

In Relation to His Power

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the significance of Christ and how He signifies above all else in this universe, and how His difference from all of mankind is the basis of His signification.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:22

Topics: "The Significance of Christ", "True Power in God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of Christ, who stands as a stark contrast to the world, embodying the true power and wisdom of God. He explores how Christ's presence provokes conflict with worldly values, particularly regarding the concept of power, which is often misused by humanity. Sparks highlights that true power lies not in self-assertion but in surrendering to God, as exemplified by Jesus, who faced fear with perfect confidence. The sermon calls for believers to embrace a new birth that aligns their mentality with Christ's, recognizing that spiritual power is rooted in what we are rather than what we do. Ultimately, the message encourages letting go of self-reliance to experience the fullness of God's power in our lives.

Transcript

"Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

"And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (Matthew 11:6).

With most of you who read these lines, it would be altogether out of place to ask the question: Does Christ signify? For us, He signifies above all other and beyond all else in this universe. But we do just put that question forward in order to draw our attention again, and to give a swift, almost instantaneous review of how immensely Christ has come to signify in this world. What an immense significance has arisen with the name of Jesus! - and not only amongst believers but in history. Does He signify? Well, that is answered by our hearts very strongly and finally, but we have to go further in our contemplation of what He signifies. What is His significance? In our previous studies we were seeking to see something of the significance of Christ in relation to the race as it is, and then to pass to the significance of Christ in relation to the race as God intended and intends it to be.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIFFERENCE OF CHRIST

That leads to the further question: How and why does He signify? I could answer that in what might be a somewhat abstruse, and would certainly be a very imperfect, way, but in a way nevertheless which would set us in the right direction of discovering this significance of Christ. I would say that the answer to the 'how' and the 'why' is found in the fact that He is so different - utterly different - from all the rest of mankind. That is how He signifies, and that is why He signifies. He is not only different, but He is of another order. Yes: very Man, true humanity, but of another order; and that other order was not perceivable on the outside as He moved amongst men. But that was the great, the basic, feature of His signification - there was that which was so completely different in order, in inward constitution.

Jesus was a stranger in this world - but not only a stranger. He was an enemy in this world; He was definitely up against this world, what was here, and His very presence was a provocation to it. It found Him a problem, a difficulty, and often unbearable - because "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). The world was and is in the power of Satan, and in that realm His significance was fully recognized; so that a clash between Him, who was of another realm and another spiritual order, and this realm and this spiritual order, was inevitable.

ISRAEL PECULIARLY IN THE POWER OF SATAN

Now, here is a very interesting and significant thing. While the whole world was in the power of Satan, the Jewish nation was peculiarly and particularly so. Here we touch one of those principles in the Divine order and economy. God has always had to have a representation of His thoughts. Israel was raised up to be a national representation of God's thoughts to the world, among the nations; to be the servant of God to make God's thoughts known. Israel failed. And it was not only that Israel FAILED in their calling, their great vocation. It was worse than that. Israel, like the first Adam, fell clean into the hands of Satan to be used to misrepresent God and His thoughts: that is, to turn right round on their Divine calling and present exactly the opposite. As we said in our last study, Israel so fell into the hands of Satan that he could even use that nation against God, to kill the very Son of God Himself.

That was the corporate expression of exactly what took place in the individual in the Garden. Adam not only fell from his calling and the Divine intention. He went lower than that. He fell right into the hands of the devil, to be, himself and his seed, a misrepresentation of God's intentions and thoughts - to be the direct opposite of what God meant. That is Satan's work.

THE LORD JESUS A STRANGER IN THIS WORLD

So, when He came into the world - He who, in His very constitution, was not of this world, but of another realm and another order - He was a stranger. "The world knew him not" (John 1:10). And He was an enemy: the world hated Him. John says both of those things. He tells the Church not to be surprised if the world does not know them - "the world knew him not"; and not to be surprised if the world hates them - it 'hated Him before it hated them' (John 15:18). Where does this come from? It is strange that you find this spontaneous hatred and alienation from Christ in the world. It is there naturally and they do not know why. Sometimes when you get down alongside of a person who has shown real objection, animosity or hatred, distance from Christ, and begin to talk to them quietly, they change altogether and do not know why they ever took that attitude. They become milder and more reasonable, and you can talk with them. So often that happens. They do not know why. Well, we know why. "The whole world" - ignorantly in very large degree - "lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19).

