

# Horizoned by Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Christ is the ultimate Horizon and Criterion of all judgment, and He is the inclusive explanation of the world's problems, offering redemption and restoration to and into God.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:21, John 8:44, Acts 10:42, Acts 17:31, Romans 8:22, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2, 1 John 5:19

**Topics:** "Spiritual Depth", "Christ as Judge"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that Jesus Christ is ordained by God as the ultimate Judge and the 'Horizon' of all judgment, meaning that all things are determined within Him. He illustrates the Christian journey as a progression from the safety of the shore to the depths of spiritual understanding, where true fulfillment lies. Sparks highlights that the Christian life is serious and requires a commitment to deeper truths, as the Holy Spirit leads believers beyond their comfort zones. He explains that the Bible provides the only satisfactory answers to life's complexities, focusing on God's eternal intention, the historic rift caused by sin, and the significance of being 'in Christ.' Ultimately, he asserts that Christ is the defining criterion for all things, and through Him, believers find their true purpose and reconciliation with God.

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## Transcript

"...this is he which is ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead" (Acts 10:42).

("...he is the one who has been designated by God as Judge of the living and the dead" N.E.B.)

"...he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world... in the man whom he hath ordained..." (Acts 17:31, mg.)

The word 'ordained' or 'designated' in the above Scriptures is, in the original language, the word from which the English word 'horizon' is derived. These are not the only occasions on which the root meaning is employed.

These statements, therefore, are that God has designated His Son - Jesus Christ - as the ultimate Horizon and Criterion of all judgment. That means that Christ is to be the sphere and scope, the realm and the range within whom and according to whom all things will be determined.

To know and consider this statement of Divine fact is to be introduced to the immense and unique significance of Christ in relation to "all things". It is the key to the great amount of Scriptural revelation

which shows that Christ is appointed by the Father, not only officially, but characteristically, the Criterion of all Divine judgment or determination.

This introduces a quite serious element into life, especially the life of the Christian. Sooner or later, every true Christian, i.e. every born-again child of God, will find that the Spirit of God is pressing this criterion against his or her life. We all know that in our spiritual beginnings, as in childhood, everything is fresh, happy, and irresponsible. Most of us know that it does not continue indefinitely like that, but that as we go on the Christian life assumes a more serious aspect, when problems, difficulties, and complications arise. Many think that, when this happens, things have gone wrong, but, while it is natural to look back with some longing, it would be unnatural to try to force ourselves back to childhood. What happens is that we come to realise that there are bigger meanings in life than we were aware of, and now we are being confronted with them.

When we go to the seaside for a holiday - if we ever do - we see three classes of people. There are those who never leave the dry land, but keep to the shore. Then there are those who just paddle in the shallows, ankle deep. Finally, there are those who strip and go out into the deeps, beyond their foothold.

Number one class have an easy and uneventful time. They keep to safety and convenience. Number two class have comparative enjoyment, and if they get an occasional splashing and things begin to look a bit difficult, they make for the land and escape from the inconvenience. Number three class find themselves contending with forces which make demands upon strength, courage, and endurance, but theirs is the real satisfaction and greatness.

The Christian life is very much like this. There are these three classes of Christians, but the Spirit of God constrains to committal to the greater fulnesses of Christ, and often precipitates us beyond our depth. The Apostle Paul cried, "O the depth of the riches...", and spoke of "...the unsearchable riches of Christ...". The Holy Spirit knows these depths and ever seeks to press Christians to know them, but the process is one which is fraught with almost frightening experiences.

The one thing for which we are ever seeking is that which will be an inclusive explanation or interpretation of the whole difficult history. The question is: Is there such an explanation? The purpose of our present consideration is to answer that question.

At our starting point there are two things on which we are, or must be, agreed.

(a) That things in this world and life are not as they ought to be; things violate our sense of right. There is contradiction, unrest, doubt, discontent, and a duality of forces in constant conflict.

