

The 'Plus' and 'Other' of Heaven

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of embodying the 'plus' and 'other' of heaven in our lives, reflecting Christ's incorruptible nature and leaving a lasting impact on others.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:8

Topics: "Incorruptible Life", "Heavenly Identity"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the 'plus' and 'other' of heaven in the life of Jesus, illustrating how His constant reference to heaven shaped His identity and purpose. He argues that Jesus had a heavenly background, an extra world of resources, and a different standard of living that set Him apart from the world. Sparks challenges believers to reflect on the lasting impression they leave on others, urging them to embody the incorruptible qualities of Christ. He highlights the importance of drawing from heavenly resources in times of need and maintaining a distinct Christian identity in a corrupt world. Ultimately, the sermon calls for Christians to live in a way that reflects their heavenly calling and leaves a lasting impact on those around them.

Transcript

Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8-10

The incorruptible characteristic of the life of the Lord Jesus upon which we shall dwell just now - all too insufficiently, I am afraid - is what I will call the 'plus' and 'other' of heaven. That is rather an awkward phrase, I know, but you will understand it better as I go on: the 'plus', or extra, and 'other', of heaven.

You have no doubt been impressed, as you have read the Gospels, with the frequency with which the word 'heaven' was on the lips of the Lord Jesus. It occurred, so far as I can see, nearly one hundred times, and when one word is so frequently on anyone's lips you are not left in very much doubt as to their main preoccupation. When we go abroad, and meet people there who are from our own land, we find that they are always eager and anxious to talk about 'the Old Country', and either that phrase, or else the name of the country, is continually on their lips as they meet us and we are in conversation. So it was with the Lord Jesus here. He was always talking about what to Him was the 'Old Country': He was always referring to heaven. You look it up again, and get a fresh impression, from His constant reference to heaven and His relationship thereto.

This, in Christ's case, indicated three things, or three aspects of one thing.

The Background

Firstly, there was His own personal background. The background against which He lived and moved was heaven. That was always in His consciousness. Secondly, there was His 'extra' to this life and this world. It was something which to Him was a great 'plus' to life, a great extra to everything here. Thirdly, to Him it was a great and wonderful difference. There were these things, then, about Jesus as Son of Man, so that when you met Him, met Him, so to speak, on the surface, face to face, as a man, it was just impossible to feel that you had met everything, that that was all. There are some people whom you meet - and that is all. You meet them, you perhaps have an interchange with them, pass the time of day or have a few words with them, and then you part, and that is all. They came and they went, and there was no more to it than that. It was never so with the Lord Jesus. If you had met Him, you would have immediately met something more than the ordinary, but you would also be left with the consciousness - 'That is not all; there is something very much more there than I have touched or seen. He implies a vast amount more than I have been able to recognise or grasp. The impression that is left with me is that that is not all, there is something more than that. That man has a lot more behind Him than is on the face of things.'

That is very simple, but that helps us toward this whole matter of the incorruptible. Suppose, instead of waiting till later on, we begin to make our application at once - because that was the thing, that was the incorruptible thing about Him, the undying thing, the thing that would abide - the fact that He did not put all His goods in the shop window, so to speak; it was not all there so that you could comprehend it all at once, and that was all there was to it. You were conscious of something there of a vast and profound fullness and depth, and that left a mighty impress. And let me say at once - If that is not true of you and me and of the Church of God, then we are sadly lacking in the material of the incorruptible.

Let me apply that here. Suppose we are a company of Christians and we are moving about the same world as the Lord Jesus - with, of course, many changes; but it is the same world, and people are more or less the same in all generations. When people meet you and meet me, when people come into the midst of us as companies of the Lord's people, what is left afterward? Can we move amongst them, can they come into touch with us, can we touch them in this world, and then part, and that is all there is to it - that is the beginning, and that is the end? 'He has gone - well, a nice fellow, a nice woman, a nice girl' - superficial impressions, judgments formed, and then fading and passing away - nothing more than that? Oh, no; that is not the incorruptible, the eternal, the abiding, the thing that will appear again in glory for ever. Not at all. That was not so with the Lord Jesus, and it must not be so with us. It must really be that when we have gone this way and touched lives, moved through this earth and gone our way, there is something left which is the plus of our lives which will abide for ever. People have to say, 'There is something more in them than was just on the face of them'.

