

The Issue of Spiritual Sight

by T. Austin-Sparks

The issue of spiritual sight is the recognition of the Lord Jesus, and it is the foundation for all the rest of the Christian life, governing the beginning, growth, and ministry of the believer.

Scripture: Numbers 24:3

Topics: "Growth In Christ", "Spiritual Sight"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks addresses the critical issue of spiritual sight, emphasizing that true spiritual vision is a miraculous gift from God, essential for both the initiation and growth of the Christian life. He illustrates that spiritual blindness is a root malady of humanity, and only through divine revelation can one truly see and recognize Jesus Christ as Lord. Sparks highlights that spiritual growth and effective ministry stem from this ongoing process of seeing Christ more clearly, which transforms believers and enables them to be spiritually helpful to others. He encourages the congregation to seek a deeper spiritual sight, free from prejudice, to experience the fullness of life in Christ.

Transcript

Reading: Num. 24:3-4; Mark 10:46, 51-52; 8:23-25; John 9:1, 7, 25; Eph. 1:17-19; Rev. 3:17; Acts 26:17-18.

At the outset of our previous meditation we were speaking of the root-malady of our time, which is spiritual blindness. We took those passages which we have read and noted how they, in a very general way, cover the full ground of spiritual blindness and spiritual sight. Then we went on to speak about the common factor in all these cases, which is that spiritual sight is always a miracle. No one has real spiritual sight by nature. It is something which comes out of heaven as a direct act of God, a faculty which is not there naturally, but has to be created. So that the very justification for Christ's coming from heaven into this world is found in this fact, that man is born blind and needed a visitant from heaven to give him sight. Then, finally, to lose spiritual sight is to lose the miraculous element in the Christian life; which was the trouble with Laodicea. We went on to see that the great need of the hour is for those who really can say, I see! Imagine yourself being born blind and living perhaps to maturity without having seen anything or anyone, and suddenly having your eyes opened to see everything and everyone. The sense of wonder would be there; the world would be a wonderful world. I suppose when that man in John 9 went home, he would be constantly saying, It is wonderful to see people, wonderful to see all these things! Wonderful! That would be the word most on his lips. Yes, but there is a spiritual counterpart, and the great need is of

people who have that spiritual wonder in their hearts all the time; that which has broken upon them by revelation of the Holy Spirit and is a constant and ever-growing wonder. It is a new world, a new universe. That is the need of the time - I see!

Well now, the final phase of our afternoon meditation was that which we are going to follow up a little now, that at every stage of the Christian life from initiation to consummation, the secret must just be that - I see: I never saw as I see now! I never saw it like that, I never saw it on this wise; but now I see! It must be like that all the way through, from start to finish, if the life is a true life in the Spirit. So for a little while let us think on one or two phases of the Christian life which must be governed by this great reality of seeing by Divine operation; and you will be recalling a great deal of the Word as I speak, seeing how much there is in the Scriptures about this matter.

Seeing Governs The Beginning Of The Christian Life

What is the beginning of the Christian life? It is a seeing. It must be a seeing. The very logic of things demands that it shall be a seeing; for this reason, that the whole of the Christian life is to be a progressive movement along one line, to one end. That line and that end is Christ. That was the issue with the man born blind in John 9. You will remember how, after they cast him out, Jesus found him, and said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" and the man answered and said, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe on Him?" Jesus said unto him, "Thou hast both seen Him and He it is That speaketh with thee." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped him. The issue of spiritual sight is the recognition of the Lord Jesus, and it is going to be that all the way through from start to finish.

We may say that our salvation was a matter of seeing ourselves as sinners. But had it been left there it would have been a poor lookout for us.

