

In Relation to His Resurrection-Ascension

by T. Austin-Sparks

Jesus' resurrection-ascension is the greatest and most momentous event in history, and it is the basis of our Christian life.

Topics: "New Creation", "Resurrection"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Christ's resurrection and ascension, asserting that these events are pivotal for the Christian faith, as they validate His atoning work and establish Him as the firstfruits of a new creation. He explains that the resurrection-ascension not only represents Christ's victory over death but also marks the beginning of a new order of humanity, where believers are called to present themselves as alive from the dead. Sparks highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers to discern between life and death in their spiritual journey, urging them to grow in their understanding of what is alive to God. The sermon underscores that Christ's ascension grants Him all authority, which is spiritual and transformative, affecting every aspect of life. Ultimately, the message calls for a deeper awareness of the divide between the old and new orders, encouraging believers to embrace their identity in Christ.

Transcript

"Jesus saith to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (John 20:17).

"For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God... Present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:10,13).

Everything waited on the resurrection of Christ. When He died, everything stood still. There was silence in heaven, darkness over the face of the earth. There was a universal pause, and heaven was holding its breath. The resurrection of Christ was the greatest and most momentous event in history. Everything that had preceded it, His birth, His life, His teaching, His works, His death and all that death meant, His atoning work: all waited for His resurrection to make them effective. If He had died and not lived again, it would all have been of no profit. "If Christ be not risen, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins" (1 Cor. 15:17), although He died an atoning death.

A PRE-ASCENSION ASCENSION

The passage we read in John 20 - the words to Mary - is a remarkable one. "Touch me not" - that is, lay not hold of Me - "for I am not yet ascended unto the Father." There has been much speculation as to this pre-ascension ascension. The fact that this very woman was allowed to take hold of Him later (Matt. 28:9) gives much point and strength, with other things, to there having taken place an ascension.

CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS

Of course, one thing was the fulfilment of an Old Testament type, and was the spiritual, the Divine heavenly counterpart of something that was probably taking place on that very day. On the day after the Sabbath the High Priest would be waving the sheaf of firstfruits before the Lord, according to Leviticus 23, and it was on that very day after the Sabbath that Jesus presented Himself alive to the Father from the dead. As Paul says: "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

That, of course, is one of the meanings of this - "I am not yet ascended"; but there is much more in it than that, and we will seek to see something more of this ascension of Christ to the Father on the morrow after the Sabbath.

FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN

We begin by noting that it was the presenting of Himself as alive from the dead, for God's satisfaction, in a representation. He had been true to the figure of the firstfruits. The sheaf of the firstfruits was representative of all that was to come. It was the prophecy of that which was to be, it was the earnest of the whole, it was the certainty that the harvest was on its way; and it was accepted as that. God was satisfied that all the travail, all the labour, all the falling into the ground and dying, all the giving over of life unto death, was eventually not for nought. God was satisfied that in the Firstfruits He had all the fruits of that death; a representation - "the firstfruits of them that are asleep"; or, in other words of the Apostle, "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). That is surely inherent in these two words in John 20:17: "Go unto my brethren" - not, 'Go to My disciples', or 'to My Apostles', or 'to My friends; to those men whom I chose, who have been with Me' - "Go unto my brethren, and say to them... my Father and your Father." He is representative of the family, of the whole. God is satisfied in the representation, and the representation is the firstfruits sheaf.

With one further word on that, we pass on. The Lord Jesus Christ, because of who He was and therefore because of what He alone could accomplish, has secured everything unto God: He has established the security of all that God is to have. He is our security unto God. Put that in another way. When the Father received that presentation of His Son at that time, He received us - all who would believe. We are not secured in the day in which we believe. We only enter into our security then by faith. We were secured at that moment when He, the sheaf of the firstfruits, presented Himself unto the Father's full satisfaction. We were secured there and then. Our security does not depend upon anything in ourselves. Through faith our security is established in Him and what He is to the Father's satisfaction. That, of course, is the very beginning, the most elementary thing in the Christian life.

INSTALLED AND ACCREDITED AS THE PROTOTYPE OF THE NEW CREATION

This ascending to the Father was also the installing and the accrediting of Him as the Prototype and Beginning of the new creation. Remember that His resurrection and ascension always go together - they are not two separate things. Paul puts them together in his letter to the Ephesians: "he raised him from the

dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenlies" (Eph. 1:20). There is no space between: He is raised and exalted in one act. That is how it is here in John 20: He will return for forty days, and then the ascension, as it is called by us, will take place - the great ascension. This resurrection-ascension was His accrediting - "declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead" - and His installing as the Prototype and Beginning of the new creation. In His resurrection-ascension, He not only presents Himself to the Father's pleasure and is accepted to the satisfaction of God; He not only includes all who believe in Him afterward in that presentation; but He there and then becomes the Image, the Model, the Pattern, of the whole of that creation - that new creation which is coming in through faith in Him.

