

The Power and Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having an inward vision of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to have a sense of purpose, incentive, and cohesion in our Christian lives.

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:16

Topics: "Spiritual Vision", "The Majesty of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound impact of the power and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, as illustrated by the Transfiguration. He explains that this event not only confirmed the prophecies of the Old Testament but also serves as a transformative experience for believers, urging them to seek an inward vision of Christ that shapes their lives. Sparks highlights that true spiritual vision leads to a sense of purpose, cohesion, and endurance in the Christian life, as seen in the lives of Peter, Paul, and others who encountered the glorified Lord. The sermon calls for a renewed understanding of Jesus' majesty and the implications of His presence in the lives of believers today.

Transcript

Reading: II Peter 1:16-19

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:10-12).

In our earlier meditation we saw that the word 'presence', used here by Peter, and by other writers, is a word which links the Transfiguration with the coming again of the Lord Jesus. The phrase is rightly translated 'power and presence' - the PRESENCE. That word, as you see, is applied to the Transfiguration: the presence of the Lord Jesus in majesty, in power, in glory. That same word is used, and in the same way, concerning His coming again. It is called His 'presencing', His 'being present'; and we know that that presencing will indeed be in power, majesty and glory. If these are the accompaniments of the presence of the Lord Jesus, as they are clearly seen to be, again and again - we shall indicate some

of these occasions as we go on - if these be the accompaniments of His presence, then the issue, not only in transfiguration and what it means, and in the advent at the end, but surely upon every occasion of the presencing of the Lord Jesus, must be to bring an impact upon the situation, the conditions, the place where He is present.

The Impact Of The Presence

There is here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, an impact. The three men who were there in His presence fell on their faces with great fear. The Lord Jesus had to approach and lay His hand on them, and say: "Arise, and be not afraid" (Matt. 17:7). The presence of the Lord Jesus will lay waste all our own strength; all our natural wisdom; all our pride; all our impetuosity. Peter - and another evangelist recording it tells us this - Peter said: "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles..." The evangelist adds: "not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33). Here he is in his own impulsiveness again, obtruding himself into this situation, taking the speech upon his lips, and the situation into his hands, wanting to organize this, and to perpetuate it, and to make something of it. In Matthew's version he says: "I will make... three tabernacles..." 'I! - Peter! - "not knowing what he said", truly perhaps with the best intentions; nevertheless Heaven had to rebuke him, and put him in his place, and this was a devastating experience, both for him and for his companions.

From one standpoint it is a glorious thing to see His MAJESTY; from another standpoint it is always a fearful thing - that is, for the flesh, for the natural life. We cannot walk into this and take hold of it, make something of it for our pleasure and satisfaction. There is an impact in it, that is the point; it registers. If we pray for, and seek - as by His grace we surely shall - new vision of the Exalted Lord, we must be prepared to be brought very low, and to have all our own natural energies wasted; to realize that that Majesty demands nothing other than that we shall be on our faces. That is a good place to be when it is before Him.

It was a tremendous thing when Stephen saw his Lord in majesty and glory. It carried him through the awful ordeal of martyrdom, of being broken, shattered and slain, with all the hatred and malice that was being poured out by those who gnashed their teeth and ran upon him. It was a glorious emergence for Stephen to see the Lord in glory as he did: but it was a tremendously devastating thing for at least one man there. More than that, we could say that it was devastating for that nation; for, in what they were doing, they were only setting their double seal to what they had done to the very Man in the Glory. Again, it is impact. What I am trying to say is, not that such and such things characterize a visitation or a vision, but that we can never really see the Lord, and be in the presence of the Lord, without knowing it, and something happening - without it being tremendously effective.

Saul of Tarsus saw the Lord glorified, and no one will argue as to there being an impact on that occasion. John saw Him; when he was in Patmos he saw his Lord glorified, and he fell to the ground - it is like that. And, whatever might be the consequences and effects, we would all say, Let us have it so, rather than this impotent, helpless, weak, ineffective state, in which we so often find ourselves. The effect of the Transfiguration, that is, of the seeing of the Glorified Lord, is always something tremendous.

The Fact Of The Transfiguration

Now here, in his letter, Peter is affirming the FACT of the Transfiguration. He is setting it over against what he calls "cunningly devised fables" - cleverly concocted reports, over against anything merely fictitious or imaginary. He says, 'This is a FACT! We were with Him; we saw; we heard'. And, he says, 'This has been

abundantly confirmed: "we have the word of prophecy made more sure" - probably referring to what he said in the passage from his first letter that we read. The prophets all pointed on to that, to that suffering and glory which met on the Mount of Transfiguration, as Moses and Elijah spoke to Him about the Cross, His 'exodus', about to be accomplished at Jerusalem. The suffering and the glory met there on that mountain. Peter says that the prophets were all pointing to that, and seeking and searching diligently to know what manner of time it would be, when they prophesied the sufferings and the glory. He says that the prophets searched DILIGENTLY. And then he crowns it all by saying, 'This is something that angels are desirous of looking into!' He says, 'We have got it - we have got it all in fulfilment! We were there on the mount, and we have seen it working out ever since; we are living in the light and the power of that blending of suffering and glory, glory and suffering. The word of the prophets is confirmed, both in the event and in our history ever since the event - it is made sure.'