No, the whole matter is summed up into seeing Jesus: and when you really see Jesus, what happens? What happened to Saul of Tarsus? Well, a whole lot of things happened, and mighty things which nothing else would have accomplished. You would never have argued Saul of Tarsus into Christianity; you would never have frightened him into Christianity; you would never have either reasoned or emotionalised him into being a Christian. To get that man out of Judaism needed something more than could have been found on this earth. But he saw Jesus of Nazareth, and that did it. He is out, he is an emancipated man, he has seen. Later, when he is right up against the great difficulty of the Judaisers, tracking and following him everywhere to disturb the faith of his converts, to wreck their position in Christ, and they are inclined to fall away, if they have not already done so (I speak of those converts and churches in Galatia), he once again raises the whole question as to what a Christian is, and focuses it upon this very point of what happened on the Damascus road. The Letter to the Galatians really can be summed up in this way: a Christian is not one who does this and that and another thing which is prescribed to be done; a Christian is not one who refrains from doing this and that and another thing because they are forbidden; a Christian is not one at all who is governed by the externalities of a way of life, an order, a legalistic system which says, You must, and You must not: a Christian is comprehended in this saying, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me: (Gal. 1:15-16). That is only another way of saying, He opened my eyes to see Jesus, for the two things are the same. The Damascus road is the place. "Who art Thou, Lord? I am Jesus of Nazareth". "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." That is one and the same thing. Seeing in an inward way: that makes a Christian. "God... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). "In our hearts": Christ, so imparted and revealed within, is what makes a Christian, and a Christian will do or not do certain things, not at the dictates of any Christian law, any more

than Jewish, but as led by the Spirit inwardly, by Christ in the heart. It is that that makes a Christian, and in that the foundation is laid for all the rest, right on to the consummation, because it is just going to be that growingly. So the foundation must be according to the superstructure; they are all of a piece. It is seeing, and it is seeing Christ.

That is a bold statement upon which a very great deal more might be said. But it is a challenge. We have to ask ourselves now, On what foundation does our Christian life rest? Is it upon something outward; something we have read, something we have been told, something we have been commanded, something we have been frightened into, or emotionalised into; or is it based upon this foundation. "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me"? When I saw Him, I saw what a sinner I am, and I saw too what a Saviour He is: but it was seeing Him that did it! I know how elementary that is for a conference of Christians, but it is good sometimes to examine our foundations. We never get away from those foundations. We are not going to grow up and be wonderful folk who have left all that behind. It is all of a piece. I do not mean that we stay at elementary things all our lives, but we take the character of our foundation through to the end. The grace which laid the foundation will bring forth the topstone with shoutings of Grace, grace! It will all be that; the grace of God in opening our eyes. I will not stay longer with that.

Seeing Governs Spiritual Growth

Let us pass on to growth. Just as the beginning is by seeing, so is growth. Spiritual growth is all a matter of seeing. I want you to think about that. We have to see if we would grow. What is spiritual growth? Well now, answer that carefully, in your heart. I think some people imagine that spiritual growth is getting to know a great deal more truth. No, not necessarily. You may increase in such knowledge as you grow it is true, but it is not just that. What is growth? Well, it is conformity to the image of God's Son. That is the end, and it is toward that that we are progressively and steadily and consistently to move. Full growth, spiritual maturity, will be our having been conformed to the image of God's Son. That is growth. Then if that be so, Paul will say to us, "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). Conformity by seeing, growth by seeing.

The Ministry Of The Holy Spirit

Now that contains a very precious and deep principle. How can we illustrate? That very passage which we have just cited helps us, I think. The last clause will give us our clue - "as from the Lord the Spirit". I trust I do not use too hackneyed an illustration in trying to help this out when I go back to Eliezer, Abraham's servant, and Isaac and Rebekah, that classic romance of the Old Testament. You remember the day came when Abraham, getting old, called his faithful household steward, Eliezer, and said, 'Put now your hand under my thigh, and swear that you will not take of the women of this country for a bride for my son, but that you will go to my own kith and kin'.

