

'According to Christ' - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Christian dispensation is characterized by Christ IN you, the hope of glory, which is made possible through the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8, Acts 19:2, Colossians 1:27

Topics: "Christ Within", "Holy Spirit"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches about the essential nature of Christ within the Church and believers. He emphasizes the devastating impact of the Cross on Peter and the followers of Jesus, leading to despair and unbelief, highlighting the need for Christ to be within each individual. The sermon underscores the transformation brought by the resurrection, shifting from delegated authority to Christ Himself indwelling believers, making them triumphant in the deepest testing. The message stresses the vital importance of receiving the Holy Spirit, ensuring that Christ is inside, as the secret to the Church's power and ultimate glory.

Transcript

Editorial Three

The occasion of these editorials is a widespread and serious exercise concerning the nature of the local expression of the Church. As we pursue this enquiry we are getting ever nearer to the heart of the matter. The fragment at the head is, we trust becoming clearer as to its real significance for every local representation, from the "two or three" gathered into the Name, to whatever greater number there may be. Let us, then, bring it right back to this: it is not an expression or representation of some THING, even be it called 'The Church', as extra to or apart from Christ, but the presence and expression of Christ Himself. To this essential reality we now apply ourselves along one more of the lines which meet in Him.

PETER AS REPRESENTATIVE

We shall all agree that, while the full revelation of the Church has come through Paul, Peter was the point at which both the intimation was given (Matt. 16:18) and the actuality broke in (Acts 2). While much - too much - has been made of this by historic ecclesiasticism, we do agree that Peter was in an outstandingly significant place in the beginning of the Church in this world. So we are going to look at Peter with a view to getting to the most fundamental factor of all in the Church and the churches.

When Peter sat down to write his circular letter to "the elect, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia", he began with a doxology. That doxology hinged upon the living hope springing up with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter, perhaps more than all men, had cause for a doxology over the resurrection of Jesus!

But we take Peter as representative of all those who had become followers of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh; not only of the twelve, but evidently quite a large number beyond the twelve. There were the seventy; and, beyond the seventy, many more who followed Jesus, and had some attachment to Him. Peter can be taken as, in a very real sense, representative of them all.

THE DEVASTATION OF THE CROSS

We are thinking at this moment particularly of the EFFECT of the Cross upon him, and upon them all. The utter devastation, and then the despair, that the Cross of the Lord Jesus brought upon them. For we are told they were 'all scattered abroad'; and we know how, even before the Cross became an actuality, any reference to it brought a terrible reaction. From time to time the Lord did just make some mention of His coming death, and, as He did so, many went away, followed no more with Him (John 6:66). Then again, others said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" (5:60). Apparently off they went as well. The very thought and prospect of the Cross was impossible of acceptance. When it came, Peter, as the very centre of that whole company, is found most vehemently denying, with a terrible denial, any association with Christ - just because of the Cross; and they all shared that, even if not in word and in the same form of expression, for we are told that 'they all forsook him and fled' (Matt. 26:56). And He had said to them: 'You will all leave Me' (John 16:32) - and it became true.

Then we meet them after His crucifixion. We meet those two on the Emmaus road, the very embodiment of despair. For them, everything had gone, was shattered. All their hopes, and their hope, were eclipsed - 'We had trusted...', or 'We had hoped that it had been He that should redeem Israel' (Luke 24:21). Now, everything was gone, and the hope laid in His grave.

From time to time we meet Thomas, and we know what Thomas thought about the Cross. He again was in the grip of an awful despair and hopelessness - loss of faith, loss of assurance. As we move through those forty days after the resurrection, we find the Lord repeatedly having to upbraid them, rebuke them, because of their unbelief. 'They believed not', it says (Mark 16:11,13,14). 'Some doubted' (Matt. 28:17). We can see what a shock the Cross had been. I have not used too strong a word when I have said that the Cross was nothing less than a devastation for every follower of the Lord Jesus. And right at the heart of them all was Peter; we could say that it was all concentrated in him. It must have been, in view of what he had done. Put yourself in his place, if you can, and see if you would have any more hope for anything, or for yourself. No!

