

The True Life and the False Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon contrasts true eternal life in Christ with the false life offered by Satan, emphasizing the importance of discernment and obedience in the believer's journey.

Scripture: Genesis 2:17, Exodus 25:8, Psalm 132:3-4, Isaiah 14:13-14, Matthew 18:20, Luke 19:10, John 1:11, 2 Corinthians 3:3, 1 John 2:27, 1 John 5:12

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Discernment of Truth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the distinction between true life, which is eternal life found in Jesus Christ, and false life, which is a deceptive imitation offered by Satan. He explains that eternal life governs humanity's destiny, and that our relationship with Jesus determines whether we experience life or death. Sparks highlights the importance of recognizing the true nature of life and the need for believers to discern between the genuine and the counterfeit, especially in a world filled with falsehoods. He also discusses the significance of Mary's renunciation and her role in bringing God back into the world, illustrating that true service to God is about making space for His presence in our lives.

Transcript

(A) THE TRUE LIFE AND THE FALSE LIFE

As you know by now, we are occupied in these morning meetings with what we are taught through the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:3, that is, that the Holy Spirit is writing a spiritual biography of Jesus Christ in every member of the Body of Christ. To put that in another way, the spiritual history and experiences of true believers are a repetition of what was true of the Lord Jesus, excepting His deity. So we have to understand that the Holy Spirit is repeating the life of the Lord Jesus in us.

So far we have been occupied with the first chapter of that biography: the eternal link with the Lord Jesus, which is by the gift of eternal life. That means that what was true of the Lord Jesus in His eternal life becomes true in every believer.

Now I did not say all that I wanted to last time, so I will add just a few things and then hope to be able to go into the second chapter of this biography.

ETERNAL LIFE ALL-GOVERNING

Let me, then, repeat this truth. Eternal life does govern the history and destiny of humanity. Without that eternal life there is no hope; humanity is in a hopeless position. The destiny of those without this gift of God is a very hopeless thing, for it is eternal death. That does not mean annihilation, nor extinction, but it does mean eternal separation from God; and if you want to know what that means, look at the Lord Jesus in the last moments on the cross and hear Him cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"! But this other side, eternal life, is the basis of eternal hope, so it is just exactly the opposite. Thus eternal life is the governing factor in history and in destiny.

That is indicated in two ways in the Bible. It is indicated on the first page and on the last page, which means that the whole of the Bible lies between this one thing. All that is in the Bible of history and destiny lies between chapter one and the last chapter, and in both of those chapters this one matter of life governs everything. It is therefore all-governing. In the beginning it is indicated in the tree of life in the Garden; at the end it is indicated in the tree fully grown in the city - the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God.

As to that tree in the Garden at the beginning (and, of course, it is only a figure, or type), it is the centre of life, so God indicates that this thing called life is at the centre of everything. Life is centred in that tree representatively, and you notice how very jealous God is about that tree. He is so jealous that, when man sinned against IT, He set a wall of fire around it, and took every precaution against man touching it. He said: "LEST he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life", and put a cherubim there with a flaming sword. It would be a very dangerous thing to touch that unless man was in full fellowship with God! God is very jealous over this matter of eternal life! That tree, symbolically, is a test of man's relationship with God. It is a challenge to man as to his relationship with God, or, in other words, as to whether he is in right standing with God. The whole issue hung upon man's fidelity to God, for that was the test. You see, man was put on probation. This life was to be given on one condition only: was man going to be faithful to God, or not?

Let us get away from the symbol and the type. That tree is a type of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for He is the tree of life, and our attitude towards the Lord Jesus is going to determine our destiny - whether we have eternal life or eternal death. We know from Genesis that on that day when man showed that he was not faithful to God, that in spirit and in mind he was not true to God's Son, he died, and the whole race died in him. In Romans 5 Paul says that death entered into the human race because of one man's disobedience; so the destiny of the human race was settled on that day. The Lord had said: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Thus man died spiritually, because death is separation from God.

So we are brought to this, as our New Testament teaches us so fully: the Lord Jesus is the test of our relationship with God, and that relationship determines whether it is to be life or death. The Lord Jesus is set up in the midst of the human race to determine life or death for mankind. So eternal life governs everything.

ETERNAL LIFE RESERVED IN JESUS CHRIST

Now note the next thing. The Lord took action and set a fence around that tree of life. In so doing He said: 'No one shall have life apart from that tree.' In other words, it is impossible for anyone to have eternal life apart from the Lord Jesus, for this life is in God's Son. "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (1 John 5:12). Life, then, is reserved in Jesus Christ and cannot be had outside of Him. Well, of course, that is very simple and elementary but we have not finished yet!

