consummated by some act of our own will, or of our own desire, or of our own mind - not at all. 'Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man...' - the man being the case in point, or the other man who would seek to bring it about - '... but OF GOD'. If God does not intervene in human life and in human history; break right in, as it were, from Heaven; if the Holy Spirit does not overshadow, and Himself produce that new life, that is not new birth; there is something lacking.

You are wondering, perhaps, why this message. I will tell you why. With a growing concern - and concern is a weak word - as one moves about the world touching Christians and Christianity, the one thing that is borne in upon one's heart, overwhelmingly, sometimes almost to the point of despair, is the need that those who bear the name of 'Christian' should know the real nature of what it means to be a child of God. They seem, so many of them, to have taken on something from the outside, by their own volition, choice and act, and so many have really not the faintest idea of what it means to be 'born' out from Heaven. And in all the needed work of recovery, in every department of Divine purpose at this time, this is one of the needs - a recovery of the real meaning of new birth, of what it is to be born from above, to be a child of God.

### The Coming Test Of Our Standing

I have sometimes wondered - maybe wrongly - whether the enemy is not very pleased with putting countless multitudes of people in a false Christian position, because he knows the day is coming when the winds will carry them away; and for a Christian to fall away is a greater reproach to the Lord perhaps than anything. Oh, how we do need to get our roots down; how we need to be grounded in the truth, and in the truth of our very nature as children of God. That is why we come to this message. The day is coming when our standing as Christians will be deeply and terribly tested - there will be a great shaking. The Prophet Ezekiel is very up-to-date; I believe these words will have perhaps a larger fulfilment in a not very distant future, than they had when Ezekiel uttered them: 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn... until He come whose right it is' (Ezekiel 21:27). There is going to be a great overturning of what is not true - of what is false. This judgment must begin at the House of God. So you will understand this present emphasis.

We begin here. As with Christ, so it must be with every child of God: they must, at the very beginning of their Christian life, be the result of a Divine intervention in human history, in their own human history, in their human life. But that is the great basic fact. Thank God that there are many who understand that, and know what it means. They are able to say: 'God intervened in my life; God broke into my life; God came out, even, as it were, from Heaven, into my life.' If we have the experience, we know the truth; but it is sometimes helpful to have it defined. This is it: When you and I were saved, God broke out of Heaven - nothing less than that. It was as though God Himself came out of His Heaven into a human life; broke into its world, and interrupted its course of history. Things could never be the same after that.

### Not Only A Newness, But A Difference

That is perfectly clear, is it not, in the case of the Lord Jesus? An angel indicated this intervention of the Holy Spirit from heaven - and it is no less than that in principle and fact with each new birth. But the next thing that is clear in the case of the Lord Jesus is that this was something different; it was not only something new that had not happened before, but it was something different. This birth is different from all other births. We cannot dwell too much upon the details of the account, but that is what it amounts to. The angel made that perfectly clear, and Mary knew it; that was her problem, her perplexity, her wonder - How? how? It was the perplexity of Nicodemus, his great question - How? This contains a profound mystery which constitutes a deep, a mighty difference. This is not the common thing; this is not the usual thing; this you cannot find, except here; it is different.

And that which results from this intervention contains this fundamental difference in its very constitution. Oh, that all who bear the name of Christian, all who are children of God, were fully alive to this! I think this is where the weakness lies with so many, and it will not hurt us, even though we know it well, to be

reminded of it, to face it again. It is something that we need to keep with us in our consciousness continually. Our new birth is different from all other births, and by new birth we are made fundamentally and constitutionally different from all other beings. You know it perhaps in some measure in experience. The birth of the Lord Jesus was so patently a different kind of birth. It was not in the usual natural way; nature had nothing to do with it; man's will, choice, decision, had nothing to do with it. And 'that which is born shall be HOLY': can you find THAT in nature anywhere? It is of a different kind and a different order of being - that which is, in its very essence, HOLY. That is the contrast with every other creature and every other birth. The Psalmist cries: 'I was born in sin, shapen in iniquity' - and that is true of us all.

