

The Way of Its Attainment

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the significance of the Incarnation and the Cross in relation to the issue of worship and the supreme place of God in the universe.

Scripture: Revelation 4:8

Topics: "Worship", "Incarnation and the Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of worship in the spiritual drama of the universe, highlighting the ultimate question of who will be worshiped. He explains that the Incarnation and the Cross are central to God's plan to restore His rightful place and rights, with the Incarnation representing the Son's role in bringing everything back to God. Sparks illustrates that our Christian lives are intricately connected to this cosmic battle, where our daily choices reflect our allegiance to God or to the adversary. He calls believers to recognize the spiritual significance of their lives and to live in a way that honors God, culminating in the ultimate worship of Him and the Lamb. The sermon concludes with a call for an undivided heart in worship and service to God.

Transcript

Reading: Rev. 4:8-11; 5:1-14; 7:9-17.

Without attempting to go back over the ground which we have covered in these studies, I want to try, for a few moments, to indicate to you what it is that I feel the Lord has brought for our attention at this time. I think it can be best gathered up in this way. We have been occupied with the great fact that everything is set in relation to a great spiritual drama, which God is working out in the Unseen. By certain Scriptures, we were taken back and shown the commencement of that drama; in some place unspecified, some time unmentioned, a big issue arose between loyal and disloyal intelligences, involving the great question, the ultimate question of the supreme and unrivaled Lordship of this universe. Then we followed out from that initiation of the question and contest into this world, its repercussions in this creation, the crisis which made it a part of everything here in this world. Then we saw how all through the spiritual history of the universe, and of this world in particular, that issue has been to the fore, and has been governing everything. Who is going to be worshiped without question and reserve? So we saw that THE issue which bounds the universe, and governs everything in it, is the issue of worship, that worship is something which comes down to the very minutiae, the smallest details of life. Who is going to have the supreme place, who is going to be Lord, who is going to have the worth-ship? We have seen this whole question set in the

super-earthly realm; and we have seen that, with the very commencement of Christ's spiritual ministry, it was set there. "If thou wilt fall down and worship me," said the Adversary to our Lord in the wilderness. The thing is unveiled, uncovered, exposed, again and again, in the Word of God. In the book of the Revelation, it stands stark naked. The end, as revealed in that book, is - "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." "And there shall be no curse any more." The issue is settled, the matter of worship is finished, summed up in God and the Lamb.

In some few practical ways in our previous meditation, we sought to see that everything with which we have to do is set in that realm, that unseen but most real of all realms. We saw what it means to be a Christian - not just that we come to believe certain doctrines or truths, assent to them, and are marked as those who believe these stated things; not just that we have decided, even by the grace of God, to live a good life, to refrain from a lot of things that are wrong, and do a lot of things that are right; that we change our form of behavior, conduct and procedure. No, not these things. But the Christian life means that we have entered actively, directly, immediately into that realm where the ultimate issue of this universe becomes the primary thing in our very existence. We are a part of something immense, going on out of sight. Everything that belongs to our Christian life has to be seen in that light. We are at a loss, altogether at a loss, until we are fully aware of that - that things are not just happenings. There is a background of immense spiritual significance and meaning to everything; when we become livingly related to the Lord, we then become livingly related to the thing which He is doing. The thing that He is doing is answering that challenge, and securing its full and final answer for eternity, and that IN us first, and then THROUGH us. "Now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God." We are set in a very large realm with a very large meaning. That has been the import of our previous meditations.

I want now to bring that down to one or two more very practical matters, the first of which is the significance or meaning of the Incarnation.

The Significance of the Incarnation

Firstly, the Incarnation, of course, of God in Christ. The question is, why the Incarnation? Why God manifest in the flesh? Why Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man? In other words. why sonship? - for it is with Him that the whole principle and meaning of sonship is introduced. Why all this in the Gospels about Father and Son, Son and Father? The question will be transferred to ourselves later. Why the Incarnation?

