

The Exaltation of the Lord Jesus and Spiritual Fulness

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the Lordship of Jesus Christ for experiencing spiritual power and fulness in the believer's life.

Scripture: Matthew 4:10, Matthew 6:13, Acts 2:34

Topics: "Lordship Of Christ", "Spiritual Fulness"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the exaltation of the Lord Jesus as central to understanding spiritual fullness and power in the life of believers. He connects the Lordship of Christ with the necessity of spiritual conquest, illustrating that true fulfillment comes only when individuals and the Church recognize and submit to Christ's sovereignty. Through biblical examples, Sparks demonstrates that spiritual power is contingent upon acknowledging Jesus as Lord, and that any attempt to attain spiritual fullness without this recognition leads to limitation and conflict. He concludes that the Holy Spirit's role is to establish this Lordship in believers, enabling them to serve effectively and experience the fullness of Christ.

Transcript

"Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Matt. 6:13).

We have kept closely in relation to that statement the earlier words from chapter 3 concerning our Lord Jesus when coming up out of the water at His baptism, when the heavens were opened and the Spirit descended and lighted upon Him, and the voice from heaven attested Him the beloved of the Father: and then immediately, the Spirit having lighted upon Him, He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil, and the closing words of His conflict with the Devil were -

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10).

We have noticed the significant thing that the next reference to the Devil is that where the Lord teaches His disciples to pray -

"Deliver us from the evil one: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever."

Now we have brought alongside words from Acts 2:34-36.

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified."

And, finally, with that we link this passage from the letter to the Ephesians.

"...when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:20-23).

The Practical Expression of the Lordship of Christ in Relation to Spiritual Fulness

In our previous meditation, we were occupied with the exaltation of the Lord Jesus as the pre-eminent work of the Holy Spirit. I am going on with the next phase of that, in connection with the throne, namely, the Holy Spirit and spiritual power and fulness; for this exaltation of the Lord Jesus, this throne position of His far above all rule and authority and every name, is bound up inseparably with spiritual power and fulness in the life of the people of God. We can only speak of power and fulness, so far as the individual believer is concerned, in a comparative way; that is, power and fulness in the complete sense relates to the Church, and we can only know power and fulness in a measure individually. But the principle applies to both the individual and the Church, the principle, that is, of the absolute Lordship and Headship of the Lord Jesus.

So then, we have to see in the first place that the Lordship, the exaltation, of the Lord Jesus governs the whole matter of spiritual power and spiritual fulness. Fulness is always in relation to the throne and fulness is only known as what is meant by the throne is pre-eminent. The Holy Spirit has written this truth deeply in the history of the Old Testament, and now, with the light that we have in the New, we are able to discern it very clearly throughout the Old Testament story. It may be helpful to us once more to note it in one or two Old Testament illustrations.

The Truth Exemplified in Israel's History

In our previous meditation we referred to the truth as illustrated in the case of Israel, when in the land after crossing Jordan, and now the further phase of the truth can also be seen in that connection, in that Israel, while being in the land where all the fulness was, and while it was a land flowing with milk and honey, only experienced fulness as their own in proportion to the establishment of the testimony of the Lord's sovereignty. They did not come immediately and automatically into the enjoyment of the fulness. They were in the realm where it was, in the realm of every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in type, but although it was all there they were not enjoying it, except just in so far as they, by definite exercise and spiritual activity, made the great fact of the Lord's sovereignty an actuality on the spot. That is a very important thing to remember. They had to go on, and their going on was a matter of conquest, and their conquest was a matter of bringing the absolute Lordship to bear upon each step, each phase, each new situation. Thus, as they brought in that perfect sovereignty of the Lord, that He was Lord, and applied it progressively, so they became possessed of the wealth and fulness, that was there. You can see how true that was by several instances of their doing the opposite.

You know the tragedy of Ai, for instance. There were two things in the tragedy of Ai. There was an Achan. But he is only one of the causes of the tragedy. The other - and this is so elementary and so well-known - was the fact that they said, 'Well, only a few of us need go up against Ai. Ai is nothing like the proposition that Jericho was, and does not need a whole force to go up against it. Just a few of us can go up, and we shall easily take Ai'. In thus acting they were taking the sovereignty of God unto themselves and not recognizing that whatever the proposition was, great or small, it still required the Lord and that, apart from the Lord, nothing was possible. It requires the sovereignty of the Lord to deal with the whole thing.

