

God's Supreme Interest in Man #2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes God's supreme interest in man and the transformative process of being renewed in the image of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 36:54

Scripture: Psalm 91:11-12, Matthew 4:5-7, Matthew 16:26, Matthew 22:37, Luke 3:21-22, Romans 12:2, Colossians 3:8-11

Topics: "Plan Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing the sequence of events in the Gospel of Luke. He highlights the moment when Jesus is baptized and the heavens open, the Spirit descends, and a voice from heaven attests to Jesus being the Son of God. This marks the official position of Jesus as the image unto which humanity is to be renewed. The speaker then references Colossians 3:8-11, which instructs believers to put away negative behaviors and put on the new man, being renewed after the image of Christ. The sermon emphasizes that the measure of Christ's presence in our relationships determines our level of peace and fulfillment.

Transcript

I return you to the letter to the Colossians, chapter 3, verses 8 to 11. But now put ye also away all these anger, wrath, malice, or railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth. Line up one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doing, and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him.

Where there cannot be greed and jewel, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, civilian, bondman, freeman, but Christ is all. And in all, putting on the new man. May I just hurriedly, for the sake of those who were not with us last night, run over the five points that compose that paragraph.

First, the retrospect to the creator and the created. Created in him after the image of him that created him. Going back to the creator and his creating.

Next, the pattern and the purpose of the creating. Christ, the pattern, the purpose, renewed after the image of him. Then thirdly, the real nature and meaning of the crisis in the life of the believer.

Ye have put off and put on. Then the occupation and energy of the Holy Spirit, being renewed after the image. And finally, the exclusiveness and the inclusiveness of Christ.

There cannot be but Christ, all in all. We have dwelt for some time upon the first of those things mentioned. The man and his creator.

The creator and the created. Spoken of the disintegration of first man and the invasion of schism into human life, resulting in the long history of human frustration. That on the one side and on the other, the intervention through incarnation of God in Christ to reintegrate and reunify human life, redeem man from that state of schism and frustration.

Leading us to the final emphasis, which is really the focal point of all our consideration and concern at this time. The dominant idea in all is God's supreme interest in man. God is supremely, there is a sense in which we could say exclusively, wholly concerned with this that is called man.

Human life, manhood according to his son Jesus Christ. God is not concerned or interested or active in relation to mere things. We are concerned with things and we are tremendously affected by things.

What I mean is a lot of our time and energy is taken up with systems and with society and with institutions and with organizations and with forms. Even in our Christian life and worship, things, the outside, God is not so concerned as we are with all that. If we could just cut him there between these interests, we would be saved from so much.

We are almost harassed by the things of Christianity. Meetings and ministers and forms of worship, how things are done, thousand and one things which have been built up around Christianity. We are concerned with and affected by the things of Christianity.

God is not. God goes right through all this, looks inside of all this. He does not look on the outside as we do.

He goes right in and what he is interested in, concerned with and seeking for is man himself. Man, a human life that satisfies his creative thought. He is dealing with you and with me as people.

As we have said sometimes, he seems to be so concentrated as to single us out as though we were the only individuals in his universe. Seems as though the whole world is something that relates to us only. You understand? He isolates us by our experiences and shuts us up and imprisons us into spiritual history to deal with us.

Yes, God is supremely concerned with man, men if you like, men. Looking for men in order to make our men a man after the image of him that created them. That is Jesus Christ.

The only possible reunification, reintegration of human life is Christ, is in Christ. And it will, this is quite a simple statement and an obvious one, but one which we very much overlook. It will be just in the measure and degree in which Christ, the man, the heavenly man, is in us that we shall be united with one another.

And the measure, we can put it the other way, the measure in which Christ is not there in our relationships will be the measure of our schism and the measure of our frustration. Well now, for the few minutes we have this morning, let us go on to the second of these points in this paragraph. The pattern and the purpose, pattern and the purpose, renewed after the image of him that created him.

We have then to focus our attention, our hearts attention, upon the him who is the image unto which we are to be renewed. So we find the image introduced, inducted, presented, and he is officially from heaven

and historically on earth, presented to us at his baptism, foreshadowing his cross. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

That marks the point at which he assumes his official position as the image unto which this renewing is to take place. Presented, inducted, introduced into the world, before heaven, heaven opened, before man, behold, before hell, he is made the focal point of this universe and all creation with this object. Here is the image introduced, presented, to which humanity is to be conformed, renewed, or perish, and pass out.

With all governing is the presentation of the image. After the presentation or the induction, there came immediately the testing. It is spiritually important to recognize the sequence, the immediate sequence, presented, introduced, inducted, and then tested.

You know that there ought to be no break in those chapters 3 and 4 in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus, baptized, coming up out of the water, heaven opened, the spirit descending, the voice from heaven attesting. Then was Jesus made of that spirit which had come upon him into the wilderness to be tempted or tried by the Devil, the other central figure in creation.

