

The Significance of Christ in His Cross

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound significance of Christ and His Cross in restoring order and unity to creation and individual lives.

Scripture: John 8:44, John 17:23, Romans 8:20, Romans 8:22, Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:20, Colossians 2:15

Topics: "The Cross", "Redemption Through Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches about the significance of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in relation to the entire created universe. He emphasizes that Jesus is the key to everything, and only through Him can creation find purpose and fulfillment. The disruption of the divine order by Satan and its impact on the cosmic, human, marriage, and church realms is explored, highlighting the need for redemption and restoration through the Cross of Christ to bring harmony and unity. The sermon underscores that victory over evil forces and division can only be achieved by embracing the power of the Cross and allowing Christ to be the center of all aspects of life.

Transcript

We have been giving ourselves to a seeking to see and to grasp something of the significance of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in relation to the whole created universe. We are really gathered around one thing: that He is the key to everything and that only as He comes into His place will the creation find the explanation and answer to its existence. That has taken us out along several lines. We have seen that there was a primeval order in the creation, of which He was the centre and the sphere, as the Son eternally appointed the 'heir of all things'. There was an order expressive of God, who is the God of order. We have seen that all progress, all fruitfulness, all satisfaction, all fullness, is a matter of Jesus Christ; and that, so far as we are concerned, Christians or mankind, it is a matter of knowing Him.

We have dwelt much upon this matter of order as essential to life, to progress and to the realization of God's end. Order is a key to everything.

We went on to see something of the disruption of that order, the interference with it and the breaking in upon it. The result: disorder, and all its baneful consequences -- pain in the creation, spiritual pain as well as physical pain. The Apostle has put it like this: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain" (Romans 8:22), because things are out of order. We traced the course of that disruption and dislocation, which began, apparently, somewhere outside of this present world -- in heaven, where there was an uprising of a leader with a great following of angels, apparently in revolt against God's destined place and

purpose for His Son as 'the heir of all things'. It was a bid for that position of equality with God, a bid to displace God's appointed One. That brought disruption in that realm, and the leader and his followers were cast out -- "angels, which kept not their first estate" (Jude 6). We saw the leader of them, no doubt with his following, invading this earth and breaking in, so that the beautiful order of the creation was upset. In the first place, the order in the man; the balance, the symmetry, the beautiful harmony in the man's own life and constitution were upset and disorganized. Then immediately to the corporate -- in the man and his wife, so that you can, in almost the first mention, detect something that has come into their fellowship. The one blamed the other for what had been done, and that momentous ordinance of God with so much bound up with it in His purpose -- the two as one -- is severed. And then of course, the family. The family has this schism in it, working out to one brother murdering the other. Jesus went right back to that and said of Satan: "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). From the family to the race, and that book which records all this brings us to the whole race in confusion in every way. The order, universally, in the upper realms of this earth, in the lower heavens, the earth and its environs, what we mean by the cosmos is shot through and through with this disruption, this schism, this strain, this conflict, and is just shattered to pieces. Spiritual progress in the purpose of God is arrested and all the beauty of the Lord is marred. Well, that is where we were in our earlier chapter.

Now we come to the significance of Christ in His Cross in relation to that. The Cross of the Lord Jesus stands right at the very centre and heart of that whole cosmic disruption. The Cross is the heart of redemption, but redemption relates to the whole range of Satanic interference with the order of God. The Cross, and redemption, and salvation are far, far greater things than dealing with men's sins. They deal with sinfulness, which is much, much more than sins, and sinfulness is traced right to that one who made this assault upon God's appointment, God's economy and God's order. The Cross of the Lord Jesus stands related to that whole realm and range of disruption and disorder from centre to circumference. The Cross is not a small thing; it is an immense thing, and it reaches as far as this thing that has happened in the universe reaches. And we must look upon the Cross and upon redemption in the light of this once existing Divine order, then its upset and disruption, and then its recovery and eternal establishment beyond any more fear of the thing happening again. So far the Cross reaches, and so far Christ crucified has His significance.

The Realms of Disruption

(i) The Cosmic Realm

The redemptive work of the Lord Jesus in the Cross follows the whole path of this mischief. It follows that very course, and it is important that you and I should recognize the order and sequence of this thing. The very first realm in which the Cross has its application is the realm of the spiritual hierarchy of evil. It begins there. On the day of our Lord's crucifixion, or death, the very heavens were affected: "Darkness was over the face of the earth"; "there was a great earthquake"; "the veil of the temple was rent, from top to bottom". Heaven is involved and is breaking in, and there is a tremendous thing happening in that realm. When we read the Gospel account, of course, we only have the events and the associated happenings, but there was a man who was given an insight into something more. This was not in the Gospels and could not at that time be revealed. He tells us that in the Cross 'He stripped off principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it' (Colossians 2:15). That is where redemption begins. The very heavens (by that, I take it, the lower heavens, not God's Presence) were defiled by this revolt, and they were purged by the Cross. The disrupting forces of the order of God were met in the spiritual world by God's Son on the Cross. It is far too deep and full a matter for us to dwell upon at length, but there is a

