

The Man Whose Eye Is Opened

by T. Austin-Sparks

The need of the hour is for people who can say, I see!, and have spiritual sight into the truth, which is a miracle from heaven.

Scripture: Numbers 22:31, Numbers 24:3-4, Mark 8:23-25, Mark 10:51-52, John 9:1-25, Acts 26:18, Ephesians 1:17-18, Revelation 3:18

Topics: "Spiritual Sight", "Authority in Faith"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the critical need for spiritual sight in his sermon 'The Man Whose Eye Is Opened', illustrating how spiritual blindness is a pervasive issue affecting both the world and the church. He references biblical accounts of individuals like Balaam and Saul of Tarsus, who were blinded by personal gain and zeal, respectively, to highlight the dangers of spiritual blindness. Sparks argues that true spiritual sight is a miraculous work of God, essential for understanding divine truth and purpose. He calls for believers to seek a deeper revelation from God, asserting that the church needs individuals who can confidently proclaim, 'I was blind, but now I see.' Ultimately, he stresses that spiritual authority comes from having one's eyes opened to the truth of God.

Transcript

Then Jehovah opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Jehovah standing in the way (Num. 22:31).

Balaam the son of Beor saith, and the man whose eye is opened saith... falling down, and having his eyes open (Num. 24:3-4; A.R.V. Margin).

And they come to Jericho: and as He went out from Jericho, with His disciples and a great multitude, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the way side... And Jesus answered him, and said, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" And the blind man said unto Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight." And Jesus said unto him, "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." And straightway he received his sight, and followed Him in the way (Mark 10:46, 51-52).

And He took hold of the blind man by the hand, and brought him out of the village; and when He had spit on his eyes, and laid His hands upon him, He asked him, "Seest thou aught?" And he looked up, and said, "I see men; for behold them as trees, walking." Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked stedfastly, and was restored, and saw all things clearly (Mark 8:23-25).

And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from his birth... and said unto him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam..." He went away therefore, and washed, and came seeing... He therefore answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see (John 9:1, 7, 25).

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:17-18).

I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see (Rev. 3:18).

...to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Me (Acts 26:18).

I think the phrase used by Balaam might very well stand at the head of our present meditation - "the man whose eye is opened".

The Root Malady Of Our Time

As we contemplate the state of things in the world to-day, we are very deeply impressed and oppressed with the prevailing malady of spiritual blindness. It is the root malady of the time. We should not be far wrong if we said that most, if not all, of the troubles from which the world is suffering, are traceable to that root, namely, blindness. The masses are blind; there is no doubt about that. In a day which is supposed to be a day of unequalled enlightenment, the masses are blind. The leaders are blind, blind leaders of the blind. But in a very large measure, the same is true of the Lord's people. Speaking quite generally, Christians are to-day very blind.

A General Survey Of The Ground Of Spiritual Blindness

The passages which we have just read cover in a general way a great deal, if not all, of the ground of spiritual blindness. They begin with those who never have seen, those born blind.

Then there are those who have been given vision, but are not seeing very much, nor very clearly - "men as trees walking" - but who come to see yet more perfectly under a further work of grace.

Then there are those who have true and clear sight as far as it goes, but for whom a vast realm of Divine thought and purpose still waits upon a fuller work of the Holy Spirit. "That He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe." Those words are addressed to people who have sight, but for whom this great realm of Divine meaning still waits upon their knowing a fuller work of the Holy Spirit in the matter of spiritual sight.

Then, again, there are those who have seen and have followed, but who have lost spiritual sight, of which they were once possessed, and are now blind, but with the most fatal additional factor: they think they see and they are blind to their own blindness. That was the tragedy of Laodicea.

Further, there are those two classes represented by Balaam and Saul of Tarsus, from whom we have quoted. Balaam, blinded by gain, or the prospect of gain. That is, I think, what is meant in the New Testament by following in the way of Balaam; being taken up so much with the question of gain and loss as to be blind to the great thoughts of God and purpose of God, not seeing the Lord Himself in the way, and by his blindness coming very near to being smitten down on the road. The statement is quite definite there. Balaam did not see the Lord until the Lord opened his eyes, and then he saw the Lord. "The angel of the Lord": that is the way which it is put. I have not much doubt but that it is the Lord Himself. Then he saw. Later he made that double statement about the matter - "the man whose eye is opened," "falling down and having his eyes open." Such is Balaam, a man blinded by considerations of a personal character, of a personal nature, how things would affect him. That is what it amounts to. And what a blinding thing that is where spiritual matters are concerned. If ever you or I pause on that question, we are in very grave peril. If ever for a moment we allow ourselves to be influenced by such questions as, how will this affect me, what will this cost me, what do I stand to get out of this or to lose by this? That is a moment when darkness may very well take possession of our hearts and we go in the way of Balaam.

