

The Shining of the Light

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the Church's divine calling to be a vessel of light, glory, wealth, and government as revealed through Paul's ministry.

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-19, Romans 11:33, Ephesians 1:18-20, Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 2:6, Ephesians 3:8, Ephesians 3:21

Topics: "Resurrection Power", "Light of the Church"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the light and glory that has come through the Apostle Paul's ministry, particularly in his final letters, which reveal the Church's calling as a vessel of resurrection, light, wealth, and government. He highlights that the Church is meant to embody the resurrection power of Christ and to be a source of light for all nations, enriching others spiritually. Sparks encourages believers to recognize their role in sharing this light universally, warning against exclusivity and urging openness to all who seek the truth. He reassures that God's intention for the Church is to be filled with glory and power, as it stands as a beacon of hope and wealth in a world often shrouded in darkness.

Transcript

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 60:1).

We have said a good deal about the ground and nature of this light. We now go on to ask, and briefly to answer, the question: What is this light which is come, and the glory which is risen? And I have no hesitation in saying that, inclusively, it is that which has come peculiarly and particularly through the instrumentality of the Apostle Paul. I know, of course, that much light has come through others; but the full light, concerning the Church and for the Church, the spiritual Israel, has come through Paul, and it is mainly stored up in the full and concentrated ministry of his last letters. The final letters of Paul, that is, his Church letters, are undoubtedly the light which has come, and the glory which has risen.

Light And Glory

Those two words - light and glory - are characteristic of those final letters. Not only are the words themselves there, but the truth is there. What light! You find no such light anywhere else in the Bible. Indeed, you are amazed at what this man came to see. Light shining right back into eternity past, light shining right on into eternity to be, light shining right down on to this dispensation. And as for the glory, again, it is a characteristic word - but it is also a characteristic feature, is it not? "Unto Him be the glory in

the church and in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:21). What glory has arisen through that ministry! But let me safeguard this by saying: this is not all the light that has come, nor all the glory; but in its fulness, its meridian, it has come through this channel.

The Church The Vessel Of Resurrection

First of all, it is light and glory concerning the Church's calling to be the resurrection vessel of the Lord. That is an early statement of the Ephesian letter. You will remember that Paul is here dealing with the Church. In other letters he deals with the individual, and refers to the individual's union with Christ in death and resurrection. That is the peculiar message to the Corinthians, for instance, where he says much concerning personal conduct and personal character. But when you come here to these last great letters, especially Ephesians and Colossians, the idea of Paul is all the time collective; and when he refers to our being quickened together and raised together, he is thinking of the Church - the quickened and raised Church. As such it is the vessel of the resurrection - the vessel of the resurrection power of Christ.

Now, of course, there can be no Church without individuals, and therefore these things have their personal application. The Apostle says that this light which has come, which has risen upon us, this glory which has appeared concerning the Church is in order that we might "know... the exceeding greatness of His power... according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead" (Eph. 1:18-20). That is for the Church, which includes all individuals. But the Church itself is a resurrection vessel, to be the embodiment of the exceeding greatness of His power. No one of us individually, nor any number of us just as detached and unrelated individuals, can know the exceeding greatness of His power, any more than we can know any other aspect of His fulness. It is thus easier to realize how the Church - the great company of the elect, in its pilgrimage and its warfare, right through all the ages, with all that it has had to encounter, and all that is still set against it - requires the exceeding greatness of His power to lift it up and out and clear, as an emancipated, established, heavenly people.

Is it not a very wonderful thing to realize that, wherever you and I may be as a part of that whole, we are by this illumination told that we are of the vessel of the resurrection - that is, of the exceeding greatness of His power? I do not know how much that comforts you, but if you had seen, as I have seen the terrible, heartbreaking state of Christians in certain parts of the world - the spiritual limitation and weakness, and all that is set to deep them so, and how little there is that can make it otherwise - you would have come, as I have come, very near to the point of despair over this matter.

May I say here that these meditations are coming directly out of my experience. This is no worked-up subject. I say again: if you really knew the state of Christians and of the Church in this world - the desperate situation, the need, the limitation and the lack of that which would bring them into greater fulness - you might well despair. You might even raise the major questions: Does God really mean to have His Church in fulness: Are we not attempting something impossible? Have we not committed ourselves to something that cannot be? Is it not going to break us, shatter us? Is it, after all, a fact that this is what God wants?

The answer is: The light has been given - it "has come" - this IS what God wants! And, blessed be God, because He wants it, the power is there for it, and it is the power of resurrection. Perhaps we want too much all at once, perhaps we are impatient; but God is going to have it. The vision has been given of a Church at the end filled with glory. The light has come that that is how it is going to be - spiritual fulness at last. God is not going to be defeated, and the Church is the very vessel or sphere of the power of the

resurrection.

