

Divine Life by Spiritual Sight

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of spiritual sight and the hope it brings in contrast to the hopelessness of traditional religion.

Scripture: John 1:4, John 9:1, Acts 26:17, Romans 7:18, Philippians 4:13

Topics: "Spiritual Sight", "Divine Sovereignty"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the intensifying conflict and widening division in John 9, where the man born blind represents spiritual sight and revelation against the backdrop of tradition and historic systems. The focal point of the controversy is 'Light through life', highlighting the difference between acknowledging our spiritual blindness and self-sufficiency. The sermon emphasizes how our natural limitations and handicaps are opportunities for God's sovereignty to work through us, as seen in the examples of Moses and Jeremiah. It concludes with the importance of spiritual illumination causing division and opposition, yet being a precious gift that leads to true discipleship.

Transcript

Reading: John 9.

We have pointed out that with the sign of the feeding of the five thousand Jesus entered upon a new phase of His ministry, that is, upon the phase of conflict. There arose a great deal of conflict out of that work, and from that time He was in an atmosphere of controversy.

When we come to this incident we see how the conflict is intensifying and the division is widening, and the end of this incident is complete division. The emphatic statement concerning this man is: "And they cast him out", and that made the division complete.

The two sides were becoming increasingly distinct and definite. On the one side there was religion, and over against that was spiritual sight. On the one side there was tradition, and on the other side there was revelation. On the one side there was the historic system, and on the other side was spirituality. On the one side there were disciples of "Moses" - you notice what they said in verse 28: "Thou art his disciples; but we are disciples of Moses" - and on the other side there were the disciples of Christ. And these two sides were getting further and further apart - the distinction between these things was becoming more manifest. On the one side religion, tradition, historic system, "Moses": on the other spiritual sight, revelation, a spiritual state and disciples of Christ.

The whole of this conflict and division focused upon one thing. John had opened his Gospel with these words: "In him was life: and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4), and that was the focal point of all this controversy: Light through life. And you see the difference in the prospect or outlook of these two sides. So far as the opposition was concerned the situation had become quite hopeless. You have only to read the whole of this story and you will see how hopeless was the Jewish situation. The words at the end of the chapter we have just read indicate that quite clearly. The verdict of the Lord Jesus upon that whole side was: "Your sin remaineth". It is a great thing to say that religion, tradition, historic system and disciples of "Moses" create a hopeless situation, but that is not my verdict: it is the verdict of the Lord Jesus. And you have only to read through these chapters of controversy and come to that which we shall be considering in the next chapter, and you will agree that that whole situation was a hopeless one.

On the other side was this man, the representative of another class. I trust that we all belong to this man's class - the class which is able to say: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Over against this hopeless situation was this wonderful hopefulness. A new hope had come into this man's life, and he had come into a new hope.

We were saying that the whole conflict focused upon this one thing: light through life. Jesus said that they were all blind, and to begin with there was no difference between this man and all the others. Of course, his was physical blindness, but it is quite evident that that was only a sign of spiritual blindness. All these others were just as blind as he was in a spiritual way. But the thing which made the difference between hope and hopelessness was just this: he knew he was blind and they did not, and hope or hopelessness turned upon that. There is no doubt about it - this man knew he was blind: "One thing I know... whereas I was blind". There is no question about that. However, these people were just as blind, but they did not know it. The difference was this: that there was in this man a terrible natural limitation of which he was conscious. He knew all about his limitation. Every day that he lived he was made aware of it. He had to be led by the hand and put in the same place every day to beg for his living. The picture of this man is of one who is every day aware of his dependence.

Over against that were these other people, and they lived every day in their own sense of self-sufficiency. Natural limitation and natural self-sufficiency were in conflict, just look at this man again.

