

Christ Crucified

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the meaning of Christ crucified, highlighting the undercutting of a false man to make way for a true man, and the reproduction of Christ through death and resurrection.

Scripture: Psalm 40:8, Mark 15:34, Luke 22:42, John 12:24, John 14:6, 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, 1 Corinthians 15:45, 2 Corinthians 5:16, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "New Creation", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Christ's crucifixion as the pivotal moment that undercuts the false man, making way for the true man in accordance with God's design. He explains that knowing Christ goes beyond mere fleshly understanding, highlighting that the essence of Christ is found in His sacrifice on the Cross, which represents both the dismissal of the false humanity and the introduction of a new creation. Sparks elaborates on the necessity of the Cross in the believer's life, asserting that true reproduction of Christ within the Church can only occur through the continuous experience of death and resurrection. He calls for a recognition of the corporate nature of the Church, which is to be a living body that embodies Christ, rather than an organized institution. Ultimately, the sermon underscores the transformative power of the Cross in shaping believers into vessels of Christ's life and purpose.

Transcript

When we were thinking about this matter in its wider range of the second man, the last Adam, our key phrase from Scripture was 1 Cor. 15:45 - "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." Then we proceeded to be occupied with the uniqueness of the Son of Man. We added to that 2 Cor. 5:16 - "Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more" - implying that Christ has to be known in another way than after the flesh.

Now we move on to the third phase, and we add another well-known passage from 1 Cor. 2:1,2:-

"And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the mystery of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

The meaning of Christ? - Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The Undercutting of a False Man

Although we have not, by a very great way, covered the meaning, for ourselves individually and for the Church, of His incarnation and earthly life, we have to move on and come anew to the meaning of Christ in the terms of His Cross - again something far beyond the possibility of our compassing within a short time, and of necessity to be looked at perhaps in only one particular; and that is, that the Cross of our Lord Jesus was the undercutting of a false man to make way for a true man. We have seen how that true man was brought in, and there is so very much more contained in those statements of His which, on the face of them, seem so simple and commonplace. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) - that comprehends everything for the new creation. The central word alone - "I am the truth" - quite clearly indicates that the truth is a Person, and not a system of teaching, not a philosophy; it is a Person. In other words, the Lord Jesus was saying, I am the true Man according to God's mind; all other men now are false to the Divine thought, a contradiction; there is one great, corporate, false man here; I am the truth as to God's idea about man, and I am the first of a great, comprehensive, corporate, true man, the one new man.

The true Man according to God's thought and intention was brought in in incarnation; He had grown up and lived His life by the Spirit; He had been tested, and through testing had been perfected; and then had been attested, and then placed, established, in heaven - there as the firstborn among many brethren, the standard and type and pattern to which the Spirit sent would work in a multitude of men. But, before that could be done, something had to take place to dispose of the false man, and so at a certain clearly defined point a new phase of His life was taken up - the phase of the Cross. That point is clearly discernible. Everything before had moved steadily up to one climax, and that was the climax of the transfiguration; the Man brought in, tested, perfected, and attested as seen in the Mount of Transfiguration. So far as He Himself was concerned, it finished on the Mount of Transfiguration. He is glorified, He is attested from heaven, He is clothed with heavenly glory; for Himself there is nothing whatever to stand between Him and entrance triumphantly into heaven; but He turns and comes down the Mount, and takes up this further phase of His meaning in relation to the false man, the man who is in a place from which he has to be removed to make room for the new corporate true man. Thus He descends and from that time He moves toward that point where He stands as the representative of the false man. On one side of His Cross, it is that. (There is another side, where He is offering Himself without spot unto God. There are two sides to the Cross.) But on this one side, He Who knew no sin was made sin in our stead that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2. Cor. 5:21). How utter that statement is! It goes deeper than any other statement about the Cross. You have the statement that He "bare our sins in his body upon the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24), but here it is more utter than that - He is made sin in our stead, meaning that we are sin: we not only have sins but we are sin: and He is made sin in our place (not inherently but representatively). The other half of the statement bears that out in its own way - "that we might become the righteousness of God in him"; not that we might receive as upon us the righteousness of God, but that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He is the righteousness of God, but not only as a virtue, as a characteristic, He is the righteousness of God, "That we might become the righteousness of God in him" - that is the statement, an utter statement. He was made sin for us. He therefore stands in His Cross as representing the false man, and comes under the stroke of Divine judgment, dismissal, cancellation: He is put away. If we want to see and know what God's attitude is toward ourselves and this creation ultimately if we are not found in Christ, listen - "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34.)