(b) For our explanation and enlightenment we are bound to the Bible. We refuse human philosophy because it never has given, and never can give, a satisfactory answer. We repudiate the wisdom of men as a means of solving the problems of life. The Bible alone gives the answer, and provides the required light. So we come to the Bible for our answer, and we find that it focuses everything upon three points:-

(1) The eternal intention of God. That is, that Christ is the horizon of all things; the ultimate range and limit; the scope, sphere, and character of all things.

(2) The historic rift in Heaven and earth which is answerable for all the discord in the creation, and explains every other rift.

(3) What really happened when that rift and rupture occurred. (This last is really the key to our whole consideration.)

#### (1) God's Eternal Intention

The Bible teaches that, in the Divine intention, all things were summed up in God's Son.

"...whom he appointed heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2).

According to the context, this appointment must have been made before all things were created, because it is also said that "...all things have been created through him, and unto him..." (Col. 1:16). The end revealed and declared is "...to sum up (gather together, reunite) all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). Primarily, all things were in God and vested in His Son as "Heir".

The rift and rupture by a revolt resulted in a fall out of God. However, it was not a fall into nothingness, but into Satan - the Adversary as the erstwhile and - for the time being - "Prince of this world".

It was a fall

from love into enmity;

from light into darkness;

from purpose into frustration and 'vanity';

from life into death;

from content into discontent;

from harmony into discord.

We leave many details given in Scripture as to the causes of, and reason for, this revolt and disruption, and just note that we find ourselves with this explanation of a creation shot through and through with the sense of there being a fundamental disorder, and that, therefore, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth... (Rom. 8:22).

The inclusive explanation is that everything, including man, is out of its true and right Sphere, Orbit, or Horizon. This can be tested and proved any day. Immediately a life is brought into Christ, this sense of unrest and unreality gives place to a consciousness of right adjustment, peace, and of all being 'reconciled'. It is all a matter of Christ being in His divinely-appointed place.

So we come to see and consider

Jesus Christ - God's Eternal Horizon

The characteristic definition of the Christian life - in the New Testament - is "In Christ".

To obtain the impression of its very great importance, every Christian ought to make it his - or her - business to do two things.

(a) To note the number of times this phrase - in various forms - e.g. "In Christ", "In Christ Jesus", etc., is mentioned.

(b) To note the numerous and various matters related to it.

This study will result in a rich education in what Christianity really is.

We are going to consider it now, in broad outline, in three main aspects:

(A) "In Christ" is a distinguishing definition.

(B) "In Christ" is a descriptive definition.

(C) "In Christ" is a determining definition.

(A) "In Christ" - A Distinguishing Definition

"...all we who were baptized into Christ..." (Romans 6:3, R.V.)

"...if any man is in Christ..." (2 Cor. 5:17).

The very term "In Christ" implies division of the human race.

(1) It is the pointer to the place and purpose of Christ in God's appointment. That is, to be the sphere of man in creation and redemption. The creation is said to have been in Him. It moved out of Him. The new creation - the redeemed from the old - is said to be in Christ. Redemption is therefore a return into Christ.

(2) If men are not in Christ (and this is only possible through 'new birth' - "born of the Spirit") then they are in someone else or something else. Here follows all the teaching concerning man's falling away and alienation from God.

"...the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19); "Ye are of your father the devil..." (John 8:44), and other such Scriptures reveal where people are if not in Christ. The Word of God declares them to be "in the flesh", "in darkness", "in death".

Redemption is recovery and restoration to and into God in Christ.

The Cross of Christ is the great divide (Romans 6, etc.) It reveals and declares what man is by nature. It shows what we leave by union with Christ's death. It discloses what we come into by union with His resurrection.

The Cross is the only opening into God's realm. By it, Christ brings man back to God.

(B) "In Christ" - A Descriptive Definition

It not only indicates the sphere, it also defines and describes the character. Christ summed up in Himself all that God ever meant by sovereignly choosing the Hebrew race. To understand God's dealings with Israel is to come to a rich understanding of Christ.

(a) The beginning in Abraham.