The disciples asked a mysterious question, and we are not going to try to explain it: "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" That only means they had the idea, which was a common one, of the pre-existence of spirits, and that people had a history before they came into this world. That may have been pure superstition, but we are not going to try to wrestle with that one, as it does not concern us very much. They asked the Lord that question and He just disposed of it: "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents". All it amounts to is that the man was born with a handicap, and, of course, that is true of everybody. It is just as true of us as it was of this man - the handicap with which we are all born is spiritual blindness.

Whatever form our handicap may take, it is meant to be an opportunity for the sovereignty of God. Here it is spiritual blindness, but we all have various kinds of handicaps with which we are born. What has been one of your greatest problems in life? Is it not that you feel yourself to be quite unfit for that to which the Lord calls you? You find that the Lord makes demands upon you and are conscious that it is not in you to meet them.

You remember Moses. When the Lord met Moses and gave him the command to go into Egypt for the deliverance of Israel, he tried to get out of it, and at last he resorted to his handicap. Perhaps he thought: 'This will beat the Lord, anyway!' He said: 'I cannot speak. This job needs an orator, a man who can preach. I am not the man for the job. Lord, You have chosen the wrong person for this. Lord, You don't know what You are doing.' And you can carry it on and on like that. 'The fact is, Lord, that I am not just fitted for the thing for which You have called me.' What did the Lord say to Moses? 'Who made man's mouth? If I made your mouth I know what kind of a mouth I made. And if I made your mouth so that you cannot speak, that will provide all the greater opportunity for Me to do it through you. Have I not taken forty years to empty you of your own ability? And all that I may have glory and you have none.'

These people said: "We are disciples of Moses" - but how false to Moses they were! They would have said: 'Oh, we can do it!' No, they were not true disciples of Moses.

You remember Jeremiah. The Lord called Jeremiah and gave him a great commission to Israel - and he did exactly the same thing that Moses had done. He tried to get out of it and his argument was: "I cannot speak: for I am a child." The Lord said: "Say not, I am a child: for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak" (Jeremiah 1:6,7).

These are examples of men born with a handicap but providing the Lord with a great opportunity to show what He can do. If the Lord requires of us that we should be righteous, we will at once say: "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). And how often we turn to that side: 'Oh, I am no good. There is no good in me. In this matter of goodness I am perfectly hopeless.'

Well, the Lord has given us quite a lot in His Word about that. We have had the Letter to the Romans for so long! "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22). We know all about the doctrine, and yet so often we just come down under this natural handicap. I could go on speaking about many handicaps with which we are born - most of us do truly know that we in ourselves are not fit for the thing the Lord requires of us. We have discovered that we were born that way and it is not in us naturally. We have this handicap. Well, the Lord Jesus has much comfort for us in this sign.

This man had a terrible handicap - he was born blind. He had never seen and did not know what it was to see. He had to have everything explained to him, having no faculty of his own. And Jesus said over against that: 'This is just the greatest opportunity for the glory of God.'

Now, dear friends, look at this in the training of disciples. It will not be long - only a few days - before these disciples discover that side of the meaning of this sign. Peter will say: 'Though all men forsake Thee, yet will I not forsake Thee. I will go with Thee even unto death.' And it says: "Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matthew 26:35) - already, 'We can do it.' Can you? Let us put it to the test - and you know what happened when the test was applied. Those two poor disciples on the road to Emmaus give us a very good idea of their disillusionment. Everything had gone for them, and all they could say was: "We hoped that it was he which should redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21), meaning to say: 'All our hopes are gone.' Oh, these disciples were a very sad picture. And they had to discover their handicap - they had to be brought there. It was necessary that they made this discovery that it was not in them at all, but that discovery was the ground of subsequent glory. We have seen the tremendous change in those men on the Day of Pentecost. Glory had just come down upon all their handicap and covered it. The life of the Lord Jesus had provided new capacities. This mighty life in Christ had taken possession of them by the Holy Spirit, and they were men who could do what they were never able to do before. All the spiritual blindness of

those three years had gone. They were men with their spiritual eyes wide open. Read what they said on the Day of Pentecost... "Peter, standing up with the eleven" (Acts 2:14). I do not know whether the whole eleven were speaking at the same time! If not, Peter was speaking for them all. And that discourse is a discourse of wonderful revelation. They were now seeing what they had never seen before as to the Lord Jesus.

