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"That Which is Born of the Spirit"

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1931, Vol. 9-4.

"The Image of His Son"

Reading: Philippians 3:1-21; Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 3:12,20.

I have it on my heart, beloved, that these days before us we shall in the will of God, be occupied with "That which is born of the Spirit," or "The New Creation in Christ Jesus"; and this morning, for a little while, we want to set the object in its place, or in His place, and see exactly what it is toward which the Lord is moving; what we might call the pattern in the heavens.

We are familiar with that phrase, we know to what it relates in the Old Testament, and I think by now we know that that pattern in the heavens, according to which all things were made in relation to the tabernacle of old, was but a revelation of Jesus Christ, and that tabernacle was the Lord Jesus in His many-sidedness, right to the very last detail; an expression of the mind of God. We know that in the Letter to the Hebrews that is taken up again, but there this difference is made that, whereas in the Old Testament it was a pattern of things in the heavens, here it is the very things themselves and you are introduced to the very things by the first words of that letter, "God Who in old times spake unto the Fathers in divers portions and divers manners, hath in the end of these times spoken in His Son," and the whole theme of the Letter to the Hebrews is the Lord Jesus Christ as the consummation of the whole of the Old Testament revelation. He in Person gathering up consummately all that God had before spoken, and thus not being a part, or parts, but being the whole; not being a shadow or a type, but being the very thing itself.

So truly, the Lord Jesus is the pattern and the reality toward which God is working; and we want now, immediately, to get that Object into its, or His place, because until that is so we shall be held to something less; we shall have an inadequate objective and dynamic for our lives here on earth. You recognise how true that was in the case of the Apostle himself. You remember that in Acts 9 he suddenly was met on the Damascus Road by the Lord in Glory. To his own consternation and amazement he discovered that that light above the brightness of the sun was Jesus of Nazareth, now exalted to the Right Hand of the Majesty on high, now glorified. That was Paul's first view of the Lord Jesus so far as we know. It was Christ in the glory. Philippians 3 is the practical consequence of that. That is "Things which were gain to me those I counted loss, yea, and I do count them but stuff to be flung to the dogs, that I might be found in Him." Tremendous statements - to gain Christ. The Lord Jesus is given to the sinner on the ground of repentance and faith; given, but Paul had come to a position where he saw that that which had been given had now got to be gained. Two realms of things, equally true. There was a gain of Christ far beyond the gift of Christ. The gift of Christ unto salvation; the gain of Christ unto glorification in the fullest Witness - That which is born of the Spirit. Philippians 3 is the practical outworking of Acts 9.

So many honestly think that all that matters is that you should be saved, and if you are saved you are done forever and you can get on with saving others. It is important to be saved, but the Word of the Lord makes it quite clear that to be saved from hell, saved from sin, to be saved from judgment, is only the beginning of things and that you may have that and miss the very great purpose for which you were saved. So that out of twenty-seven books in the New Testament, twenty-one are given up to leading believers into the fullness of Christ. A striking fact. There is this little parabolic element in the truth that we have just noted about Paul seeing Christ on the Damascus Road, when he saw the Lord Jesus in glory; in that moment he lost his natural sight and was blind and they led him by the hand into the City.

Beloved, that is a very good thing. Probably, it meant much infirmity to Paul for the rest of his life; we have traces that eye trouble followed him right through. But, spiritually, that is a very good thing, that we should get such a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory as to lose our natural sight. To have no eyes from that moment onward for anything but Him. To lose our eyes for things of the world, of the earth, for all that is less than Himself, and that you should gain spiritual vision which far transcends all the vision of the natural man, and those who have had a little bit of the revelation of the Christ glorified know how true this is, that they have no taste for anything else, that He fills their vision, and it is true that "things of earth have grown strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