"When all things have been subjected unto him" - that is, the Son - "then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). That is a word of finality, and that is also a word of transition. It sees a purpose fulfilled, an end reached. In a word, it says that sonship had a purpose, and that purpose would be fulfilled. I am saying that this passage of Scripture indicates an object achieved by a certain means, and therefore that means changing its place from fulfilling to fulfilled purpose; and the end is "God... all in all." Sonship, therefore, or the Incarnation, was and is with a view to securing all God's universal rights unto Himself. It throws a lot of light, beautiful light I think, upon the whole matter of sonship, the relationship of son and father, father and son. It lifts the earthly, human conception on to a very high level, as one of the things of which we were speaking in our previous meditation, all the things in the Bible, which have back of them something so much greater than themselves, something of God. Human relationships are intended to be indications of Divine things. Oh, that they were more truly that! - human relationships real indications, representations, of Divine things. That is what they were intended for, and here amongst the human relationships is father and son, son and

father, and it shows why the firstborn in Israel was of such consequence, such value, import, significance, honor; the firstborn in whom all sonship was summed up. The father might say. These are my sons, but this is my son, my firstborn. And why, when God ordered the family life of His people as in Israel, why did the firstborn son have such a place of honor and importance? Because bound up with him were all the father's rights and honor and glory and purpose. The father, with all the meaning of his fatherhood as a true father, was gathered up into that son. If that son failed, the dishonor fell upon the father. If he went wrong, the father came under that shadow. If that son died, the father's heart went with that son. The father was wrapped up in his firstborn. He was the heir; the best that the father had was his. Vested in him was everything of value and concern to the father. He was supposed to stand for the absolute honor, glory, satisfaction of his father. We know the principle holds good throughout. As we said in our previous meditation, pick up Scripture anywhere at random, if you look close enough you will find behind it something of God that is immense, endowed with the measure of God.

"Honour thy father" (Ex. 20:12). What is that? - just something to govern social conduct, make us behave ourselves? Oh no, it involves this immense thing. God the Father is wrapped up in the Son, and the Son has no less than all His Father's rights, honor, influence, in His hands. That is a Divine truth. That lies behind the Incarnation. Something has happened. God's place has been challenged, God's rights have been challenged, God's honor has been challenged. Something has happened in this universe affecting God, and has been taken up by the Son. The Son will answer that, the Son will meet that, the Son will finally settle that issue. Sonship is that which brings everything back to God. It is the very meaning of the Incarnation to bring everything back to God, to answer all disputes.

Do you see this challenge affecting God's creation, and in the creation, man? Man is one; a race, a son-race. God's rights in man have been disputed and challenged, and it is in man that God's rights have to be secured so it requires Incarnation and Sonship. Why Incarnation, why Sonship? That! and when He shall have subjected all things unto the Son, then the Son Himself shall be subject, that God may be all in all. Sonship has done its work, brought everything back to God.

That is perfectly clear so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, though there is a great deal more in it than that. I simply state the fact, the principle, the law. You will have to look it up, to think about it, to bring the Scriptures in. You will understand then why the Son says, "Lo, I am come... to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). "Thy will, O God" - that is the essence of worship. And when He draws His disciples to prayer, He gives them the principle of worship - "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." That is answering the great universal challenge. It is not just a prayer to be recited every so often. It is an immense thing. The Lord Jesus was not concerned with ritual; He was concerned with the immense principles which govern this universe. Thy will, O My God, Thy will! That is worship. We get to the place of most utter worship when at last, after some conflict, some battle over some issue, we go down before the Lord and say, Thy will, Lord; not resignedly, but, Thy will shall be done! It shall be Thy will! That is worship, the Lord is getting His rights. The will of God in this universe is worship.

There is so much more as to the Son's relationship with the Father. You read John's Gospel, anew perhaps, in the light of this. Our space does not allow of the detail.

The Spirit of Sonship in Us

We are chosen unto the adoption of sons. "Foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). "... in bringing many sons unto glory" (Heb. 2:10). So the Scriptures could be gathered. I am

