

His Excellent Greatness

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the excellent greatness of the Lord Jesus, His supreme dominion, and the fulness of Christ that He provides for His people.

Scripture: 1 Kings 4:1, 1 Kings 10:1-9, Matthew 6:28-29, Matthew 12:42, Matthew 16:9-10, John 6:35, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Philippians 3:8, Hebrews 1:8

Topics: "Trust in God's Sovereignty", "The Greatness of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the excellent greatness of the Lord Jesus, drawing parallels between Him and Solomon's dominion, bounty, and glory. He highlights that only the Father fully knows the Son, and that the Apostle Paul recognized a deeper knowledge of Christ that surpasses all earthly gains. Sparks urges believers to comprehend the practical implications of Christ's sovereignty and abundance, asserting that true fulfillment and wisdom are found in Him alone. He encourages the congregation to trust in Jesus' governing wisdom, which works all things for good, and to recognize that His love underpins His actions, even when they seem hard to understand.

Transcript

Reading: 1 Kings 4:1,7,20-34, 10:1-9; Matt. 12:42.

Some of the passages which have provided the background for our meditations have referred very definitely and precisely to the excellence and exceeding greatness of the Lord Jesus. One basic passage of tremendous implication is that which came from His own lips: "...no one knoweth the Son, save the Father...." That is a declaration, in other words, that only the Father knows the Son, knows Who the Son is and what the Son is; only the Father knows all that the Son means. Along with that we have the profound statement of the Apostle Paul: "...it was the good pleasure of God... to reveal His Son in me...." That relates to the beginning of his life in Christ Jesus, and it was a revelation which was destined to become so full that after all his years of learning, after all his discovery of Christ, at the end he is still to be found crying from his heart, "...I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ..." (Phil. 3:8). It indicates clearly that even at the end the Apostle recognized that there was a knowledge of Christ still available to him which was beyond anything that had yet come to him, and such knowledge was more precious and more important than all other things. We often sing in one of our hymns, "Tell of His excellent greatness"--"Behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

Our difficulty always will be to comprehend, to grasp, to bring that excellent greatness, that transcendent fulness within the compass of practical everyday life and experience. Yet it is necessary that this should be, and our approach to that fulness must be of such a kind as to render it of immediate value to us; for all that vast range of power and fulness, although so far beyond our comprehension, is yet for our present good and advantage. There are some features in this account of Solomon's greatness which foreshadow this greatness of the Lord Jesus, a greatness which, as we have said, is for our present benefit.

(1) Supreme Dominion

We mark that it is said of Solomon that he was king over all Israel and that he had dominion over all the region beyond the river; and a greater than Solomon is here. The first feature, then, is this of his supreme dominion, his excelling lordship, kingship, sovereignty. That is of tremendous practical value. It operated, as we see, in two realms; he was king over all Israel, and he had dominion over all the region beyond the river.

Those statements suggest that the Lord Jesus is not only King within the compass of those who acknowledge Him as Lord, His own saved ones, but that, in spite of what may seem, He is King in a far wider sense. We are moving much in the realm of Ephesians in our consideration, and in Ephesians it is the universal sovereignty of the Lord Jesus that is brought before us, not only His relation to the Church. He is Head over the Church which is His Body, He is Lord there, but He is, in addition, far above all rule and authority, principality and power. He is now universal Lord. It does not appear like it; everything would seem to contradict the fact; but we need to be given sight to see that the Kingship, the Lordship, the Universal Dominion of the Lord Jesus at this present time does not necessarily mean that all are enjoying that Lordship, nor that for all within the universe is it a beneficent reign. But even if that be the case, it does not alter the fact. There are other things which also point to the fact in a very positive way.

Of course, our trouble is that we take such short views. We are children of a span of time, and that span of time is of such great importance with us that our view of things is so narrow. If we could but take the long view, and see things from God's standpoint, how different would be the result in our own hearts. In saying that, we have in mind the widespread denial of the Kingship, the Lordship, the Sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. This period of the world's history is called the day of His rejection and there is a verse of a hymn that commences thus:

Our Lord is now rejected,

And by the world disowned.