THE ONE SUPREME ESSENTIAL

Now, there were forty days of this: forty days of appearances, disappearances, of coming and going; a build-up, steadily, of the fact that He was risen; overcoming day by day that despair and that unbelief; building up a new hope. But even after forty days of all that, the most vital thing is still lacking. You might think, 'Well, given all that, they have enough to go on.' But no: the most vital thing, even at that point, is still lacking. What is it? It is CHRIST WITHIN! All that - yes! but not CHRIST WITHIN - yet. Hence the restraint: 'Tarry ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high' (Luke 24:49). 'Don't move yet. With all that you have, you really have not yet got the vital thing, the essential thing.' And that thing is Christ IN

you, the hope of glory. Christ IN you!

That is why the apostles were so particular as to converts receiving the Holy Spirit before ever they felt assurance about their conversion. Thus, there were all the reports - there was no reason to believe they were false reports, mere rumours - about things happening in Samaria. Had not the Lord said that they would be witnesses unto Him in Samaria (Acts 1:8)? The report comes back of things happening, of people turning to the Lord, real conversions taking place in large numbers. Why not be satisfied with the report? It is a good report, and there is surely no reason to doubt it. But no; the apostles are not just satisfied with that. They sent down from Jerusalem, and when they were come down, they laid their hands upon them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). We see again and again, how that happens. For them, things were not really settled until they were sure that Christ was on the INSIDE - that Christ was IN them; which is saying the same thing as 'receiving the Holy Spirit', the Spirit of Jesus. That, I say, is why the Lord said, 'Tarry; don't move yet!' And that is why the apostles were so meticulous on this matter of 'receiving the Holy Spirit'.

That, too, is why the Holy Spirit gave evidences, in those times, that He had come within. We believe that this book, the Book of the Acts, is a book of fundamental principles for the dispensation. When principles are being laid down in the first instance, God always bears them out with mighty evidences that they are true principles - that these are governing things for all time. God puts His seal upon them. So, when they received the Spirit, there were the evidences of the Spirit. They spoke with tongues; mighty things happened. It was clear to all, without any doubt whatever, that the Spirit was on the inside; Christ had entered in. That universal Christ, transcending all human language; that Christ of Heaven, transcending all earthly things - He had come in, and the evidences were given.

There is no mistaking this, that the matter of CHRIST WITHIN is the fundamental essential of Christianity. You may have the mightiest facts - the mightiest facts of His birth, of His marvelous life, His death, His resurrection - and they are the mightiest of facts - you may have them all, and may all be im-potent, non-potent, until He is inside! That is a tremendous statement, but it is borne out by at least this threefold truth: Tarry - don't move yet; the essential has not taken place after all! Make sure; leave nothing to chance let it not be just an emotional revival in Samaria! Whatever there may seem to be on the outside, to prove that something has happened, make sure that it has got inside! Make sure that Christ is IN - the Holy Spirit is IN! Make sure! For, as we shall see as we go on, you may have so much - and then, that vital thing being lacking, there may be calamity, as with them.

This mighty hope does not rest merely upon historic grounds - that is, upon the ground of the historic Jesus. This mighty hope rests upon inward reality - Christ in you! That is super-historic! And for the full, full meaning - the 'mystery which hath been hid from all generations' - it has been there through ALL generations - 'but is now made known, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' - we have to go to Paul.

THE INSUFFICIENT FOUNDATION

So much for a general approach to the matter. Let us now in greater detail consider Peter, and the others whom he undoubtedly represents.

Firstly, then, as to THE HOPELESSNESS, ultimately, of a merely outward association with Christ, however sincere. There is no question about the sincerity of Peter or of any of those followers. They were sincere; there was a devotion to Jesus; their motives could not be called into question; it was well meant - there is no doubt about it. They had left all and followed Him; and to follow Jesus of Nazareth in those

days involved them in a considerable amount of trouble, at least with the high-up people, and the prevailing system. Their association with Him undoubtedly meant something.

Moreover, while perhaps they were not able fully to see and understand; while they were not in the full light of who He was - the FACT of who He was was present with them.

For instance, there is the fact of the INCARNATION - the FACT of it: that this One amongst them was God incarnate, was the very Son of God, was God come down from Heaven to dwell in human form. There is the fact. They were in closest touch with that fact every day of their lives.

