

# The Quality of Divine Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

---

*The sermon explores the concept of discipleship as apprenticeship, emphasizing the transformative quality of divine life in believers.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 21:43, Luke 6:13, John 1:4, John 10:10, John 20:31, John 21:25, Acts 2:36, 1 Corinthians 15:4, Colossians 1:27, Revelation 17:14

**Topics:** "Discipleship Training", "Divine Life"

---

## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the distinction between being a disciple as a student versus an apprentice, highlighting Jesus' practical training of His disciples for His work. He delves into the three phases of discipleship in the New Testament: the general call, being chosen, and being put into His business with the great commission. The sermon explores how Jesus chose disciples for the work of His Kingdom, symbolized by the number twelve, representing the Kingdom. It also discusses the basis of the new spiritual Kingdom, which is heavenly and divine life, focusing on the quality and characteristics of this life.

---

## Transcript

We have pointed out that the Greek word for disciple means 'a learner', but I want to make a correction to that. The Gospels were not all written originally in Greek, but in Aramaic, and in Aramaic the word 'disciple' does not mean a student, but an apprentice. So we have to make an adjustment. Disciples are not just students - they are apprentices. Jesus was a carpenter and would not think of His disciples just as students. He was far more likely to think of them as apprentices learning a business. You may be an apprentice to engineering, or to the law, and the idea of an apprentice is something quite practical. The idea of a student is only theoretical, and Jesus never wanted His servants to be merely theoretical. He intended them to be very practical, so His training was not in theory but in practice. He was training His disciples for His work: not just to be preachers, but to work. Jesus was not just a lecturer. He was a demonstrator, and there is a lot of difference between a lecturer and a demonstrator! So Jesus took His disciples into very practical situations.

We have shown how John said that Jesus always did His works in the presence of His disciples. He took them into actual situations and involved them in the situations so that they became a part of them. We must remember that because, as we have already said, we are supposed to be disciples. Perhaps you have not thought of this before - but you are apprentices if you are related to the Lord Jesus. That may be a new idea to you, but the reality is no new idea. You know quite well that the Lord Jesus is taking you into

very practical situations, and is involving you in situations where you have to learn something. You have to learn how to be the master of a situation, and that is very practical training. So, whether you take the name or not, the truth remains. If we have come into relationship with the Lord Jesus it means that we at once become apprentices.

In the New Testament there were three phases in discipleship.

First of all, there was the call, and it seems that this was much more general than the call to the twelve. It is put like this: 'He called unto Him whom He would and He chose twelve.' The first was a general call. Jesus was calling to people: 'Come, follow Me.' A number of people responded, and then from them He chose twelve. It does not mean that all the others were not faithful or that they were not suitable, but it does clearly show that the twelve came into the real business of their calling.

You can see quite clearly how true this is at all times. There are multitudes of people who are just followers of the Lord Jesus. They would take one of the other names and call themselves Christians. If you said: 'Are you a follower of the Lord Jesus?' they would say 'Yes', but many of these people are not really meaning business with Him. And the Lord must have those who do mean business, so He draws such ones nearer to Himself. It may be one thing to be called, but it may be another thing to be chosen. You remember that in the Book of the Revelation these words are used when speaking about the followers of the Lamb: "And they that are with him are called, and chosen" (Revelation 17:14 - AV). There is a difference between being chosen and being called.

The third phase was that He put them into His business and gave them the great commission. I am going to leave that there for the moment.

What was the work for which the disciples were chosen? I can put that in the present tense, for we are in the same dispensation: What is the work for which the Lord would choose us? The answer is: the work of His Kingdom. Notice: "And he chose from them twelve" (Luke 6:13). Twelve is the number of the Kingdom. Jesus was following the pattern of the twelve tribes of Israel, who were to be the kingdom of the coming Messiah. Twelve is the Kingdom number. Jesus has come to set up His Kingdom and has chosen disciples, or apprentices, for the work of that Kingdom.

Here is an important thing for us to notice. Jesus knew beforehand how things were going to work out and exactly what would happen in His own lifetime and afterward. He knew that Israel would refuse Him as the Messiah and as the Head of the Kingdom, and would refuse the Kingdom that He had come to set up. He knew all that beforehand, and so He was working with this foreknowledge. He foreknew that the time would come when He would say to Israel: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). He was working with this foreknowledge of the transfer of the Kingdom from Israel to the Church. So He chose twelve. This was the nucleus of His new Kingdom, which, as represented by these, will call Him 'Lord'. They will go everywhere proclaiming: 'Jesus Christ is Lord.' They are the people who have come to see by divine revelation the place of Jesus Christ in the appointment of God. They have come to see "that God hath made him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

So you have the new Kingdom and the new King, but there is a great deal of difference. The old kingdom of Israel was a temporal, earthly kingdom and the new Kingdom is a spiritual, heavenly Kingdom. I am not going to dwell on the Kingdom just now, but we are moving toward something. He chose, and He chooses, for the work of His Kingdom. He puts us into His school as apprentices to learn the nature of the Kingdom,

and what the Kingdom of Heaven really is.