We need to get the object fixed then immediately, Christ in glory, and Christ in glory as the pattern man according to God's heart. That brings in another factor, that while He is there as very God in the Godhead, and having all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him in bodily form, and while He occupies that place with the Name of Jehovah upon Him, it is equally true that He is there as man. He is the Man in the glory. He is the glorified man, He is the first born of many brethren. God has taken a man into the glory, and He has there consummated in the very person of the Lord Jesus man according to His own heart. We see what was God's thought before ever man was created and before the world was; when He contemplated bringing man into being He had a thought, a conception, a mind for that Being and that mind is revealed in the Lord Jesus when you see Him in the glory. That is man according to the original thought and intention of God, and the Lord Jesus is there as the pattern man according to God's heart, and unto that pattern God is working in and with all those who have come into His Hands for His pattern. It is a tremendous thing, and were the Scripture not here to prove it, it is far too big a thing for a man to dare to say. Here it is "whom He

foreknew, then He foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son." That is a positive statement; and then literally "we shall be like Him for we shall see Him" - not as He was but - "as He is." Not conformity to Jesus of Nazareth as on earth, it is conformity to Jesus in the glory glorified with the Father, as He is.

God has glorified Jesus Christ and we are called into His eternal glory. What a prospect! And we who do groan in these bodies, and who know the burden of their weakness and infirmity, and who know so much of the awful havoc that sin and the curse has brought into the physical life of the creation, what a prospect for us when we read Philippians 3:21: "Who shall change, or fashion anew, the body of our humiliation that it might be conformed unto the body of His glory," not the body of His humiliation, the body of His glory - something to dwell upon with joyful anticipation if you know anything about groaning in the body. The body is only a part of this great work. God begins inside now and is going to finish outside later on. Blessed be His Name. In getting down to this thing more closely, we have to see that the Lord Jesus in His history from the Jordan to the Glory is the history of every believer. The Jordan for Him, His life here on earth, His death and burial and resurrection, His being received up into Glory and being anointed with the Holy Spirit, has a counterpart in the history of every Child of God on one side.

I am not now dealing with the great work which He did in the matter of atonement, in His great redemptive activity when He stood as our substitute and took upon Him our sin, bore it in His own body on the tree, coming under all the billows of God's wrath and coming into the full depths of judgment on our behalf. I am not speaking about that, that is a thing which we do not enter or share in; blessed be God! It is not necessary for us to enter into that at all now. We need not know judgment. There is no condemnation. He has taken that side for us, but there is another side, a representative side where His history is the history of every child of God. That, of course, opens up a very wide sphere which can only be very lightly touched upon in these moments, and we are coming, I think, in these coming days to see the content of that, breaking it up into its fragments. One merely intimates it here, that there has to be a beginning where the entire will of man as man has to be cut off and set aside, and the will of God has to take its place absolutely, and be established and enthroned as the governing law of man's life.

That was what happened at Jordan in the case of the Lord Jesus. At that moment, though having a sinless will, He had nevertheless a man's will, the will of the human, and that as something apart from, something in itself detached from the will of God, and that man's will, the will of the human, the natural will which He possessed was, although sinless, set aside for the will of God at Jordan and there from that moment for Him there was the one governing thing of all life in word, and thought, and deed, in goings and in comings, in acting or in refusing to act, speaking or refusing to speak, going or refusing to go, in the timing of things which He did, now or not now; and you will call to mind that on every one of these things you have examples of the acts of the Lord Jesus. In all it was a matter of "not My will but Thy will," and Jordan represented Calvary for Him in the matter of repudiation of the natural will of man and the establishment of the will of God; that He should henceforth not live unto Himself. And so He stepped out and was challenged immediately beyond Jordan on that very question. Challenged upon that matter as to whether He would act out from Himself; upon the most plausible basis that a man could act upon. You know the enemy very rarely puts it up to you to do a thing which he tells you is sin, but he usually tells you to do a thing on very good ground for doing it. He came to the Lord Jesus about bread and said, in fact, necessity knows no law, necessity requires it, it is necessary to do it, it is absolutely essential. If you have been

brought to that position at any time you know how difficult it is. *What* necessity? An earthly interest or a heavenly interest?

