

In Relation to His Knowledge

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of spiritual knowledge through Christ and the necessity of the Cross in understanding true significance in God.

Scripture: Genesis 2:16

Topics: "Authority in Christ", "Spiritual Knowledge"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound relationship between knowledge and power in the context of God's wisdom, contrasting the deceptive allure of worldly knowledge with the true spiritual knowledge embodied in Christ. He explains that while Adam and Eve sought knowledge to gain power, it ultimately led to their downfall, whereas Christ's knowledge, rooted in divine understanding, grants true authority and significance. Sparks urges believers to pursue a deep, personal knowledge of God, which comes through the Cross and leads to spiritual maturity and true significance in the universe. He highlights that this journey may involve suffering and trials, but it is essential for becoming men and women of God who reflect Christ's significance. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a commitment to knowing the Lord above all else, as this knowledge is the foundation of true power and authority.

Transcript

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

"And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (Gen. 3:2-6).

"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever - therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden" (Gen. 3:22-23).

"For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

"We speak wisdom, however, among them that are fullgrown: yet a wisdom not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nought: but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the ages unto our glory: which none of the rulers of this age hath known: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:6-8, R.V. mg.).

The Lord Jesus did not come into this world as God incarnate, taking human form, merely for His own sake, to do something in isolation, in His isolated Person, and go away again, as though He had accomplished His life-work and that was that. The fundamental fact of our faith is that the Lord Jesus is God's basis and model for the constitution of every child of His. Christ is very vitally related to us. God's thought is: "as he is, so are we". We are "foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son". The significance of Christ for us is a very real, very vital one.

Our significance, therefore - and our hearts must be wholly set upon being, as utterly as God has made possible, men or women of God - our significance in this universe must therefore be the significance of Christ. Exactly what HE signifies, WE have to signify, and so it is for us to understand, to grasp, to see, by Divine enablement, what is the nature of Christ's significance.

HIS SIGNIFICANCE NOT OF THIS WORLD

We have seen that His significance was altogether outside of this world and its standards, its ideas, its mentality. It was another significance. It was the impact of something other upon this world and in this world. It was not just an influence, it was not something abstract. It was the very nature of His humanity. He was a Man in possession of certain things which no other man possessed. All the race beside Him did not possess the things which He possessed, and those things are the things which are going to give us our significance, as the significance of Christ. For there is no doubt about it - these things do make people significant.

THE NATURE OF HIS POWER

We spoke in our last meditation of the nature of His power. With the world's ideas of power it had nothing in common. It was power which worked through utter selflessness, meekness, humility, so far as He Himself was concerned; emptiness, absolute dependence upon sources outside of Himself. That was the position He had accepted voluntarily. But He would not have been such a man of power if He had had it in Himself. Why should He spend all night in prayer before He would allow Himself to choose the men who were to be His disciples and later His apostles? He would not allow Himself to do that out from Himself. It was necessary for Him to be able to say later, "I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18), and any man making choice for such responsibility would naturally never have chosen those men - least of all Judas Iscariot. "Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). He spent all night in prayer before He did it. Many other pointers there are to His power not being in Himself but being drawn from another source. It is just the exact opposite of the world's ideas of power.

THE ASSOCIATION OF KNOWLEDGE WITH POWER

Now I come to another point in connection with that - the association of KNOWLEDGE with power. There is a saying, 'Knowledge is power'. That may in a sense be true in the natural world. It certainly is true in the spiritual world. But natural knowledge is not powerful in the spiritual world. We have only to go back to the passages in Genesis that we read, to see that the idea primarily was one of power. 'New power is going to be reached by way of knowledge: knowledge is going to bring to power' - so the devil said, and so the woman came to believe, and the man and the race. Knowledge and power. Yes, it is true, it is quite true. The lie of the devil was not in that he said, in effect, 'Knowledge is power'. The lie was, "Ye shall be as God"; that is, 'You will be able to dispense with God, you will be as God yourself; you will have the power in yourself, and that will make you equal with God, and you will have the secret of life, the secret of pre-eminence, the secret of dominion; you will have it in your own hands, in yourself.' The lie was there.

The truth was that in the day that their soul-eyes were opened, when they acquired a soulish or psychical knowledge, in that day their spiritual eyes closed. In the day that they saw in one realm, they became blind forever in another. The whole race was blinded by seeking knowledge - not by knowledge in itself, for knowledge is not evil, it is not wrong - but by seeking knowledge as personal power, to give personal advantage and to glorify the flesh, to glorify man. The end, as we said earlier, is man's undoing. The more he knows, the more by his knowledge he brings the race into proximity to utter destruction.

