

# The Resurrection, Ascension and Exaltation of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the profound implications of Christ's Resurrection, Ascension, and Exaltation for believers and the Church as a living entity in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 1:19, Hebrews 1:2

**Topics:** "Resurrection", "Exaltation of Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Christ's resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, illustrating how these events are pivotal in God's plan for redemption and the restoration of creation. He explains that the rupture caused by insubordination to God's will led to a duality in existence, with Christ as the central figure who reconciles all things. The Transfiguration serves as a crucial moment that foreshadows the glory of the resurrection, which transforms believers into a new creation. Sparks highlights that the Church, born from the resurrection, embodies the life and power of Christ, and that through His ascension, believers are called to share in His glory. Ultimately, the sermon reveals that Christ's exaltation is not just a historical event but a present reality that governs the life of the Church and the destiny of all believers.

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## Transcript

We have now reached so far on in our consideration as to make wise and profitable a brief review before we take the next specific steps.

We began these meditations by noting that the Bible focuses everything upon a primal rift and rupture in Heaven and then on earth, or, before the present created order and after.

The cause of that universal rupture is shown to be insubordination to the will of God; independent action, issuing from a desire for superiority, ascendancy, and power. This is the evil brood of pride: arrogance and conceit.

While there may be no specific statement to this effect or conclusion, there is much in Scripture to lead us to conclude that it was the 'appointment' of God's Son as "heir of all things" that were to be created that inspired this jealous revolt, and resulted in the long-term bitter enmity of Satan against that Son, and, since He could not be seduced, ultimately led to His murder.

We have defined all this as the fall out from God. Whereas, originally, there was but one realm, the realm of God, through the rupture there became two realms, and these in perpetual hostility to each other.

God, the Father, had horizoned everything by His Son, and, henceforth, everything of God was to have the Son as its sphere. So, the Son would be the measure, range, scope, nature, and constitution of all that is of God.

When we have recognized the eternal fact we have the key to the Bible, to history, and to experience.

There follows the twofold work of God "concerning his Son".

- (a) The judgment, discipline, and undoing of the infected and disordered creation, particularly man.
- (b) The reconstruction, reconstituting, and conforming of men of faith to the image of God's Son.

This is foreshadowed in God's sovereign choice of, and dealings with, Israel - the seed of Abraham. Israel was elected as the channel through which God would eventually bring His Son into this world, and - through redemption - ultimately 'reunite all things in Christ'. Mark you it is only in Christ that this will be effected, and the Bible shows that the ultimate "all things" will be exclusively those who have re-entered Christ by faith, not force. Thus "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son", and He as transfigured and glorified was to be, and now is, the full embodiment of all that is to be universal when the last vestige of revolt and revolters has been banished.

Having followed this horizoning of Christ up to His Transfiguration, we take up the matter at that point.

The Transfiguration followed closely upon the plain and unequivocal statement by Jesus regarding His death at Jerusalem, and the shattering effect of that statement on the disciples. The Cross and the Transfiguration go together hand in hand. Both in the announcement made to them, and in the conversation of Moses and Elijah on the mount, this is seen to be the case. They are mutually interpretive. The Cross is the way to the glory. The glory will justify the Cross.

In, and by, the Transfiguration the ultimate destiny of redeemed man is horizoned by "the Son of man" as such.

At the time it was but the act without any teaching or explanation. The disciples were still men in the flesh, as the Lord's so-recent rebuke to Peter shows, the mystery of ultimate destiny and glory would be one of those things referred to by the Lord when He said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now". Not only would it be impossible for the natural man to understand the deep things of God, to speak of them to such would be to put them under too big a responsibility. These things need more than natural wisdom to 'discern', and to 'bear'.

Paul makes this very plain at the beginning of his first Corinthian letter. Only when there are "spiritual men" to 'judge spiritual things' can the Lord speak freely and fully. So, it was but the act of Transfiguration and not the meaning. But the act left an abiding and unforgettable impression, as seen in Peter's letter so long after.

When the Spirit had come, and there were men born of the Spirit - a "new creation in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), then the meaning of the Transfiguration could be disclosed. The Spirit then 'takes the things of Christ and shows them', so that in 1 Corinthians 15 we have this meaning given. There it is revealed that Christ risen

and glorified is the Horizon of redeemed men - in body as well as in spirit - in transfiguration. In his second letter to Corinth, chapter 3 verse 18, Paul follows this up with an application to believers. "Like unto his glorious body" is the key to the Transfiguration, so far as we are concerned.

