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## The Things of the Spirit

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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### **The Kingdom of God**

"He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he taketh of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John 16:14,15).

"But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God... Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Corinthians 2:10,14).

It is quite clear, I think, that the passage we have quoted from Corinthians represents the fulfilment of the words in John: that is, that what the Lord Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do, in declaring or revealing His things, the Holy Spirit really did do through the Apostles. What we have through the Apostles is really the Holy Spirit taking the things of Christ and showing them to us. I want at this time to take up one of these major things which came in with Christ, about which He Himself said a great deal and about which the Apostles said much, and about which their ministry as a whole is really concerned. I refer to what the Lord Jesus called the Kingdom of God.

As I have said, and as we know from the Gospels, the Lord Jesus said a very great deal about the Kingdom of God. And right at the end of the book of the Acts, near the end of the long, full life of the

Apostle Paul, we are told that the last things he was talking about were the things of the kingdom of God. He received in his hired house where he was a prisoner all who came to him, and spoke to them the things concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:30,31). This, then, is a major matter in relation to the Lord Jesus about which we need the Holy Spirit's teaching and interpretation, for it is really this that sums up the whole mission and ministry of the Lord Jesus. Everything else may be said to be gathered into this: you have only to be reminded of the parables of the Kingdom to realise how very comprehensive this matter of the Kingdom is.

### **The Jewish Idea of the Kingdom**

Now, in order to prepare our way for the real heart of this message, we must spend just a few minutes reminding ourselves of the Jewish background and expectation as to the Kingdom of God. To those to whom He spoke in His time on this earth, this about the Kingdom of God was no strange language. They had been looking and waiting for the coming of that Kingdom for many centuries. Their prophets had said much about it, and they were in expectation of the coming Messiah to set up this Kingdom of God. They believed that God was the Ruler of this universe, and they believed that Israel was the nation in which He would set up His Kingdom on earth, and they were waiting for Him to do it. At the very time of the coming of the Lord Jesus, we are told, they were in expectation of this coming One. Their ideas of the Kingdom were entirely secular, entirely temporal, with all the personal, physical, earthly advantages to themselves that that would create.

We know that it did not happen in the way in which they expected. Christ came, the Messiah came, but in their form of expectation the Kingdom of God did not come, and they missed it. As they expected it, it was never instituted and set up: and so, because they missed it, a common phrase has come into existence about this Kingdom. It is said now to be 'the Kingdom in mystery'. I think what is meant by that phrase (which is not a Bible phrase, by the way) is that it is a suspended Kingdom, in its real nature; it is something abstract and something rather indefinite. The mentality about the Kingdom in this dispensation is like that - that it is an indefinite kind of thing, so that many people are still waiting for the Kingdom to come; and that gives us our point in this very meditation.

### **The True Meaning of the Kingdom**

We have already said that the whole ministry of the Apostles was the ministry of the Holy Spirit interpreting and showing the meaning of the Kingdom of God. Now, the whole New Testament rests upon a present definite fact: that the Kingdom has come. It is here - it is in existence. It may not be the temporal Kingdom that the Jews looked for; it may not be in secular terms: it is something even more real than that. The Kingdom is come, in very truth: but, in order to appreciate that, it is necessary for us in the first place to get a better understanding of the word 'kingdom'. The translation of the Greek word which the translators have given is not a very happy or fortunate one. When you speak of a 'kingdom', it at once conjures up ideas - such as that of a system and a realm; but the original word does not, at any rate in the first place, connote that at all.

The word behind our word 'kingdom' means 'sovereignty', 'rule', or 'reign': and so the Kingdom of God really means the reign of God, the rule of God, the sovereignty of God. It is a realm or a form of government - an economy, as we call it - in so far as it is the sphere where God's sovereignty is in operation, where God's rule is active. That, of course, is found in the synonym for the Kingdom of God, so often used - the 'Kingdom of heaven'. There is no essential difference between the two

expressions. It just means, on the one hand, the personal rule of God, and on the other hand, the sphere where that rule, that sovereignty operates - namely, Heaven.