Do you feel that is too simple? But oh, how it applies to everything! How concerned about this matter we must be, as to what we leave when we have made a contact, what the impression is. It may not be that they can define it, it may not be that they even sit down to think about it, but somehow or other they are aware, whether they take thoughtful account of it or not, that 'having met him and having met her, I have not met everything, there is something more there'. And it is just that something more that is the ground of the Lord's activity in lives. He knows where there are people who are looking for something more than this world can give, something more than they have. They are disappointed, they are hungry; or they may have been peculiarly in the Lord's thought to be brought into something more for a specific purpose, a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His Name. The Lord knows where that Saul of Tarsus is, where that Ethiopian eunuch is, where that Cornelius is, marked out and recognised, and hungry deep down for

something more. And where is something more to be found? The Lord must have it available - He must have it in a Philip. He must have it in a Peter, in an Ananias; He must have it in you and in me: that is, the incorruptible, the immortal, the eternal factor: so that there is a point of contact made between heaven and lives by means of this heavenly background and heavenly place in you and in me.

That is the principle of service. You think of the work of the Lord, the service of the Lord, as giving up business and coming out and taking a course of Bible study and then going out preaching. That is not what the Lord thinks about it at all. What He thinks about is - Where can I find something which is an extra, a real extra, a mighty extra, that I can use as the ground of bringing about contacts, touching lives? That is 'evangelization', that is 'the extension of the Kingdom', if you like to use those phrases. It is that something is there to which the Lord can bring as the point of His contact.

You can test that. So often it is not what we say at all. We try to persuade, we try to argue, we try to urge, we try to bring about issues in other lives - and we are missing the way all the time. The real upshot rests upon this - Was there something more than our argument, something more than our effort, something more than our persuasiveness? - so that if something happens, those in whom it happens will afterwards say, 'It was not your argument, it was not the way you put things, and it was not even your earnestness. There was something about YOU; you have got something, and that found me out.' Unless that is there, we seek to persuade and argue in vain. That is the incorruptible thing. The Lord Jesus had a background, something behind Him, and men knew when they met Him that that was not all. Now you and I are moving about and we are contacting people all the time; and what is the impression? You see how important it is for us to have this plus of heaven.

The Extra

Then not only was there something more behind Christ, but it was to Him an extra world - an extra world of resources that He could draw upon, an extra world of knowledge that was available to Him, an extra world of relationships, heavenly relationships: with the Father, with the Spirit - yes, and with other intelligences, celestial intelligences; an extra world, another world of relationships. What a big world He had behind Him to draw upon in this life down here, in its vicissitudes, its difficulties, its trials, its adversities, when He was alone and no one could help Him. Even those who would want to seek to help Him could not. He was alone here. Without the resources of this world, He had another world to draw upon, a wonderful other world of resource.

And what is the incorruptible world? It is that which gives the real value to our life here, which says that this is not all. The knowledge that we possess and the knowledge that this world possesses which is available to us comes to a point where it can no longer help us. Have we something beyond that? Is there a realm of knowledge which is altogether beyond and above this world's knowledge at its greatest and our knowledge at its fullest? When we have exhausted things here, we are only beginning with the resources of heaven. That is no exaggeration; for, after all, most of us, as the Lord's people, know in experience something about this, if it has not been put that way in our minds: we are after all living out from and drawing upon another extra, plus world. When we pray, we do that; whenever we go to the Lord, we are doing that, we are drawing out from a realm which is more than this one.

Oh, how much more real that must be to us and in our consciousness! 'Here I have come to an end of my resources, here I am right up in a corner, here I am, not knowing, so far as this world is concerned, which way to turn: I am at a standstill, a deadlock, an IMPASSE; but I have another world to draw upon, a very

real world, and that other world can come right into my situation.' And it is just as we are living out from heaven, out from our extra, our plus, world, that things will partake of the character of the eternal, and that into this life will come the imperishable: so that there is something in that solved problem, that overcome difficulty, which is not just the result of human ingenuity, but of Divine intervention and undertaking. That is the incorruptible, and God is always seeking to have it like that. Perhaps that is why He allows the problems and the IMPASSES, to make us know that this is not all. There is another world of resource, all so infinitely in advance of what is here.

The Difference

Once more, not only a background, and an extra, but a difference. Looking at the Lord Jesus, speaking as men speak, we could say that that Man was governed by different standards, by different conceptions, by different ideas, from anything here. He did not act just as people usually act here. His conduct was different from the usual conduct of people, from the established and accepted order of things, of how it is done, and how people think it ought to be done and all that kind of thing. No; He did not belong to that realm at all, He seemed to have entirely different standards and different ideas and different conceptions. He could not be involved in our system of ideas and procedure and conduct at all. He just would not allow Himself to be roped into our order. He had another world with an altogether different set of conceptions, and He acted according to them and was governed by them, and that made Him so strange amongst us. We thought the way was THIS - this is the ordinary way, the usual way, the accepted way; but He did not do it our way at all. He had a strange way of doing things.

