

The Momentousness of Jesus Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon highlights the momentousness of Jesus Christ, His reversal of the fall, and His role as the great Daysman and mediator, providing redemption and victory over death.

Scripture: Philippians 3:1

Topics: "The Significance of Christ", "Personal Transformation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the momentousness of Jesus Christ through the life of Job, illustrating how Job's journey from outward righteousness to inward knowledge of God reflects the necessity of experiencing Christ personally. Job's initial fullness and goodness were overshadowed by complacency, leading to a profound transformation through suffering, where he ultimately recognized his own nothingness and the greatness of God. This transition highlights that true knowledge of God comes not from mere hearing but from deep, personal encounters with Christ, who serves as our mediator and redeemer. Sparks draws parallels between Job's quest for understanding and the believer's need for a personal relationship with Christ, culminating in the realization that all judgment and redemption are found in Him. The sermon calls for a deeper understanding of Christ's significance in our lives, urging believers to seek a transformative relationship with Him.

Transcript

From "A Witness and A Testimony" magazines 1969, Volumes 47-4 & 47-5

Reading: Philippians 3:1-16.

"I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5).

This verse sums up the whole book of Job, for it is the deep explanation underlying Job's life. This book takes a patriarchal character and shows us, in a wonderful way, God's dealings with that man in relation to Christ. Christ takes a very large place in the book of Job; indeed, He is the object in view in all that is happening here.

This verse, then, sums up the whole book of Job and shows us a tremendous transaction which is taking place in the life of this man. Concerning his past life Job said: "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear", so that his relationship to God had only been by the hearing of the ear. Then came these tremendous experiences that he went through. He went down into the depth of sorrow, and this resulted in an

altogether different relationship to God: "But now mine eye seeth thee." From hearing he went to seeing, and that is no small thing. It marks a revolution in a life.

Where do we begin with Job? First there are three marks which we must consider:

(a) Fullness

At the beginning of his life we find Job in a state of fullness. He was a wealthy man. He had a large estate, with every kind of comfort, and a prosperous, happy family. He was highly esteemed, a man who was taken account of and who held a position of influence. His life was marked by fullness.

(b) Goodness

Job was a good man. God Himself challenged Satan as to Job, saying: "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and turneth away from evil." So we see that Job was a good man; but the statement is made with certain reservations, and is not absolute. However, as amongst men, Job was a good man; that is, he was not wicked and God had a high estimate of him.

(c) Complacency

We see clearly that Job was quite satisfied with himself. He knew no trouble in his relationship to God, neither did his spiritual state cause him anxiety.

That is where we begin with Job, but what comes out later?

As to goodness, we have to look more intently and we find that it was an outward and legal goodness, not inward and spiritual. His knowledge of God was more an objective knowledge. There was no question for him as to the reality of the existence of God, but to him God was something outward, someone up in His heaven while he was on this earth. He had just HEARD about God, and he adjusted his life according to the light he had, but it was all outward. Job's righteousness was based upon his works. He argued with his friends about that. When they said to him that his sin was the cause of his suffering, he gave a whole catalogue of all his good works. So his righteousness was rather of works than of faith.

Thus we see in Job fullness, outward goodness and self-satisfaction.

The Transition

Now let us turn to the beginning of Job's transition:

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth."

But Satan challenges God, and says:

"Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side?" In effect, Satan is saying that Job does it because it is for his own benefit. It is easy to be good when you are protected from suffering! "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all

that he hath, and he will renounce thee to thy face."

God accepts Satan's challenge and gives him permission to touch Job, except that he may not touch his life. And Satan goes, and does his work. All Job's outward wealth falls under Satan's power: his home, his children, his herds, everything is destroyed. Then Job is touched in his body, and finally his wife and his friends turn against him. And at last he suffers from the stroke of Satan. (We will touch that later.)

