

The Cross in Relation to the Issue of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of the Cross in granting eternal life and enabling believers to live abundantly through the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:11

Topics: "Eternal Life", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound relationship between the Cross of Jesus Christ and the manifestation of eternal life. He explains that eternal life is a gift received through faith in Christ's atoning work, while abundant life requires a progressive transformation through the power of the Cross. Sparks highlights the disorder in creation due to sin and the active forces of death and Satan, which necessitate a judicial setting aside of the old order. He asserts that true life is found in a vital union with Christ and continuous submission to the Holy Spirit, leading to a life that overcomes death and disorder. Ultimately, the Cross is presented as the all-inclusive answer to the need for life, where believers are called to be conformed to Christ's death to experience the fullness of His resurrection life.

Transcript

Reading: Deuteronomy 30.11-20; Hebrews 2.14-15; Revelation 1.18; Philippians 3.10.

The matter which we now have before us is the relationship of the Cross to the manifesting of life. It is very important for us to be clear as to what that relationship is. One thing is patent, and that is that life, in this Divine sense, in this spiritual sense, this life called eternal life, is only to be had as the result of the Cross of Jesus Christ. On the ground of His death and by His resurrection this eternal life is given to them that believe. We sometimes speak of this as simple faith in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus. In the reception of that life there may be no sense of battle, nor conflict; there may be no knowledge whatever of this fuller realm where the battle for life goes on. That is because, in the matter of the gift of eternal life, the Lord Jesus Himself fought the battle in His Cross, and we receive the free gift by faith's acceptance of what He did in order that we might have the life.

That is one aspect of the Cross and the issue of life. That is to say, by the objective apprehension of the Cross we receive eternal life. All that the Lord Jesus did for us in His Cross in order that we might pass from death unto life, appropriated, apprehended by faith, results in our having life.

But there is another side. The Cross of the Lord Jesus subjectively wrought out results in our having life more abundant. His own words are: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10.10). I believe that the first half of that statement relates to the simple faith-appropriation of the objective work of the Cross - what He did for us - but the second part of the statement carries us further. Life more abundant requires that what He did for us shall be made good in us. May we put it in this way: In His Cross He dealt with our sins, and on the ground of His having so dealt with them, and of our believing in His atoning work for our sins, we receive the gift of eternal life. He also dealt with ourselves, but that is something which has to be made good progressively, and it is as we ourselves are dealt with in the power of the Cross that the way is made for that life to express itself in ever deepening fullness. The fact is that it is self which is in the way of the life and its full expression. It is the natural life which obstructs the course of the Divine life. Thus what has been done for us has to be done in us, and as it is done in us that life becomes more than a deposit, more than a simple, though glorious possession; it becomes a deepening, growing power, a fullness of expression.

A STATE OF DISORDER IN THE CREATION

Let us seek to set forth the position. In the first place there is in the creation a state of disorder with which God is not united. We can all grasp that. There is nothing very profound about it except as the fact breaks upon us, and we realize that there is this state of disorder in the creation of which we are a part, and that God is not united with that state, with the creation in that condition. It is not according to His mind. It has ceased to express His thought. It is contrary to His intention and therefore He is not linked with it.

DEATH AND SATAN POSITIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH THAT STATE

Secondly, there is a positive association of death and Satan with that state. It is not just a passive mass, in confusion, in chaos, in disorder. There are active elements in it. We might say that it is a seething mass. There are forces at work in it and those forces are not the forces of life, but of death. Death is working, and Satan is associated with that state.

A NEED ARISES

In the third place, we see that a need arises, and a need along various lines. Firstly, there must be a judicial setting aside of that creation. We mean by 'a judicial setting aside' that a judgment must be passed upon it, and under that judgment it must be put away out of God's sight. It must come to the place where in its entirety it is under the Divine ban and not one part of it can come into acceptance with Him: that is, it must be judicially dealt with, and judicially set aside. That becomes necessary as a preliminary step to anything which God will do after a new order. God has dealt thus with the creation in the Cross of Christ.

Secondly, an actual and a potential destroying of that power of death and Satan must take place. Let us watch our words - an actual, and a potential, destroying of that power of death and Satan. Well, God did that in actuality in the Person of the Lord Jesus. He destroyed death and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. In Christ it is actually done. Christ at God's right hand represents and declares that this has been accomplished. Death is swallowed up victoriously. Satan too has been destroyed. That word 'destroyed', translated in the Revised Version 'bring to naught', does not mean what some people take it to mean. There are times, when speaking of destroying, we think of going the whole length of utterly obliterating, putting out of existence. This word does not mean that. Bringing to naught means, in the intention of God, to render utterly abortive, to render incapable of ultimate success. Do not forget that, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned at God's right hand, Satan is defeated. He cannot touch Him

personally, and he knows it. The only way in which he can touch Him is through His members. Satan no longer has any power to touch Christ directly with death, or with any other weapon. "Through death he has destroyed him that had the power of death." It is actually done in Christ.

