

The Centrality and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ as the pivot and key to all scriptures, the explanation of His incarnation, and the realization of God's heart purposes.

Scripture: Colossians 1:13

Topics: "Spiritual Revelation", "Centrality of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, highlighting that He is the 'Son of His love' and the key to understanding all of Scripture. Sparks explains that Christ's preeminence is to be realized in four spheres: the individual believer, the Church, the nations, and the universe. He stresses that the revelation of Christ within the believer is essential for spiritual life and effectiveness, and that all Christian activity should center around Him rather than institutional or movement-based efforts. Ultimately, the message calls for a deeper inward revelation of Christ to fulfill God's eternal purpose and to express His glory in our lives.

Transcript

Reading: Colossians 1:9-29.

The clause in the thirteenth verse very largely represents what has been laid on my heart for this time: "The Son of his love"; then that which follows, the position which He occupies according to the will of the Father - "He is before all things, and in him all things consist" and He in all things having the pre-eminence: then, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." I think we can well sum up all that in the phrase "The Centrality and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ," and with that be wholly occupied for the rest of our lives, not only for this present time.

And so it is upon the centrality and supremacy of the Son of God's love that we shall dwell as the Lord will enable us. The Word of God brings into view four spheres in which that thought and purpose of God concerning the Son of His love is to be realized. There is the sphere of the believer's own individual life; then secondly, there is the sphere of the Church which is His Body; in the third place there is the sphere of the kingdoms of this world, the nations of the earth; and in the fourth place He is to be central and supreme in the whole universe, heaven and earth and what is under the earth.

We may not be able, in the time which we have in these days, to reach unto all those spheres and see what the Word of God has to say about the Lord Jesus in relation thereto, but we shall move as the Lord enables and at least take the first one or two of those spheres. But before coming to the first of them may I remind you also that

THE CENTRALITY AND SUPREMACY OF THE LORD JESUS IS THE PIVOT AND THE KEY TO ALL THE SCRIPTURES

Of course the Lord Jesus Himself has told us as much. We know from Luke 24 that that is so. There we find Him taking Moses, the Psalms, and all the Prophets, and in them all speaking of the things concerning Himself. So that in our reading of the Word of God, WHEREVER we happen to be reading, the question that should always be in our minds is "What has this to do with Christ?"; and if you bring that question to your reading of the Word of God, wherever you may read (and that is not said without thought) you will at once get a new understanding of the Word, you will have a new value in your reading; for the Scriptures, and ALL the Scriptures, are they which speak of Him; although you may have difficulty sometimes in tracing Him, yet He is there. The cumulative effect of all parts of the Word of God is to bring you to Christ. You must not read the Word of God as history, narrative, prophecy, or as anything else as a theme in itself, but always ask the question: "What has this to do with Christ?" and until you can find what it has to do with Christ you have not found the key. You will probably be thinking of certain portions of Scripture which will be difficult. You will think of such books as the Book of Proverbs, and you will say: "What has this to do with Christ?" One little suggestion will at once illuminate that book for you. Wherever you read the word Wisdom, put Christ in the place of Wisdom and you have transformed the book and you have got its essence - and that is quite legitimate, quite proper, quite right, as your reading will prove to you. He is the Wisdom of God, the Eternal Logos. Well, just in passing we mention that because what we are after is to see the centrality and universality of the Lord Jesus, and He is by Divine appointment at the centre of everything in this universe, every phase and every aspect, and He is its explanation.

IT IS ALSO THE EXPLANATION OF THE INCARNATION

Not only is this true as to the Scriptures, but this is the object and the explanation of His own incarnation. When you are studying the person and the life and the work of the Lord Jesus, there must be a Divine quest in your heart, and that quest must be for those features which suggest universality. Approach again the reading of the life of the Lord Jesus with that thought; you will not want for helpful, profitable Bible study, and you will find that things begin to enlarge in a way which throws back your horizon and enlarges your own heart and makes you feel the wonder of Christ. Looking for features of universality you will not go very far before you find them. They can be traced in the prophecies concerning His incarnation. You can trace them in the annunciation; you can trace them in the words of His forerunner as He is introduced. You can trace them in His birth with all its associations and incidents; the universe is there. It is so also in His circumcision. In the light of the rest of the Scriptures which are now ours in the New Testament you will find that there are universal features even in His circumcision, and even in His presentation in the temple. In His visit to Jerusalem, in His baptism, His anointing, His temptation, His teaching, His works, His transfiguration, His passion, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His sending of the Spirit, His present activity, and His coming again, it is that which is universal that is in view. Every one of these things is marked by universal features, they are things which reach out to the very bounds of the universe and embrace all the ages and the eternities and all realms. That is not uncommon ground to most of us, but it is said again in order to bring afresh to our remembrance the way in which we should regard the Lord Jesus.