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE

Let us come to the Lord Jesus. The significance of the Lord Jesus was His knowledge. His power worked by way of His knowledge. It was not just putting forth force. His power was because of His knowledge. But what was the nature and basis of His knowledge? The nature of His knowledge was that He knew God, He knew the Father; He knew heaven's standpoint, heaven's standards. He knew eternal laws and principles. He knew with the knowledge of heaven - that was His power. It was spiritual knowledge which He possessed. They could not understand. As we said, He was a stranger in this world. They did not understand. "Whence hath this man this wisdom...?" (Matt. 13:54). They referred to what seemed to them to be His store of information. He could speak about almost anything. He could speak about the sea, He could speak about boats, He could speak about fishes, He could speak about everything on a farm; He could speak about anything. That was impressive enough, but that was not the thing that perplexed them. There was something more than that. "He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:29), who were the knowledgeable people according to this world. There was some element in His knowledge which defeated every attempt of theirs to fathom. It was spiritual knowledge, and that spiritual knowledge met men's need as nothing else met that need - when men's hearts were open to be met and when they realized that they had a need. It met need in the deepest way for man.

Of course, we know that ourselves. You know very well the difference between information and Divine spiritual knowledge. If the Lord speaks spiritually, how utterly satisfying it is, how it meets us right deep down in our being, how it is food, how it is life! But the mere imparting of Bible or religious information - that is another thing in another realm. It may be the cleverest person doing it: it does not touch us. I have lately been trying to read a book on doctrine, Christian doctrine, by an eminent religious scholar who took a whole year off from his work at Oxford University in order to write it. I had to read every sentence two or three times before I knew what he was talking about. I thought: 'Something has happened to me, I have lost out - I can't cope with this!' Until I met a man who is miles and miles ahead of me intellectually and I said, 'Have you encountered such and such a book?' He said, 'Yes, but it is a weariness to the flesh; I do not know what the man is talking about!' That was a great comfort to me, purely naturally, in the flesh! But, you see, that kind of approach, in dealing with the things of God, is death.

But when the Lord Jesus spoke, He spoke out of knowledge which was not of that kind. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:63), and the hungry heart knew it and ever has known it. There is a knowledge which we, like the Lord Jesus, may possess. He is not apart from us in this. He accepted our position, to have, in the days of His flesh, all things as we may have them. In saying that, nothing is taken from His Deity, His Godhead; but I must accept His absolute humanity, and that, for the duration of that humanity, He, of His own will, accepted our position - to go our way, and not to have power in Himself, but to have it only in God and to obtain it all from God. The purity of His Spirit, of course, made for possibilities beyond anything we can imagine. "The pure in heart... shall see God" (Matt. 5:8), and therefore He could see and discern and perceive as perhaps we never shall. But, on the same basis, we are permitted to have knowledge, of an order, in a realm, which means the very heart satisfaction of others and which, being that, is a power beyond anything that is academic, however great it may be. It is heart knowledge and heart satisfaction that matters. It is that that is going to make you and me men and women of God. In a word, we shall be men and women of God just in proportion to our spiritual knowledge of the Lord. That is our measure as men and women before God.

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding, and knoweth me" (Jer. 9:23-24).

THE AUTHORITY AND POWER OF CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE

Then I said that He spoke with authority. His knowledge gave Him an authority. It was not official authority - it was not that God had placed Him in a position of official authority. It was the authority of spiritual knowledge. He could speak straight out, without the slightest wavering in His certainty. 'Moses said' - and Moses was a great authority - "but I say unto you" (Matt. 5). Here is an authority transcending Moses. 'The scribes and Pharisees say, but I say...' It was not just the asserting, self-sufficient, self-assured declaration of some conviction. It came out of a hidden secret knowledge which brought Him absolute certainty. He could say it, and commit Himself and everything to what He said. I very often hesitate to say some things that I say, and I often keep things back on the point of saying them, and sometimes when I am thinking of things beforehand, I make up my mind I am not going to say that, not because it is not true, but because I am afraid of the consequences. The Lord Jesus never had a reservation. He could say a thing, and know that sooner or later that would come about and they would have to acknowledge that He had spoken the truth.

