

Ministering to the Glory of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the Church's calling to minister to the glory of God through spiritual warfare and unwavering devotion to Christ.

Topics: "Glory Of God", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the Church's primary purpose is to minister to the glory of God, drawing parallels between Jesus' temptations in the wilderness and the Church's spiritual battles. He highlights that true ministry is not about outward activities but about glorifying God through our lives and maintaining a full revelation of Him. Sparks urges believers to recognize their calling to stand against the Evil One while affirming God's kingdom, power, and glory. He stresses the importance of being spiritually alive and aware of God's holiness, which should govern the Church's actions and responses to sin. Ultimately, the Church must embody a deep commitment to glorifying God in all aspects of life.

Transcript

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil... Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him... Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:1,8-10).

"Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Matt. 6:13).

"For not unto angels did he subject the world to come, whereof we speak. But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst him with glory and honour, And didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he subjected all things unto him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God he should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:5-10).

This passage in the letter to the Hebrews fits very truly into the other passages read from Matthew. In chapter 4 of Matthew, we see the last Adam, the second Man, entering upon the field of trial at the hands of the Evil One, and being tempted on the same principle as the first Adam, namely, that of having things in Himself and for Himself, and of Himself, instead of having them in relation to God on a basis of faith and dependence. In this record, the last Adam, the second Man, triumphed where the first failed; holding everything into God, and having nothing save as in God. His declaration "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" reveals Him as recognizing and standing for the rights of God.

Now, when we pass on to chapter 6 of Matthew, the Lord has His own near Him, and He instructs them in the matter of prayer. At the end of that which is not a form of prayer to be repeated continually, but a gathering up of principles of prayer, He introduces exactly the same factors as are found in chapter 4. There is the Evil One, there is the testing or trying at the hands of the Evil One, and there is the acknowledgment of all things as being in God - "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." As we said in our previous meditation, by such words and spiritual principles there enunciated, the Lord Jesus puts His own people, His Church, into the position of standing against the Evil One, against his kingdom, his power, his glory and of repudiating all that, and, on the other hand, holding to the Father, His kingdom, His power, His glory, and testifying thereto. The point of our message is that this is what the Church is called for - to stand in that gap on the one hand, all the time repudiating certain claims which, with ostentation and demonstration, are constantly being asserted by the Evil One, and, on the other hand, declaring and holding to what is God's rightful position and what belongs to Him - the kingdom, the power, the glory. This position, as we have said, is constantly raising issues in our own lives and they become the one big cumulative issue of the Church's vocation.

The Position of a Church Governed by the Holy Spirit

There are two or three things that should help us as we recognize that. The first is this - the position in which the Church will be found when it is governed by the Holy Spirit. There are a good many ideas as to what such a life or church will be. Many of them are right, many of them are doubtful, but this one is perfectly clear.

1. Standing in the Gap

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

A life or church which is governed and directed by the Holy Spirit, will be led into the breach where the testimony of God's rights, God's honour, God's glory, is the main issue in view. That is most certainly a mark of the Holy Spirit's government. Under the Holy Spirit's direction, such a position is inevitable. That may comfort us in all our affliction. Satan would like very often to make of our affliction, of our suffering, a ground of accusation: to insinuate that, because of all this having come upon us, we must be wrong; the Lord must be against us, or at least have reservations about us - things cannot be as they ought to be, whereas the truth is just the opposite. Look at God's own Son in the wilderness and see Him alone and in need and pressed by the enemy, and doubtless suffering in soul and weak in body, and know that this is a situation created by the Holy Ghost for a testimony, for the glory of God, for the kingdom of God, for the power of God. So it is a great thing, and a glorious thing, if we did but recognize it, to be put into the position where that testimony hangs, as it were, upon us, in a day of fierce and terrible assaults from the enemy. Such is a Holy Spirit-led church.