Then, on the other hand we have Saul of Tarsus. There is no doubt about his blindness; but his was the blindness of his very religious zeal, his zeal for God, his zeal for tradition, his zeal for historic religion, his zeal for the established and accepted thing in the religious world. It was a blind zeal about which afterward he had to say, "I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). "I thought I ought." What a tremendous turn round it was when he discovered that the things which he thought, and passionately thought he ought to do, in order to please God and to satisfy his own conscience, were utterly and diametrically opposed to God and the way of right and truth. What blindness! Surely he stands as an abiding warning to us all that zeal for anything is not necessarily a proof that the thing is right, and that we are on the right road. Our very zeal as a thing in itself may be a blinding thing, our devotion to tradition may be our blindness. I think eyes have a very large place in Paul's life. When his eyes spiritually were opened, his eyes naturally were blinded, and you can use that as a metaphor. The using of natural eyes religiously too strongly may be just the indication of how blind we are, and it may be that, when those natural eyes religiously are blinded, we will see something, and not until they are do we see something. For a lot of people, the thing that is in the way of their real seeing is that they see too much and see in the wrong way. They are seeing with natural senses, natural faculties of reason and intellect and learning, and all that is in the way. Paul stands to tell us that sometimes, in order really to see, it is necessary to be blinded. Evidently that left its mark upon him, just as the finger of the Lord left its mark upon Jacob, for the rest of his days. He went into Galatia and later wrote the Letter to the Galatians; and you remember he said, "I bear you witness, that, if possible, ye would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me" (4:15); meaning that they noted his affliction, they were aware of that mark which had lasted from the Damascus road, and so felt for him, that if they could have done so, they would have plucked out their very eyes for him. But it is wonderful that the commission which came when he was naturally blinded on the Damascus road was all about eyes. He was blind, and they led him by the hand into Damascus; but the Lord had said in that hour, "to whom I send thee to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God".

Well, all these have their own message for us, but they cover the ground fairly generally in relation to spiritual sight. There are, of course, many details, but we will not seek to search those out at the moment; we will get on with this general consideration.

Spiritual Sight Always A Miracle

When we have covered the whole ground in a general way, we come back to notice one particular and peculiar feature in every case, and that is, that spiritual sight is always a miracle. That fact carries with it the whole significance of the coming into this world of God's Son. The very justification of the coming into this world of the Lord Jesus Christ is found in the Word of God; because it is a settled matter with God Himself that man now is born blind. "I am come a light into the world" (John 12:46); "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5): and that statement, as you know was made right there in that section of John's Gospel where the Lord Jesus is dealing with blindness. "When I am in the world, I am the light of the world", and He illustrates that by dealing with the man born blind.

So spiritual sight is a miracle from heaven every time, and that means that the one who really sees spiritually has a miracle right at the foundation of his life. His whole spiritual life springs out of a miracle, and it is the miracle of having sight given to eyes which never have seen. That is just where the spiritual life begins, just where the Christian life has its commencement: it is in seeing.

And whoever preaches must have that miracle in his history, and he himself is dependent entirely upon that miracle being repeated in the case of every one who listens to him. That is where he is so helpless and so foolish. Perhaps it is here that, in one sense, we find "the foolishness of preaching". A man may have seen, and may be preaching what he has seen, but no one listening to him has seen or does see: and so he is saying to the blind, See! And they see not. He is dependent entirely upon the Spirit of God coming and, there and then, working a miracle. Unless that miracle is wrought, his preaching is vain, so far as the desired effect is concerned. I do not know what you say when you come into a gathering and bow your head in prayer, but there is a suggestion for you. There may be present that which has come out of a miracle in the one who is giving it forth in preaching or teaching, and you may miss it all. The suggestion is that you ever and always ask the Holy Spirit to work that miracle in you afresh in this hour, that you may see.