You and I well know that, in so far as we apprehend this truth by faith that we are a part of that, that we are on that ground and we stand there, we shall come into the good of this power of resurrection, and it will operate in us wherever we are. It is the light that has been given, the calling of the Church to be the vessel of resurrection life and power. Therefore: "Arise, shine; ...thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

Now you may recall that that was what we said about this light in our last message: that here, in Isaiah 60, we have the other side of the captivity - the other side, so to speak, of the grave of Israel, when their grave of exile has been opened and they have been called out on resurrection ground. The word is: "Thy light has come". So you see, this light is bound up with resurrection, and so Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with that. "You did He quicken... God raised us up with Him" (Eph. 2:1, 6); and "to us-ward" is the "exceeding greatness of His power", as in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The Church The Vessel Of Light

The second thing in this Isaiah message, which find its spiritual fulfilment in the ministry of Paul, is that the Church is called to be the vessel of light, the light for all, unto the nations. We have already seen what that light meant, how it worked out, how effective it is shown to be in this chapter: what tremendous impact it registered to the ends of the earth, and how the nations are pictured as flowing toward that light.

Now, it is perfectly clear from this ministry of Paul that that is the vocation of the Church - to be the vessel and the vehicle of this light, the light which all need. Paul's great prayer for the saints is for light - 'the eyes of their heart being enlightened, that they might know...' And then there follows the gradual unfolding of that light. What a wonderful fulness it is! How many beams there are to that light in his prayer! What there is to be known by the Spirit of revelation opening the eyes of the heart! The Church - and that means you and me - is definitely called to be the vessel of light. The Lord's intention is that, if people are wanting to see and wanting to know, He shall be able to transmit such knowledge through us. It will be found amongst the Lord's people.

That, as we know, is not generally true. But this is the calling of the Church: that wherever people are really seeking to know the truth, know the Lord, to come into the light, the Lord should have a vessel where that light can be found. It is a challenge, as well as a statement of fact. It is something that we must quite definitely lay hold of by faith. You see, it is God's intention: therefore it must be possible: therefore the Lord provides for what He wants. It is not necessary for any child of God, who is standing by faith in the good of the heavenly calling and vocation, not to be a vehicle of light to others. Indeed, it is a failure in our calling if we are not such - if others are not seeing the light through us. I am not now thinking in terms of our moving about with our Bibles, trying to give people light, but of our being the light. The Church is to be the light which is given, and we are to be all "light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8).

Now, the enemy's great work is to try to bring in darkness and shadows, by means of anything that he can do to eclipse the light that the Church is called to be. He has succeeded to a very large degree in doing that, and he is always at it. We know that as soon as there comes anything of difference, disagreement, division, lack of love, there is a shadow, there is darkness. But how blessed it is to realize that, given the conditions required, there can be light which radiates, as in this chapter, to the ends of the earth, and people will flow to it. The flowing is because there is something to which to flow, something that answers a need. May the Lord put us in the position where need is all the time being met, right out to the uttermost

bounds.

The Church The Vessel Of Wealth

The next thing in this chapter, as we pointed out, is wealth. How much is said here about wealth! There is so much wealth that the whole world seems to be enriched by it everywhere. This is no mere fanciful imagination. This is something that the Lord has really provided for, because He has called to it - to have a people here on this earth who, wherever they are, are the channels of the enrichment of others in all directions, a people through whom there shall go out spiritual riches.

Now you see how true that is in Paul's ministry. What riches have been disclosed to us through him! Here is a man who was himself overwhelmed with the wealth into which he had been brought. He would cry - "O the depth of the riches...!" (Rom. 11:33). He would speak of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8); and he has given us the light concerning a great deal of that wealth. Look again into his ministry with that thought in mind. What wealth there is! Ought we to be poor, ought we to be in a state of spiritual penury? Ought we to be living so that it is difficult to make ends meet? Ought that to be the state of the Church - as, sadly enough, is largely the case? Ought it to be so, in the light of all this wealth?

Look again at the unsearchable, inexhaustible wealth that has come to light through this man alone. If you are familiar with these vessels of light that are his letters, you will realize that you have been taken out of your depth. There is a phrase in this sixtieth chapter of Isaiah: "the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee" (vs. 5). It is a phrase which intimates, as perhaps nothing else might intimate, how vast are the resources that God has uncovered. A year or two ago we read in the papers about the return of the fishing fleet on the East coast of our own country. So great, so immense, was the haul that a whole fleet of fishing boats had to wait for hours because there were no berths for them. The harbour staff just could not cope with them, and the fear was that the great hauls of fish would have to be thrown back into the sea. But that is only one little spot on this earth, after all, a mere microcosm of the whole. We cannot faintly imagine the content of the sea.

What, then, shall we say of the abundance of the spiritual sea? What inexpressible wealth! I have been trying to cope with it for upward of forty years, and I am conscious yet that I am well-nigh drowned in this sea. Every time you come to it in the Spirit, you realize that its ranges are beyond you. Can you cope with the wonderful light as to the counsels of God before this world was? Can you cope with all that is said about what is going to be in the ages of the ages? It is beyond us altogether. But out of that fulness you and I are called to be enriched for the sake of others. The Church is called into this wealth. How wealthy we should be! If you do not understand this, ask the Lord to open your eyes to your inheritance in Christ. The Church is called to be the vessel of resurrection, the vessel of light which has come, the vessel of the wealth that has been disclosed.

