

# The Setting and Background of the Issue

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The ultimate issue in the universe is worship, and it is the object of the whole campaign of the Devil.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:8

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Worship"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the ultimate issue of worship in the universe, asserting that it is the central theme of spiritual history and the reason for creation. He explains that true worship is not merely a ritual but a profound spiritual engagement that acknowledges God as the sole object of worship, free from any rival. The sermon highlights the cosmic conflict between God and the forces that challenge His supremacy, illustrating that the essence of worship is tied to the recognition of God's authority and the Lamb's redemptive work. Sparks encourages believers to understand their role in this spiritual battle and the importance of the Holy Spirit in enabling true worship. Ultimately, he concludes that God desires to be all in all, and worship is the means through which this divine purpose is fulfilled.

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## Transcript

Reading: Matt. 4:8-10; 1 Cor. 15:28; Revelation 21:22; 22:3.

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

"... That God may be all in all."

"... The Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof."

These closing words of the New Testament in the book of the Revelation, from which we have read the small fragment, contain those factors which sum up the spiritual history of this universe. It is helpful and instructive to go right to the end of things as we have them in the Word of God, and just to note what the end is, to see what is the last word in it all. There is a sense in which Rev. 21:22 is a final utterance. There will be other things said before the book closes, but up to this everything, the history of this universe, has been heading right through the ages. And how does it terminate, what is the end of it all? As I have said, in a sense, it is this - "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." This contains the great factors in summing up spiritual history. First, the Lord God the Almighty; second, the Lamb; and in connection with that the third thing is said - "no more curse" (Rev. 22:3). (1) and (2), the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb, are, as you note, linked into the Temple, they are the

Temple. (2) and (3), the Lamb and the curse, are connected in that they signify the challenge to the Lord God the Almighty, and its answer. The curse suggests the entering in of something which was a challenge to God's place of unreserved Lordship; the Lamb is the answer to that challenge. So we have these three factors here which lie back of this long and terrible history.

By the way, there is a finality here in the matter of interpretation. It is that the spiritual is the right and the essential interpretation, not the temporal or the sentient. So far as the Temple is concerned, ultimately it turns out to be God and the Lamb. You have reached finality in the whole history of temples and lambs, sacrifices, priesthood and every such thing. When all is said, and all is done, and all that could be seen through history is passed, it all turns out to be a spiritual matter. This temple matter, what is it all about? This lamb matter, what is it all about? It is God the Almighty and the Lamb. With what has it got to do? - a curse, a challenge, a false thing entering into God's universe which has to be eliminated in order that actually, not only positionally, but actually, God may be all in all.

### Worship - The Ultimate Issue

What we have to see is, firstly, the ultimate issue in this universe; secondly, the relatedness of all else to it; and thirdly, the way of its attainment.

Firstly, then, the ultimate issue in this universe. It is summed up in one word, a very comprehensive word including many things, an all-embracing word. It is the word "worship." That is the ultimate issue in this universe to which all else is related, and which governs all that has been revealed in the Word of God as God's way of reaching His end. As we approach this matter of worship, standing back from the detail and from all the form, the means used temporally to set it forth, we recognize that it is set in a realm far bigger than this earth. It embraces other realms, its setting is super-earthly. You have no need that I remind you of Scriptures in that connection, but perhaps it is as well for us to keep the Scriptures well in view. You will call to mind those extraordinary passages such as in Ezekiel 28.

"Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyre, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Because thy heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art man, and not God, though thou didst set thy heart as the heart of God; behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is hidden from thee; by thy wisdom and by thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures; by thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thy heart is lifted up because of thy riches.... Moreover the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre" (note the change - not the PRINCE of Tyre now) "and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou wast in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, the topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold; the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was in thee; in the day that thou wast created they were prepared. Thou wast the anointed cherub that covereth: and I set thee, so that thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till unrighteousness was found in thee. By the abundance of thy traffic they filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore have I cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God; and I have destroyed thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I have cast thee to the ground; I have laid thee before kings, that they may behold thee.... All they that know thee among the peoples shall be astonished at thee: thou art

become a terror, and thou shalt nevermore have any being."

That is one; you are familiar with another in Isaiah 14.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O daystar, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, that didst lay low the nations! And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to Sheol, to the uttermost parts of the pit. They that see thee shall gaze at thee, they shall consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and overthrew the cities thereof; that let not loose his prisoners to their home? All the kings of the nations, all of them, sleep in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast forth away from thy sepulchre like an abominable branch, clothed with the slain, that are thrust through with the sword..."

