

# Divine Life, Unlimited by Time and Space

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the universality and timelessness of divine life, which is experienced through faith in Jesus Christ and is ministered through prayer.*

**Scripture:** John 4:52, John 14:6

**Topics:** "Divine Life", "Faith in Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that divine life is intrinsically linked to the person of Jesus Christ, asserting that true life cannot be separated from Him. He illustrates this through the story of a nobleman whose faith in Jesus transcended time and distance, demonstrating that Jesus' words have the power to heal and bring life regardless of physical barriers. The nobleman's journey to faith reflects a deeper understanding that it is not merely blessings he seeks, but a relationship with the Lord Himself. Sparks highlights that faith, even in its weakest form, can touch the eternal Son of God, who is omnipresent and timeless. Ultimately, he encourages believers to recognize their unity in Christ, which transcends earthly divisions and distances.

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## Transcript

Before we go on to the next of these signs I just want to put in an important word. This does not mean that anything else that is said is not important, but this must be important as the beginning of anything that we say.

When we say so much about this divine life, we are not just thinking about it as some abstract element, but in its true relationship to the Lord Jesus. Jesus Himself is this life and we cannot have the life without having Him. It is not something separate from the person of the Lord Jesus, and I would be very sorry if there should be any thought that we are speaking of some thing called life as apart from the person of Jesus Christ. The life is the way in which the Lord Jesus manifests His person - it is the expression of the divine person.

That is a very important thing, for it would be quite easy for some people who want to find fault to say: 'You put life in the place of the person.' Well, we have safeguarded ourselves against that accusation. It is the person of the Lord Jesus who is in view, but we can only know that person by the Spirit of life, and the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus, is the Spirit of life. It is not that some abstract element called life is Christ, but Christ personally is the life.

Now, having said that, we can come to the second of the signs chosen by John.

Reading: John 4:45-54.

The key to this incident is in verses 52 and 53: "So he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. They said therefore unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth."

There are several features to note in this story, and the first is that this man of Capernaum was a king's officer and was no doubt a Gentile.

Then we note his courtesy toward the Lord Jesus. He called Him 'Lord' - "Lord, come down ere my child die" which was a title of honour and courtesy.

Then we notice his refusal to be offended with the way the Lord Jesus answered him. It did seem sometimes that He answered people in a not very kind way. We saw how He answered His mother at the marriage in Cana when He said: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2:4). On another occasion, when a Syrophenician woman came in her trouble He did not seem to answer her very kindly. And here is this man coming in a very courteous way and in great trouble, and Jesus just says: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe." But if you look more deeply into these answers of Jesus you will see why He did it. Sometimes the Lord seems to be very unkind. He is not really so, but He sees that something is very necessary before He can show His kindness, and that is that it is necessary for us to be perfectly clear that it is not just the benefit that we want, but Himself. It is not just faith in what He can do for us, but faith in His own person. Do we want the blessing, or do we want the Lord? The Lord Jesus is always trying to get us to want Him, and that is exactly what happened here. The man said: 'Lord, come down. It is You I need. I cannot go on without You. This is a matter of life or death.' The Lord Jesus saw that that was his spirit - that he was not going to argue about motives or discuss signs and wonders, but was saying 'Lord, it is You I need' and He always responds to that. Sometimes He seems to be unkind, but it is to find out whether our hearts really want Him or only a blessing. And with this man the result was that "Himself believed, and his whole house".

You notice that the word 'believe' is used twice here. When Jesus said "Go thy way; thy son liveth", it says that "he believed the word that Jesus spake", but it is quite clear from the second use of the word 'believe' that that was a belief with some reservation, or difficulty, or question. I expect the man stood still for a moment and had to ask himself a question: 'Now, if I don't do what He tells me to do, then I am in a desperate situation. I had better believe what He says. I will go, and believe that what He says is all right.' But he was not wholly committed. There is a kind of belief which is not a wholehearted committal. At the end, however, it says: "Himself believed and his whole house" and this is complete faith, the kind of belief which commits himself with all that he has.

Well, these are things that we take note of as we go on, but we are really dealing with this matter of life and its nature. It will not take us long to get to the heart of this particular sign. It is a very important feature of this divine life, but it is very simple.

Just look carefully at the story again. We have said that the key of this sign is in verses 52 and 53, and it is the time factor. It was one o'clock in the afternoon when Jesus said: "Go thy way; thy son liveth" - and the servant said: "Yesterday at the seventh hour". The man knew that that was the time when Jesus said those words. The Jewish day began at six o'clock in the morning and ended at six o'clock in the afternoon,

so the seventh hour was one o'clock in the afternoon.

You will remember, perhaps, other time marks in the Gospels. When Jesus yielded up His Spirit to the Father on the Cross, it says: "A darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Luke 23:44). That was three o'clock in the afternoon, when the sun ought to have been shining most powerfully.

This time factor is very important, especially in this sign. The Lord Jesus said these words at one o'clock in the afternoon, and the man had to journey, perhaps on foot, all the way from Cana to Capernaum. He started on his long walk. Probably when the sun went down at six o'clock he did not continue his journey, for they did not travel after dark in that country. So he went in somewhere to stay for the night and started again on his journey in the morning. His servants came to meet him. We do not know exactly what the hour was when the servants and the master met, but there was the whole of the rest of the first day, the night, and some of the next morning between his meeting with the Lord Jesus and this meeting. And there were many miles between - a lot of time and a lot of distance; a lot of time and a lot of geography: and the life disposed of all that in an instant. All the time and all the miles disappeared when Jesus spoke His words. The thing happened at the very time Jesus uttered those words away there in Cana - the life came in.

