

The Good News of a Satisfied God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the meaning of Pentecost and God's satisfaction, which is the supreme issue in the Church, the dispensation, and the proclamation of the gospel.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:13, 1 Timothy 1:11

Topics: "God's Satisfaction", "The Glory of the Gospel"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of the gospel as the 'gospel of the glory of the satisfied God,' highlighting that God's nature must be satisfied for the good news to be proclaimed. He explains that the glorification of Jesus is central to understanding God's satisfaction and the establishment of the Church, which embodies this glory. The sermon delves into the implications of Pentecost, asserting that the Holy Spirit's coming signifies God's fulfillment of righteousness and the establishment of a new dispensation. Sparks encourages believers to recognize their identity in Christ and the importance of living in the reality of God's satisfaction, which empowers their testimony and service. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the gospel that transcends mere doctrinal knowledge, urging believers to embody the glory of God in their lives.

Transcript

"...according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (1 Tim. 1:11).

"...in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, - in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with 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" (Eph. 1:13-14).

"...with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, and on my behalf, that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:18-19).

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34).

"...then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud, for the glory of Jehovah filled the house of God" (2 Chron. 5:13-14).

"Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven... and the glory of Jehovah filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of Jehovah, because the glory of

Jehovah filled Jehovah's house. And all the children of Israel looked on, when the fire came down, and the glory of Jehovah was upon the house" (2 Chron. 7:1-3).

"But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).

"The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Servant Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied before the face of Pilate" (Acts 3:13).

Let us make one or two preliminary observations as we now follow on our previous meditation with a specific point in view. We want to remember at this time that the book of the Acts sees three things - firstly, the Church born; secondly, a new dispensation inaugurated; thirdly, the gospel sent on its way to the ends of the earth. If we have those three things in mind, we shall be able rightly to grasp the significance of this wonderful phrase - "the gospel of the glory."

The Need to Understand the Meaning of Pentecost

Now in the light of our definition of the word "glory" we must approach and explain Pentecost, and in explaining Pentecost we are only explaining the Divine thought as to the dispensation in which we are living - that is, the dispensation from Pentecost or the ascension of our Lord to His return. Pentecost gives character to this dispensation. It is therefore necessary for us to know what Pentecost means. Many people have thought of it only as the advent of the Holy Spirit and empowerment for witness and service. That is rather the effect of Pentecost than the meaning. Many have gone one step further back and said that Pentecost is the expression of Christ glorified: He has been received up into glory, He is glorified at God's right hand, and because Jesus is glorified the Holy Spirit is sent forth and we have the results recorded in this book of the Acts. That is quite true, but we have to go further back still before we have a right apprehension of Pentecost, and therefore a sufficient ground for the existence of the Church, the distinctive character of this dispensation, and the preaching of the gospel of the glory of God. Why should the Church exist? why should this dispensation be different from all others? and why should the gospel be preached in all the world for a witness? These are not small matters: I suppose it would be rather difficult to get outside of them. We have to answer our enquiry in those three connections, and so, seeing that Pentecost was the inauguration of all three, we must explain Pentecost for ourselves and for present practical purposes for our very being now, and our very vocation now - and not merely as a subject of interesting Bible study.

We say that Jesus was glorified and therefore the Holy Spirit was sent. That, of course, is what is implicit in John 7:39: Jesus was not yet glorified, therefore the Holy Spirit was not yet given. But again, what is glorification from God's standpoint? Well, it has to do with this whole question of Divine righteousness; the very nature of God is involved. In the Church, in the dispensation and in the proclamation of the gospel, the very nature of God is involved. In other words, the righteousness of God is the supreme issue.

Glory Related to God's Satisfaction

Firstly, God's nature itself must be satisfied or there is no good news, no gospel. There is nothing of a joyful character to proclaim until God's own nature is fully satisfied.

