

Seeing the Lord Jesus

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a vision of Jesus Christ in order to make progress in our spiritual lives and to be unified in our faith.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Purpose in God", "Vision of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of focusing on Jesus Christ as the central figure in our spiritual journey, urging believers to let go of personal ambitions and distractions to fully embrace God's purpose. He illustrates that true Christianity involves being caught up in the dynamic movement of God, which is realized through a spiritual vision of Christ that propels us forward in faith. Sparks highlights the importance of renouncing our own purposes to align with God's will, and he encourages believers to maintain their gaze on Jesus to overcome the sins and obstacles that hinder their progress. He asserts that this vision of Christ not only inspires individual believers but also fosters unity within the church, as it draws people together under a common purpose. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of Jesus, which serves as the foundation for spiritual growth and perseverance.

Transcript

"Therefore... let us run... looking off unto Jesus the author (or captain, or file-leader) and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

I want to try to gather up and focus the ministry of these messages, taking you back to the beginning and reminding you that we pointed out that the whole Bible, in every part, is concerned with the will of God; which means that, as the Bible is the Word of God, the will of God is only to be found in the Word of God. Then we pointed out that the Bible introduces God to us as a 'going' God, a God moving IN and WITH purpose. He is in action from the first verse: "In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1:1), and all the way through the Bible He is seen to be pressing onward in purpose and revealing Himself, and that purpose, in His Word. So the Word of God has to govern everything if the purpose of God is to be fulfilled and completed.

We moved on to see that, in order to be in that full, comprehensive will of God with purpose, it is necessary for us to have no purpose of our own, and so we dwelt upon the great law of spiritual progress - the law of letting go; the law of renunciation of all unto God. We mentioned three factors for a true beginning:

- (1) That we are supremely concerned to know the will of God;
- (2) That we are quite prepared at least to listen to and consider anything that might help us to know the will of God, being open-hearted and open-minded
- (3) That we are committed to do what the Lord shows us as to that will.

That is the point at which we have now arrived, and, as I have said, I want to gather all that up with one other great essential to going on with God.

CAUGHT UP IN THE GOINGS OF GOD

Let me say this. In the presence of such a great deal of misapprehension and inadequate understanding in the world as to what Christianity is, I would say that Christianity really is that persons are caught up in the goings of God. The Apostle Paul used the word "apprehended", and this is what he meant. He had been apprehended of Christ, and Christ was going on, moving forward - and how true that was at that time! In the early days of the Book of the Acts it is so evident that He was a forward-moving Christ. There was a great forward movement from heaven, and this man was caught up, and carried on in that going as one under arrest.

That is what Christianity is. It is not just a little thing. It contains many things, but what it really amounts to is that you and I have been caught up in something; we have been taken hold of. There is a very interesting word in the New Testament which is just this very thing. It comes in the betrayal of Jesus, when the band of people came out to arrest Him, and there is a clause which says: "And they that had laid hold of Jesus led him away" (Matthew 26:57). You can see what kind of men they were! They were pretty tough, and to be in their grasp and grip would certainly be something that was not easy to resist. Again, it is the same word as the Apostle Paul used when he said: "The love of Christ CONSTRAINETH us" (2 Corinthians 5:14) and the word just means that we are taken hold of and irresistibly carried on. There was the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment for healing, and He said: "Who is it that touched me?" The disciples said: "Master, the multitudes PRESS thee" (Luke 8:45). That, again, is the same word. Have you ever been in a mob, a crowd, a multitude that is GOING? There is plenty of that sort of thing today! There is a rushing multitude, and when you get in what can you do but go? It is no use trying to resist. And Christianity is just being caught up in the eternal going of the eternal God, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, and being mastered and irresistibly carried on.

I am very careful that you should get the point, for this is a law of progress. That may seem very obvious, but we need to see the principle of it.

You know the content of this Letter to the Hebrews. What does it do right at the beginning? It gathers up everything of all the goings of God. It gathers up all the previous movements and goings of God - "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners" - and focuses them in His Son, Jesus Christ - "hath at the end of these days spoken", not by bits and pieces, not here and there, by divers portions and manners, but focused, concentrated, consummated, fully and finally, "IN HIS SON". Then the writer goes on to tell us what Jesus Christ is, and Who He is. This wonderful Christ that is being presented is greater than all the angels, greater than the law, greater than Moses, and greater than everything. Then the writer uses the metaphor of a race, a going. We are caught up in something as in a race, and what is it that is governing this movement, this race, all this energy? "Looking unto JESUS" - it is this wonderful Jesus about whom he has been writing. He is the full and

consummate embodiment of Divine purpose into which we are called and caught up.

What does this say to us? We have used a lot of words, but what does it all mean?