Then again there was the case of the Gibeonites. The secret of the Gibeonite is this, that the Gibeonites eliminate the element of conquest. They compromised, they came deceitfully, and they succeeded in shelving the whole idea of battle and got the elders of Israel acting in this matter as though it did not require any battle at all. This thing could be dealt with without any fight! The Gibeonites succeeded in ruling out that element of conquest, and in doing that in effect ruled out the Lordship of the Lord, because this whole thing had to be taken by conquest. It was only another subtle form of undercutting the absolute Lordship of the Lord, and you see it in the fact that the elders of Israel did not refer the matter to the Lord. They simply dealt with it themselves "off their own bat", as we say, and put the Lord's Lordship on one side. That is just what the enemy is always out to do, subtly or openly in some way to eliminate this mighty thing that has to be registered. Well, that brought Israel into limitation again. You have only to go on to the book of Judges to discover what that meant for Israel

Later as you know, they began to tire of conquest and to slacken their pace and their energies, and the idea of conquest dropped into the background. Some came to Joshua at one time and said they were a great people and asked him for a certain part of the land, hill country and forest country, and Joshua said, 'Well, prove your greatness by conquest'. They wanted it by gift and not by conquest. Joshua, typical of the energy of the Holy Spirit, says that the only way of knowing fulness is by bringing the sovereignty, the authority of the throne to bear upon the situation to subdue it. He has put all things in subjection under His feet, and the Lord will not countenance anything that is not being made subject. Universal subjection: no compromise, no leagues and no accepting without subjecting to the Lord. You see the principle at work. So they failed to come into the absolute fulness of the land because they failed in the matter of the Lordship of Jehovah, and the principle is well illustrated there for us in the spiritual life. Fulness is bound up with the throne all the time.

David and Saul

There are other illustrations in the Old Testament. We referred in our previous meditation to David as anointed, and what the anointing means as to the throne; that the anointing is essentially bound up with the throne, points on to the throne. And now in this connection we have Saul. Saul was anointed, but Saul never came to fulness. He was only king in any real sense for three years out of the forty for which he held the name of king, and after three years, in which he certainly did not come to fulness, because he violated the object of the anointing, he lost everything and it passed over to David. Saul is a terrible tragedy. Anointed unto fulness; but fulness is bound up with the throne, absolute dominion. Now, the Lord tested him. 'Go, smite Amalek. That is what you are anointed for. There is some other thing here holding sway. There is another power which is against the Divine throne, another order of things in existence. Go and smite Amalek: that is what you are anointed for, to establish the throne of the Lord above every other power'. But Saul compromised in the smiting of Amalek, violated the very object of the anointing and lost the fulness. It passed to David. The anointing coming to David and the anointing being observed in all its implications by David brought David right through to fulness as it is displayed in Solomon. Why? Because

the anointing for David meant the subjecting of every hostile thing. Oh, on the right hand and on the left, in all directions, David subdues - true kingship - and comes to fulness. Unto that he was anointed.

Elijah and Elisha

Again, take the case of Elijah and Elisha. I think Elijah and Elisha fit into the last verse of the first chapter of Ephesians - "...gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all". Elijah is the head and Elisha is the body. Elijah, the anointed head (for, although there was no recorded act of anointing of Elijah, he undoubtedly had the Spirit) goes to heaven and Elisha, who succeeds him on the earth, standing in relation to him as the Church stands in relation to Christ in heaven, is anointed. Elisha is the only prophet of whom it is recorded that he was anointed. There is the anointed one on the earth. You see the two sides. In Elijah you have power: in Elisha you have fulness. Elisha was the fulness of Elijah. A double portion of his spirit; "the fulness of him that filleth all in all" in type. Power and fulness by the anointing.

But look at the direction in which the anointing is operating through these men. You will see how the anointing is operating on Mount Carmel. There is another hierarchy, another system, which has risen against the sovereignty of Jehovah, and, on Carmel, Elijah fights out that battle for the rights of God. It is the throne of the Lord that is in view. That is fought out and then Elisha follows on; and is he not all the time having to deal with the matter of the kingdom? Well, power and fulness are the work of the Holy Spirit, but on the ground that the throne is established.