### **The Kingdom Now Come**

Now, in this particular and peculiar form, the Kingdom of God came in with the exaltation of Jesus Christ to God's right hand. You remember that the Lord Jesus said one day to His disciples: "There be some here of them that stand by, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). Now, that is a very interesting statement. That is the way Mark puts it: "till the kingdom of God come with power". You know that the 'miracles' of the Lord Jesus are really, according to the original language, the 'powers' of the Lord Jesus. Instead of speaking of them as miracles, we should speak of them as powers, or as 'mighty works'. As His parables were an expression of His wisdom, His miracles were an expression of His power. They were powers in certain specific forms; it is the same word, the same meaning. "Some... shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come" - if you like - 'as a miracle, as a mighty work, as a power', corresponding to His miracles in the days of His flesh.

But the supreme miracle, or the supreme power - what was that? The Apostle Paul, under the tuition and illumination of the Holy Spirit, makes that perfectly clear in one statement. "That ye may know... the exceeding greatness of his power... that working which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:18-21). The supreme 'power' was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, with a view to His exaltation, and the Kingdom came then. Paul says it has happened already, that Jesus, by this tremendous, this superlative, miracle of God, is at the Father's own right hand, "far above all rule, and authority", *now*. And into that you will be gathering other statements. "For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25). "He must reign": that is not future - that is now. "God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). It is something already done. The Kingdom has come; the Kingdom of God is in existence. Christian history can only be explained in terms of a Throne, and that Throne is the Throne of Christ.

It is tremendously impressive that when it has been in right relatedness to the exalted Christ as supreme Head and Lord, the Church has been unconquerable, unquenchable, impregnable. Through everything that men and hell could do to bring it to an end, as they did with its Lord, it has gone on its way. All the hammers have worn themselves out; the anvil remains intact. But when, as in the dark ages, the Church has been out of right relationship with Him as its Lord, as on the Throne, then the Church has suffered defeat and humiliation. There, then, is God's fact, and if only we are adjusted to God's fact, the world and the kingdom of darkness cannot overthrow us, do what it will. We shall march on, "terrible as an army with banners" (S. of Sol. 6:4,10).

### **The Holy Spirit the Custodian of the Kingdom**

Now, this whole matter of the Kingdom is shown to have been put into the custodianship of the Holy Spirit. His relationship to this matter is made very clear. A comment by one of the Apostolic writers upon something that the Lord Jesus said when He was here was this: "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). The Spirit is given when Jesus is glorified: which means that Jesus is

now in glory, exalted to the right hand of God. The Spirit, then, came expressly to take up this whole matter of the Throne rights, the Kingdom interests, of the Lord Jesus. His whole work is bent upon bringing this sovereignty of Christ into expression, this rule of Christ into realisation, this government of Christ into the Church and through the Church. And, alongside that, it is the Spirit's ministry to instruct us, to teach us, to show us the meaning of the reign, the rule, the sovereignty, of Christ. That is a big ministry, and you and I must seek to interpret everything in the light of that.

The Spirit has come - He has come as committed to a particular task. He has come as the Custodian of a great and specific Divine purpose. If the Holy Spirit is doing anything at all in this world with men and women, with you and with me, and in us, let it be understood that His object, His aim and His end is to make Christ absolutely Lord in every detail - the supreme, sovereign King.

### **The Kingdom Working in Secret**

It explains all that happens to us, and it explains all that is going on within us. Of course, this Kingdom - this reign, this rule, this sovereignty - is working very largely in secret. We have said that it marks the change in the dispensation. As things are now, the Kingdom is something that is so largely hidden because it is now spiritual, and not temporal or secular. But oh, how wonderful is this secret working of the Spirit in relation to this rule! It forms a subject by itself, which we cannot pursue just now. But let it be understood that there is a deep, deep work going on from Heaven by the Spirit of God in this whole creation; sometimes we speak of a person as being a 'deep' person. We pass the remark, 'Oh, he is a deep one'. What do we mean? There is something deep down there that is characteristic: you cannot always just put your finger on it, or define it and say what it is, but it is something very real that explains that person.