In Genesis 14:13, Abraham is called "the Hebrew". The word 'Hebrew' means 'the man from beyond' (i.e. beyond the river). He is spoken of as a 'stranger', a 'sojourner'. In the world of his sojourn, which was to be his as an inheritance - by Divine covenant - he was, for his earthly life, a stranger. For that time he had no 'abiding place', no fixed residence, and 'no continuing city'. He was not only a visitor, he was essentially

different, of a different order and type.

Here we are introduced to all that Christ is spiritually and humanly. He was, and is, different and apart. In Him God works in contradiction to and repudiation of all that which has come into the human race contrary to His thought and intention.

In a fuller and altogether different way Jesus was the Man from beyond. How often He spoke of Himself as having come from above! How different He was from all others here! What a stranger He was on this earth! How homeless in more than the material sense! He was of another 'order' in the deepest reality of His being. The reality was known by demons; sensed acutely by His enemies; and felt by the common people.

Jesus - "the Son of Man" - was, and is, the norm of what will eventually be in the redeemed humanity.

(b) From Abraham in person look at Abraham in the nation. The great inclusive idea of Israel was their intended vocation as the servant-nation. All their discipline was related to this purpose. The personal history of the Patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David - was all directed toward servanthood in the highest, deepest, and fullest sense. It was a servant-sonship, and a sonship-servanthood which - in principle - lay behind God's dealings with them.

And what was true of the founders was true of the nation - 'not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give their life' was their calling.

The loss of this conception of their existence as God's chosen, cost them their place in God. They fell out of God, and have ceased to be His 'servant' nation. Surrender and submission, not superiority and pride, are the laws of God's service.

Read and consider Christ and His life in the light of Israel's calling and vocation. It is very illuminating.

(a) Look at His birth.

His mother (Luke 1:26-38).

Think of the social embarrassment.

Think of the religious predicament.

Think of the personal dilemma.

Then reflect upon the grand renunciation!

Jesus was born of this grand triumph of the servant spirit - "Be it unto me according to thy word."

(b) The thirty years.

This is the period of life in which preparation and training for life's vocation takes place. School days and home training, followed by college. It is the period in which life's ambition governs everything.

In the case of Jesus, so far as the records go (and it is the unconcealed disappointment of Christendom that we know so little of this period), it was a naturally negative time. He came from it with no academic honours or distinctions; no status or 'references'. Rather did He come out with many handicaps. Not as a

master and governor according to men's standards, but as a Servant, disciplined in a hard school for thirty years. He emerged as the suffering Servant of Jehovah.

Thus He inherited and took over the forfeited and lost vocation of Israel, but in a fuller and deeper way than Israel could ever have fulfilled it. The truest thing about Him was His surrender and submission.

(c) See, next, the Horizon of servanthood in His baptism - "...thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness". There is a very great range in those two words "all righteousness".

(1) John the Baptist - or Baptizer.

It is evident from the crowds that flocked to John that there existed a state of concern, weariness, frustration, and a sense of sin. His message was that of 'remission'; his cry, of 'repent'.

But, great as was the man and his mission, John himself was labouring under a sense of limitation and tentativeness. "I" - "but he"; "water" - but "the Holy Spirit". The comparisons and contrasts show how insufficient John felt his ministry to be.

Moreover, in pointing to "the Lamb of God", John seems clearly to have included himself among those who needed to have their sins 'taken away'. He needed the Sin-Bearer. Further; John himself exemplified and embodied the servant-spirit in a way second only to Jesus. His whole life was one of discipline unto his great service, and his supreme declaration expressed that: "he must increase, but I must decrease".

(2) Jesus baptized.

It is said of those being baptized by John that they were "baptized... confessing their sins". Other Scriptures tell us that Jesus was without sin. Yet the whole Gospel of Christianity rests upon His being "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12); upon the fact that "Him who knew no sin he [God] made to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor 5:21). So Jesus took a place - not His own, but in our stead - among sinners, confessing the sin of the whole world, He bore it unto death. The range is "the world"; thus Christ, in death and resurrection, is the Horizon for the world's salvation.