The Church The Vessel Of Government

We find the matter of government clearly touched on both in Isaiah 60 and in these letters of Paul. Here is the picture from Isaiah: "Kings (shall come) to the brightness of thy rising" (vs. 3). In a word - You shall have power, authority, government. Here are the rulers, the people who are themselves supposed to be in the place of government, and they are all bowing at your feet, they are all going down before you. Surely that is superior authority. Is there anything about that in Paul's letters? Indeed there is. "...Made Him to sit at His right hand... far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:20-21). Yes, even over principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness and

spiritual hosts of wickedness. And the Church is called to that position. "...Raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus" (2:6). We have much to learn yet about that place and power of governing, ruling, of spiritual ascendancy; but we are saying that what the light has shown to us is that that is the Church's place according to God's mind. That is our place--the place of spiritual government, ascendancy, power, in Christ.

If only we knew more about it in practice! But may we be moved to realize that this is not something to which we are to climb by struggling. We have been brought there by Christ. He has seated us together with Him in the heavenlies. He has raised us, set us far above all. That is our place by right. I think one thing that you and I need to learn - although we have to be very careful about this, for some people have got themselves into trouble on this matter, developing a special phraseology and so on - nevertheless, we have to learn how, in our prayer times together, whether we be two or three or larger companies, how really to stand in our place of authority and government. We are all the time beseeching and imploring and entreating, and striving and struggling and reaching out to get somewhere, and we rarely take the position that is ours in Christ to govern situations and spiritual forces. And yet we are called to that - to rulership in a spiritual way. That does not call for loud voices and strident language. It is a spiritual position, but it is a definite, positive exercise, to be made by us together as the Church: the exercise of authority over other authorities that are at work in this universe.

The Light For All

You notice the universality of what is spoken of in this sixtieth chapter of Isaiah - how far-reaching it all is. "Thy sons shall come from far" (vs. 4), "The wealth of the nations" (vs. 5), and so on. It is very comprehensive and extensive. This ministry is universal; the value of this light is so far-reaching. And when you turn to Paul's ministry, you find the same thing. This is not just something for a little few in some odd corners of the earth. This is something for all. May God deliver us from exclusiveness - from tying up anything that He has given us to ourselves, and to just little companies here and there. God make us know that He has planted us right in the midst of the nations, and that He has given enough for all His people. We need constantly to watch this matter, lest we should preserve things to certain people who like this sort of thing. This light has been given for all, and we must watch carefully against anything and everything that prevents us seeing that it is available for all. The Church's light is universal: it is for everyone and everywhere.

And there is enough of it. We are not going to lose anything - certainly we are not going to run out of resources - if we enlarge ourselves to all the Lord's people. The real way of our own enlargement is the enlargement of our hearts to the Lord's people. Be careful, then, and watchful against all that which is ever the propensity of people who get light - to reserve it for certain narrow circles. Remember that it is not only for people who have seen it and responded to it. But many of the Lord's people are in danger of interpreting things in this way. The effect of that is pernicious. It is destructive to the very thing which the Church exists. The light is for all, as the love is for all. We must keep the open heart and the open mind. It is amazing how many hungry and longing people there are just shut up where there is no light. We have got to be always watchful that the light is available for them all.

This is a very necessary warning note. The Lord does not make His sun to shine upon the good only: the light of the sun does good to very bad people, very evil people as well. The Lord does not say, 'Only the good people are going to have the light, have the sun'. No, it is available for all. If the light has come, and the glory has arisen, then it is like the sun - for everyone. We get surprises, do we not? I am ashamed to

say that I have had some startling surprises. One has met, say, some dear person with make-believe as thick as paint, and everything that would set you back, make you keep away: and yet upon making contact, beginning to speak, one has found a heart that is hungry and ready. That is not exaggeration, that is not fiction - that is true. Hungry hearts and ready hearts are hidden away behind things that would repel. We must keep the light available for all, and never be put off.

I have spoken of physical things, but there are other things that must not put us off - ecclesiastical things, religious things, denominational things - anything you like. Do not be put off; do not allow your light to be withheld from anybody because of these complexes toward what perhaps you think is not the Lord's full thought. Keep open to all. You will be in the way of surprises, and you will find that there will be wonderful responses to the light, from very unexpected quarters, if only you make it available.

It is a large thing, this light. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord will be unto thee an everlasting light" (Isa. 60:19). That is something very much bigger than natural luminaries. How great is the Lord! If our sun is great to the illumination and the warming of the whole earth, how much more so the Lord! Do not keep His light to yourself, do not tie it up in compartments. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

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