But not only that: God must be satisfied along the line of His creation. We said in our previous meditation that one of those many things involved in this whole question of glory is the very existence of the creation,

and of man as its crown. The governing thought of God in creating was for His glory, that is, that His glory might be expressed and manifested - that what He is in Himself might be displayed in everything that He touches, everything that emanates from Him; that He should not be just a self-contained and confined God living in the satisfaction and gratification of His own self-sufficiency. If He is love, if He is more than simply power, He must give. He must be the great Giver; He must be not only Jehovah Self-Sufficient, but Jehovah El-Shaddai, the great Purer-Forth. He must be One out from Whom there go powers resulting in works and in definite expressions of Himself. That is creation in motive, in idea; God finding a sphere full of morally responsible people whose great desire is to satisfy Him in this matter - that He should show forth Himself in what He is in His own nature. Creation is governed by that, and God must be satisfied in that before there is anything that is the gospel of the glory of God - and of the happy God, "the blessed God," as the phrase is here: God satisfied. 'Satisfied' is a word that you can put at the beginning of all the Beatitudes. "Satisfied are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6); blessed, satisfied or happy. It is the gospel of the glory of the satisfied God. It is a great thing to go out with that born in your heart by the Holy Spirit - that God is satisfied, and satisfied with you and with me. Is that possible? That is precisely what you arrive at; you have no gospel to preach until you have arrived there. That is where we shall arrive, I hope, before long; that is the object in view at the moment.

Now, you see, the glorifying of the Lord Jesus is God's answer relative to the requirements of His own nature - absolute, utter, final righteousness. And it is equally His answer with reference to the conception and object of the creation. God is satisfied, and man is represented in the new creation - "We behold... Jesus... crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9). I must remind you of the use of the name "Jesus" here. This is where the use of that name by itself is right. It is habitually thus used by certain schools, as you know, thereby divesting Him of His Deity and Lordship; they always call Him simply 'Jesus'. That is wrong. But He is here called "Jesus" in a right way, because in that name He is representative of man, and "God has glorified his Servant Jesus" as representative of all who believe: Jesus glorified because God is satisfied.

God Satisfied in Christ Jesus

But how was God satisfied? How was it possible for God to say, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17)? - God fully, completely, utterly pleased. Well, here is the simple course of the gospel. What happened at Jordan was that the Lord Jesus, stepping across the line from a private life into the public life of taking up the real ministry and work for which He came in the redemptive sense, figuratively recognised that the Cross was basic to it all, and everything would spring from that. So "then cometh Jesus... to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:13-15). "To fulfil (to make full) all righteousness." How? On two sides, in two connections; the death side in Jordan, the life side beyond Jordan.

God's Satisfaction Extends to all Who Are in Christ

Everything that cannot be glorified must be buried: it has to be put out of God's sight once and for all; that is an established law. That is, everything that is not righteous, not in harmony with the very nature of God, must be buried. But it can only be buried after it has been judged and, being judged, has been proved worthy of death. Therefore, judgment having come unto all men to condemnation, and death having passed unto all men, for that all sinned (Rom. 5:18,12), the Lord Jesus in His own person in a typical way

at the Jordan took the place of that entire sinful race. In a representative way, the judgment was borne by Him and was concluded - the judgment of what we are. As we said in our previous meditation, this was not the judgment merely of things we do or do not do which men so often regard as righteousness, but the judgment of what we are. "Him who knew no sin he made sin on our behalf" (in our stead, in our place): "that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Now, you may wonder why I am saying this to you who doubtless are the Lord's true children. Well, I tell you this - probably you know it in your own experience, but you will be constantly meeting it in the experience of others and your power to help them will depend entirely upon whether you are settled and fully assured in this matter - you will meet all the way through your life people who are the Lord's real children who are constantly assailed by uncertainty about their salvation, who are constantly found with their eyes turned in upon their own spiritual condition and absolutely paralysed by a question, a question which goes right to the root of salvation with them. That is terrible. Some of us have found it to be the one thing which has caused us more trouble in other people than perhaps anything else with which we have had to do. It is this matter of Satanic assault upon the faith of the children of God, very often encamping upon some physical or nervous trouble, or in other ways assailing to break down absolute assurance; and immediately the enemy has a foothold there he has destroyed testimony, paralysed service and put the glory out.

Always the glory goes out. Wherever you find that sort of thing, you find no glory. It is a terrible thing for the glory to go out - a terrible thing that, over a life which is redeemed and has accepted its redemption and known the Lord, there should be written Ichabod, 'the glory is departed.' Remember that is a thing which the Apostle Paul particularly found himself continually striving to circumvent. Why do we have such frequent references in the New Testament to Israel's breakdown in the wilderness? Come to that awful reiterated statement in the Hebrew letter - "I swear... they shall not enter into my rest" (Heb. 3:11, etc.): and then the appeal, "Today if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts." This is not a 'gospel message' to the unsaved. Many sermons are preached to the unsaved on that - 'now is the day of salvation, today harden not your hearts'; but those words were taken out of the Old Testament into the New and used to believers, and again and again Israel's example in the wilderness is presented to believers as a warning, as a basis of appeal. Why? Were they not translated typically out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love? In type had they not come by the way of mighty, precious Blood? Were they not the Lord's? Yes, they were, but for them the peril was that the glory should depart.