Jesus Christ is Man still. The New Testament Church believed that He did not let go His humanity when He went to heaven. Stephen saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). The Apostle writes: "There is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), and He is still mediating as Man. The whole system of Christianity hangs upon this very thing, that there is now a Man glorified to answer to God's original thought and intention. So He is now installed as God's model and pattern for the whole creation.

INVESTED WITH ALL AUTHORITY

Further, at that moment when He ascended to His Father, on that occasion, there was conferred upon Him all authority in heaven and earth for the great world commission. We do not get the full force of the original words in Matthew 28:18. Literally, it is: "All authority has just been given to me in heaven and on earth." When He appeared before the Father, satisfying the Father and being installed as the model for the race, the new creation, all authority was then given to Him because of that satisfaction, and in His capacity as that model. "All authority... in heaven and on earth" - SPIRITUAL authority. I think sometimes we may have a little difficulty, mentally, in reconciling the fact that all authority has been given to Him and that He has been made to sit at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens and that all things are put in subjection under Him, and all the other things that are said of His Lordship and His supremacy and His authority - in reconciling this with the setbacks, the difficulties, the enemy's triumphs, as they appear to be, and all the extreme difficulty connected with the slightest degree of progress in the things of Christ. It does not seem to balance. But that is just our earthly way of judging. The authority of Christ is spiritual and it remains.

To condense very much into a phrase, a tremendous history into a short sentence or two, this is how it works: that if Christ ever really and truly, spiritually, comes into any place on this earth, that place can never be the same again. An issue has arisen, an eternal issue, and for all eternity the consequences of that issue, in one way or another, will be found to exist. So often it seems that, when Christ has come, when something of Christ has been brought, there is nothing to see as the result, or it seems to be just covered over and the enemy seems again to take possession; and you say, "What was it all for? Why were those lives laid down? Why all that suffering and cost. There is nothing!" Oh, make no mistake! The authority of Christ has come there, and how often it has happened that years after, perhaps when that generation has passed away entirely, something has sprung up in that very place. That is the story of the Gospel in Japan. Something of Christ came in, in a simple way, and then it was all swamped and seemed to be drowned. But years after something was found growing, and growing, and growing, till a great thing of Christ existed. There is something that is not official authority, but a spiritual power which cannot be quenched. It will come back somehow, in some way. Paul expressed it that he was a sweet savour unto God, and that it was a matter of a savour of life unto life or of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:15-16). It was never neutral. The authority of Christ means that where He comes, in any form or in any way, neutrality is

impossible. There will be an effect one way or the other. But that, as I said, is a very insufficient explanation of this authority, which works in many other ways.

A GREAT DIVIDE BETWEEN TWO ORDERS

The first issue of this resurrection-ascension is that there is created a great divide between two human orders. There is the order that was and the order that is - a new order, the new human order. One order, to which all the children of Adam belong, in the resurrection of Christ is left behind in death; then there is the new human order in His resurrection in life; and there is the great divide between two humanities. That divide is planted right into the very centre of the being of every child of God, so that now there are TWO beings in the believer. On the one hand we are a new creation, we are of the new order, of the Christ order, there is the new kind in us. On the other hand we still carry the old order about with us - but it is a dead body. And right through all this race, that divide is established. Two orders of humanity, one in death, one in life.

To the latter, the order in Christ, the heaven is opened. That is the meaning of this resurrection-ascension. Yes, He can ascend to His Father, He can ascend right away, there is no need to wait. Immediately on resurrection He can go right through. The heaven is opened, the face of the Father is in His direction waiting to receive Him. Heaven is opened to this new order. It is closed to the old. These are facts, but they are the facts which lie at the very basis of the Christian's life.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Immediately we pass from the one order to the other, from the old order to the order of Christ as God's model, from death unto life; immediately we in Christ 'present ourselves a living sacrifice', or, in other words, 'present ourselves as alive from the dead' - immediately we do that, we must understand that we enter into the school of the Holy Spirit. The great Schoolmaster takes charge. He is not a despot, but He takes charge; and there is one work to which He is committed, and that work - if we will let Him - is to teach us, to make us know the difference between these two orders: the order that lies behind and the order that now is; the order that is in death and the order that is in life; the order that has the closed heaven, and the order that has the opened heaven. And almost any hour or moment in our lives, if we are under the tuition of this great Divine Schoolmaster, the Holy Spirit, we can be having the registration in us of what is alive and what is dead unto God. It is the very nature of the Christian life. It is the very purpose for which the Lord leaves us here and deals with us as He does - to make our spirits, as alive from the dead, capable of discerning what is dead to God and what is alive to God.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH BY THE KNOWLEDGE OF LIFE AND DEATH