Probably Peter meant more than that, but he meant that. That is not the whole interpretation, but it is a part. What I am trying to underline is this FACT that Peter himself is affirming here - THE THING HAD HAPPENED. But, when Peter adds his word about "more sure", you notice he carries it beyond the event, that historic event, that occasion on the mount. There is something added to this, something added to the (if we may call it) 'incident'. Mighty incident! Something more - it has been "made more sure" in our case. What is it?

An Inward Reality

Well, just this, that is so true in the other cases, it was not only something BEFORE THE EYES of Peter (and the others); it was something that happened TO him, and afterward came INTO him. True, there was the event, the happening, in time, at a certain place. But, with it, something happened IN Peter. You notice the immediate context: he is speaking of his departure. "Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me". 'I will seek that you have these things after my departure....' He is at the end of his life, at the end of his ministry; but something has happened that has carried him through. It is not that something has remained as the memory of an objective experience, but that something has happened IN him.

This is more than a doctrine, more than a theory, more than even something in the Holy Scriptures. To see the Lord does something IN us. We can get the 'truth' about anything and everything: all the truth that is available about the Lord Jesus Himself - His birth, His life, His works, His words, His death, His resurrection - all that there is; we can have all the 'truth' about the Church - and what a lot there is available; we can have it all, know it all - nothing fresh to know about it; and any other thing you like to mention, in the Scriptures - and yet the fact can remain that nothing has happened in us as a result. I ask you: What has all your knowledge of the Church meant, as a 'happening' in you, to effect something, to put you in a new place, with an entirely new conception, revolutionizing your whole life, so that one whole order of things just falls away as empty, and another heavenly order comes in? That is how it ought to be. True spiritual apprehension ought not just to be something in front of us - it ought to be something IN us. It was so with Peter, and we can trace this in his life.

Take again his great contemporary, Paul. Here is this fact, that, on the Damascus road, Jesus appeared UNTO him in glory - 'brightness above the brightness of the sun'. It was a tremendous objective 'something' that was before him; it struck him as from the outside. But as you know, when speaking of it years afterward, he says: "it pleased God... to reveal His Son IN me" (Galatians 1:15-16). It was not only to him - it was something IN him. The Apostle Paul's whole life and ministry was based upon and sprang

out of that double event, TO and IN. And the Majesty of the Lord Jesus became an INWARD thing with him, and therefore a tremendously effective thing. The answer to the critics, who say that Saul of Tarsus was in a frenzy, and therefore was overtaken by a terrible hysteria, and began to 'see things', and believed that they were real, and that that is the psychological explanation of the conversion of Paul - the answer is his life of endurance, and suffering, and service, and love; and his death for his testimony. You do not go that way, like that, on a dream, on an imagination, on an hysteria. I venture to say that a very small proportion of what Paul had to meet during the thirty years of his ministry would knock hysteria out of most men. No, something happened inside; the vision did something in him, as well as being something to him.

And so we could go on with the other people, like John, who saw the Lord in His glory. But that is enough. The thing happened TO him, but it happened IN him. It was an event, true; but it was also an abiding process. For, right on through their lives, this was the thing that was growing - this marvellous greatness of the Lord Jesus. They did not get it all at once, even in the wonderful event, but throughout their lives the one mighty thing that was happening was this growing realization. Jesus, in all the greatness of His glorified Person and position, was dominating their whole horizon and the whole course of their lives.

The Principle Of Spiritual Vision

Now that brings us to the principle of all this, which opens up a very large field, in which we could move for a long time. The principle is the principle of true, spiritual, inward vision. Not 'visionariness', but inward vision, which is specific, which is definite. Visionariness can be very abstract, but what we mean by 'vision', spiritual vision, is very concrete; it is very specific. It is a Person Who is in view, and this mighty Person is no abstraction. There is nothing unreal or imaginary when we see the Lord Jesus.

Let us weigh this whole matter. You and I and the Lord's people, as we said earlier, in our various places, various situations, various experiences, scattered and tried and pressed, need something very mighty to carry us through to the end. Things are becoming very grim, are they not? Most of us are aware that we are in a most terrific spiritual conflict, and the Christian life is not getting easier. It is becoming exceedingly difficult just to hold on, keep on, and especially to be triumphant. That is how it was when Peter wrote his letter.