After the identifying, this is, this is, my beloved, the testing. And I want you in these few moments to note again the inclusiveness of this testing, this time of temptation. It must have been in the mind of Christ something tremendously important to take account of.

The fact that it is recorded in all the synoptic Gospels and referred to in the later New Testament. And the fact that Jesus, who was reticent about speaking of his own inner history, he alone could have told about this experience. No one else with him.

He was in the wilderness alone. He alone knew about this, but at some subsequent time he must have told it so that Matthew and Luke could record it, be placed on record. And divulging one of the deepest experiences of his earthly history in this way must surely mean that it held a very great significance in the whole meaning of the Incarnation.

And that is the point I want you to notice, to take careful account of. This stands in a position of very great significance in the whole meaning of the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is so inclusive of everything.

Every subsequent temptation that came to the Lord Jesus, and this was not the only one. Remember, it says at the end of this, then the devil leaves him for a season. For a season.

It is as though the devil says, I'll be back again. It's not the end of this. And how true it was.

Every subsequent attack of the enemy would take on the very things that were included in this one temptation. In different ways. In different ways it would come.

By different means. Along different lines. In different jobs.

But the same thing again and again in principle. And just note then, how true that was. We have here a temptation in three forms.

Not three temptations, but a temptation in three different realms with three different aspects. First of all, the body. He hungered.

He hungered. And the tempter came along the line of physical demand. Physical need.

And physical interest. First through the body. And then failing there, for this body was already in principle made the whole sacrifice.

The body there was utter obedient. Failing there, he came along the line of the soul. Took him up to the temple.

Cast yourself down. It is written. The devil can quote scripture.

It is written. He shall give his angels charge concerning this. The devil left out one very vital fragment of the statement in Psalm 91.

He did not complete it. He did not say, or in all thy ways. In all thy ways.

That would have been dangerous. There are ways in which you cannot even rest upon scripture. There are ways in which even God won't protect you.

If they are the ways of presumption. If you are presuming upon God, you cannot claim the protection of his word or his hand. Not in all thy ways.

Only as all thy ways are in God. However, that by the way. Here the point of the temptation was.

If you do this. Cast yourself down. The world will acclaim you at once.

This man has come down out of heaven. We saw him. Actual light.

A light in our midst. Come down and look. From the great height here he is.

They will acclaim you. The world will. The world will accept you.

The world will applaud you. The world will be one. One act.

And you'll win the world. Again. Again.

What is called the world. The acceptance. The popularity.

That's our soul. My isn't it testing. Or reverse that.

See if you don't get the world's approval. What is disapproval? It's rejection. It's prostitution.

You do not get a place and a standing in the favor of the world. Men. Sometimes that can be exceedingly testing.

Many a man has to put everything in the balances of loyalty to God on the one side. And whether he's going to get the favor of men and position and advancement and all that on the other side. By some way.

That is a bit crooked. That's not straight. Not right before God.

This matter of standing well with the world sometimes becomes a very acute thing. The God of this world makes it so. A real temptation in the realm of our soul.

The soul that wants to stand well with men. Our temptation to compromise is on this. To get an easier way in the world.

The favors of the world. Failed again there. The enemy swung round to another angle.

He walked into the great high mountain. Showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof. And said, all this will I give you if you will worship me.

He has moved from the outer circle of the body into that inner place of the soul. Now he's gone right for the heart, the citadel, the spirit. Worship.

The place of God only. God only. Who is to be God.

Who is to occupy that inner sanctuary of man's being. Well now I'm not dwelling upon these three things in particular. But I'm showing you or trying to show you the intrusiveness of this temptation where the whole man was involved.

Body, soul and spirit. Tried there. You know we, the Lord allows us to be tried in all these realms.

Sometimes the physical is the realm. Faces of very definite testing and trying. And there is no doubt of our physical life for God.

As he, the Lord said on another occasion, he that saveth his life shall lose it. He that loseth it, when I say, shall find it. And that often becomes a physical issue.

A real physical issue. Been that for many in recent days. And it becomes that for us whether we will serve the interests of our bodies.

When spiritual interests are at stake or involved. Or whether we will bring under the body. And say, look here, you're not the master, you're the servant.

But it's a realm of real testing. And our souls, my, the better I think is much greater than the realm of our souls. Whole matter of reputation, standing and favor and advancement in this world.

Gaining the world. As the Lord put it, gaining the world. Which means gaining its advantages and gaining its favor, its smile, its pleasure.

Temptation for young people especially. For all Christians, but for young people particularly. Whether they're going to compromise in order to really stand well with the world.

And in spirit, the most acute form of temptation in our spirit. Well now, I pointed it out. You see, we cannot deal at any length with these things.

But what I'm saying is, that here in this temptation of the Lord Jesus, you had an inclusiveness of all temptation. In the whole man, spirit, soul, and body. Of body, soul, and spirit.