The last thing, and where we start again, is the basis of this new Kingdom. What is the basis of this new spiritual and heavenly Kingdom? It is heavenly life, divine life... and now we are back again where we were in the last message. John, introducing the Lord Jesus, said: "In him, was life" (John 1:4). Right in the middle of the Gospel he put the words of Jesus: "I came that they might have life" (John 10:10). And he summed up the whole of his Gospel with: "That believing ye may have life" (John 20:31).

John, as we have said, gathered the whole of his Gospel, his spiritual Gospel of the Kingdom, around seven signs, and those signs are a setting forth of the meaning of this life of the Kingdom. You remember that John said he selected these signs out of a great many more. I like to think of John doing this. He said that the signs which Jesus did were so many that "if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). And so you can think of John, with this great mass of material, saying to himself. 'Now I want to convey to those who are going to read this the real nature and meaning of this divine life. I have to select the best illustrations out of this great mass of material.' And so he went through it and said: 'That is the first one, that is the second', and so on, and then 'Those seven will do', and he put these seven signs into his book, which is the Gospel of eternal life. Remember, he called them signs, not miracles, although they were miracles. He did not call them wonders, although they were wonders, nor did he call them powers, although they were powers. He left Matthew, Mark and Luke to call them by those names. He called them signs, which meant that they pointed to something more than themselves. There was the work that Jesus did, which was one thing, but the meaning was another thing. John said: 'I want to get at the meaning through the work.'

You know what the seven signs are in the Gospel by John, but let us just run through them to refresh our memories:

- (1) The Turning of the Water into Wine:
- (2) The Healing of the Nobleman's Son:
- (3) The Raising of the Impotent Man at the Pool of Bethesda:
- (4) The Feeding of the Five Thousand:
- (5) The Walking on the Water:
- (6) The Giving of Sight to the Man born blind:
- (7) The Raising of Lazarus from the Dead.

John said: 'That is quite enough. If only I can get the meaning of those things over, then people will know the meaning of life.'

Now we are going to consider these seven signs, the first of which is the Turning of the Water into Wine.

Reading: John 2:1-11.

Of course, there are many lessons in this incident, but I am going to leave them in order to come to the one main point. We are dealing with the matter of divine life, which Jesus came to give, and we are seeking to understand the nature of that life. I trust it is true of all of us that we have received what the

New Testament calls eternal life! But it is important for us to know what it is we have received, that is, what it means to have eternal life, the life which Jesus has brought to us in His own Person. And here you have the first characteristic of that life.

The key to this sign is the verdict of the master of the feast. You can take it that this man knew all about wine, whether it was good or bad. He was an authority on wine. He would not have been responsible for the feast if he did not know what wine was. Therefore, this authority on wine gives us the secret of the whole thing in his verdict. What was that? "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." If this wine was intended by John and by Jesus to illustrate eternal life, then there is a quality about that life which is different from every other kind of life. Every other kind of life is what this man called 'poor wine', but you never know how poor the other wine is until you have tasted the better. The point is that this life which Jesus gives has a quality in it.

Let us look again at this story and remember that the heart of the incident is the training of disciples. It says: "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana". It is not quite easy to understand why John said 'the third day' here. If you read what goes before you say: 'Well, evidently that incident was on the first day, that one was on the second day and this was on the third day' - but it does not say so. All that it says is: 'On the third day'. Does that strike a note? "He hath been raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:4). The third day is the day of resurrection, the day when divine life triumphs over death, the day of life. "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee." John knew what was in his mind when he was writing, for he had one thought running all the way through: 'I am working on the line of resurrection life', and he brought that into everything in his Gospel. And so this verdict of the master of the feast gives us the key to divine life. It is a quality in that life which is quite different from everything else. You can see, as we say, 'by reading between the lines' what the quality of this life is.

This was the reversing of human failure. Someone had failed, had made a terrible mistake: they had not provided enough wine - it says: "When the wine failed". That was a terrible thing for a marriage feast, for the wine was everything, and if that failed the whole feast broke down. And what happened? Everybody looked at the master of the feast, and looked on him with reproach: 'Oh, you terrible man! You have spoiled everything. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!' And the poor man bowed his head in shame. He was altogether dishonoured as the master of the feast. Jesus, in bringing in the new wine, removed the human failure and took away all the human shame. He made it possible for this poor man to lift up his head and to feel that the feast was a great success and not a great failure.