The Case of Ananias and Sapphira

We pass away from the Old Testament and come into the New, and the thing is so patent there that it hardly needs pointing out. You take a case like that of Ananias and Sapphira. Now, Ananias and Sapphira strive to get fulness by violating the Holy Ghost. That was the charge, that Satan had filled their heart to lie to the Holy Ghost. They tried to stand possessed of something, of fulness, by violating the Holy Spirit, and in effect that was countering the great testimony that has just been given under the Holy Ghost's mighty energies and directions as to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord! "God hath made him Lord and Christ." That is the Holy Ghost's testimony on the day of Pentecost. The others come under that and accept that, move into that, and they know spiritual fulness. Ananias and Sapphira violate the Holy Ghost's movement in relation to the throne, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, thinking to have something in that way. What happens? They lose everything. You can only have fulness along the line of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is what it means.

Well now, that truth need not be much more fully opened up or argued. You and I have to recognize it as something which has been established all the way through by God. It is written through the whole of the Scriptures that spiritual power and spiritual fulness are not bound up with receiving the Holy Spirit as such. It is in that, but that is not it in itself. You see, we concentrate upon either receiving the Holy Spirit or being filled with the Spirit or having a baptism of the Spirit, and we think that is power and fulness. In a sense that is quite true; but we have to see the meaning of the Holy Spirit. It is not just that we receive the Spirit or are filled with the Spirit. It is what the Holy Spirit means by filling us: and what does He mean? He means the establishment of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ in us. We cannot have the real value without the real meaning. That is why it is so necessary that, to know the power and fulness of the Spirit, there should be an utter emptying and breaking down of everything in us to make way for the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Now, before I pass on, have we grasped this fact, that our spiritual enlargement, our spiritual increase, our spiritual wealth, our spiritual fulness and spiritual power is not a matter of gifts as such? It is a matter of the Lord Jesus being really and truly Lord within and throughout in every part.

The Anointed Ministries of Prophet, Priest and King

The Lord Jesus embodies and embraces the great threefold function of Prophet, Priest and King, and in what that means He has to be established in us in the power of the Holy Ghost. You see, the Prophet, the Priest and the King were anointed ministries, and, as we know quite well, God has never been interested in just having certain offices here on the earth amongst men. God does not play like that, having a set of prophets, a set of priests and a set of kings, as though it were a game. God is not interested in that sort of thing. No, God has great spiritual principles in view all the time, and those who went by those names in the Old Testament embodied something of a heavenly thought, and that heavenly thought is gathered up in the Lord Jesus, and it is all in the anointing, it is all by the Holy Spirit. Then as Head, embodying those things, He has to come upon the Church and the Church has to come under the value of that.

Now, what are the values? What is the value of an anointed prophet? Well, just this. The anointed prophet is the man who has the sanctified mind, who can say, "We have the mind of Christ". The prophet stood for the mind of God in a day when men had lost the way, when the mind of God was not apprehended. He was the embodiment of the mind of God for his day by the Spirit. The Spirit came upon the prophets and they knew the mind of the Lord for the day; they had, as differing from all the other minds around them, a sanctified mind. That is to say, by the Spirit, their mind came under the government of God.

The priest: what is he in spiritual principle? He is the man of the sanctified heart. He has to do with, and only with, the question of inward holiness, righteousness. That is the priest's function; the man who represents the sanctified heart by the Holy Spirit. In a day when all around was corrupt, the priesthood, when it was according to God's mind, was a thing which stood for holiness, for righteousness, in the midst of corruption.

The king: he is the one who, by the anointing, represents the sanctified will, to execute, to do, to govern, to rule, to have things done. The sanctified will is what the king represents when really under the anointing, and it was in respect of this very thing that Saul violated his anointing. He had a will of his own. David on the other hand was a man who willed one will with his God, a man after God's own heart who would do all His pleasure. That is a king in principle. He does according to God's mind.

All that is gathered up in the Lord Jesus. He has the mind of the Father. He has the heart that is free from all the corruption and taint of self-interest and worldly interest; a heart that is pure in the sense that it is only set upon the delight of the Father. He has the will of God which He has come to do, the sanctified will. He is Prophet, Priest and King in the embodiment of all the spiritual principles thereof by the anointing. This constitutes spiritual ministry you see; and the Church, the members of Christ's Body, coming under His absolute Lordship can only function as, by the Holy Ghost, they have the sanctified mind, the sanctified heart, the sanctified will. That means just this, that your will and your mind and your heart have been broken. That is to say, your reasoning as sovereign has been dethroned; your desiring as governing has been dethroned; your choosing, your doing, as the governing thing in your life has been absolutely shattered and laid in the dust, and His mind, His heart, His will, is established by the Holy Ghost in you. Fulness comes that way. You can never know the fulness of the Lord's thoughts only as your own thoughts have been set aside, and that means the sovereignty of the Lord. You can never know the

fulness of the Lord's desires and purposes only as your own have been set aside. You can never know the will of God in fulness, all that glorious will, good, acceptable and perfect, until you have presented yourself a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable, not being conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind. That simply means that His will has taken the ascendancy over your will. That is the way of fulness. So all the time it is the matter of the Lordship of Jesus Christ which governs our power in life, spiritual power, and our fulness.