very real practical value in this, for, after all, we are not dealing in the first place with circumstances, nor conditions, nor with effects and results. We are dealing with causes. When there is a breaking in, in any realm, of those disruptive, schismatic, disordering forces, in an individual life, or in a community, or anywhere, the usual way is to find a scapegoat, to blame somebody, to begin to look at one another, to put it down to this, and that, and something else, and in so doing we are missing the point and missing the way, and we will never clear it up like that. We will only make it worse. We have got to get behind it, for there is something behind it all -- ah, there is someone behind it all.

I do not know what you feel about it, but with all the desire that we may have -- and it is a very real one -- not to become demoniacal-minded, you are just more and more forced to realize that there is a whole system of iniquity and animosity to the things of God at work in this universe, and it seems that these forces are more and more at work. They come very near and are like a blanket upon you, especially when there is something of the Lord on hand. It just recurs like the seasons when the Lord has something more in view. It just happens. It is not coincidence, nor chance, nor imagination, for the thing is far too desperately real: it is calculated to put you right out of the fight, and strategically so, at a very, very important moment. Well, we could say much about it, but this is in a realm that is over things, that encompasses 'things', circumstances, happenings, feelings, and all that. They are secondary. It is what is around as the source of them that it is important to recognize.

Now, the Lord Jesus, in His Cross, has something to say to that realm, and you and I will never know victory over things until we know the value of the Cross and the Blood of Jesus in that ground and realm. The victory has got to be won in that realm, or applied in that realm, before 'things' will give place. Oh, take that to heart! Remember that! For we are just being 'played with' by these evil forces, and being made to do just as they want us to do, because we have either lost, or never have had, this key to the situation: that Calvary touches the cosmic realm of evil. That is where the path of redemption begins, as that is where the trouble began.

(ii) The Realm of Man

The next thing on the way, as you noted, is man. This whole thing, great and far-reaching in its range, and terrible in its nature, is focused down upon man. He is the next point of assault, to disrupt him, divide him, and make him, in himself, incapable of functioning simply because he is divided. You know that it is true, if you are divided in yourself, or amongst yourselves, you cannot do anything. You are just paralysed and cannot get anywhere. That is a fact, and the devil knows it, if you do not! And so he comes in from the outside and brings this disruption down to man himself, and man becomes a paralysed creature simply because he himself is in division. His nature is divided. The order, the beautiful order, balance and symmetry of his own personality is upset. Man was created in an order. I am not staying with the order of spirit, soul and body, but there is an order, and if that order obtains in Christ, you have a man in peace, in rest, in strength, and a man who is accounted for something. Upset that man in himself, in his own constitution, and throw him all out of gear and out of order, and where does he get? Well, that is what the Bible means by vanity. "The creation", says Paul, "was subjected to vanity" (Romans 8:20). That is, 'You shall not get through!' It is imposed and you cannot get anywhere.

Redemption by the Cross of the Lord Jesus is intended, dear friends, to come to us individually to recover and restore a harmony in ourselves. It may be a long process, but we do know that a beginning is made when new birth takes place; when we come to the Cross of the Lord Jesus as to our condition, our need as to ourselves, and that Cross becomes effective just at the beginning of the Christian life. The testimony

of all that have come that way is that there is a wonderful sense of peace that comes into the heart. Peace is only another word for harmony, you know. It is not just that everything has quietened down. Oh, no! It is that now you have got into true line with the purpose for which you were made. You are on the path now. You have been all over the place, but now your feet are on the way and something of the peace of the end comes into the beginning. You are going to have many conflicts presently, but the beginning is like that. Even with a little child it is wonderful. A child does not understand all your theology and doctrine of atonement and justification, but a little child can know what it means to receive Jesus into the heart. And when that is done with a little child you at once see something. Something has happened, and it is not imagination. It is the beginning of a life re-adjusted, re-harmonized. The conflict has gone out, so far as the person is concerned. It is like that in new birth. It is the beginning of the new creation which, in its completion, will be a beautiful reproduction of a lost harmonious order.