Wherein lay that peril? It lay here, that their hearts were not set upon God's satisfaction but upon their own. This was the focal point of everything in the wilderness. They were constantly, in spirit if not in word, bargaining with God and saying in effect, 'If You will satisfy our desire and give us what we want, we will go on with You; if not, we will not go on.' So it was, when from time to time the Lord gave them their request, they were very happy, ready to go on a little further. Then He had to do something more. In the end God said, 'Enough of this; I brought you out for My satisfaction, for My pleasure, for My glory.' So, because they were bargaining with God, because it was always a matter of their satisfaction rather than His, the glory departed and shame stands written over that generation. Hence the Jordan has to be faced, and Jordan says once for all - fully, finally, overwhelmingly - 'It is the Lord; henceforth unto Him.' "We thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

God's Satisfaction to be Appropriated by Faith

Until that issue is settled, there is no glory, no possibility of glory. Glory demands that we recognise that in Christ not only were our unrighteous selves buried, but there was buried also any possibility of ourselves ever being righteous. You are willing to take your poor, wretched, miserable self and have it buried, but you are not always ready to take the supposed possibility of your ever being otherwise and bury it! You still walk round that wretched corpse, hoping it will produce some life!

The only thing to do is to put it where God has put it - bury it! Oh, miserable Christian, get buried! Accept God's judgment and have done with it! In yourself you will not be any better when you have done that; you will still be that wretched self. But the point is that you must cease to have your eyes on that, and you must have your eyes on Another Who has taken your place. Yes, judgment and death are to be accepted; but are you listening to those evil voices that constantly suggest that God is judging you, a believer, for your sinfulness?

That is how the difficulties, the trials, the strange experiences of life are represented to you - and it is most extraordinary what sensations and experiences the devil can give believers to make them think or feel that God has departed from them. This is the realm in which the battle of faith has to be fought against our soul sensations and the things which come to us. You can have the most wonderful proof one day that the Lord is with you and is using you and pouring Himself and His word through you, and at that time you have no doubt about it; and the next day you can have all the sensations that there is no God at all in your universe.

Which of these two things is the fact? Was your earlier consciousness only an imagination, a bit of hysteria, or was it a fact? Is your sensation of the next day, the reality? Well, listen; these fluctuating feelings are not to be accepted as a true criterion. If God is judging your sinfulness, Christ came in vain. We are not atoning for our sins as believers; if we are, the atonement was not completed on Calvary, the work was not finished. Whatever may be the need of training and discipline and chastening by way of developing what is of God in us and making actual the setting aside of what is of ourselves, we are nevertheless, with all that, not atoning for our sins or sinfulness.

That was done when one Man gathered us all into Himself and went down under the overwhelming flood of God's wrath. That is the gospel for believers. It is the gospel of the glory of the satisfied God. If you find anybody constantly reverting to their sinfulness, inevitably they have a bad time and you have to help them and be patient and sympathetic, understanding that there may be some background for this: but if you find a believer who persistently, over a course of months or years, reverts to that and undoes the atonement, just point out what they are doing.

They have removed Calvary, they have undone in themselves the work of the Cross, they have taken the place of the Lamb of God in trying to atone for their own sinfulness. Are you prepared to do that? God forbid! Oh, let us really face squarely the terrific issues that are bound up with this matter of the accuser of the brethren finding a way in to the spirit of a child of God.

God's Satisfaction Expressed at Pentecost

That is one side - Jordan on its death side. It is only on the other side, when Jordan has been passed through, that the heavens are opened and the glory is proclaimed - that is, God's absolute satisfaction is realized, righteousness is made full, and there is glory. Now that was indicated of course in Christ when the heavens were opened. When the first Adam fell, heaven was closed. In other words, Paradise was shut; there was no re-entry. When this last Adam took and bore away typically at Jordan all that the first

Adam let in, Paradise was re-opened, heaven was re-opened, the glory was in view. That led right on to the transfiguration. But literally and actually all this was carried out at the Cross, as we know, and through the judgment and the Cross - the full atonement which He made, the "all righteousness" which He made full - the glory is immediately at hand.