We are not forgetting the so-vital aspect of the Transfiguration to Jesus Himself. That it marked a climax in His life and ministry here, we have seen. For Himself and His personal relationship with His Father everything was "well-pleasing" - "In whom I am well pleased". The Father's satisfaction with His Son personally was perfect, and the glory was His personal right and due then and there. But, if He had gone through to glory then He would not have been the Horizon of the redeemed, for redemption was not yet accomplished. It has been pointed out that the words "Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising shame" can be rightly translated "Who instead of the joy set before him [as His own right] endured..." Jesus had not to go to the Cross to get His own glory, but to get ours, and to become our Horizon in glory.

There is this touch of finality in the Transfiguration. Nothing had been made perfect - complete - up till then. That is the meaning of the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Him in the mount. They respectively represent the Law and the Prophets, a term which is used to embrace the whole of the Old Testament. They made nothing perfect, and their own perfecting awaited the coming, the Cross, and the resurrection of Christ - "apart from us they should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:40).

Perhaps it would be giving too much play to imagination to try to define the ecstasy of Moses and Elijah on that mount. They must have felt - 'This is what we have waited for for so long. This is the crown of all our hopes, labours, sufferings, and the vindication of our faith.'

Glory was certainly at hand for our Lord as His personal right, but what of the "many sons"? The servant-spirit must again triumph, and so, He goes down from the mountain to the Cross. Not for Himself but for the sake of others were the Cross and the shame, but through that the way is opened to the still greater glory.

#### The Horizon of the Resurrection

This is a vast and comprehensive matter, with limitless prospects. These, in detail, it is not our intention to consider; we keep to the one all-comprehending reality - the Son of God as God's universal Horizon.

The Resurrection brings that into view in a supreme way. There are three aspects of this.

- (1) The changed condition and position of Christ by resurrection.
  - (2) The essential meaning and nature of the Church.
  - (3) The representation of man as he will be in the full meaning of the resurrection in the body.
- (1) The changed condition and position of Christ.

Resurrection is not resuscitation. There is an essential difference from what He was before. This difference is too manifest in His appearances to need arguing.

He has a body, real and touchable, yet with capacities and abilities beyond anything known in our material world. Walls and doors; miles and time have no significance to this body. His knowledge is not by surmise, guess, or information, but, like true spiritual knowledge, it is intuitive. To try to describe it would only be to

become more mystified. The theophanies of the Old Testament help in the matter of reality, but we are left to prove that reality by a knowing in spirit how truly He is alive now. He is the same, but different, and the difference is the great blessing of all believers in every part of the world.

The life given by Him is a deathless and indestructible life. It is a supernaturally intelligent life, i.e. a life which gives an intelligence which the profoundest scholarship cannot attain unto. It is a life which supports through superhuman adversities and sufferings.

(2) The essential meaning and nature of the Church.

Speaking of the Church, let us at once make it clear that we refer to the Church which was born on the Day of Pentecost and is the Church of the New Testament. To describe this is to make distinctions clear.

The Church takes its character from Christ risen. It is referred to as that which is 'risen together with Christ'. It is as truly a miracle as was His resurrection. It is a supernatural entity.

If Christ in resurrection can only be known spiritually, i.e., in a spiritual way by the Holy Spirit's revelation, that is also true of the true Church. It is inscrutable, it is a "mystery". Although it may have embodiment in human life it is not a temporal thing. If we had lived in the first days of the Church we should not have been able to identify it by special buildings, dress, ritual, liturgy, or such externals. While certain language and ways of life may have characterized it, the thing that marked it out most clearly was its life. This was a living entity. There was a life in it which was a spiritual power, a spiritual beauty, a spiritual joy, a spiritual influence. This was a self-propagating and reproductive life.

The one impression registered upon people who came into contact with it was this livingness, and triumphant livingness. If asked to explain it, the answer would invariably and exultingly be 'Jesus lives, and He lives within us and in the midst of us.'

If Christ was raised by the power of God, so the Church survived the most terrible ordeals of persecution and manifold suffering, went on its way overcoming immense difficulties, by reason of that same power. It was the embodiment of "the power of his resurrection".

Again, if in resurrection Christ was released from merely local and geographical limitations, the very life and progress of the Church had to be universal. Local testimonies and representations there would be, but only of the universality of Christ. The local is never the horizon in the New Testament. Christ risen, ascended, and reigning was the Horizon, and the Holy Spirit saw to it that when He was really in charge, the vision and passion was to the fullest compass of Christ. In the thought of God, nothing was to be smaller than Christ.

