

The Heavenly Man and Eternal Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Heavenly Man, Christ, is the appointed Life-giver, and His eternal life is the vital principle of redemption, which is progressive in the believer by life.

Scripture: Genesis 3:22, Matthew 13:44, Luke 19:10, John 1:4, John 5:26, John 10:10, Ephesians 1:5, Revelation 21:24

Topics: "Redemption", "Eternal Life"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that Christ, as the Heavenly Man, embodies eternal life, which is the essence of His being and the foundation of redemption. He explains that eternal life was part of God's original intention for humanity, and through Christ, believers can access this divine life, which is not merely about existence but a transformative nature. The sermon highlights that redemption is not just a return to a previous state but a progressive journey towards maturity in Christ, where the life of God is continually at work within believers. Sparks also illustrates that the Church represents the treasure God seeks to recover, emphasizing its centrality in God's eternal purpose. Ultimately, he calls believers to embrace and lay hold of eternal life in their daily lives.

Transcript

It is Christ as the Heavenly Man that is our consideration at this time, and we have been seeing that the main spring of the being of the Heavenly Man is eternal life. "In Him was life..." (John 1:4); "...as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself..." (John 5:26). It is eternal life, Divine life, life from God, a special kind of life; not merely extensiveness of life, but a nature of life. The main spring of His being as the Heavenly Man is eternal life. The Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, was ever appointed to be the Life-giver. From eternity that life was in Him for creation.

Eternal Life in View from Eternity

The words in the Gospel of John, used by the Lord Jesus, that it was given to Him of the Father both to have life in Himself, and to give that life unto whomsoever He willed, carry us back again into the "before times eternal." Here they relate to redemption, but that is not where the matter of life-giving, of God's intention with regard to life begins. We are shown in a figurative way that right at the beginning, before there was any fall, and therefore before there was any practical necessity for redemption, God's thought was eternal life, and when from fallen man He shut off the tree of life, He is seen to do so on this ground: "...lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever..." (Gen. 3:22). Now God had made that provision. Eternal life was there in the thought and intention of God, but this eternal life

was for a certain kind of man, and the Adam that came to be, as separated from God, ceased to stand in God's view as the being in whom eternal life could reside, and so that was reserved. It was maintained in the Son; for the tree surely is but a figure of Christ. When we get to the end of the Scripture the tree is seen again. Christ is the "tree of life." Christ is the repository of that life, and here He comes forth in Man-form as the last Adam, as the kind of Man in Whom that life can be.

Through union with Him now by redemption, that life that is in Him is deposited in the believer himself; not as apart from Christ, but in Christ in the believer. It never departs from Christ. The Apostle states that this life is in His Son, and was given to us. We have eternal life, and this life is in His Son. It is Christ resident within in the Person of His Spirit in Whom the life is, and it is never possessed apart from Him.

We have been saying that the Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, was ever the appointed Life-giver. Of course, He can only so be known as Redeemer. He could have been known as the Life-giver apart from redemption, but now on account of man's condition through the fall, He can only be known as the Life-giver according as He is known as Redeemer. So that what we have to do with now, here in time, is redemption and life, redemption unto life.

Redemption Related to the Eternal Purpose

Here we want again to speak for a few moments of that main line of eternal purpose which the Lord is seeking to bring us to, and to bring to us. Because it is so great, and lifts us so much out of that with which we are more entirely occupied in time, that is, our salvation, our redemption, and all that is associated with it; because it takes us out of that and puts us into so much larger a realm, it is quite natural that we should have difficulties and not be able to grasp it immediately. That is how we are finding it, and that is what is making necessary a return to this main emphasis.

Look again intently at the word redemption. The word itself carries an implication. Redemption implies a bringing back. The question immediately presents itself: Brought back to what? And to what place? There is something that, for the time being, has been lost. It has ceased to remain in its original relationship, in its original position. It has to be brought back, reclaimed, restored, redeemed. Then there must have been a place and a position, and that is our main point.

We are seeking to say at this time, that before ever there was a fall, and even before this creation was, there was a counsel of God issuing in a purpose, and the straight line of that purpose through the ages was intended to work out progressively to a universal display of God in man, through His Son. So, through the Son, He created all things. Everything that was created in heaven and in earth, and in the universe came, through the Son, to be "Son-wise" itself, God expressed and manifested in terms of "Son." In relation to that, we were "...foreordained... unto adoption as sons..." (Eph. 1:5).