Think of some of the things that He said. Speaking of the temple, He said, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another" (Matt. 24:2). 'Before this generation passes away, Jerusalem will be compassed about with armies; families will be betraying one another; the most ghastly things will be happening here.' "This generation shall not pass away, until all these things be accomplished" (Mark 13:30). Was it true? Fifty years later it all happened to the very letter. That is only an outstanding example of what I mean. He could commit Himself absolutely to what He said, knowing that sooner or later it would be proved, because it was true. And if you and I are on His basis, taught by His Spirit, something of that significance will come into our lives also. People will say - That is what So-and-so said, and there it is; it is just what they said. That is power by knowledge. Oh, it is not just using power for self-vindication or self-justification. I am speaking of power like that of the Lord Jesus - of His knowledge being His power and the power of tremendous authority.

So I could go round the clock and touch on all sorts of things relating to authority, relating to His hidden knowledge giving Him His significance in this universe. It was what He knew that gave Him His significance; not what He did only, but what He knew. If you know the secret, you are in a position of great power. Some years ago I tried to illustrate this. An engineering firm sent in an account for some work they had done. The account was a very heavy one, and the people who were asked to pay sent it back and questioned it. 'This is much too heavy! We want you to explain why you are charging us so much.' And the engineering firm sent it back again, detailing the account item by item: materials - so much; time and labour - so much; so they itemized it. But that did not amount to the whole, that did not account for the total, by a long way. There was still a large balance, and this was summed up by one item: 'To knowing how!' It would never have been done otherwise. There was all the material, all the labour, all the time - but 'knowing how' is the big thing.

THE COST OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

And it is the costly thing. This spiritual knowledge is costly. It is like power, as we said in our last meditation. It is Calvary knowledge. The Cross will have to strike very hardly and deeply into our own certainties, our own self-assurance, our own self-confidence in what we think - yes, into that whole store of knowledge that we thought gave us significance. It will have to strike deep into us until we have to say, 'I do not know, I do not understand; I cannot follow, I cannot see. What is it that the Lord is doing with me? There is an end to all my own understanding!' Spiritual knowledge comes by way of the Cross, as every other spiritual thing does. It is Calvary knowledge. It is the weak things who have been broken by the application of the Cross who become the powerful factors in the realm that counts most.

"Behold your calling, brethren" - in other words, 'You see your calling, brethren: how you are called, the basis of your calling.' "Not many wise... not many mighty, not many noble... God chose the foolish things of the world" (1 Cor. 1:26-27); because it is not the wisdom of this world and the strength of this world - it is another kind. Have you noticed how some who are very ignorant and foolish so far as this world is concerned, some who would never pass an examination, who could not answer a general knowledge paper of the most ordinary kind - how, when they have come to the Lord and come under the power and instruction of the Holy Spirit, they begin to take on significance and weight, and how very often it is just to such people that others needing help go? That is the thing that makes for significance - knowledge of the Lord. How often, on the other hand, have we found those who, according to this world, are tremendously advanced, very knowledgeable and very highly educated, have the very best scientific knowledge and equipment - and yet they are like little babes in spiritual things. I confess that I have often been taken aback by that. I have thought, Here is someone who is very intelligent: with their great academic achievements and accomplishments, and their very able minds, they will be able to understand things and we shall have a good time. We have started off, and soon they have taken on a far away look and do not know what you are talking about, and we do not get anywhere at all.

I am not saying, of course, that that is always so. When the Countess of Huntingdon heard that passage read - "not many noble" - she said: 'Thank God, it says "not many" - there can be some!' I am not saying it is necessary to be without education in order to have spiritual knowledge, nor am I saying it is necessary to have it. But spiritual knowledge is of another order, something different altogether, and it is that that gives the meaning. If you know the Lord, if you have that opened heaven, that which the Lord Jesus had of a life with God, a walk with God, a fellowship with God, you will count for something, not only as an influence, but as one who has the secret for other people, who can help by enlightenment and instruction, who has something to give - and oh, how much that is needed! Is it not true that the poor, weak, retarded

state of the mass of Christians today is due to the absence of a teaching ministry that is truly under the Holy Spirit? Surely it is! We can see what is bound up with this matter of spiritual knowledge, spiritual understanding, in giving significance.

Now I started here - do you really want to be a man of God, a woman of God, as swiftly as it is possible for God to make you one? Then, if so, your heart will be set upon knowing the Lord more than anything else. It will be your one ambition, your one passion - to know the Lord. You will be seeking to walk with the Lord, to know the Lord - but it is going to cost you.

