

Divine Life: All-Sufficient and Inexhaustible

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the all-sufficient and inexhaustible nature of the divine life found in Christ, challenging believers to recognize His essential role in their lives.

Scripture: Mark 15:10, John 6:12-13, John 6:35, John 6:60, John 6:66, John 10:10, Galatians 1:15-16, Galatians 2:20, 2 Timothy 1:15

Topics: "Divine Life", "Sufficiency in Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the all-sufficient and inexhaustible nature of the life that Christ offers, as illustrated through the signs in the Gospel of John. He explains that this divine life is not only different in quality but also timeless and liberating, providing freedom from bondage and the power to overcome life's challenges. The sermon highlights the necessity of recognizing Jesus as the Bread of Life, essential for spiritual sustenance, and the importance of being true disciples who prioritize Him above all else. Sparks encourages believers to trust in the inexhaustible life of Christ, assuring them that they will always find more than enough in Him.

Transcript

Jesus said: "I came that they might have life" (John 10:10). Paul said: "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20). "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20 - R.V. margin).

We put the emphasis upon the word 'liveth' - 'Christ liveth in me'.

And so we are occupied with Christ living in us as the Life; and we are seeking to understand something of the meaning and nature of that life. For that purpose we are looking into the seven signs which the Apostle John chose. He called them signs, because they were works with a meaning, and it is the meaning which is the important thing. I trust that we are seeing that these things have a deeper meaning than we had thought. We can take these miracles of Jesus and just conclude that He worked miracles, or we can go further and say that He still does work miracles, and then we can take these different miracles and say: 'This is what Jesus can do.'

Well, that is all quite true, but there is very much more in it than that - there is a whole life education in every one of these signs. Each of them contains a secret for the whole life.

We have already considered three of these signs in the Gospel by John, and perhaps you have noticed the progressive nature of the signs.

The turning of water into wine at Galilee set forth the different nature of this life. The wine that Jesus produced was altogether different from and better than the other wine, and the life which comes in Christ is of a different quality altogether.

Then we went on to the healing of the nobleman's son, and we saw that this life which comes from Jesus is an eternal life, over which time and distance have no power. He spoke in one place and many miles away, at that very moment, something happened. Time and miles were set aside. It was timeless life, and that is the nature of this life. Dear friends, that is not only a statement of truth. It ought to be very comforting to old people. We get old - our bodies and minds get old, but the life of Christ in us never gets old. Oh, this life has a wonderful power of overcoming time!

Then we went on to the healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda, and we saw the power of this life to set a man free from bondage. This life is a life of glorious liberty. I think Paul's word describes that man's experience perfectly: "I have been crucified with Christ: yet I live: and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). That just fits into the man at Bethesda - there is a great power of liberation in this life.

There is just a further word to say before we come to the next sign. It is only a technical word, yet it must be noted. It is important to remember that in John's Gospel we do not have an ordered arrangement of the works of Jesus, nor of His teaching. There are many things in the other three Gospels which are not mentioned by John, both as to His teaching and His works, and as to the places where He went. Therefore, a great deal of time has to be fitted in between the things which John does record. As you read this Gospel, it looks as though things follow closely, the one upon another, but that is not true. Take, for instance, the beginning of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6: "After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (5:1). And: "Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand" (6:4). These were two different feasts, and very likely both were the Feast of the Passover. If that were so, then there would be a whole year between, and a lot of things would have happened in that year which John does not mention. You just have to remember that when you are studying this Gospel.

Well, having prepared the way, we can come to the fourth of the signs chosen by John.

Reading: John 6.

(You notice that Philip had said: "that every one may take a little" - and the end was that they all had as much as they wanted!)

To arrive at the meaning of this sign it is necessary for us to know the time and setting of it. At this point Jesus had reached the highest peak of His popularity. You notice that verse 15 says: "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king". As far as the multitudes were concerned, He had reached a point of very great popularity.

Next, He had entered upon the second phase of His ministry, which was a time of controversy, with increasing antagonism so far as the rulers were concerned. Popularity with the people: unpopularity with the rulers. And immediately after this sign that antagonism sprang into life and He found Himself in an atmosphere of positive controversy. This had two causes: one was the claims which He made for Himself,

for they would not accept His testimony concerning Himself, and the other was this very popularity. Later it is said that "for envy the chief priests had delivered him up" (Mark 15:10). It was the jealousy of the rulers which provoked them to this antagonism.

The third thing to notice: It is quite evident from this story that there was a large group of those who went by the name of 'disciples'. Look at verse 60 in this chapter: "Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" And verse 66: "Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." So it is evident that there was a large group of people who went by the name of 'disciples'.

We find ourselves, then, in the presence of three groups of people. Firstly, there were the twelve disciples, then there was this much larger group of disciples called 'many', and then there was the great multitude of people.

That is the setting of this sign, and you have to take all that into account in order to understand the meaning of it. It is quite clear that it was intended to do three things.

First of all, it was intended to be a test of everybody. It was not just something done, but something projected to test everybody. Everybody was going to be challenged by this, and there had to be some kind of reaction to it. Jesus meant it to be that.

In the second place, it was intended to sift out all these people. You notice that when Jesus perceived that they would come and take Him by force to be king, He "withdrew again into the mountain himself alone". He is not taking all this at its face value - He has seen through it all. Presently He will say: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves". Oh no, this whole crowd, all these people, have to be sifted out.