2. Maintaining the Spirituality of the Kingdom

The next thing, which runs closely in accord with it, is this: a life or people governed and directed by the Holy Spirit will come to the place where the kingdom, the power and the glory are essentially spiritual. That is a challenge. The Church has lost its real, powerful, effective testimony because it has sought a temporal, seen, tangible kingdom, power, and glory, and Satan has triumphed along that line. As he sought to triumph with Christ, so he has sought to triumph with the Church, and, in a great degree, has triumphed by bringing the Church into the realm where present kingdom, present power, present glory, is the thing sought after, reached unto, accepted, whereas the true kingdom, power and glory is spiritual, not temporal; is heavenly not earthly; is manifested not amongst men as Divine demonstrations, but manifested in the spiritual realm back of men and can only really be appraised, appreciated, recognized there.

See the example in the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. These chapters in Matthew all have to do with the kingdom. The kingdom was with Him; the power was with Him; the glory was with Him. "We beheld his glory", said another writer, "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and that is not the kind of glory that men appreciate as on this earth as we see today. The glory that they are flaunting before the eyes of the world has nothing of grace and truth about it. It is another kind of glory that belongs to the Lord Jesus, just the opposite of this world's glory; it is full of grace and truth, and cannot be appreciated as amongst men of fleshly mind, worldly mentality. The Church must come into that place where, like its Head in the wilderness, it is stripped of everything that man calls a kingdom and power and glory, yet nevertheless demonstrates a kingdom and power and glory which is superior, though not capable of being appreciated by the natural mind. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink. Satan said, "Command that these stones become bread". The word is, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. 14:17). The power is not that by which you demonstrate fleshly might over man. It is that by which the spiritual forces are dethroned and upset, and so the glory is also spiritual. The kingdom, the power and the glory were with Him, but it was not in manifestation, it was hidden. All the issues were with Him, but in such a realm and in such a way as to give no gratification to the natural life at all. Satan was out to get Him to gratify His soul, His natural life, His humanity as such, and He was refusing to move on that plane, in that realm, and maintained His heavenly relationship with His Father, and it was there that the kingdom came, and the power and the glory were felt.

Now you see the principles. The Church will come into the same position and state as the Lord Jesus came into because of the essentially corporate nature of this thing. That is one reason why we have read Hebrews 2. There you have the uniting.

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one."

That leads you back to this - What is man, that thou are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou makest mention of him? In relation to what? - the subjecting of "the world to come, whereof we speak". We are speaking not unto angels but to man, but we see not man collectively in that Divinely appointed and designed position yet. But we see the Man in Whom all the others will be found, we see Him there, and so He goes before and they follow on. They come into the same position as He was led into, to the same end - the kingdom, the power and the glory, with Him and in Him.

3. Attesting the Accomplished Triumph of Christ

There is, however, a third thing which has to qualify that somewhat. It is this - that we are not doing what He did. There is a difference between Matthew 4 and Matthew 6. In Matthew 4 He fought the fight through and, so far as the foundation of the kingdom, the power, and the glory were concerned, it was a settled matter when He emerged from the wilderness. The victory was in His possession. Of course, the fulness of it was carried forward to the Cross and all accomplished there; but here as an initial, basic encounter with the enemy, He emerged in the power of the Spirit as Victor, and the thing was done. It was a settled issue, perhaps we should say potentially, for on the same things there were to be many more battles in His life; nevertheless, potentially the thing was settled.

When you come to Chapter 6, where we are brought in, it is not our being put into the position to fight that battle to a victory, and we must be very careful lest the enemy should gain a tremendous advantage by our having a mentality that the thing is not settled. You have to be careful here, because the enemy is always trying to get us into a position where the issue is not a settled one. If he can get any weakness in this matter, you may take it that he is going to win that battle. In Chapter 6 the Church is put into the place to stand not into something that is now being fought out as an issue, but into something that is very positive. "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory", not - Thine is going to be, will be, when the battle is over. You see, this is a Book of spiritual laws. All this is opened fully in the later parts of the New Testament. So here the Church is put into a position as on its knees in battle in the presence of the assailing Evil One, and its position is that of attestation, declaration, repudiation. In effect it is a repudiation - 'His is not the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Thine is...' and before ever you can win in the assault of the enemy, you have to be settled upon the fact that already that issue has been won, and that position established.

