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"In the Likeness of His Resurrection"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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It is important that we should recognise what a great scope and tremendous emphasis the subject of resurrection has in the Word of God. As a principle it is patent or latent, according to the measure of our discernment, from the beginning to the end of the divine revelation of Scripture. Since the fall, all things which are of God have their new beginning and vital value in and by the representative and inclusive resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Note how much is wrapped up with the divine attestation of Sonship at the resurrection. Not at His birth nor at His death, not at Bethlehem nor at Calvary, was such a specific attestation made, but it was reserved for resurrection. "Declared to be (marked out as) the Son of God with (in) power... by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). Psalm 2 prefigures the counsel of malignity against the Lord's Anointed. This counsel is put into action to its utmost limit; He is slain. The ultimate issue is the heritage of the nations; the immediate issue in resurrection is a decree (v.7) "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." He is the representative "first born from the dead" of a specific and peculiar kind of sonship.

To this very passage the company of believers in the presence of a further counsel of malignity made their appeal (Acts 4:25) and received at once a further divine acknowledgment; the place was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and there were other triumphant issues. Similarly an effectual testimony was borne at Antioch of Pisidia with this very passage at the centre of the

message (Acts 13:33), clearly relating the divine pronouncement to the resurrection. Then again, this particular transcendence of Christ's Sonship above angels and all else has this very passage quoted as its basis in Hebrews 1:5. This is related to the inclusive dominion in the universe of the race in Christ, and also to the dethronement of "the lord of death" (Hebrews 2:5-15).

This signifies where the finger of God makes its emphatic seal, and how God is jealous for a testimony to the resurrection of Christ. So we are able to draw attention to a very vital principle in Christian experience as coming out of the divine truth. Have you ever noticed that even that which has its origin in God, which comes forth from God, which is brought about by a supernatural act of God, has to pass into death in order that by resurrection it may have its supreme divine seal and attestation?

The Old Testament is full of types of this truth. Reflect upon Isaac alone. He was brought into this world by a miracle. There was no natural ground upon which to account for him (see Romans 4:19). Yet he must die and (as it is said of Abraham's body) he was "as good as dead" when the knife was lifted; but for all time, resurrection is the point of divine emphasis in this story, especially in the vindication of Abraham's faith. Isaac was a type of Christ and, as we have said, although Christ was a miracle in His birth and truly the Son of God incarnate, yet the death prepares the way for a superlative testimony from heaven.

Without tracing this principle, so far as the Word is concerned let us note its application in experience as to ourselves. We are born of God, and are sons in the Son by right of our birth from above; but how true it is that the course of our spiritual life seems to consist of deeper and ever deeper baptisms in death - His death - in order that more and more of the power of His resurrection may be known by us and manifested in us. There seem to be cycles or tides of death and life, and while each cycle or tide appears to compass our end more completely or to leave us at a lower ebb than ever, there comes with ever-increasing fullness an uprising of spiritual life and knowledge and power. Thus while death destroys "the old man", we live increasingly by that life, "the new man", which is not human but divine, and upon which - and upon which alone - the seal of God rests. This is a deliberate course which God takes with us.

See it further in service and work. Is it not true that most, if not all, of the pieces of work raised up by God to fulfil some ministry in His eternal purpose have firstly had every evidence of being God-born, but later have gone down into a time of deep and awful death, seeming disintegration, break-up, loss, until it seemed that nothing would remain? Sometimes this has been by persecution or massacre; sometimes by a series of what we humanly call catastrophes, tragedies, misfortunes. Sometimes the causes are not apparent; they are inside, like some evil thing sapping the very vitals. Sometimes, again, it is an inexplicable arrest and pressure, a paralysis and a deadlock, and it is difficult to know whether it is from within or from without. All we know is that death reigns, or appears so to do. Place this rule alongside of some of the great missions for work abroad or at home, and see how it applies. What is true in the greater is also true in the smaller - a local fellowship, a Sunday-school class, or some other piece of work. Provided always that the initiation of the work was of Him, that we were put into it by Him and that it has been kept on such lines as are consistent with His mind and purpose, such an experience of death is not an argument that the Lord is not in it, but may be regarded as evidence of His concern to put the work ever more fully where His highest attestation can be given.

