

He Must Reign

by T. Austin-Sparks

Christ's reign is a present reality that transforms individuals and societies, and the Church's role is to co-operate with Him in His mission to the world.

Scripture: Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:25, Ephesians 1:20

Topics: "The Reign of Christ", "The Lordship of Jesus"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the present reign of Christ, asserting that His Lordship is not a future event but a current reality that must be recognized and embraced by the Church. He highlights how the early apostles lived in the consciousness of Christ's exaltation, which empowered their mission and transformed their understanding of Scripture. Sparks argues that a personal encounter with the reigning Christ is essential for believers to experience His Lordship in their lives. He calls for the Church to recover this awareness of Christ's active reign, which is crucial for overcoming adversities and fulfilling its divine purpose. Ultimately, he stresses that Christ is actively working to put all His enemies under His feet through His Church.

Transcript

"He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet" (I Corinthians 15:25).

In these past messages our eyes have been turned to that Throne that was seen by Ezekiel through the open heaven, with the 'appearance as of a Man upon it above'. And we have seen, I trust, how everything that follows is just the expression and manifestation of that Throne - of the absolute exaltation of the Lord Jesus above all things.

Now, when Paul wrote these words that we have quoted above, he was not thinking of some future time when Christ would reign and put all His enemies under His feet. He was not thinking of Jesus as waiting for a time to come, when something would be done that would put Him in that position and bring about that result. Whenever Paul - or, for that matter, any of the apostles - referred to Christ's exaltation and Lordship, he and they always regarded it and spoke of it as a present thing. Whilst they looked on into the future and saw something more of its outworking, in its beginning and in its actuality it was not to them a future thing; to them it was now. And when Paul said, 'He must reign', he meant, 'He is reigning, and must continue to reign, until He has put all His enemies under His feet.'

That is something that has to be recovered in our consciousness and in our conviction. That is THE thing that needs to be restored to its place in the Church's life and consciousness continually. For, to a very large extent, while the Church adheres to the doctrine of the exaltation of Christ, His Kingship and Lordship, the reality, the power and the consciousness of it has been to a very large extent lost. The Church, in the beginning, lived in the consciousness and the power of the fact - as it was to them - that Jesus was on the Throne; undoubtedly, unquestionably He was on the Throne; He was Lord of all. Peter affirmed it: "He is Lord of all!" (Acts 10:36). Paul said: 'God DID set Him far above all rule and authority' (Eph. 1:20-21). It was something accomplished. That was their view of the matter; that was their conviction; that was their consciousness; and it was so powerful with them as to affect every aspect of their lives.

And until that is as true in the life and realization of the Church in our time as it was at the beginning, the same results and effects will not be found in the Church or through the church today. If the mighty impact and registration of Christ at that time was something incomparably greater than the deplorable state today in the Church, it was due to this one thing. If you wish to trace the secret of their power, their influence, their progress, their onward march - for in spite of a world of terrible hostility, persecution, martyrdom and every other kind of adversity, they marched forward 'terrible as an army with banners', and were described as the people who had "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) - if you wish to discover the secret, you will find it here: 'He MUST reign - He MUST reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet.' He is reigning.

We have said that, for the apostles, the reign of Christ had already begun; it did obtain in their time. How did they come to that conviction, to that knowledge? We will keep, for our purpose, to the man whose words we have extracted, the man Paul. Paul's knowledge of Christ as reigning sprang out of his personal experience of that fact. He had had an encounter in his life with the reigning, glorified Lord; and the Lord from Heaven had had an encounter with him. It had become something in his own personal experience, history and life. It was something very personal; and it has to be that. Until it is that, it can be very theoretical. It has to be personal and experimental. And it was so with Paul. In that encounter, on the way to Damascus, two very personal words had been used, and I think it all centres in that fact.

Two Personal Words

First of all, Paul had been spoken to by his own personal name: 'Saul, Saul!' His own name was called and reiterated. He is being nailed down to this personally; he is not getting away with it; he is not being allowed to mistake what he hears. It is being directed to the man in his own personal name. He is not mixed up in a crowd; he is not just met in a teaching: the thing has come quite straight at him as a man, as an individual - 'Saul, Saul!' I am not suggesting that we all have to have the same form of encounter. But we all have to have the same crisis; that is, we are all to have, and can have, a point in our life when we come face to face with the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ; and there is THE crisis upon which all the future turns. It is a tremendous thing to come face to face with the Lordship of Christ; it is a greater thing than coming face to face with His Saviourhood. There are many people who are saved by the Saviour, and own Him as Saviour, but whose lives are seriously lacking in the power of His Lordship. That is a statement - we leave it.