But we go further. Every bit of new seeing is a work from heaven. It is not something done fully once for all. It is possible for us to go on seeing and seeing, and yet more fully seeing, but with every fresh fragment of truth, this work, which is not in our power to do, has to be done. Spiritual life is not only a miracle in its inception; it is a continuous miracle in this matter right on to the last. That is what arises from the passages we have read. A man may have had a touch, and, whereas before he was blind and saw nothing, now he sees; but he sees only a little, both in its measure and in its range, and he sees imperfectly. There is a certain amount of distortion about his vision yet. Another touch is required from heaven in order that he may see all things correctly, perfectly. But even then it is not the end, for such as are seeing things correctly, perfectly, within that measure, have yet possibilities from God of seeing such vast ranges. But is it still a spirit of wisdom and revelation which is required to effect it. All the way along it is from heaven. And who would have it otherwise, for is not this the thing which gives to a true spiritual life its real value, that there should forever remain in it the miraculous element?

The Effect Of The Loss Of Spiritual Sight

Then we come to that final word. To lose spiritual vision is to lose the supernatural feature of the spiritual life, and that produces the Laodicean state. If you seek to get to the heart of this thing, this state of things represented by Laodicea, neither hot nor cold, the state which provokes the Lord to say, "I will spew thee out of My mouth"; if you seek to get to the heart of it and say, Why is this, what is the thing lying behind this? The one thing that explains it is simply this, that it has lost its supernatural feature, it has come down to earth; it is religious, but it has come out of its heavenly place. And then, you see, you get the

corresponding rebound to overcomers in Laodicea, "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne". You have gone down a long way to earth, you have lost your heavenly feature, but for overcomers in the midst of such conditions there is still a place above, showing the Lord's thought as over against this condition. To lose spiritual vision is to lose the supernatural feature of the spiritual life. When that has gone out, be as religious as you like, the Lord only has one word to say - Buy eyesalve: that is your need.

The Need Of The Hour

That brings us, then, to the need of the hour, the need which, of course, is the need of every hour, of every day, of every age. But we are made more and more aware in our time of this need, and in a sense, we can say there never was a time when there was a greater need for people who could say and can say, I see! That is the need just now. Great and terrible is that need, and not until that need is met will there be any hope. Hope hangs upon this, that there would arise people in this world, this dark world of confusion and chaos and tragedy and contradiction, people who are able to say, I see! If there should arise a man to-day who had position, to exercise influence and be taken account of, and such a man who saw, what new hope would arise with him, what a new prospect! That is the need. Whether that need will be met in a public, national, international way or not, I do not know, but that need must be met in a spiritual way by people on this earth who are in that position, who really can say, I see!

You see, Christianity has so largely become a tradition. The truth has been resolved into truths and put into a Blue-Book, the Blue-Book of Evangelical Doctrine, a set and fenced up thing. These are the evangelical doctrines, they set the bounds of evangelical Christianity in preaching and in teaching. Yes, they are presented in many and various forms. They are served up with interesting and attractive anecdotes and illustrations, and with studied originality and uniqueness, so that the old truths will not be too obvious, but will stand some chance of getting over because of the clothes in which they are dressed up; and a very great deal depends upon the ability and the personality of the preacher or the teacher. People say, I like his style, I like his manner, I like his way of saying things! - and much depends upon that: but when all those trappings have been stripped off, the stories, the anecdotes, the illustrations, and the personality and the ability of the preacher or teacher: when that has all gone, you have simply got again the same old things, and some of us come along and outdo the last man in the way of presenting them in order to gain for them some acceptance, some impression. I do not think that is unkind criticism, for that is what it amounts to; and no one will think that I am asking for a change or dismissal of the old truths.

But what I am trying to get at is this: it is not new truths, it is not the changing of the truth, but it is that there shall be those who, in presenting the truth, can be recognised by those who listen as men who have seen: and that makes all the difference. Not men who have read and studied and prepared, but men who have seen, about whom there is that which we find in this man in John 9 - the element of wonder. "Whether he is a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see". And you know whether a person has seen or not, you know where it has come from and how it has come: and that is the need: that something, that indefinable something, which works out in wonder, and you have to say, That man has seen something, that woman has seen something! It is that seeing factor which makes all the difference.