only trying to show that you and I, in the thought and intent of God, are bound up with this tremendous question of sonship, and the same object governs, and is at work. The incarnation principle is pursued when Christ, by the Holy Spirit, takes up residence within; our bodies become the temple of the Holy Ghost, the sanctuary of God; that is the individual: then the Church. The spirit of sonship has entered in, we have received the Spirit of sonship, the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father (Rom. 8:15). I am not saying that we, in the same full sense as Jesus Christ, are sons of God, but we come into this relationship by receiving the Spirit of His Son; we are sons with the same object; the same process at once begins. The issue is now bound up - with the Church of the firstborn sons, to bring everything back to God. The honor, and the glory, and the rights of God now become bound up with believers and with the Church. The battle is carried out into the heavenlies, our lives are set in this great spiritual background and the one issue all the time for us, day by day, year in and year out, is, Who is going to get the worship from our lives? How far, by means of us, is this great question going to be furthered toward its consummation, when God shall be all in all? It is a practical one, not a doctrinal one, not a theoretical one. It is a practical one - we know it every day of our lives. There is hardly an hour in the life of any of us when this great, eternal question may not be the very basis and issue of the situation. Who is going to have the worth-ship? Who is going to get glory out of that, the good from this? Satan or God? You see why it is that at length the Church is to come into oneness with Him in His glory. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory IN THE CHURCH and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever (Eph. 3:20). You only need those hints. Sonship is our point at the moment. We are called to sonship, which means we are called into the fellowship of God's Son, for the settling of this issue in a practical way. God is not a God of theories; He is a God of practicalities: and what I want you to realize, especially the younger ones, is that your lives, when you have come into a vital oneness with Jesus Christ, are not just things of hap or chance. Everything in your life has a spiritual setting, a background which is so vast as to involve this great question of the Incarnation, why God was manifest in the flesh, why sonship.

Take it into your business life, all the difficulties, the adversities, the trials, the testings; your home life; anywhere. Do not take things as natural things that happen. There are two kingdoms looking on and very interested in the life of every one of us; two whole hierarchies of intelligences are watching and actively connected with the life of every one, each seeking to get from our lives and through our lives the good, the worth-ship. Sonship is a tremendous thing; to be sons of God is a glorious thing, but what a vocation is bound up with it, what a calling, and what an issue! I leave that there because of space, and pass on. My difficulty is to keep all sorts of matter out; we should be overwhelmed if I let it in. We could have seen what we might call this super-earthly interest in the Incarnation. What does Bethlehem represent really? Does not the birth of the Lord Jesus uncover the other world's interest in this? Heaven is interested, coming in, most evidently coming in. All earth is represented; and hell is there, watching with sinister purpose; to destroy that life and that Man. That Son of man has not gone this earthly road without much attention from the spiritual realm. I leave you to follow that.

The Significance of the Cross

Come to the Cross. We have asked, Why the Incarnation? Now, Why the Cross? The answer is found in the same spiritual realm, set there ultimately. Historic, and in a certain place on this earth, on a certain date? On "a green hill far away, outside a city wall"? Yes, true, but that is as nothing in comparison. Set it in its right place. "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up..." (John 12:31-32). "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out"; and when He died, all creation registered it, and

responded. "Darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Luke 23:44). The tombs were rent, and there was a great earthquake (Matt. 27:51-52). Paul tells us more: Paul tells us what was going on. "Having put off from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (His Cross) (Col. 2:15). That is the setting. That is where the Cross touches the greatest range and the greatest depth. It is set amongst the great forces of this universe, the ultimate things. It touches us here, but if it had not touched there, it could not help us here: it is out there.

Why the Cross? Because this challenge of God's place and God's rights had brought in pollution, and corruption, and a false reign, and a false order and nature of things. The whole realm had been touched by that uncleanness, which was first in the heavens, and then came to the earth, corrupting, distorting, and twisting, and making things altogether different, and no longer acceptable to God. Now both source and river must be dealt with; the spring and its outflow had to be destroyed. Christ crucified goes to the very spring, the Evil One himself, and judicially deals with the situation there, and then touches the consequence of the Evil One, our sin, our sinfulness, our state, our nature, our twisted, distorted humanity, morally and spiritually. His resurrection is a triumph over two things, firstly over Satan, arch-adversary, and then, over the humanity which he has touched to corruption and distortion; add in His risen Self, you have One Who is absolutely Lord of Satan and Lord of righteousness. Why the Cross? Well, that, briefly, comprehensively!