The Church's Vocation

That forms the ground of a good deal of valuable consideration. What is the Church here for? The Church's primary object and purpose in being here is to minister to the glory of God, That is the first thing, whatever that means, however that is made effective, that is the thing above everything else. The Lord's people are here before and above everything else to minister to the glory of God. You know how much there is in that letter which has more to do with the Church than any other letter in the New Testament - the letter to the Ephesians - bearing upon this very thing. You are so familiar with the words.

"...to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory" (1:12).

"...the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory" (1:14).

"...unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (3:21).

"...that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (5:27).

"A glorious church"; "unto the praise of his glory". Let me repeat. The primary object for which the Lord's people are here and will be wherever they are through the eternity to be, unto all ages for ever and ever, is to minister to the glory of God. That means that we are here to maintain a testimony to the glory of God.

There are many ways, I should say countless ways, in which that is effected, in which glory is brought to the Lord by us, in which we minister to His glory, and it would be quite impossible for me to get anywhere

in trying to set down how the glory of God is ministered to by the Church. But it is the fact that we need to recognize, for it must govern our minds and our attitude in all considerations. It has to resolve itself into this. All things in our lives - in our conduct, in our demeanour, in our manner, in our speech, in our relationships, in our position, the position that we take, our attitudes, our home life, our business life - the thing which has to govern us is, Does this minister to the glory of God? for that is the thing for which I am here. If only we could settle this matter finally, it would make a great deal of difference.

Let us ask ourselves, beloved, one question, one all-embracing question. For what am I on the earth? Why am I here? What interests have I, what are my purposes, and what, above everything else, is the thing which will have marked my course through this life? Now, if I said quite simply that our response to such a question would be, 'Lord, I am here for You', you would all say Amen to that. 'I am here on the earth for God.' But what do you mean by that? It is the practical application of that that matters. What do you mean by that? 'I am here for God.' You will probably begin to work in your mind along the line of various activities in which you would engage yourself, all kinds of things that you would do for the Lord. Beloved, in the course of our lives here as we really come under the government of the Holy Spirit, where there is real subjection to the Lord, we do arrive at a point where it becomes quite clear to us that the primary thing with the Lord is not what we do for Him, not the number of things or the amount that we do for the Lord. It is not a matter of things for the Lord at all. It is just how much the Lord is being glorified in us and by us. That is the thing that matters, and very often the Lord thinks that a greater amount of ministry to His glory can be fulfilled by our being laid aside from doing anything than by any amount of activity. We discover that.

The question arises at such a time, 'Oh, why this? Why am I not allowed to do this? Why am I shut up, cut off? If only I could be working for the Lord!' The Lord has taken it all away. He closes us down and in, and then, if we wait long enough and if we are true of heart and listen for the Lord, it comes to us by the Spirit that what the Lord is after is not so many things that we might do for Him, but to get more glory to Himself in us. And who of us will dare to say that God has not got as much, if not more, glory through some who were never able to do very much for the Lord outwardly, but glorified Him in affliction? It is true, is it not? We have to recognize that to be here for the Lord means not what we think will serve the Lord, but what the Lord decides will be most for His glory; and our attitude must be always that, if a thing really is for the glory of God, although we may not be able to see it, we are content, we accept it. It is very important. The Church is here for that - to His glory. That must be the all-governing consideration in everything.

That must also determine for us the meaning of the Lord's dealings with us. His dealings with us are sometimes very strange to us, and, to our flesh, very hard. The way by which He leads us is a painful way and a sorrowful way to our flesh, but we have to judge of all the Lord's dealings with us in the light of the amount of glory that He is getting in the unseen realm where true spiritual values can really be appraised. We can settle it, and let us do so, that His dealings with us are positively in order that we should be to the praise of His glory, we who first trusted in God.