Oh yes, it is a far bigger thing than you and I have yet appreciated. Let me tell you forthwith that all hell is banded together against that, and the man who has had his eyes opened is going to meet hell. This man in John 9 was up against it at once. They cast him out, and even his own parents were afraid to take sides with him because of the cost. "He is of age, ask him". Yes, this is our son, but do not press us too much,

do not involve us in this thing; go to him, get it cleared up with him, leave us alone! They saw a red light, and so they were seeking to by-pass this issue. It costs to see, and it may cost everything, because of the immense value of seeing to the Lord, and as against Satan, the god of this age, who hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving. It is the undoing of his work. "I send thee to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God". Satan is not going to take that, neither at the beginning nor in any measure. It is a tremendous thing, to see.

But oh, what a need to-day for men and women who can stand spiritually in the position in which this man stood and say, I was blind, but now I see, and this one thing I know! It is a great thing to be there. How much I do not know, one thing I do know, I see! Which was not the case before. There is an impact, a registration, with that. Life and light always go together in the Word of God. If a man really sees, there is life, and there is uplift. If he is giving you something secondhand, studied, read, worked up, there is no life in it, other than, perhaps, that temporary and false lift of interest, passing fascination. But there is no real life which makes people live.

So one does not plead for changing the truth or having new truths, but for spiritual sight into the truth. "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word", which is true. Let me get rid of that thing which has been fastened upon us here if I can. We do not seek for new revelation, and we do not say or suggest or hint that you may have anything extra to the Word of God, but we do claim that there is a vast amount in the Word of God that we have never seen, which we may see. Surely everybody agrees with that: and it is just that - to see, and the more you see, really see, the more overwhelmed you feel about the whole thing, because you know that you have come to the borders of the land of far distances, lying far beyond a short lifetime's power of experience.

Now just to close, let me repeat, that, at every stage from initiation to consummation, spiritual life must have this secret in it, I see! Right at the commencement when we are born again, that should be the spontaneous expression or ejaculation in the life. Our Christian life ought to begin there. But all the way along to the final consummation it must be that, the working out of this miracle, so that you and I are maintained in this atmosphere of wonder, the wonder-factor repeated again and again, so that every fresh occasion is as though we had never yet seen anything at all.

But I may as well say at once that usually a new breaking in of the Spirit in that way follows the eclipse of all that has gone before. It seems that the Lord has to make it necessary, so that we come to the place where we cry out, Unless the Lord shows, unless the Lord reveals, unless the Lord does a new thing, all that ever has been is as nothing, it will not save me now! Thus He leads us into a dark place, a dark time. We feel that what has been has lost the power which it once had to make us buoyant, triumphant. That is the Lord's way of keeping us moving on. If you and I were allowed to be perfectly satisfied with what we have got at any stage, and not to feel the absolute necessity for something we never have had, should we go on? Of course not! To keep us going on, the Lord has to bring about those experiences where it is absolutely necessary for us to see the Lord, and know the Lord in a new way, and it must just be so all the way along to the end. It may be a series of crises of seeing and seeing again, and yet again, as the Lord opens our eyes, and we are able to say, as never before, I see! So it is not our study, our learning, our book knowledge, but it is a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of our hearts being enlightened, and it is that seeing which brings the note of authority that is so much needed. That is the element, the feature, that is required to-day. It is not just seeing for seeing's sake, but it is to bring in a new note of authority.

Where is the voice of authority today? Where are those who are really speaking with authority? We are languishing terribly in every department of life for the voice of authority. The Church is languishing for want of a voice of spiritual authority, want of that prophetic note - Thus saith the Lord! The world is languishing for want of authority, and that authority is with those who have seen. There is far more authority in the man born blind seeing, in his testimony - One thing I know that, whereas I was blind, now I see - than there is in all Israel, with all Israel's tradition and learning. And may it not be that that was the thing about the Lord Jesus that carried such weight, for "He spoke as One having authority, and not as the Scribes" (Matt. 7:29). The Scribes were the authorities. If anybody wanted an interpretation of the law, they went to the Scribes. If they wanted to know what the authoritative position was, they went to the Scribes. But He spoke as One having authority, and not as the Scribes. Wherein lay that authority? Just that in all things He could say, I know! It is not what I have read, what I have been told, what I have studied, that is with power, but this - I know! I have seen!

The Lord make us all to be of those who have eyes opened.

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