

# The Cross

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Cross is the crisis of God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge, where sin is met, judged, and dealt with once and for all.*

**Scripture:** Acts 2:22

**Topics:** "Redemption", "The Significance of the Cross"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the profound significance of the Cross in the context of redemption, emphasizing that it represents a divine crisis where sin, righteousness, and judgment converge. He articulates that the incarnation and earthly life of Jesus were essential for the reconstitution and glorification of humanity, culminating in the Cross as the ultimate confrontation between good and evil. Sparks highlights that the Cross reveals the depth of sin as rebellion against God, the establishment of righteousness through Christ's perfect obedience, and the execution of divine judgment against sin. He asserts that the Cross is not merely a historical event but a transformative power that shapes believers into the image of Christ, leading them towards ultimate glorification. The sermon calls for a deeper understanding of the Cross as the foundation of Christian faith and the pathway to spiritual freedom.

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## Transcript

We have said that these eight aspects, or 'notes', in the scale of redemption, succeed one another in a harmonious sequence, each one following the other and leading to the next. Our answer to the first question --Why the incarnation? was threefold: the redemption of man, the reconstitution of man, and the perfecting and glorifying of man. In seeking to answer the second question--Why the earthly life?--we sought to indicate the end in view in this whole redemptive process, as exemplified in the earthly life of our Lord as Son of Man--the model. The earthly life, so fully lived under every test, was intended, in the purpose of God, to set forth the different kind of person that God has in view through redemption and reconstitution and perfecting to final glorification. It is necessary for us to take up the inclusive issue of all these phases, seeing how one leads to the other, and at the same time what each one represents.

But, before I go further, let me say this. The point is that God has put right down into this world, into the midst of mankind, a new kind of Man, Who is not just better, more or less, than other men, but different altogether from other men; and has, in effect, said, 'That is the Man that I have in view, and eternally it has been My purpose to conform to that image.' How important it is, therefore, for us to understand the real nature and meaning of the life of our Lord Jesus as lived here on this earth. It is not just a beautiful story,

about a man living and working and teaching, in a country somewhere in this world, far away and long ago. But, right up to date, a Man is presented to us, as altogether different from us in constitution and yet as God's pattern for His working in us. That is something very important.

### The On-Drive Of Evil At The Crucifixion

So, then, those two points lead us to the third: Why the Cross? Let us approach this by looking for a moment at the record, and trying to get into the very atmosphere, evil as it was, of what took place on that day which we commemorate as Good Friday. We will take two verses from Peter's discourse on the day of Pentecost.

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by Him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay" (Acts 2:22-23; A.S.V.).

If we could, as it were, get inside those words, and really grasp their significance, we should have the answer to our question: Why the Cross?

Let us try to sense what was happening. If you have recently read in the Gospels the accounts of the events leading to the crucifixion, you will be able to recall the scene. On the one side, it is impossible, taking everything into account, to fail to recognize a tremendous on-drive over this matter of crucifying Jesus. This is not just human. There is something here of an impelling force--an impelling, evil force--behind it. No argument will stem it, no appeal will weaken it; it will be influenced by no consideration whatsoever. When they cried: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:25), it was as though there was an implacable determination, set upon carrying this thing through--no matter what it meant--to the last degree, to the very uttermost. From that side, there was a fierce, awful, terrible on-drive of the evil powers to do Him to death, and it seemed that nothing whatever could stem that tidal wave of evil.

On the other side, there is Pilate--Pilate seeking, by every recourse conceivable to him, both personally to get out of this and officially to avoid it, to stop it. See how much there is that comes in to give him a case, to make his position a strong one, even to the message from his wife: "Have thou nothing to do with that righteous Man" (Matt. 27:19). But it is as though a hidden voice says: 'Pilate, it is no good: wriggle, argue, say and do what you like--it is no good: it is going to happen. You may be held responsible from one standpoint, but you cannot help yourself.' The on-drive of evil forces, the helplessness of man and office and temporal powers, and so many other factors, might have come in to weigh in this issue.

### "The Determinate Counsel And Foreknowledge Of God"

But behind it all is another factor. The Devil may be blindly forging on, and man may be helplessly trying to counter; but behind Devil and man lies the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). The Cross is God's crisis in which He says: 'We are going to have this thing out, we are going to settle this issue at long last, once and for all. Nothing is going either to misconstrue it or to prevent it. The Devil may mean murder; I know what I mean by this. The Devil may be blindly driving on to destroy Him, but I know what I mean by it. I will take that up in relation to eternal counsels and foreknowledge. Man may try to stop it, prevent it: but no--the hour has come, and we are going to settle this thing. This is the Crisis of the Ages; the whole issue is going to be settled today.'