Christ is a stranger in this world. "The world knew him not." That applied primarily to His Deity. The world knew Him not in His Deity: that of course is the great point of John's writings, the gospel and his letters - who Jesus Christ essentially was. The world knew Him not in that sense primarily; but that is true in a larger sense also. The world knew Him not in His true human nature. It did not know this kind of MAN. He is another kind of man - to them a very irritating man, a very annoying man, a very disturbing man. It was not simply because, from their standpoint, He was an upstart and a revolutionary and 'agin everybody' - no, not that. There is something about this Man Himself that they cannot understand, they cannot fathom; they cannot cope with Him. They knew Him not in His real Manhood. He was at variance with their whole mentality. They were mentally constituted after a different order from what He was. Jesus was in conflict with the whole natural make-up of man as he is found on the earth since Adam: with man's thought-life, yes; but deeper than that - with man's motives, man's UN-thought-out way of life. He was in conflict with it in its very essence, its uttermost depth. And from the other side, for that very reason, it was impossible for man on this earth to grasp and appreciate Him. He was so differently constituted in the very depths of His being - not in His thought-out philosophy of life, His creed, but in what He was. The natural man cannot grasp and appreciate Jesus.

And now we come very near home. That is as true of you and of me as Christians as it is of non-Christians. That is the basis of so large an amount of our trouble, and is the basis of all God's work with us: to create an entirely different mentality from what we are naturally, to bring about an altogether different constitution - not in our philosophy of life, but in the very springs of our being, in what comes up spontaneously, without thought, without premeditation. It is there that the work of the Spirit of God goes on. Christ and Christians can be just as much at variance as Christ and worldlings, because we Christians are still so much actuated by the world's ideas. Certainly organized Christianity, as it is called, proceeds along the lines of the world's ideas.

THE QUESTION OF POWER THE ROOT OF THE DIFFERENCE

I come back to that point with which we were dealing earlier: the very root of this difference - the whole question of power. The natural man's ideas of power are as far removed from Jesus Christ as the heavens are removed from the earth. I said that this matter of power is the very root of all the trouble in this world, in the individual and in the whole race. The whole matter of power as an instrument in the hands of self sprang up with Satan. It brought that first mighty clash between God and that perhaps highest of His created beings - with what results, with what havoc, we are unable to measure. And then the same principle of power for personal use, power for personal 'being something', was insinuated into the race through Adam, when he fell to the temptation to have that power in himself and not in God. It is a very, very far expansive reach that is gathered into that little phrase, that little clause, in Ps. 62:11: "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God!" It belongs to God. You take it from God into your own hands, and get away with it, and you get the far reach from the poor iron cannon-ball to the atomic bomb. That looks like a tremendous advance in power. Take it out of God's hands, and see where it will land you. The very thing that you have clamoured for may be given. God seems to be giving - until it becomes your very doom. There is a terrible history bound up with this matter of power. "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth UNTO GOD."

Seeing, then, that there is such a mighty gap between the race, in its mentality about this, and the Lord Jesus, the necessity does arise for a new birth. We have to learn yet about the new birth. We have never comprehended one small fraction of what it means to be born again, or anew, or from above, born from another world, with that world's mentality. Now step back one step and we will come on to that again.

"To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The "works of the devil" are found concentrated in this word 'power'. He made a bid for that power which would put God out of His place. He caused man to do the same, and thus we have all this wrong, false and disastrous mentality about power.

FEAR THE COMPANION OF THE QUEST FOR POWER

What is the, perhaps imperceptible, but very real thing which lies behind all the trouble in this world, all the 'nerves' of the individual or of the race? It is FEAR: fear of being overwhelmed, of being overcome, subjected, of going under, losing out - put it how you like - in many, many ways. It is fear that lies behind all this hankering and craving and working for power. Now look at the Lord Jesus. Was there ever a sign of fear in Him? Everything gathered round Him that would make for fear. His whole position, not only from his enemies' but from this world's standpoint, was a most precarious one. Nothing seemed naturally to be sure, to be safe. Indeed, everything conspired to become a tremendous threat to His security, His personal security, the security of His cause. But there is never the suggestion of a moment's fear. There is perfect confidence, assurance, tranquility. He goes on quietly, unperturbed. That was the thing that made everybody wonder. They could not understand this Man, in His precarious position in the judgment Hall, being so utterly tranquil, self-possessed, self-confident. As has been said many times, it was Pilate before Christ, not Christ before Pilate. They could not understand this perfect absence of fear. Fear comes from hell, and it is the companion of this quest for power. The rush today for power, to get the upper hand in the nations, is simply born of fear. How different the Lord Jesus was and is! Fear is the result of the work of the enemy, of Satan.