If we wanted more, we could go to the book of Daniel, to which we may refer again. You remember those extraordinary statements about Daniel praying for three weeks, and that from the first day that he set his heart, archangels were set in motion to fulfill his prayer, and they were withstood by world rulers of this darkness, principalities in the heavens. Or we might just put in the whole book of Job - which is not fiction. It is all of a piece with this great drama in the realm of things spiritual. Again, we should come to our Lord, and find that immediately He moved into the realm of spiritual things, full of the Holy Ghost, which constituted Him one to fulfill essentially spiritual purposes - that is the object of the gift of the Holy Spirit, to constitute for spiritual work - endued with the Holy Ghost, immediately He met the prince of spiritual realms. But the point for the moment is this. In Matthew's record, that spiritual foe, the Devil, started through His body, where he started with the first Adam. Failing there, he moved to his soul, and was defeated there; but fully and finally the object comes to light as he tried to get in through His spirit, and the one word connected with spirit is worship, always. "... If thou wilt fall down and worship me." He has got right to the citadel of man - worship in the spirit. So he assailed finally His spirit, showing that that was, after all, the object of the whole campaign; worship in the spirit, or by the spirit. We might do well to stay and think quietly about that. It is not part of our subject for the moment, but just keep it pigeon-holed. How the Devil tries to get at the ultimate thing through other channels, through the body, through the soul, to capture the spirit with a view to installing himself as God, to be worshiped!

Or we might again pass on to Paul, and listen to those familiar words about principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies; all this, with all that the book of the Revelation holds on the matter, indicates the setting of this issue, this ultimate, consummate issue. It is in the realm of things spiritual. It is in a far bigger realm than the mere earthly. It embraces a vast range, goes right out to the heavens; that is where it is set - worship in the universe, and it is essentially spiritual. "God is spirit; and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). "Such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers." "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." This is what it is all heading up to, "that God may be all in all." That statement in 1 Cor. 15 is a very enlightening statement. It speaks about the Son having all things put in subjection under Him, and it says, that when all things are put in subjection under Him, it must exclude the One Who puts them in subjection under Him. They must be put by somebody, and therefore that somebody must be excluded, remain outside, alone. So the complete statement is - "When all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all."

And the significance is this; you have there, in that small fragment, the whole conception and idea and meaning of sonship. Here I am not going back again over those words "child" and "son"; you know the difference by now. The word "son" in the Scriptures is a full thought, a much bigger thought than "child"; it is a child fullgrown. Recognizing that, what is the object of sonship? Here it is. It says quite plainly that the whole object of sonship is to secure God's universal rights unto Him in man. Sonship has fulfilled its purpose when God is all in all. In sonship all God's universal rights are secured to Him in man, and that not only positionally but actually. Positionally, God is all in all, but actually He is not yet that in you and me, in the creation. The Spirit of sonship is seeking to bring that about; we are called unto the adoption of sons with a view to God's securing all His universal rights in worship. We are in a tremendous business when we become possessors of the Holy Spirit. Linked up with receiving the Holy Spirit is the ultimate purpose of this universe, and we, of course, come into that immense conflict which has raged since that undated time when God's place of supreme and undivided worship was challenged by this one of whom we read. At that time, conflict entered into God's universe and it came down on to this earth. At that moment, the question arose - Who is going to be worshiped? Who is going to be the ALONE OBJECT of worship, to whom alone is everything to come?

### The Cosmic Conflict

That is a far more acute question than it sounds to be. Of course we worship God! Ah, but do we? That is pressed right down to the innermost secrets of our being. That will have to be looked at more closely when we come to see how everything is related to this issue. It is the issue of the book of Job, to which we have referred. The one question standing out in that book, over all that is taking place, is this, Who is going to be worshiped? Is there any way or means at all open to Satan, by which he can turn a man away from God? Then he will exploit it. So all Job's domestic affairs come into the realm of a great cosmic conflict; all his physical, bodily affairs move right out of the mere significance of a man on this earth; all his relationships and friendships become involved in this terrific battle. Oh, the darts and arrows, satanic assaults striking upon his soul; doubts, questions, fears, all about this one thing - Is God going to come out supreme in this man's spirit or is the Devil? Who is going to be the alone object of worship? "In all this Job sinned not" (Job 1:22) is the verdict. You read many things; you say, Surely that is wrong, he ought not to have said that! Listen to God - "In all this Job sinned not." These pious friends said many things, lovely things, so true philosophically - "Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" (Job 42:7) was God's verdict. It is not what we say under stress, it is not the doubts and the fears that rack our souls at times of terrific pressure: it is down in our spirit - do we hold on to God, do we believe God, can we curse God? "There shall be no more curse." "The Lord God is the temple." Worship and the curse cannot go together. When you come to the final issue, the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple, there is no more curse. Perhaps you do not follow that, it sounds a remote thought, but it is principalities we are dealing with and this is the thing we are in. I am only dealing with the background of things in this meditation. We come very near in practical life later on.