That is God's attitude toward us ultimately, outside of Christ. Now, thank God, it is the day of grace, and He is waiting, giving us a chance; but that is the actual and positive destiny of all those who have been in the way of being saved, and have refused, have not acted upon their opportunity; it is their destiny to know

what He knew in that awful moment, the most awful moment in the history of any man - God forsaking him. You may have intellectual problems and difficulties about eternity and eternal punishment, but do not try to resolve that into human understanding, even by using human language of age and ages and eternal ages - no human language can convey that. Taste God-forsakenness, and though it be, in time, but for an instant, it will grey you like an old man, it will put years upon you, it will be like an awful eternity. Lose God for an instant, and it is an awful thing. Well, in that moment, He stood in the place that we shall occupy if we are not found in Him. In order that we might not be in that position, the grace of God in Jesus Christ is available to save us from it. But the point is, He was swallowing up the destiny of the false man, swallowing it up in His own person to get that man out of the way, to make room for a man who would never know that at all. Oh, thank God we in Christ inherit the countenance of God for ever - no face turned away from any child of God abiding in Christ, because it was turned away from Him for that awful, that eternal, moment.

A Threefold Sequence in Experience

But we must keep closely to the specific thing we have in view. He has entered upon this new phase, taken up in His Cross the representation of the false man. While this is a clearly defined new phase, it is, after all, but the climax of underlying purpose, for this has been underlying the whole course of things - especially from that day when He came to the river Jordan to be baptized of John. All that was crowded into the three and a half final years of His life here was with the Cross underlying it. At His baptism He definitely and deliberately, in a figurative way, accepted the Cross, made the Cross the basis and background of everything to follow. There are two high peaks in the three and a half years with a deep valley between. The first is His baptism and the open heaven, and, looking across the valley, the second is the transfiguration. Those two things are joined and are in sequence. The baptism in figure is the Cross; the transfiguration, the glory that should follow. Between those two lies the deep valley of the temptation, immediately brought in after the baptism; the testing which, while it had a particular and peculiar form and inclusiveness at the end of those forty days in the wilderness, went on for the whole three and a half years in many other forms. The end of that valley is on the next high peak of transfiguration. I want you to see the sequence in those things; baptism, temptation, transfiguration. First the acceptance of the Cross; then the bringing home of what that acceptance meant continually through a lifetime, the working in of the Cross in principle, coming to know what He had accepted in a very practical way along a thousand lines; issuing in a glorious triumph so far as He personally was concerned, and heaven attesting Him as triumphant.

Now He is actually going to the Cross to make all that good for us, and possible of transmission to us; to bring us to the acceptance of the Cross; then through the working out of the Cross, unto that triumphant issue in glory. You see, this last phase is not for Himself, it is for us, every part of it. That threefold sequence is now taken up in the Cross to be made good for others, for His Church, for the one corporate new man. So we are immediately brought to the Cross of our Lord Jesus on one principle. It is the principle that came in to govern when He went to Jordan - that we, after nature, after our Adam relationship and life, are altogether put out. From the Jordan onward, in the more specific and positive way, with Him everything was - the Father. "Not my will, but thine" (Luke 22:42). "I delight to do thy will" (Psa. 40:8). Everything was referred to the Father, and Satan's effort all the way through those long three and a half years was to get Him in some way to act on His own ground, His own choice, according to His own judgment, after His own feelings: to allow Himself to direct and govern His Procedure, His activities: to do it of Himself independently, out from Himself; and the one persistent attitude and determination of

the Lord Jesus through the whole course was to refer everything to the Father, and to defer to the Father about everything. The governing thing was - "My Father"; it was "Father, Father," all the way through.

"No longer I, but Christ"

Now that is taken up for us in this way, that it is "no longer I, but Christ." I have been to Jordan, I have been to the Cross, I have been crucified, I have been put into a grave and have been dismissed, I have been ruled out, I have been cancelled, I am something not acceptable to God, I am false. It can only be Christ now; all must be referred to Him. In every thing, whether I understand or not, whether it is painful or otherwise, I must refer it to Him, I must defer to Him, I must judge nothing of myself, decide nothing myself, I must not come into the picture at all independently. It must be Christ, only Christ. That is the meaning of the Cross. I have gone out and He has come in - the new Man. I am on other ground, altogether other ground, and that Cross is the great divide.