And he swore. And then Eliezer set out, as you know, with the camels for the distant Country across the desert, praying as he went that the Lord would prosper him and give him a sign. The sign was given at the well. Rebekah responded to the man, and when, after tarrying a bit and being confronted with the challenge quite definitely, she decided to go with the man, on the way he brought out from his treasures things of his master's house, things of his master's son, and showed them to her, and occupied her all the time with his master's son and the things which indicated what a son he was, and what possessions he

had and what she was coming into; and this went on right across the desert until they reached the other side and came into the district of the father's home.

Isaac was out in the field meditating: and they lifted up their eyes and saw; and the servant said, There he is! The one of whom I have been speaking to you all the time, the one whose things I have been showing you: there he is! And she lighted down from the camel. Do you think she felt strange, as though she had come from a far country? I think the effect of Eliezer's ministry was to make her feel quite at home, to make her feel that she knew the man she was going to marry.

She felt no strangeness or distress or foreign element about this thing. They just merged, shall we say? It was the consummation of a process. "As from the Lord the Spirit." The Lord Jesus said, "When He is come... He shall take of Mine, and show it unto you". "He shall not speak of Himself; but what things soever He shall hear, these shall He speak... He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:13-14). The Spirit, the faithful servant of the Father's house, has come right across the wilderness to find the bride for the Son, of His own kith and kin.

Yes, there is room for wonder here. "Since the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same" (Heb. 2:14). "Both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one" (Heb. 2:11). The Spirit has come to secure that bride now, one with Him, His flesh and His bone. But the Spirit desires to be occupying us with the Lord Jesus all the time, showing us His things. To what effect? That we shall not be strangers when we see Him, that we shall not feel that we are of one kind and He another, but that it may just be, 'This is the last step of many which have been leading to this, and every step has been making this oneness more perfect, this harmony more complete'.

At the end, without any very great crisis, we just go in. We have been going in all the time, and this is the last step. That is conformity to His image, that is spiritual growth; getting to know the Lord, and to become like Him, getting to be perfectly at home with Him, so that there is no clash, no strangeness, no discord, no distance. Oneness with our Lord Jesus deepening all the time unto the consummation: that is spiritual growth. You see, it is something inward again, and it is but the development of that initiation, that beginning. We have seen and are seeing, and seeing and seeing, and as we see we are changed.

Is that true of everything you think you see? We have to test everything we think we see and know by its effect in our lives. You and I may have an enormous amount of what we think to be spiritual knowledge; we have all the doctrines, all the truths. We can box the compass of evangelical doctrine; and what is the effect? It is not seeing, beloved, in a true spiritual sense, if we are not changed. Yes, seeing is to be changed, and it is not seeing if it does not bring that about. It would be far better for us to be stripped of all that and to be brought right down to the point where we really do see just a little that makes a difference. We must be very honest with God about this. Oh, would we not sooner have just a very little indeed that was a hundred per cent effective, than a whole mountain of knowledge, ninety per cent of which counted for nothing? We must ask the Lord to save us from advancing beyond spiritual life, advancing, I mean, with knowledge, a kind of knowledge, presuming to know. You know what I mean. Real seeing, Paul says, is being changed, and being changed is a matter of seeing as by the Lord the Spirit. So we will pray to see.

Some of us knew our Bible, knew our New Testament, knew Romans, knew Ephesians, thought we saw. We could even lecture on the Bible and these books, and on the truths in them, and did so for years. Then one day we saw; and people saw that we saw, and said, What has happened to the minister? He is not

saying anything different from what he has always said, but there is a difference; he has seen something! That is it!