You notice what happened in the Garden: Satan was there to make God a liar. Jesus said that Satan "is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44), and he was there in the Garden to make God a liar, Did he do it? Mark you, this is something very important for us to notice today, for this is always Satan's way. He did not accept the situation in the Garden, and he never does accept a situation. There will come a time when he will have to accept a situation and will not be able to do anything about it, but all through the ages he has refused to accept this situation and has told a lie. So man has fallen a victim to the lie of Satan. What is Satan's lie in connection with life? He offers false life, another kind of life that looks like the true one. Satan falsifies true life, and, instead of being spiritual life, it is just soul life. Do you know the difference between spiritual life and soul life?

Satan attacked the soul life of Adam. You know what the soul is, do you not? It is your reason, your emotions, your will. Satan began by REASONING with Adam, and, oh, what a dangerous thing it is to argue with Satan! Never reason with the devil, or, in other words, do not listen to his arguments! There is a sting in his tail! So Satan first came to man's reason and started an argument: "Yea, hath God said?" (Genesis 3:1). Immediately a question about God was lodged in the mind. There is a terrible destiny bound up with that question!

Then Satan appealed to Adam's FEELINGS, and, pointing to the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he said: 'You see how lovely and full of juice that fruit is! How much it is to be desired!' So Adam looked at the fruit and said: 'How lovely! I think I would like some of that.' His emotions went out to it, and when Satan has got your mind and your emotions, it is not far to your WILL! The next thing was that Adam took the fruit. He used his will, and the damage was done.

It is all symbolic, but, you see, it contains eternal principles. The whole kingdom and reign of Satan are built upon that basis. The mind, the heart and the will of humanity are captured by the devil, but it is false life. What about all the emotion in the world, even in Christianity? There is a vast difference between spiritual, eternal life, and soul life. There is such a thing as false life, and that thing is the master-stroke of Satan! You will remember that there was a time in the history of Israel in the wilderness when certain sons of Aaron brought false fire and offered it upon God's altar. You know what happened! You know all about God's jealousy. There is a vast amount of false fire in this world today. It looks like true life, true fire, what is of God, but there is a lie in it, and the fruit of that tree is bitter fruit in the end.

I think this is a time in the world's history when we need to understand this more than ever. How can we discern the difference between the true life and the false life? Well, I think John is the great messenger of this, because his writings were particularly in this connection. He wrote in a time when everything in Christianity was being falsified. There was Christ and anti-Christ. In fact, there were many antichrists, for many false spirits had gone abroad. It was a time when Christians were being deceived, and John, writing for that time, said: "The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you" (1 John 2:27). In effect, John was saying: 'By the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the true life, you will be able to discern between the true and the false.' Even when they look so much alike, the Spirit in you will say: 'There is something not true about this!'

I think that one of the things that indicates whether it is true or false is whether man made it or not. You see, those sons of Aaron MADE their incense, and they did not make it of the same ingredients as those with which the true incense was made. It was something which looked like the true, but it was false, and the Spirit of God knew the difference. We have to be very careful that we do not create false fire, for that is the danger of strong personalities. Do you notice how many of these things which look like life have come

from strong personalities? They are uncrucified Christian men! Is that a contradiction in terms? No, the Cross has to divide between soul and spirit, and if you see the fire coming from strong, forceful soulish men, you have reason to doubt the reality of it. When the true fire comes, it is always through crucified men.

I think the Apostle Peter could have created a lot of false fire. He was a man who was always trying to get things going! He would rush in in front of someone else, and would even tell the Lord Jesus where to get on and where to get off! It would have been a poor lookout for Christianity if it had come through Peter! But Peter had to go to the Cross, and the true fire of the Holy Spirit did not come until he was an utterly broken man.

Well, perhaps I have said enough on that matter, but it is something that should be an instruction to us in these days. We do verily need to know the difference between the true life and the false life, for Satan's master-work is to imitate God.

Now can we go on with the next chapter in this spiritual biography?

(B) THE CRISIS OF BETHLEHEM

I want you to read these passages very carefully. You may think that you know them, but before we have finished I think you may find that you do not!

Luke 1:26-34,37,38. Mark 10:42-45. Philippians 2:5-8.

There has to be a Bethlehem in the spiritual history of every believer. What is the Bethlehem of the child of God? It is not in Luke's Gospel, for that is the Bethlehem of the Lord Jesus. John's Gospel is the spiritual history, and the Bethlehem of the child of God is in chapter 3: 'Most truly I say unto you, you must be born anew.' That is our Bethlehem!

