

The Light of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of dying to self to fully embrace the light of life found in Christ and to participate in God's eternal purpose.

Scripture: Ezekiel 43:2, Ezekiel 44:4, Ezekiel 47:1, John 1:4, John 3:3, John 8:12, John 9:5, John 12:20

Topics: "God's Purpose", "Light Of Life"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the 'Light of Life' in the believer's journey, illustrating how God's glory fills the house and how this light is essential for understanding His eternal purpose. He challenges listeners to genuinely seek to be in God's purpose, highlighting that true communion with God is only found in Christ, who embodies the light and life of God. Sparks explains that entering into this light requires a crisis of self-denial and a process of daily taking up one's cross, leading to a deeper revelation of Christ's life within us. The sermon calls for a commitment to allow God's glory to shine through us, ultimately culminating in the fullness of His light and glory in our lives.

Transcript

"And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shined with his glory. And the glory of Jehovah came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. And the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court, and, behold, the glory of Jehovah filled the house" (Eze 43:2, 4-5).

"Then he brought me by the way of the north gate before the house; and I looked and, behold, the glory of Jehovah filled the house of Jehovah: and I fell upon my face" (Eze 44:4).

"And he brought me back unto the door of the house, and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward (for the forefront of the house was toward the east); and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, on the south of the altar" (Eze 47:1).

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

"Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, margin).

"When I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5).

"Now there were certain Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast: these therefore came to Philip, who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: Andrew cometh, and Philip, and they tell Jesus. And Jesus answereth them saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone, but if it die, it beareth much fruit" (John 12:20-24).

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me may not abide in the darkness" (John 12:46).

" . . . in whom the god of this world 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" (2 Cor 4:4).

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might . . ." (Eph 1:17-19).

The light of life! Before coming to a closer consideration of this matter of the light of life, may I just ask a simple but very direct question? Can we all say with truth of heart that we are really concerned to be in God's purpose; to know what that purpose is, and to be found in it? Everything depends upon whether we have such a concern. It is a practical matter. It should immediately swing us clear of just being interested in truth and increasing our knowledge or information about spiritual things. As we look into our own hearts at this moment--and let us do so, each one of us--can we really say that there is a genuine and strong desire to be in the purpose, the great eternal purpose of God? Are we prepared to commit ourselves to the Lord in relation to that in an utter transaction, by which we now have an understanding with Him that He will stand at nothing so far as we are concerned to secure us in His eternal purpose, whatever it may cost? As the Lord's people, are we ready to just pause and face that, and get right into line with God's end? I know that some of you are there, and that for you there is not much need of exercise about it, but it is quite likely that there are some who have taken things pretty much for granted. That is to say, they are Christians, they are believers, they belong to the Lord, they are saved, they put their faith in Christ, they have had association with Christian institutions and matters for so long, perhaps even from infancy. It is to such that I make this appeal at the outset. Here in God's Word that very phrase is used repeatedly--"according to his eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world was". Is that the thing which stands foremost on our horizon or is it something remote, dim, in the background? I press this, because we must have something upon which to work. God must have something upon which to work, and if that is the position, then we can go on, and there will be a drawing out of revelation as to that purpose and the way of it. But unless we are in some quite positive position and attitude about it, you will hear a lot of things said and they will simply be things said, more or less of account to you.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD

Well now, given that there is that concern, at least in some measure, which justifies our going on, we ask, What is the purpose of God? What is God's end? And I think it can be put in one way amongst others. We can say that God's purpose is that there shall come a time when He has a vessel in which and through

which His glory shines forth to this universe. We see that intimated in the case of new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, having the glory of God, her light like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal. "Having the glory of God!" That is the end which God has in view for a people; to be, in a spiritual sense, to His universe of spiritual intelligences what the sun is to this universe; that the very nations shall walk in the light thereof, no need of sun, no need of moon, for there is no night; and that is only saying that God wills to have a people full of light, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." That is the end, and God begins to move toward that end immediately a child of His is born from above; for that very birth, a new birth from above, is the scattering of the darkness and the breaking in of the light.