Let me say to you in the very simplest way: In the simplest matters of life, if you ever fear about some movement, some step, you are going to take, if ever the element of fear comes in with a proposition - stop; do not move; wait. If Satan can, he will bring in an element of fear. You and I have got to move with God in quiet, steady restfulness. You keep your eye upon the fact of a fear. Whenever it comes, you say, 'This is not of God'. "God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness" (2 Tim. 1:7). That comes from somewhere else.

THE LORD WAS WITHOUT FEAR

Did Jesus signify? Does He signify? How does He signify? Because He is different. The question of power with Him had no fear associated with it. Oh, how He was urged to act in a precautionary, in a safeguarding way, in a self-preserving way - lest this or that should happen. The exigencies and the contingencies of the way He was taking were constantly brought before Him, and so the emergency element was constantly introduced, to get Him to act to safeguard either Himself or the mission on which He had come, the work committed to Him. But they never could get Him to act on that emergency basis at all. He was perfectly at rest, and in His case that represented tremendous power. Their ideas of power were other: 'You must do this, you must do that; you must build up here, you must safeguard there; your security will come along the line of your own doing something.' You see, it all hung upon the question of faith - for the greatest factor in power is faith. That is how it was with Jesus at the beginning. Will He trust God? The voice of the tempter said, 'If you are not quite sure of God, you must do something yourself or the day is lost, everything is lost.' So we see that, in this matter of our attitude in regard to power, we have to be 'born again', 'born from above' - to get an entirely different mentality, from another world, which brings in another nature, a disposition altogether different.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is a paradox of power in the Word of God. On the one hand you can see how evil it can be - not, however, that power in itself is evil - but how when man takes it into his own hands, to use it as an instrument of his selfhood, it becomes an evil thing, the very root of iniquity in the universe, because it puts God out of His place. That is one side.

And yet the Bible is just full of exhortations to be powerful, to be strong. It is the great word on which Christians rest for the accomplishment of the work of God in this dispensation. "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8). What is this power? You have to look again and again at the Lord Jesus. Do not think that power is invariably or preeminently demonstrated or manifested by miracles. There were miracles, there were manifestations, there were the phenomena of power, but they were for a purpose. You do not find either Christ or the apostles spending every minute, every hour, of their lives working miracles. There may be many recorded, but it was not the miracles that were the foundation of Christianity, and they are not the foundation of Christianity now. They are not the proofs positive and final that Christianity is Divine. Satan can simulate miracles, Satan can always work miracles, and it may sometimes be difficult to discriminate between the Divine and Satanic, for often they are psychical miracles. Antichrist will work miracles, and it will not be easy to detect that they are of Antichrist. Miracles do not represent the power, essentially and basically, of God. They are only one means of fulfilling His purpose at times, under given circumstances.

THE POWER OF WHAT WE ARE

The real power of Christ, the real power of Christianity, the real power of the Church, is essentially spiritual: it is what Christ WAS and IS, and what you and I ARE, not what we DO at all. The power of God is not in our activities: that is, our activities are not just the proof of the power of God. If that were so, the Church would be a mighty force on earth today. It never was more active, more busy, more engaged in DOING, than it is now. I venture to say that the spiritual power is far, far from commensurate with the Church's activities, and its mentality is so different. It has made bigness take the place of greatness. Loudness now seems to be regarded as force. No, power is a spiritual thing, and it is a matter of what we are. Our presence, without our words or actions, ought to be far more than both words and actions put together. After all, our words and our actions may only touch men as seen. What we are touches the world unseen. "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" (Acts 19:15). It is not that you have embraced Christianity; it is that you now belong to another realm, which realm is destined utterly to set aside this realm - which Kingdom of Heaven is destined to put aside this kingdom of Satan. It is not going to be official; it is not going to be done objectively. It is going to be done, and it is being done, spiritually. It is just in proportion to the measure of Christ represented in individuals, in companies, in the Church, that the kingdom of Satan is put out. And that means Christ's ideas, Christ's mentality, Christ's constitution.