The third thing is that it was intended to confirm those who really did mean business. Like Gideon's great army of twenty-two thousand, He was bringing it down to a very small company of people who really did mean business.

Now note: the means that He employed for this threefold purpose was life in the form of bread. The mind of Jesus ran far ahead of His acts and beyond what He did to what He meant by what He did. Of course, there is abundant evidence that that was true: you have already seen it in this story - "Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do." Already He had thought this whole thing out: it had a meaning that was more than the act, and by the act He was moving toward that meaning.

What was the test by which they were going to be sifted out? You have the answer in this chapter. Jesus only wants those as His disciples to whom He is as necessary as their daily bread. If it should come to the choice between daily bread and the Lord Jesus, He wants the people who say 'the Lord Jesus'. That is why He said: "I am the bread of life". This is a matter of living or dying: 'Whether you have Me is a matter of life or death. The people that I want for disciples are those who know that their only life is to have Me.' You see, He was sifting out. Notice this: "Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.... Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? ...Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." This is the ultimate issue, and that is exactly why Jesus performed this sign. He tested the multitude. He said: "Work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life". To the professing

disciples He said: "Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves." Presently that great multitude which would have taken Him by force and made Him king will cry: 'Crucify Him!' Where was the voice of the multitude when Jesus was on trial? It was quite silent. No, they had not come to see that He was necessary to their life.

So He sifted out the many disciples, drawing a broad line between professing disciples and real disciples. And when they answered Him: "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life", He had got where He wanted to get with this sign.

You notice that there were three things here. One was that it was a matter of their perception as to who He really was. Did they really see that He was the Bread of God come down from Heaven? It was because the majority did not see that that they went away. How important it is for our very life that we should have an inward revelation of Jesus Christ! That was the very thing that kept the Apostle Paul going right to the very end. Oh, what a lot of trouble that dear man went through! Think of all his sufferings, all his persecutions and all that he had to meet of opposition! Think of him at the end of his life saying: "All that are in Asia turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). What was it that kept that man in victory right to the end? The answer is in his own words: "It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal his Son in me" (Galatians 1:15,16). It was the inward revelation of Jesus Christ that became the life of that man.

I think we can say that that was true of Peter and John, and of many others. It may be true of some of us here today. We have seen who Jesus is by revelation of the Holy Spirit. He is the very Bread of God come down from Heaven and is as necessary to our inward man as natural food is to our outward man. That is so often proved by our choices. If, on the one hand, there is an opportunity for some spiritual food, and on the other hand there is an opportunity or invitation for some natural enjoyment, the true disciple always says: 'I am for the spiritual food! That is more important to me than all natural pleasures.' This is the kind of disciple that Jesus must have: those to whom He is the only life. That is gathered into this word which He used: 'Except'... 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man... Except ye drink His blood ye have not life.' There are no alternatives to this. There is nothing that you can put into the place of this. It is this, or nothing - or, it is this or spiritual death.

Yes, He wants disciples to whom He is the only life, not just life and something else. There are whole multitudes of disciples who want Christ and something else, to whom Christ is not all-sufficient, the only life, and the Lord is going to sift out this large body who carry the name of 'disciples'. He has always done it. He did it in New Testament times. The mighty persecutions which came upon the early Church were His means of sifting out, and through the ages He has done this thing by many means. He is doing it in the world today. Oh, what a tremendous sifting is going on amongst Christians! It is already beginning in the east and is going to develop in the west - the western world is not going to escape this. The great multitudes who may call themselves by the name of Christ's disciples are going to be found out. Let us be quite clear and certain on this point. If Christ is not our only life we are going out, for sooner or later we shall not be able to stand up to the test.

But we come to a happier note to finish with, and that is the wonder of this sign. He began with everything very small. In our translation it says: "There is a lad here", but in the Greek it is: "There is a little child here". The probability is that this lad had been sent out by his mother with a basket of loaves and fishes to sell for her support, and that the multitude away from home presented to him a good opportunity for business. So he got as near to the front as possible, offering his wares, and at the same time, like all boys, full of curiosity as to what was happening. He got a big surprise! When I was sitting downstairs yesterday I

saw someone come in with a huge basket in which there were loaves about a metre long. Now, don't think of loaves like that with this boy. They were probably just little round pieces of baked dough, and only a few of them. And the fishes were very small. And Jesus took that into His hands, and after He had prayed He began to give to the disciples. He gave, and gave and gave, and still He went on giving until every one of the five thousand people had had all that they could eat and were filled. And then there was a lot over afterward. How inexhaustible is the life that Jesus gives! There is no end and no limitation to it.

Dear friends, this is not just something that we are saying. It is very true. Again and again we have been the doubtful optimists like Andrew. We have faced a situation and said: 'Well, whence will there be bread enough for this?' But the Lord has met the need and there has always been something over. We need never, never come to an end when we have this life, for it is an inexhaustible life. There is always something more. We may be filled today, but there is more for tomorrow.

Now that is very practical. If you go back to your own life, you know that every day will make demands upon you, and sometimes the demands may seem too big for you, and you may say: 'I wonder how I am going to get through! I wonder how I am going to meet this situation!' Remember, you have the Lord of Life in you, and He is inexhaustible in His life. You may have fullness for today and then for tomorrow when it comes, and right to the end.

I am asking that at the end the Lord Jesus will be glorified in this way - that I have more than when I started. That is the kind of life that has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

May we learn to live by Him! And when I say 'live', I do not mean just exist. I mean live, in a way that naturally we could never live.

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