If you read the Word carefully you will descry Adam in the condition of a child, rather than of a son; a child under probation, under test; and because he failed under the test, he never came to the maturity of a son. Some of us are familiar with the New Testament teaching on the difference between a child of God and a son. Adam is in the infancy of God's thought, God's intention. He has to grow, to develop, to expand, to mature, to come to full stature; and we are not saying that the one test was the only one, the final test unto his maturity, but it was the first one. The whole plan of growth, of progressive development unto a fullgrown, corporate man, does not necessarily rest upon redemption. It rests upon the eternal purpose, the eternal counsels. The straight line of things would have gone right on apart from any redemptive plan at all, and would have been realized. If Adam had not fallen, the eternal purpose would still have been

realized, because it is all eternally vested in the Son. Now inasmuch as man is included, Adam was included. Adam failed and, with him, the race. Then a redemptive plan must come in; just as complete a plan in the counsels of God, but one developed or projected because of something that went wrong. We cannot say the fall was right, but it occasioned a plan, a perfect plan, a wonderful plan, and when God made the plan, when in His eternal counsels He was projecting this whole scheme of creation and intention and purpose, then the attitude, as we read back into those counsels, was undoubtedly this: 'We know, because We cannot help knowing, being what We are, all-knowing, how things will go. We know that Our first thought will not be immediately realized, that there will be this bend down, this break. We therefore project this further plan of redemption by which We come down into that bend and bring things right up again on to Our level. We fill it up; but in so doing We will not lose, We will gain. This work of the adversary, all this tragedy, this suffering shall not take from Our original plan and thought, shall not diminish it one whit, neither shall it just mean that in the end We come back to Our level; We will come back with added glories, and these will be the glories of grace.' God always reacts to the work of the Devil in that way; to get more than He had before, through suffering. Suffering is not God's will any more than sin is God's will, but in the sufferings of His own people He always secures something more than was there before. It is not only that He keeps even with the Devil, God is always "more than conqueror." That means that He obtains added glories as the result of the interference of His enemy, whatever may be said of that. This is so in the details of the individual experience, but in its fulness, in its whole movement, that interference occasioned the whole redemptive system and plan.

We recognize that, but that is not at the moment the thing with which we are dealing. Were it so, we should be speaking on the glories of redemption. But the Lord has laid this burden of His eternal thought for man upon our hearts at this time, and we do not believe that for one moment we are taking away from the glories of redemption, or putting redemption into a place of less value than it should have. If it seems to you that we are brushing that aside, or putting it into a secondary place, it is not that we are seeing less value in it than there is. God forbid! How are we to know God at all apart from it? At the same time, what we have in view is God's Son. It is not redemption, but the Son of God, this Heavenly Man, as representing God's full thought for man, and for the universe, with which we are dealing. The Son of God as Redeemer is but one expression of the Son, and one which, while so full of glory, and ever to be the theme of the redeemed through the ages of the ages, has become painfully necessary here in time. It speaks of tragedy. It speaks of Divine heart-break, of God suffering. This, however, as we have said, is not our main consideration at the present time, but in these meditations we are occupied with Christ as the Heavenly Man.

The Lost Treasure

We have said that we can only know Him as the Life-giver now in terms of redemption, as the Redeemer: "...the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). What do we understand by that Scripture? Of course, in Gospel terms we have painted pictures of lost sheep, and we have thought of the individuals who are out and away from the Lord, as that which is lost. Well, that is quite true, but you have to be far more comprehensive than that in interpreting that Scripture. God has lost something, and the Son of Man has come to recover that which God has lost. What is it that God has lost? Listen again: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matt. 13:44). What is the treasure? What is the field? The field is the world, the treasure is the Church. That treasure is hid, and the Lord Jesus paid the price for the crown rights of the whole creation in order to have the Church which was in it. Christ

acquired by redemption, by paying the price, universal rights in order to secure that treasure, the Church. This it was that was lost. What is the Church? The Church is the one new man, the fulness of the measure of the stature of a man in Christ. It is the corporate heavenly man, the expression of Himself in corporate form, His inheritance in the saints. That is a very precious treasure.

The Church is not the only thing, but it is the central thing. The Lord Jesus has acquired the rights of the universe, and there will be other things in addition to the Church. There will be the nations walking in the light thereof. There will be a redemption that goes far beyond the Church, but the Church is the central thing. He has found that, and it was this lost treasure that dictated His course, and governed Him in paying the price. That is a tremendous thought. The Church is so precious to Him as to make Him willing to pay the price for the whole universe, in order to have it. That is the focal point. The Church is the key to redemption. It is that which is coming to the perfect image of Christ. All else will be secondary. There will be a reflection of Christ through the Church; His light will fall upon all else; what He is will come to rest upon all else; all else will take its character from what He is in the Church, but the Church will be at the centre: "...the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof..." (Rev. 21:24). It is a tremendous thing to live in this dispensation when the Lord, though having acquired the rights of the universe, of the whole creation, by His Cross, is specifically concentrated upon the treasure now, to get it out of the creation.