Seeing Governs Ministry

And of course that must lead us to the next thing, though in a very brief word. What is true of the beginning of the Christian life, and what is true of growth, is true in the matter of ministry. Now, do not think I am speaking to any particular class of people called "ministers". Ministry, as we have said here before, is a matter of spiritual helpfulness. Any ministry which is not a matter of spiritual helpfulness is not true ministry, and anybody who is spiritually helpful is a minister of Christ. So we are all in the ministry, in God's plan. Now, since that is so, we are all affected, we are all governed by this same law. To be spiritually helpful is a matter of seeing. You know that 2 Corinthians is the letter in the New Testament which has most to do with ministry. "Seeing we have this ministry" (4:1) - and what is this ministry? Well, "God hath shined into our hearts" (4:6). It is very familiar to us that Paul has at the back of his mind as he writes this part of the letter, Moses, the minister of God. That is the designation by which we know Moses, as the servant of God, and Paul is referring to Moses fulfilling his ministry, his service, reading the law and having to put a veil upon his face because of the glory, the people being unable to look upon him. And that was a glory that was passing. Now, says Paul, in the ministry committed to us God hath shined inside and we have no need of a veil; in Christ the veil is taken away; and what you are to see is Christ in us, and Christ is to be ministered through us as He is seen, as we are the vehicles of bringing Christ into view. That is spiritual helpfulness, that is ministry, namely, bringing Christ into view, and "we have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves" (4:7). "We are...": and then follows a whole list of things which put us at a discount. But he is saying, in effect, It is Christ! If we are put at a discount, if we are persecuted, pursued, cast down, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that is only God's way of bringing Christ into view. If we are pursued and persecuted and cast down and the grace of the Lord Jesus is sufficient, and you see the grace of the Lord Jesus being exhibited in that suffering and trial, then you say, that is a wonderful Christ! You see Christ, and by our sufferings Christ is ministered. That is spiritual helpfulness.

Who has helped you most? I know who has helped me most. It has not been anyone in the pulpit. It was one who passed through intense and terrible suffering for many years, and in whom the grace of God was sufficient. I was able to say, If I go through suffering like that, then mine will be a Christianity worth having, mine will be a Christ worth having. That helped me most, that is what I want to see. Do not preach to me; live, and you help me most. It is an inspiration, surely, or should be to us, to see that it is in our trial and adversity that others may see the Lord and be most helped. How we go through trial is the thing that is going to help someone else better than all that we can say to them. Oh, the Lord cover us as we say a thing like that, for we know our frailty, how we fail Him under trial. But that is what Paul is saying here about ministry. "We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay... we are persecuted, pursued, cast down, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." But, with Paul, the end of all such things was, "they glorified God in me" (Gal. 1:24). What do you want more than that? That is ministry. If you and I could say that at any time, well, we should not have lived in vain. We should have been of some help if it could be said, "They glorified God in me."

But it is seeing; we, to be spiritually helpful, have to see, that others may have the ground provided for seeing. I put it that way; because we may see, and we may give out what we see, we may be living epistles, but others may not be seeing. But there is the ground for their seeing, and if they are honest in heart and unprejudiced, really open to the Lord, He will give them to see what it is the Lord has revealed to

us and in us, and is seeking to reveal of Himself through us. He must have living epistles, men and women in whom He can be read. That is ministry.

Well, ministry to be given and to be received, is all a matter of this Divine work of grace of opening eyes. I think we can leave it there, and it all constitutes one great appeal to our hearts to seek the Lord to have our eyes opened. It is never too late to get spiritual sight, however blind we may have been, and for however long, if we really mean business with the Lord. But do not forget that this is a matter of being honest with God. The Lord Jesus said a wonderful thing to Nathanael. Nathanael was perilously near that double blindness. At the moment when he allowed himself to give expression to a popular prejudice, he was very near the danger zone. He said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" That is a popular prejudice. A popular prejudice has robbed many a man and woman of knowing God's fuller thoughts. Prejudices may take many forms. Let us be careful. But Nathanael was saved. The Lord Jesus said, "Hereafter ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). "Hereafter..." - He meant, of course, in the day of the Spirit. "As by the Lord the Spirit", Nathanael would see. Well, he was in danger, but he escaped.

If you are in danger through your prejudice, beware; forsake your prejudice, be open-hearted. Be an Israelite in whom there is no Jacob, no guile, open-hearted to the Lord, and you will see.

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