Then, there was the fact of His PERSONALITY: and there is no avoiding this, that that was a personality! I mean, there was a Presence where He was, that was different; that made itself felt, that registered. His was a very, very impressive Presence, beyond that of anyone else with whom they had any association, or of whom they had any other knowledge. There is a mystery about this Man: you cannot fathom Him; you cannot explain Him; you cannot comprehend Him: He is more; He is different. And wherever He comes, His Presence has an effect, and a tremendous effect. The FACT of His personality!

And then, although we do not know how far it went, there was the fact of MARY and her secret. We do not know to how many she spoke of her secret; we are told that she 'hid all these things in her heart' (Luke 2:19,51). But we do know that some knew about it. We know that she told Elisabeth all about it; and Zechariah knew it; and John the Baptist knew Mary's secret. She was there with them all. There is the FACT of Mary and her secret - without pressing that too much; but it is there.

Then there is the fact of the MIRACLES - we cannot very well get away from them. Miracles in the realm of the elements - the sea and the wind; miracles in the realm of nature - as our hymn says: 'It was spring-time when He took the loaves, and harvest when He brake'. Miracles in the realm of sickness and disease, and even death: His healing, and His raising from the dead, such as the son of the widow of Nain. These were FACTS. And then, in the realm of the powers of evil - muzzling demons and casting them out, and delivering the demon-possessed. These were all facts present with them. It is a tremendous accumulation of evidence.

Further, the fact of the TEACHING: that, without special education, He bewildered, confounded and defeated the authorities of His time - all the men of information and knowledge, the scribes, the lawyers, the best representatives of the intellect of Jewry. They picked out on occasions their best intellects, to go and try and catch Him in His words; and these very men had to ask the question: 'Whence hath this Man this, having never learned?' (John 7:15). There was the FACT of His teaching.

There is a tremendous build-up. What a situation! They had all that (and how much more that embraces!) - and yet, whilst being in possession of that whole mass of mighty facts and realities about Him, and whilst living in the closest association with Him, it was possible for them to know all the havoc and the despair of the Cross. I venture to say that you and I would probably think that, if we had only a bit of that, we should be safe forever; never have any reason whatever to doubt our salvation. And they had it all, and yet here we have them after the Cross in abject despair. I have not exaggerated; I do not think one could exaggerate in this matter. When it came to the supreme test, all that did not save them; there was lacking the one essential to make it all vital, to make it the very triumph in the trying hour. That one essential is Christ - THAT Christ - in you. So long as all that is still objective, on the outside, though you may be in the closest association with it all, there is yet something lacking. And that lack may spell disaster, for it did with them.

By the resurrection a new hope was born; by the resurrection a new power came into the world and human life; by the resurrection the way was opened for that Christ to change His position from Heaven - from outside - into the inner life of the believer. It has all got to be 'Christ IN you, the hope of glory'. This is just the essential nature of this dispensation in which we live. In the former dispensation, the Spirit moved from the outside UPON. Jesus said: 'When He is come, He shall be IN you.' That is the change of dispensations; that is the character of this present dispensation - the Spirit within. What is the secret of the Church's power? What is the secret of the believer's life, strength, persistence, endurance, triumph against all hell and the world? What is the secret of ultimate glory? It is Christ IN you; in other words, that you have really and definitely RECEIVED the Holy Spirit.

How important this is! - that you and I shall KNOW that our Christianity, our faith, does not rest upon even the greatest historic facts, but that we KNOW that Christ is inside; we KNOW that we have received the Holy Spirit. That is the secret of everything.

Let us carry this a little further, and consider the next thing: the hopelessness of work for Christ without Christ within.

'He called unto Him whom He Himself would; and He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him' (Mark 3:13,14); and He chose seventy, and sent them forth, and gave them power over unclean spirits, over all manner of diseases, and they went forth, and they returned with great joy saying, 'Even the demons are subject unto us in Thy Name' (Luke 10:1,17). Tremendous! 'Heal the sick' - yes; 'raise the dead; cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give' (Matt. 10:8). And they returned with great joy: it was done; they had seen it! And you have this picture after the Cross of these same people - the SAME PEOPLE - devastated! You say: Is that possible? Is that real? If you know your own heart, you will know it is possible. But what is the meaning of this?