FAITHFULNESS IN TESTIMONY

In our last study, in connection with power, we cited one or two passages of Scripture. "Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:22-23). And then, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (Matt. 11:6). Now the offence of the Cross comes here in this matter. In order to be a man or woman of God, are you prepared to be called a fool, to be regarded as silly, weak, foolish - and the world does think Christians are foolish - and because you know that they think of Christians like that, are you either going to hide your light and not let them know too clearly that you are a Christian, or are you going to try to meet them on their own ground, and 'be up to them' with natural ability, thinking, deludedly, that you are going to win them, or are you going in some way to convince them by being as they are, taking their standards? Both of those courses, needless to say, are disastrous. The only way to be of real account in the eternal sense, in the heavenly sense, as a man or woman of God, is to come right out with it, plainly, clearly, unreservedly - 'I am a Christian, I belong to the Lord!' - and all that that means, risking everything upon a very clear testimony; leaving the Lord to support, to vindicate, but taking the consequences, which for the time being will probably be sneers, jeers, discounting, calling you names that hurt the flesh, perhaps ostracising or isolating you. But, sooner or later, your significance will come into light; sooner or later you will find that conditions are forcing men beyond their own resources to the need of something which you alone have got, and that God gives you the opportunity because of your faithfulness. God will never give you opportunities unless you have been faithful. You have to be faithful in the least before you have your opportunity increased.

COUNTING FOR GOD

Does this matter to you - whether you are of that kind of significance or not, whether you count? Some of you have settled that long ago; but it is so easy to stand up and sing - especially with a tune that helps and is perhaps rather soulful - "Jesus, and shall it ever be, a mortal man ashamed of Thee?", and all those wonderful things that follow in that hymn; but is that true? You say that this is very elementary. Let it be elementary. I am going by elementary stages in order to get at the thing itself. The thing itself is this: you are counting, or you are not going to count, according to your measure of spiritual knowledge - your knowledge of the Lord. That can only be had in a walk with God as the Lord Jesus walked with the Father, and that is going to be by way of the Cross. It will be for us Calvary knowledge. It will mean that we are emptied of all self-resource, brought to the place - yes, many times - where, unless the Lord helps us, we are finished.

But that is the way of spiritual knowledge. That is what the Lord would bring us to, and here I close. We go through it as Christians - so much suffering, affliction, trial, adversity, disappointment - oh, yes, so much of it. But what is the meaning of it? Why does the Lord not shield His own loved children and spare them?

Why does He allow them, perhaps more than any others, to know affliction and suffering and weakness? It is for this very thing. There is no other way now for us to know the Lord, the flesh being what it is. If everything is going all right, if we are all hearty and well, we do not feel our need of the Lord, we do not go seeking the Lord with all our hearts. We can only know Him by the way of the working of the Cross, which is the death of ourselves, and the Lord will bring us to the place where He would have us and where we would say, in the time of affliction, There is something to learn in this, something to get out of this: something of the Lord is bound up with this. The enemy will have us revolt against the means the Lord uses, tempt us to break away from it, to escape it, to get out of the difficult place, to run away. The Lord would have us to say, In that difficult place, in that painful experience, there is something of the knowledge of Him to be had. Do not allow yourself to be pressed out and do not run away. Say, Rather let me have this, if it has something of the Lord, than be free from it.

That is the way of stature, measure, manhood. We grow when we get there. That is significance. "The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). That is manhood, that is to be full-grown. Oh, the temptation for the easy way that was constantly pressed upon our Lord! 'The kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof - you can have them on the simple condition that you acknowledge me, the prince of this world!' It was the temptation to the easy way all along. 'Save yourself! Spare yourself! Get out of the difficulty by an easy short cut.' No, His very measure, His spiritual measure, meant refusing, repudiating, anything like that, and accepting the cost. This was the way of the Father, the knowledge of the Father.

I have tried to pass on to you something that is so difficult to explain. Let us sum it up again as we started. This is the kind of man and woman that is going to bear significance of the true kind, of the eternal kind, the kind that matters. It is those who know - whatever else they do NOT know - those who know the Lord. They may be like the man in the Gospel who is such a great example of this very thing. On the one side, there was the sin of Adam bringing blindness; on the other side, the works of the devil destroyed by the Son of man bringing sight to the blind. When challenged: 'What do you know about this man, what do you know about this and that?' - he replied, 'Oh, I do not know this and that, but whatever I do not know, there is one thing I do know - that, whereas I was blind, now I see' (John 9:25). 'I know': that is authority, that is power - by seeing. The Lord wants witnesses like that - men and women who know Him because they have made it the one passion of their hearts to know Him, at any cost, at every cost. And, seeing that this knowledge is by way of the Cross, through Jesus Christ crucified, every occasion is present for being offended - offended because of the foolishness from this world's standpoint, the weakness by the world's standards. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (Matt. 11:6). The Lord make us men and women of spiritual stature.

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