We are not trying to make Him bigger than He is, but we are trying to reach His real dimensions; and the need of the Lord's people is to have a new apprehension of the greatness of their Christ, a new appreciation of the Son of God's love - and what a mighty, majestic, glorious, wonderful Son He is - and then to remember that unto us that Son is given. That will lift us, that will enlarge us, it will do a good many things which we shall see as we go along.

CHRIST'S CENTRALITY AND SUPREMACY IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

Coming now to those more specific applications of this universality to the spheres of His centrality and supremacy already mentioned, we take first His centrality and supremacy in the life of the believer. Let us look at that word again - "Christ in you, the hope of glory." You will notice in the context that the first chapter of the Colossian letter carries us right back into the mind and heart of God before the world was, and we are shown what was going on in the mind and heart of the Father concerning His Son.

It is called "the mystery," that is, the Divine secret. It is impressive to see that before any creative activities commenced, God was cherishing a secret in His heart, the Father had a secret, something which He had shown to no one, told to no one, a cherished secret; it related to His Son. Out of the secret of His heart concerning His Son, every activity of God proceeded, and down through the ages He was occupied in many activities, in many forms and ways, working with His secret, enshrining His secret in those many activities, in those many forms and ways of His self-expression, never giving out what the secret was, never proclaiming what was in His heart in so many words, but hiding it, hiding it within symbols and types and many things; they all enshrined a secret, "the mystery".

Then at length, in the fullness of the times, at the end of these times, He sent forth His Son, the Son of His love; then by revelation of the Holy Spirit He was pleased to make known the mystery, pleased to disclose the secret, and the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians is the matchless, incomparable unveiling of the secret of God's heart concerning the Son of His love, what that secret was. Read it again, every fragment of it, what God's secret was. It is all gathered up, every fragment of it, in this: "That in all things he might have the pre-eminence."

"In ALL things"; and then - and this seems to me to be the wonder of it, this is a thing which is so far beyond our comprehending - that all that, the eternal heart secret of God in its mighty meaning and outworking, was to have its beginning of realization within the individual heart of a believer. So far as the actual and practical realization of the mystery, the secret of God, is concerned, its beginning is within the heart of the individual believers. This mystery is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

This secret of God, this thing that God has had in His heart from eternity is: "Christ in you". I want to emphasize that once more. That which was in God's heart from eternity, for its realization has to be put into our hearts in time. That which was in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world, has its commencement in the receiving of Christ into the heart by faith on the part of the believer, the individual believer. That is not the end, that is the beginning.

What will follow will be the Church which is His Body. That has been foreseen and is complete in the eternal thought, but it will follow the individual believer's reception of Christ. The Church which is His Body is not the end. It will be the centre of another sphere, the kingdoms of this world, the nations will walk in the light thereof. And then again, that will not be the end, it will expand to the universe. Not only glorified humanity but the celestial forces and hosts will be in the light of that. But we come back to the individual.

God begins on the inside. Paul has a good deal to say about this eternal thought as to Christ and His centrality to the believer, and he speaks concerning this matter very largely from his own life and his own spiritual ambition, and as far as I can see he gathers it all up into five main aspects. There is the revelation of Christ within; there is the living of Christ within; there is the forming of Christ within; there is the home-making of Christ within, and there is the consummation of Christ within.

1. THE REVELATION OF CHRIST WITHIN

Firstly, the revelation of Christ within. You know to what we refer: Gal. 1:15,16. You look back to verse 12 and you see what it means: "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." "It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Now that represents the inner side of the Damascus Road experience. There was an objective, an outward, side. There was an inner side into which he entered because it had entered into him, and I think that inner side was not confined to the moment when the light from heaven above the noon-day sun in brightness was shining; that probably was very transient, swiftly passing. It seems to me that that inner side continued for three days. He was blind for three days, not having sight, and yet he was seeing. You notice that the connection was this, that "when it pleased God... to reveal his Son in me... IMMEDIATELY" - and if you look back at Acts 9 you will find that it was at the end of the three days when Ananias came in and laid his hands upon him and he received his natural sightedness there was a revelation given on the inside, there was an inwardness of the unveiling of Jesus Christ. It pleased God to reveal His Son in him. We shall never know all that those three days meant to Saul. They were three mighty days, three tremendous days, we might say three terrific days. He was seeing the Lord Jesus inwardly, and when inwardly he had seen Him, straightway he preached that Jesus is the Son of God; immediately.