These are but a few statements of facts. A very big volume would be required in which to do justice to the true nature of the Church.

(3) The representation of man in his ultimate resurrection body.

The Apostle Paul states precisely that the body of the believer in whom Christ dwells will be changed, and the new body will be "like unto his glorious body" or "body of glory". The Resurrection links with the Transfiguration. "This corruptible must put on incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:53).

Christ in resurrection is the norm of what will be true of all born-again children of God when redemption is consummated. This is the issue of all the travail in the groaning creation, the adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:22,23).

All this resolves itself into certain very obvious things.

If the Resurrection of Christ is the supreme demonstration of Divine power, as the Word says it is, namely, "the exceeding greatness of his power" (Eph. 1:19), then the very great power of sin, Satan, and the world against the Church is transcended by the risen Christ who dwells within. If the death of Christ is the expression of the great people are gathered together, the kings of the power of sin and evil, His resurrection is in power "exceeding".

On one side of human history, death is the most powerful force in creation. The unceasing and unrelenting battle in man and in nature is with death.

The testimony of Jesus raised from the dead is that this most powerful force has been destroyed in Him personally. The Church is the elect Body in which that testimony is meant to be deposited and demonstrated; "Glory in the church by Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:21). The Resurrection was - and is - the release of that mighty life which, until then, had been in Him alone, and its transmission to, and residence in, the Church which is His Body, a life shared with Him organically and corporately. The vocation of the Church is to be, in itself, a testimony to the power of that life, and a vehicle through which the life is passed on to others. Thus, Christ as "the Living one", in the power of resurrection, is the Horizon of all things in the energies and activities of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Life.

The next peak is very near, indeed it is joined to this one by a very narrow neck. It is the peak of

The Ascension and Exaltation.

There are some twenty-five references to this in the New Testament. This is the climax of the cycle from emptying to filling, from humbling to glorifying. It is also a climax in His mission and work.

Keeping in view the inclusive truth of Christ as the Horizon of all things we can see some of the major "all things" in this particular connection. Out of these all else will issue.

Inclusively, the Horizon is enthroned, and is therefore all-governing. We have mentioned that the characteristic definition of Christianity - "In Christ" - is finally a governing definition. That means that it governs everything.

Here then we see

(1) Victory Enthroned

Psalms 24 is the psalm of the ascended triumphant Lord; it celebrates His re-entry into glory. Verse 7 describes this King of Glory as "the Lord mighty in battle". Therefore, His enthronement is the enthronement of victory in battle. Here, then, the Horizon is seen in all its dimensions.

There is the far-back view reaching to the revolt in Heaven and then on earth, and all the following entail of rebellion. There is the far-round view, earthly and cosmic - 'the heathen rage, the earth take counsel' (Ps. 2:1,2; Acts 4:25,26); 'principalities, and powers; world-rulers of this darkness; hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies' (Eph. 6:12). There is the far-on look, unto the day when "he shall come whose right it is, and it

shall be given unto him" (Ezek. 21:27), when He is present as "King of kings and Lord of lords". That universal triumph is with Him as "by the right hand of God exalted" (Acts 2:33).

## (2) Redemption Enthroned

Here is the counterpart of the Transfiguration. The symbol covering this is 'the Lamb in the midst of the Throne'.

Christ enthroned means:-

(a) Redemption from the authority of darkness - 'He led His captivity captive' (Ps. 118:18; Eph. 4:8).

(b) Redemption from all iniquity. This (as, the root-meaning of the word 'iniquity' means) is redemption from complicity with, and involvement in, Satan's rebellion.

(c) Redemption 'unto God' (Rev. 5:9).

It is the return into God as the true environment and life.

## (3) It is Man's Perfection Enthroned

He was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10), and presented to God "without blemish" (Heb. 9:14). He was the Priest and the Sacrifice, sinless and perfect, spotless and complete. As Priest in Heaven - "...a priest upon his throne" (Zech. 6:13) - He makes intercession prevailingly because of His own perfection.

He is where He is representatively of all 'whom He sanctifies'. He is the Firstfruits of our perfection.

## (4) Man Glorified Enthroned

We are to be "glorified with him" if "we suffer with him" (Rom. 8:17). He, the Son, is "bringing many sons unto glory" (Heb. 2:10). His glorification is the guarantee of ours.

Thus, Christ exalted and enthroned is not just an objective truth, but the Horizon within which the Holy Spirit is at work to bring us to "reign together with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

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