

# Christ Revealed as God's Purpose

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeing Jesus Christ in the heart, which brings about a deeper understanding of God's plan and a more intimate relationship with Him.*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 1:15, Ephesians 1:11, Colossians 1:16

**Topics:** "God's Purpose", "Revelation of Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the revelation of Jesus Christ as central to understanding God's purpose, using Paul's transformation as a key example. He explains how Paul's encounter with Jesus brought light into his darkness, illustrating the profound shift from chaos to order and from emptiness to fullness. Sparks highlights that true Christian life is not merely about salvation as a gift but about seeing Jesus as the embodiment of God's purpose. He urges believers to recognize that all divine energy and purpose are centered in Christ, which leads to spiritual growth and liberation. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of Jesus as the focal point of God's plan for humanity.

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## Transcript

The Lord has led us in these days to be occupied with the revelation of Jesus Christ. So far, John the apostle has been our interpreter. We are going now to allow Paul to say something to us about this matter.

I turn you, therefore, to his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter four at verse six: "Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Place alongside of that the words from his letter to the Galatians chapter one at verse fifteen: "...when it was the good pleasure of God, to reveal His son in me." It was the good pleasure of God, to reveal His Son in me; shined into our hearts in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is Paul's way of describing his great life revolution. This is his personal testimony as to what happened when he saw the face of Jesus Christ. And as you see, he likened that to the divine fiat in creation: God who said "Let light be" has repeated that in a spiritual way in my heart. The implication clearly is that what happened in creation when God commanded light to shine, had happened in Paul when he saw the face of Jesus. And when you apply that to such a man as Saul of Tarsus (later Paul) the implications are indeed tremendous. It's a tremendous confession on his part because when God said at the beginning in creation "Let light be" - there was NO light. All was darkness. Darkness was over the face of the deep. And here is this man, SUCH a man as we know him to have been with all his claimed

enlightenment, here is this man saying: "until I saw the face of Jesus, that's how it was with me". He would never have admitted that before, that he was in the dark, and all was darkness to him; he would have claimed to have been one of the most enlightened of men! Here, when he saw the face of Jesus, he said "Until then, I realize now that the primal darkness at creation was my condition spiritually". More than that! When God first said "let light be" everything was in chaos, a state of disruption, disorder - yes, chaos. The earth was without form and empty. And Paul dares here to say "After all, with all that I had and had learned and knew and claimed to be, until I saw the face of Jesus, that's how it was for me, chaos, chaos! And still again, until God said 'let light be' there was utter desolation and barrenness. Really nothing there at all!" Paul means what he's saying.

He realized - oh yes, you will find plenty in his writings afterward and utterances to bear it out - that for him the face of Jesus meant light as over against darkness. Not just some more light, but the mighty CONTRAST between light and darkness. Seeing the face of Jesus meant for him order out of chaos, meaning out of meaninglessness, and still seeing the face of Jesus meant for him fruitfulness out of barrenness and desolation.

I say the implications are tremendous, but Paul quite agreed with all that, indeed he does. And dear friends, although the method and the manner of the beginning of our Christian life and experience may differ, indeed there may be many different ways in which we come into new life in Christ; however many may be the ways, those should be THE features and characteristics of everyone's coming into that relationship with the Lord Jesus. It should be as passing truly from darkness to light. Not just getting some light but the difference between day and night, and the darkest night and the brightest day. Between chaos, confusion, disruption, and order; beautiful order and meaning. Between emptiness, hollowness, a void, and fullness and fruitfulness and plenty. It should be like that in every case.

But note the main and the great point in all this is that it was all in the face of Jesus Christ. In the face of Jesus Christ! When it happened and Saul questioned, "Who art thou?" the answer came clear: "I am Jesus, I am Jesus". We can never, never grasp the tremendous (and we do not use exaggerated language when we say the TERRIFIC) implication for that man of that word 'Jesus' at that time. All this, all this in the face of Jesus! It's there that I want to spend a few moments because that is really the focal point, and very much can be said but we want really to feel the force of this message.