Pentecost, then - issuing in the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers, the existence of the Church, the particular and peculiar nature of this dispensation, and the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth - is just the glory of the satisfied God Who has found, in that inclusive, all-comprehending Man, His own nature satisfied and His own object in creating man satisfied. God can say, 'I have secured what I want, what I ever needed, and having that, I can reproduce from it.'

The Spirit an Earnest of the Glory in Fullness

Thus the Holy Spirit comes; and notice what is written - "in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:13,14). What is the inheritance? - the glory of God in fullness. We have read of the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle and the temple. Have you recognized that is where all Israel's fullness resided? It was there that Israel's satisfaction was found; the glory was there, it was from thence that everything came for Israel's life. In that place where the glory was, Israel's inheritance dwelt. Now, you know that little fragment in "Ephesians" where the Apostle prays that believers may have the eyes of their hearts enlightened that they might know (amongst other things) "what (are) the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18). In the Greek, "saints" is basically exactly the same word as the word used in the letter to the Hebrews for the "Holy of holies" (Heb. 9:3), so that the scripture just quoted may be said to relate to His inheritance in the 'Holy of holies'. God has His inheritance in the 'Holy of holies'; we have our inheritance in the 'Holy of holies'. The fullness of God's satisfaction, therefore the fullness of glory, is found there. The Holy Spirit has come as the Spirit of promise and as an earnest of our inheritance. What is that going to be? - the fullness of God in the Most Holy Place.

Come to "Hebrews". Where is the 'Holy of holies'? It is in heaven. The 'Holy of holies' of the tabernacle or of the temple was only a pattern of things in the heavens; the real things are in the heavens. So that our inheritance is in the heavens, where God's glory is full because God's satisfaction in Christ is absolute. What was at the heart of the 'Holy of holies'? - the ark of the testimony. When the ark was brought in the place was filled with glory. It portrays the Lord Jesus glorified in the fullness of the glory. And the Spirit comes forth to us, and we receive Him, as an earnest that we shall be where the Lord Jesus is and in the same glory with Him - our inheritance and God's inheritance too, for God will have His satisfaction when He gets the saints there. You see, God's inheritance is His Son, His first-born Son, and He gets that inheritance in His Son when He has Him in glory. Now then, many sons are to be brought to glory, and God's inheritance is found in those sons as brought to glory. Yes, glory is a place, but it is more than a place, it is God in full expression. Oh, is it possible that you and I are going to reach the place where God has unhindered expression of Himself in us? That is the gospel of the glory, that is this gospel that we are always talking about. What a marvellous thing it is! "The gospel of the glory of the satisfied God."

When the Holy Spirit comes as an earnest of our inheritance, of full and final satisfaction, what is our first sensation? It is one of wonderful satisfaction. But are we any different in ourselves? We shall learn very soon that we are not, but somehow or other there has come into us the feeling that this is what we were born for, this is what we have been after all the time. But is it just a sensation? Oh no, it is the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), and the

Spirit is the earnest of the heir's inheritance. He is, in effect, bringing God's satisfaction out of heaven into our hearts. That is the one thing in this universe which Satan cannot tolerate. He was in the glory once and knows something of what the glory means, but he lost it, and now he cannot bear to see anybody enjoying it; and if Satan can do anything at all to destroy the glory in your heart and mine he will do it. God's satisfaction - oh, God's satisfaction witnessed to by the Spirit in our hearts! Ought we not to be more satisfied with the Lord? Well, everything begins there. The Spirit Who came at Pentecost comes as an earnest of our inheritance.