It stands there to say "Finish" to a false man, and to bring in another. I am not going now to begin to analyse the old and the new man. I am simply stating facts. In His Cross the Lord Jesus has undercut a false man and ruled him out. We are that; dear friends, we are false, we are not the true thing that God meant when He made man. We are different, we are other, Satan has interfered and made man altogether other than God intended, and man is a false thing. But Satan is seeking to keep and preserve and propagate and maintain and minister to a false humanity. God has closed the door, in the Cross, upon us. Oh, that even Christians recognised this more! Here is the realm for our repentance - not only of our sinful life of the past, and our sins, whatever they may be: vices and evils and so on: but repentance that we have come in at all, that we have allowed so much of ourselves to come in, even for God. We cannot fail to be impressed with this, that inside of the whole system of Christianity the old man is sporting himself; he is making a name for himself, getting a reputation, gratifying himself, using the very service of God to bring himself into the limelight, to express himself, to realise himself; and that is the reason for the lost impact. "Can Satan cast out Satan?" (Mark 3:23). Can the old man cure the old man? Can the false make the false true? No! We have to get out of the way. We are getting in the way all the time. We are meeting the old man so much in one another. We see it, it almost obsesses us, we know it about ourselves. It is something about which we must continually repent, something we must continually repudiate, and ask the Lord to deal with in the power of the Cross - more and more to dismiss that which He has dismissed, to make good the mighty dismissal when He turned His face away, and said in effect, You are dismissed, I have done with you, you no longer stand before My face. Now, that refers not to a gross, vicious sinner, but to a man, a kind of humanity which has to go in order to make room for this other Man.

Why? While that is, in a sense, the negative side, it is very positive in its working, and we have stayed long with it because that is the realm of all Christian experience, right through the Christian life; it explains what the Lord is doing with us, and why He deals with us as He does. He is getting rid of us; He got rid of us, and He is getting rid of us. He is working out the riddance of this rubbish. The more we know of ourselves, the more we agree that it is rubbish; the more the Lord lets us see ourselves, the more we agree that the best thing is for us to be got rid of, and very often we would get rid of ourselves in the light of it. But, thank God, He has done this in the representative and inclusive Person of the Son of Man, and now He is working it out. We can trust Him to work it out. Do not put your hands on other people and try and work out their death - the Lord will do it. Do not put your hands on yourself and try to work out your own death; hand yourself over to the Lord, He will do it.

The Reproduction of Christ through Death and Resurrection

But as He does it, there is the other side. As the one is removed, the other comes in. The movement goes on in even balance, making room for the true man, for Christ. He went to the Cross to get us out of the way representatively and inclusively in Himself, but He also went there in order to make possible a reproduction of Himself as He was truly; not as He was made in that moment - sin: but as He was truly in Himself. I am not talking about His Deity; please leave that out of the question.

I am talking about the Son of Man. He went to the Cross in order to make possible a reproduction of Himself as He was as Son of Man, and reproduction remains inseparably upon the ground of the undercutting of the false man and the installing of the true. In other words, it remains upon the ground of death on the one side, and resurrection on the other. There has to be the continuous working of His death in us to get rid of that which is false and can never satisfy God or be used by God, that there may be a continuous working of resurrection to bring in more and more of Himself.

It is the way of the Lord's reproducing of Himself. We know that from the law of the grain of wheat - "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit" (John 12:24). But this for us is a thing which has repeated crises. I do not want to dishearten or discourage you, but I must say this, that these crises do not become less acute: they become deeper and deeper as we go on. Sometimes we think that we have touched bottom, and that we can never go lower, but we have lived to prove that we can go deeper yet, that there really is no bottom to this thing so far as this life is concerned.

Well, do not lose heart about that statement. I am trying to say this, that the Lord is out to bring in His Christ in ever-growing fulness, and in order to do that, room has to be made for Him by getting rid of the fallen man which is in His place. The meaning of Christ is that, for one thing - reproduction. What is the most reproductive, vessel and instrument of the Lord, reproductive of Christ? It is the most crucified vessel or instrument, the most dead to the old man, to the life of nature: that which has had taken from it its own competence in the most utter way, which has been brought most completely to the place where it has nothing in itself but everything in Him.