In a very much fuller sense, that is the character of the rule of Christ by the Spirit in this dispensation. There is something very deep going on: God's plans are very deeply laid. Sometimes you just get a hint of them, just see some little suggestion or token. God is deeper than all the wit and wisdom of men; God undercuts all the cunning of Satan - yes, He is deeper than the deep things of the very Devil himself. He has got it all measured, all weighed up, all in hand; and when the full story is told, it will be seen that Satan was not having his way at all, but underneath everything God was working.

### **The Kingdom and Patience**

Now, in closing, just this word for practical help. John, who, as you know, is so much occupied with the spiritual aspect of things, in the opening of the book of the Revelation uses a phrase which I think is a clue to very much: "Your brother... in the... kingdom and patience which are in Jesus" (Rev. 1:9). The sovereignty and the patience are here put together, hand-in-hand. Sovereignty and patience - what does that mean?

Well, it may very well mean that God and Christ, in that absolute sovereignty, can afford to be very patient and to wait a long time. They have the thing in hand, and know how it is going to work out in the end. They can be very patient because of sovereignty.

It may also mean that patience is the way of sovereignty: that if you have the power in your hand, you are not going to use it for men's instant destruction - you are going to be patient. Men interpret God's patience and longsuffering and long delay as God's weakness or indifference, but His patience

has to be interpreted in the light of His sovereignty in this way. He is not going to use His power to force issues instantly. He is going to give us plenty of time - plenty of time. John was knowing something of that in his exile in Patmos. If He was on the Throne, why did not the Lord meet this Nero - meet this terrible, terrible persecution from Rome - meet the sufferings of His servant and servants with swift deliverance? Well, that is not God's way; He is not using His sovereignty in that way. He is giving men time, He is being infinitely patient, He is waiting. The sovereign rule and the patience go together.

But there is a third aspect to this. Why was John in Patmos? Was it because Rome and the emperor had sent him there into exile? Was it because of the persecution of the Christians at that time? Not at all! The Roman emperor and his minions were mere blind instruments under the Throne of Jesus Christ. What was the meaning of it? - and if we get this, we have got the meaning of so much adversity and suffering and difficulty. You see, virtues are the real power. Power is not official; power is not coming and bludgeoning people into submission and obedience. That is not power, that is not the Kingdom of God. The power of God's rule is the power of virtues, spiritual qualities; and there is a quality about Divine patience that is infinite power.

Where would you or I be today but for the infinite patience of God? Is it not that that has saved us, preserved us, kept us? Every day we have to worship God for His patience, to acknowledge that this patience of His is such a mighty thing. What we owe to it! Where should we be without it? John was a fellow-partaker in the patience of the sovereignty. John was really learning the power of the Kingdom of God and of Christ which was found in patience; for, after all, the triumphant person is the one who can wait patiently. We know that impetuosity spells weakness - weakness and impetuosity go together. The test of strength is: Can we wait - not being passive, but waiting positively - and go on waiting?

That kind of waiting represents a mighty faith. It is a faith that says: God *can* do and *will* do.

'The mills of God grind slowly,  
But they grind exceeding small.  
Though with patience He stands waiting,  
With exactness grinds He all.'

He spreads it over a long time, but it is all right. The issue is a very thorough work.

Now, the bringing together here of the Kingdom - the sovereign rule - and patience, means this: that you and I are being trained for rule, for government, along the line of necessitated patience. The impulsive, the impetuous person will never reign, will never be put into responsibility of spiritual government. The work of the Spirit in relation to the Kingdom - the rule - is to bring about patience, Divine patience, in our hearts. I venture to say that this is perhaps one of the things that we all need more than anything else. You may be a very patient person - some of us know very well that we are not - but the Lord takes great pains with us over this, because He sees that patience is not only a virtue, but a power (the words 'virtue' and 'virile' are cognates). Patience is both virtuous and efficacious: it is the rule of the Spirit in our hearts.