

Light Through Death and Resurrection

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of resurrection experience for knowing the power of His resurrection, which is necessary for ministry and helping others.

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1

Topics: "Resurrection", "Light of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the transformative power of resurrection in his sermon 'Light Through Death and Resurrection', drawing from Isaiah 60. He explains that the light of God shines upon His people, calling them to arise and reflect His glory, especially in times of darkness and despair. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of this light, which not only enriches individuals but also attracts others to the faith. Sparks highlights that true ministry stems from personal experiences of resurrection, urging believers to seek a deep relationship with Christ rather than merely accumulating knowledge. Ultimately, he reassures that every believer, regardless of their situation, is part of the collective body of Christ, sharing in both suffering and glory.

Transcript

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: thy all gather themselves together, they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then thou shalt see and be radiant, and thy heart shall thrill and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee; they shall come up with acceptance on Mine altar; and I will glorify the house of My glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, for the name of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee.

And foreigners shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favor have I had mercy on thee. Thy gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be

shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the wealth of the nations, and their kings led captive. For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.

The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine, and the bow-tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious. And the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 60:1-14; A.R.V.).

We are familiar with the fact that there is usually a twofold interpretation of Old Testament Scriptures. There is the historical, and there is the spiritual: on the one hand, that which is after the flesh, and on the other hand, that which is after the Spirit. To a large extent, it is on the one hand that which relates to Israel naturally, and on the other hand that which relates to the Church, and to Christ, as seen through and beyond Israel.

This, of course, is very apparent in the Prophets. Sometimes you do not know whether the prophet is speaking about himself, or about Israel, or about Christ. That very problem arose with the Ethiopian in the chariot in the desert, when he asked Philip: "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other?" (Acts 8:34). Many have thought that Isaiah 53 related to Israel. It is perfectly clear that, while there might be a measure of truth in that, that is not the whole truth by any means. Here, as always, there are two interpretations, and what is true of that chapter is very true in the chapter from which we have read. It is said that this chapter relates to the remnant of Israel which will be found at the end in Jerusalem. We will not call that into question, but it is almost impossible not to see that there is another side to Isaiah chapter 60, and it is that other side with which we are to be occupied at the present time.

Here is Zion, and Zion's light and Zion's wealth. You are very familiar with that name, and you know that our New Testament tells us that we "are come" - not that we are coming, not that we are 'marching to' - but that we "are come" to Zion, "the city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22). And yet I suppose it is true that we are in a sense on the way to Zion, not as a place, but as a state of spiritual fulness. But if it is true that we are already come to Zion - and we will not for a moment dispute with the Apostle who says it - then may it not be equally true that the things that are said in the Old Testament, and here particularly, about Zion, if they refer in part to some later literal Zion on this earth, certainly refer more to the Zion to which we have come. The exhortation therefore is to the people of this Zion, this "city of the living God", to which we "are come" - indeed, of which we are a part. The exhortation is to us: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come".

Light Through The Experience Of Resurrection

Let us look for a moment at the ground and the nature of this light which has come to us. Again we are brought back to this open door to everything. Here everything begins and here the light bursts forth - the resurrection of our Lord, and our resurrection with Him. May I recall to your mind that wonderful twentieth chapter of John's Gospel. I confess that there is no chapter in the Bible which moves me more than that one. But to me the special thing about it is the breaking light. From early morning, even before it was day, there were hearts in darkness waiting, longing; and then it is as though, after the very dark night, the sun suddenly rises over the horizon, begins to throw its shafts of rays over the skies. We see the day opening, the light breaking and spreading, and one by one the disciples are caught in its rays. And what a transformation! Surely they did 'arise and shine', for their Light had indeed come!

Now, the setting of this chapter in Isaiah is just like that. There is a fragment in it in which we read about God's wrath, the dark night of God's wrath, which had passed (vs. 10b). Certainly the people had been (to use the language of Ezekiel) in a dark grace in their exile and captivity afar off. It was a dark night - a night of spiritual death; and it was therefore death to Zion during that time. Zion was dead and buried for that whole period of the captivity. But here, again using Ezekiel's language, the graves had been opened; resurrection had taken place. Isaiah is the prophet of resurrection, looking through and beyond the Cross. Here, in the latter part of his prophecies, we see the shadows departing and the morning breaking, and hear this triumphant cry - as the sun arises - "Arise, shine; for thy light is come".