THE RENUNCIATION OF THE LORD JESUS

Things did not begin with the Lord Jesus at the little town of Bethlehem in Palestine. I have called that a 'crisis', for it was a turning-point in Christianity, but it all began in heaven. You have to go back behind Bethlehem and into heaven, and see what was happening there. The eternal Son of God was there, and He was equal with God. He was one with God in position, having all heaven's fullness and Divine glory. In John 17:5 the Lord Jesus prayed in these words: "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory WHICH I HAD WITH THEE BEFORE THE WORLD WAS", and that was before Bethlehem! In heaven, then, before this world was, there was the Son possessing the glory of God, occupying the very throne of God, the throne of the universe. Then, speaking in human language, the point came when something needed to be done in this little world. God had lost His place, had been rejected, and man had lost what God had intended for him. He had forfeited the eternal life which God had intended him to have. So to speak Satan and man together had turned God out of this world, and it was in pride. Satan had said: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt MY throne above the stars of God... I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). We know the result of that! And man entered into a complicity with Satan and God's place and God's life were lost to man. There is so much more in that word 'lost' than we are accustomed to thinking! We sing: "I was lost, but Jesus found me", but when were you lost, and what did you lose?

Here we are in an eternal setting. Jesus said: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and as we go on we shall see what that was.

In this situation in eternity the Son said: 'I will undertake to bring it all back. Father, I will do this service for You. I know what it means. Because it was pride that did all the mischief, pride must be destroyed in Me. Because it was disobedience that resulted in all this trouble, obedience must be the law of My life.' Well, to make it short, away there in eternity the Lord Jesus made the great renunciation. He relinquished His position, emptied Himself of His fullness, humbled Himself, and then came forth to do this service for God, which was to recover God's place in this world and in this universe. That was the crisis of Bethlehem!

Can it be true? Is that little babe in that manger in the innermost reality of His being that eternal Son who occupied the place of supreme authority in the past ages? Is this little baby the same One who was filled with the glory of God and all heaven? Oh, wonder of wonders, He has indeed taken the lowest place! What ought He to have had? But what He did have was a manger in a stable! There was no place for Him in the world that He Himself had created. "He came unto his own things, and they that were his own received him not" (John 1:11). What a crisis in the ages!

That is what took place in heaven, so you are not surprised that heaven is interested in this crisis! To begin with, an archangel, Gabriel, is interested, and then we read of a "multitude" of angels who are interested, for they know something of the meaning of it.

MARY'S RENUNCIATION

Well, we have to come to the really important thing. Where was all this focused? In a simple Galilean woman, whose name was Mary.

You know, for two reasons we have lost something very wonderful in this connection. It is the devil's trick again! Satan will always try to get hold of something Divine and discredit it, and the Church of Rome has discredited this living thing by the worship of the Virgin Mary. If you go into Roman Catholic countries and see the place that the Virgin Mary has, your whole being revolts against it and you do not want to talk about her. This is a great triumph for the devil, as you will see in a moment or two.

There is another thing that has made us very hesitant to dwell upon this birth of Christ, and I think it is either a right or a wrong sensitiveness. We are so nice and so good, you know, and we do not like to read and talk about this Virgin Mary! I wonder how you felt when we read that passage from Luke just now! 'It is very wonderful and very beautiful, but don't let us dwell upon it too much! Let us be very sentimental, very proper, very good and very nice!' Do you know what I mean?

So, for these two reasons, we have lost something that is very Divine, and I think poor Mary needs to be redeemed. She needs to be brought back to her right place, and we have to get a new appreciation of this young woman. I have a friend who is a Mother Superior in a very high Catholic body. When I last went to see her she took me into the chapel, and as she went in she bowed to the Virgin Mary. I cannot tell you how badly I reacted to that! She did it again when we went out, and, no, I did not bow! My reaction to that was very bad, but I have had to recover something about Mary.

There is a link between that which happened in heaven with the Son of God when He emptied Himself, and Mary. Do not make any mistake! Mary had to make a great renunciation, for she knew what it meant to have a child without a husband. Is that not the deepest shame that a woman can know? Does that not mean that she has sacrificed all that is noble and honourable about womanhood? Supposing it became known that this child was born and Joseph was not the father! Who was the father, then? That is something for people to talk about! I am not sure that the people in wicked Nazareth had not already

spread a rumour, because at one time some of the enemies of Jesus Christ threw this thing at Him, when they said: "We were not born in iniquity" (John 8:41). Is that not horrible, terrible? Ah, Mary knew what it meant! She knew that if this thing got out into the world she would be counted as one of the world's most disgraceful people. Everyone would look down upon her. She was afraid, and, more than that, "greatly troubled". The angel Gabriel read what was going on in her soul and said: "Fear not, Mary." Never in all history did a woman need that word more than Mary did that day! She had taken in the situation and realized in what she was involved. The angel Gabriel said: 'Mary, you are a very specially favoured woman. God has favoured you more than other women.' And the word that the angel used was 'grace' - 'God has put His grace upon you more than upon any other woman.' Well, she considered the whole thing, realizing what it meant, knowing that if she had to go out into the world, and the world knew about it, it would talk (and the world never gives a Divine meaning to a thing like that! You know the kind of world we are in!), and she said - note! - "Behold, the BONDSLAVE of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." I put a mighty emphasis upon that word 'bondslave'! Did Mary empty herself of a woman's glory? That is what it meant naturally. Did Mary humble herself to be obedient unto death? For, you know, a woman like that would have been stoned in Israel, and she knew it. Did she humble herself and become obedient unto death? Oh, yes, she did. She went down to the lowest place. But what is the word? "BONDSLAVE of the Lord" - the servant of God.