That is the question. We have always to look to see if there is any higher necessity than an earthly one and we never discover until we have raised the question as to whether earthly interests are the necessity. If you take an earthly necessity as an argument you become earthbound and get the thing horizontally - it seems to be necessary that I do this. The Lord may see it in another way. Get a heavenly necessity along *that* line. The enemy said necessity knows no law; but there is a law not of this earth, a law of heaven. So the Lord Jesus refused to act out from Himself, but always out from God. That was Jordan, and there has to be that crisis when once and for all in every detail of the life it is not going to be a government by the earth, a government by things here, a government by human reason, arguments, necessities, a government by anything that is less than the will of God, to which there is true abandonment. Christ's life from Jordan always was the outworking of that law.

We have to go into that more fully. But those three-and-a-half years from Jordan also have their counterpart in the life of every child of God because there you see a life of absolute dependence upon God for everything, accepted by Him, a voluntary thing but nevertheless very, very real; absolute dependence upon God, and because of that He is revealing what man is here upon earth according to the mind of God. A man who is God-governed and led in a God-consciousness every moment of his life, that is the earthly life of man according to the mind of God. The Lord Jesus reveals that man who walks here on the earth under the government and control of the Holy Spirit, to Whom he brings everything to get His authority; to get the mind of God.

As to Calvary; we do know from much that was subsequently written by the Holy Spirit, especially through one apostle, that Calvary is to have its counterpart in the life of every believer and in a very deep way, and while something to be accepted once and for all, it is to have an abiding meaning for every day. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in the dying body." That is Calvary on both sides. Then being received up; we have much to say in these coming days about the heavenly life of the believer, but there is the necessity for us to be received up now and come into everything of this from above.

The next thing is this - there are a lot of people who stumble on this thing; that the Holy Spirit has come with the pattern, as it were, in His eye; He has seen the Lord Jesus in glory, He has seen the Man in the glory according to God's heart, perfected. The Holy Spirit knows that pattern through and through, every detail and He has come, and if we are truly born-from-above-children-of-God, He is in us and now, what the Holy Spirit is here to do is to work that pattern inwardly that we might be conformed to the image of God's Son. The point where so many people stumble is that they are trying to imitate an objective conception of Jesus; they get some objective idea of this wonderful Man, this beautiful life with loving acts and kindly works, and they have Him objectively, and try to imitate that life outside of themselves. Very noble, very good, but altogether inadequate. The imitation of Christ is not that. It is not a matter of outward activities, in the first instance. The Apostle puts us perfectly right on that in Galatians 1:16, "To reveal His Son *in* me." Beloved, you are not to go out to proclaim to men that they have to imitate Jesus Christ. There is a standard which God has which no man - apart from the mighty energies of the Holy Ghost - can attain unto. The standard of Christ cannot be reached in any energy of ours. Imitation is a poor thing. What we need is a new conception, a new operation inside. The Holy Spirit is here to make this inward, and blessed be God for that Gift - the Gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a great thing to know that a very member of the Godhead has come and taken up residence in every child of God, not to make them gods in

themselves, but to conform them to the image of His Son. Not to bring into them Deity, and to transfer to them Deity, but to make them like unto the Man in the glory, and the effect is that the Christ in the glory is also now the Christ within, the hope of glory. That is our hope, and we have no other hope of glory other than that He is already inward. This whole thing is gathered up in all the energies and possibilities and capacities of the Holy Spirit; gathered up and resident within, and if we let the Lord have His way He will do His work.