But it is not so easy a matter to put the Lord Jesus aside. Men may reject, nations may reject, may seek to put Him out, deny Him a place, repudiate His rights, refuse to acknowledge His claims and His Lordship, but that does not get rid of Him. God has set His King upon His Throne. Of the Son He has said, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever..." (Heb. 1:8). Nothing can upset that. The attitude of men, the attitude of the world, cannot interfere with that, cannot depose the Lord Jesus. It may be said: That is a statement, but how will you prove it? Well, there are evidences. We have evidence that He is Lord, that He is holding things in His own Sovereign hand, that nothing can take His place.

The Witness of History

Look at history and see what has tried to take the place of the Lord Jesus in sovereignty; tried to do what only the Lord Jesus could do; tried to bring about a state of things, to accomplish which is put into the power of the Son alone, and see how far those efforts have succeeded. Anything, which seeks to bring about a state of things which the Lord Jesus alone can establish is doomed. You can see it repeated through history again and again. World dominion has been sought by one and another. Things which were ideals, magnificent conceptions for the world, have been attempted, and they have all failed, all broken down. Kingdoms and empires, despots, dictators, monarchs, have risen to a tremendous height, some of them having great sway, but the empire has broken and passed, the reign has broken down. So you have these things coming and going all the way through history; and, mark you, the whole matter is related to the Lord Jesus.

Read the Book of Daniel again, and you will perceive the realm in which we are moving. There you have the prophetic unveiling of world empires; Babylonia, the empire of the Medes and Persians, then that of the Greeks, and on to the great Roman Empire; they all pass in review, and pass away. The lesson of the Book of Daniel is this, that there is but One Whom God has appointed to be universal Lord, and that no one else can hold that place. Others may go a long way, but they can never gain that place, and so they must pass. We may yet see great powers coming into being, vast ranges of territory under one sway, but all this will pass. The matter is held in the hands of the Lord Jesus. All this endeavour is doomed from its birth to go so far, and then pass out. The Lord Jesus alone can have world dominion. He alone can bring universal peace. He alone can bring prosperity to all nations. That is held in reserve for Him and His reign. Till then there will be fluctuations and variations in world fortunes, but it will all pass.

This passing, this breakdown, this confusion, this deadlock is all because the course of things is in His hands, and He is holding it all unto Himself. He is King! He is Lord! It is a tremendous thing to recognize that the very course of the nations, the very history of this world, is held in the hands of the Lord Jesus unto His own destined end. God has for ever set His Son as the only One to be full, complete, and final Lord of His universe, King of kings and Lord of lords, with a beneficent sway and reign over all the earth. Peace and prosperity is locked up with the Lord Jesus, and He holds the destiny of nations unto that. Men may attempt it of themselves, and they may go a long way to usurp His place, but the end is foreseen, foreshown. He must come whose right it is, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end. It has commenced in heaven; it is already vested in Him and held in His hands. That is how we must read history. That is how we must read our daily papers. That is how we shall be saved from the evil depression and despair that would creep into our hearts as we mark the state of things in this world. All is being held by Him to a certain end. The meaning is that nothing can take the place of the Lord Jesus.

You can apply that in various ways, and in different directions. It explains the history of the so-called church, the history of Christendom. Why is it that what professes to be of Christ, but in reality is not, breaks down, continually breaks down all the way through history? Simply because it is something assuming the place of Christ, which is not of Christ. Failure is written upon it from the beginning. Everything that is not of Christ is going to break down; and it does break down. Though a thing may begin with Christ and evidence a measure of Christ, immediately it moves beyond the range of Christ and becomes of man, its end is in view.