(3) The opened Heaven and the Divine satisfaction. Everything in the whole Bible shows that Heaven is closed to man by nature. It was closed when man fell out of God by disobedience. That man ceased to be under the pronouncement, "It is very good". Banished, he lies under the curse which is on the race and on the earth.

But

'A final Adam to the fight

And to the rescue came.'

Here is the Man in whom God is well pleased. To Him Heaven is open, and upon Him the attestation of acceptance rests. If His baptism - death and resurrection in figure - was representative and inclusive, so is His acceptance and His open Heaven.

But note, it is in Him that the good pleasure and open Heaven are found. Not elsewhere nor otherwise. He is the Horizon of an open way with God and Heaven.

Having touched upon the Incarnation, the thirty years, the baptism of Jesus, as God's appointed Horizon of all things, we proceed to the same relatedness of

### The Temptation

That was not an incident, however wonderful, in the life of our Lord. It, like all the other special events, reached far back to the beginning and far on to the end. Indeed it ranged the whole horizon of human history and destiny. The first phase of the Temptation contained that primal issue of gratifying natural desire on the argument of 'necessity' at the suggestion of the Devil, or being prepared to risk all on obedience. It was a false idea of life which resulted in death, whereas abiding in God is the only true life. (More on this later.)

As to the second phase of the Temptation, the only possible way to adequately measure its force and rightly appraise its meaning is to read Mark 14:53-15:15, especially in the New English Translation. The alternatives for Jesus are evident and obvious: -

Acceptance (by the world) or rejection.

An easy and cheap way or a costly and hard one.

Reputation and popularity or being despised and discredited.

Having all in this life or having all eternally.

His own salvation or the salvation of the world.

The local or the universal.

Policy or principle.

Compromise or singlemindedness.

All this was, and ever is, deeply testing. It is ever the battleground of the natural and the spiritual man; the soul in conflict with the spirit.

The heart of the temptation is faith relating to the long view. The history of the last nearly two thousand years has shown one thing; that when Jesus refused the quick and easy way and chose the long-view way, He became a spiritual power universally for ever; whereas, if He had accepted what Satan offered, one of two things could have resulted. He could have been killed by Romans, just as many zealots were killed in His day, and that would have been the end. Perhaps that was the hidden snare in the Devil's offer, and would have pleased him - the Devil - well. Or He might have become one of the dictators energized and inspired by the Devil, which have 'had their day and ceased to be', ending in ignominy.

He chose aright, and eternity will add to the vindication of time, but it was very costly.

In the third temptation the cosmic secret is uncovered. Foiled in the other two, the enemy seems to have become desperate and came right out into the open. "Worship me". Yes, that takes everything a long way back. To be 'equal with the Most High', 'worshipped as God', was ever his ambition. For this he is willing to give very much. Yes, he can give much! So often those who compromise, who let go God's fullest and best are peculiarly and uncannily prospered in their life. The exchange of the higher for the lower; the

highest for the less high; the spiritual for the natural; the cross for a crown, is not always accompanied by immediately palpable disaster and a sense of loss. The Devil can give much, but Jesus saw through to the essential and supreme values. He reserved all His worship for God only. It was not so long after all. A little over three years; three painful years and an infinitely painful climax, and then - "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth", "Wherefore also God highly exalted him". And the best is yet to be.

We return to our beginning. Not only by eternal choice, but by universal triumph, Jesus is God's Horizon, within whom and according to whom all things will be judged and determined. It is "...in the man whom he [God] has horizoned (literal Greek) that God will judge the world." (Acts 17:31.)

Before we leave the subject of the Temptation, it is necessary to recognise what was the heart of the whole conflict. In the earthly life of our Lord, there were three main features which govern the whole purpose of the Father in Him.

(a) His life in God.

There was immensely more in this than just seeking to live day by day with God in view; respecting and honouring God, and giving God His place. It reached right back to, and through, the great rift with all its involvements. It reached right on to the order and constitution of "a new heaven and a new earth". This is an essential and elemental factor in His being God's Horizon for all things.