Of course we know that the use of the word or term 'face' is metaphorical. In the original language the word means more than just 'countenance' it carries with it also the idea of person or personality. We understand that, that metaphorically the face is the expression of the person. And so everything was in the Person of Jesus Christ that Paul saw and came into.

Now this is the thing that I want to stress right at the outset, that if you and I, dear friends, are going to make anything like the progress that Paul made as a young convert and as a growing Christian, and if we are going to have anything of the wheat that he has had in spiritual impress and impact, and if we are going to count in any degree as he counted in the work of the Lord; one thing is absolutely essential and do get hold of this. The youngest Christian get hold of this and everybody else; that if we take our salvation, our conversion or anything that has to do with it as something in itself, there's going to be limitation. We have got to see every thing in the light of the PERSON, Jesus Christ! That is, we have not to take this as a gift - salvation as a gift - or anything else of the Christian life as a gift in itself; we have got to look at that and say: "What does that signify as to the Giver? What does THAT signify as to Christ? What does that mean as to the Source of my salvation?" You may not grasp the point but it is of infinite

importance because all progress in the Christian life and all power in Christian service comes from NOT the grasping, the apprehending, and the enjoyment of salvation as such, but SEEING JESUS! Because, you see, Jesus is the sum total of ALL divine fullness.

In a long experience in Christian ministry and work, I have moved much amongst Christians and I have had a lot to do with what we may call "mission centres", "mission halls". Larger or smaller, in some cases a very large number of Christians meeting there, and listening either to their prayers or to their singing, taking note of their Christian life... There they are, they've been Christians for years, decades; and all they've got to talk about is the day when they were saved, all about when they came to the Lord, when the Lord found them - they're back there. And when you come to these people - who have YEARS of Christian life - with anything beyond the most elementary, they don't know what you're talking about - it's another language, just can't follow it - you've got nothing to work on! They've not grown up, they cannot take solid meat. All they want, as they say, is the simple gospel, let's have the simple gospel.

Now, that is not meant to be a criticism or a judgment, but an illustration. What have they done? They've taken salvation in itself and not seen salvation as only a PART of something FAR, far greater, more immense; and that greater fullness is Christ! It is the thing and not the Person! And it makes all the difference. See, I come back here: what does explain Paul's BOUNDING onward in the Christian life, his RAPID spiritual progress, his stature spiritually and his tremendous impress upon the dispensation? The answer is he saw in the face of Jesus everything. Everything! For you see, Paul was a Jew and both personally and nationally the quest of the Jews was for light, light! They were always in quest of light, they were trained to be the most enlightened, but light was what they were after all the time. Light in relation to God, and God and man, and man and God. And Paul says himself that although that was true of him as of all Jews, perhaps more so in his own case than many of his own countrymen; all that quest for life did not begin to be answered until he saw the face of Jesus Christ. This was such a tremendous thing, such an overwhelming thing for him!

The Christian life and everything to do with it is inclusively and fundamentally a revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart. It may be there in the Word, now note: Paul probably knew the Old Testament as well as anyone and better than most - it was all there! But not until this happened did he see his Old Testament; when he saw it in the face of Jesus Christ. You will never know your Bible truly as it needs to be known for spiritual effect until by the Holy Spirit you see Jesus Christ everywhere. Not the Bible, not books of the Bible, not the analysis of the books of the Bible, not the themes and the subjects of the Bible, but in and through them all - the face of Jesus. That is, how HE is signified here, how HE is implied here, what this means where HE is concerned. That is the key. Paul never had that key until he saw the face of Jesus and then wherever he looked after that, ANYWHERE in this universe - Bible or outside the Bible - he saw the face of Jesus. That face was clear to him wherever he looked. Now that is not exaggeration. You know sometimes if you look right into the sun, right into the sun, for some while afterward wherever you look you don't see the things that are there, you only see the sun. You're blinded to everything else. That is exactly what happened with Paul; he was blinded in a sense, to everything else, having seen the face of Jesus.