We must remember - it is just a little technical point - we must keep a line between the judicial and the actual work of Christ on His Cross. Satan still is, sin still is, a distorted humanity still is. In many ways, things are just as they were before Calvary; but judicially they are no longer that. He has entered into judgment, into the state of judgment. He has borne the judgment, He has died under the judgment, and He has judicially removed the ground from Satan. The judicial side is finished, the practical side is being carried out. That is Christian experience; that is where the Cross comes in, has abiding efficacy for us. What is happening? He has come to dwell within, and now He begins at the center, at our spirit, bringing it to new birth with His own indestructible and incorruptible life. We have eternal life; A KIND of life, not only of duration. We have it in Christ in our spirit. From our spirit, He works out to our soul, our mind. The Holy Spirit is dealing with our minds; and, praise God, the day is coming when it will work out to the body. "When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality.... Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). He has started that. From the judicial He is moving to the practical. Why the Cross? To remove Satan's rights in us, Satan's ground in us, to make the judicial the actual where we are concerned. It is the process of the Cross. Do not despise or reject the subjective side of the Cross. Do not become too subjective yourself, but remember that the Lord is doing something inside, on the ground of what He has done by His Cross. That is the answer. Why the Cross? To deal with this ultimate thing in His universe. He is not just going to take us as we are, and, in a moment, make us like Himself. He takes us, and He begins to work in us, and He works and He works, by every means, Satan himself and Satan's work so often being employed. He is following on the trail of the Serpent, and making seeming misfortunes, mishaps, everything that seems so commonplace and ordinary, to turn to spiritual account, all to remove the ground of this other one, this Evil One, to remove his ground from us, and get His own ground in us. Herein is one of the wonders of grace, one of the great triumphs of the Lord. Is it not true that, very often, those who have suffered most for their Lord, have been the most worshipping people the Lord ever had? Is that not true, and is that not strange? Those who really love the Lord, and know the Lord, and worship the Lord most fully, are those who have suffered most with their Lord. That is the triumph.

Well, I am not going to pursue this matter any further. What I have said is indicative of many other things. We are enunciating a great truth. We are set in a great spiritual background, with an immense question being answered. We know, as we have already seen, that is just what the book of Job means, why it is in the Bible. It is set there by Divine order, and it is set there with this object - to sum up this whole drama of the ages, and show God working out an answer to an antagonist, in the very soul and body of a man. "Doth Job serve God for nought?" That is not human nature! No man ever does that, no man serves anybody for nought. You may take it if Job serves God, it is to his advantage to do so! All right, says God, I will answer that question in the very soul and body of this man; all that makes up a man's life, what a man lives for, works for, take everything from him, strip him! If a man loses his health and is in perfect physical misery, he has not much more to lose. God answers Satan in that man's soul and body, and Satan's ground of argument is simply wiped out. That is Job. I am saying, while we are not Jobs, we are not going to claim to be Jobs, we are to some little extent in the succession. That is why we read Rev. 4, 5, and 7. Is it not a glorious picture and prospect? They are worshipping, they are bringing all back to Him that sitteth on the Throne, and to the Lamb. Satan is not getting a look in there.

I would like you to read again the story of Daniel in the light of this - I merely mention it in closing - and you see the working out of all the principles that I have enunciated, and more. Daniel purposes in his heart that he will not defile himself with the king's meat. He is having none of it. Why? Turn to Chapter 3 and put your pencil underneath one word, and you find your answer. That word is worship. The king sets up an image which all must fall down and worship. When it comes to these other friends of Daniel - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - what is the thing said about them? These men "yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God." "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1). Sanctification means having no contact with that other realm of worship, keeping ourselves wholly for the Lord. "I saw... one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13,14). You see the way to the Throne. It is the way of the Cross, the way of the yielding to God rather than to Satan, at any cost, presenting your bodies living sacrifices. At the end, a Kingdom, a Throne, and it is said to Daniel, "And thou... shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:13). The book of Revelation shows us what it means to stand in our lot at the end; a great multitude, worshipping the Lamb, standing at the end in our lot.

If it is true that all the distress, disruption, discord, and misery through the ages is to be attributed to this divided worship, then the new creation, the new and joyous order prophesied in the Scriptures, will come about, or will be realized, on the sole basis of God being "all in all." This has its rise in every individual in whom divided allegiance is ended. It takes its larger and corporate form in the Church "which he purchased [for this purpose] with his own blood." This, again, is the motive and dynamic of every Holy Spirit-initiated and energized movement of the Evangel and it gives meaning to all His urges to holy living, loving fellowship, patient enduring, and spiritual warfare.

All that we have said is but a hint at very great realities. May the Lord find in us those who are utter and of an undivided heart.

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