The principle holds good in the matter of received truth. The Lord may reveal to us truth which is of

great importance and which is intended to be tremendously fruitful in life and ministry. It comes with the power of a revelation, and for a while we rejoice in its light, talk about nothing else, and find that it works. Then something happens. Whatever that may be, the result is that we go down into death with and because of that truth. For the time it seems to have lost its potency, and all hope that we shall be saved is abandoned. We wonder if we shall ever be able honestly to believe that truth again, let alone preach it. But at length, by a touch of life which leaves us as those who dream (Psalm 126:1) and in spite of all our past fears, that very truth now becomes our chief emphasis, but now with a solemnity and reality not known before. Moreover the Lord is making its ministry a power to others which is quite new and previously unknown. So in all this He seems to get more for Himself by resurrection than He did by birth. This may seem largely a mystery, but it is evident and true to experience.

There are other directions in which this applies, one of which we might mention. It is that of relationships. How frequently have we come up against this perplexing experience. Between those related - sometimes in the deepest bonds - for some reason, often quite without any *natural* ground, there has come the severest strain. It appears that the old ground of fellowship is entirely breaking down and being lost. It may be by reason of some spiritual crisis in the life of one of those affected, some call to service or to go a little further with the Lord, or some test of faith or loyalty to God. Whatever may be the cause, seen or unseen, such an experience is not uncommon. The first issue is an end of the kind or level of fellowship that has been. It would sometimes appear that the whole thing has broken down and gone for ever. At such a time serious questionings arise as to the apparent antagonism between a conceived idea of what God requires and what looks manifestly to be plain duty to others. This is a bitter and harrowing time to the soul-life. The ultimate issue - if there has been a definite willingness to suffer the loss of all for His sake and a holding on to God, though blindly and with much weakness - is that the whole thing is brought back again, but yet not the same. "That which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be" (1 Corinthians 15:37); it is the same, yet different. It is on a higher plane; a purer, holier, stronger, deeper thing, and capable of much greater spiritual fruitfulness. In a word, in the grave it has shed much of the human, and in the resurrection it has become more divine. The elements which are temporal and natural have been supplanted by more of the spiritual and eternal.

Having given this space to stating and illustrating a fact and an abiding law, we must now say something about the nature of resurrection. What is resurrection? It is the power of ascendancy over death. What is the central factor in resurrection? It is a life which cannot know death, a life which is indestructible. Such is the nature of the resurrection to which we are giving our attention. There is a resurrection which is but the re-animation of the body for a time or for judgment. That is not our subject. We are speaking of the resurrection of Christ and our incorporation thereinto.

By our new birth from above we become partakers of the life of God. That which the Scripture calls "eternal life" is the unique possession of the born-again; no man has it by nature. The whole course of true spiritual experience is for the increase and development of that life, and this particularly takes place, as we have seen, through crises and cycles of death and resurrection. What is the Lord's supreme aim with His children? It is undoubtedly to get them to live by His life only. To this end He will more and more take away their own life.

As the time of the Church's translation becomes more imminent, this truth will have an increasing emphasis, so that to live victoriously at all, or to work effectively, there will need to be a greater drawing upon the Lord for His life. When the saints are translated that they shall not see death, and

when that great shout of victory over death and the grave goes up (1 Corinthians 15:54-55) it will not be by some outside, external operation of divine power alone, but it will be the triumph of the resurrection life of Christ within the Body of Christ, expressing itself in that final glorious consummation of a process of ascendancy which has been going on since the time when that life was received at new birth by faith in the risen Lord. This is a most important truth to recognise, for it explains everything. Why must we know weakness, impotence, worthlessness, nothingness, on the side of our natural life? Emphatically, that His strength may be "made perfect (or be perfected) in weakness". And what is His strength? "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, *when he raised him from the dead*" (Ephesians 1:19-20). It is resurrection might and life. The more spiritual a believer becomes, the more he will realise his dependence upon the life of God for all things. This will be true physically as in every other way.