Everything in life, everything in character, everything in endurance, through trials and opposition and suffering, everything in victory over opposition and adversity, everything in service; will depend entirely upon how much we have seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Make no mistake about it. Dear friends, this, as we have said and as we've said in prayer again here this morning, is a very critical time in the history of the people of God as it is in the history of this world. And if I'm not mistaken, this conference is set in a very critical time. We are fast moving into and more deeply into, the final testing of everything. Oh, how

true that is literally in some parts of this world. What an ultimate testing is taking place in the life of many of the Lord's people and the Lord's servants. And think not that we shall escape that, in some form or another we are really going to be put to it. The world is going to move into a situation where every Christian will have their foundations most certainly and severely tested. You may be tasting that in a spiritual way now. How many people have said to me about this very time, "Why, what a battle it's been to get here!" all the unusual things happening... wouldn't happen otherwise; strange things. It all just happens when you've got something of the Lord in view. Oh yes, and those happenings are very, very often testing happenings; they could shake you.

Well, it's like that, toward the end. I don't want to discourage you... it's going to increase in that way. But you see, the point is this: even our salvation as such is going to be put to the test. Even all that we have really got is going to be put to the test and it will not be too difficult for us to question our salvation, to question the Lord Himself if our Christian life is a kind of objective thing that is made up of things, made up of meetings, made up of teachings, made up of fellowship, made up of beliefs. If it is made up like that it will not be difficult for us to question the reality of the whole thing. The REALITY of the whole thing - does that sound a terrible thing to say? The REALITY of Christianity... not difficult to allow that question. The issue? The issue is going to be only one thing: how much this thing is a matter of God having shined into our hearts! I've put it in a way which has caused a good deal of trouble, but nevertheless perhaps that itself is significant; that God has revealed it in us, what we have has come to us by REVELATION of Jesus Christ. I emphasize that does not mean something extra to the Bible, but what is there in the Bible has, by the Holy Spirit, been ILLUMINATED in our own hearts. That this has come out of the Bible into us by an ACT of God, a FIAT of God; we have seen that in our hearts. That has become a HEART matter with us when it's like that.

Well, we referred, I think yesterday, to the saintly Polycarp who was burned for the faith there in those days of the early persecution. And, as an old man with his white hair and his saintly face, was being forced along by those cruel and wicked Jews to be burned on that day, an official standing by looked and was tremendously moved to see such a man being carried to such a fate. And he stepped up and he said "Curse! Just curse Jesus and I will save you. I'll save you!" Said Polycarp, "Forty and six years have I served my Master and He has never done me a single injury. Do you think I would say something against Him to save my life? No." And so he went to the martyr's death. That's a heart relationship isn't it? That is something more than life, more than anything else. I say, it was that that carried Paul through all his sufferings; he'd seen the face of Jesus. It was that that was the strength and the substance of his great ministry, he'd seen the face of Jesus. It was that that made him the Christian that he was. And please do not get mentalities about objective visions of the face of Jesus, that's not what I'm talking about at all - seeing a face - I'm simply meaning that there has come to you by the Holy Spirit in your heart, a knowledge of the significance of Jesus Christ in this whole universe in the counsels of God: the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's the light, the knowledge, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What strength that brings, what strength that brings!

