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The Sign and Wonder of Resurrection

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

"And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

"...God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that He raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee" (Acts 13:33).

"Who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4).

"For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" (Heb. 1:5).

The matter which is brought before us by these passages is one more for meditation than for speaking about; it is something to quietly and thoughtfully dwell upon. I shall do little more than bring it before you with a few observations for further meditation on your part.

Going back to those passages in the Gospels, we have first of all the cry of desertion and forsaking, and the term used by our Lord at that moment was: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

In the next passage, we come to the last cry, the final cry of the Lord on the cross, and the term used was, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." When the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, as far as we can tell, the first thing that He said was, "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto My brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (John 20:17). Bringing both of these cries from the cross together: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" "Father, into Thy hands..." "My God, My Father; your God, your Father"; and therein lies a whole wealth of wonderful spiritual truth.

In the first of those two cries, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?", sonship has gone right out, sonship is not there, it is: "My God". At the last cry, the battle is won; all that that meant of sonship being denied has been set aside. In perfect tranquility, peace, rest: "*Father...*"; sonship is back. Now it is: "My God and your God; My Father and your Father".

Sonship in Resurrection

There must have occurred to your minds at some time a difficulty over these passages - the passage in the second psalm quoted in the New Testament - "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee", "...declared to be the Son of God... by the resurrection from the dead". Probably the little intellectual difficulty is, was He not always the Son of God? What about the eternal Sonship? Was He not God's Son before the resurrection? If so, in what way is He the Son in resurrection? What does it mean - "This day have I begotten Thee" - quite evidently referring to His resurrection. That is borne out without any question by the first and second chapters of the letter to the Hebrews alone. If you look at the context, there is no room for any doubt about it, that the "this day" is the day of His resurrection, and on that day He was begotten and on that day He is called 'Son'. When, then, is the difference? Was He not the Son? If so, how is He and in what way is He the Son in resurrection? Perhaps you have had that difficulty, perhaps you have never thought about it seriously; it has flashed through your mind and you have never stopped to work it out. We will just seek to clear that up and get to the point of this word.

Let us say at once that it is altogether related to the first and the last Adam. The first Adam was called God's son in the genealogy (Luke 3:38), "Adam, the son of God". There is a sense in which the first Adam was the son of God, but there is a sense in which that sonship was never fully realised; all its meaning, all its potentiality, all the Divine intention, was never known. It was sonship on probation, before determination. You notice the marginal word in Rom. 1:4, "declared to be the Son of God with power". Well, the first Adam failed, and in him the whole race lost its sonship. The Lord Jesus came, as we so well know, into that position as representative of the whole race in Adam. In the cross He stepped right into that position representatively, into that relationship, to meet the final consequences of that lost sonship.

No son of the first Adam has ever known the final consequences of that lost sonship in this life. The final consequences of that last sonship are in that eternal hour of unspeakable agony when there is the awful consciousness of what it is to be abandoned by God. We are out of Christ, without God and without hope in this world, but we are not aware of it fully or to the full extent of what it involves. The Lord Jesus, so to speak, in that moment in the cross, projected Himself forward into the full realisation of that complete consciousness of what God-forsakenness really means, that which is the terrible destiny of all deliberate and conscious rejectors - to be rejected. There He stood in a relationship to lost sonship in its full and final meaning and suffered the consciousness of being abandoned by God.

Well, having suffered that judgment, that consequence, and carried all the agony of it to the very disrupting of His soul and the breaking of His heart so that He died not by crucifixion, while the other men on the other crosses were alive, He was dead already when they came to inspect. He died by the very disrupting of His soul and of His heart for this God-forsakenness. When that was accomplished He had the eternal moment of consciousness that that was past.

It was all borne, and He can return to the word 'Father', but with a meaning which it never bore for man before that time. And the last word of the cross is not 'forsaken' but '*Father*'. Sonship has come now on to a new ground of resurrection, restoration; the alienation of the race in Christ has been overcome, restoration is made for the race in Him, and so it is 'Father' with which everything begins; it is God and Father. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:3) - what a wealth that phrase holds when you look at it in the light of the Cross! That is the ground of our approach, our appeal. It is the full meaning of the triumph of His Cross over all the alienation that had come to the race and the loss of God's meaning of sonship.

Briefly then, that is the explanation of "This day have I begotten thee." It is a begetting, not of the eternal Son, not of Christ as God the Son; it is the begetting of the *Son of Man*, it is the begetting of the *last Adam*, it is the begetting of sonship for man in Him, for us in Him. And so Peter cries, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:3-5). Death and the resurrection were the point at which this issue arose, the issue of the alienation of man and the issue of the re-birth of man in a representation.