That is the explanation of things which God has raised up in relation to His Son, things which were pure and true, but of which, because of the blessing resting upon them, men have taken hold. Whenever this has been done the end of these things has come into view, that is, as a spiritual force. Why is this? It has gone beyond Christ, it has gone outside of Christ, and nothing can take the place of Christ. Oh, how

necessary it is to abide wholly in Christ, to be wholly of Christ, according to Christ, governed by the Holy Spirit. He operates His Sovereignty against the success, the prosperity, the final triumph of anything and everything that is not of Himself, and if we want the Sovereignty of the Lord Jesus on our side, then we have to be utterly on the side of the Lord Jesus; otherwise that Sovereignty works against us. The world confusion, and the world trouble, and the world despair, is all a mighty evidence that Jesus is Lord, because it is a world that is trying to get on without Him, but cannot do so. No! He says it cannot be done. He says: I am essential! I am indispensable! If you would have it otherwise, then you must learn that without Me it cannot be.

We could spend all our time considering Solomon's dominion and kingship. He was king over Israel, and had dominion over all the land beyond the river. But we must pass on to consider another feature in which Solomon foreshadows the excellency of the Lord Jesus.

(2) The Bounty of Solomon's Table

"And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and three score measures of meal; ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and gazelles, and roebucks, and fatted fowl." That is a great day's feast for Solomon! What does this speak of, if not of the bountifulness of Solomon. This is no mean fare, no starvation diet! "A greater than Solomon is here."

When by the Holy Spirit we really come into the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, there is no need to starve spiritually. Oh, the tragedy of starving believers, with such a King! The tragedy, the unspeakable grief of children of the Lord spiritually starving! The fact is there is a fulness for His people which far excels that of Solomon.

Read the Gospel by John again with this one thought in mind, and you will see how the truth receives confirmation from the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. Take chapter six, with its great incident of the feeding of the multitude, all leading up to the spiritual interpretation: "I am the bread...." His disciples broke down in faith at one point, and He was amazed: "Do ye not yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?" (Matt. 16:9,10). He was amazed at their failure to understand that in Him was not only enough, but abundance. There is something wrong with us if we have not discovered it to be so. The fulness of Christ is for our spiritual satisfaction. There is abundance of food.

Again, consider not only the pathetic tragedy, but the wicked tragedy of starvation. What is it that is keeping the Lord's people out of fulness? Very largely it is prejudice, the Devil's trick of putting up the barrier of prejudice between the need and the supply. Oh, the wickedness of the Devil in coming in by these works of blinding to starve the Lord's people. There is bread in Christ. He is an inexhaustible fulness for the spiritual life. We know that we shall come to the same position as Paul, when he cried, "...that I may know Him..." --that is, to a consciousness of there being a knowledge beyond anything that we have yet attained unto, and where everything is counted as nothing compared with that. This is not mere words, it is true. There is bread in the Lord Jesus; there is bread in His house. This is where He is superior to Solomon. There is bread for a mighty host, a company capable of doing greater justice to His fare than ever Solomon's household could do. If they had sat down to his bounty, they could have gone so far and no farther, but our appetite will go on. We have a spiritual capacity which is growing, and growing all the time, unto the fulness of Christ. Solomon's bounty, then, is another feature by which he foreshadows the excellent greatness of the Lord Jesus. We touch but briefly on a third.

(3) The Glory of Solomon

The glory of Solomon is proverbial. Even the Lord Jesus spoke of it as being so: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory (and they knew what his glory was) was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt. 6:28,29). But what was Solomon in his glory compared with the Lord Jesus? What is the glory of the Lord Jesus? Inclusively it is the revelation of the fulness of God, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That may not sound very practical, but let us mark that this glory of Solomon was closely associated with his wisdom; his wisdom indicated the nature of his glory. There was something beyond the glory. This glory was not mere tinsel, or mere show, but was the fruit of a great wisdom that God had given him. It was the wisdom of Solomon that issued in his glory and his fame. What may be said of his wisdom? He spoke three thousand proverbs, he wrote many songs; he spoke of trees, and of beasts, and of birds, of creeping things, and of fishes. They are all very practical things. How did he speak of them? He invested everything in the creation with a meaning. If he speaks of trees, he will give you a secret, give a meaning to the trees, from the cedar in Lebanon (trees in the Word of God all have a significance) to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall. We know of what hyssop speaks as we first meet with it away back in Exodus and Leviticus. We know what the cedars of Lebanon stand for, and all the trees in between the two equally bear a meaning. Solomon gave the secret significance, the Divine meaning. Then he spoke of beasts, and we know that the Bible speaks of many beasts, and they all have a significance. He spoke of fowls also, and of creeping things, and of fishes. He unfolded the secrets of the creation, and invested everything in the creation with a deeper meaning. To be able to do that is proof of no mean wisdom.