Now, we need more than words, and more than visionariness, to get us through. Our Christian lives ought to be based upon something like this: 'I have seen the Lord'. We shall only go through if that is true. By the operation and activity of the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven we must have an inward vision of the Exalted Lord. For all endurance, and for all service, that is essential. Life that has to go on without that is just a drag; it is an existence. Work or service without that INWARD VISION has nothing in it to lift us, to carry us on. For everything - life and work and endurance - it is indispensable that we have this inward vision of the Lord in majesty and glory, kept fresh, kept clear, constantly revived. With such a vision all the essentials of effectiveness are bound up.

A Sense Of Purpose

First of all, what we all need, what the Church as a whole needs, and what every part of it needs, is a mighty governing sense of purpose: that there is something for which to live, and something for which to work, and something for which to endure and go on: a real master-purpose in our existence. If you look into this matter in the New Testament, you will find that these men and the Church were brought into this master-purpose. We are so familiar with the very word that it has lost its music in our ears - 'the eternal purpose' - 'called according to His purpose'. They were governed by this objective, this goal, this

something toward which they were being moved, drawn, constrained, urged and held; which, again and again, when they were cast down, and it seemed that everything was hopeless, revived in them, and revived them, and brought them up again. It was not a mentality, not a theory, not an idea, but what Paul calls "the power that worketh in us" - "according to the power that worketh in us". The word 'worketh' there, as you know, is the one from which we get our word 'energize' - 'the power that energizes in us'. What is it?

Look again, and you will see that it had to do with that great, great end which God had fixed concerning His Son, the Lord Jesus, in universal majesty and glory and fullness. They had seen something of that in Him. It had become the great purpose which bound their lives, and drew them out in a sense that life is not empty, meaningless; it has some great end: 'We see what it is - it is concerning the Lord Jesus'. We, too, must have that sense of purpose, or we shall not get very far. Not only was it A purpose, but this inward spiritual vision gave the incentive to life. Through days and years of wearing out and wearing down, weariness and disappointment, over many things, disillusionment and heartbreak, it is not difficult to lose incentive; to ask, Is it worth it? Is it all justified? Are we not just spending our strength for nought? We need incentive. It was this apprehension of Christ as having gone that way of weariness and devastation and triumph, and having been glorified, and now being there in the glory, which gave them the incentive; it imparted to life an incentive, a motive, a power.

Cohesive Power

Further, in this vision, there is the effect of cohesion. A vision is a very cohesive thing: that is, it has the power of drawing people together, holding them together, making them a 'together' people - those who are going on together. They have one vision. The great illustration of this is Nehemiah and the people of his time, with their one vision. Look at all the variety of people, and variety of gifts and qualifications- every kind of artisan and profession mentioned; every sphere of life; but they are one people, a solid whole, simply because they have got one vision. That wall and the rebuilding of the city dominated everyone's heart and everyone's mind, and brought them together in a wonderful unity. There is no other way of having unity but really to see the Lord Jesus, and have Him in view as on the throne, above all, over all. It will bring us together.

I have said that what we all need is the power to endure; and it is just there, as we have seen, that Peter introduces the Transfiguration. He speaks about 'the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth...' - the TRIAL of your faith. 'Manifold temptations' - he brings in the vision as the power for enduring and going through. We are told that Moses endured 'as seeing Him Who is invisible' (Hebrews 11:27). This is the power. Now, you can see this from the opposite and contrary standpoint. See the effects of loss of a vision! However many other visions the Lord's people may have, as soon as they lose the vision of the Lord Himself, as Lord over all, as on the Throne, what happens? They lose their sense of purpose; they lose their awareness of a true objective in their existence. They then have to have substitutes for that vision, to keep them going; but these things wear out and disappoint. The loss of vision always results in the loss of an incentive, real incentive for life.

In the same way, it is true of this matter of cohesion, coordination: lose vision, and the result is always disintegration, division, separation, confusion, and the loss of strength and stability. This is no matter of theory or technique - it is very true. Some of us know - and that is why we are speaking like this just now - we know that when a people have really been gripped by the vision of the Throne, the Majesty of the Lord Jesus, the Authority of Christ, a wonderful sense of purpose comes on that people, and a wonderful

incentive, and a wonderful unity: they are a one people. It is the Throne that has done it, and their apprehension of that Throne. And when things take the place of the Lord - anything that you like to mention - then the falling apart begins. Sooner or later the disintegration sets in, the confusion, the loss of heart, incentive and purpose. A real INWARD seeing of the Lord Jesus, as in the place of Authority and Government and Majesty, is the answer to our every need, personally and collectively. It was so of old; it is so now.