But what issue? Of course, the whole thing is far, far too great and many-sided for us to cover. It reaches so far up and so far down, so far back and so far on. All that we know about the Cross is only a fragment compared with what we shall know through eternity. We can only say a very little about this, compressing it into one or two things which answer the question, Why the Cross? The answer, as I have said, is inherent in the words which we have read in Acts 2.

What is the issue? What is the crisis? Why the Cross? Whenever we find ourselves in the presence of the Cross, whether in type in the Old Testament--the altar, the sacrifice, the fire, and so on--or in reality in the New Testament, we are always in the presence of three things: sin, righteousness and judgment.

#### (1) Sin

What do we mean by sin? What does the Bible mean by sin?--this far-reaching thing, like an octopus but with countless limbs and suckers--this thing called 'sin'. What does the Bible mean by sin? If the Cross of the Lord Jesus was the crisis, and God was going to settle this thing once and for all, what was it that had reached the point of the crisis, what was it that He was going to settle? Let us here get away from sins--we are not talking about sins. Sins are only the fruit, or the outcrop, of the root--sin. Sin does not begin with the things that we do or do not do. Sin is something far deeper than our wrong-doings--our commissions or our omissions. Sins may be forgiven, sins may be remitted; but sin is another thing.

Now let us trace this thing as far as we can. In the Old Testament, sin, even before Adam's act, centred in God and His alternative. God, or His alternative--that is the focal point of sin. There is an inclusive word in the Old Testament, a word which includes and covers all other words used for sin, and that word is 'iniquity'. That covers such words as 'transgression', 'trespass', and others. The inclusive, comprehensive word for sin is 'iniquity', and not until we understand that word do we really understand what sin is. This word 'iniquity' at its very root means 'perversity', 'lawlessness'. It is not just the violation of certain laws, but a spirit of lawlessness and rebellion. That found its first expression, as the Bible tells us, before Adam sinned. Adam was only caught in something that had already started. The rebellion took place somewhere where God is, in relation to God's purposes--His purposes, as we have reasons to believe, concerning His Son, Jesus Christ, as Heir, the 'appointed heir of all things'. Rebellion was found in the heart of one exalted being, and then disseminated by that one amongst angels; and so a whole rebellious hierarchy arose, and was cast out, and we are told that they are reserved in everlasting bonds unto judgment (Jude 6).

Iniquity, then, is rebellion, it is lawlessness. "Ye by the hand of lawless men...." We have got right to the heart of the thing, you see. This drive is from Hell itself. No appeal is heeded to law, reason, argument, consideration, sympathy, wisdom, or anything else--not even to the very children's well-being. No, this thing has run amok, it has broken loose, it has come out at last. There has come into the centre of the earthly, human stage One Who is the focal point of it all, and He has drawn it right out. No longer can it go masked, no longer can it work secretly; it is out. He has drawn it out, He is the occasion of it. The hosts of evil surge round Him: to use the prophetic words of the Psalm, "they compassed me about like bees" (Ps. 118:12); but, in the words of the Apostle, 'He stripped off principalities and powers' (Col. 2:15). He has drawn them out.

Yes, in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God the thing is up for decision--this whole matter of basic, fundamental rebellion, which started in Satan, spread to a host of angels who entered into complicity with him, and came down into this world. By man opening the door, the door of his soul, as we

saw earlier, the thing came into him, and now every child of Adam has that deep-rooted thing in his or her nature: rebellion against God. Sooner or later you will discover it, if you have never yet done so. Let God put you to some of the tests to which He put His Son, and see whether there is any rebellion in your heart, in your nature, against God. Under testing, trial, opposition, or suffering, we find that it is there, ready to come up. It is in us.

Very well; that was taken account of by God. He said, 'We are going to settle this'; and that is the meaning of the Cross. Firstly, this spirit of lawlessness and rebellion, in all its ugliness, all its evil, all its sinister character, is dragged out into the open; and then, in the Cross, not just the evil in abstract, but the person responsible for it, is met and dealt with.