THE POWER OF LETTING GO TO GOD

It works out, as we tried to show earlier, in this way, that very often the most mighty thing that a believer can do is to let go to God. Everything is locked up while they are holding on, while they are not going to give anything away or let anybody have their work; while they are not going to relax or 'eat humble pie'; while they are determined to stick to it on the ground that God has given it, and they hold it in their hands and will not let go. A terrific battle goes on, very often. But when at last that child of God lets go to God, relaxes the grip and says, 'Lord, I hand it back to You: it is Yours, not mine; it is for You to guard, it is for me to be the custodian of Your things; this is not my work, it is Yours, I am not going to hold on to it' - when

that happens, something else happens. The lock-up gives way, there is a mighty release. God comes in, and He in freedom does something, something wonderful. He may give back, but He will give back with something very much more added in of spiritual power. It was not until Jacob, with all his effort and strain through the hours of the night, recognized that he was, after all, weaker than God, that he came to be Israel - a prince with God. The Lord Jesus was never holding on in fear of losing something. It was in the Father's hand, He trusted the Father, He let go to the Father. That is His way, that is His nature, that is His mentality - and that is power. Heaven comes in along that line, and it is then that the significance of a life arises. That is why He signified, and signifies.

Do you desire to signify something for God, to be, after all, of a right kind of significance, accountability, meaning? You see the need of getting Christ's Holy constitution in us. The most powerful thing, we have often said, with God and as bringing God alongside, is meekness. Power is spiritual. That is the point. You see the place of weakness in the New Testament. "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). "Most gladly... will I... glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). There is a lot said about human weakness. It is just the opposite of the devil; it is just the opposite of what the devil made man. I am only hinting. There is far too much in this of detail to stay to speak of.

What is your idea of power? What is your mentality concerning power? Are you clamouring for power, wanting power? Well, it all works out this way. True power from God's standpoint is Calvary power. Christ crucified is the power of God. What is Calvary power? Well, it is emptiness of self, you and I being emptied of self - and truly, that is easier said than endured! Oh, how very much there is of this self about us still! How we hate - how we suffer - being emptied of ourselves! What a terrible thing it is to feel our inability - to know that we do not count in ourselves. Oh, to be ABLE! And yet have we not proved, again and again, that our times of greatest emptiness and weakness have been the times when God has done most, and got glory by what He has done? Yes, it has been true. We have learnt it along various lines and different ways, but God has been working right into the very inside of us, so that the thing is done - it becomes a part of us. He does not have to maintain it by external conditions. But He frequently uses such - very often physical - conditions, to bring us to that place of utter dependence upon Himself. It is really not good enough, is it, to be forced to it, compelled to it? That is God's way of education, but it would be very much better for us to be fit and well and as dependent upon God as ever.

"Power belongeth unto God." Power is a spiritual thing. The true nature of power is of a totally different order from our natural idea and conception of it. The Lord is so different. Power is not a temporal matter, it is not a physical matter, it is not an intellectual matter, it is not a social, a positional, or a possessional matter, at all. Power is essentially spiritual: I say again, it is what we are. Do believe that Satan is far more afraid of you being Christlike than he is of all your phraseology, and your epithets against him, and your hurling at him certain terms about the Blood. He laughs - he snaps his fingers at a lot of that. He says, 'I will catch you one of these days, and you will rue it!' But if you are spiritual, what can he do? "The prince of this world cometh: and he hath nothing in me" (John 14:30), said the Lord. So, in the hour of the power of darkness, He could say, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). I say again, that was not objectively and officially done. It was done by what He was. Satan had no ground, and so no power. This Man defeated every contemplation of Satan as he walked round Him. 'How can I get in? I have been trying all these years to find some little gap; I cannot find it, I am beaten, I can do nothing with Him, He does not give me a chance. I offer Him prizes - He snaps His fingers at them; I threaten Him with the direst consequences of the course He is taking - it does not make any difference! I cannot get this Man.' That is how the prince of this world is cast out.

So it all resolves itself into the need, in the first place, for what is meant by being born from above: an entirely new nature and disposition, to begin with, and then a letting God do His work of conforming us to the image of His Son. I am not saying that works and words do not come in, but it is a heartbreaking business to be working and speaking with no power, no registration of heaven.

The Lord give us light as to what He means by this.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/in-relation-to-his-power/>

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