It was necessary therefore that, from birth, through boyhood and manhood, there should be those features which postulated obedience. But in full manhood, at the age of thirty, He had to make His position publicly absolute in baptism. He may have been circumcised when eight days old, but that did not carry with it what He evidently recognised His baptism to mean. This was - in figure - a death, burial, and resurrection, and represented what His Cross would mean - absolute committal and subordination to the will of God.

For Him, life was in God, abiding in God. Only so was it possible for Him to reverse - 'in man, for man' - the Fall out of God.

To be "in Christ" is to be in God.

This is the main theme of John in his Gospel and in his Letters. It is what Paul had seen and what led him to write so much regarding the significance of Christ from eternity to eternity, and of the final destiny of redeemed man and creation.

Satan abode not in God. Christ abode in the Father. Hence He is the Mender of the universal rift and rupture.

(b) The life-long and many-sided effort of Satan to get between the Son and the Father.

We can never understand the persistent hostility to Jesus, both directly by Satan and indirectly by those influenced by him; the trials, temptations, sufferings, treacheries, disloyalties, and misrepresentations, until we recognise that one object which was the aim of them all. The object was to get Him to move out of God, to act in pride, self-interest, independence, resentment, or in any other way that would take Him out of God. To do, in the case of 'the last Adam', what he succeeded in doing with the first, would be a greater triumph of Satan than the former, for it involved much more. Satan's triumph is always in getting anyone, either in details or as a whole, out of their life and abode in God.

So the basic committal was put to the test continually right up to Gethsemane, and it was unrelenting.

(c) His full victory in the utter cost of the Cross.

His last words - "Father, into thy hands..." - contain the most sublime, the most tremendous, the most Satan-devastating triumph that this universe has ever seen. They explain the cry a little before: "It is finished". What an "it"! The first words at His committal were "My Son". The last word in His fulfilment was: "Father". It almost sounds like a call and an answer: "Son" - "Father"! The Father entrusted to the Son a great trust. The Son fulfilled that trust. He abode in the Father, although all hell strove to get Him out.

That looks on to the next main event in His life relating to His being God's eternal Horizon.

The Transfiguration

The earthly sojourn of our Lord is marked by a series of mountain peaks, some literal, some spiritual. His incarnation is the first; His baptism the second; His temptation the third; His transfiguration the fourth. Here we stop for the present while we look at the Mount of Transfiguration.

The sequence is in the right order. From each peak or eminence, the next comes into view with valleys between. From the temptation and full victory there, it is right that we should espy this peak and let it be a link in the chain between the conflict in the wilderness and the travail on the Cross. The transfiguration must look back to the temptation and on to Calvary.

The transfiguration was evidently regarded by Jesus as a climax and a new point of advance. The climax pivoted upon who Jesus was. Everything past and future, hung upon that.

"Who do men say that the Son of man is?"

"...who say ye that I am?"

Jesus felt that the time had come to introduce and press that all-important question and issue. The farthest point, both spiritually and geographically, had been reached. It is as though He said: 'You have seen and heard enough to resolve the question of identity; to get beyond all merely human deductions, conjectures, surmises, or acceptances. You must settle in your own hearts this vital and fundamental question. All that is yet to be will, for you, hinge, not upon the fact, but upon your certainty as to this matter.' From general speculation He brought them to personal apprehension. It is not good enough that men should be saying even the best things as to who He was (and the disciples only told Him the good things). Those who are to go on with Him must face the question more deeply and utterly.

Peter gave Him what He was requiring, and He immediately declared that to be the foundation of His future building activity, namely, His essential Sonship as God's Horizon. That, however men may interpret Peter's confession, is what it came to be. God never builds His eternal structures upon fallible man, however much His grace may have done in him, and it is necessary to invent the fallacy of infallibility to make either Peter or any 'successor' the foundation.

This surely is evident in the events which immediately followed the confession. The announcement by Jesus of His passion. "From that time began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed..." (Matthew 16:21).

This threw them all into confusion, consternation. They - including Peter - were completely disconcerted by this statement, and Peter comes out worst of all.

This painful and almost devastating background became the setting for the Transfiguration.

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