The True Nature of Spiritual Service

Now before we close, a little word further in one other connection; for, as this matter of the throne governs power and fulness, so it governs the matter of service. What is service to the Lord in the highest sense? Oh, if only the Lord's people could see this, if it could get into them, it would make such a lot of difference; for I think the majority of the Lord's people have the idea that Christian service is represented by the number of things you are doing for the Lord, the amount of work as work that you are doing: how many souls you speak to about salvation, or how many you lead to the Lord, how many meetings you address and messages you give, and all that sort of thing. I am not saying that is not the Lord's work, but I am saying that that may be much less than the service the Lord is really after: and it is proving to be so in every instance. If we state positively what service is in its highest expression, we can see everything else in the light of it. We serve the Lord most and supremely in bringing the Lordship of Christ to men. Until the Lordship of Christ has really been effected in lives there is going to be limitation in those lives, even though they may be saved. Beloved, there is far, far more bound up with the Lordship of Christ in a life than there is in that one just being saved from hell and from sin, and not until that Lordship of Christ is established in the whole life of the child of God does the Divine purpose really become served. So that service, in the fullest sense, is bound up with the throne. It is the throne that has to be served, not men. This means one or two things.

Such Service Alone Possible through the Holy Spirit

This necessitates the Holy Spirit. If it is the Holy Spirit's pre-eminent object and work to establish the absolute exaltation of the Lord Jesus in this universe everywhere, then the Holy Spirit is required for this work, and you know it. If you have a battle over the question of sin and salvation, as very often you do, you will have an infinitely greater battle over the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the life - the absolute Lordship. But you know this is true. You can get any number of Christian people to listen to you if you are talking about the ordinary and accepted and general ideas of Christian service; but begin to talk to them about the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ and see what you get. It is not such easy going. They have no interest in that. It is a fact, and for this work nothing less than the power of the Holy Ghost is necessary. I believe that is the point where people have missed the way. Everybody is prepared to quote Acts 1:8 "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you". They will go on - "and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth." But what does that mean with regard to the majority of people? Well, in the first place, of course power is the great word! It is something to have, to feel, to experience. Of course we all admit and acknowledge that it is a matter of the Holy Spirit, power by the Holy Spirit. What then of the result? Well, we shall be witnesses. What does that mean? We shall go out and preach the Gospel. Does it mean that? It may mean that, mark you, but that is not the full meaning of it. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." What was the witness they bore in every place? Jesus Christ is Lord! 'This Jesus has been regarded by men as a mere man and something less or worse even than that by a great many, but He is none other than God's exalted and reigning Son. He is at God's right hand exalted. He is King. He is Lord. He has all power in this universe.' That was the witness. It was

that that enraged hell. But that was in the power of the Spirit, and it requires nothing less than the mighty power of the Holy Spirit to carry that testimony forward and establish it. It is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and it is no small thing to bring in the throne. Oh no, you have every kind of resistance that is available to the enemy when it is a matter of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So it is a work of the Spirit; it is only by the Spirit that it can be done.

Such Service Involves in Bitterest Conflict

Then of course, as I have said already, this matter more than anything else involves in conflict. If you or I are really out in the testimony, not to Jesus as Saviour only, but to Jesus as Lord, as sovereign Head, the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, if we are out in that testimony, we are out in the fiercest conflict. It is true. It explains a good deal. You may meet some conflict when you are out in the matter of soul-winning and you do, because the enemy sees quite clearly what that may lead to: for, in God's purpose, it is never intended to stay there. If men and women are saved from hell and sin, it represents, in the first place, a translation from his kingdom into another, and he knows what that portends. Satan always takes full account of the significance of any step, but when you go on right to the full end and bring the full end in view immediately into the situation - the Lordship of Jesus Christ - ah then you are in the fight, then it is warfare indeed. You are anointed to that battle, and you know it. We said in our previous meditation that, immediately the anointing came on the Lord Jesus, the Devil came out of hiding. There is this fact that we had better take full account of at once and reckon with, that, when the Lordship of Jesus Christ comes right clearly into view, what will follow inevitably is the drawing out of all the power of Satan, and that under God's own act.