Having said that much, I just want to say perhaps in closing this which is a preliminary of what we have before us in the coming days, that this great dominating objective of God, to have all the sons coming to glory conformed to the image of His Son, is the explanation of all the Lord's dealings with us here; all the conditions of our lives which He has allowed to remain; all the strange experiences through which we go; all the deep trials which form part of our life; everything in the providence and in the sovereignty of God where we are concerned has its explanation in the light of the thing which God has in view, and unless you recognise that, beloved, you have not got the dynamic to carry you through, you have not got a sufficient motive for going on. Take the matter of service, ministry, the work of the Lord unto which we are called. Anyone who is really in spiritual ministry, really in spiritual work for the Lord, knows how difficult it is, how hard, intensely hard, growingly hard it is. It is fraught with difficulties of almost every kind and one thing so real in this is the activity of the enemy apart from and beyond what men do themselves of themselves (if ever men do anything of themselves. I am not quite sure that they do).

Apart from what you might call the ordinary difficulties of life, and the work of the Lord, there are these extra difficulties where the enemy seems to have so much hold, and this whole situation of service would seem so often to say that the enemy is so strong, that the Lord has great difficulty in getting His work done. Do you believe that the Lord *has* great difficulty in getting His work done because of the enemy? This is something to face. There it is - the devil has a lot of liberty and seems to have a lot of power, and he makes great difficulties which constitute for the Lord's servant a very hard and strenuous time. That is true, isn't it? It seems that the Lord is up against something that He can hardly cope with, that the Lord is face to face with a situation that is full of almost insuperable difficulties. That is NOT the argument at all. Why has the Lord left the enemy here and given him such liberty, such a degree of power? Why does He allow our steps all the time to be met by these difficulties? Why is it that in the way of the Lord's will you meet something which brings you to a standstill? Why, if God is God on the throne, and the Holy Ghost is definitely strong and mighty? This is the problem for so many people.

The explanation is this. Not on the side of the enemy at all, not on the side of the Lord; the explanation is in us. The Lord is seeking a conformity to the image of His Son, and every difficulty and trial and obstruction and activity of the devil, is to draw us out to God and develop the features of the Lord Jesus in us. Spiritual ascendancy, faith, the mighty faith of the Son of God. The features of Jesus Christ. The love of the Spirit. All these features of Christ have got to be fully developed in us. So the Lord thinks it worthwhile to let the enemy carry on and allow us to have difficulties, sorrows, and sufferings, even while we are living in an absolutely sovereign mighty Lord.

It is to bring out the features of Christ, and until you have got that you have not got the power to go through. If you begin to say the Lord is not with us, not able to meet this, or the power of God is not manifested, you have a lesser object and you begin to circle round yourself, not Christ in the Glory to Whom the Holy Spirit is trying to bring you into conformity. It is necessary to get your objective and see what the Lord is seeking to do with His children and how He does it. You cannot conform

anyone literally to the image of another in any other way than by bringing them through experimentally. The thing is not done by teaching, doctrine, or by being preached at; you have got to go through it, and the whole fabric of our being has got to be reconstructed according to Christ. On the one side there has to be a breaking down of all that is otherwise in order that there might be a constituting of that which is of the Lord Jesus. The Lord gives us our object; that is what I am after this morning; to see the Lord Jesus. Don't you become spiritually introspective and get yourself as the object in view. No! Don't you have *your* spirit always before your eyes and analysing it. We have been saying lately that if we become occupied with ourselves, that is self-conscious, and self-consciousness is weakness. Self-consciousness in every form is weakness. We want to be occupied with the Lord Jesus.

Oh that there might be for us a vision of the man in the glory. Christ glorified - and that we could see that because God has got Him there, having taken Him through Hell, through death and the grave, and through all the judgment of God - God has got Him there - that is a triumph, and He is the first of a large number who are going to be there with Him. He is going to get us there. We are in Christ in the heavenlies, but we have to approximate to where we already are; we have to get to the place where we already are! He has got His Son in the glory and that is His supreme and His all-inclusive triumph. It includes our triumph, His triumph for us. So may the Lord lead us on from place to place in the train of His triumph to celebrate His victory over the enemies of Christ.