We have used another word - potential. That potential destroying of death and Satan was on behalf of the saints. That is something which is secured and, though not yet fully entered into in experience, can be entered into by faith and known in a progressive way. It cannot be said that you and I at present in the entirety of our being find that death and Satan have no power. So far as we are concerned it is not an actual fact that Satan is inoperative. But this has been secured for us potentially in Christ, that we may become those who more and more experience what Christ has wrought for us, and come progressively into the good of that work which was potentially done on our behalf. In Christ, then, we see that destruction to be accomplished in actuality; in the saints, potentially.

Thirdly, it is essential that there should be a living representation of the Divine order, which is deathless, and victorious over Satan, as the pattern to which believers are to be conformed. That is a necessity, and it is realized in Christ. He is the representation of the new creation, the Divine order, to which we are to be conformed, and which is deathless, and victorious over Satan. God must work to an end, to a pattern, to a model, and Christ is that for Him. He is working in the saints to bring about conformity to Christ, which means also conformity to the Divine order represented by Christ; for we must remember that Christ is the sum total of a Divine order. So often the Lord's people fail to recognize that. We must in the first place, of course, recognize that He is a Person. Before all else, He is the Divine Person, but He is in Himself the sum total of a Divine and heavenly order. If the tabernacle or the temple of old expressed a whole system of things: regulated, ordered, appointed, functioning, related: a wonderful system (do not be afraid of that word, for put in the right realm it is a very good word), and if the temple or tabernacle represented that, they were but types of Christ. Christ is the Priest; Christ is the Altar, Christ is the Sacrifice, Christ is the Fine Linen; Christ is the Gold, Christ is the perfect Humanity, Christ is all, and Christ is the order. "Let everything be done decently and in order", says the Apostle. It is a heavenly planning and appointing.

When we come into Christ, while it is true that we come into the Divine Person, we have to come into our place in a Divine order, and being in Christ requires that there shall be a right relationship to one another; an appointing, a functioning, a relativity about everything. It is a wonderful Divine system. Death and Satan have their occasion when anything that relates to Divine order is not obeyed, recognized or observed. It is quite easy for death to get a chance amongst the Lord's people when there is a disorder amongst them, when they are not conformed to Christ in the sense of His being an expression of an ordered, heavenly system. Surely the New Testament rather thunders upon that than speaks. If the Corinthian Church is an example of weak testimony, and indeed it is, the reason is not far to seek. It was a matter of disorder amongst believers.

So God must have this representation of His Divine order, which is deathless, and victorious over Satan, and to that believers are to be conformed. That is conformity to the image of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, there is required a vital union with Him as basic, and a life utterly and continuously in the Holy Spirit. We all accept the first essential, vital union with Him as basic, but what is just as important, if there is to be the full expression of life, is that there shall be a life which is altogether in the Holy Spirit continuously. Life in the Holy Spirit is the Divine offset to that other life in death and under the power of Satan. That other life is disordered, and God is not united with it.

That is the first state: a life in death, under the power of Satan, in disorder; tremendously active, energetic, and yet God is not in it. It may even be active in a religious way, and yet God is not in it. I sometimes wonder if religion is not God's greatest enemy in this world. It sounds a terrible thing to say, but I am quite sincere in raising that question. Religion seems to place more people in a position in which God - if we may so speak - is put to a greater measure of difficulty to reach them by the Holy Spirit than any other thing, because it puts them into a false position. Over against that God sets this new Order which is utterly under the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be utterly under the government of the Holy Spirit? It means that everything shall be submitted to the Holy Spirit. You and I will recognize that if we move any way without our lives completely committed to the Holy Spirit, we are most likely to function outside of God's realm; and the end is death. There may be the best of intentions. Our motives may be all right. We may even do a thing for the Lord; but there are multitudes of things done for the Lord which are not done in the Holy Spirit. There is a whole mountain of activity proceeding from the purest motives for the Lord's interests, but they are not the Holy Spirit's activities. I believe the Lord is generous and gracious, and that, because it is a matter of ignorance, He is patient with us and seeks to lead us into better ways. The mistaken course may be due to want of light, and while fuller light is not available, or until it breaks in the Lord continues alongside and gives as much blessing as He can. But that does not mean that in the long run all that past activity is going to meet with acceptance and prove to have been for the accomplishment of Divine ends. At some point it will break down, and those concerned will come to a recognition of the fact that, after all, a great percentage of all that work for the Lord has not counted; and the earlier we come to that recognition the better.

THE CROSS: THE ALL-INCLUSIVE ANSWER

All that is gathered up in the Cross. The Cross simply says that an order, though it be religious, well-motivated, or good-intentioned, but nevertheless proceeding from man in his natural state (not necessarily in defiance of God or in conscious rebellion against Him, but just the expression of man's natural state as he is), the Cross says that this entire order is set aside. God has judicially judged it and put a ban upon it. In the Cross of the Lord Jesus God has said finally: 'You in your natural state cannot serve Me, and cannot bear any fruit to My glory! It is possible to go out and work, labour, and die of the strain of trying to serve Me and yet it still remains true that you cannot, out from yourself, by any natural resources whatever, bear fruit unto Me.' The only thing that can ever get through to God's end, and that can be in life - eternal, Divine, heavenly life - is that which proceeds from the Holy Spirit.