The Christian life, from that beginning, from that starting point, is just the school in which we learn the way of harmony, the way of life. What is it? It is everything centred in, and governed by, the Lord Jesus. You see, we have these statements here. We are so familiar with them that they have almost lost their real meaning to us. "In him all things hold together." He is the integrating centre of this universe. He brings the broken parts together, and forms again. He takes hold of the chords, which are all out of tune and tunes them again into a harmony. 'In Him all things consist.' When Jesus has His place, things begin to be like that. There is a re-conciliating. And, I say, the Christian life is the school of learning to let Jesus have His place, and when He has His place you know, as well as I do that, so far as our inner life is concerned, things are far more restful, more sure, and certainly more fruitful. It is just that, but that is a tremendous thing, because we say: 'Jesus has His place!' It sounds so elementary, but you see how comprehensive it is. He is the centre of a harmonized universe, and when He has His place, He begins to harmonize the inner life. And the more place He has, the more unified we are, and the more at peace we are. We know quite well how true it is in the opposite: that when He is not getting His place in everything, everything is under a strain.

For the individual, and His significance there as the unifying of the heart -- one heart, not a divided heart -- it is a deep work, a great work, and perhaps it is a long work, but that is the business of life: the unifying of everything in Christ. That is, Christ becoming the single Factor who makes of everything a single factor: 'For to me to live is Christ,' a single factor unifying the whole life. Satan is not going to leave that alone. He is going, by every possible means, to assail it, to interfere with it if he can. But, you see, he cannot, for he just cannot destroy Christ. He has been destroyed by Christ! And the work of the Cross of our Lord Jesus is the ground upon which we stand, and must stand, against all that interfering work of the evil forces to bring us again into inward confusion and uncertainty. Satan is trying it all the time. Stand your ground on the Cross! Stand your ground under the Blood when he tries to rob you of that quiet assurance that all is well, because of what the Lord Jesus has done in His Cross.

(iii) The Marriage Realm

You move from the personal into the corporate life. This is the pathway of the evil forces, and this is the pathway of the Cross. Yes, into this most sacred relationship which was the true ordinance of God at the beginning -- husband and wife. Is it necessary for me to say to young people who are contemplating that union: 'Be sure that it is in Christ! Be sure that it is in Christ to begin with!' There is no guarantee or even hope for all that it means in the purpose of God unless it is in Christ. And there are tremendous things bound up with that relationship in Christ. But, if it has taken place, this is one of the sacred things that the evil forces and the evil one will never cease to assail. You, perhaps, have not realized the tremendous

damage that the devil can do when he can separate two in that relationship. It is a focal point of his constant attack to divide there. That relationship is a real battleground through life, for there is so much for the Lord in it. If it has in any way been interfered with, how are you going to put it right? Not by mere human attempts. You have got to get back into Christ, for it is only getting back on to the ground of Christ that will put that right. It may be that the man is pulling in one direction and the woman in another. There is no real togetherness. One has one mind, and the other has another: one will, and another; one interest, and another; one like, and another. And you know it is weakening, it is frustrating and it is desolating. It is only when the two get on to the ground of Christ crucified that that thing can be dealt with and put right. Every one has got to let go their natural ground and take the ground of Christ crucified as to themselves.

But, dear friends, the Word of God makes it perfectly clear to us that, in the beginning, that ordinance of God, that relationship, was a representation of something far greater. This, in its testimony, is a Church matter. 'I speak of Christ and the Church', says the Apostle in speaking of that relationship. The real principle in the principle of 'corporate life' anywhere, anyhow, in Christ -- maybe the two, the three, the local company, or the larger company of the Lord's people. The principle is one principle. The enemy will stand at nothing to get in between, to divide. And the only -- but the sure -- means of preserving that unity is the Cross of the Lord Jesus at work in an inward way in us all. That is a tremendous thing! But it will do it. If only that Cross becomes really a subjective reality in all concerned, that is the end of all divisions.

(iv) The Realm of the Church

We can easily see, without dwelling upon it, that this extends, beyond the individual, beyond the two and three, beyond the little group and company, to the Church universal. We can see that, eventually, it will reach the whole inhabited world, when Christ has His place. 'All the great multitude, out of every diversity of nationality, and tongue, and clime, and kindred' will be on the ground of the Lamb slain, the Cross of the Lord Jesus. They will be 'singing one song' in harmony. The high notes, the low notes, and all the notes between will be ascribing worth to the Lamb. Glorious chorus! Redemption follows that course. The Cross of the Lord Jesus relates to that one thing, to an end where all is reunited in Christ.

We have placed John 17 as the foundation of this message, and you know the great, perhaps the highest, note of that chapter is in a little clause: 'that they may be perfected into one'. Perfected into one! That is the end of His prayer, the end of His travail, the end of His redeeming work -- perfected into one! Then the great arch-adversary of the Divine order can do no more. His work is finished, his power is destroyed, for the Cross stands victorious over this long history of disruption.

I see no hope for unity anywhere other than in the Cross of the Lord Jesus: Christ crucified, put in His place. And although the battle goes on and the enemy is always trying to make a show of disruption and disorder, if the Cross has really done a work in human hearts, there is a basic something that will triumph over all that.

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