Gathering all these difficulties and needs of Job together, we have the spectacle of a man whose life had been very full on this earth. He had had friends, earthly means, a home, a family, a standing amongst men, influence, and a sphere of usefulness. He was not a bad man. But now he is broken and utterly emptied, until he reaches the very bottom of himself. He is emptied of all he possessed, he is broken in spirit, broken in soul, broken in body, and brought down to the very bottom - and at the bottom he meets God on a basis of pure grace. He has learned the lesson of his own nothingness. It often takes a tremendous amount to bring people to that place of recognising their nothingness! Job's knowledge of God had not been an inward knowledge, a knowing Him in his own heart, but something from the outside, and therefore, as there was no true knowledge of God, there was a corresponding ignorance of his own heart. This is always so! So Job did not, at the beginning, know his own heart.

"I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

This is the transition stage! But what was it all unto? On the one hand, fullness and goodness, a great measure of self-righteousness, and on the other hand, brokenness, emptiness, everything gone - and all that by God's permission!

We must remember that Satan was God's instrument and he was not doing this independently of God. After the first blow, when Job's possessions and family were destroyed, Satan went back to God and challenged Him a second time. Again God asked him: "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth... and he still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him." GOD did it through Satan, but why did He do all this? We can never say when some trouble comes into our life: 'This is absolutely from the devil!' It may be from the devil, but there is the Lord's meaning behind it. What was all this unto?

We have the all-inclusive answer in this verse: "...but now mine eye seeth thee." What does that mean? It is Christ who comes into view again and again. Job is in quest of God in a new way. He knew Him - "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear" - but now he cries: "O that I knew where I might find him!" Job is crying out to find God, for God is not in him. He is crying for a personal inward knowledge of God, and why does he seek after a personal, inward and spiritual union with God? Because this is the only thing which can save him now. One of his friends says to him: "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace," but Job says: "It is easy to say: "Acquaint now thyself with God!", but that is just my difficulty. I cannot find Him, so how can I get to know Him? Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" That personal, inward knowledge of God has been the quest of men throughout the ages, and Christ is the answer to that cry.

"Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"; "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." God is found in Christ, and in Christ the Holy Spirit becomes an inward reality. But first all our own righteousness and fullness and self-satisfaction

have to go and Christ has to be our righteousness our fullness and our satisfaction.

Victory Over Death

Then we see another thing in Job's life, and that is the matter of victory over death. Job came face to face with death. This had not caused him any difficulty before, because the sin question had not been dealt with, but now he had questions about himself. He was shaken and his soul was torn through fear of death. He was not sure about himself and his relationship to God, and he asks: "If a man die shall he live again?" There must be an explanation, or is life only a dream? Is there no answer, no vindication? He had lost all, yet he had believed in God. Is that all now? Is God a myth and life a tragedy? If a man die, is that all, or shall he live again?

Let us turn to the Gospel of John to find the answer to this acute question: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live."

Job wanted the resurrection and the life, and Christ is the answer to his need. Christ governs everything. Job came to see that there is life beyond, a life triumphant over death, and now he is at rest. In the forty-second chapter we find Job as a man who has come through the storms. His heart is at rest and his problems are solved: "Now mine eye seeth thee."

The Great Daysman

Then there is another point. Job's friends were accusing him of sin; Satan, through those friends, was acting as the accuser. In himself Job was not sure and he longed for assurance. On the other hand, it looked as if God had a controversy with him, as if something had gone wrong. His friends could not help him, and Job cried for a daysman to stand between the opposing sides, for such a man who could come in between to see that both sides had fair play and that all got their rights: a man who had no personal interests, neither on one side nor on the other.

We know our New Testament well enough to see that Jesus Christ has become that great Daysman. He is the great mediator. In 1 Timothy 2:5 we read: "For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself and man, Christ Jesus." Christ answers Job's need and is the One who will see that there is fair play on both sides.