Sonship Continually Demonstrated on the Ground of Resurrection

But then, for our present spiritual benefit, there is this other word. Our *sonship* standing in all the value of that work of the Cross and in Christ risen, while to be appropriated and entered into by faith as an act, for testimony here, the testimony of Jesus (that is, the testimony as to that great truth of what He has done) is something that has to be continuous and has to be a matter of spiritual experience continuously. It is accepted in an act, but it is something to be borne out in a continuous process.

Sonship, as you will see if you study it in the New Testament, while it relates to a beginning, is something which relates to the whole life of the believer in a practical way of expression, so that, seeing sonship is inseparably bound up with resurrection in the case of the Lord Jesus, sonship is always worked out on the basis of resurrection. How is sonship declared as a testimony? How do we know our sonship? Well, we say, we believe; there was a time when we believed and we in believing were made children or sons of God. "Ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26); because we believe, we have that sonship. That is very good, and of course we have always to cling to that tenaciously by faith, that it was so many years ago, but do you always find that a tremendous present support? Did the Lord just mean it to be something, well, in some cases forty or more years ago, in other cases a very much shorter time? There it is back there. Yes, we have always to hold on to that transaction with the Lord and believe, but does it not call for a reinforcement as we go along? Is there not some place for it to be more and more confirmed? Surely that is the teaching of the Word on this matter, and so not only the origin but the experience of the believer is that of sonship being continually demonstrated and manifested on the same ground as its origin: resurrection.

What is God's confirmation to your sonship and to mine? It is that He does continually raise us from the dead. He has left us here in a setting and a background of death; we are called upon to live and to walk amidst death. This world is a tomb which will engulf all those outside of Christ sooner or later. But here we are in this very tomb, this scene and realm of death, living; not a part of death, but living, and that is the testimony, and that is sonship. Sonship is something for manifestation. The end of this process is the full manifestation of the sons of God, according to Romans 8:19. Here in a spiritual way, to ourselves, to one another, and to all who have any perception, who are willing to see, and to the condemnation of others and to the confounding of principalities and powers, the manifold wisdom of God is shown in the church.

Now we begin at our new birth. You notice how rich Hebrews 1 and 2 - how rich they are in this connection, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee". Then those two chapters are set definitely in the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, "Made perfect through sufferings" (2:10); "He should taste of death for every man" (2:9). Then these quotations, and amongst them the little fragment from Isaiah, "I and the children whom God hath given Me" (2:13). "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren" (2:12). You note the completion of the statement in Isaiah, "Behold, I and the children whom God hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel" (Isa. 8:18). "I and the children" taken over from Isaiah, related supremely to the Lord Jesus Christ says, "I and the children whom God hath given Me". How? In resurrection, "Begot us again by a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". It is the corn of wheat; "I and the children".

In resurrection, we are the children of Christ, given to Christ in resurrection. "I and the children whom God hath given Me are for signs and for wonders in Israel". What signs and wonders? "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet" (Matt. 12:39). What is that? Death and resurrection. "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" - signs and wonders, resurrection every time.

What signs and wonders are you wanting to be able to give the world? If you are spiritual, it will only be a spiritual sign and it will be this again and again: that God raised you from the dead, and all who have spiritual intelligence are able to see that; principalities and powers are seeing signs and wonders in us in this repeated act of resurrection. There is no other way of accounting for the continuance of the church through the ages; all the powers of hell and death have come like a deluge upon the church through the centuries, sometimes seeming almost to quench its light, but it has sprung up again, it has broken forth again, it is greater than ever after every such time.

What is true of the church as a whole is true in its smaller ways in our own experience. We know in our own hearts how we sometimes become compassed by death, how we almost fear for our own faith at times, wondering if we shall spiritually survive, but we have gone on, we do not know how, but here we are still going on. It is just that working of "the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe" (Eph. 1:19). It is not our endurance, it is the power of His resurrection. That is the testimony - "for signs and for wonders". The story is not to be read openly, it will one day be read to His glory. I mean that what you and I go through in secret in this way, is not known generally to others, those dark and terrible hours and days and weeks and sometimes months when we wonder if we are going to come out of this low point. It is a story hidden, everyone knows their own dark deadly hours in the spiritual life and in other ways too. Well, we begin on resurrection, we go on on resurrection, and we shall end on resurrection - that is the testimony.

When God forsook Him, that was the final forsaking of man in Christ; no more forsaking, now there is no more tasting of death for those who are in Christ. He tasted death in that moment of death; spiritual death is becoming fully alive to what it means to be finally abandoned by God. He tasted that for every man; that death has been swallowed up in Christ. So we go on on the ground of that, the ground of tremendous promise.

The Lord give us strength to stand on that ground in the darkest and most deadly hour. If we are children of Christ by resurrection, we are for signs and wonders in Israel. Let us believe that for ourselves and for those for whom we have responsibility here. The situation may seem very grim, but it is an occasion, an opportunity, for the signs and wonders of resurrection.