All along our way in the School of Christ, the Holy Spirit is engaged upon this one thing, to lead us more and more into the light, "of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", that it shall be true in our case that "the path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (mid-day) (Prov 4:18) Many people have thought--and, thinking so, have been disappointed--that that means it is going to get easier and easier, brighter and brighter, the more cheerful as we go on. But it does not work out that way. I do not see it to be true in the circumstances and outward condition of saints anywhere at any time. For them the path does not become brighter and brighter outwardly. But if we are really moving under the Spirit's government, we can say with the strongest affirmation, that in an inward way the light is growing. The path is growing brighter and brighter; we are seeing and seeing and seeing. That is God's purpose; until the time comes when there is no darkness at all, and no shadow at all, and no mist at all, but all is light, perfect light: we see not through a glass darkly, but face to face, we know even as we are known. That is God's purpose put in a certain way. Does that interest you? Are you concerned with that?

And that has a crisis and is also a process in spiritual life with a glorious climax in rapture. What I am especially concerned with now is the process.

We read in Ezekiel about the glory of the Lord coming and filling the House, and we have been seeing in previous meditations that the Lord Jesus is that House. He is the great Bethel of God on whom the angels ascend and descend, in whom God is found, in whom God speaks (the place of the oracle), in whom is the Divine authority, the final word. He is the House, and the glory of the Lord is in Him, the light of God is in Him.

THE PLACE OF THE SHEKINAH GLORY

Looking backward at that tabernacle or that temple of old where the Shekinah glory was found, we mark that that light, that glory which linked heaven and earth like a ladder, had its expression in the Most Holy Place. You know that in the Holy of Holies, everything was curtained around and over, excluding every bit of natural light, so that the place, entered into apart from the Shekinah, would have been black darkness, without light at all; but entered into while the glory rested upon it, it was all light, it was all Divine light, heavenly light, the light of God. And that Most Holy Place sets forth the inner life of the Lord Jesus, His spirit where God is found, the light from heaven, the light of what God is in Him. His spirit is the Most Holy Place, in the holy House of God, and it was there, in that Most Holy Place where the light of the glory was, that God said He would commune with His people through their representative. "I will commune with you above the mercy seat between the cherubim" (Exo 25:22). The place of communion--"I will commune". What a lovely word--"commune". There is nothing hard, nothing terrible, nothing fearful about that. "I will commune with you." It is the place where God speaks; in the communion God speaks, makes Himself

known. It is the place of speaking. It is called the place of the oracle, the place of the speaking; and that is the Propitiatory, the Mercy Seat, and that is all the Lord Jesus. He, we are told, has been set forth by God to be a propitiatory (Rom 3:25), and in Him God communes with His people. In Him God speaks to and with His people.

But the underlining must be of those words "in Him", for there is no communion with God, no communion of God, no speaking to be heard, no meeting at all, save in Christ. That would be a place of death and destruction for the natural man; hence the terrible warnings given about coming into that place without the right equipment, that symbolic equipment which spoke of the natural man having been altogether covered and another heavenly Man having enfolded him as with heavenly robes, the robes of righteousness. Only so dare he enter into that place: otherwise it was "lest he die . . ."

If you want to know exactly how that works out, come over to the New Testament and take up the story of the journey of Saul of Tarsus to Damascus. He says, "At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun . . . And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me . . . Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Then you will remember how they lifted him up and led him into the city, because he was without sight. By the mercy of God, he was without sight only for three days and three nights. God commissioned Ananias to go and visit that blinded man, and say to him, "Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mayest receive thy sight." Saul of Tarsus would otherwise have been a blind man to the end of his life. That is the effect of a natural man encountering the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is destruction. There is no place for the natural man in the presence of that light; it would be death. But in John 8 we have those words, "the light of life", over against the darkness of death. Well, in Jesus Christ the natural man is regarded as having been entirely put away. There is no place for him there.