Apparently death had been at work in this child for some time. The Greek word which describes his condition is in the imperfect tense, which means that he had got nearer and nearer to death. It had been coming on for some time. When the man came and said: 'My child is at the point of death', it was just about to finish its history in this child. So the time factor is here as well as the geography factor. Jesus spoke the word and time and geography were no more. It would not have mattered if that child had been six thousand miles away, or if he had been on Venus!

This divine life is a timeless life. It is eternal life, because it is in the eternal Son of God.

John has told us, as we have seen, that all this was to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. How do we know that He is the Son of God? Because He gave us eternal life.

Try this out on someone else - on the Hindu Krishna, for instance, or any other god in this world, and see if it will work half a mile away. And see how long it takes to work. It never works, even right on the spot. But we in this place today are in the benefit of prayer hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles away. If we are knowing something of the presence of the Lord Jesus and His life, it is largely due to prayers many, many miles away. Of course, that is only a human way of putting it. There are no miles nor hours where the Lord Jesus is concerned. His presence means that all those things go. He is God, and one of God's characteristics is omnipresence. He is everywhere, at the same time.

This is something that we can put to the test. Why do we pray for people on the other side of the world? Because we believe that Jesus is more than time and distance. And His people who are knowing the working of death can receive life by our touching the Lord Jesus here. I feel that we, the Lord's people, and the Lord's Church, have not used this great value of life enough. We must believe that people on the other side of the world are as near to Him as we are. And how near to Him are we? He is nearer than hands and closer than breathing.

And He is the same to all His people, wherever they are. I said it would not take long to get to the heart of this sign - but what a wonderful sign it is! Jesus has only to speak a word and all time and distance disappear. This nobleman's faith touched the Lord Jesus and He drew it out. He put that faith to the test.

He really said: 'Do you mean business? Do you really trust Me? Or is it signs and wonders that you want? Do you really believe who I am?' All that is in this test, and when this man believed Jesus, even if it was in a weak way, He took that faith, which was only like the grain of mustard seed, and through it the mountain of his trouble disappeared.

The point is that faith always touches the Lord Jesus, and so it touches the eternal Son of God, the universal Son of God, the Son of God who is greater than all time and all distance.

That is the meaning of this sign. You see, when we are really 'in Christ', to use Paul's phrase, we are always regarded as being together, though we may be thousands of miles apart. The Lord Jesus does not look upon us as being in this country, in that country and in another country. He Himself is the only country in this universe, and so we leave our country and our own nationality when we come into Christ. I think perhaps this is found in the fact that this man is a Gentile. The Jews were exclusive and said: 'We are the only people and our country is the only country.' Jesus went outside those frontiers and touched the world outside. This man was a representative of all the nations, for he was a Gentile. In the Lord Jesus every earthly division is removed. There are no British, Swiss, German, French or Indian in Christ. He is only one nationality and that is a heavenly one. He is only one language and that is a spiritual one. He is the heavenly country. No matter what we are here, in Him we are all together as one man in Christ. All the earthly distinctions of place and time disappear in Him. It may take us a long time to travel about this world, though men think it is a very wonderful thing to travel at so many hundred or thousand miles a minute and get to the moon in no very great time! But, dear friends, in this very moment in Christ we can touch our brethren six or seven thousand miles away.

That is a miracle. But here is the sign of that miracle. This life is eternal life; it is timeless; it knows no space; everything is present when Jesus is present.

Let us just go back for a moment before we finish. John tells us that Jesus did these signs "in the presence of his disciples" (John 20:30), and we have already pointed out that in Matthew, Mark and Luke the word 'disciples' is in Aramaic and means 'apprentices'. To learn Christ is to learn this great secret. We are apprentices in the School of Eternity and we have to learn what Christ means in this way. Of course, we do know something about it. Some of us have had very real experiences of prayers being made for us many, many hundreds of miles away and being answered for us at the very time they were made. It is a wonderful thing to learn that! That was what Jesus was teaching His apprentices. They were able to say: 'Well, that is wonderful! Here in one place Jesus speaks a word, and it is discovered the very next day that at that very moment the thing happened many miles away.'

I am quite sure that this is one of the great things that came into the Church at the beginning. You can see it at work in the Book of the Acts. There, up in Caesarea, is a Gentile man who is praying. Down here, on the coast of Palestine, at Joppa, is another man who is praying. The prayers of both are answered at the same time, and the result is that they come together, and Jesus is glorified. Dear friends, what does this mean to us? Surely this is something that the Lord has put into our hands? If He is the carpenter and we are the apprentices, He has put this tool into our hands and is saying: 'Now go and make things out of this wonderful power of divine life which is ministered through prayer.'

There is much more in this story, but we have just sought to get to the heart of it. I think the Lord has revealed His secret to us, and it is a wonderful secret to possess. We need not be alone, wherever we are. Oh, what some of the dear, suffering servants of God far away are knowing of help from the Lord because

we are praying here! Let us believe this and use it. Let us bring glory to Him in this way.

We are going to leave it there, but if these have been only a few words, not taking a long time to say, it is one of the most wonderful things that have been revealed by the Holy Spirit. How great the Lord Jesus is! No time, but from eternity to eternity. No limitation of place, but everywhere.

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