

# The Supreme Importance of the Incorruptible

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christ's incorruptible life and how it provides a place for God in the heart of man, in terms of fellowship and love.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:20, John 5:18, John 14:18, John 14:23-24, Acts 13:37, 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Hebrews 2:5-6

**Topics:** "Fellowship With God", "Incorruptibility"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the supreme importance of the incorruptible life embodied in Jesus Christ, who represents the true purpose of humanity as intended by God. He explains that through Christ's union with the Father, established by the Holy Spirit, we see the essence of incorruptibility and the restoration of man's purpose, which was lost due to sin. The sermon highlights that Christ's life and death exemplified incorruption, providing a model for believers to seek a relationship with God that transcends mere sovereignty to one of fellowship. Sparks challenges listeners to evaluate how much of God is reflected in their lives and interactions, urging them to ensure that their existence leads others to a deeper knowledge of God. Ultimately, the message calls for a life that embodies the incorruptible characteristics of Christ, fostering a genuine connection with God.

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## Transcript

Incorruptible Characteristics of the Life of the Lord Jesus

Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8-10

The Lord Jesus was the embodiment of the incorruptible. Life and incorruption were embodied in Him in terms of manhood, as the true Man. We leave out of our present consideration His Deity, for very God of very God leaves no room for discussion or argument concerning incorruption. We will consider Him in His capacity as Son of Man, by which He makes the whole question and issue of the incorruptible a human question.

Man, or manhood, is a big and specific thought of God. The idea of Man, humanity, was born in the mind of God. He is a peculiar creation intended for a special purpose. When the writer of the letter to the Hebrews asserts that "Not unto angels did he subject the world to come", he proceeds to ask: "What is man?" (Hebrews 2:5-6). 'Not unto angels... but man...'. This, then, is not a matter which concerns angels and it is certainly not a matter of abstract and unrelated ideas. There is a testimony which has to be found in the concrete expression of man and manhood. The Bible makes it perfectly clear from beginning to end

that the idea connected with man or manhood is that of representation. "In the image of God", in the likeness of God - that is representation. The question running all through the Bible is as to whether man does or does not fulfil the purpose of his being, which is to represent God, to express God.

Now man was made for incorruption, for incorruptible life issuing eventually in his glorification. I am not going to argue that from the Scripture, for those who know their Bibles will be able to support the statement. But man missed the purpose of his creation, he missed the incorruptible life, by his disobedience and unbelief, by his rebellion against God, his self-will, his pride. He is no longer a candidate for glory in his natural condition. Glory is not possible for man as he is found outside of Christ. But Christ came, and in His coming fulfilled a work by which the destiny and purpose of man was recovered and secured. In Christ, incorruptible life is recovered for man, for He was a Man who could not be corrupted, and therefore corruption was kept out of the very stream of His life. It was not possible that He should see corruption even in the grave. "He whom God raised up saw no corruption" (Acts 13:37). He was incorruptible in His life and therefore triumphant over corruption in His death. So Christ was constituted of incorruptible characteristics, and we are now going to ask what these were.

#### A RELATIONSHIP ESTABLISHED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The first, then, of these characteristics was His union with God as His Father - a simple but most profound truth. We are aware of how often He used that word: 'Father', and how often He said: 'My Father' and then: 'The Father and I'. His enemies saw the point; they were not slow to pick on what they thought was blasphemy: "He makes Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). That union between Him and the Father was of such a kind that their relationship was absolute and final. That relationship was established by the Holy Spirit. I am speaking now of Christ as the Son of Man. In His birth He was begotten of the Holy Ghost. In His work, He functioned by reason of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. His walk was always in and by the Spirit. In His Cross, He offered Himself up by the eternal Spirit. And we can complete the circle by saying that it was through that eternal Spirit that He was raised. The Holy Spirit initiated, maintained and consummated that relationship with the Father. The union with the Father was the governing thing in His whole life. At every point, at all times, He referred and deferred to God as His Father. All His works were out from the Father: "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:24). Everything for Him was out from the Father, by way of this union, this oneness, and this was the occasion of all the conflict in His life. It was the very point of all the attack and assault of the enemy. The one thing that the Evil One and all the evil powers were ever focusing upon was this oneness and fellowship with the Father, in order to try somehow to drive in a wedge, to get that relationship ruptured. That is very significant. If an enemy concentrates all his attention and all his resources on any one point, it is clear that he regards that as the point upon which the whole matter can be made to collapse. It did not matter which method the enemy used - whether open antagonism or friendly suggestion or subtle subterfuge, or any other means - the point was to try to get between the Father and the Son.

#### THE EXPLANATION OF HIS SUFFERING

That union, then, that relationship, was the explanation of all His sufferings and testings - indeed of the whole ordeal of His life. Would He, on any consideration, let go, violate the principle of that union? To maintain and preserve it, to adhere to it, was no small or light thing for Him. For that one thing, the most terrible cost ever paid in the history of the universe was paid, the cost of that dark moment of the Cross when everything seemed lost. There was not one glimmer of light, even from the Father's face, while He was under that test. Yes, this was a costly thing. There must have been some very great issue involved in

this union. There was nothing superficial about it, but rather something infinitely great. What was it?