NO PLACE FOR THE NATURAL MAN

That means that the natural man cannot come into the light, nor can he come into God's great purpose and be found in that House full of His glory, that vessel through which He is going to manifest that glory to His universe. The natural man cannot come in there: and when we speak about the natural man, we are not just referring to the unsaved man, that is, the man who has never come to the Lord Jesus. We are speaking about the man whom God has reckoned as being put aside altogether.

The Apostle Paul had to speak to Corinthian believers along these lines. They were converted people, saved people, but they were enamoured of this world's wisdom and this world's power; that is, of natural wisdom, knowledge, and the strength that comes by it, and their disposition or inclination was to try to seek to take hold of Divine things and analyze them and investigate them, and probe into them along the lines of natural wisdom and understanding, philosophy, the philosophy and wisdom of this world. So they were bringing the natural man to bear upon Divine things, and the Apostle wrote to them, and in their own language he said, 'Now the man of soul' (not the unregenerate man, not the man who has never had a transaction with the Lord Jesus on the basis of His atoning work for salvation; no, not that man) 'the man of soul receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them' (I Cor 2:14). The man of the psuche, that is the natural man. The newest of our sciences is psychology, the science of the soul: and what is psychology? It has to do with the mind of man; it is the science of man's mind; and here is the word now--I am paraphrasing this because this is exactly what it means--Now the science of the mind can never receive the things of the Spirit of God, neither can it know them. This man is very clever, very intellectual, very highly trained, with all his natural senses brought to a high state of development and acuteness, yet

this man is outside when it comes to knowing the things of God: he cannot, he is outside. For the first glimmer of the knowledge of God a miracle has to be wrought, by which blind eyes which never have seen are given sight, and by which light comes as by a flash of revelation, so that it can be said, "Blessed art thou . . . for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

This is stating a tremendous fact. Every bit of real light which is in the direction of that ultimate effulgence, the revealing of the glory of God in us and through us, every bit of it is in Christ Jesus, and can only be had in Him on the basis of the natural man having been altogether put outside, put away, and a new man having been brought into being with a new set of spiritual faculties: so that Nicodemus, the best product of the religious school of his day and of his world, is told, "Except one be born anew (or from above), he cannot see . . ." He cannot see. Well, it resolves itself into this, that to know even the first letters of the Divine alphabet we must be in Christ, and every bit that follows is a matter of learning Christ, knowing what it means to be in Christ.

HOW WE GET THE LIGHT OF LIFE

(a) THE CRISIS

That brings us to this question. What is the way into Christ, or how do we get the light of life? Well, the answer is, of course, briefly, to have the light we have to have the life. This light is the light of life. It is the product of life. All Divine light, true light from God, is living light. It is never theoretical light, mere doctrinal light, it is living light. And how do we get this light of life?

We have these two things brought very much before us in this Gospel of John, namely, Christ in us, and we in Christ. The Lord has given us a beautiful illustration of what that means, and that illustration we have read in chapter 12. What is it to be in Christ? What is it to have Christ in us? What is it to be in the life and in the light? What is it to have the life and the light in us? Well, here it is. There is life in that grain of wheat, but it is just one single grain. I want to get the life that is in that single grain into a whole host of grains, enough grains to cover the earth. How shall I do it? Well, the Lord says, put it into the ground: let it fall into the earth and die; let it fall into the dark earth, and let the earth cover it over. What happens? It immediately begins to disintegrate, to fall apart, to yield itself up, as to its own individual and personal life alone. Presently a shoot begins to break through the earth and up the stalk comes, and eventually there is an ear, a heavy ear, of grains of wheat; and if I could actually see life and look into those grains of wheat, I should see that life which was in the one in every one of them. Then I sow that ear, be it one hundred grains I sow, and I get ten thousand; and I sow them again, and they are multiplied a hundredfold, and so on until the earth is full; and if I could look with a magnifying glass into every one of those millions and millions of grains, and life was something visible to the eye, I should see that that same original life was the life of every one of them. That is the answer.

