

The Burning Fire of the Spirit - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeing Jesus in His glory and the greatness of Christ as the key to recovery, renewal, and fortification in times of suffering.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1, Acts 7:55, Hebrews 1:3, Revelation 1:1

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "The Greatness of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of a fresh unveiling of the greatness of Jesus Christ to address the spiritual decline and suffering faced by believers. He illustrates how throughout biblical history, encounters with God's glory provided strength and sustenance to figures like Abraham, Moses, and Paul, enabling them to endure trials. Sparks argues that the key to overcoming adversity and renewing spiritual life lies in recognizing Christ's true greatness, which is often diminished by contemporary views. He calls for believers to seek a deeper understanding of Christ's glory, which will empower them to navigate their challenges and enhance their spiritual lives. Ultimately, he asserts that a greater revelation of Jesus leads to a more profound faith and a more vibrant Christian experience.

Transcript

This evening, leaving aside very much that might have been said as right out of the first chapters of the book of the Revelation, I'm going to confine myself to a word on the first clause of the book, "the Revelation of Jesus Christ".

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

We might quite rightly change that word from "revelation" to "unveiling" - that is even nearer to the original word than "revelation". The unveiling of Jesus Christ.

We have seen that as we move on into this book, we move into a situation that really does need speaking to. On the one hand, it's a situation of spiritual loss and failure, weakness, and many other conditions and features which even the Lord Himself, in all His grace, had to deplore. The renewing of the life of His people, and the restoring of those primary and primal values of their beginnings; then it was a situation of great difficulty, many difficulties, sufferings, and trials, and adversities as we have seen from various quarters and of various kinds - that the Christians of those times were both actually in a time of much adversity and were moving yet more deeply into suffering. To one of these churches the Lord said that they were about to suffer, they were about to be cast into prison, they were going to have tribulation for a

specified time. It was a time when Christians both actually needed real help, stimulus, and needed to be prepared for further battles, further conflicts, and further suffering. These were the two main aspects of the general situation.

And we stand back and ask, in the light of those facts, how did the Lord, and how does the Lord, meet that need? Indeed, we might say: how does the Lord ever meet a great need? What is that which will supply the need, and that which alone will supply it and be the key to the problem, the answer to the demand, and the assurance or the assured ground both of recovery, renewal, and of fortification for the suffering? And the answer has ever been and always is: a new revelation of the greatness of Jesus Christ - an unveiling of His greatness.

That is the very platform, we may say, upon which and from which the Lord moves into these situations and into all the situations that follow in this book; He prefaces everything with this fresh revelation or unveiling of His own personal greatness. You know that has ever been the way, Abraham was called upon to make tremendous decisions and sacrifices. In his native country and city (marvelous and rich civilisations, a very full life indeed) and without assurance that his movement would be justified, he was called upon to move with sealed orders, "Get thee out and to a land that I will show thee...", "I will show thee, when you get there..." a tremendous move, very costly and very testing. But if you have wondered how it was that Abraham went through, met all the tests and at last survived, you have, I think, the answer in these words: "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Ur of the Chaldees...". If ever that happens, you've got something to move on, you've got a background, you've got something that will again and again come to your rescue in a time of difficulty.

Moses was called upon to undertake a tremendous responsibility. We know the whole story now, Moses was not altogether ignorant of what he had got to face in Egypt and afterwards, and we may wonder sometimes how he got through and kept to the course, but we know that he met God face to face. It could be said equally, that the God of glory appeared to him. References are made several times in the Bible to that encounter with God in the book and we are told that he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. That was the secret of his sustenance.

Joshua was called as a young man to face tremendous responsibilities and undertaking. In the ridding and clearing of that country of those ten kingdoms, getting that people (such a people... he knew them) in to possess, and all that was bound up with it. And no wonder the Lord had to repeat one word to Joshua continually to keep him on the move, "Be of good courage, be strong and of good courage... only be of good courage... only be strong...". How did the Lord give to Joshua the basis? "He lifted up his eyes and saw the captain of the host of the Lord..." from that time it was alright, he could go on and go through.

Isaiah was a young man in a very, very difficult day. One of those very, very cloudy days in Israel's history, and he was taking up his great prophetic ministry in the face of great difficulties and threatening problems. How did he get through? "I saw the Lord, high and lifted up," he said. That's the answer.

