

The All-Governing and Dominating Vision: The Seeing of Jesus Our Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeing Jesus our Lord as the key to understanding the place and destiny of man in the economy of God.

Scripture: Romans 8:19-21, 1 Corinthians 2:9, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, Galatians 1:15, Ephesians 1:18, Philippians 3:20-21, Colossians 3:1-4, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Peter 3:3-4

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Vision of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of seeing Jesus Christ as the all-governing vision for believers, warning against relying on earthly means for divine work. He discusses the transition from the old humanity in Adam to the new humanity in Christ, highlighting the dangers of mixing the natural with the spiritual. Sparks stresses that true ministry and understanding come from a revelation of Christ, which transforms our perception of our purpose and destiny in God's economy. He encourages believers to seek a deeper revelation of Jesus, which will lead to spiritual growth and maturity, avoiding the stagnation seen in the Corinthian church. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a heartfelt appeal to God for enlightenment and a genuine encounter with Christ.

Transcript

Lord, we have to appeal to Thee again for Thy compassion. What a pathetic thing it would be if we tried to do heavenly work with earthly means; Divine work in our own human strength. And that is just where we are now. We need Thy sympathy, Thy compassion, for our speaking and our hearing will really profit us nothing, will have no eternal value. O Lord, help us with Thy Divine help at this time that we may speak under the anointing and with the unction of the Holy Spirit; and also in the same way hear. Anoint our ears, anoint our ears, and give us a hearing that is not just our natural hearing that we may this morning by the power of the Holy Spirit hear the voice of the Son of God and live. Grant us this mercy for Thine Own Name and Glory's sake, Amen.

We have been occupied in these morning hours with the great transition from an old discredited humanity as in Adam to a New accredited Humanity in Christ. Our first attention was with the exposure and the devastation of that discredited humanity as we saw it representatively gathered around the Cross of the Lord Jesus in Caiaphas, Pilate, Judas Iscariot, Peter, and the two on the Emmaus Road. Then we saw what a devastation the Cross was or an exposure of the old humanity at its highest, at its best; and there

could have been nothing worse when we were finished. Then we went on to the battleground of the two humanities as we have it in the two letters to the Corinthians: on the one side, "the natural man" which is the old humanity; on the other side, "the spiritual man," the New.

We stood and did little more than look into those letters in a general way, pinpointing a few things in the letters where the carry-over of the old to the New is shown, the conflict being between the natural man and the spiritual man or that which is natural and that which is spiritual, the natural touching so many things, even the most sacred things. The things of the Spirit touched by the hand of the natural man and taken up and used for the natural man's gratification and glory. That is what is in the First Letter to the Corinthians.

There is much more detail, with which we are not going to deal; we have only touched it in order to indicate something. I trust that you have seen the indication of how dangerous it is and with what tragic consequences the touch of the natural man on spiritual things can be. We brought out that most terrible warning, the warning to Christians as in Corinth: to "born again" people called "saints," separated unto God, came that terrible warning where Israel's tragedy in the wilderness is taken as the ground of the warning. They perished in the wilderness, and the apostle uses that to warn the Corinthians that the battle can be lost in the wilderness if there is any compromise between the natural and the Spiritual. If you are still in Egypt, while being geographically so to speak out of Egypt but Egypt not being spiritually out of you, then you are positionally where the Corinthians were.

Now that is all the negative side, however we came yesterday morning to point out that the answer the apostle gave concerning the whole compass of things in the First Letter, the answer he gave to the ten questions raised by the Corinthians in a letter to him, was not in a code of rules and laws like the Mosaic, but in principles. And all the principles gathered into one principle which amounted to this: how much of Christ is in this? How much of Christ is in your divisions? "Is Christ divided?"

Paul, pinpointing the whole question of division, said: "Is Christ divided? Were you baptized into Paul?" Christ is the principle of solving that problem of divisions and all the other matters which I am not going to reiterate now. The answer he gave to the solving of these difficulties is focusing on Christ. The answer he gave them was how much does this minister Christ? How much does this represent of Christ? Everything is tested from that standpoint, judged and settled. Paul said these things are answered by principle and the principle is Christ.

"Have I Not Seen Jesus Our Lord?"