How does this life get into us, this light of life? The Lord Jesus says that death must take place, a death to what we are in ourselves, a death to our own life, a death to a life apart from Him. We must go down with Him into death, and there, under the act of the Spirit of God in union with Christ buried, there is a transmission of His life to us, and He, coming up no longer merely as a single grain of wheat, comes up manifold in every one of us. It is the miracle that is going on every year in the natural realm, and it is just exactly the principle by which the Lord gets into us. You see the necessity of our ceasing to have a life apart from the Lord, the necessity of our letting that life of ours go absolutely. That is a crisis at the beginning, a real crisis. Sooner or later, it has to be a crisis.

Some may say, I have not had that crisis. For me becoming a Christian was a very, very simple thing. As a child, I was simply taught, or, At sometime I simply expressed my personal faith in the Lord Jesus in some way, and from that time I belonged to the Lord; I am a Christian! Are you moving on in the growing fullness of the revelation of the Lord Jesus? Are you? Have you an open heaven? Is God in Christ revealing Himself to you in ever greater wonder and fullness? Is He? I am not saying that you do not belong to the Lord Jesus, but I am saying to you that the unalterable basis of an open heaven is a grave, and a crisis at which you come to an end of your own self-life. It is the crisis of real experimental identification with Christ in His death, not now for your sins, but as you. Your open heaven depends upon that. It is a crisis. And so with not one or two but with many this has been the way. The truth is this, that they were the Lord's children; they knew Christ, they were saved, they had no doubt about that; but then the time came when the Lord, the Light of Life, showed to them that He not only died to bear their sins in His body on the tree, but He Himself represented them in the totality of their natural life, to put it aside. It was the man, and not only his sins, that went to the Cross. That man is you, that man is me: and many, after years of being Christians, have come to that tremendous crisis of identification with Christ as men, as women, as a part of the human race; not only as sinners, but as a part of a race; natural men, not unregenerate, but natural men, all that we are in our natural life. Many have come to that crisis, and from that time everything has been on a vast, a vaster scale than ever before in the Christian life. There has been the open heaven, the enlarged vision, the light of life in a far greater way.

How does it come about? Just like that, and that crisis is a crisis for us all. If you have not had that crisis, you ask the Lord about it. Mark you, if you are going to have that transaction with the Lord, you are asking for something, you are asking for trouble; for, as I said before, this natural man dies hard; he clings tenaciously, he does not like being put aside. Look at that grain of wheat. When it has fallen into the ground, look at what happens to it. Do you think it is pleasant? What is happening? It is losing its own identity. You cannot recognize it. Take it out and have a look at it. Is this that lovely little grain of wheat I put into the ground? What an ugly thing it has become! It has lost all its own identity, lost its own cohesiveness; it is all falling to pieces. How ugly! Yes, that is what death does. This death of Christ as it is wrought in us breaks up our own natural life. It scatters it, pulls it to pieces, takes all its beauty away. We begin to discover that, after all, there is nothing in us but corruption. That is the truth. Falling apart, we are losing all that beauty that was there from the natural point of view, perhaps, as men saw it. It is no pleasant thing to fall into the ground and die. That is what happens.

"But if it die . . ." "If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Rom 6:8). We shall share His life, take another life, and then a new form is given, a new life; not ours, but His. It is a crisis. I do urge upon you to have real dealings with the Lord about this matter. But if you do, expect what I have said, expect that you are going to fall to pieces, expect that the beauty you thought was there will be altogether marred; expect to discover that you are far more corrupt than ever you thought you were; expect that the Lord will bring you to a place where you cry, Woe is me for I am undone! But then the blessing that will come will just be this--O Lord, the best thing that can happen for me is that I shall die! And the Lord will say, That is exactly what I have been working at, I cannot glorify that corruption. "This corruptible must put on incorruption" (1 Cor 15:53), and that incorruption is the germ of that Divine life in the seed which yields its own life up, that is transmitted from Him. God is not going to glorify this humanity. He is going to make us like Christ's glorious body. That is far too deep, and too much ahead, but our point is that there has to be this crisis if we are coming to the glory, God's end.