"The kingdom of heaven [it should be in the plural, the kingdom of the heavens] is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid..." The Lord is doing a secret work in relation to the Church. It is always a dangerous thing to bring what we conceive to be the Church out into a conspicuous place, and make a public thing of it. The real Church is a secret, hidden company, and a hidden and secret work is going on in it. That is its safety. When you and I launch out into great public movements, displaying and advertising, we expose the work of God, and open it to infinite perils. Our safety is in keeping where God has put us, in the hidden, secret place with Himself. That by the way. "The kingdom of heaven (the heavens) is like unto..." What is the significance of that phrase? It means that the whole heavenly system is focused upon the Church. It is the centre of the heavenly system. All that "the heavens" means, in this spiritual sense, is interested in the Church, is concerned with the Church, the treasure in the field. Why is this? Because, again, the Church is the heavenly man in Christ.

Take the Lord Jesus in Person, as the Heavenly Man. The whole universe is interested in Him. At His birth heaven is active; the hosts of heavenly beings break through in relation to Him. Hell also is active and, through Herod, seeks to destroy this birth and all its meaning. You find that right on through His earthly life all the universe is centering its attention upon Him, and is related to Him, so that in His death the sun hides its face, the earth quakes, and there is darkness over the face of it. The whole universe is bound up with this One.

Thus the kingdom of the heavens, all the heavenly system, is concerned with this treasure in the field, because of its eternal significance, relationship, purpose. That is an immense thing. Now, of course, you are able to appraise more perfectly the value and meaning of redemption. To see the background of things is not to take away from redemption, it is to add marvellously to it. It is to give to redemption a meaning far removed from that of just being saved as a unit here and getting to heaven. That is a big thing, of course, that saving of the individual. But when we see the redemption that is in Christ Jesus in the light of God's eternal background, how immense a thing it is! If you want really to appreciate, and rightly appraise redemption, you have to set it where Paul set it, and see that it is cosmic. The coming into redemption on the part of every single individual is a coming into something immense, a far bigger thing than the redemption of the individual himself. All the powers and intelligences of the universe are bound up with,

and interested in, this redemption. We believe that in order rightly to appreciate and enjoy the things of God, it is necessary to get their universal and eternal background, and not take them as something in themselves. That is how Paul saw redemption.

Eternal Life the Vital Principle of Redemption

The vital principle in redemption has to be implanted. Redemption is not something objective, something that is done for us. It is that, but it is not just that. It is not merely a system carried through, but redemption embraces a vital principle which has to become implanted in the believer, and the vital principle in redemption is eternal life, the life of the ages. So that redemption, bringing with it its vital principle, at once swings us back into relation with Christ before times eternal as the appointed Life-giver, and then we are carried right through with deathless life. Redemption itself, by itself, that principle of eternal life, expresses itself in the bringing back to the place where God can do what He found it impossible to do with the first Adam, to the place where He can give eternal life. When we come into redemption, all the ages of this world are wiped out as a matter of time, and we find ourselves at once made eternal beings, linked back there with the timeless God. The vital principle of redemption is eternal life to be implanted in the redeemed.

Redemption Progressive in the Believer by the Life Principle

The next thing, working out from that, is that this vital principle of redemption makes the perfect redemption which is in Christ Jesus progressive in us. In Christ our redemption is perfect. We have a full redemption in Christ. His being in glory betokens that redemption is complete, full and final. But when the vital principle of redemption, that is, eternal life, is introduced into us through faith, this, which is perfect in Christ as redemption, takes up a progressive course in us as that principle of life. Redemption becomes progressive in us by life. That life is a progressive thing. We only come to the understanding and the enjoyment of the full redemption as the life increases in us. It is the work of redemption life in us which is going to bring us to the fulness of redemption. That is going to be proved true in spirit, mind, and body. We are going to enter into the fulness of redemption that is in Christ's present heavenly, physical body. His body, His present heavenly physical body, is a representation, a standard of the redemption of our complete humanity. We are going to be made like unto His glorious body. By what principle is this to be accomplished? By the working of that redemption life in us progressively.