Now, that very attitude, that 'mindedness', that devotion, settles for ever the question of value to the Lord in us, in His Body, and I believe, beloved, that that goes to the root of what we have come to call 'the overcomer'. Look at the Church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7 and the same church addressed in the letter to the Ephesians, and listen to what the Lord has to say to that church. "I know thy works, and thy toil and patience (I know the things about you, all the things that are true of you)... but... thou didst leave thy first love... To him that overcometh..." so that the overcomer there is directly and immediately related to first love. What is first love? We are not going to discuss that very fully, but first love surely is gathered up

into this, that there is no other person in all the universe who can compare with the one loved. No one else may see all that magnificence, all that splendour, all that is so wonderful to the lover, but he sees that and sees very little else, and there is not another to compare with that one. That one is everything, everything that is good, everything that is right, everything that is proper, everything that is splendid, and no one dare say a word against that one. The heart, the life, is wrapped up with that one entirely. The world, the horizon, is bounded by that one. That is first love. "Thou hast left thy first love". Oh, yes, you are doing things! Ah, but that essential, central, basic thing is no longer there. It is no longer the case with you that you have nothing else in all the universe and in all life as your object of heart devotion but Myself. "Thou hast left thy first love".'

That, I think, is why the words in the Ephesian letter, Chapter 5, are brought in in relation to Christ and the Church - "...that he might present the church to himself a glorious church", and what is that? - "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing". Of course, a spot means defilement - 'not having defilement'. What is it to be without defilement? "Unspotted from the world" - that is John's way of putting it. In the Old Testament, when Israel had any kind of voluntary fellowship with another nation, with a heathen nation, that was called fornication. That was the virgin daughter of Israel falling from her chastity. That is the great cry of the prophets about Israel. They had committed fornication, they had fallen from their purity. How? Simply by indulging themselves in relation to the other nations and the gods of the other nations. In the New Testament, the whole thing is gathered up in one word - the world. The world has brought in interests. There is a reaching out to the world in some matter. The Lord does not satisfy, fully and finally. The Lord is not everything. We must have something to make up. We must look over the hedge and satisfy some whim outside of the Lord. That is being spotted by the world, and those that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth are the ones who are not defiled. Do you remember that? It is just a matter of the Lord being everything. That is being unspotted, without spot, not having spot.

"Or wrinkle." The Greek word is 'contraction' Of course it is the same thing, and what is it? A mark of time! It is the mark of age. Even a little child can have wrinkles, and we say 'a little old woman'. That is not the eternal, the ever-fresh life of the Lord. That is something of time; something that is here, has left its mark. The Church has come into the realm where it is touched by the changing, the passing, the transient. It has come down to earth and become part of that which is perishing and decaying. "Not having... wrinkle." A Church whose countenance, whose complexion, is as fresh as the morning; to present a Church like that. For such a Church to be presented, a glorious Church, there must be this living only on the Lord, out from the Lord, by the Lord's life, the Lord satisfying us. It is a high level. But I do believe that the more the Lord becomes our satisfaction and we come to rest in the Lord, the fewer wrinkles we shall have. We know in our hearts that as the Lord becomes more to us, the less we worry and fret and are anxious, the more we rest ourselves, and that is a good remedy for wrinkles! The Lord help us to learn that lesson!

Now, the glorious Church is that which is satisfied with the Lord, and therefore is not tainted, spotted by contamination with the world, and is not marked by that which is perishing and decaying, belonging to time. Well, that is first love. When first love is gone, the wrinkles come and other considerations come. You know it is true in human life. You begin to look elsewhere when first love is gone. Interests are divided. The overcomer, then, is one who has no divided interest, has no look elsewhere, to whom the Lord is everything, full satisfaction to the heart. "Thou hast left thy first love. Consider from whence thou art fallen." That goes to the heart of the overcomer question. It means simply that the church or the overcomer has come back to the place for which it was designed, to minister to the glory of God, and we can never minister to the glory of God unless we are wholly taken up with Him. That is what made the Lord

Jesus the chief Overcomer.