I'm quite sure that there are some here today who have gone on for many years with the Lord and who could say with me that if what we have and hold and teach had only been theory, we'd have been out of the fight long ago. Been out of the fight long ago, no doubt about it. It is because, may I put it this way, we've SEEN something... where something is into someone, when you've seen, when you've seen, something is done. Oh, what effect it had with Paul, first of all look what a man it made of him. Do you notice the context of those words that we read in Galatians, "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me

what did I do, go and consult those who were apostles before me as to whether I was right? Wonder whether I was mistaken, whether this was according to tradition? No, not at all. I didn't go up to Jerusalem to confer with flesh and blood and talk it over and see whether I was right; this thing put me on my feet in such a way there was no question for me about it. No one could add anything to this for me by way of confirmation as to the reality and the rightness of it." So many dear Christians are all the time running around to others for advice on their Christian life and on this and that... Now, please don't misunderstand me, get all the help that you can, but somehow it seems that some people can never stand on their own feet for any time together, they're not sure at all. They're not sure about anything, anything that arises they've got a question, they must get some opinion on this matter. Now, while you must have help and seek it, there is after all a fundamental, root thing that makes you KNOW where you stand - you stand in Christ by a work of God. Something's been DONE. You can never question that. It put Paul in that position where, while he was not independent and he did later on go up and have a nice time of conference with Peter in Jerusalem for several days and I suppose they talked over much, but that didn't happen until Paul had faced this whole issue for himself and got it settled with him between himself and the Lord. Like that. And all these other aspects of a new creation started on their wonderful movement after he'd seen the face of Jesus like that.

The certainty and the assurance that was right at the root of his Christian life and service came because of this one thing: he'd seen everything in Jesus. Everything... in Jesus. What liberation that brought to him! What emancipation! We have often said here that there was no power in this world that could have turned that rabid, fanatical Jew, Saul of Tarsus, into a Christian and a lover of Jesus of Nazareth. No power in this world that could have done that, but just SEEING Jesus Himself in this way and that did it, that did it! He was emancipated, he was free! No wonder of all his writings the fiercest, the fieriest is his letter to the Galatians, the letter of our LIBERTY in Christ and it begins with this "God revealed His Son in me and that set me free from all other things." No use telling people that this and that, and the other thing is a limitation and that they should seek enlargement by getting out of it. That is an unfruitful, unprofitable, indeed that's a dangerous line to take with anybody. But again, if only we can bring CHRIST... with all His divine significance and meaning and comprehensiveness to them and the Holy Spirit can reveal Him in their hearts... oh, that will do it! That will do it; they will never again be content with anything that limits them to the grave clothes of religion. It delivered Paul from Judaism as nothing else would have done. The way of an escape, the way of enlargement, the way of endurance is to see Jesus. It is not by learning, that is, it is not by the schools. Paul had all of the schools he did... of religion. He didn't get it through the schools and we'll never get it through the schools; along that line of the technical instruction of things Christian or religious. This is not a merely mental or academic or intellectual thing at all. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, that's the foundation and may the Lord even now begin to shine into our hearts. I want to go on just for a little while in answering the question: What DID Paul see in the face of Jesus Christ? Yes, he saw the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; a comprehensive statement. What DID Paul see in Christ (if you like to drop out the word 'face' you can) what did he see when he saw Jesus Christ by divine illumination? And I suggest to you that the first thing that he saw was Christ as the Purpose of God, Christ as the Purpose of God.

If there was one thing that was true about Saul of Tarsus, it was that he was a man of purpose. He was a purposeful man, there's no doubt about that, he was bent upon something, he was after something, he was in quest of something, he was on full stretch for something. That is, he was characterized by this spirit or sense of purpose. Now, as a Jew, and a member of the Jewish nation, his whole horizon was Israel. For