The other very personal word to Saul was the one that came when he asked, "Who art Thou, Lord?" The answer came: "I am JESUS..."; and, lest Saul should prevaricate, try to evade, get round it, by saying, 'Yes, but our country is full of men by that name; which Jesus do you mean?' - the Lord safeguarded it by

adding: "... Whom thou persecutest" - 'the Jesus Whom you are persecuting - that is the One!' And Saul knew Who that One was, right enough. He had but one Jesus in all his thoughts and in all his plans, and THAT Jesus he was determined to blot out and wipe out from the world's memory; he was out to eradicate every trace of that Jesus. 'I am Jesus - the One that you are persecuting'. You see how personal the Lord made this matter. He brought it right home, first to the man himself, and then to the very purpose of his life - the very object to which he had dedicated all his strength of mind and body for its destruction: 'I am Jesus.'

Something like that is really necessary if there is to be any kind of repetition, in the Church and in us, of the after results in the life of Paul. There has to come a point where, instead of being just one of a multitude, we come, personally and individually, under His absolute personal domination and Lordship. Our whole life - all our ambitions, all our enterprises, all our commitments, are now brought under His Lordship. It is a tremendous thing, but the glory of that Throne waits upon the acceptance of its Government, its Lordship.

Paul's Transfigured Bible

From that crisis, that encounter, that vision, that 'seeing' - that transaction, shall we call it - everything else took its rise in the life of Paul the apostle. Everything from that moment was transfigured, transformed, seen in an entirely new way, in the light of Jesus as on the Throne. After that, Paul went for a little while to Damascus, and then he went away into Arabia; and he went there with his Bible, I am quite sure; there are all the evidences of it. And he spent a long time there, with the Bible in one hand, and Jesus on the Throne, so to speak, in the other. If you want to know your Bible, that is the way; that is the key; that is the door - Jesus on the Throne, and the Bible. And Paul got a new Bible, a transfigured Bible! He saw his Bible, his Old Testament, with which he was very familiar, in a new and a living light, through that great truth - Jesus on the Throne! And as he went back over the Bible that he had, he saw this inherent everywhere. 'Yes, yes, that is what is here!' He saw that the Bible was really the Book of one thing - God's intention to have a Man and His kind in dominion, reigning in glory. This matter of the glory of a Man in Heaven interpreted everything, explained everything.

After all, when you come to think of it, it does open the Bible. Why these awful conditions that we see? Because that is contrary to what God intended; it declares it. We look out on the world, and see the awful conditions in the nations, and round about us in our own country - the terrible conditions of suffering, of misery, of evil - and we may feel inclined to ask the question of the doubter, of the cynic: Why? Why? Why does God allow it? The answer is here: God allows that which is contrary to Him to shout at men that it IS contrary - He never meant it to be like that. When something goes wrong, God does not just pass it over, smooth it over, let it go as though it did not matter: He makes it shout its own crime and its own tragedy. The world is screaming with its own tragedy, and it is the tragedy of a missed purpose of God. Interpret that to the world, and you have an effective way of bringing in the Gospel.

But the Bible sprang into life for Paul, and it is an amazing thing how, from that moment, as he took his Bible with him everywhere, the one thing he is preaching is: 'Jesus is Lord; Jesus Christ is Lord!' The exalted Lord, the exalted Christ, the glorified Christ, was his theme; and Paul preached from the Bible. It had changed his Bible for him. It was responsible for, and accounted for, his whole mission and work. What was the great business to which he was committed? What was it that constituted him an apostle? Well, his mission and his work was impassioned and motivated and controlled by just this one thing - the absolute glory of the Lord Jesus; that Jesus should come into His rightful place in this world and in human

hearts. That was the one motive, the one object, the one dominating thing in all his work, in all his mission. It was not this and that, and a number of other things; it was one central, but all-inclusive passion - Jesus as Lord, to be that in human lives. His work and his mission were both transfigured and controlled by this that had come into his experience.