That is the basis of guidance, the basis of knowing the mind of the Lord, the basis of our complete transformation - the renewing, the making over again, of our minds. It is the basis of our new intelligence. It is all governed by the laws of life and death, and our spiritual growth will be according to our ability to know, on the one hand, what is dead when we touch it, when we come into contact with it, to recognize what lies behind the withdrawn face of God - the Lord is not in that, the Lord is not for that, the Lord does not accept that - and on the other hand, when we meet life, to be able to say, 'Yes, I am touching life here, the Lord is in this'. It is not something reasoned out; it is not the result of logical comparisons: it is something in the Spirit; it is life and death. Oh that every Christian, every young Christian, lived on this basis - not on the basis of meetings, not even on the basis of being told by others, but steadily, surely, on the basis of their own spiritual discernment and perception of what is alive and what is dead so far as God

is concerned; what is left behind in His judgment, and so has to be left behind and repudiated by us; what is brought in with Christ and has to be apprehended. The difference is life and death. I think you know something of it. This is the mark of growth, but we do not grow out of it: it is always ahead of us, and it will be ahead of us to the last breath that we draw in this body.

Let me put that another way. The longer we live and go on with the Lord and know a life of fellowship with Him, walking in the Spirit, the more acute will be our sense of life and death. We shall not be overtaking this; it will always be ahead of us. The most advanced people spiritually are those who have the keenest sense of what they may and what they may not touch, and they sense it in this - life and death, death and life. You touch something at one time, even in your Christian life, and you touch it without any reaction. But touch that now and it precipitates a new crisis. You have gone on. You used to do that and have no trouble, but somehow or other you cannot touch it now. And it will always be like that.

Let us remember that death is an immense thing, a terrible thing - not merely as we know it, but as it is in this universe. Death is the greatest enemy of all that is of God. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26); everything in the end of the Bible is the swallowing up of death and the curse. Death is no friend; we do not go with the poets in that. Death is a terrible enemy - it is the end of everything. Spiritual death is a very, very grim enemy indeed. And as we go on we become more acutely aware of how great death is and how far-reaching, and therefore of how much more there is which, being death, we may not touch - even though others may because they have not reached that point of spiritual sensitiveness. It is all right to be a child while you are a child; there is nothing wrong with that; but it is wrong to be a child when you ought to be a man. God blesses the children. Do not say, These people do these things and the Lord blesses them. Of course He does; He blessed the little children. But if they go on with the Lord and grow up, they also will come to the place where they know they cannot go on with certain things any longer. If they do, they forfeit their consciousness of Divine life; something has gone. I do not say they forfeit Divine life, but they forfeit the LIFE in their life, their enjoyment of it, their consciousness of it.

Do believe me, that this is true - Christ has become a standard and a different standard, a model altogether different, and the Holy Spirit has taken in hand the work of conforming us to the image of Christ. And how does He do it? Just in this way - in our own growing spiritual consciousness; and that consciousness is a matter of death or of life. How much can you corroborate? I am sure you can, up to some point; but do give heed to this word, because a very, very great deal is bound up with this. "I ascend unto my Father!" "I ascend!" If He had explained why, He would have said, 'I ascend to be installed, accredited; placed, in the great Son-placing, as God's model and basis for you'; meaning, 'You cannot have Me on the old earthly terms; you have to apprehend Me now in a different way.'

So may we really be people who are growing. It is painful. This capacity for knowing when you touch death is a painful thing, but it is also a very blessed thing to have the capacity for knowing when you touch life. Very often you have to go round the whole dial on the Divine radio, feeling your way till you get attuned to that particular frequency and wave-length - and you touch life. As you go round that radio dial - I cannot have this, I cannot have that, you go a little further - Ah, now, this is it! The selectiveness of the Spirit in us as to Divine things bears witness in our spirits: 'This is of God!' - and there is life and there is satisfaction.

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