Wherein is the Lord Jesus superior? Well, after all, Solomon's was only poetic wisdom in those realms. The Lord Jesus has practical wisdom; in this sense, that everything is laid hold of by Him in relation to His purpose, and made to serve that purpose. Oh that we could see and believe that at all times in our experience! So many things come into our lives. What a diversity! What a range! How mysterious some things seem to be! How strange it is that the Lord's own people have so many more experiences, both in number and variety, than anyone else. It seems that almost anything that can happen to a person, happens to a believer. You wonder sometimes, if anything else is possible. Have we not exhausted the whole store of possible experiences? That is how we question. There is not one thing in the life of a child of God but what is controlled and governed by a deeper meaning in relation to His purpose. We recall Paul's statement: "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). The more accurate translation is, God worketh in all things good. God invests everything with a meaning, for those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose. The wisdom of God lays hold of everything and gives to it a value. It may be that only eternity will reveal to us the value of some things, but we must believe that, inasmuch as our lives are wholly under His government, there is nothing without a meaning, nothing without a value. His wisdom is governing everything.

It is when we come to realize that, to accept and believe it, that we find rest in our hearts, and find ourselves on the way to gain rather than loss. When we revolt against these things, then we are in the way to rob ourselves of something. But when we come into line with the Lord in these things we find, firstly, rest in our hearts, and then the discipline produces something of value. It is gain, not loss; it is good, not evil. This is wisdom. That is better than having so many poems; it is practical. A greater than Solomon is here! That is the glory of the Lord Jesus. How does His wisdom work out to His glory? You and I go through a painful experience, a mysterious experience; we can see no good in it; we can only see harm in it. We are

led to look to the Lord, to believe that although we cannot see, cannot understand, He knows; and we trust Him. We come through the trial, and our eyes are enlightened about the purpose of it, and we worship. Oh, we never saw that such a thing as that could produce this! We never, never imagined that this value could result from it. The thing which seemed to be for our undoing is the thing that has brought us into a greater fulness of the Lord. That is His glory.

Remember that His wisdom is governed by His love. That is a great point with Solomon. It was the heart of Solomon which was behind his wisdom. It was a wise and understanding heart (not brain). Now look at Solomon. Two women bring a babe to him. Solomon is watching. For what is he watching? For something that he knows out of his own experience. Read the story of Solomon's birth. Read that little clause about his mother's special love for him. Solomon was the darling of his mother's heart, and Solomon knew what mother love was. He knew what the love of a mother for her babe was, and he watches these two women. He has the keen eye of a mother for her child upon those two women, and he says to one at his side: Take this sword and divide the child in two. That does not sound very much like a mother heart; but he is watching. Then he sees the mother heart leap, and hears her cry: No! I had rather that the other woman had the child than that you should hurt it! And Solomon knew who was the mother of that child. That is the wisdom of Solomon which is actuated by his love.

Supremely does this characterize the Lord Jesus. Oh, it seems at times that the way He goes to work is hard, but it is actuated by His love. It may be strange and mysterious, but love is in it; there is a great heart behind it all.

When at the direction of Solomon the Ark was brought into the sanctuary, and set there in its appointed place, speaking of the Lord coming into His rest and satisfaction, we are told that this symbolic realization of the Lord's end in rest was attested from heaven, and that Solomon turned his face to the people and blessed them. God has come into His rest in His Son, into full satisfaction, and then the Son, in whose face is the glory of God, turns to us in blessing: "...the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). A greater than Solomon is here.

The Lord give us a new apprehension of His Son.

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