It is on that ground of resurrection that the light comes, and that gives to the light its character. That being its ground, its nature is of that kind. We shall see, as we go on, how tremendously potent this light was - what it did. Here is light that is not just a mental grasp of things. It is certainly not the light of collected truth, of studied matter, of the intellect, even in the things of God. It is a different kind of light altogether. I want to press this - it is not just a statement of things. Dear friends, light, if it is to be as effective as the light in this chapter was shown to be, has got to be of this kind - the light of resurrection. You may collect what is given out in public ministry into your notebooks with your own ministry in view, and go and retail it. That will not be light of this kind. Too often, when we are reading and when we are listening, we have other people in view. We are thinking of how we are going to get this over to some others, and thereby we are more concerned for ministry and work, and having material to give others, than we are for the fundamental matter of Christlikeness.

But the fact is that all real light springs from the realities of Christ as born in our own experience. Quite clearly, in the case of Israel or the remnant, and certainly even more so in the case of the Church, this light is the light that springs out of a deep experience, from which and through which resurrection was the only answer. If God had not done what He said He would do for the remnant - He said, "Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel" (Ezek. 37:12) - if the Lord had not opened their graves and brought them out, this part of Isaiah's prophecy would not have been written, because there would have been nothing to write about. It would never have been possible on any ground to say, "Thy light is come". The meaning of this is - 'You have been in the dark and you have been delivered; you have been in death and have come to know the power of resurrection'.

Resurrection Faith's Ultimate Point

And therefore the very nature of light which is light indeed, light after this order of life, light which is to have this effect, is that it is born out of an experience, or out of continuous experiences of resurrection. One thing we have been trying to say all through these meditations is just this, that, through the necessitated exercises of faith again and again, we have got to reach the ultimate goal of faith, and the ultimate, the final issue of faith is resurrection. When the writer to the Hebrews is recounting the faith, and the faith activity, of those of old, and is dealing with Abraham, the last stage in Abraham's faith that is mentioned is that in which he received Isaac back as from the dead. That is always the ultimate point to be reached by faith.

This is not faith in the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, nor is it faith in the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is faith in the resurrection of Christ as a present active power. The resurrection of Christ has, so to speak, to be brought up to date. It has not merely to be remembered once a year at Easter. This is no merely sentimental thing. It is to be something for every day of our lives. Every

new morning has to be a new occasion for our proving the power of His resurrection. It has to be so: and if so, then there will be a necessity for it. The Lord will keep us on the ground of a necessity for knowing resurrection power and resurrection life.

If you are in any way engaged in ministry, or the work of the lord, no matter how much you study, how much you read upon the subject matter, however diligent you are in your research, it will count for nothing if there is not behind it an experience which makes resurrection - that is, a deep experience which makes resurrection the only way out. The Lord has no place for mere mechanical teachers and preachers, reproducers of matter secondhand. The Lord's principle is to bring everything right into experimental relationship to the person concerned, and so it is kept in power and freshness and reality.

So the very setting of Isaiah 60 - "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" - is that of resurrection, in the experience of the people concerned. Let me repeat: Do not be more concerned with ministry that you are with knowing Him - and the only way to know Him is the power of His resurrection. You may be sure that, if you have this as the basis and background of your life, you will have ministry without the need of research! I am not saying that study is not important: what I am saying is that, while it may have its place, there has got to be something more than that. There has got to be the experience of the thing that we are saying - the experience of life saving us in deep and desperate situations. That is the ground upon which the Lord keeps His true servants. For, after all, light is not something objective to us. Light is what we are - "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14) - and what we are through deep history with God in our lives. So God makes us lights.

Effective Light

Therefore, the light that is mentioned here is light which is vital, light which is pure, which is effective. Note that the rest of this chapter shows how effective the light is. What tremendous effectiveness is related to this kind of light, born out of an experience of resurrection. Underline all the words in this chapter which refer to wealth - "The abundance of the sea", "the wealth of the nations" (vs. 5b), gold and frankincense (6b), silver and gold (9), and so on. That is the value, the effectiveness, of light after this kind. It means the possession of wealth. It means resources for the enrichment of people.

Do believe this: If you want to be able to help people, to enrich them, to bring them into the wealth that is in Christ, to deliver them from their poverty - and God knows how poverty-stricken His people are, and how little they know of His wealth - if you want to help others to a knowledge of this wealth, it is by way of the light which comes through resurrection. In more simple terms, if you are going through a deep and dark time, you may have very rich treasures of darkness. The right attitude toward our times of death and darkness is that this can mean wealth - the Lord means more riches out of this thing for others; something for their enrichment, is going to come out of our times of spiritual death. It is effective light that enriches, that brings into wealth.