His sufferings and his endurance were made possible by this vision. Sometimes he makes light of his sufferings. If ever a man suffered, I think that man suffered. I do not know that there were many ways in which he did not suffer; he suffered greatly, many sufferings, and heavy sufferings. But listen! 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen' (II Cor. 4:17-18); and amongst those 'things not seen', supremely and over them all, was that Exalted One in the glory, 'Whom', says his fellow-apostle Peter, 'having not seen ye love; on Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory' (I Pet. 1:8). But the point is - how was it that he was able to endure and suffer triumphantly? It was just because of this basic and central consciousness - the deep, strong conviction that Jesus was on the Throne.

Paul's Understanding Of The Church, And Concern For The Churches

I believe that this also was the key to Paul's understanding of the Church. Paul, as no one else, perhaps, had the greatest comprehension and understanding of the Church 'from eternity to eternity'. He goes right back into the Divine counsels 'before the world was', and sees it there in the heart and thought of God; he comes right through and sees it in the great consummation of the age of the ages. He has a marvellous comprehension of the Church. But of all the things he says - the highest things, the fullest things - the most complete expression of the meaning and vocation of the Church is contained and summed up in this matchless phrase: 'Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (the Church), unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever' (Eph. 3:20-21). 'Glory in the Church' - what glory? The glory of the glorified Christ! I could stay long with that matter of the Church and its eternal vocation and election, to be the vessel of the glory of Christ. John saw it at the end, in characteristic symbolism, in terms of the City - it is simply the glory of Christ in expression at last. It is that for which the church was chosen; it is that to which the church is called - to be the vessel, the seat, of this authority, this government, and this glory. Christ in glory gave to Paul the clue as to the church, and an ever-growing explanation of its meaning.

This same thing accounted for his concern for the churches. No one will question that Paul had tremendous concern for the churches. He says that he travailed for them; he wept day and night for them; he longed and yearned over them, spent himself for them. But why? What was the motive? What prompted all that? Ah, it was the glory of his Lord Jesus! The churches existed for the glory of Christ. He said so. It was all just for that one thing - the glory of Christ. And if there was any deflection, if there was anything that was not right in the Church, or in the churches; if anything whatsoever could be done to help them, it was all motivated by this one thing, that the Lord Jesus should in all things be glorified.

And if we pass to the end of it all, and look at Paul's writing about the Lord's coming again, what is it that is uppermost with him in relation to that coming? Is it the end of his troubles? Is it just his own joy and pleasure in getting to heaven? Oh no, it is the reign of His Lord the fact that His Lord is coming into His own, coming into His kingdom, coming into His rights, coming into the place that He ought to have, to be ceded that place universally - that is the great thing, the one thing giving birth and giving rise to everything

else. "He must reign".

Christ Is Actively Reigning Now

And He reigns. Christ IS reigning. Christ is active. On several occasions He is spoken of as having, on His ascension, 'sat down' in heaven: He "SAT DOWN on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3); He 'sat down'. But if you notice, whenever it is said that He 'sat down', it is invariably related to the finishing of His redemptive work. That is done. On the other hand, He stands. There is no contradiction; it is only an implication of a different meaning. Stephen saw Him - "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man STANDING on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). He is spoken of as 'standing'. When it is a matter of the work of redemption, it is finished; there is nothing more to do - He can sit down. When it is a matter of the working out of that redemption here in this world, He is on His feet. When there is a challenge to what He has done, He rises up. Stephen is in the presence of that challenge, and the Exalted Lord is on His feet, for the sake of His testimony. He is active, that is the point. He is not just passively sitting down, waiting till His enemies are put under Him: He is putting them under! He stands to work this thing out.

Now, the activity of the reigning Lord is seen in several ways, only to be mentioned. Firstly, He is 'taking out from the nations a people for His Name' (Acts 15:14). The great illustration in the Old Testament, of course, is that of Israel in Egypt. The taking out of a people for His Name is a tremendous business - you cannot do that sitting down! He extended the prince of this world, exhausted all his power and all his resources and all his endurance, and got them out. We are left in no doubt about it that that was the Old Testament demonstration of the supreme power of God. There is only one demonstration that exceeds that, and that is New Testament - 'the exceeding greatness of His power when He raised Jesus from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand.' That is EXCEEDING greatness of power! But it was a tremendous thing to get Israel out of Egypt as a people for His Name.