(b) THE PROCESS

Then there is going to be a process. The Lord Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me", and in so saying He was not wrong in principle. That the Cross is something taken up or entered into once for all is true, as to the crisis in which we say, Lord I accept once for all what the Cross means! But we are going to find that after the crisis, the all-inclusive crisis, day by day the Cross has to be adhered to, and the Cross is working out in those afflictions and sufferings which the Lord is allowing to come upon His people. He has put you in a difficult situation in His sovereignty; a difficult home, business, physical situation, a difficult situation with some relation. Beloved, that is the outworking of the Cross in your experience, in order to make a way for the Lord Jesus to have a larger place. It is going to make a way for His patience, the endurance of Christ, for the love of Christ. It is going to make a way for Him: and you have not to go to your knees every morning and say, Oh, Lord, get me out of this home, get me out of this business, get me out of this difficulty! you are to say, Lord, if this is the Cross in its expression for me today, I take it up today. Facing the situation like that, you will find there is strength, there is victory, the co-operation of the Lord, and there is fruit and not barrenness. It is in that sense that the Lord was right in principle in making the Cross a daily experience. "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple"--one of My taught ones, one learning Me! So that the taking up of this difficulty, whatever it be, day by day, is the very way in which I am learning Christ, and it is the process of light, the light of life, coming to know, coming to see, coming into fullness. You and I can never see and know apart from the Cross. The Cross has to clear the ground of this natural life. The Lord knows what we would do if He lifted away the Cross from us every day. I wonder what we would do.

It may not be just the later New Testament phraseology, or way of putting it, to speak of our daily cross, bearing my cross daily. The principle may more truly be that it is the Cross which is given to Him and becomes mine daily. That may be true, but it just works out this way. If the Lord lifted that which is the expression of the Cross for us day by day and took it off our shoulders, it would not be for our good. It would at once clear the way for the uprising of the natural life. You can see when people begin to get a bit of relief from trial. How they throw their weight about! They get on stilts, they are looking down on you; you are wrong, they are right. Pride, self-sufficiency, all comes up. Well, then, what about Paul? I look up to Paul as a giant, spiritually. Beside that man we are puppets spiritually, and yet, Paul, spiritual giant that he was, humbly confessed that the Lord sent him a messenger of Satan to buffet him, a stake through his flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure. Yes, spiritual giants can exalt themselves if the Lord does not see to it and take precautions, and in order to keep the way of that great revelation opened and clear, that it might grow and grow, the Lord said, 'Paul, I must keep you down very low, very much under limitation; it is the only way: immediately you begin to get up, Paul, you are going to limit the light, spoil the revelation.'

Well, there is the principle. The light of life. It is His life: and so again the Apostle says,

"Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:10).

His life is what we need, and with the life comes the light. It is light by life. There is no other real Divine light, only that which comes out of His life within us, and it is His death wrought in us that clears the way for His life.

I must close there. See again God's end; light, glory, the fullness coming in. It is in Christ. The measure of the light, the measure of the glory, is going to be the measure of Christ, and the measure of Christ is going

to depend entirely upon what space the Lord can find for Himself in us; and, for space to be made for Him, we must come to the place where the utterness of the setting aside of the self-life has been accomplished: and that takes a whole lifetime. But, blessed be God, there is the glorious climax, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be marvelled at in all them that believe. Marvelled at! Having the glory of God! Oh, may something of the light of that glory fall upon our hearts now to encourage and comfort us in the way, to strengthen our hearts to go on in the knowledge of His Son, for His Name's sake.

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