Attractive Light

And then note again how it attracts. "Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms" (4b); "...the ships of Tarshish... to bring thy sons from far" (9a); and so on. They are all coming, they are all coming. Why? Because you have got something to give, you have got the light which answers to their problems and their questions and their difficulties. As the light attracts the moth, so need is attracted to where there is supply. Out of these experiences of death and darkness, leading to resurrection, comes something that others want. And it is like that, if it is after that order, they come for it -

yes, from the ends of the earth. Not just for teaching, for interpretations, for doctrines, but for real, living light born out of experience, the experience of resurrection, again and again.

I do not believe that it is necessary to have tremendous attractions of other kinds to get people together for spiritual purposes. I believe that, if there is real vital light, they will come, they will find their way to it. The answer to empty churches is not entertainments and attractions, but living light. That can be proved. Would there were more light--then there might be a drawing.

The Word Applied To A Corporate Vessel

Now this word, while of course it applies, as it must always apply, to individuals, because you can have nothing collective unless there are individuals to make it so, is a word to a company, a group; it is a word to a collective vessel of life. 'Zion' is something corporate and collective, and the Lord wants these vessels, these vessels of light, after this kind. My point in saying that is this, that we not only go through deep and dark and trying experiences individually, but we go through them in relation to our fellow-believers. There is such a thing as companies of the Lord's people going deep down into experiences where only the power of His resurrection can meet the need. Let us therefore realize that we are sharers in this ministry, that we are involved in something that may not just be personal.

Perhaps you are thinking, 'Oh, that is all out there in the air - it may relate to somebody or something, somewhere. I am just nothing, I do not signify; all that has nothing to do with me'. But it has in a related way. You are a part of that Body of Christ which is to be the expression of His risen life, and therefore you have a share in the suffering which comes upon the people of God: hence the necessity for knowing His resurrection-power. And we are suffering together with Him. Let us remember that. 'Together' means not only that we are suffering with Christ: we are suffering together - with Christ. It is our collective or corporate suffering with Christ - just as the reigning also is to be collective and corporate. Suffering together, we reign together with Him (Rom. 8:17b; 2 Tim. 2:12). It is the Church that is in view.

So what might never come to us individually and personally comes to us by reason of our relationship with something much bigger that the Lord wants to use. We become involved in something that is not, after all, our own personal responsibility. The Lord is after a vessel, and we are a part of the vessel; and in a related way we have got to know this power of His resurrection, that the light may shine.

Yes, these things concern and relate to the Church. But many of you who read these words are just individuals, or twos or threes, scattered in distant places, and you might have some thought in the back of your minds - 'Well, that is for the Church, he is speaking about the Church, all that is concerning the Church. I am just one lonely one somewhere - we are just two or three together in some remote place. We cannot be regarded as the Church, and therefore - to some degree - all this can hardly apply to us.'

So it is necessary to say a corrective word about that, and the best way of doing so is to remind you that when Paul wrote his final letters to Timothy and Titus, mainly to and about the Church, he did not write them to any one collection of Christians in any one place, nor did he write them just to several large companies of Christians. They were for all Christians, whether in companies or scattered and alone, and they have remained that ever since. Paul thought comprehensively and inclusively of all believers, and just called them 'the Church' - that is all. They may have been here and there or in many places, just ones or twos or little groups, or there may have been the larger assemblies; but as far as he was concerned they were all the Church. What he had to say applied to them all - for this reason, as we shall emphasize later: that he never at that time thought of them finally as on this earth. So far as geography and time were

concerned, he had got completely away from earth conditions, from the merely physical, and he was seeing the Church from the standpoint of God and Heaven, as one thing. And so this matter of scatteredness and individual situation did not come into the thing at all, except in this way, that every fragment, wherever it was, was a part of a whole, as in Heaven; so that everything applied to every fragment.

The practical value of that as I said earlier, is this, that wherever we are and however alone we may be, we may yet be involved in all that the Church is involved in. You may be in a remote place alone, but you are bound up with all that relates to the Church, all that is happening to the Church, all that the Church is knowing, all that the Church is suffering, all that the Church is called to. You are bound up with it, you are in it; you are not apart from it, wherever you may be. It is necessary for you to grasp that and say, 'Although I am here, alone or with another, in this remote place, I am as much a part of the whole of the Church as that group at so-and-so, or any other group.'

For in the Spirit, and in the heavenlies, you are always in the whole congregation of the Church. You may not see them, may not have, perhaps, the extra benefits of close personal fellowship and association with all the others on the earth, but you are in the whole Church, wherever you are, a part of the congregation. You see, we "are come... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn ones" (Heb. 12:22-23); and that means not just a few somewhere in one place, or even a big crowd in some place. It means all the children of God. We are all come to the general assembly, the Church of the firstborn ones. It is said to us all, wherever we are.

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