

# Christ Is the Great Spiritual Order

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Christ is the Great Spiritual Order, and the Church is measured according to Him, through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 40:3

**Topics:** "Spiritual Revelation", "The Church"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that Christ is the Great Spiritual Order, using Ezekiel's vision of the Man of brass as a symbol of righteous judgment and the standard for measuring the Church. He explains that the fullness of Christ, represented by the line of flax and the measuring reed, must be applied to the details of our lives and the Church. The sermon highlights the necessity of spiritual revelation to truly understand the Church as the Body of Christ, which is measured by Christ Himself. Sparks urges believers to behold, hear, and set their hearts on the truths revealed by the Holy Spirit, as only through this can they effectively present Christ to others. Ultimately, the message is that the Church's existence and function are defined by the measure of Christ within it.

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## Transcript

Yesterday morning we took a general view of this House which was shown to Ezekiel. This morning we shall begin to consider it more in detail. We are going to return to chapter forty, verses three and four:

And He brought me thither, and, behold, there was a Man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in His hand, and a measuring reed; and He stood in the gate. And the Man said unto me, Son of Man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel.

So we take another look at this Man of brass. You will remember that we noticed that the feet of the cherubims were of brass, and the feet of the Lord Jesus in the first chapter of the Revelation were of brass; and we said that brass in the Bible is a symbol of righteous judgment. This Man of brass stands at the gate, and that means that there is no way in for the unrighteous man. The man of the flesh cannot enter this gate. There is no place for the flesh in this House. It is only the Righteous Man who may come in here, and everything is going to be measured by the Righteous Man.

Let us take a look at the two instruments of measurement, and we note that there are two instruments of measurement. There is firstly the line of flax, and no measurement is given unto it. We are not told how long that line was, but we do know that it was used for the greater measurement. When we come later to the river in chapter forty-seven, it is not the rod but the line that is the instrument of measurement; and we find that that river becomes too deep for man. I think this clearly corresponds to what Paul said in the Letter to the Ephesians. There he spoke of "the love of Christ, which passes knowledge." We are here in the presence of something that is far greater than human measurement. If this Man does represent the Holy Spirit, as we have said, there is no measuring the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is without measure. But within that great fullness, there is the rod of measurement. There is that which brings the great fullness down to particular matters. So we have this measuring reed. These are two ways of measuring. One is what we may call the "measureless" Measure, the Measure that has no limit. That is the great fullness of the Spirit. The other is that which is brought down to things in everyday life. This rod was used for all the details of the House. Now I do not think it necessary to stay with that. We only note that there are two means of measuring. One, there is the great fullness of Christ; the other is that that fullness is brought down to the details of the House of God. I will just leave that with you because there is a lot in that.

We must remember this, that when we think of the fullness of the Spirit, or the fullness of Christ, we must not forget that that is going to be brought down to the details of our life. That is made perfectly clear in the Letter to the Ephesians. The first three chapters relate to the great fullness of Christ, that Unmeasured Fullness. Chapter four begins in this way: "I... beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called..." And then all the details are mentioned, husbands and wives, wives and husbands, masters and servants, servants and masters, children and parents, parents and children. You see, the Measuring Rod has come down to everyday life. We must not think in these great terms without realizing that the Lord is going to apply His measure to every detail. It is so easy to have these great ideas about the fullness of Christ, and to neglect the details. Every little thing must be measured by the same Spirit that measures the fullness of Christ. We must see that.

So here in Ezekiel is this Man. Let that "Man" represent the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit is speaking about the vast fullness of Christ and His House. The Holy Spirit is speaking about the vast fullness of the Life which flows out, and that same Holy Spirit comes to these very small details. It is the same Spirit, and, while He speaks of the greatness, He also points to the details. I do not think that there would be any value in our looking at the measurements of the rod. So we just pass on to the instructions that were given to the prophet.

Notice in chapter forty, verse four: "..The Man said unto me,

'Son of man,

BEHOLD with thine eyes,

and

HEAR with thine ears,

and

SET thine heart upon

all that I shall shew thee...

(Son of man),

DECLARE all that thou seest to the house of Israel."

Notice these words: "behold, hear, set thy heart, declare." Then, if you go over to chapter forty-three in verse ten, you have another part of the instructions: "Shew the House to the House of Israel." Now let us think about that for a minute.

Before we can present anything to other people, we ourselves must first know what we are going to present. The instructions to the prophet were very particular: 'Behold with thine eyes, hear with thine ears, and so on - i.e., give very careful attention to this whole matter!' You must have a very clearly defined apprehension of what you are going to show to the people. You yourselves must see this object. We ask again, what is that object? What is the answer to this whole vision? In the first place, undoubtedly the answer is found in the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the key to everything here.

First of all, in the Incarnation we have the Righteous Man, the Man according to God, and He is the standard and the measure of everything. "He is made unto us righteousness from God." You will remember that that was said at a time when things were out of order in the Church, things were not according to the Lord's Mind, and so the apostle said about Jesus, He is made unto us Righteousness. Everything in the Church has got to be measured according to Christ; that is, according to God's standard as present in His Son. He is the Righteous One. God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness in the Man Whom He has appointed. Jesus said that the Father had given Him authority to execute judgment because He was the Son of Man. Here is the Man of brass. The Son of Man is the Righteous One, and He is God's standard of measurement. God measures everything by Him. We shall have to come back to that again later on, but we just note the meaning of the Man of brass and His measuring reed.