The Great Redeemer

Just one thing more for now. Job needed a redeemer. He needed to be redeemed from SIN, redeemed from SATAN, redeemed from the POWER OF DEATH, and redeemed from the corruption of his own FLESH. He cried for this redemption; then, towards the end of God's dealings with him, there came a flash into his heart - only a flash - but in that flash he saw some One and he cried: "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" And then darkness returned.

"He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). That is what we need - redemption to the uttermost! Here Job saw his Redeemer for a moment and knew that HE lives. And because He lives - "He ever liveth" - He can save to the uttermost.

What we want to emphasise is that the great transition of Job was A TRANSITION FROM HIMSELF TO CHRIST. God thought it worthwhile to lead him through the depths, to empty him and to break him

completely in order to bring him to an inward knowledge of Christ. God finds it far more important that we should know Him in a deep personal way than to do a great many good works.

Perhaps God has led us that way of taking certain things away from us - our reputation, or the estimation of our friends. Perhaps those who are near to us have lost their confidence in us. We may have known a certain sphere of fullness, many a door has been open to us and we had many friends - and then God has laid His hand upon that and it has all gone. Perhaps we are increasingly conscious of our own nothingness, and we are coming to the place where we do not think we are as good as we thought we were. Our heart, perhaps, is not quite sure about our spiritual state, and it may be that our relationship to God is not quite what it should be. Perhaps friends say to us that we are going wrong and are mistaken. But that through which we are now going may be the way into something much larger, and we may get to know the Lord in a much deeper way. In Philippians 3 Paul speaks of himself and of the law. He possessed much by birth, through education and teaching, and was much esteemed by others. But then Christ came into his life, and all these things had to go in order that he might win Christ; yet the knowledge of Christ was far more to him than what he had possessed before.

We are speaking of the momentousness, the tremendous significance of Christ, but it is only through experience that we enter into these things - not through hearing about them, nor by studying the Bible, nor by going to church. Those are not the ways which will bring us there. Only by being emptied and broken do we come into the fullness of Christ. But the end justifies all: the great place which Christ has in us. It is worth everything to know Christ in fullness! A good man is broken and loses everything in order to find more of Christ. The floodtide of God is Christ. May we be filled unto all His fullness!

The Momentousness of Jesus Christ

"God... has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by (in) the (a) man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

"For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son... and he gave him authority to execute judgment because he is the (a) Son of man" (John 5:22,27).

Here we have a comprehensive and emphatic statement concerning the place that the Lord Jesus occupies by the appointment of God His Father. That place is shown to be inclusive and exclusive. That means that:

1. God has summed up all things in Christ. Ultimately there will be nothing outside of Christ, and all that eventually is found to be outside of Christ will be removed from God's domain.
2. Nothing of God can be had outside of Christ.

In the Bible we have two revelations: one of man outside of Christ and the other of man in Christ. The emphasis is upon the word MAN. The Scripture above says that the final judgment of the world is in a MAN; a God-ordained, God-horizoned man. And it is not BY, but IN that Man. What is in that Man in the matter of righteousness will be the criterion of judgment.