Many years ago I made an analysis of that address of Peter's, just to see how many subjects he touched upon. If you do that you will be surprised at the large number of subjects included in that sermon. Indeed, his eyes had been opened! Not only were the disciples seeing, but they were able to do what they could never do before, and the life of the Lord Jesus had effected this.

This is the kind of training that disciples need. The disciples of Christ are like this, but not the disciples of Moses. They are under the law and have always to say 'I cannot'. The true disciples of Christ can say: "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). It is the power of His life within and means that we have gifts and abilities that we never have by nature. This is the beginning of the Gospel. I do not want anyone to think that this is something advanced in the Christian life. It is the very beginning of everything. The commission to the Apostle Paul was in these terms. The Lord said: "Unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:17,18). That is the beginning of the Gospel, and this sign ought to have been fulfilled in us right at the beginning of our Christian life. The very first thing that a true Christian and disciple ought to be able to say is: 'I was blind, but now I see. The Lord has opened my spiritual eyes and has removed my natural handicap.'

But while it is the beginning, it is only the beginning. Everyone has noticed the progressive feature in this man's case. They asked him: 'Who opened thine eyes?' In verse 11 he says: "The man that is called Jesus". That is a very simple and elementary beginning. Later on they said: 'What have you to say about Him?' In verse 17 he says: "He is a prophet." That is quite a long way on from 'a man'. But in the end, when Jesus met him - or shall I put it in another way, for this is what it really means - when Jesus knew that they had cast him out and went to find him and said: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" he answered: "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" Jesus replied: "He it is that speaketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him." Worshipping Him as God is a long way beyond calling Him just a man.

You see, this is all in the sign: it is in the meaning of things. This life which we receive in Christ has a simple beginning, but it is a progressive life, and the progressive nature of that life is a fuller and fuller discovery of the Lord Jesus. We "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18 - A.V.). We just detach words like this and separate them from their context. Of course it is quite true, but where do those words come from? Oh, Peter has told us - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). How shall we grow in grace and in knowledge? By the power of resurrection life in us. This life is a life of spiritual progress.

Now we must come back to where we started. Have you recognized one thing that is so important? We have spoken of the great division, of how things were dividing into two classes, and that division was because a man had received spiritual illumination. That is the factor which always causes the trouble. Dear friends, we can divide professing Christians into two classes. The one class may believe all the Scriptures as being inspired by God; they may believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God; they may believe in the deity of Christ and all the fundamentals of the Christian religion; and they may still be people

without spiritual revelation - they may still be unspiritual people. Is that true? Yes, the division there was just as distinct as between believers and unbelievers. And if the Lord really does open someone's eyes and give them spiritual revelation, they are in for trouble - and their trouble will come from the religious world.

Well, here were these orthodox Jews. They believed in the Bible and in all that the Bible taught so far as the words were concerned. But when one man in their midst received spiritual sight they cast him out. Spiritual revelation always provokes hostility - tradition never does. Orthodox religion never does cause trouble, but if you are a man or a woman living in the power of resurrection life, with your eyes wide open, you will meet trouble, and, as I have said, that trouble will come from the religious people.

What are you going to do about it? Well, we have already pointed out that many of the Lord's disciples said: "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" and "Many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:60,66)... 'This way of spiritual illumination is too hard. We are not prepared to pay the price for it. We are not going that way.'

And so the Lord sifts out on this one thing, and the true disciples are those who have really had their eyes opened. The Lord make us true disciples!

It is a costly way and it does provoke a lot of opposition, but it is a very precious thing to have had our eyes opened - just to be able to see because the Lord has made us see. Those who have counted most for the Lord have been men and women who have come to see with spiritual eyes.

So here in the training of disciples is the sign of the opened eye. May we be able to learn the meaning of this sign!

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