Dear friends, it is a law, amongst the others, of GOING. This Letter is full of phrases such as: 'Let us go on', 'let us leave the beginning and go on', 'let us... let us... let us be caught up in something that makes us shed every impeding, arresting and hindering thing.' What is it that carries us on? We have seen the Lord Jesus! We have had a vision, not objectively, perhaps, but something has happened in our hearts and Jesus Christ has become the all-mastering, all-controlling and all-absorbing object of our existence. We have SEEN Jesus, and that vision carries us on. What we have seen about Him, what God's purpose is in Him, what we have seen in Jesus has become a dynamic in our life, and such a dynamic that nothing else matters. 'Let us lay aside this', for this does not matter. 'Let us lay aside that... and that... and THAT', for they are not THE thing. THIS is it - what we have seen of God's will, in its fullness, as comprehended in His Son for us. All that He is is for us.

THE SIN THAT DOTHSO EASILY BESET US

You know, we have not yet really grasped the Lord Jesus. I say that meaningfully and knowingly. Oh, how many of our worries would go if only we had seen the Lord Jesus! How many of those delaying, arresting things in our life would go if only we had seen the Lord Jesus! What is it that is holding us back? What is "the sin that doth so easily beset us"? What is it that is slowing us in the race, or even holding us up? 'Oh, this terrible sinful thing that I am! This wretched man that I am! This poor thing, so weak, sinful and faulty. I think about this, I dwell upon that, and what happens? I stop running! All the "go" goes out of my being!'

You stop and think about yourself for five minutes, and see how fast you will run forward in the Lord! Oh, yes, we all do it. We are overwhelmingly obsessed with this terrible, poor, miserable thing that we are! We dwell upon it, and then we flop down - and the race is at an end for us while we are there. We have not seen the Lord Jesus!

In Him we have been dismissed. In His death we have been put out of sight. In Him risen we no longer appear before God, for He appears for us as us. He is us. THAT is seeing Jesus! If only we could get hold of that! If only we could get hold of Him! If only our eyes really did see what God has made Him to be for us - "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who is made unto us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Not dwelling upon our own foolishness and folly, but "unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." What more do you want? That comprehends everything in redemption and unto glory! "Looking OFF unto Jesus."

Do you see what I am trying to say? The writer of this Letter to the Hebrews sees us as in a race and he says that if we are going on in this we have to see Jesus, and keep Him always in view; not by seeing ourselves and other people all the time, but keeping our eye on Him. Then we will keep going, but if we do not keep Him in view, then we will stop going.

That is very plain, very simple, but it is the Gospel concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ.

VISION ESSENTIAL TO PROGRESS

You and I, dear friends, individually, and if we belong to a company of the Lord's people, that company, will only make progress toward that full, ultimate end of God in Christ if we have a spiritual vision of Jesus Christ. Vision is essential to progress. Is it necessary for me to stay with the word 'vision'? I am not

thinking about something objective that you see with your eyes of flesh. It is something that has happened inside of you, and your inner spiritual eyes have been opened. You can say: 'I have SEEN, and that has revolutionised my life. That has put me on my feet. That has set me on a course. That has become a dynamic in my life which, IN SPITE OF MYSELF, keeps me going.' Yes, thank God, it works like that. I know the aspect, the factor, of our responsibility, but God help you and me if it is all going to be left to our responsibility and what we do! I tell you - and this may have been your experience, or it may interpret your present experience - many, many times I would have given up the race. That is an awful confession! Indeed many times I have given it up in my heart. It became so difficult that I could go no further, so I gave up. It was not, therefore, my persistence that enabled me to go on, but what the Apostle calls "the power that worketh in us". What is that? The Holy Spirit has put a dynamic in us and we have seen. We cannot un-see! We cannot go back. The seeing may fade, and it may even be eclipsed by days of darkness and trouble. We may know what Paul meant when he said: "We were pressed out of measure, beyond our strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8). That was a terrible thing for the greatest of all apostles to say! What happened? Did Paul give up and say: 'Well, I cannot go on!?' No, not at all! "The power that worketh in us" got him on his feet again and again. Let Elijah seek out his juniper tree and say: 'Take away my life!', but the Lord does not agree. He has given Elijah a part in his great, eternal purpose, and so he will come up again.

Be encouraged! Are you down? Are you despondent? Are you despairing? Are you feeling you cannot go on? You still come up again, for something has taken place. I am calling it 'vision', but that may be misleading. What I mean is that something has come into our life which is a spiritual knowledge and has become a spiritual dynamic, giving us a sense of purpose, God's purpose. It is something that God has done, and that is going to be the secret of our survival, at least. But for that we will not survive. We will not get through on any resource of our own, but we will go on in the going as the eternal goings of God if there has been this initial seeing of God's purpose in Jesus Christ.