Now the whole Bible is opened up! Before the Bible began the Divine Son was saying: 'I will be Your servant, Father. I will go down to be Your bondslave.' And right from the beginning God has sought to have SERVANTS. You have a long line of servants of God in this world's history: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and on you go to Isaiah, the Prophet, who says: "Israel, my servant" (Isaiah 41:8). They were the people of service.

That is what God is seeking, but it is always a very costly thing. It cost Abel his life, for he was obedient unto death; Enoch found it was no longer possible to live in a world like this; and so you could go on.

WHAT IS SERVICE?

But what do we arrive at? The point is: What is service? What is the meaning of being the servant of God? Can you put your finger upon it? Go to Mary again. What is the law? To bring God back into His world, and that is the only service of God. Service is comprehended in that one thing - making a place for God, bringing God back into His right place, seeing that He is not excluded from His world. The presence of God is the great law of everything in service. Mary brought God back into this world, so she was "highly graced", supremely honoured. It was not just an angel, or a little cherub, that was sent to her, but the archangel Gabriel was sent from GOD to this woman Mary, because she was to be the vessel and the channel of bringing God back into this world. Is that not tremendous? Is Mary redeemed now? Has she got a new place? But it is not Mary herself. It is Mary as the bondservant of God. And it is not what we are in ourselves, but just a matter of how much of God is brought back to this world by our being here.

Dear friends, is that what the service of God means to you? It is not the place, nor the person. The place may be a stable and the person a simple woman. It is nothing of the glory of this world. Oh, how men have made a mistake over this! They think that in order to have God present they must have a very elaborate building, with some very important persons, Lord this and Baron that, with a cathedral here and a cathedral there - and the Word says: "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48). Where is God? "Whosoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). That can be anywhere, in anything, but the point is this: we are here, dear

friends, as the Lord's people to be His servants, and true service is bringing God back where we are. Do you understand that? Why am I here? Why are you here? Why are you wherever you are? Our presence ought to mean the presence of the Lord.

You see, God has been seeking a place for His feet all through the ages. He raised up the men I have mentioned in order that He should be brought back to this world. He raised up Israel in order to bring Him back, and said: "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). The Old Testament is just about that one thing - a few men bringing God back. That is the meaning of the priesthood, for it was just to bring God back. That is the meaning of the kingship. The supreme king said: "I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids; until I find out a place for the Lord" (Psalm 132:3-4). David was a very imperfect man, and Mary, I expect, was a very imperfect woman, but it was where their hearts were and what was the purpose of their lives that mattered, and that was to bring back the Lord. Israel was raised up to bring God back into the midst of the nations. In the end they failed, and you close the Old Testament. Then you open the New Testament with Mary of Nazareth, and God coming back through this simple woman.

I repeat, it is a costly thing to be here for God, but it is a glorious thing, because heaven IS interested. The angels of God are rejoicing if there is anything of God in this world. The wise men and the poor shepherds were all wondering what this thing meant. They did not understand it - but there was another one who knew what it meant, and this that represented the presence of God was a mark for Satan. Satan had an evil man in Jerusalem, and that man massacred all the little boys in order to get hold of this One. The fear and the hatred of hell were focused upon this that was of God, and if hell could drive it out, it would. Does that not explain a lot of spiritual experience? Surely you can now see the biography being written in spiritual experience! If you are standing for God here, heaven is on your side, but men will not understand you. Hell will hate you and do everything to get you out.

Oh, does this not throw a lot of light upon what is happening? Communism is anti-God, and is the most satanic thing that history has known. It is saying: 'Get rid of God!', and is the great instrument of Satan in the nations. The battle for holding the ground for God is becoming very intense.

Let this test everything. Let it test your own life. How much of the Lord has come into this world by our being here? That will determine whether we are the Lord's servants, or not. In the little assemblies of God's people where they live or work together, it is not the outward things that matter, but how much of the Lord is there. In the places where God puts you in this world, does the fact that you are there mean that the Lord is there? That is the crisis of Bethlehem.

I think I have said enough. It is something to search our hearts, and we must just say: 'Lord, make me a point where You are in this world!'

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