## PROVIDING GOD WITH A PLACE

It can be answered in one brief sentence. Primarily, it was the issue of providing God with a place. God created the first man in order that He might have a place in that man and in all his seed; and not just a place, but the place. In a sense God's place had been taken from Him. God had been rejected and put out of His place with man. He still remained sovereign Creator, of course. He still remained Ruler and Lord, the original Owner, but there was a difference. Let us look at it like this.

Here is a landlord. He builds a house and he is the owner of that house. In kindness and friendliness he lets that house to some people, and to begin with, the relationship is quite a happy one, so happy that he is able to visit the house and is welcomed and given a place in the family; they are always glad to see him. But someone comes along while he is not there and begins to say things about him that are unworthy and that are scandalous, defaming him and making evil suggestions against him, with a view to getting him out of his place in that home. This evil person succeeds so well that no longer has he a place in the heart of that family. He is still the landlord, the rightful owner, and all the law is on his side, but there is a difference between being a landlord with legal rights and a friend who has a place in the family. That is what I mean. God lost His place. He is still sovereign Owner of this universe. He is still Lord, and one day He will assert His legal rights over His creation. But do you think that is good enough? Within His creation He wants to have a place.

There is all the difference between sovereignty and fellowship. The union between Christ and His Father was not the relationship of a sovereign and a subject. He did not live that life and do that work under the sovereign government of God. No, it was all on a different footing from that. It was fellowship. God can do a lot of things with us and through us in a sovereign way, but that is never, never good enough for Him. He wants us in fellowship; He wants a place, not as sovereign and despot, but as Father. Father! That is the significance of the word on the lips of the Lord Jesus. He taught them to pray: 'Father'. The significance, then, of the relationship between Christ and God as His Father was that God had a place in the heart of a Man.

The Bible is occupied with that one concern; that is the issue which arises all the way through. God is seeking to have a place in the heart of man - somewhere where He can be known in terms of fellowship, of love, in terms of a delight to have Him. The Old Testament is full of that in type and illustration. He seeks some place for His Name, where His Name is loved, some place where He can meet men on the ground of fellowship and love. The New Testament brings that out into bold relief. Its beginnings contain links between the Old and the New. Christ, as Son of Man, is the inclusive link. Here again is the law of incorruptibility. There is that which will go through to eternity, something that Satan cannot destroy, something that death cannot annul. There is something that is so precious to God that it will appear again for ever. When all that is capable of corruption has gone, the love relationship as between Christ and His Father will abide. Oh, what a difference there is between this and the kind of relationship with God that exists in general!

This, of course, is clearly seen to be the idea of the New Testament as to the individual. This is what God is after with us all. It is just that - to have a place in our hearts on the basis of love and fellowship. "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). That, too, is the idea concerning the nucleus - that they, even the little companies of the two and three, should give

Him a place. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I" (Matthew 18:20) and: "I come unto you" (John 14:18). And it is the New Testament idea of the whole Church. What does the Church mean in the divine thought? Just a place for God in love relationship, in perfect fellowship. That is the idea of the Church.

So, then, if Christ meant anything, He signified the coming of God into this world in terms of fellowship. And this is an eternal issue. If we could project ourselves into the ages of the ages, the eternal hereafter, and see the nature of things, as it will be then, we should find it was just this: a perfect harmony between God and man, so harmonious that it is all music. There is no discord, no strain, no shadow; there is no suspicion, no prejudice, no fear. All those things have gone with the corruptible: it is the incorruptible which remains. And in this first place the incorruptible is this - fellowship with God. It is this kind of relationship. It is an eternal issue.

### THE TEST OF EVERYTHING

Therefore the test of everything for us will be: How much of God came in by our having been here? That is a fairly thorough-going test. It may sound very exacting, but it is just this - how much of God came in by your and my having been here? How much, afterward, will it be possible for others to say: 'Well, through that life I came to know God, I came to fellowship with God, to know more of Him'?

Yes, that is testing and discriminating. The test of everything, of all our teaching and all our labours, is how much of it results in more of God - not more of knowledge, not more of mental apprehension, but how much more of God? As I have talked with others about the life-work and teaching of certain men of God in the past, we have agreed that even though there may have been things in their teaching which we did not feel able to accept, they themselves had left us a heritage, they have given us a deposit of God. There is something of the Lord that has come through them to us, and that is what marks them out to us. It is not just that they were great teachers, great organisers of Christian work, but that somehow they have passed to us a deposit of God; God has come through them to the enrichment and enlargement of our lives.

That is the test of everything. For me, at least, it is a searching test - one that I wonder whether I can face. Is it going to be like that, that after all the speaking, after all the teaching, there is a heritage of the Lord Himself left behind? The teaching of the truths about the Church as the House of God is important, but we need to beware of putting the emphasis on the truth of the thing, instead of the spiritual reality of how it works out. This issue is this - that God comes in. His place is provided, He is there. We have many meetings and other Christian activities, but if they do not issue in the people concerned having something more of the Lord Himself, then the whole thing is futile. Yes, with all our exact technique and the rest - if the Lord is not found there, it is meaningless, valueless. All must be related to this one issue, that of God having His own rightful place. That is the incorruptible element.

This is what the apostle says in our Scripture: "Be not ashamed... of the testimony of our Lord". What is this testimony of our Lord? It is that He: "annulled death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel". The testimony of our Lord is His incorruptible life. In His life here on earth the Lord Jesus provided a place for God, and there was no place in His life for anything else. Oh, that we might be like that! It will be that which will determine the measure of the permanent, the eternal, the intrinsic value of our lives.

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