The Twofold Law of the Life

Now, how does that redemption life in us operate? It operates in two ways. On the one hand, it operates to cut us off from our own natural life as the basis of our relationship with God. That is a big thing, and a big work, and a very deep work. So many in spiritual infancy and immaturity are making their own natural life, energies, resources, enthusiasms, and all such things, the basis of their relationship with the Lord both in life and service. It is a mark of immaturity. We know quite well that the young believer is always full of tremendous enthusiasm, and thinks it to be the real strength of his union with God, and that it really does represent something in relation to God. When presently the March winds begin to blow, and the blossom is carried away, such as these think the Winter has come instead of the Summer. They think they have lost everything. They ask, What has happened to me? The words of the hymn are perhaps heard upon their lips:

"Where is the blessedness I knew

When first I saw the Lord?"

But you do not get the fruit until the blossom has gone. It is the Summer, not the Winter, that follows the blowing away of the blossom. Of course, we all like to see the blossom in its time, but we should have some strange feelings if we saw the blossom there all through the Summer. We should say: 'There is something wrong here, it is time that blossom went.' We look closer, and we see something in its place, full of promise, and of much more value. This early blossom may be a sign of life, but it is not the life itself. A sign of early life belongs to the early Spring, showing that the Winter is past and resurrection is at work. It is a sign but it is not the thing itself, and it passes with spiritual infancy. These early enthusiasms are not the real basis of our union with God, but are signs of something that has happened in us. They are of ourselves, they are not of God. He is something other than that. He is not going to blow away. The life is working and will show itself in stronger and deeper forms.

All the way through this life we have to learn the change from what is, after all, ourselves in relation to God, to what is God Himself in us. There is a great deal that is of ourselves in relation to God, and I expect there will be in some measure right to the end. There is still something of our minds at work on God's things. We may be thinking that they are God's thoughts, God's mentality, but there is still much that is of our human mind, the mental make-up of ourselves in relation to the things of God, and we shall always find that God's mind is other than that, and we have to give place to new conceptions of the Lord. In will and in heart it is just the same.

We have been speaking of the body. This law of life works to the removing of our natural basis in relation to the Lord, so that even in our physical being we come on to the Lord in relation to His things, and the Lord becomes even our bodily life in relation to heavenly things. That is a fact. Therein is the testimony, that we are brought progressively, on the one hand, to the place where, in the Lord's things, we have no life in ourselves, where even physically we are faced with impossibility. It always has been so from God's standpoint, but we have been thinking that we were doing quite a lot because we had not been brought to the point where the consciousness of natural inability was allowed to overtake us. Now we have come to the place where, in greater or lesser degree, we realize that in the things of God we "cannot," even physically.

But if, on the one hand, eternal life operates to cut us off from our natural life as the basis of our relationship with God, on the other hand, it is perfectly wonderful what is done. It is "the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." The Lord even comes in as our physical life to the doing of more than would have been possible to us at our best, and certainly far beyond the present possibility, because He has made us know that as men we are nothing, even at our best. Life does that. Life forces off one system and brings on another, making room for it as it goes.

That, I believe is what the Lord meant when He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). We have thought that just to mean that we are to have abundance of exuberance. We are always asking for life more abundant than we might feel wonderfully elated and overflowing and energetic. The Lord is pre-eminently practical, and more abundant life means that, having life, you will find the need of more to lead you a little further, and you will need it abundantly as you go on, because that life alone can bring you into the fulness. And it is His will that there should be the full provision of life unto the full end, because the purpose is such an abundant purpose. The life is commensurate with the purpose.

All that and much more is bound up with this basic statement that the active principle of redemption is eternal life, and that while that redemption is perfect in Christ it is progressive in us by the principle of life, and that to come into the fulness of redemption for spirit, mind and body there has to be a constant increase of redemption life. This life is redeeming us all the time. It is redeeming us from this present evil age, from all that came in with Adam. Full redemption will be displayed when Christ appears, and we with Him, when seeing Him we shall be like Him. It will simply be the manifestation of that life which is His eternal life in us. Oh, the possibilities of that life to transfigure! As we look at the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration we see the full display of the life which the Father gave to dwell in us. It blazes forth in its fulness there, and shows you what kind of a Man that Man is in Whom Divine life is fully triumphant. He is a Man full of glory, full of perfection; and when we see Him we shall be like Him.

The word for us as we close is this, that He has called us unto eternal life. We must lay hold on eternal life daily for spirit, and mind, and body.

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