The Practical Outworking of Ministering to the Glory of God

In practical outworking, that ministering to the glory of God, to His satisfaction, means, as I see it, two things. It means the maintaining and preserving of a full revelation of God here for His people. I think of the Apostle Paul. Here is an overcomer indeed. Here is one whose devotion to the Lord is without reservation. Here is one who can say truly, on the ground of what he really has practised, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). Here is a representation of the glorious Church without spot or wrinkle. Here is the overcomer. But then, what was it that so characterised the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul? Was it not that he kept, maintained, a full revelation of the Lord for the Lord's people? He was never content with half truth or partial light and revelation. He would never have said, 'Let us be content with the simplicities and leave all the other things alone'. It is a wrong way of putting it, of course, but what is meant by that is a very mistaken apprehension of God's pleasure. What the Lord wants is that His people should have a full revelation of Himself, and we minister to the Lord's glory and satisfaction when we are standing truly for all that the Lord wants for His people. That is very practical, and we will accept nothing less for ourselves than all that the Lord wants, and we can accept nothing less for the Lord's people than that. That is one thing which marks ministering to the glory of God.

The other thing is a standing for the full life of God's people, and being deeply and terribly affected by the fact that so many of them do not really know life in any fulness. This is true, I am sure, of a great number of you. The thing that affects you, distresses you, the thing that constitutes the greatest problem for you and makes you groan more than anything else is to see people who belong to the Lord who are only half alive, or in whom there are very few marks of life at all. Their Christian life, their Christianity, is very largely one of forms, one of tradition; that loving, throbbing going on with the Lord where the mark is life and you can say, they are alive unto God, is absent, and the absence of it constitutes the greatest difficulties. You cannot get anything across to them, you cannot help them. They have no life basis upon which to build. It becomes a great and terrible concern, and you know that an enemy hath done this thing. This is the one who had the hold of death who is affecting them evilly, and bringing their life into bondage, and nullifying it as far as possible. To minister to God's satisfaction is to have that concern for the life of God's people and to be tremendously exercised. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly", said the Lord Jesus. Then the Church must be the vessel and channel of that life, and must take up this question, this interest of the Lord, that they might have it abundantly. That will minister to the satisfaction of God.

Now one last word. For the Church to minister to the glory of God and for the Church to be a glorious Church, the Church must have a deep - I was going to say, a terrible - sense of what the glory of God is. The glory of God, beloved, is the holiness of God, the moral excellence and perfection of God, the truth that God is, the purity that God is. It is God's nature that is the glory of God, and to minister to God's glory means that we must have a very acute sense of God's holiness, so much so that anything arising which is unholy in our midst immediately becomes an agony to us, a real distress to us. It is like an evil germ that has got into the body system, and is working havoc and bringing about disorder and pain, and when a germ like that, an evil germ, gets into anything like a healthy human body, all the organism begins to work to eject it, to overcome it. That is health. Health is the power, the vitality, the energy in a body to overcome the invasion of disease, of disease germs. What is true in the physical must be true in the spiritual in the Body of Christ. The mark of our health is that, when an evil thing comes in amongst us and invades us, we in the Spirit feel it, react to it, and will not have it, strive to eject it, and make it a matter of real concern

before the Lord.

The church at Corinth was in a bad state of spiritual health because it did not take seriously the evils in its midst until the Apostle wrote a severe letter, a very severe letter, about things. They did not spontaneously react to the things until they got this stirring up and energising and stimulus from the Apostle. But a healthy church, like a healthy body, will at once sense there is something wrong, and recognise that something as being against the glory of God, and will rise and say, 'This must not be! This will destroy the very thing for which we exist. Our vocation goes if this remains, for we are here to minister to the glory of God, and that means satisfying Him as to what He is in His essential nature'.

The Lord just speak His word into our hearts.

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