Paul... if ever a man had to face greater difficulties, oppositions and antagonisms and sufferings and peril and what not, more than that man... how did he get through? He saw the Lord, for "The Lord appeared unto him..." he saw the greatness of Jesus Christ. Stephen triumphed as he saw the heavens open and he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. And so we could go on.

But here... the Lord's people had come to a point where there was going to be a devastating blow struck at their corporate life; just on the point of that final siege of Jerusalem in this dispensation, when everything

was going to be shattered and scattered. The great earth-shaking was about to take place. All that the Lord Jesus Himself had foreshadowed, "not one stone left upon another..." and all those other things, terrible things, all about to take place within a very little time. How were the believers going to get through? The Lord took up a man, we don't know now exactly who it was, some say one and some say another, but he took up a man to write what we call, "the letter to the Hebrews". And you see how he begins - almost a matchless unveiling of the greatness of Jesus Christ: "Who, being the express image of His person... the effulgence of His glory" the greatness of Jesus Christ.

And the Lord was saying through that letter, "If only you can get that as your foundation, you'll go through it all". You will not go back because you are being tempted to do as perhaps you're contemplating doing, you'll go on, you'll go on if only... you'll see how great your Lord is. So he laid the foundation for survival of faith, survival of faith because that's the issue. You know, it all comes up in the eleventh chapter - the survival of faith on the ground of the apprehension of the greatness of Christ.

And now you come to this book of the Revelation and again you're in the presence of these things. On the one side: spiritual declension, failure, breakdown, loss; on the other side: suffering, growing suffering, terrible afflictions for the church. How will the one be remedied and recovery take place? What is the key to a renewing of spiritual life when it's got to low ebb? How shall they go on through the tribulation and the tribulations and come out in victory in the City of God? Well, the answer is again - it's the Lord's only answer, it always has been His one answer, it has always been successful, it's the only one that will be successful in any situation of need: a new unveiling of the greatness of the Lord Jesus.

But oh, dear friends, these are words, these are words. When we say these things, and we all agree that they're true, that's right, we know it, but having said it, with all that we can say like that, then we are so helpless. We're so helpless because it's the thing and not talking about it. You see, if, if only, by the Holy Spirit (there's no other way, no other means) we could capture a new glimpse of His greatness, how many problems that would solve, and questions that would answer, and need that would meet if only it could be like that! How overwhelming it would be... when I say "overwhelming", I mean how much would be overwhelmed - a mighty tidal wave making all these rocks upon which we threaten to flounder as nothing, they're sunk beneath it - disappear from view. Now, that's not just language. Look, who is writing this? It's the apostle John. The apostle John! Yes, that man who walked with Jesus of Nazareth, listened to Him and watched Him at work, and then at the supper and at other times, sat next to Him and put his head upon His shoulder; the most familiar picture of a man alongside of a man, close association, very devoted, very affectionate. I never could understand why John called himself, "the man whom Jesus loved" but there you are, it showed that there was a kind of familiarity, perhaps a sacred, holy familiarity between John and Jesus, like that, on very human terms.

Listen! That same man says, "When I saw Him I fell as one dead..." it's the same Jesus, and the same man. "I fell to the ground as one dead..." and if that One had not come and laid His hand upon him and said, "Fear not John, I am the first and the last, I am the living One..." John would have been there a dead man, or as a dead man. The same Jesus, but look at the transition: from the Jesus of history to the Christ of glory! That's the difference; you see, that is the difference from the John of the gospels to the John of the Revelation - a marvelous and mighty movement. He never felt like that when he walked the earth with Jesus, devoted as he was, perhaps sometimes awestruck and awe-inspired. With his fullest consciousness of who Jesus was, it was not until he saw Him glorified, that he went down helplessly prostrate like a dead man. I say, it was a great transition, from the Jesus of history, to the Christ of glory.

And dear friends, I take nothing whatever from the values and blessings of the gospels when I say that I'm sometimes just a little afraid that we dwell too much upon the Jesus of history and fail to see or to remember that the men who wrote those four gospels wrote them long after Jesus was glorified. They did not, at some point toward the end of His life when they perhaps began to sense that He would not be with them much longer, get away and decide to write the story of His life, of His birth, and His manhood and His teaching, and His miracles, and that as a human story, as an earthly story. They had all the mighty facts and realities of His resurrection, ascension, and heavenly glory which they were seeking to crowd into that story of His life here and say, "That One was this One; that was not just Jesus of Nazareth, that was the mighty Son of God from heaven!" They are crowding every incident with the fullest apprehension that they had of the glorified Christ, Christ now there at the right hand of God, not just a human story. That is the only way to preach the gospel from the gospels.