### The New Birth Brings Into A Heavenly Kingdom

Now when I say that that principle holds good in every new birth, it needs this explanation. We know quite well that it is not our bodies that are born again; therefore they are not holy. We know that it is not our souls that are born again: if our souls are our minds - our reasoning powers, and our emotions, and our power of choice - well, they are not different. It is the trouble of our whole Christian life that we still have so much of that which is not holy with us, in mind and heart and will. It is the realm of our conflicts, our battles, our sorrows. Nevertheless, something, somewhere, has happened, something has come in, that is not of that kingdom at all, that is of another heavenly kingdom; and THAT, which is born of God, is holy. Do you know that? Even if it has never been explained or defined to you, you know it in experience. You know that there is that within you that revolts against sin and unholiness; you know that one of the great blessings of your life is an inward power of reaction when things are not right, not good. As we go on, we do become more and more sensitive to evil, to the sin of this world. Our peril may be sometimes to accept its presence; to take it just because it is there.

Now, we are in a world like that, but nevertheless it is true of every child of God that there is that feeling about it - something of a tremendous inward revolt and reaction to sin, to evil, to unholiness. What a safeguard that is! what a gift of God it is to have that! God forbid that ever we should lose our sensitiveness in that realm, or cease to be moved by the sinfulness of sin.

### The Need For Sensitiveness To This Difference

Beware, young people, that you do not blunt the edge of your new birth, by accommodating yourself to this world's ways, its forms and customs and acceptances, and taking it all as something inevitable. Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you very sensitive to sin, very sensitive to evil; to keep alive this DIFFERENCE, which is your birthright - a part of your very birth. If you are a true child of God, you know something about the difference, as you go out into the world, not only in the matter of sin, but in all kinds of ways. You are different; something has happened to you.

At some point, this difference should have become quite clear to you, so that you know it - not just because you are told, not because your parents are Christians and do not like you doing certain things and you have got a sort of conscience which is your parents' really, and not your own - but in your own heart, in your own self, you have got this consciousness of being DIFFERENT, fundamentally different, from those who are not the Lord's. If that is not true as to a crisis in your life - for all do not have a violent breaking in as in the case of Paul on the road to Damascus - nevertheless, there has to arrive at some point this sense: 'I am a child of God; I am different; something has happened; a great difference has been made deep down somewhere; I am not the same; and I am not the same as those who are not the BORN AGAIN children of God.'

But, also, it is the nature of spiritual growth that that difference becomes more and more accentuated. It is the thing that is making this world more and more a 'strange and foreign' land to us - it is not our home, not our place; and conversely, 'making heaven' truly more and more to be our home. Now, where heaven is I cannot tell you; but I do know this, that, whatever heaven means, that is where I belong. And more and more I am discovering that I belong there, and that I do not belong here.

### The Divide Of The New Birth

I speak to young Christians particularly, that this is the very nature of your new birth, that more and more it must be like that. And do not be afraid of it; do not rebel against it; accept it. It is a proof of something, of the greatest thing that God is doing in human history - breaking in to make this tremendous difference. It is on that ground that the Great Divide is going to be set up. We get our mental pictures of the judgment; well, we will not argue as to the material side of that. But I do know that this judgment has already begun, and it is going on (I Peter 4:17), and the finality of it will be here: that there are those who belong here, and there are those who belong there, and there is no mistaking to which realm these people belong. The great divide has been made. The Lord is seeking to bring that about now. But oh, the tragedy of many Christians, and many young Christians, trying to bridge that gap - to hold those two things together; instead of allowing the gap to widen, whilst they stand on the side where they are moving further and further away from a judged world.

### An Inherent Power To Overcome

The next thing that comes out in this matter of Christ's birth, and the birth of the children of God, is that by this birth there comes into us an inherent potency, an inherent power. Now, the Lord Jesus said: 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33b). And John says: 'Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world' (I John 5:4). In Christ, in the born anew child of God, there is an inherent power and virtue which is going to overcome the world. It is there in the very nature of things, in the very constitution of the new life: it is going to overcome. There may be failure - there may be frequent failure; there may be falling in the battle; there may be some casualties; there may be some dark patches; there may even be some going away. But it is a most remarkable thing, and a most heart-ravishing thing, to see how this life persists.

