

Human and Religious Blindness, and Heavenly Sight

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the theme of human and religious blindness, highlighting the importance of spiritual enlightenment and understanding, and the role of the Lord Jesus as the new Israel in carrying God's thoughts and transferring them to His companions.

Scripture: Exodus 35:29, Amos 3:3, John 8:12, John 9:25, John 16:13, Acts 26:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 1:16-18, Colossians 1:27, 1 John 1:7

Topics: "Spiritual Blindness", "Enlightenment in Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the contrast between human and religious blindness and the heavenly sight offered through Jesus Christ. He illustrates how the spiritual blindness of Israel reflects a broader human condition, where many fail to recognize the light of God in Christ. Sparks explains that Jesus embodies the new Israel, fulfilling God's intentions and transferring His light to His followers, who are called to reflect that light to the world. The sermon highlights the necessity of spiritual enlightenment and understanding, urging believers to seek a deeper relationship with Christ to overcome the darkness that blinds them. Ultimately, the message calls for a transformation that allows individuals to declare, 'I was blind, but now I see.'

Transcript

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Reading: John 8:12-9:41

It is a pity that these chapters are divided, because in chapter nine Jesus is showing the truth of what He has been saying in chapter eight in a very practical way.

It is perfectly clear that this incident is set in the background of the earthly Israel, and this long section of the record is intended to show that Israel after the flesh is blind. If ever men demonstrated how blind they were, these people did in all this argument! Jesus is making them give themselves away. That is, He is just compelling them to betray their own blindness. The fact is that these people were just not seeing. They were spiritually blind, as that man was naturally blind. So that what we have here is set in Israel's blindness, all with the object of showing this specific characteristic of the new spiritual Israel which the

Lord Jesus was bringing into being.

Will you retain that for a few minutes, as we are going away from it for a little while - because there is one marvelous truth which embraces all these things which we are saying, and that is that no thought that God has ever expressed dies. There is no lapse of any thought that God has expressed. God expressed His thoughts in the very conception and constitution of the Israel of old. They were in all that was said about Israel and in all that was revealed as to God's purpose in Israel. God expressed His thoughts concerning Israel in a multitude of ways. That Israel failed to answer to the thoughts of God. His thoughts concerning Israel were never fully realized because of their rebellion. So that Israel was passed by, but God's thoughts were not put aside. All those same thoughts are taken up in a new Israel.

Jesus Himself becomes the inclusive new Israel. You remember that when He referred to Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, He said to Nathanael: "Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). So Jesus is the new Israel in person. All the communications of God and Heaven to man are by way of Jesus, the new Israel. All God's thoughts in the past ages are taken up in the Lord Jesus in the first place. All that was ever intended by God concerning Israel and was lost by them is carried on in the Lord Jesus, and then transferred by Him to His companions and the companions of the heavenly calling - the new Israel, which is spiritual.

This opens up a very big realm for you. It would be impossible to number all the characteristics of God's mind concerning Israel, but let us just indicate what we mean.

You know, God marked Israel off as a people distinct from all other people in appearance. Some years ago, before he went to the Lord, I knew a very distinguished Hebrew Christian. He used to travel all over the world, and he once said this to me: 'Wherever I go, in all parts of the world, I always know when I meet a Jew. They may have lived for generations in this country or in that, but there is something about them that they never lose. I always know they are Jews without being told.' God marked them out as a people distinct from all other races.

Now see how that is taken up in the Lord Jesus and in His true companions. Whenever you meet a true Christian in this world, you know it before he or she is introduced to you. It is not the shape of his or her face, or, indeed, by any outward form, but there is never any need for anyone to bring them to you and say: 'This is a Christian.' You come into their presence and there is something about them that is different. Then when you begin to talk you know that you have met one of your own race. Their outward features may be those of the Chinese, Indian, British, or anything else, but there are spiritual features which mark them out as different from all others: "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

That is a truth, but we must very sacredly safeguard that truth. There are far too many who bear the name of Christ who cannot be distinguished from the world.