You notice, when after His ascension and His glorification they preached or they wrote, how little, how remotely little, they ever said about the three and a half years. A fragment here and there... they said very little about His teaching, and His miracles, and His walk about Palestine and that; very little indeed. They were all occupied with this One who had been crowned with glory and honour. That was their message. That One? Alright, Jesus of Nazareth, if you like, "who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil..." sort of a passing reference to all that, a summary, but! God raised Him. God honoured Him. This One! It will not get us very far just to be occupied with the incidents of His earthly life, however precious they are. If we are going on and going through, we need an apprehension of that fullness of glory that is His now.

The Greatness of Christ

You see, dear friends, it is because, it is just because He has been robbed or stripped of His essential greatness that we have down the centuries the deplorable conditions that have obtained. Our liberal theologians have stripped Him of His deity. With what result? Oh, devastating results in the impact of Christ upon this earth. They've made Him a lesser Christ than He is. The philosophers have just made Him one in their gallery of great and wise men. It was against that tendency, even with the Christians in Corinth, that Paul raged in his first letter; taking something from the Lord Jesus and just putting Him amongst other great and wise men.

The gnostics of Colossae, what were they doing? Oh, they had a theory of angelic ranks and orders, from the highest order of angelic beings down, down, down to the lowest subordinate and they put Jesus, perhaps at the top, but nothing more than an angelic being, robbing Him of His essential person: the very God. The comparative religionists, all along and in our own day, are saying, "Well, there are great, great founders of religion, there's Buddha, and Confucius, and Mohammed, and Jesus, and..." like that. You see the subtlety? Just like that. A comparative; not an absolutely supreme and unique.

And the humanists, those humanists of our time... inflating and glorifying man and humanity to such a point that after all, humanity will be deified one day, will reach Godhead and Jesus is only, after all, the super Man... so it goes on. And it's all these things; this satanic work to reduce the size of Christ, to make Him less than He is, that has done so much mischief.

My point is this, dear friends, that if we lose, if we lose the essential greatness of Christ in our consciousness, or if we fail to have it, ours is going to be a lesser spiritual life than it could be, and we are going to break down under the stress and the strain of adversity. The only thing for every need is this

recovery: the recovery of His greatness. Now, here you see He is presented and He is not presented in the language of Deity here, although it runs very close, you at some points cannot distinguish between the humanity and the Deity; you don't know whether John is thinking of God or of Christ at certain points. The fact is he is speaking of the One who is both; who is both. But the title we have already seen, by which He is presented in this matchless, incomparable unveiling is: "Son of Man". The personal greatness, the personal greatness of the Son of Man, who is at the same time Son of God, very God.

We have referred to the letter to the Hebrews and we need to call it in, ask it to come in now for our help in this matter. We read into it, ignoring, ignoring chapter divisions. We begin with this express image of His glory, this effulgence of God in there. We read: "Whom He appointed Heir of all things..." appointed Heir of all things. "Through whom He made the ages..." and on. "But one in a certain place has said, What is man that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that Thou makest mention of him? Thou madest him... to have dominion over the works of Thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For not yet do we see all under His feet... But we behold Jesus... who was made for a little while lower than the angels... that He by the grace of God might taste death in the behalf of every man. Crowned with glory and honour..." Here's the Son of Man; it's His own personal greatness.

See who He is! The effulgence... the express image. See His appointment: Heir of all things! See His instrumentality and agency through whom the angels were made: the Son of Man. How great this One is! You wouldn't think that when you see Him walking about Palestine, not all that, but recognise that that same One is now here before John with these devastating effects. That same One; now revealed, unveiled as to what He is essentially in His person, Who He is, what position He holds; He is here as the Heir of all things come for His inheritance. And the rest of the book sees Him working it out, working it out, the securing of that inheritance of which He is the Heir. And in the end you have a new earth. What a glorious inheritance comes into view in the last chapters of this book! This, this is the Son of Man; this is His greatness. Oh, but you see we're completely defeated at any attempt at quite a true, not an exaggerated, a true unveiling of Jesus Christ.