I sometimes have to smile. People tell me that they are going to give it all up; they cannot go on any longer; and off they go, and you do not see them for a little while. But they are back again. And that happens a hundred and one times. How many people have said to me, and quite recently, 'I am giving it all up; I am finished; I am going.' And as far as they knew themselves, they meant it. But they cannot do it; they are just like moths round the lamp - they cannot keep away; back they come, and, yes - crestfallen and ashamed! You know, if it were natural, they would not do it; I would not do it; for very face saving, I would not come back again, show my face again after that. But there is something else, something more, that is stronger than our shame, stronger than our self-reproach, stronger than our self-despair, stronger than our constant delinquency: there is a persistence that brings us up, and brings us back. It is the history of most children of God. 'That which is born of God overcometh the world.'

It was true of Jesus. How did He overcome? Not by physical force; not by resolve of will, not by power of brain and mind and argument. He never did bring the world under His feet in those ways. By sheer force of Divine character; by the kind of Man He was; by the Divine nature in Him, He overcame. And so, with every child of God: in so much lesser degree than in His case, perhaps; so much slower in expression and

manifestation; nevertheless it is there. Every true child of God knows quite well that, had it not been for that inward grip of something, or Someone, not themselves, they would not be where they are today, still seeking the things of God. No! It is inherent in that which is born of God to overcome!

### The Inevitable Antagonism Against Heaven

The next thing, of course, is the inevitable antagonism. It was not very long after the birth of the Lord Jesus before it broke out. The kingdom of Satan knew who He was, and what He was. That kingdom had many a powerful instrument and means at hand, and Herod was one such. We are not to know what happened during the thirty years of His boyhood and young manhood - that is passed over. It would not be surprising if there were many narrow escapes even then. But we do know that, from the moment of His stepping out from His anointing at Jordan, to take up this work of bringing 'the other sheep', bringing the other sons to glory, all hell was on His track. Whenever He came into a place, the atmosphere became charged with antagonism. We perhaps know something of those atmospherics, but how infinitely worse it must have been for our Lord, with His very sensitive spirit, to have known this terrible hatred and animosity of the evil powers toward Him, and working through men. Oh, the constant, almost monotonous repetition: 'They sought to destroy Him... they sought to destroy Him... they sought how they might destroy Him.' That was the atmosphere in which He lived. Why?

Well, it might be put down to many causes, but the fundamental cause was this: He belonged to Heaven, and the destiny of the Heavenly One and the heavenly ones is to possess this world and govern it, by the final abolishment of its prince and his whole kingdom. And they know. Said they: "I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). And they know every one who is holy, in that sense. There is an inevitable antagonism in the spiritual realm. Often it cannot be traced to any physical, material, or temporal cause, or to people; it is just there in the air. We know something of the antagonisms of a spiritual kind that the Christian has to meet in this world, without provoking deliberately or knowingly or really, by words or deeds. When you are born again, somehow or other the consciousness comes alive that you are a speckled bird, a marked man or woman. And so John says about these that are born of God: 'For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not' (I John 3: 1b). It 'KNOWETH' us not. There is a deeper meaning in that word 'knoweth' than just being aware of us, knowing who we are. It is being able to place us; being able to explain us, being able to trace us, as to what we are and where we came from. To the world there is something about us that is inscrutable; and that constitutes an antagonism.

Let me appeal once again to young Christians. Do not try to cut out that kind of antagonism. Be careful not to give unnecessary offence; try to 'commend yourself to every man's conscience in the sight of God' (II Cor. 4:2b); do things honourably before all men (Rom. 12:17b); give them no occasion for accusing you fairly as a Christian. But when you have done all, do not think that you will not meet this antagonism - if you are a child of God you will. You just cannot avoid it. Do not try to eliminate it; recognize that this is a part of the very fact, a wonderful evidence of the fact that you are in the company of Jesus Christ. The world knew Him not; therefore it knows us not.