And in that comprehensive trial. The image trial. Is really to thunders the image.

Said the devil, back again, always back to the closest of his disciples. Beloved Peter, when speaking of his coming dead. This shall never come to thee, Lord.

Save thyself. Here we are back on the body level again. Spare yourself.

Don't put yourself in the way of that. Came to him in his soul. His soul.

My soul is exceedingly sorrowful. Elatedly. He poured out his soul.

And finally, tried to the last degree as to God, his Father. The love of his Father. The faithfulness of his Father.

Testing was pressed into the deepest and closest area of his human life. Like that, all the way through. But the point is, that he tried.

But note, what is the heart? The core of it all. Whether it is in the body, the trial, or in the soul, the testing. Or in the spirit.

The deepest ordeal. There is one thing at the heart of all. Each and all.

It is filial relationship with God. The attesting, the presenting, was my son, in whom I am well pleased. My son.

All right, says the devil, that's the point, focus point, focal point. On which I will concentrate. And what is the essence of true sonship? It is the filial relationship to the Father.

Relationship of love to the Father. You have attested through your body to doubt the love of God. Through your situations and circumstances arising in the world amongst people.

Or in your own spirit. Oh yes, we know a little of this. Something of this.

The concentrated force of all subtlety powers its issue. Whatever form. See, the Lord Jesus just went this way.

But, in his triumph, it says, he was made perfect. Though he was a son, he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. He was made perfect through suffering.

Through suffering. Don't think of that word suffering in connection with him as just being his physical sufferings on the cross. His bodily sufferings.

That's where Rome focuses everything. On the crucifix, the wounds. That side of things.

No, no, his sufferings were here. In the realm of not serving his own interest in one way at all. Body, soul or spirit.

And what it cost him. What it cost him. So to do.

They were his sufferings. He was made perfect through suffering. And then, having been made perfect through suffering.

He is installed in heaven. Instated in heaven. As the man that satisfies God.

Stephen, in his last moments and his last breath. Almost. Said, I see the son of man.

Standing at the right hand of God. The son of man. Installed as the heavenly pattern.

The heavenly pattern. To which the Holy Spirit will take up his work. Now, so soon.

After this. Pattern. There's a Greek word which is only used once in the New Testament.

It's used by the Lord Jesus himself. He said, I have left you an example. I have left you an example.

The only time in the New Testament when that word example occurs. And it's like all other Greek words. A pictorial word.

Has a picture behind it. It is taken from the classroom. The classroom and the scholars.

We know something about it. Where the master sets a pattern. To be copied.

Of writing. The top line, we used to call it. I don't know so much about things in the infant school now.

But I remember well how I plotted on to imitate that top line. In writing. And how much hung upon my success in imitating.

Lord Jesus took this word. Example of pattern out of the classroom. The scholar, the boy, has been given a top line.

Has been given a pattern, an example to follow. Copying the master's writing. Do you know the word says much about looking off unto Jesus.

Beholding him. But then, that doesn't exhaust it. Because I think there's always some weakness.

I have found it at any rate about this example idea. Thomas Akempis and his imitation of Christ. I never found wholly helpful.

Wholly helpful. I try every day to imitate Jesus. What an awful mess we make of this top line, don't we? But there was more in the Greek word than that.

And I'm closing with this for the moment. The master not only gave the top line pattern. But he drew some grooves in the clay upon which the writing was being done.

Because at that time, writing, the only means of writing in school, cheap enough to provide sufficient, was clay tablets. Clay tablets. And so the master would draw grooves, lines.

Now that's fairly helpful, isn't it? Having some lines to work on, but you don't go crooked. But if they are grooves, so that if you tend to go out of the street, the groove holds you. That's an extra.

That's all in the word. That's an extra. That's all in the word.

In the word here, example, it means this. Not only has he become the pattern to which we are to be conformed, but the Holy Spirit has given us, in our own heart, the grooves. When we do go out of the street, the groove pulls us back again.

Something that holds us to the street. Do you understand? Very simple illustration. But that's the word, you see.

The meaning of the word. That he has been told and been stated as the pattern that the Holy Spirit has come to keep us on the line. Of the pattern.

Keep us from deviating. Kept by the power of God. If we go askew, if something can pull us back again, get us back onto the street.

Now for the moment I must stop there, because that does introduce this activity and energy of the Holy Spirit in the matter of renewing after the image of him that created him. We'll hold that over, but let us again return to the point of all this. It is the Lord has focused his attention upon us as human beings to recover the image of the one perfect man.

And it's in us as people that he is concerned. He's concerned with us. As we so often say, it matters to him about us, or about you.

Focusing his attention, not upon getting a perfect system, a New Testament order, but people. Just people. And we'll never have any kind of heavenly or New Testament order until he gets the kind of people that he wants.

When he's got them, or he's getting them, then everything else will follow and we'll have the right order.

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