Now beloved, for ourselves that principle holds true as it did for Paul, that everything hangs upon an inward revelation of Jesus Christ. Our lives as children of God are constituted by that, and all that we are and all that we do in relation to Him rests upon that inward revelation which has resulted in His centrality and supremacy so far as our lives are concerned. It is so, even for religious people, for Saul was an exceeding religious man. I say that because so often there is a kind of a mental kick back when we speak of Paul's conversion and the radical nature of it, and the attitude is mentally taken - "Yes, well, we have never had such an experience; God has never done to us what He did to Saul of Tarsus, therefore the same thing cannot be expected of us, and cannot be basic to our lives."

Now in spite of such a mental reaction, we want to reaffirm that the law holds good and that you and I will never be Christians, or servants of the Lord, in real spiritual life and effectiveness beyond the measure of our inward apprehension of the Lord Jesus. That is basic to everything. Many have not had a thorough-going revelation or knowledge of the Lord Jesus because they themselves are not thorough-going in anything. Saul of Tarsus was thorough-going and the Lord met him on his own basis, on his own ground, and because he was so thorough-going the Lord was thorough-going with him.

"With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward," and the Lord did it. If you and I are more or less careless about spiritual things the Lord will meet us on that ground, and we shall never get anywhere; but when we get to the point of being burnt up to the last ounce in the interests of the Lord, even though we may be mistaken, nevertheless out and out, God will meet us on that ground. Is it not true with so many that the Lord has had to bring them to the place where it was a matter of desperation, life or death hanging upon a new knowledge of Himself?

He has not been able to give them that inward unveiling until there could be for them no more life unless there was a new knowledge of the Lord. They wished not to live unless the Lord came to them in a new way. I think the Lord very often works to precipitate that. Well, even for religious persons this principle holds good, that everything hangs, not upon our religion, not upon our religious zeal, but upon the inward revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God's love. Christ brings the glory of God in His face, into our hearts, says the Apostle; just as Moses brought the glory of God upon his face from the mountain into the camp.

That glory of God made him as God unto the people, for the Lord said: "... shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." "You shall be as God to these people, you shall stand for Me." So in a far more true, utter, intrinsic way Jesus brings the glory of God in His face into our hearts. "For God... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

EVERYTHING TESTED BY THIS INWARDNESS

"... that I might preach him." Everything hangs on that. "It pleased God... to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him," or proclaim Him; underline the last word "Him," that goes to the heart of everything, that interrogates everything, that weighs up the value of everything, Him! Since Paul's day so very much of Christian activity has been the furthering of a movement, the propagating of a teaching, the furthering of the interests of an institution. It is not a movement, nor to establish a movement in the earth and to get followers, adherents, members, support.

It is not an institution, even though we might call that institution the Church. The Church has no existence in the thought of God apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ, and it is judged according to the measure in which Christ the Son of God's love is in evidence by its existence. It is not a testimony, if by that you mean a specific form of teaching, a systematized doctrine. No, it is not a testimony. Let us be careful what we mean when we speak about "the testimony". We may have in our minds some arrangement of truth, and that truth couched in certain phraseology, form of words, and thus speak about "the testimony"; it is not the testimony in that sense.

It is not a denomination, and it is not an "undenomination," and it is not an "interdenomination". It is not Christianity. It is not "the work" - oh, we are always talking about "the work": "How is the work getting on?" - we are giving ourselves to the work, we are interested in the work, we are out in the work. It is not a mission. It is Christ. "... that I might preach HIM." If that had remained central and pre-eminent all these horrible disintegrating jealousies would never have had a chance.

All the wretched mess that exists in the organization of Christianity today would never have come about. It is because something specific in itself, either a movement, a mission, a teaching, a testimony, a fellowship, has taken the place of Christ. People have gone out to further THAT, to project THAT, to establish THAT. It would not be confessed, nevertheless it is true, that today it is not so much Christ as our work. It is true! Now beloved, an inward revelation is the cure of all that, and all that - am I saying too hard a thing, too sweeping a thing? - the existence of all that represents the absence of an adequate inward revelation of Christ.