There's His personal greatness, but as Son of Man we have in that very term His representative greatness. Borrow again from the letter to the Hebrews where first He is appointed Heir of all things, then He is the captain of their salvation bringing many sons to glory. The word "captain" there would be better translated, "the pioneer" of their salvation; the one who goes before - to lead them into that which He Himself has entered. That's, of course, the substance of the book of the letter to the Hebrews. He has gone before, He has entered into the heavens, He's passed through the heavens. He has gone the whole way and reached the end as the Pioneer of the many sons being brought to glory and those whom He calls His 'brethren'. His representative greatness as there at the end in fullness, in glory, there He represents all those He is going to bring and is bringing - His representative greatness - how great it is!

We sung our hymn; we sing our songs, we read of a great multitude which no man can number out of every tribe and kindred and tongue, thousands, ten thousands of thousands... language is taxed to breaking point to describe the fruit of the sufferings of the Lamb. And He is the representative in glory of them all, of them all. How great is His Person and His representation. And then:-

His Official Greatness.

That is seen in this book and again in the letter to the Hebrews: His official greatness as High Priest. What a great High Priest He is, as according to that book! What a tremendous thing He does. Think of it!

Through century after century, sacrifices of lambs, and goats, and bulls, and other things... blood enough to fill an ocean. All through the centuries, day after day... that never reaching an end in effectiveness where sin was concerned, but He! One offering, only one, went far beyond the millions of sacrifices on Jewish altars. One only. How great His sacrifice and His priesthood as He offered Himself without spot unto God, once for all.

And here in this book is the other side of His official greatness: His description as King of kings, and Lord of lords. What a thing to say in a day when that tyrant of Rome was dominating the world and assuming lordship over all lordships and seeking to subject every power to himself, not only in earth, but in heaven as the proclaimed deity. In that day, in that day the unveiling of Jesus Christ as King of kings - yes, Nero amongst them - and Lord of lords. His official greatness. I am not going to try to add to that, dear friends.

To sum up, I believe we would have a very much better kind of convert if they were presented with a very much greater Christ.

And I would say to anyone who does not know in their own life and experience salvation in Jesus Christ, what it means really to be born again, (use whatever word or phrase or language you like; saved, redeemed, born again whatever) you know what it means to really be a child of God and to know it! To know it, to be able to heartily join in with this apostle John when he said, "Beloved, now are we the children of God... behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God, and such we are!" Such we are! To be able to join in like that and say, "And such we are", with that conscious affirmation of its truth. If that is not where you are, I would say to you, while Jesus would be a Saviour, the forgiver of your sin and many other things to you, He's far, far greater than you can think of, or imagine.

Salvation takes its greatness from the measure of the Saviour. If you want a great salvation, see what a great Saviour He is, and remember, remember, that because of what He is, because of what He is, you need have no fears in putting your trust in Him. You need not fear that you'll (as some people put it) not be able to keep it up; no, you won't, but He will. He'll be able to keep you up. Any bit of you He can keep up; He's great enough.

We need a greater unveiling, or an unveiling of the greatness of Jesus Christ to get a better kind of Christian for the recovery of spiritual losses, and declensions, and failure, and deliverance from all these things which are so abhorrent to us and Him. There's only one way, only one way really to see His greatness... if we do that we can't live on a little level. In this matter it will be true, it'll be a tremendously effective thing.

The other day we went to the planetarium in London. Any of you been to that? Well, you've been overwhelmed with amazement, I'm quite sure. But the thing that was with me all the time and afterward as I listened to the little man giving his lecture: how can ever a man be a little man when he's dealing with these things all the time? I suppose it is possible even for a fellow of the Astronomical Society to be a little man, petty man in character (this is not what I'm saying about this man) but it's possible. But it's not possible, it is not possible to have a revelation of the greatness of Jesus Christ and be a little person.

Oh, for our enlargement, our ennoblement, our deliverance from our pettinesses and all this which is so despicable. What is the answer? A new grasp of His greatness. That's all. And then, if we are suffering, if we are knowing adversity, trials, and the clouds seem to be gathering, accumulating and increasing, how will we get through? Only thus, by this: getting away and asking, and seeking, and pursuing in prayer a

new heart revelation unveiling of Jesus Christ. And I'm sure that will do it. The Lord give it to us.

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