Man Outside of Christ

We know, not only by the statements of the Bible, but in our own hearts that man is marred and spoilt by sin. It is an ugly word, hated by all, refused acknowledgment by many, excused by many more, but, apart from those in Christ, not confessed or allowed recognition. In this connection it is very significant that, in a time of moral landslide and increasing depravity, there is a great revival of humanism - the theory of man's inherent goodness and moral greatness: the total dismissal of the fact of sin AS SIN. It is called by any other name, even good in the making. It is not difficult to see through this artifice of the devil. It is to construct a humanity which, IN ITSELF, is its own saviour, and to wholly dispose of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This is almost the last word in human blindness. It is blindness to history. It is blindness to the moral DEvolution of recent times. It does not allow that the last decades have uncovered a depth of iniquity, wickedness, and "man's inhumanity to man", beyond description, and that in the areas which have had more education, scientific research, discovery, and "culture" (?) than anywhere else on the earth. Such is the master-deception of the devil! "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving", says the Word of God. We must ever remember that Satan's rebellion against God was on the decision of God to make MAN. He knew that the intention of God was to give dominion over the world to man, and THAT dominion he - Satan - both coveted and usurped by the deception of man. This is all very clearly implied in the titles given to Satan in the Bible as "The prince of this world", "the god of this age", "the world-ruler of this darkness", etc. Hence the double issue of man's deception, seduction, and ruin: man's separation from God: and the defeat of God's intention. Man, out of Christ, is such a man, even at what he - man - thinks to be the highest levels of intelligence, "culture" and "progress". The Bible says much about the sinister nature of "the wisdom of this world", and even foretells that apostasy will go hand-in-hand with the increase of knowledge. The subtlety of sin is that to try and eliminate its malevolence it has to be called by other names. The Bible does not hide the fact of man's sinful nature, not even to omit mention of the sins of the greatest of its men of God: Abraham, Moses, David, etc.

It is now possible to discern the momentousness of Christ. For this we have to go a long way back, even to a cosmic event before man's creation, when, the Bible tells us explicitly, God appointed His Son "Heir of all things". That was the point of cosmic controversy then, and has been ever since. The focal point of the conflict of the ages is the predestined place of Christ as Son of Man, the humanity according to God's intention, of which Jesus the Christ is the "Firstborn", Progenitor, "Pioneer" and "Head". Countless are the ways and means pursued to prevent, frustrate, and defeat Christ from coming into His own in a humanity conformed to His image. In other words, (a) to discredit and displace Christ; and (b) to prevent there coming into being a people truly, by new birth, coming "into Christ". THE great revelation of the New Testament is what is represented by that phrase "In Christ". The "fall" was not only a fall in level, from one higher level to a lower; it was a fall OUT OF GOD! The momentousness of Jesus Christ is in His reversal of that, and in Himself restoring man 'into God', his right place.

This is the meaning of that darkest and deepest eternal moment at the end of the Cross when Jesus went out from God - "Forsaken"; out into the direst distress; OUT, that in 'lostness' He might find us just where we are in God's knowledge and bring us back into God. "Christ died once, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). His body broken was the reality of which the veil of the tabernacle and temple was the type. Its rending, as between heaven and earth, man and God, opened a fast-closed way back into the realm of God. Surely that was a momentous moment: a momentous act!

Every aspect of Christ's person and work, and every aspect of the Gospel has to do with this. Moreover, every activity of the evil powers upon the Christian is with the object of cutting in between him - or her - and the Lord by weakening or damaging the one tie of that union, namely faith.

Hence Christ's imperative "Abide in me". Satan "abode not in God" and see the consequences! Hence the momentousness of being in, and abiding in Christ, which is in God.

We return to where we began. God binds Himself up with His Son for man. All judgment is, and will be, on the basis of what Christ is and whether man is in Him or not. The whole Christian life, if it is true and under the government of the Holy Spirit, is a lifelong education as to the significance of Christ; the knowledge of Christ, and, seeing that it is not merely theoretical, doctrinal, theological knowledge, but very practical, wrought on the anvil and by the fires of deep experiences, it is knowledge which is a part of our being, our constitution. It is knowledge which represents something that has taken place in us. We ARE that knowledge.

When we first come back to God through Christ we have only a more-or-less understanding of the depth, the cost, the momentousness of what we have come into. But as we go on, the dealings of God with us bring us to an ever-deepening realisation and appreciation of what Christ is and has done. On the one side, the depth of our worthlessness becomes more terrible to our awareness. This is not for our desolation as the end, but to make us "KNOW" how great is the meaning of Christ from God TO us, and to God FOR us. The ultimate vision of the redeemed multitude is that of a WORSHIPPING people attributing everything to the Lamb.

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