

In the Letter to the Colossians

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Letter to the Colossians presents the supremacy of Christ and the range of His Cross, highlighting the cosmic conflict and the significance of the Cross in bringing about a devastating rift between the two cosmic and world rulers.

Scripture: Colossians 1:16

Topics: "Supremacy Of Christ", "Cosmic Redemption"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the supremacy of Christ in his sermon on the Letter to the Colossians, illustrating how Christ is not only the Creator and Sustainer of all things but also the victor over sin and death through His crucifixion. He contrasts the human perspective of the crucifixion as a tragedy with the divine perspective that reveals it as a cosmic victory over evil forces. Sparks highlights that the battle at Calvary was not merely a historical event but a profound cosmic conflict that secured humanity's redemption. He calls for a deeper understanding of salvation, urging believers to recognize the gravity and significance of Christ's work on the Cross. The sermon concludes with a call to gratitude and faithfulness to Christ, who has triumphed over all powers.

Transcript

[The following note written by TAS preceded this chapter in the magazine:

"Note: In the sequence of this series of messages, the next in order would be the Letter to the Philippians. This has been included in the other series - last month's issue, "The Battle for Life". Hence, we proceed to "Colossians"."

The chapter which was in the previous issue was chapter 4 and isn't based on the book of Philippians. We think TAS may have meant the series entitled Christ Our All which was published in the magazine concurrently with the first chapters of this book and is a meditation on the letter to the Philippians.]

In 'Philippians' the climax and crown of all is in one clause: "the Name which is above every name" (2:9). That is the point at which the Colossian Letter begins. The supremacy of Christ is horizoned in 'Philippians' by two clauses: "Equal with God" (2:6) and "the Name above every name" (2:9). In 'Colossians' the One who was equal with God is presented as the Creator of all things and the Upholder or integrating centre. But here we are brought to the farthest range of His victorious work, and the utmost realm of that "Name". We are not going to take time in telling of and explaining the Gnostic error which

called forth this Letter from the Apostle. The conclusion which we shall point out will do all that is necessary in that connection.

Having declared that Jesus Christ was the Creator, the Container, the Consistor and the Upholder of all things, the Apostle makes one flashing and devastating declaration: "He stripped off the principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it [the Cross]" (2:15). This is terrific! It links the Cross with that immense revolt against God and His 'appointed heir of all things' which took place in a dateless past, before creation: the occasion of the "casting down" of Satan and the angels which "kept not their first estate" (Jude 6), a rebellion which has built up a vast world kingdom and system which determined to exclude or prevent Christ from His inheritance. The serried ranks of spiritual forces are opposed to God and all His rights. A cosmic conflict for the government of this world and its occupants has been operative through the ages, and for the universe. This conflict from outside made its first HISTORICAL impact upon the first couple, and it LOOKS as though that battle went in favour of Satan. From then on an innumerable host of hostile forces were let loose to press home this advantage. The two major spiritual weapons of Satan and his hosts are sin and death. God's counter to these are righteousness and life in similar sequence. Upon these two pairs the whole Bible rests. Thus it is that something more than historical (i.e. earthly) redemption is essential; it had to be cosmic, universal, super-mundane.

'Colossians' is set in that context, and its focus is the supremacy of Christ and the range of His Cross. The Cross there is seen as cleaving a devastating rift between the two cosmic and world rulers, and between the two forces of sin and death, on the one side, and righteousness and life on the other.

But what a different complexion it gives to Christ crucified! The broken, battered, pierced, bleeding, despised and rejected "Man of Calvary" is not just Jesus the Nazarene dying at the hands of evil men; He is fighting out to an eternal issue the battle of the eternities with the cosmic forces of the universe, and settling forever the question of sin and righteousness; of death and life, and laying down the foundation of human destiny!

There are two ways of seeing that drama of Calvary. One is that of a human tragedy with all its horrors and pathos, giving a place to Satanic triumph and sinful man's evil power. This interpretation would spell the defeat of God, the vanquishing of righteousness, and the victory of death. Such an interpretation would give credit to all the planners and executors of Christ's destruction and make the crucifixion to be a vindication of the Jewish rulers, who were the primary schemers and actors in the work. But there is another and still deeper interpretation and power. The Bible speaks of a Wisdom, a profound wisdom which is HID in God from before times eternal, hid from men, hid from devils, and hid from Satan himself. This means that both men and the evil cosmic forces are in darkness and blindness, and are deceived, so that they really do not know what they are doing in their hatred, malice and spite. The result is that, all unconsciously and blindly, they are only carrying out what God intended, and fulfilling the very purpose which they intended to destroy. This is exactly what happened at Calvary. A great work of cosmic redemption was accomplished there through the very means being used by Satan with the idea of totally preventing it. So Paul speaks of "Christ CRUCIFIED, the wisdom and power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

The Bible views the human race and the world as being in the prison and authority of this great spiritual system headed by Satan. Man is wholly unable to free himself; he has neither the wisdom nor the power to do so. A Man must come to his rescue and, because it is sin and death which are the binding power and

basis of the arch-enemy's hold, the Rescuer and Deliverer must draw both the enemies and their power on to Himself (like Samson and the Philistines) - "through death destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

This the Final Adam did when He "to the rescue came". The original commission of the Apostle Paul was couched in these words: "I send thee, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God..." (Acts 26:17-18). There you have it. While redemption has many aspects, which are represented by the various words and terms used in the Gospel, that is the outermost and all-inclusive range and realm in this cosmic redemption.

We have, in much fewer words than are really required, ranged the Gospel of our salvation, but surely we have said enough to show how much greater salvation is than is often so cheaply presented in evangelism. One sometimes thinks that Satan must be very pleased with the cheap and easygoing presentation of this that - to him - spells such devastation! We are called to a very great HEAVENLY vocation in the ages to come and to "attain" is through the most terrific debacle in the history of this universe. Read again the Letter to the Colossians in this light. It is surely not without significance that - IN THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ORDERING - this Letter is the last doctrinal document from the pen of the Apostle Paul before the Letters on the Lord's coming, the consummation of all things, although the chronological order would be otherwise.

Lord Jesus, receive the grateful thanks of Thy people. We bow at Thy feet. We would be Thy humble servants for evermore. Help us by Thy grace to be faithful until the end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/in-the-letter-to-the-colossians/>

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