### The New Birth Is All Of Grace

In conclusion, let us think for a few minutes of Mary herself, because she is characteristic in some ways of the vessel of the new birth. To whom, to what, upon what ground, will the new birth take place? Here there is a correspondence between the birth of the Lord Jesus and the new birth of every child of God. We have, of course, to recognize the Divine sovereignty of eternal election: 'chosen in Christ before the foundation

of the world'. Let us accept that, and leave it for the moment. We come into the operation and activity of God in time. Upon what ground in time, in our own lives, will this thing come to us? Are there some grounds, are there some occasions, are there some conditions which will always obtain where God comes in in this way?

Yes, always. One of the beautiful things about Mary, as characteristic of a vessel of new birth, was that which the angel said to her: 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured of God.' The margin perhaps gets nearer to the true meaning: 'Hail, thou that art endued with grace'. That is the beginning of every new birth - ENDUED WITH GRACE. If there was one person in that little country in those days who was aware - and this comes out so clearly - of the wonder of this, the condescension of this, and her own unworthiness of it, it was Mary. 'How should this thing be?' Before this wonderful thing can happen to us, we have often to be brought to the place where the only word that suits the situation in our consciousness is GRACE; it is God's grace; it is all of grace. 'Thou art endued with grace'.

That is simple, I know, but that is the beginning of everything for the Christian life, for this wonderful miracle of God: that we must see and be deeply impressed, as she was, with our own utter worthlessness in this matter: that this could never be to us if we, in ourselves, in our own state, were the deciding factor. It is only God's infinite mercy, His infinite grace. That is a humble and a contrite spirit, and God is with that. But the new birth is but the beginning. This which is of God and of Heaven, has to grow and grow; more and more there is to be an increase of Him; but it is all on the same basis - the emptying of ourselves, the pouring out of all that is selfhood, to make way for the grace of God.

#### Submissiveness And Simplicity

The next thing about Mary is her simplicity and her submissiveness. There is something very beautiful about her simplicity, is there not? We are often too complicated about all these things. We make the Christian life far too complicated - projecting our mentalities and our arguments, our contentions, and our demands for explanation, and what-not - and we are standing in our own light as we do so. The Lord cannot get on; that is all rubbish in the way. He needs a heart like Mary's (and I am not setting up Mary to be worshipped): a heart that is simple, in this sense, that there is nothing argumentative, querulous, awkward, about it. It is an open heart: perplexed, it is true; not understanding; wondering how it can be, and saying so. Nevertheless, because of the simplicity, honesty, purity of her heart, she arrived at this: 'Be it unto me according to Thy word' - absolute submission, even to the mystery, and what it would involve. The trouble with so many of us is that we are so slow in our submission, our surrender, our giving way, our letting go. We will argue; we will demand an explanation. We go round and round this eternal circle, getting nowhere, because we will not let go - we just will not let go; and so we come back to the point from which we started a thousand times. Mary put her whole life into this: 'Be it unto me according to Thy word'. And the angel departed. That was what he was working toward.

It involved Mary in suffering - it involved her in suffering immediately. And then, forty days after the birth, Simeon told her: 'A sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed'. I think there is something there that is very helpful. When the Cross is at work in a life, people begin to betray themselves; their thoughts begin to accuse, to make charges; to say, This is because of so and so.... When someone is having a bad time, thoughts come out: people divulge what they are thinking and feeling about the one concerned - some are sympathetic and some antagonistic. 'A sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.' It was necessary that men should show themselves, show where they stood, on that day of the Cross; Mary's suffering was a part of

that.

This may seem to us something of a mystery. But the point is that this kind of thing that happened to her, and which happens to us, involves us in suffering. It involves us in the offence of the Cross; it involves us in much misunderstanding, even much ostracism. The angel left her. She knew what it meant then. But later on Simeon told her what was coming, along the line of this child. What it amounts to is this: that to be a child of God is no ordinary thing. It is something unusual, something different, something of God. It is the result of an intervention of God from heaven.

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