And it is no less a thing to get this people out of the nations for His Name. The prince of this world withstands and challenges at every point, in every way. No soul is going to be released from that bondage and that kingdom without a fight. It is often made out to be far too easy; people are put into a false position by it being made too easy. If we did but know, we have got to stand into the Throne for souls, to get them out. Perhaps you have some experience of those parts of the earth where the prince of this world has a terrible hold, a very terrible hold, and so much at his command; and you know something of what it means to get just one soul out of that. The suffering, the travail, the anguish, the cost bound up with getting one soul out of a nation for His Name! It needs the Throne, the mighty Throne. But, in spite of so much, He is doing it. The point is that there is so much like Pharaoh and Egypt - but even greater than that - set against this; and yet He is doing it.

The second thing He is doing is that He is constituting the life of that people on heavenly principles. We wish He had freer, fuller scope to do it. But He is doing it. That is, He is inculcating the life and laws of Heaven into that people. And again the illustration is Israel at Sinai, and in the Wilderness. There the heavenly laws were given, and they were constituted according to heavenly principles. They were tested, tried, proved according to the laws of Heaven. Their very daily bread had to come out of Heaven: they had to live out of Heaven, live on Heaven; their life had to be, indeed, a heavenly life. There was nothing here to constitute them God's people. They had to be constituted on a heavenly basis. And that is what the Risen Lord is seeking to do with His people. If only we understood, again, our experiences, we should see that that is the explanation and interpretation. He is seeking to re-constitute us on a heavenly basis of life. He is energetically trying to do it. Because we do not understand what He is doing, we are so slow in the

change-over. Let us recognize the fact and take it to heart.

The third thing that He is doing is putting all His enemies under His feet. And that takes us, with Israel, over the Jordan, into the Land. See there how those nations were put under the feet of Joshua through the people. The counterpart of that now is that it is through His Church that the Lord Jesus is bringing His enemies under His feet. Oh that we were more efficient in this! Oh that it were more true of us that we, like the people, were putting our Joshua's enemies under His feet! That is a challenge; it is a truth. But He is doing it, putting His enemies under His feet, and doing it through His church - so imperfectly and with such limitations, but that is His way. Old William Gurnall, the writer of *The Christian in Complete Armour* (1655), speaking of the serpent's head being put under the Lord's heel, pictures the Lord saying to His Church: 'I have put him under My heel, come you and put your heel upon him!' We should be co-operating with the Lord Jesus in this matter.

See how He has done it through the centuries. It is a tremendous story! The very long-term nature of it, the extension of it over time, may rob it of some of its force in our consciousness. But if you could just put it all together, the story of how He has done it through the centuries, what a story it would be!

Israel vaunted itself against Him and His Lordship - where is Israel? Can Israel lift up its head? Through all these centuries it has been bruised, unable to lift itself up; impotent; paralyzed; it vaunted itself against the Throne of the Exalted Christ. Rome entered into the battle to try this thing, and there was Caesar, with all his mighty power and resources, determined to destroy that Name and that power. Where is Caesar? Where is Rome and all its mighty power? It has gone down into shame and into the dust, and has not been able to lift itself up again. So we could go on. In our own life-time, many of us have seen men who have made a bid for world-dominion, and Heaven says: That is reserved for One only! And what has happened? Man after man has ended his career in ignominy, and worse than that, who made that bid for the place of God's Son, for the Throne, right up to date. And it will be the same thing with the rest of them. It is reserved to Him. 'He must reign, till He has put ALL His enemies under His feet.' And He will do it.

How does Ezekiel put it? Right in the midst of his prophecies, right at the very centre of the book, with Israel in captivity; the captivity itself; the mighty power of Babylon and all these world powers enthralled, holding, seeking this place of absolute supremacy - Ezekiel cries, as from God: 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn... until He come Whose right it is to wear the crown!' (Ezek. 21:27; Amplified Bible).

'He must reign, till He has put all His enemies under His feet.'

May that transfigure the way for us.

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