The Church the Corporate Vessel of the Glory

Then, as the result of Pentecost, the Church immediately became the corporate vessel of the glory, that is, of God's satisfaction. If you have anywhere a true expression of God's thought about the Church you have a people who are living in the enjoyment of God's satisfaction, a people who have entered into rest, a people who are very, very satisfied - satisfied not with themselves but with the Lord. You will have that, amongst many other things. The Church is brought into being just to embody and to be the vessel of this glory of God, which is God's satisfaction as to His own nature. Therefore, when you come to a letter which has to do mainly with the Church, you have this exclamation - "Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. 3:21). "Glory in the church." The glory filled the tabernacle, the glory filled the temple: now it has filled something which is not a type but the reality. The glory is the satisfaction of God on the whole matter of righteousness, and you and I despoil our Church membership in the spiritual sense immediately we have any doubts about God's satisfaction. How can you preach about the Church while you are miserable and uncertain about your own salvation? You are denying the Church, and virtually putting yourself out of it in a spiritual sense, while you are in that condition. The enemy strikes at once at the Church when he gets any member doubting his or her salvation, having once known that salvation. It is a tremendous business. We are up against an awful thing: therefore this letter on the Church must inevitably head up to our wrestling with principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness. You can talk about evil forces and go out against them in prayer, but do remember this, that if you have a question about your salvation the ground is taken from under your feet in fighting the enemy: you may say, 'I take up the whole armour of God', but the enemy is inside the armour and you are helpless. Talk as much as you like, you are beaten before you start fighting if you have a question about your salvation or about God's satisfaction with you in Christ.

The nature of this dispensation, then, is that it is the dispensation of a Church which embodies this testimony of Jesus.

Effective Testimony Measured by Glory Apprehended

Then we come to the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth. It is this gospel to which we have been referring. Everywhere we go we find people up against the sin question - the problem of getting on to good terms with God, of removing every ground in them of His displeasure. You may say that brings us back to the simple preaching of substitution and so on, but I venture to suggest that it is a great deal more than that. In our apprehension, that can leave us with something entirely objective. You will find in the Word of God - in the Old Testament by abundant typical proofs and in the New Testament by much direct teaching - that the effectiveness of our testimony depends upon the measure of our apprehension of the glory. That has to be borne out and made clear, but there it is. There has to be an impact upon the enemy that is more than a doctrinal impact. The doctrine may be absolutely sound and true, but Satan is never overpowered in that way. There has to be an embodiment of the doctrine, and, if you will allow it, there is a

clear revelation that there are degrees of glory because there are degrees of entering into the meaning of the death, the resurrection, the ascension, the glorification of the Lord Jesus. It is something to be entered into, as distinct from the mere knowledge of historic facts, doctrines, truths. The Lord Jesus is in heaven, and we have to know Him in a heavenly way. We have to go to heaven to know Him, and we have to go now. A Church that clings to this earth and becomes an earthly thing is a powerless Church. It is only a Church which spiritually occupies its place in the heavenlies that can register anything upon this earth, and the measure in which you are emancipated from this earth and this world and are knowing a life in the heavenlies is the measure of your impact, your testimony upon this earth. A worldly Christian is a powerless Christian; a worldly Church is a Church stripped of power and of glory. The heavenly position of the Lord Jesus is something to be entered into and we shall take all our lives to enter into only a part of that. If you go on with the Lord under the hand of the Holy Spirit, you will find that you are becoming more and more in spirit a stranger on earth, and more and more things which are not here are becoming the things which are your life. That is not only a statement of fact, that is a test of your spiritual life. As we go on, the things which are above ought to become more and more our very being, without which we cannot live here on this earth; and in so far as that is true shall we have power against the enemy and in testimony.

There are degrees of glory resultant from the degree of apprehension of Christ, and the degree determines the power of world-wide testimony. That is only saying in perhaps a round-about way that in the beginning, in the book of the Acts, the world-wide testimony did count for something; there was impact; they could talk about men who had turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). There was a tremendous registration. Satan was mightily active, but he was beaten every time. Why? - the Lord's people had a great apprehension of the glory of Christ. By the Holy Spirit that glory had come into the Church and therefore the Church could minister like that.

Now this is but an attempt to point out what a gospel we have. Do you not agree that one of the greatest needs, if not the greatest, of our time is the recovery of the greatness of the gospel from its littleness and from its cheapness? - cheapness which is always offering something for the pleasure and satisfaction of those concerned in order to make them happy. That may be very good, but it is very cheap. Oh, there is something infinitely bigger than that! It reaches right back, before times eternal, in those counsels of God: it reaches right on to the ages of the ages. It is an immense thing - that the universe shall be filled with the glory of God, and that the vessel in which that glory is deposited and through which it is revealed and administered is the Church, "the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God." It is to that we are called. That is no small gospel. It is "the mystery of the gospel" and yet it is still "the gospel of your salvation."

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