Oh, I do wish with all my heart that in the preaching of the Gospel to the unsaved the note of eternal purpose was more often struck! The Gospel is generally presented from the point of view of what WE are going to get. The appeal is to our souls, that we will have something that will make us happy. That is the whole set-up: being happy! Oh, you will not get much of a Christian by that means, but you will if those who have come to the Lord have come because they have seen something of the greatness of Jesus Christ, and of their calling in Him; if they have had this vision which has produced a sense of vocation, a sense of mastering purpose. Without that we will not get very far in the race! It is that which the Apostle means, though he speaks in symbolic language. Do not just dwell upon the literal idea. The spiritual motivation is "looking off unto Jesus", who started it and will finish it. He is the author, the file-leader, and the perfecter. It did not begin with us, thank God! How many times we have been rescued by that word of the Lord Jesus: 'You did not choose Me. I chose you. I initiated this thing and I will complete it, if you will let Me, if you will fall into this going, if you will keep your eye on Me, and off the things that delay and arrest this vision' - or whatever word you may use for the idea, the principle, the law, this something that has taken hold of you, and you know it is that which is carrying you on.

Have you got that? Are you a Christian of that sort? I am not asking you if you had a Damascus Road experience, when the whole thing was visual, ocular and sensational, but whether something has happened so that, if you wanted to put it into words, you would say: 'Well, I have come to see Jesus Christ, and in Him my eternal destiny has been bound up.' Do you see what I mean, what I am trying to say? A mastering motivation has been brought into us, and upon us, by Jesus Christ at the beginning that

will make us Christians that go on in this race with patience. Have you got a mighty, Divine imperative in your life?

I wish I could get this home! After all your troubles, trials, temptations and difficulties, are you prepared to give up, to abandon everything and say: 'I am not going on with this any longer!?' Well, sit down and try! I venture to say that you will not get very far with that! You may have two or three miserable days over it, but sooner or later you will say: 'It is no use; I have to go on!' That is what I mean by vision - this sense of a God of purpose having laid hold of us to carry us on.

This is exactly what is meant by inspiration. The Lord's people ought to be inspired people, which is only another way of saying 'inspired'. And, because of that, they ought to be an inspiration to others. Oh, if we are not an inspiration to others there is something seriously lacking in the very nature of our Christianity! If we cannot inspire others, if we cannot bring in inspiration in our ministry and our contacts, in our leadership, then that is a contradiction in terms, because the idea in the Bible of leadership is inspiration, inspiring people. If you are leading a meeting you ought to inspire people, in whatever kind of meeting it is.

And what should be true of the individual should also be true of every company. They should be a company of people who are being carried on by this mighty Divine dynamic of purpose, or vision. 'We KNOW where we stand. We KNOW where we are going, and what we are after.' Many of the Lord's people today do not seem to know where they are going, or where they are. No assembly ought to be like that! They ought to be a 'going' company and everybody ought to know that those people have seen something and are mastered by something that is carrying them on, something that is a real force in their being.

VISION ESSENTIAL FOR UNITY

Such a vision has many side-effects and values, one of which is the resolving of the whole question of unity. And what a question that is! I hardly know what to say and what not to say, for there is so much. Take up the first Letter to the Corinthians and what have you there? People with internal dissensions, divisions and quarrellings, and anything but unity and oneness. Paul knew it well before he went to them, and so he said: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). To him that was the one all-unifying thing - a focused vision of Jesus Christ and His Cross.

If you have this what I am calling 'vision', this dominating sense of purpose and meaning given by the Lord, it will resolve so much of this trouble manifested in divisions and lack of real fellowship. A vision of Jesus Christ is a unifying dynamic.

We go to the Old Testament for an illustration. Take the case of Nehemiah. Well, Nehemiah had a vision. He was a man of vision. He saw Jerusalem rebuilt, with the wall reconstructed and made complete. He had a vision of this new Jerusalem on the earth for that time, and he was a man who was tremendously mastered by his vision. Then all these poor people - and they were a bedraggled remnant! - came back, with all the possibilities of more disintegration, murmurings and quarrellings to hinder the realization of this thing that had mastered this man. But what? They shared his vision! They were gathered up into it. They met persecution, opposition, and everything that could deter them, but the verdict was: "The wall was finished... in fifty and two days" (Nehemiah 6:15). Why? Because the people had a mind to work. And what was that mind? Well, it was this vision of the purpose which had been put into the heart of this man and which unified the people. Let the devil come alone and do everything that he can to discourage and make

difficulty! He even tried the subtle ruse of trying to get Nehemiah to come and have a conference in order to discuss things. 'No!' said Nehemiah, 'Not on your life! I am doing a great work and I will not come down there.' You see the power of a mighty objective, a vision, to unify, to energise, to keep going? Do we not need that? Does not Christianity need that? Do we not need it in our assemblies? We do indeed need something like that, so we must have this new apprehension of God's purpose and will as centred in His Son concerning us, a mighty, animating power in life that is (as I have said and want to say again) more powerful than all our capacity for giving up and being discouraged and resigning. It is more powerful than all the weaknesses of our own souls.