him all divine purpose was centred in Israel. It was the nation that stood at the heart of the purpose of God for him, that nation as in ascendancy over all the nations, superior to all the nations, ruling all the nations, having that central place in the midst of the nations, to make all the nations serve it, and well, yes, to serve all the nations. This was what divine purpose meant to Saul of Tarsus, as it meant to every Jew, every member of the Jewish nation. That was the horizon. That was all temporal, that was all earthly, albeit it was religious. But that was the horizon. That spelt purpose for every Jew and inasmuch as Saul of Tarsus was a Jew plus, you can see how that idea of divine purpose for his own nation was INTENSELY strong for him. Let anybody call that into question! That really was the cause and the reason for his VEHEMENT antagonism to Jesus. You know quite well that that is why the Jews crucified Jesus. They said, "If we let this man go on, the Romans shall come and take away our, our nation, our kingdom." And Saul was one of them. He saw that Jesus setting up another kingdom was a menace to Israel and all Israel's heritage. That, for him, was the meaning of divine purpose. When he SAW the face of Jesus Christ, all that was changed! All that was changed, his horizon expanded to the universe and what a universe it is that is presented to us in his letter to the Ephesians! What an immense expanse and RANGE of divine purpose that comes out - "called according to His purpose Who worketh all things out to the counsel of His own will from eternity to eternity" - divine purpose. Poor little Israel, shrinking, and shrinking, and shrinking, until for him, while he would that they would be saved and give anything to have them saved; they no longer occupy that place - his horizon has become universal. And again, the temporal, the temporal has given place to the spiritual and the eternal in talking about every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies unto the ages of the ages. These, you see, are all terms which explain what happened in this tremendous revolution in which Paul's horizon was pressed out to the uttermost bounds. He saw ALL this in the face of Jesus, JESUS signifies THIS! JESUS is the embodiment and the sum of Purpose from eternity to eternity! It is the purpose in Christ Jesus; that is his language. HE is the Purpose of God and it's not of this earth, temporal or temporary, material and transient; but of heaven, of eternity and it's ALL IN HIM! Summed up in Christ - the fullness of all things.

If only we could, what tremendous amount we could draw in of quotations from Paul about this. God's purpose concerning His Son that He should fill all things and that He should be the fullness of all things; all things should in Him dwell, all things should be gathered together into Him! Indeed, his world has enlarged and all the barriers have broken down. Dear friends what does this MEAN to us? This is not just a beautiful story or description of what happened to a man, I'm speaking of spiritual principles. If you and I really DID get a sight of the significance of Jesus Christ, we really DID see the glory of God in His face, we can NEVER be little! We can NEVER be just tied up in our little local things, we can never be sectarian or anything like that at all, we should be all-embracing. We could not (we get into a lot of trouble because we could not and would not) accept the confines of human systems and Christian departmentalisms and all that. You're emancipated right out when once you've seen the Lord Jesus and all that is silly nonsense - churches and chapels and playing at things - no! Christ is FAR, far greater and vaster than all this. For enlargement you just need to see Him! For deliverance you need to see Him!

What happened to Paul, and Paul's universality of vision and ministry, Paul's spiritual and heavenly impact upon this earth through the centuries is due to this: he saw in the face of Jesus Christ the greatness of God's purpose for this universe - that the universe was Christocentric. Not Israel-centric but Christocentric. He saw then that divine purpose is centred in Christ. And that revelation, that seeing, that apprehending, brought with it certain other things. First, it brought with it the understanding and recognition of God's energy in relation to Christ, God's ENERGY in relation to Christ.

You can see that the creation was for, through and unto Christ. And all the energies of the Godhead called forth in creation - and they're tremendous energies, tremendous energies - called forth in the creation of this universe, those energies in creation were working toward Christ's inheritance. Tremendous energies in creation again were unto Christ: "for unto Him were all things created, things in the heavens, things in the earth". Unto Him! The mighty energy of God in creation, in changing chaos to order, light to darkness the darkness to light, and emptiness to fullness; all that was mighty, mighty power of God, but it was unto His Son. The end is that He should be the Heir of all things for He was appointed Heir of all things and He was to come into His heritage at last.