The central truth of a "divine healing" which is in truth of God and to spiritual purpose is described in Romans 8:11. It is an energising of the mortal body with resurrection life. This does not of necessity, inevitably or invariably carry with it complete physical healing, but it does mean such a quickening as to make for a transcendence of the weakness or infirmity which prevents a fulfilment of the will of God in life or service. It means an accession of divine life in our spirit so that we are enabled to do much more than is humanly or naturally possible. This life cannot be taken hold of and used by the flesh. Immediately there is a dropping down on to a natural level by one who has been led into a life of faith, there will be a recrudescence of death. An atmosphere charged with the life of God is always a place of renewal, refreshing and strengthening to him that is spiritual.

If Enoch was a type of the believers who will be translated that they shall not see death, then we must remember that it was "*by faith*" that Enoch was translated. What is the nature of this faith? It is the faith which depends upon divine life for all things, and is therefore an abiding witness and testimony to the resurrection of Christ. Hence, as the Lord's coming draws near, we shall be forced to live exclusively by His life - "the life whereby Jesus conquered death". This is the life which has brought triumph to God's people through the ages. A close study of the Old Testament will reveal that it was faith in resurrection life which brought the divine vindication. "That they might obtain a better resurrection" was the motive which made them victorious in death and therefore over the authority of death. The ascendancy of spirit so markedly characteristic of New Testament believers is to be accounted for on the ground of a life within their spirit which could not see death, the life of Him who "dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over him", for "it was impossible that he should be holden of death".

Now it is important to remember that death is not only a law or a principle. It is that; but the Scriptures constantly make clear that behind the thing there is a person. Back of death is he "that had the power of death, that is, the devil". Conybeare translates that: "the lord of death". The great battle which took place at the exodus of Israel from Egypt was really a battle between Jehovah and "all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12), which gods were but the spiritual hierarchy of him who had ever made it his aim to be "like the Most High", and had assumed the role of "the god of this world". A right understanding of that story would make very clear that it was a conflict between the Lord of life and the lord of death, and that the Hebrews were only translated out of the kingdom of darkness and the authority of death because a lamb had shed its blood, and through death had figuratively destroyed him that had the power of death.

This was fulfilled at Calvary, for on the Cross Christ drew on Himself the whole hierarchy of evil, and

went down under it to the bottommost reach of its domain, and then, by reason of the life which could not be holden of death, He stripped off principalities and powers, broke through, and rose their Conqueror. It was in resurrection far above all rule and authority that He became the Firstborn from the dead - the first and inclusive One of all who should be identified with Him. So far as we are concerned, the power of Satan can only be so destroyed as we, through death, know Christ in the power of His resurrection, receiving His risen life more and more.

In conclusion, let us point out that after His resurrection our Lord was, because of the peculiar nature of His resurrection state, no longer subject to natural limitations. Time and space now had no control of Him. This principle abides, and it applies now. When there is a living in the values and energy of resurrection life we are children of eternity and of the universe. Prayer touches the ends of the earth, and the significance of our being and doing is of universal and eternal dimensions: there are no limitations. So then, beloved of God, the natural life is no longer a criterion; whether it be strong or weak matters not. Its strength does not mean effectiveness in spiritual things, whether that strength be intellectual, moral, social or physical. Its weakness does not carry a handicap. We are called to live and serve only in His life, which is the only efficient and sure one. What is true of the Head must be true of the members. What is true of the Vine must be true of the branches. What is true of the last Adam must be true of every member of His race. "Planted together in the likeness of his resurrection" said the apostle (Romans 6:5), and he prayed that it might be more and more experiential - "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). That should be the prayer of every true Spirit-led servant of Christ.