If Christ the Son of God's love is central and supreme in the heart of the believer so much else goes down, it must go down. Dividing things will go, insofar as they are things which are not controversies with the Lord. Controversies with God will divide, but those artificial things, those things resultant from man's activity and his projecting of himself, insinuating of himself into the interests of God, those things cannot

abide where there is an adequate inward revelation of the Lord Jesus; they cannot be.

These two things are before us: one, because of the revelation of Jesus Christ in our heart we have a passion for Him; on the other hand, because of the absence of a sufficient revelation of Christ in our hearts we are out for other things which we would say were in His interests, and for Him, but which can never, never satisfy God's heart. It is the satisfaction of the heart of the Father which is in view.

GOD'S ETERNAL SECRET

From eternity God had a secret in His heart - a heart secret. I say a "heart secret" because this term, this designation, "the Son of his LOVE" is linked with the mystery, the secret. It was not what God was doing to make His Son an official, in an official sense. It was not some activity (pardon me if it seems irreverent) of a great managing director of the universe seeking to promote someone in whom he had an interest. No, it was the Son of His love; His heart was in this thing, and there was a secret in His heart concerning His Son. He is beloved of the Father. Study the references to the Lord Jesus from the Divine side, the unveiling of God's heart as to Christ, and you will have a new appreciation of what we are saying. The Lord Jesus, speaking that parable of the wicked husbandmen, at last arrived at the sending of the son, and do you remember how He put it? "But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son." Why should they reverence His Son? Because He was the Son of the Father. Because of whose Son He was; because of the relationship. They had evil entreated all servants, but now surely they will change their attitude when the Son comes; surely they will reverence, respect, honour Him. And it was because they said: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance"; because of their utter denial, rejection of the rights of God as represented by His Son, that so great a judgment was pronounced upon them.

Well, it is the Son of God's love, and what is bound up with this whole thing is the satisfaction of the heart of God in relation to that eternal heart secret of His. That lies beneath what we are and all that we do. We are believers on the ground of "Christ in you." Yes, but Christ in you represents the realization of God's heart purposes, that is the way in which He is going to realize it, that is His manner of coming to the end that was in His heart in eternity past: "Christ in you." We can say that God can never realize that heart desire of His concerning His Son, save as there are believers who receive Christ into their hearts. Therefore, it is not converting people to Christianity, or getting them to be followers of a movement; it is receiving Christ, God's satisfaction. Then when we have received Christ, everything with which we have to do in relation to Him, anything in which we have a voice or an influence, any part that we can take in the Lord's interests, must be wholly, utterly and always for the expression of Christ, the revelation of Jesus Christ, the bringing into view of Christ. No assembly, no church, no movement, no testimony, no fellowship, is justified in its existence from God's standpoint except insofar as Christ is expressed by it.

Beloved, we are speaking about the individual. I am not justified, and you are not justified, in claiming to be Christians except in the measure in which Christ is manifested in me, in you; and all the force and weight and ingenuity of hell is out against that. Believers have far more to provoke them to un-Christ-likeness than anyone else in this world. Believers have far more assaults to churn them up and to make them betray Christ than anyone else. Hell is dead set against the revelation of Jesus Christ. Everything begins with this, the revelation of Christ within.

Now we must have this very much in our hearts in its double out-working, in life and service. "What am I here for?" "Why do I bear the Name of Christ?" "What is the meaning of my being related to the Lord?"

"What is the point in my salvation?" The answer is: Not my satisfaction, not my gratification, not my salvation as the end in itself, but the revelation of Jesus Christ, the realization of His centrality and supremacy according to the Father's desire. And then in the second place the question is: "What am I going to work for?" "Am I going to work to try to establish some society, some denomination, or some 'undenomination,' to win a place for a teaching, or an interpretation, or a system of truth?" "Is it to some THING that I am devoted, or is it to secure for the Lord Jesus His absolute centrality and supremacy?" Whatever we may say, we shall never get past that, we begin and end there. Christ is the beginning and Christ is the end, the A to Z, the Alpha and Omega.

We must have dealings with the Lord very earnestly about a new inward apprehension and appreciation of the Lord Jesus. It is the only way of deliverance from all the unworthy things in ourselves, and in things with which we may be linked. It is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and the only hope of glory, and if it is not that it will certainly mean shame and not glory.

The Lord just write this first fragment deeply in our hearts for His Name's sake.

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