However, our point is this: Whatever the expressed thought of God was, in any one of a thousand ways, if Israel lost that thought, it is taken up in Jesus Christ and is transferred by Him to His companions. The companions of Christ always take some of His character. That is why someone started the name 'Christian': "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Someone said: 'These are Christ ones.'

That is a very large truth within which we are speaking in these chapters. Israel was called to be God's instrument of light to the world. He raised them up to be for Him light to all the nations. They were all intended to come to know God through Israel, to see what He was like and to come into a knowledge of Him. Israel was set in the nations to be the light of the world. God intended to reflect Himself on this earth through Israel. It was intended that the light of God should fall upon Israel like a mirror and then be reflected from them to shine forth to all the nations. There were times when it was like that to some extent - but what a tragedy Israel became in that particular! The time came when God was veiled by Israel rather than revealed. Israel became a terrible contradiction of God. When you pick up these Gospels and read all these arguments between Jesus and the leaders of Israel, and all that is in them as to the Jewish rulers, the way they behaved, the way they talked and the spirit that they showed, you say: 'Well, if that were God, I would want to have nothing to do with Him.' That is a terrible misrepresentation of God! And because of that God put Israel aside, but in this particular respect He did not put His thought aside.

At that time, when Israel was about to be rejected, God's Son came into the world, and He took up the thought of God that was intended to be realized in Israel and He said, right in the midst of this dark and blind people, "I am the light of the world". 'Israel has failed. I take the place of Israel, and in Me and through Me shall all the world know what God is like.' "While I am in the world I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." God always intended that the races of this world should have the light of life, life-giving light, liberating light.

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." How does the Son make us free? "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" ... "I am the light of the world", and the effect of the light is to set men free.

Do you remember the commission given by the Lord to the Apostle Paul at the time of his conversion? It is most illuminating and instructive in the light of what we are saying. The Lord said to Paul: "Unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:17, 18). He was to be sent to those who were prisoners of Satan and therefore in the dark, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. Every member of the human race is by nature in the devil's prison.

You will remember that in Bunyan's Holy War there is set forth the battle for man's Soul, and all the forces of Apollyon are attacking to capture man's Soul, which is represented as a city. Apollyon calls his leaders together and says: 'If we are going to capture Mansoul we must first of all capture the burgomaster. His name is Mr. Understanding. We must capture him and put him in a dark dungeon so that he does not see what is happening.' There is a stroke of genius in that! The Word says: "Having the understanding darkened" (Ephesians 4:18 A.V.) "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them" (II Corinthians 4:4). If light comes from Jesus to any soul, that soul is liberated, and the whole strategy of Apollyon is upset.

Yes, how important it is to the god of this age to blind the minds of men and to put Mr. Understanding in a dark dungeon, thus making sure that he does not see what is going on!

And that is the state of every child of Adam after the flesh. The Lord was saying to Israel: 'That is where you have got to. You, who were intended to be the light of the world, are now involved in the very darkness of the world. You are a contradiction of God's thought and intention.'

That is quite clear and evident, is it not? However, it is the negative side. We repeat: what Israel failed to realize is taken up in the person of God's Son and is transferred to the new, collective Israel, called in the Hebrew Letter 'the companions of Christ'.

Do you see what the companions of Christ are supposed to be like? They are supposed to be the very vessels in which this truth is fulfilled. They are supposed to be the very temples of Christ, and in them He is the light: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

That would lead us to a very large study. You know that the New Testament has a very great deal to say about spiritual understanding, and the tremendous importance of spiritual knowledge. It puts a very high and great value upon this faculty of spiritual sight. You will remember that it says: "It is God that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves" (II Corinthians 4:6,7). Do you notice what surrounds that marvelous statement? It is connected with Moses going up into the mountain where God was, receiving the law at the mouth of God, and then coming down the mountain, not knowing that his face was shining. It says: "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone" (Exodus 35:29), but the people saw it and could not look. The light was too strong and they could not look upon the face of Moses, so Moses took a veil and put it over his face and hid the glory of God behind the veil. 'Now', says the Apostle, bringing this right up to date 'from that time unto now there is a veil upon the heart of Israel. They are incapable of looking upon the glory of God... "But whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Corinthians 3:16,17).' When the Holy Spirit shines Christ in, there is liberty. The life is liberated.