Oh, I do thank God for survival! That is a weak word, I know. It is not enough to say that we survive, for we are doing more than surviving, but in order to survive all this that is against us, there must be something more than ourselves. The Word says: "God is greater than our heart" (1 John 3:20), and we have proved that many times. Our hearts have fainted and well-nigh given up the struggle, but He is greater than our hearts.

VISION AN EMANCIPATING POWER

This thing, call it vision or what you will - you know what it means now! - is a mighty emancipating power. I use that word in this sense: it is a great power for lifting us out of our smallness, our narrowness, our littleness.

In illustrating this we will take up our good friend who supplies us with so much instruction in this matter in his own history, the Apostle Paul. You know, dear friends, that the cause of the old Israel's calamity, first of all of being sent into Babylon and captivity for seventy years, and then eventually being dismissed by God, was because of exclusiveness. There is no other answer. 'We are THE people. The truth will die with us. No one else has any place at all. We are it, and only we are it. These nations, the Gentiles, are mere dogs. There is no place for them in the Divine economy! We are the chosen people, God's elect, and no one else.' This was in spite of all the prophecies of what they were meant by God to be to the Gentiles, to the nations. They were to be the seed in which all the nations were to be blessed, but in spite of that covenant with Abraham, they had closed in on themselves until they were the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. It was exclusiveness, and Paul the Apostle was a representative of that. He was born and brought up in that, trained in it, imbibing it from his childhood. He was an embodiment of that pharasaic exclusiveness. What are you going to do with a man like that? Try argument, and see how far you will get. He will out-argue you! Try persuasion. No, not a bit of it! He is not the kind to be persuaded. He is a bigot in this! Try persecutions. It makes no difference. You will not move that man! He is shut in to this exclusive position - but the thing is done. [Now] He is emancipated, and the old Israel is no longer his parish. The WORLD is his parish. How vast is the range of his vision now! You cannot cope with his language about this! He leaps over all language barriers because of what? HE HAS SEEN JESUS CHRIST! He had a vision, and not only has he seen Him in the incident of the vision of a Person, but he has seen the significance. He has seen what Jesus Christ means in God's universe, in God's economy, in God's goings from eternity to eternity. You cannot be exclusive if you have seen Jesus Christ! That would dissipate and ruin all exclusiveness. You cannot be mean, contemptible and small if you have seen Jesus Christ!

Do you not agree with me when I say that this presentation of Christ in His infinite greatness is the only way to emancipate people from their littleness in their spiritual life? Is that not needed today? Oh, indeed it is! It is unifying, because we have one central Object which draws us together and makes us say to about one-thousand-and-one things that would hinder: 'You get out of the way! We are set upon this purpose of

God, and we are going on.' It is unifying, emancipating and enlarging. Oh, that the Lord would give us this emancipation again, and enlarge us! The Psalmist says: "I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psalm 119:32), and enlargement of heart will make you fleet of foot in the ways of the Lord.

VISION THE GREAT BATTLEGROUND

Vision is the great battleground of all time. Oh, if you have seen you will be a marked person. If your eyes have been opened you will know something of what that fellow knew when the Lord opened those eyes that had been blind from his birth. It is all so true to life! He had his eyes opened and said: "Whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). 'This one thing I know, and you cannot rob me of that!' But it was not long before he was excommunicated from the synagogue. He was cut off and made an object of the Pharisees' spite.

That is true to spiritual experience. If you have seen you are in the battle. You will not be troubled very much by the devil if you have not got this dynamic in you, because it is this dynamic which spells his final overthrow. You have to count for God, and you only do so by having seen; and when you have seen you are marked, and there is a battle on. Anything to destroy you, to get you out of the race and out of the battle will ensue!

How are we going to end? What are you praying? I will tell you what I am praying! After all these years I am praying with all my heart: 'Lord, reveal Thy Son in me more than ever. Give me yet a larger apprehension and comprehension of the meaning of Jesus Christ!' Will you go and pray that? Will you seek the Lord continually that He will enlarge and strengthen your apprehension of Jesus Christ so that, figurative language or not, this is what it is in actuality: 'Looking off unto Jesus, all that He means, all that He contains, all that He represents of God concerning us, the File-leader, the Perfecter, the Completer, the Beginning and the End.' Pray that Christ seen in the heart becomes this dominating power in our lives which saves us from all that would bring us into despair.

"I have seen the face of Jesus,

Tell me not of aught beside!"

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