Now having come past that, with all there is left in the letters, we come onto the positive side. I want you just to look at one or two fragments from the First Letter to the Corinthians. It is only a fragment found in chapter nine at verse one: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" It is that clause that I want you to take hold of and hold for a moment--"Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"

And now over to Second Corinthians, chapter four, verse four: "In whom the god of this age hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them." And in verse six: "Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, Who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

"Have I Not Seen Jesus Our Lord?"

"God has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Again I would like to add another fragment; this time from the Letter to the Galatians, chapter one, verse fifteen. It is in a rather large section, but I would like to lift out just a fragment, "But when it was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the nations":--It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me.

"Have I Not Seen Jesus Our Lord?"

Of course, the immediate context of those words is the apostle authenticating his apostleship and answering those who said that he was not an authentic apostle because he was not one of the twelve. That is connected with that charge, but it has a very much larger and more comprehensive context than that, as you see from these other verses and many more like them. His answer to them: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." God, the same God Who said in the beginning, "Let light be, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"; which means, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Seeing Of Jesus Our Lord

What we are going to be occupied with this morning is this all-governing, all-dominating vision of Jesus Christ. This brings in four of the greatest matters with which we can have to do. The seeing of Jesus--how comprehensive and revolutionary it is! These four things are major things. Firstly: The place and destiny of man in the economy of God. That comes in with a seeing of Jesus our Lord.

I am glad the apostle added that last clause, "our Lord," and I would like to point out that in the New Testament, the name "Jesus" by itself is only used when it relates to His pre-resurrection life. If the name "Jesus" is used alone, you will find that the context is of His pre-resurrection life. However, after the resurrection, the apostles never called Him "Jesus" alone; they always linked on our Lord, our Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us note "Jesus," yes; but "our Lord" and His Lordship came into view after His resurrection and ascension. Right there on the Damascus Road, "and he said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' "--"I Am Jesus." He knew it was Jesus. "Lord, (not, 'Jesus, what will You have me to do?' but) Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The very beginning of a revolution of a transition from knowing after the flesh to knowing after the Spirit. All that is parenthetical. Let us go on.

The four magnitudes which come in with a true Spiritual seeing of Jesus are:

The Place And Destiny Of Man In The Economy Of God

The Nature And Dynamic Of Ministry In This Dispensation

The Nature And Purpose Of The Church Now And In After-Ages

The Immense Significance In That Three-fold Context Of Jesus Christ Crucified, Risen, and Exalted

These are four very big things, and they are all comprehended by "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"--"It pleased God to reveal His Son in me"; and when He revealed His Son in me, this is what I began to see. That is what the apostle is saying: "This is what I began to see." He does not tabulate these things like that, but I have just taken these four magnitudes as the content and substance of the New Testament.

This is where we begin; firstly the seeing of Jesus our Lord or God revealing His Son in us, illuminating, unveiling, the place and destiny of man in the Divine Economy. I must say here (though it might get me onto controversial ground) I am a firm believer that the Apostle Paul had a very real hand in the writing of the Letter to the Hebrews. Whether he actually wrote it or dictated it, I am certain that Paul had a very definite and direct influence, to say the least, upon the writing of the Letter to the Hebrews; and you will recognize it in what I am going to say. It is there; it comes out of that.

Paul, from the beginning in his First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter fifteen, takes up man from his inception. He says, "The first man, Adam." It starts with man; it goes right back to the beginning of humanity, mankind, and he follows right through mankind on the battleground of the two humanities until he reaches the point of man glorified. How marvelous that chapter is. I have stood back from that chapter many times, and said, "How did any mortal man know that?" It could only be because he had seen Jesus Christ. That is the only answer:--

A New Man In Christ

"There are bodies terrestrial, and there are bodies celestial. There are bodies earthy and there are bodies heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthy, so we shall bear the image of the heavenly." Here Paul describes something of the nature of this Heavenly Body, this Heavenly physical Body, this glorified Manhood. This is an amazing unveiling of the destiny of man in the economy of God.

So Paul takes up manhood first in Adam, and then by the Cross he smites that race in Adam, discredits it, rejects it, and puts it aside, and starts with the New Man, "The last Adam": "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation,"--the old humanity past, all is New. We have the whole history of man in this letter, right from his inception in the heart of God, his inception in the creation of the first Adam and his rejection in this letter; and then we have man created in the New Man, Christ.