We've been dwelling in the book of the Revelation and these are the final movements to the kingdom becoming the kingdom of our God and His Christ - the inheritance of His Son. But that's only a mere fragment of the whole story of divine energies. After that creation we see the fall of man and the fall of this earth. And it's a tremendous fall, it's not just a moral fall, a moral collapse... We dare not stay to contemplate the IMMENSITY of the thing that happened when Adam disobeyed God and what he dragged with him and all the TREMENDOUS forces that were focused upon him from the outside spiritual world to make him do it. Yes, it was a fall indeed, involving tremendous and far reaching things as we very well know that was part. But does God abandon, does He give up? He at once reacts, reacts to that and with new application and new energy proceeds along His line - same line - toward His Son. And He immediately gives intimations that all this that has happened which has come from the great usurper, the serpent, the devil, will one day in His Son come [under His heel] and be crushed forever. Immediately He reacts! And you and I, dear friends, know what power is called for to bring that about - the energy of God concerning His Son. God said that the Seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. That's not a fanciful statement, that's a TERRIFIC cosmic conflict! The battle of the ages, but at last we see it; forces in the heavens hurled down, no more place found for them, cast into the abyss. It's done! But this is the energy concerning His Son, and that again is but a fragment.

The people in whom all this was to have its illustration and display as a kind and token - Israel - we find them, because, because of their failure, spiritual failure, following on in the way of the covenant in the bondage of Egypt and what bondage. You see, God has taken pains to let us know that THIS thing was a thing of TREMENDOUS spiritual power. We are impressed aren't we, with how Pharaoh could stand up to it! Why surely he'll let them go after that, even the first judgment, and the second and the third! No, not a bit of it. We're amazed! I venture to say that you wouldn't hold onto anything if you had a little bit of that. Here it is, and God is drawing out this thing, extending it to show what terrific force there is behind this whole matter and then finally with one blow He smashes the whole thing until there was those people and forever their deliverance from Egypt becomes the Old Testament illustration of the EXCEEDING greatness of His power. Always refer back to that as the example of God's exceeding power: deliverance from Egypt. But it's all in line of His Son, the Son's in view. It's the energy of God, you see, moving on.

I've missed the flood, another thing; God's reaction to a departure of the world. And so you must go on pursuing this through the Old Testament - Israel coming through the wilderness to the border of the land and then again the whole thing breaking down by unbelief. Did God give it up? No, that land forever stands as a type of His Son and in His fullness into which He's going to bring a people and therefore He cannot give it up in light of the spiritual meaning. He cannot give it up and say "Well, I must abandon My purpose". Not at all. Let THAT generation fail, He'll have another, and He'll bring them in, and see the mighty energies of God in that new people as they take possession and overcome in the land.

Failure again and you have exile in Babylon; oh dear, surely God's purposes are defeated now... The land lies desolate, the city is waste and the people are gone. No! "For your sake have I sent to Babylon and have brought down all their mighty ones". The remnant shall return! But this is not something in itself, it is still with the object, the ultimate object in view: the kingdom of His Son moving on. So we go on like that. We come as we have been in this book of the Revelation where His Church is suffering untold agonies, persecutions and martyrdoms... but how does it end? Well, it just ends in God's victory, God's power, God's energy. Does it? How? His Son is at last on the throne! That's the point. The purpose of God, calling out the energies of God; all in relation to His Son! And what I have said to you is only what is contained in Paul's writings, I haven't added or imagined, I've given it to you and I've given it to you imperfectly, it's all there, this is what Paul saw! The Purpose of God, drawing out the energies of God, he puts it in one so familiar phrase, "the exceeding greatness of His power which is to usward who believe according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ in raising Him from the dead and setting Him at His own right hand far above all rule and authority and every name that is named". Exceeding greatness! The energy of God in relation to His purpose concerning His Son... Paul saw that in the face of Jesus Christ. And I repeat, if we see something of that, it's going to be a tremendous strength to us, it's going to mean tremendous enlargement, enrichment and strengthening to see us through at last.

Now, because of my warning not to put too much on you at one time, I'll stop there, although there is so much more of what Paul saw as to that very matter - God's thought concerning His Son, the Purpose. We'll have another session yet perhaps.

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