You remember that the natural man had intruded into the church at Corinth. The apostle had to speak to Corinth much about the natural man, the carnal man. He pointed out that this natural man, carnal man, had no place in the realm of the things of the Spirit. This "man receiveth not the things of the Spirit... neither can he know them." And that is what this Man of brass is doing, He is saying that only the man according to Christ can behold and see and hear. Only the spiritual man can come into this realm of the things of the Spirit. I say that the natural and carnal man had intruded into the church at Corinth, and you see the method by which the apostle fought to put that right. He said, "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Paul brought in this Righteous Man to correct the things that were unrighteous. By bringing in the Righteous Man, he put out the unrighteous man. By bringing in the Man of the Spirit, he put out the man of the flesh. That is exactly the meaning of this Man of brass with His measuring rod, so that first of all the object in view is Christ. He is governing everything.

And then going with that is "the Church, which is His Body." The Church is called "the one new man." Paul said, "You have PUT ON the new man." And so the Church is measured according to Christ. Christ is the measure of everything in the Church. Indeed, that is the only Church that is known in heaven! The only Church that heaven recognizes is that Church which is the Body of Christ, that Church which is measured according to Christ. Everything in that Church has to do with one thing only, it is the measure of Christ. That is what we have in Colossians and Ephesians, and in Philipians also. But Colossians and Ephesians are particularly the letters concerning the Church. In those letters measurement is mentioned, "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"; "the breadth and length and height and depth." You

see, measurement is very much there in these letters. But this measurement is in the Church, and everything with the Spirit is just a matter of how much of Christ there is.

Let us try to get free of our technical idea of the Church. We know that the Church is not a thing. It is not an institution. It is not here or there as to geography. The Church is just where it is as the measure of Christ. If there is more of the measure of Christ in one place than another, then there is more of the Church there. It is just the measure of Christ that determines how much of the Church is there. Do try to remember that it is spiritual measure, which is the measure of Christ, that defines the Church. If you ask the question, "What is the Church and where is the Church?" - the answer is, "Where Christ is"; and where Christ is most fully, there is the Church more fully. We must recognize that the Church is entirely measured according to this Man and can only be seen by revelation of the Holy Spirit.

Now, if we have not received "the spirit of wisdom and revelation," then we may talk about the Church, but we shall just see the Church in some way that is not the Spirit's way of seeing the Church. It requires the Holy Spirit to enable us to see the Church. And when the Holy Spirit shows us the Church, what shall we see? Shall we see something that is called the Church? Shall we see a lot of people who hold a certain doctrine about the Church? Shall we see something in which a certain interpretation of Bible teaching about the Church is held? Shall we see a congregation of people who call themselves the Church? Shall we see any of that? No! when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, we shall not see that. We shall see Christ. To see Christ is to see the Church! and to have seen the Church means that you have seen Christ. You see, Christ is the Great Spiritual Order as well as the Great Spiritual Person.

There is a great heavenly system. Christ is the embodiment of that Heavenly and Spiritual system. It is all a matter of what Christ is. It is a matter of the Mind of Christ; that is, what Christ thinks and how He views things. It is exactly how Christ does things. You see, the Church is an expression of a very comprehensive Person. That is how we should consider the Life of Christ, as here to reveal these great spiritual truths of heaven. It is a vast heavenly system brought to us in the Person of God's Son.

It was when Paul saw Christ that he began to see the Church. Those two things went together; and the more he saw of Christ, the more he understood the Church. That resulted in Paul giving us this unique presentation of the Church. It is only Paul who calls the Church "the Body of Christ"; and because the Church is the Body of Christ, I am saying that this can only be seen from a heavenly standpoint by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

"Behold... Hear... Set Thine Heart"

So we come to these instructions, "Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee." What does that mean in New Testament terms? Well, in the Letter to the Ephesians the apostle prays that the Church may come to "the knowledge of Him," that is, as you know, in the original "the full knowledge of Him." The Ephesian believers had a knowledge of the Lord; I think they had a very large knowledge of the Lord. Paul had been with them for two years, and he had said that he had not shunned to declare unto them "the whole counsel of God," so that they had received very much teaching from Paul; and, yet, in the end he is praying for them that they might be brought to the full knowledge of Christ. And he explained that in his own prayer: "that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power." - "That you may KNOW." - "Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears and set thy heart upon all that I will show you." ( Ezekiel 40:4 paraphrased) - So Paul says,

"That I may know Him." Right at the end of his life he is still saying, "That I may know Him." - Son of man, behold and hear, and set thy heart! You cannot as servants of Christ show anything to others until you yourselves have seen. Afterwards the Man said to Ezekiel, "Shew the House to the House of Israel," so that this new ministry to which Ezekiel was called was a presenting, or revealing, of Christ. We can put it in this way. In the first vision Ezekiel had seen the Man on the throne, he had seen the Man in heaven and now his last great vision was the Man in the Church. He was seeing the Church now, and his ministry at the end related to that, the presenting of the fullness of Christ, and the Church which is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. - So the end of that prayer of Paul is "to Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages: Amen" (Greek Interlinear).

"Son of man, shew the House to the House of Israel." What will be the effect of that? This is the test as to whether we have seen. You see, we can talk about the Church as we have it in the New Testament, yet know nothing about it. There was a time when I was doing Bible teaching, and in those days I could give a very good analysis and outline of the Letter to the Ephesians. It was what was in the New Testament about the Church, and I could present it. You see, I was talking about the Church but I knew nothing about it. I had really not seen the Church. All my knowledge of what the Bible taught made no difference to me. What was the result of that? There was very little spiritual value in that ministry. All that ministry certainly did not create a revolution.

Now notice what it says here, "Shew the House to the House of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their ways, and may keep My Word"; and if the effect of the ministry is to have effect like that, we must have seen in the Spirit. It will not have that effect if we have only seen it in the letter. "The letter killeth, but the Spirit maketh alive." The effect of a ministry of revelation is quite positive; it has an effect upon people.

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