In the case of the 'twelve' and the 'seventy' we have set forth a strange, wonderful, and almost frightening fact. It is that, within the vast scope of the sovereign rule of God - which is only another definition of the 'Kingdom of God' - within the sovereign rule of God, many things obtain which only EXPRESS that sovereignty. They are not of the essential and permanent essence of God Himself, as in the nature of things; they are the WORKS of God. I say, within that vast scope of His rule and His reign, God has countless instruments of His sovereignty - be it official, be it providential - which He just uses in His sovereignty in relation to His end. There is a purpose to be served, an end to be reached, concerning His Son, Jesus Christ: it has got to be made known in this world that the Kingdom of God has drawn near, and that Jesus Christ is the centre of that Kingdom. And, in order to make that known, God will employ sovereignly even the Devil himself! His sovereignty gathers into it many, many things which are not essentially of the nature of God.

Perhaps you have been amazed sometimes, and perplexed and bewildered, why God should use that, and that and that; and such and such persons. You have been inclined to say: 'It is all contrary to what I believe to be necessary to God for His work. I see that the Bible says that instruments have got to be according to God's mind in order to be used.' But history does not bear that out. As I say, He has used the Devil, and the Devil is not according to God's mind. There is a sovereignty of God spread over in relation to His end.

But when you have said that, it is a frightening fact when you come to the work of God. I mean this - that we may be working for God, and doing many mighty things as employees of the Kingdom of God, the rule

of God, and then, in the end, be cast away! In the end, we ourselves might just go to pieces. Here it is - this strange thing, that these men went out, twelve and seventy, with this 'delegated authority' - this DELEGATED authority - and exercised it, and mighty things resulted; and then these same people are found, after the Cross, with their faith shattered; nothing to rest upon. What does it say?

THE DEFICIENCY MADE GOOD

Thank God, the book of the Acts transforms the whole situation! Because the book of the Acts brings in this mighty new factor: that Christ, who had delegated the authority, is now indwelling as the authority Himself. And the works now are mighty works, but they are not just works FOR the Lord - they are the works OF the Lord. It all goes to prove this tremendous fact: that it is "Christ IN you" that is the indispensable necessity for life and for work. All that they had in their association with Him, and then all that they were allowed to do by His delegated authority - all fell short of being something that could make them triumphant in the hour of the deepest testing. And that is something!

Paul put his finger on it at Ephesus, if you remember, when he said: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' (Acts 19:2). It was ever the apostles' question, and ever their quest. They knew afterward, if they knew anything at all, that nothing, NOTHING, will stand up to anything, save Christ Himself indwelling.

Now, we can, of course, take that both ways. There is the negative side - the almost frightening possibility that there should be all that, and then disaster at the end. But let us take it positively. What a marvelous thing it is that we are in the dispensation when the one thing, above all others, that God will make true, is "Christ in you" - Christ IN you! No wonder Peter burst forth with his doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who... hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"! You need to be Peter to be able to speak as he spoke; to have gone through the awful shattering, into that unspeakable depth of despair, loss of hope, to be able to say "a living hope" - a LIVING hope! And what is it? "Christ IN you, the hope of glory."

No; there is no hope for us individually; there is no hope for our companies, our churches, our assemblies; there is no hope for Christianity - unless and until the living Christ, with all the tremendous significance of His coming into this world, of His life here, of His Cross, of His resurrection, has come, by the Holy Spirit on to the inside of things, of people, and churches; until it is "Christ IN you". All the other may be there - the creed, the teaching; you may, with all sincerity and honesty, say: 'I believe in God the Father...' and so on - it may all be there, and yet there may be disaster where that thing is the most frequently declared.

It is the impact of Christ that matters. In those early days He could not be present without it being known; and that is the thing that you and I need; that is the secret of the Church's power. It is the presence of Christ on the 'inside' of you and of me, and of all of us as people together; "this mystery AMONG THE NATIONS, which is Christ in you". You are among the nations; and the deepest, the profoundest, the most inexplicable thing is "Christ in you", as you are amongst the nations, "the hope of glory."

It is a question of HOPE. It can be touched by a deep and terrible despair; it can see disintegration and disruption. What we need is a mighty, mighty hope, a living hope - that is, Christ, Christ risen, Christ Himself! We need to get beyond even the resurrection, to where we are able to say: It is Christ present; to what Christ means, as WITHIN us.

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