You can embrace everything and gather it up into this one question; it is the one thing that runs right through the spiritual history of this universe; it is the one thing which lies behind all that is taking place on this earth. There is only one thing. There is nothing here of two realms that you might call secular and spiritual, no two realms in this universe, it is spiritual altogether. If you have not recognized, even in the blatant history of the past six years, that spiritual factors have been predominant, you have missed the whole thing. It has been a most remarkable display of spiritual principalities during these years. God is going to uncover the meaning of this world's history and in the end it will be more patent than ever that it

was spiritual. It is a spiritual thing that is happening. You cannot touch anything in this universe and get outside of spiritual issues. There is a spiritual issue bound up with anything and everything. You cannot put these things in water-tight compartments. The simple issue is this - worship. Do not just have narrow ideas of worship. Worship is not merely singing hymns, bowing heads, saying prayers, coming together in "public worship." Get behind all that. It is the question which arises with us continually, all the way through our lives, in every connection. What place has God in this, where does God come in? How does Satan stand to get an advantage here? It only needs two Christians divided against one another to raise this whole issue. How much is Satan getting out of this? A lot! Then it is my worship to see that this thing ends; ending this is worship to God and giving God His place. It touches everything. What I feel so much in my heart needs to come home to you and to me is the tremendous significance of our lives, as being in this universe. They are not little things, they are not unrelated things. They are bound up with the one thing for which the universe exists and which is governing the whole course of the spiritual history of this universe. Who is going to be worshiped alone, without reserve, without dividedness, without question, without rival and without grudging? - whole-hearted, unquestioning worship! It is an attitude of heart, it is a position of life, and all that is in the Bible is simply gathered into this.

Oh, this question of worship is such a battle, is such a conflict, and anything that has to do with things being brought God-ward, and more God-ward, is going to be withstood and fought up to the hilt. The whole course of this opposing activity is to draw away from God; and God plants something right down in the midst, the course of "away-ness" from God is challenged, and upon that this storm breaks. That is saying, No, not away from God, but unto God. "Now unto him." That is what we are in this universe for as God's people, and it is standing against something, very often against something in ourselves as well as outside. If the Lord's people only recognized this more fully, were more alive to it, how much greater would be the meaning in things. Take our hymn singing. Why do we sing hymns? Just to open the service? "Let us open our meeting by singing," "let us begin our service by singing" - a part of the program? Would it not be better to say, "Now, let us challenge the Devil and put God in His place by singing"? If it were like that we would not sing many things that we do sing, and we would sing some things with very much more meaning. Our spirit would come in it, we should worship in spirit. So it would be in every other part; especially in that central act of the Church's life, the Table of the Lord. It is worship! What meaning would come into it! What value there would be in it if it were taken out of the realm of "Holy Communion" as an ordinance, a part of the Church's calendar! This Table stands in the midst of this universe in relation to the ultimate thing. In the light of what we are doing today, we are standing across the whole course of drawing away from God on the part of the evil powers and saying, No! - the other way, unto Him!

It is not only in the Church's life, in meetings, and so on. It is our life individually in every sphere. That is why we are there. I do not want to go further now with that side because it will have to be looked at more closely a little later. All that occupies us at this time is the setting of this ultimate issue. I come back here to the passage which governs all, which from the end throws its meaning and value right back over all that has been - "And I saw no temple therein." To be without a temple is a terrible omission! No, not at all, "for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." Everything at last is gathered up in the Lord by way of the Cross, through the Lamb, Who has dealt with the curse coming in through the challenge of the enemy. There is no more curse, because the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple. I think it is very beautiful to come to the end like that. The Lord God the Almighty is the temple; worship is centered in Him, not in things. He is the sum of worship, it is all in Him, and that has been brought about because of the Blood of the Lamb, the mighty work of the Cross.

Shall we leave it there for the present? It is not in the amount that is said in words, it is in the thing that is said that we shall find the real value. Recognize this, then, as one thing that governs everything else. It simplifies the Bible. Go back to your Bible, and you find one thing, after all, one thing embracing, covering everything that you can think of, one issue - Who is going to have the "worth-ship" without question, without reserve? And the answering of that question involves us in the conflict. You know, or you ought to know by now, that if you are the Lord's, and you have any spiritual perception as to why you are the Lord's, and why you are here on the earth as the Lord's, you ought to know quite well that you are a marked man or a marked woman. Before you have said anything about it, you are marked. The more utter you are going to be for the Lord, the more you are marked, without asking for it or saying anything about it. Satan has real spiritual discernment. He is able, without weighing up the pros and cons, to jump to very right conclusions very quickly as to the significance of an individual. He can foresee what you are going to count for in this one issue. Therefore you are marked out as an object to be by any possible means subverted, turned away, destroyed, got out of the way, nullified. If you are going to contribute to God's being worshiped in the sense of which I have been speaking, you are involved; and remember that you never do count for the Lord in this matter, nor against the enemy, until you have received the Holy Spirit. The Devil does not mind how many people go to "public worship." It is of no account to him, in the ultimate sense, how many go to "public worship." You begin to count spiritually in this matter of really drawing toward God only when you receive the Holy Spirit. Therein is your salvation. We have the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of worship, Who is the power of accomplishing His end. Oh, thank God, He has determined to have the unquestioned place at last, and He has sent His Son to secure it. It will be by His Spirit that we are fulfilling this holy vocation. The power of the Holy Ghost is our salvation. The shield will be anointed and the battle will be in the power of the Holy Spirit. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). So we need not be frightened, scared at the outlook and prospect. What has been said is in order that we may really see we are in something immense. Sooner or later every Christian, every young Christian, will find that he or she is in something more than just having signed a decision card to become Christ's. They will find they are in something for which they need resources beyond their own to get through. It is a great thing to understand the nature of what we are in, to have some light on this matter.

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