How sweeping that is! How that analyses and dissects everything! Of the things we say, for example, it continually presents the interrogation: 'Was that spoken in the Holy Spirit?' It is not enough to ask ourselves: 'Did I mean it well? Did I intend it for the Lord?' but: 'Was it said, was it done, in the Holy Spirit, or did I do it?' It is not a question of motive or of intention, but of the source from which we did it.

We have daily to recognize that our lives must be subject to the Holy Spirit, and when we are aware that there has been something of our own will, we have to be faithful before God about it. I believe that slowly and surely we shall come to the place where we live with that certain pause in our hearts which is a check on our impulsiveness, a check on rashness, a check on acting under excitement, a check on our own way of reasoning about things. That is a thing for the Holy Spirit to set up in us. Our business is to recognize that from centre to circumference our lives must be handed over to His control. The result will be that the Holy Spirit will all the time work back to the Cross. The Cross, once for all, settled that position in a comprehensive and detailed way. It stands for ever as God's judicial ban upon man by nature, in his unregenerate state. The Holy Spirit will work back to that with us.

Do recognize that the Cross is the end of the risen life, and not only the beginning. If you forget everything else, remember that. The Cross is the end of the risen life, as well as the beginning: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death." People have been to me with Philippians 3 and have asked: 'Why did Paul put death at the end? Surely it ought to be right the other way round - "That I may be conformed to His death, and know Him in the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings"!' No, there is no mistake. The order is of the Holy Spirit. The power of His resurrection presupposes that there has been a death, but the very resurrection-life leads to the Cross. The Holy Spirit in the power of the risen life is always leading you back to the Cross, to conformity to His death. It is the very property of life to rule out all that belongs to death. It is the very power of resurrection to bring us back to the place where death is constantly overcome. That place is none other than the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ where the natural life is put aside. So Paul says: "...becoming conformed unto his death...", which means: to have the ground of death continuously and progressively removed; and that, again, as we have said, is the fruit of living union with Him. It would be a poor look-out for you and for me were we to be conformed to His death in entirety apart from the power of resurrection in us, apart from our already knowing the life of the Lord. Where would be our hope? What is it that is the power of our survival when the Cross is made more real in our experience? There would be no survival were it not that His risen life is in us. So Paul prays: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection...", and that means conformity to His death without utter destruction. The end of the risen life is the Cross. The Holy Spirit is always working in relation to the Cross, in order that the power of His resurrection may be increasingly manifested in us.

This is the background of the whole question of life. I am sure, with a greater certainty today than ever, that the basis in us for life triumphant is the working of the Cross in the setting aside of all that which is natural. There is nothing more hated by the enemy than the Cross. Let us seek to free our minds from all false conceptions of the Cross! So often there has been this kind of reaction: 'Oh, it is the Cross; it is death, death, death! This working of the Cross in a subjective way is all the time leading to death!' That is why we have already mentioned that it is so important for us to recognize that it is not that death destroys us, but that it makes the way for a greater fullness of life. It is the positive side that we have to keep in mind; not the fact that we are constantly being ruled out, and ruled out, but rather that of necessity that is being done in order that He may come in, and come in, and come in. It is the life side which has to be kept uppermost, even in the working of the Cross with reference to what was set aside by God at Calvary.

Is your need, then, that of life? The Lord, in effect, says: 'Well, let us get this thing out of the way!' And when He gets that out of the way there is life. Do you want more life? Well, let us get this thing out of the way; and you have more life. You very rarely meet people who, having really laid themselves out before God for an increase of spiritual life, have not promptly gone into a very bad experience and had a difficult time. Have you ever come to the place where you have laid yourself out for that extra thing, that new thing, which God has been revealing to you, and not gone through some dark, trying and painful time? It is always so. It is not wrong. The Lord is only saying: 'Do you want that?' There is always something to be got out of the way. It may be that you want spiritual increase because it will make you a happier man. That motive will have to be got out of the way so that you want it, not for your own sake, but for His sake. If you go through a bad time, and the dominating element is self, you will say: 'Oh, well, it does not matter. I would rather not have it if it means this!' That is the selfish way of regarding it. But if you are in a dark time in relation to something, and you come to the place where you say: 'Well, whatever it costs, the Lord must have this thing in my life!' you have come there by way of Christ's victory. The Holy Spirit always brings that issue. It is life that He is after, and life more abundant, and this is alone realized by His bringing back

and back to the Cross. The Cross is basic to life, because it was there that the Lord Jesus conquered death, and brought life forth for the saints. Calvary is victory, not defeat!

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