Oh, it is wonderful just to see something of the Lord by the Holy Spirit!

What we have said is the statement of fact, and when the facts have been stated we are only at the beginning of the matter. You will never be liberated by a statement of fact! We may state facts for years, but they will make no difference. Something has got to happen. It has to begin to happen if you are not already born again, but what has to happen at the beginning of your Christian life is what happened to this man who was born blind: you have to be able to say exactly the same words that he used: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." 'There are a lot of things that I do not know, but one thing I do know.' That is the characteristic of the beginning of a true companion of Jesus Christ.

But that is only the beginning of seeing. The Apostle Paul had given a tremendous amount of teaching to the believers in Ephesus. He said to them: "I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). He spent some years with them and just poured out to them the light that he had. They were therefore Christians who had a lot of instruction. After that Paul went to prison and when there he wrote a letter to them, in which he said: "Making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened" (Ephesians 1:16-18). That was not for their salvation. They had been saved a long time and had been taught very much. They had gone a long way with the Lord - but Paul still prayed this prayer. In effect he was saying: 'All that you have received and all that I have given you is nothing to what there is yet to see in the Lord Jesus. And for all that you need to have your eyes opened. You need the spirit of wisdom and revelation.' How important this is!

Do you notice how Paul finished that Letter? "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). What is it that these are seeking to do? They are trying to rob you of the light. Paul says there: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). The WILES of the devil are, among other things, to stop you getting more light, to rob you of the light that you have, to bring in something that will blind your eyes, and to get them off the Lord Jesus on to something else, perhaps on to yourself, or on to some worldly interest. As soon as that happens you will go into bondage and will be helpless prisoners again. The evil forces are "the world-rulers of THIS DARKNESS" (Ephesians 6:12).

This matter of spiritual enlightenment is a great battle. Indeed, there is always a battle bound up with receiving more true spiritual light.

We must leave it there for the present, though we have come only to the threshold of a very great matter. We close by repeating what we have already said: This great thought of God is taken up in Christ and transferred to His companions.

We might have said something about Christ's battle with His own companions in the days of His flesh about this matter. He had chosen twelve, the number of the tribes of Israel. He had made them His companions, but, oh, what difficulty He had in making them understand! He had sometimes to say: 'Do you not yet understand?' and He had to put His teaching into parables for little children, to try to get through their dark minds some understanding of spiritual truth. "The sower went forth to sow" - you know the picture. But it is a picture for little children, is it not? And He told them all the other parables. When He had finished them all, He had to tell the disciples that it was necessary to speak to them like that because they had no understanding. All the way through He was battling with their dark minds, and was pointing on to a day when they would understand. However, because He knew that day was coming, He did not give them up. 'In that day ye shall ask Me no more questions... "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).'

I have often thought that the Lord Jesus must have been very happy on the Day of Pentecost! Have you read Peter's address to the multitude on that day? (Here is a nice little bit of Bible study for you - make a list of all the subjects included in that address.) It is packed full of the Old Testament, and Peter is saying: 'Why, it is all being fulfilled in Jesus Christ!' That is what Jesus laboured for three and a half years to get them to understand! And on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had come, why, the Bible was wide open to them. They saw it all and were set free by the truth and the light. I think Jesus must have been saying: 'This is what I lived and suffered for! These men are seeing at last. They are My companions now.'

The companions of Jesus are those who see as He sees. How true that is of all companionship! There is really no companionship between two people if they do not see alike. You might want to keep together, but, oh! how difficult it is when one does not see what you see. You can go so far and no further. The Scriptures say: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Real companionship rests upon mutual understanding, and I think there are few things that Jesus wants and longs for more than to have people who understand Him. This is what God ever wanted, and this thought is taken up in His Son and is passed on to the Son's companions. John says: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (I John 1:7). Fellowship with the Lord and with one another - if we walk in the light. I dare to say that you have received, at least in word, a good deal of light. All I can say is: Walk in it,

and you will be set free.

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