Oh, what a Man this is in glory. In this we groan! But what is the groaning about? Oh, for that for which I was created; which God meant for me. In this we groan waiting, "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body," the putting on of our New Man. "When this corruptible will have put on incorruption." My, do you not groan for that? Incorruption, this mortal dying "will have put on immortality," eternally living. Now how did Paul get all that? "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me."

Paul said: "God has repeated His Divine fiat in me. Over all the world in chaos and darkness God said, 'Let light be--and there was light,' a fiat of God, and He has done that in me. God has repeated and said, In this darkened humanity, 'Let light be'; and when He said that, I--in that Light--saw His Son and in His Son I saw all that God intended and intends for mankind"--man's destiny in the economy of God.

All that is in chapter fifteen, and Paul tells us out of this seeing that the world to come is going to be entirely subjected to this Man and this Humanity. As I was saying, this is Hebrews two: "For Thou madest Him in order to have dominion over the works of Thy hand. Thou has put all things in Thine economy and intention under His feet," but we do not see that true of the old humanity. It is discredited, it is lost, it has lost that kingdom.

But we see Jesus, we see Jesus the Representative Man of this New Humanity, the Inclusive Man, the Last Adam of this Humanity, we see Him crowned with glory and honor. That is the destiny of man in the intention of God. That is what Paul is saying here by the Spirit.

He Must: He Must Have: He Will Have!

Paul shows us in these letters to the Corinthians and by his influence, at least, in the Letter to the Hebrews, he shows us God's intense interest in man and God's infinite patience and perseverance and pains with man through history. God never, never wiped out any mankind until it had finally gone beyond the point of no return where mankind said, "We will not, we will not," finally "We will not"--that was Noah's day. Noah--a preacher of righteousness, and the effect in them was: "We will not." So God said, "The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." God never did anything like that until the cup of iniquity was full to overflowing, and there was no hope because of man's settled determination not to have the revealed will of God.

Apart from that, look at the infinite pains and patience and perseverance of God. Oh, how marvelous is God in His Sovereignty. I think God chose the Jewish race because it was going to extend Him to the fulness of His patience; and it did. God is marvelous in His Sovereignty, sometimes I think that He chose it for no other purpose than just to show what mercy He has. Well, that would take us into another part of First Corinthians: "God hath chosen the foolish things... the weak things... the ignoble things... that are not." We see what patience, what long-suffering, what pains, what perseverance is shown by the apostle on the part of God with mankind because God has set such store by this kind of creation; and if God should never have a humanity like that at the end, then God is defeated utterly and He is not God, the God of the Bible. He must--He must, and He will have a humanity that His heart is set upon.

Moreover, the apostle shows here by the Spirit, that all God's dealings with His Own children (and the terms are family terms: His Own children, His Own family) he shows that all God's dealings with His Own children and family had this end in view--the transition unto the glory, bringing many sons to glory, getting many sons to glory. But we must link with that: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked or reprov'd of Him. Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth. He scourgeth every son that He places by Him." That wonderful chapter in Hebrews 12 about God's dealings with His children, His family, showing that "no chastening (child-training) for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous"--for the present, grievous.

You and I know something about that. But "afterward," there is an "afterward"; and it is that "afterward" that God is working toward in His dealings with us, difficult as they may be. We will come to that again, and I do not know whether we will get to it this morning, but here is the principle. Oh!! God is not against us when we are having a hard time. The devil says He is. Have a bad time, and there is at once a little demon at your ear accusing God, maligning God, trying to get a twist in your mind that questions God, trying to get you right back into the garden again, "Hath God said?" trying to get you onto the old Adam ground again. Oh, brethren, I can say this more easily than I can go through it, and so can you hear it more easily than you can go through it, but there is that "afterward." What afterward? The end of One Corinthians, chapter fifteen. Oh, yes, all this, "But thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." All His dealings with us are governed by this great destiny for which He has made us and called us.