Let us illustrate. Go back to Egypt with Israel. Here, in type, is the kingdom, the power and the glory in view, bound up with Israel, and Moses stands in Egypt with the challenge in the authority of the one who is I Am, who is Lord Jehovah. It is the question of who the Lord is, who Jehovah is. Is Jehovah Lord? Moses stands there to say, 'Yes, Jehovah is supreme Lord'. Very well, the challenge is presented, the challenge of the Lordship of Jehovah. The testimony is brought in by Moses. What is the result? Steadily, steadily, with ever increasing strength, the powers of evil come out until the last drop of Satanic power, of evil resource, is exhausted. God exhausts the store of antagonism. For what purpose? To show who is invincible; and you can never prove who is invincible until you have exhausted all the resource on the side of your opponent. We are hearing in these days claims to be invincible. All right, that is to be put to the test. It will never be proved if any resource remains unused at the end. When God has finished, He will say 'Now, you have used your last ounce of power and you are broken. Who is invincible?' So, in Egypt, God had to draw out Pharaoh's power to the last degree to prove that He was Lord: otherwise it would still have been an open question. Oh, it is a terrible thought, but that is how it is going to be.

It must be like that. Satan is going to be drawn out, extended to his last ounce. It is a terrible thing, but that is what the Word reveals, that when Satan is at last cast down it will be because he has not another card to play, another shot to fire, another resource to draw upon: he is exhausted. Ah, who will be invincible then? The Lord will stand possessed of many resources then. But the point, you see, is that, when you come into the conflict of the sovereignty of the throne, you may expect to be launched into a fight in which Satan is going to be fully extended, and you will meet the full force of Satanic power. That is why you must have the anointing, for only the Holy Ghost has the power equal to that or superior to that. But it is true that, once you get on the line of the throne, you are on the line of intensive conflict. I do not want to dishearten you, but you are not going to have an easier time. There is going to be no let up in this battle. But let us lift up our eyes to the end. Though today may seem intolerable, almost unbearable, let us lift up

our eyes. We are with the invincible Lord, whose invincibility is going to be established over all the powers of the enemy to the last drop. But it is conflict, and when it comes to seeking to bring the Lord's own children into the fulness of Christ, which is really by way of the absolute Lordship of Christ, then it is battle all the way along, with increasing fierceness and intensity.

The Lordship of Christ the Key to Recovery and Enlargement

So we see that it is the throne always that governs the matter of service, service in the full sense, and that can be proved in many ways. You have only to take up the letters of the New Testament, and in so many of them you find situations and things which, in their arising, have brought limitation amongst the Lord's children, which have stood athwart the path of their spiritual progress, which have weakened them in the way, which have challenged the Divine end in them, and wherever and whenever you find something like that, you find that the letter is written to meet that situation with a note of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Is it Romans? Has the law come in there, the law as the way of righteousness, standing across the path of progress into that full righteousness of God? Well, what is the difficulty? It is just stated in these words - "They... going about to establish their own righteousness, have not subjected themselves unto the righteousness of God" (10:3). What is this? This is something that has got up, that is not of God. You will go on with Romans and you find you will never come into fulness until you have presented yourself a living sacrifice, which, in a word, is subjection.

Pass from Romans to Corinthians, and the limitation, the hindrance, the circumscribing there, is so patent. To meet it, "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (2 Cor. 2:2). "We preach... Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5) - the Lordship of Jesus Christ. For them, that meant their going down into death, the letting go of all the "I". This one says, and that one, and another! Jesus Christ and Him crucified means the end of all that; and now Jesus Christ is Lord.

You find it so all the way. Is it Galatians? Well, there again, something has come in to interrupt the course. "Ye were running well; who did hinder you..." (Gal. 5:7); an interruption again, bringing into limitation. What is the appeal, the basis of deliverance? "I have been crucified with Christ." His Lordship is my deliverance from every limitation.

Philippians: here too something has come in to interrupt, and we find strained relationships, broken fellowship. What is the ground of appeal here? "He emptied himself... becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave him the name which is above every name." The exaltation of the Lord Jesus through humility is presented to them.

In the Hebrews, it is the old story again. They have been brought back, brought down from the heavenlies to the earthlies, to traditional religion again. How is the situation met? "Of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb 1:8). He is introduced as the King supreme: and so the principle is found everywhere.

The way of fulness, the way of power, the way right to God's end is only on the ground of Christ being Lord in every part and in everything.

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