### Ground For Satan

For sin is never looked upon just as something abstract; it is always personal--it is always a matter of Satan. The whole question is always this: Is Satan getting an advantage, is Satan being given ground? Too often we make light of these things. We think of 'failure', we speak about 'weakness' and 'imperfections'. We get offended, we get upset; we lose love, perhaps we lose our temper; and then we say that that is our weakness, our failing, our imperfection, our fault. Well, that may be so, but God always says: 'That is ground for Satan'; and that is what makes it so heinous, so much more evil. Because, you see, it is Satan who is all the time trying to work upon our 'weaknesses' and produce such ground, and then to come upon it and use it--both as an accusation against us, to bring us back into that bondage from which we are redeemed, and to have an accusation to God. Always remember that it is this personal thing that is the essence of iniquity, that constitutes sin. God does not look at sin apart from the person of Satan: it is always that one that He has in view. And He would say to us: 'Now, don't forget: if you slipped up, that is not just something in itself--that is very good ground for Satan; and unless you take it away from him, and get it cleared up and covered, he is going to enlarge it, establish it, and consolidate it, and it is going to be very much more difficult for you presently to clear it up. This is not just an incident, a mistake, a mishap: there is a person, there is a whole evil system at work in relation to it.'

Yes, and what is the effect that he is seeking to bring about? Something antagonistic to God--rebellion, lawlessness. The Lord Jesus, while He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, was the Lamb of God, that took away the sin of the world (1 Pet. 2:24; John 1:29). Do you not think it is very wonderful--seeing that sin is iniquity, rebellion, lawlessness, is this thing that is always breaking away and running riot against God--that a Lamb should deal with it? A lamb is the very symbol of yieldedness, is it not? "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter" (Is. 53:7): no rebellion there, no lawlessness there. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter": exactly the other extreme from this lawless, rebellious thing. The Lamb of God took away sin by the utterness of His yieldedness to God. He undid the unyieldedness of Satan. I think it is impressive. You see the principles that are at work, mighty principles embodied in two persons: the principle of lawlessness in Satan, the principle of yieldedness in Christ. These two things are in mortal combat, and the Lamb overcomes.

Does it not say much for the work of the Cross, the effect of the Cross? Do you see why the Cross, and why the Cross in you and me? What we are to inherit from the Cross--what it means as an abiding principle of activity in us? If the Cross really does work in us, we shall become more and ever more yielded to God, unresisting, compliant, of the spirit of the Lamb. What a conflict that was! It was the conflict between two natures: the conflict between sin, in the particular sense of rebellion and lawlessness, on the one side; and the spirit of--"Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O God", and "a body hast Thou prepared for Me"

(Heb. 10:7, 5), on the other; and by that body on the tree He dealt with that other thing--with the embodied iniquity of this universe in Satan. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31).

We feel our helplessness in trying to cope with this matter of the Cross; it was such an immense thing that happened then. I come back to this: God said, 'We will settle this here and now, once and for all.' Sin, in the sense in which we have spoken of it, was met there in its full tide--'Jordan overflowing all its banks'--what a tide!--and was fully and finally exhausted.

## (2) Righteousness

If we said that righteousness was just the opposite of sin, we should, of course, have said in a word nearly all that could be said about it. But let us look at it more closely, and begin by examining the word itself. Righteousness is an inclusive word. Just as 'iniquity' is inclusive of other aspects of sin, so 'righteousness' is inclusive of other concepts. There is the word 'holiness', for instance; there is the word 'sanctification'; there is the word 'consecration'. All these are gathered into this word 'righteousness'. What does it mean?

I am sure we shall not forget sin. It is written now in deep, dark, black letters. Sin is rebellion; sin is lawlessness; sin is that which throws off the government of God and puts Him out of His place and makes choice of the alternative to God. Of course, when we sin we do not consciously mean that--that is not thought out and intended; but that is what is implied and what is involved in reality.

What, then, is the essence of this word 'righteousness'? Righteousness is that nature of God which is perfectly consistent, perfectly pure, perfectly transparent. Different symbols are used in the Bible for the nature of God, such as the crystal, and the jasper. It is that in which there is absolutely no mixture, in which there are no two things contrary to each other. For the Bible makes it perfectly clear that mixture, or contradiction, is what is most abhorrent to God. More than anything else, God abhors mixture--two contrary elements brought together, two different realms brought into association, the two being different in constitution. We recall some of the Old Testament types of that: 'Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a mingled stuff, wool and linen together' (Deut. 22:10-11). These are two different realms. Linen draws off bodily warmth; wool keeps it in: so there is a conflict in the two things.

These are only simple illustrations or figures of something very deep. God hates mixture; His very nature is against contrary elements. His nature is absolutely transparent, consistent, pure. And that is righteousness. It was for that that the prophets were always appealing. Unrighteousness was found in dealings; that is, people were being robbed by deceitful methods. They were not fair, not square, not straight. Satan is the great mixer, the great deceiver, the great corrupter, the great polluter. There is nothing transparent about him, nothing straight about him; he is always coming round, in some way, to get an advantage by unfairness, by cowardice.