Destined For Sonship

Now all this the apostle shows, all this is represented by the perfected Man in glory, and all this is not only represented by Him there as the ultimate of God for mankind, but it is secured in that Man in the glory. It is security for us, and in this connection the apostle uses a figure from the Greek about the Holy Spirit having

been given to us as an "earnest" of our final redemption. You know what the figure is? What is it? You see some goods, some produce at a depot on a railroad station. It is destined for something or somewhere, and there is stamped on it "sample," "sample," destined for sonship. It is an earnest, it is a firstfruits, it is a prophecy, but there is more to follow; and a great deal more to follow. This is only the beginning, this is only a piece of what is coming; and the apostle uses that figure of speech. The Greeks understood quite well what he was talking about. Paul says: "He has given us the Spirit as the 'sample,' the earnest, the prophecy, of what is to be." It is secured, it is all there secured in Him to come to us; and He has sent Him (is it irreverent to speak of the Holy Spirit like this?)--He sent the Sample. If you and I really have the Spirit, what have we got?--The earnest of our inheritance, and what is it?--We have this witness, this assurance, and the working of this Power holding us unto something, unto a destiny. Thank God for that holding. To quote the Apostle Peter: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto a salvation to be revealed in the last time."

We Are Kept By The Power.

Now where would any of us be today if there had not been that holding of us? When we really did let go, when we really did say: "We can go no further, this is the end." And we would have gone if it had been left to us. Well, the miracle is we are here kept by the earnest of the Spirit unto that because it is secured unto us in Christ. So the apostle says: "Cast not away, cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward. You have need of patience that after you have done the will of God..." Brethren, there is so much in all this. He shows that it is all represented in the Man perfected in heaven; even more, it is secured in Him up there. I am glad it is up there and out of this world beyond any power to undo the security.

(1) The Summation Of All--His Son

Now the apostle shows then that the advent of Jesus Christ into this world was this: first of all, it was the summation of all God's former forms and ways of His Self-revelation. "God Who at sundry times and in divers places spake unto the prophets," spake by the prophets in many-sided fragmentary bits. Here a line and there a line; a bit through this one and a bit through that one, all speaking bits and pieces and fragments. He has summed them all up now, gathered them all together, made One Sum of them; and it is the summation of all when His Son comes into this world Incarnate. That is what is here! See Jesus and you see the summation of all God's previous methods and ways and times of Self-revelation. It is the full and the final revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

That is what this young man Saul of Tarsus, with his background of the Old Testament in his mind (so that he could quote the whole thing without the Book) with that he saw Jesus Christ, the Risen Glorified Lord; and his Bible became a new book. Paul saw that in the One everything was gathered up, everything was summed up. "Have not I seen Jesus our Lord; and when I saw Him, I saw." There are no more fragments, the thing is complete now; no more bits and pieces, it is just One Great Glorious Whole. No more "then" and "now" and "afterward," it is all eternally present in Him now: the summation of all God's previous ways of Self-revelation.

(2) His Son--The End Of The Old Economy And The Introduction Of An Entirely New Economy

Then Paul saw, and this meant so much to a Jew and an educated Jew, so thoroughly educated as was Saul of Tarsus, he saw that Jesus our Lord was not only the summation of all God's previous ways of revealing Himself, but He was the consummation of a whole economy, the whole of the Mosaic economy.

That is why I say I am sure that Paul had a hand in this Hebrew Letter, because the whole of the Mosaic economy is gone over in that letter. And what is the purpose of that letter? the transition from that Mosaic economy to Christ. He is the High Priest. He is the Sacrifice. He is the Altar. He is the Temple. He is everything that that economy represented in type and figure, but He is the consummation of that. He is the end of that and the introduction of an entirely New economy. It is a Heavenly One in the heavens, "not made with hands." Oh, the terms are so definite. "Not of this creation."--The consummation of a whole economy. Brethren, has Christendom seen what Paul saw? Has Christendom grasped this yet? Is it still clinging onto the old economy in its vestments, its robes, its ritual, its external things? Has it failed to see that this is all finished with, and now our robing is the robing of His Righteousness, and no other can appear before God. All our adornments are spiritual.

Peter has seen this, for in 1 Peter 3:3-4 he speaks to the dear sisters "whose adorning is not the plaiting of the hair and the wearing of the jewelry." What is the word "adorning"? "Adorning" in the original is "Whose world (cosmos)"--"whose cosmos" is the word "adorning." "Whose cosmos, whose world," whose realm and system of things is not this getting yourself up in making an impression. Oh, I am not holding any agreement with carelessness and slovenliness and that sort of thing, but the question is what "world" do you live in?--how do you appear to others, what impression do you make by these outward things? "No," says Peter, of the saintly women whose world is not that. That is not their world, that is not their cosmos, their system, but their "adorning" is "the ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit." So we see one system of externals is gone, and it is all now a system of the Spirit in the heart, a Heavenly thing for a Heavenly people.