Dear friends, that is exactly what divine life does - it takes the failure and shame out of life. It makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and say: 'Life is not a failure, not something to be ashamed of.' We need not hang down our heads in dishonour. We can lift them up and rejoice. Is that not true of the life which the Lord gives? There is a quality about this life which is different - it gives character to the people who receive it. If you think that I am just reading into this something out of my own imagination, I can prove to you that what I have said is true.

I want you to notice the change which came about in these disciples with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Look at them when the wine failed - when Jesus was crucified! It was as though they had lost everything. They were wondering if they had made a great mistake in trusting Him, and were going about with their heads hanging down. They were afraid to meet the people who knew they were His disciples. When Peter, the leader of them, was down in that room warming himself by the fire, a little serving-maid came in and said: "This man also was with him" (Luke 22:56), but Peter said: "Woman, I know him not" (Luke 22:57).

What shame! What dishonour! Yes, they were men going about with their heads hanging down because they thought the wine had failed.

Look at these men not many days afterward! Their heads are up. They can look the whole world in the face and there is not the slightest sign of any shame about them. They are boasting in their faith in the Lord Jesus. What a difference the life has made! Before, they were cowards, afraid even of a little servant maid. Now look at their courage! It is said of the rulers: 'When they beheld the boldness of Peter and John' (Acts 14:13). From being cowards they became men of courage. From being men who were ashamed to be in the world they became men of dignity - they are standing upright before everybody. From men who were always thinking about themselves and trying to draw everything to themselves - such as the first places in the Kingdom - they are men who have forgotten themselves and are altogether selfless, thinking only of the Lord's interests and not their own.

They had been men who had very little sympathy in their hearts for other people. The poor Canaanitish woman came crying after the Lord to help her daughter and the disciples said: "Send her away; for she crieth after us" (Matthew 14:23). When He entered into a certain city the people did not receive Him, so the disciples said: "Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). Mothers brought their little children to Him to get a blessing, and the disciples drove them away. There was not much sympathy in their hearts for other people.

Now look at them! After the resurrection and the life had come into them the whole world is in their hearts, and their hearts have become as large as the whole world. They go everywhere in this great sympathy for sinful men.

In the old days they could not stand up to any kind of difficulty. They began to give up altogether as soon as things went wrong. "This is a hard saying" (John 6:60) ... "Upon this many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). These twelve were all too ready to give up too soon when things became difficult.

Now look at them! What about difficulties? Why, they are greater than anything they had known before! All the rulers, all the world, all the circumstances and the devil himself are against them, but they are going on: they are not giving up. This life has brought into them a new stamina, the power to endure.

All that is in this new wine. There is a quality about this life. It makes us different people from what we are naturally. It puts into us that which was in Christ Himself, and we are better able to understand the words: "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). There is not much hope of glory in the old wine, dear friends. There is not much hope of glory in that old, natural life, but it does come with the life which Christ brings. This life is the very character of the Lord Himself.

You see, there was something about Him that was different. The rulers looked at Him and there was a big question on their faces. They were really perplexed and did not know how to explain Him. They saw His life, His work, and the wonderful fact of His life and His work. They heard His teaching and saw how it met the need of the people. And they said: "Is not this the carpenter?" (Mark 6:3). But there is something different about this carpenter, something more than just an ordinary carpenter. See His dignity as He walked amongst them - and what dignity there was when He was before Pilate! They tried to make Him look very small, but all that they did to Him did not take away His dignity. What endurance there was in Him! He endured 'to the end'. What a different quality there was in Jesus from other men! It was the quality of the life that was in Him, the very life of God, divine life, eternal life, that explained everything as to His

character.

Dear friends, you and I are supposed to have that same life. It was released from Him at the Cross and has been brought to us by the Holy Spirit. Now do we see what it means? There ought to be something about us that is different. Anybody who has any intelligence, like the master of the feast, ought to be able to say: 'These people are different. They have something that we have not. There is character about them.' We as Christians ought to be marked by a spiritual dignity. We ought not to be going about with our heads hanging down, ashamed to be alive! We ought to have our heads up in a right sense. There ought to be real courage about us and endurance of suffering in us. Yes, there is a quality about this life.

I wonder what the verdict of this world is upon us! Does it say - is it able to say: 'Well, our kind of life is poor stuff in comparison with theirs. Their life is different, and it is better. You have kept the best wine till now'?

That is sign Number One. How rich, how challenging it is! It comes home to our hearts with a big question. But, dear friends, if we have the life, and if we allow the life to have its way in us, that is what it will do. We may naturally be poor wine, but when the Lord Jesus comes in with His life, it will be the best wine.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-quality-of-divine-life/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**