Four Major Elements

Do you notice how this Transfiguration was the confirmation and complement of all the teaching? Look again at the record of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. What have we? We have the four major elements of the Christian faith and the Christian life:

(1) The Person Of The Lord Jesus

"When Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father Which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:13-17).

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." I think that there it might have been said that Peter, once again, did not know what he was talking about! It was a tremendous utterance: 'Thou art the Messiah! Thou ART the Messiah!' Both 'Christ' and 'Messiah' mean 'The Anointed One', and, as such, the Son of the Living God. Here is the basic fact of Christianity - the Person of the Lord Jesus. For a man like Peter, a Jew, versed and saturated in the Old Testament and Jewish history, to say that, meant far more than we realize. Think of the tremendous things that were bound up with that word 'Messiah'!

There were three great conceptions of the Messiah in Israel. The first we find in the first part of the prophecies of Isaiah - the 'Son of David'; the Seed and the Son of David. You remember Isaiah's prophecy about 'the shoot of Jesse' (Isaiah 11:1): that was the first conception of the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, Who should take over the Throne of David, and all that that meant.

In the second part of Isaiah, the Messiah is the Suffering Servant of Jehovah; King-Redeemer, Redeemer-King; and Isaiah 53 stands right at the centre of that conception of the Messiah. We see the Throne, and Redemption: how it is going to work out.

We find the third conception of the coming Messiah in the Book of Daniel, chapter 7. It is a very wonderful passage.

"I beheld till thrones were placed, and One that was Ancient of days did sit: His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand of thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened... I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a Son of Man, and He came even to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve

Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:9,10,13,14).

That was their coming Messiah: King, Saviour, reigning Lord for ever and ever, in universal sovereignty. When Peter said, 'THOU art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God', all that was present in the declaration. Hence, Jesus said, 'Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you. My Father knows the meaning of the Christhood, the Messiahship, the Sonship, and it is all that!'

Now, I have included that, only with a view to trying to revive this conception of the greatness of our Lord Jesus; to help toward the vision. I would that, as we speak of it, read of it, you might see that your Lord Jesus is no little, defeated Lord - defeated at the hands of the great enemy. Only as we have such a conception and apprehension of His Person shall we get through in triumph.

(2) The Church

The second thing is the Church. The Person always does lead to the Church, in Divine sequence. "I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Why? Well, for that very reason. It is His Church, the Church of this One - this One to Whom the Kingdom is given, and the Throne; before Whom all nations shall bow. The Church is the embodiment of the vision of the Exalted Lord. If that is true, it will make it a great Church, a powerful Church. If this One - this One of the Transfiguration mount, this One of Stephen's vision, of Paul's vision - if this One, by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven, is embodied in the Church - then what a Church! What a Church! Is that the Church with which we are familiar? Have we really understood that that is what is meant by the very term 'Church' - the embodiment of Himself as Lord over all?

(3) The Cross

The third thing is the Cross.

"From that time began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem" (Matthew 16:21). "The Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men" (Luke 9:44).

His wonderful Cross! I like that thought, that idea, that a certain writer has expressed when he has spoken of Christ 'reigning and ruling by His Cross'. There is no doubt that that is right. What looked, humanly, so much to the contrary - defeat and failure, loss and despair, weakness and helplessness - has proved in history to be the most potent force in the universe - the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Saul, before his conversion, looked upon the Cross as the very symbol of ignominy, of shame; something despicable, to be hated. Afterward he said: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14, AN). From the shame to the glory. The Transfiguration transfigures the Cross. In other words, a vision of the glorified Lord will transfigure our sufferings, will altogether transform our afflictions. We see what that Cross meant really in the mind of God.

(4) The Coming Of The Lord

The fourth thing is the coming of the Lord.

"The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then shall He render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:27).

The point is this, that the Transfiguration was the crown and confirmation, the complement of all those four things. It was the crown of the Person: Peter had said, 'Thou art the Christ!' Well, the mount of Transfiguration gave good evidence to that fact as he saw Him transfigured. The Lord had said to him: 'I will build My Church'. The mount of Transfiguration gave good hope for that Church, if He, that One, was going to build it. If the Lord was speaking about the Cross, the mount of Transfiguration will give an altogether new and different interpretation to the Cross. If He has spoken of His Coming Again in the Glory of the Father, the mount of Transfiguration explains that, demonstrates that.

Yes: to see the Lord in that way, glorified, is the confirmation of our whole faith; the establishment of our whole position; and the assurance of our final triumph with Him. The Lord give us a new vision of Himself - His power, His majesty and His presence.

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