Now some people have seen the principle, and they have tried to put it into effect by putting on a certain kind of raiment and becoming a sect who wear that kind of raiment. They have seen the principle all right, but you cannot fulfill a principle in that way. It is the Spirit that comes out and expresses itself. The end of an economy, its consummation and then the transition to an entirely new regime, the regime of the Man perfected and installed in glory as God's Model for this New Humanity. "According to Christ" is the phrase so often used. It is "according to Christ" or "not according to Christ." That is the test, the challenge, according to the perfected Man and Humanity installed in Heaven, God's Pattern, to which He is working.

He is working, and here we come back again to the place of the Holy Spirit in the Letters to the Corinthians, especially the First Letter. As we look through the letter, what is the full, ultimate, supreme function of the Holy Spirit?--"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, ...though I give all my goods to the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, I have nothing." The supreme work of the Holy Spirit is the Character of Jesus Christ, not love as a thing. You can put on love as a thing. You can put that on, and it can be a pretension, a way of behaving and speaking. Beloved, people can come and put their hand on your shoulder and be treacherous behind your back by pointing out your faults to someone else. It must be "unfeigned love" the apostle says. "Unfeigned, unhypocritical, love of the brethren": it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Are you not surprised when Paul has finished his letters, and he says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ..." (this benediction has become so commonplace and lost so much of its contextual significance as applying and relating to the whole Corinthian situation). What is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? "...though He were rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich." That is the grace of the Lord Jesus, self-emptying; Paul will later say that to the Philippians.

The benediction, what is it? "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." It is Jesus Christ all the time. "The love of God." How do you know it? in Jesus Christ only, never in any other way can we know the Love of God. "The fellowship of the Holy Spirit": the communion, the unity,--the removal of those divisions and that divisive spirit, ("I am of Paul, Apollos, Peter, and so on--").

"Have I Not Seen Jesus Our Lord?"

"He Was Pleased To Reveal His Son In Me"

Now time does not permit me to start this morning on that next great thing: how seeing Jesus is the Source, the Character, of all ministry in this dispensation. But let us hold what we have heard this morning quietly before the Lord because it challenges us. How far are we here able to say with the effect of it, the revolution, the transformation, the transition:--"Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"--"He was pleased to reveal His Son in me." And when that happened, my word, what a lot went. It just went and what a lot came. How different! I have called this section:

The All-governing And Dominating Vision,--The Seeing Of Jesus Our Lord.

Go and ask Him to do that with you, and let me just say this, it is not something that is going to be all done at once. Oh, no, some of us after many years are seeing more today of the significance and meaning of Jesus our Lord than we have ever seen all through our lives. It has got to be like that, thank God, it has got to be like that. We always have a margin, a plus, an extra right to the end. As one brother has said, "All ministry should have such an overflow that no man ever finishes his sermon," and you know what he meant. When you have come to the end of your time, you have got far more than your time will allow you to go on with. And it ought to be like that over the Lord Jesus. Oh, how much more I see than I have ever been able to say or could say today. I see He is so vast, so full, so immense. We are here, dear friends, not to talk about the greatness of Christ as a subject, but to be the expression of it!--It may defeat us. We may go to the grave (if He does not come) feeling, "Oh, we haven't begun yet," but it should be like that. He is so great, so Wonderful. And may the fiat take place, if it has not. But if it has, and our eyes, the eyes of our hearts, have been enlightened, we have begun to see something of Him. Remember, there should be no stalemate over this, no arrested progress as at Corinth, no undue babyhood. Yes, it is all right to be a baby when you are a baby; but it is a horrible thing to be a baby when you have the years of maturity.

That is how it was at Corinth. Growth was stunted, it was arrested, because of what? They had really failed to see the Lord Jesus. They had heard the teaching; they knew what the apostle was talking about, but he has to come back with this: "The eyes of our heart be enlightened." He has to come back with this Second Letter to them:--"The veil taken away," and we all with unveiled face see Another Face, "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and "are changed into the same image from glory to glory." Shall we pray...

So, Lord, we can only say that with the presentation of the truth Thou would go beyond, take us beyond; and grant that every life here may stand in the good of the unveiled face of Jesus Christ--the glory therein... may stand in the good of having seen Jesus our Lord. O make that true of every one of us, very true, wonderfully true, and growingly true, until we finally see His face. We ask it in His Name, Amen.

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