That is the most reproductive vessel; and do remember that the Lord is after a reproductive vessel. "It is not good that the man should be alone" said the Lord about the first Adam, and He says the same about the last Adam. So God made the woman, and she was called Eve - "because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). But that was within the limited realm of a certain life which was not eternal life, for they had not partaken of the Tree of Life to live for ever. Christ is the last Adam; the Church, His Eve, having taken of the Tree of Life, is His vessel of reproduction, and she comes in by way of the Cross.

It is after Calvary, that the Church comes in and becomes the Jerusalem which is above, which is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26), the vessel through which Christ reproduces Himself. But my point is this, that the Church which is really going to reproduce Christ is the Church which has been to the Cross, has come out of the Cross, and is continually coming out of the Cross. This is only saying in other words that the law of enlargement is the law of death and resurrection continually operating.

Oh, do we not know it in our own personal experience? It is true that any additional measure that we have of the Lord has come ever and always by some deeper experience and working out of our own undoing, our own dismissal.

And what is true of the individual will be true of any local company. It is possible for a local company to be put again and again ever more deeply into His death, and, as it is so, to be enlarged with spiritual

measure, and with Divine reproductiveness. Oh, that the whole Church were conformed to that law! What a different situation there would be today. In the beginning it was a crucified Church, and it rapidly multiplied, reproduced.

The Reproductive Vessel

(a) Corporate, Not Individual

Now, this introduces something perhaps beyond what we ought even to touch now, but let me hint this to you. This is why everything in the New Testament was upon a Body basis. By this I mean a Church basis. Nothing was individualistic, nothing merely personal; all was corporate, on a Body basis. Even Paul, the great Apostle, foreknown and chosen before his birth (Gal. 1:15) for his great ministry and having it announced to him right out of heaven by the glorified Lord Himself, has to be brought into the Church and to move out to that great work on Church ground, on Body ground, and everything has to be held on that basis. Why? - because it is the Church that is the Eve of Christ, the mother, the vessel through which Christ reproduces, and it is the Church which is born out of His death in His resurrection. You see a governing law, you have the clue to the increase, the enlargement that took place at the beginning. It was on that basis then; and the multiplication took place and the reproduction went on marvellously then because it was a well-crucified Church, and a well-resurrected Church in Christ, and it was moving on that basis all the time. Now, perhaps that is a little beyond what we ought to touch now, but it is worth noting.

(b) Organic, Not Organized

Let us come to the simple principle itself. Christ went to the Cross to dismiss the false man, to undercut him, to get him out of the way. We are that. Christ, when He died, not only took our sins and not only took us as sinners, as we would regard ourselves, but He took us as people to the Cross. We are so mixed up and tangled, that you cannot separate between us and our sins, you cannot get in between something called "us" and our sinfulness, and separate the two. It is necessary to get rid of the lot and bring in another man, and Christ is that other. God is working on that principle all the time. He is not trying - He never does try - to make us something new in ourselves, and by ourselves apart. His method is to bring Christ into us, and build up Christ in us; and as Christ is built up, we go out, because we have gone out in the thought of God. That is God's intention, made so clear - that Christ is to be all and in all. Do you want your life to be fruitful? You will have to die, you will have to know the Cross ever deepening in its work. That is the way of fruitfulness. It is a painful way, but we can reproduce only after our kind. Christ, has to reproduce after His kind. He will do it and He will do it through the Church. I see a lot more than I am trying to say about the place of Eve taken by the Church as Christ's vessel to reproduce Himself. One thing that I wish you could see is this, that the Lord's method of reproducing is not by machinery and organisation, but by a living Body which knows in a living way death and resurrection. Any kind of institution that has not been born out of a death in which the stricture of God against the flesh and the old nature has been registered is not going to reproduce after Christ's order. It may grow, it may get a great many adherents, it may become a great multitude, but it is something of the old creation, it cannot stand before God. It is "this great Babylon which I have built"; I am going to violate grammar and say, which "I" has built, and it will not stand. Babylon the Great will fall, but the new Jerusalem will rise at the fall of Babylon.

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