Now, the Cross of the Lord Jesus was the crisis of this matter of righteousness. It was the other side. He "offered Himself without spot unto God" (Heb. 9:14). Here is something pure: there is no mixture here, no blemish here, no two things here; this is all one thing; this is all straight, this is all clear, this is all absolutely pure, transparent. You cannot find in Him any blemish of corruption. There is no clouding film; in Him there is no darkness. He had settled this matter of righteousness in His own Person and body, and established righteousness for ever, in type, as He came to His baptism, which was prefiguring His Cross. He said: "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). He satisfied God on this matter of His own nature, as something absolutely pure. When Jesus said, "Thus it becometh us to

fulfil all righteousness", God responded immediately and said, "My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased". 'It is the offering that I want, the offering that I seek: the offering satisfies Me.' He "offered Himself without spot unto God". The question of righteousness is settled in Him, in the Cross.

### (3) Judgment

Sin, righteousness; and now judgment. What is that? We usually limit the idea of judgment to one thought--that is, penalty. The word 'judgment' is a larger word than that in the Bible. Judgment, we could say, has three parts. To take an illustration from the Book of Daniel: you remember Belshazzar's feast, and the handwriting on the wall, and how Daniel was brought in to interpret (Dan. 5:1-28). First of all, it means bringing something to have a decision given upon it, as to what it is. The first part here is: "Thou art weighed in the balances". That is the first part of judgment: being brought to be weighed up. Secondly, the putting of it into its proper category: "found wanting". When it has been determined what it is, that is the place to which it belongs. Thirdly, there is the pronouncement and execution of the sentence.

That is judgment in its threefold meaning. It is a big word. The Cross was that. God was saying, 'We will settle what this thing is in its nature; we will put it into its proper place to which it belongs; and we will deal with it fully and finally.' The thing was determined as to what it is: sin is not called by other names; it is called by its proper name--lawlessness, rebellion. For that is what sin is. It is against God. And it belongs to a realm that is away from God--the wilderness, the desolation, the place of the scapegoat, the place of the driven-away creature, driven from the very presence of God to where it belongs. When He bore our sins, when He was made sin for us, when, in that dire moment, He was made a curse for us, He was put in the place to which you and I belong. The thing was settled as to what it was, and driven out from the presence of God; the door was closed upon it, and the face of God for ever turned away from it. The judgment was carried out.

Yes, there are two sides to the Cross, but that was the judgment side. Of what? No, not the judgment of our sins--that may be included--but the judgment of our sin. "Him Who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21); that is, that we might be brought to the place where there are no two things in conflict, no two contradictory elements. And that begins on the very day when we--to use familiar, homely language--come to the Cross. When we come to the Lord Jesus and accept the work of His Cross for ourselves, there is given to us, there is brought into us, that transparent, pure, holy, righteous life of the Lord Jesus. It is a thing without mixture. We are all mixture, but that life has no mixture.

### Clear As Crystal

And then, when we live by that life--and this is not only a statement of fact, but a very searching test--if you and I live by the life of the Son of God, we are going to become more and more transparent people, absolutely honest, absolutely straightforward, absolutely square. Anything that is not like that about us says that somehow or other we are countering or not moving with the life. The Cross involves us in that. So the end of the Bible gives us the picture of the City, as one of the symbols of the Church. In its entire constitution it is, as it says, like pure gold, or glass, or jasper (Rev. 21:11,18), and its river is the water of life, free and clear as crystal (22:1). It is all clear--that is the end of the work. This is a truly practical thing. About true Christians--Christians who are truly crucified with Christ--there ought to be a steady progressiveness in transparency, further and further away from duplicity, from deception, from murkiness, from everything of that kind. They should be clear as the light.

That is the answer, so very imperfectly, to--Why the Cross? Sin, righteousness, and the determination as to what is what: judgment determining, judgment placing. "Thou art weighed in the balances"--that is the first thing. "Thou art found wanting"--that is the second stage. "Thy kingdom is divided"--the third stage. It is all judgment. In the Cross the Lord Jesus effected all that.

That is, perhaps, the darker side. But it is a wonderful deliverance that the Lord Jesus has wrought for us in His Cross. Just think of what we were involved in! We were involved in Satan's sin, we were involved in his rebellion, our very natures were involved in it: but by His Cross He has saved us--"delivered us out of the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13)--set us free, given us another nature, set us on the way to the City of God. That, as we know, is not geography, but spiritual condition; not an objective thing, but an inward, subjective state. What a day it will be when we are like that--absolutely free of the last trace of Satan's touch, the touch of the serpent, upon our human nature! What a great day that will be! But He started us on that way on the day in which we came to the Cross. And "He Who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6; A.S.V.).

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