Now that word 'strange' means 'not just as we do things'. You can of course use it in another sense. We sometimes talk about people and say, 'A strange person', meaning that they are a little mentally out of order. But the Lord Jesus was strange in the sense that He was a foreigner to this set-up, to this whole order of things. He belonged to another world, and He had that other world's conceptions. There was a great difference about Him. They just could not keep Him in, they just could not make Him conform, they just could not understand Him at all.

Well, it was those very heavenly standards and conceptions and ideas which were the incorruptible things. This world's ways of going on - what do they lead to? They lead to corruption. At their fullest, highest, greatest, they lead to corruption. Never, never was that more apparent than in our own day. The greatest development of human ideas and ingenuity is leading to the greatest development of corruption. In every realm, corruption. Men are talking very freely now, men who know best - talking almost with bated breath, yet talking quite a lot, of the end of the human race now within sight. Well, that is the end of human ingenuity, of this world's wisdom - corruption.

HIS ideas did not work out that way. You and I - we have come to know something of the Lord, something of the Lord's standards, the Lord's conception of heavenly things, and we know quite well that this is not corruption, this is life and incorruption. We know it, do we not? We are rejoicing in something because we have come to know the Lord; but what have we come to know? Something from outside of this world altogether, something different.

Now let us apply this. Let us be very careful that we do not just seek to be all of a piece with men here, all in tune with them, all in step with this world, just falling into line and being one. If we do, we forfeit the very essential of our heavenly birth and our heavenly relationship, which is this something so other and so different. Paul is saying here to Timothy, "Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of

me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God". Why this "be not ashamed"? Oh, for shame, we try to be on good terms with the world, we are ashamed to be otherwise, we think we will lose prestige, we think we will lose influence if we do not just come into line and be hail-fellow-well-met with everybody. What a deception! We simply throw overboard the very values of our Christian life when we do anything like that. See how it worked out in the case of the Lord Jesus. This other - well, it worked out and resulted in contacts, yes, but without connections. Can you make that discrimination - contacts without connections? Oh, He was in contact with people, He was in contact with things, He was moving amongst them, meeting them, yes very definitely in contact, but there was no connection. He was not all of a piece. Associations - yes, He associated Himself - a marriage, a funeral, a feast, and the rest, but no compromise or acquiescence. A gap was always kept between association and compromise or acquiescence. It was not kept formally, it was not kept in a kind of strain or pretension - You belong there and I belong here, you keep on your ground and I am keeping on mine. That may not be said in word, but so many people, I am afraid, give the impression. It was something spiritual. He associated, it was a charge laid against Him, that He was a friend of publicans and sinners (Matt. 11:19), but He was not a publican nor a sinner. Association, but no compromise, no letting down, no letting go, no acquiescence, no acceptance of what was there. It was that relationship with heaven, that extra, and that other which kept Him incorruptible. He was the incorruptible One in it all. It was all summed up in one precise phrase of His - "I am not of this world" (John 8:23).

There never was another who so filled his time seeing to things, carrying the burden of other people's lives, no, never anyone else whose life was so full of things in relation to other people's interests, but at the same time so marked by a detachment. There was something there that made Him different, that still made Him a kind of outsider, and everybody knew it. That is a very important thing. The Christian life in the New Testament is clearly shown to be heavenly in every respect, heavenly in birth, born from above, heavenly in sustenance, sustenance from above, heavenly in consummation, in translation or rapture, yes heavenly in vocation, a heavenly calling, everything heavenly makes up the Christian life according to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit coming down from heaven has not come just to make us successful in this world, not just to prosper our ventures here, nor to be used by us to realise the thing in which we are interested and to further those plans of ours. He has not come down from heaven for anything like that. He has come down to reconstitute us as heavenly people, and then translate us to heaven. That is His whole work, the reconstituting of our whole being according to heaven's ideas. That is what He is getting at if we understood the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which is only the work of God in our lives, His dealings with us, His ways with us, if we understood the ways and the workings of the Spirit we should see that what He is after is not to make us something here at all, not to make a lot of this life, but to get us to turn everything to heavenly account, to make us according to heaven's pattern. He is after the incorruptible. All this other will go.

That is a very simple word, but let us follow it through again. We must ask ourselves this question continually - When I have been met or when I have met others, when I have gone through this world, in my business, my social, my domestic contacts, in my religious activities, I have come and I have gone, is that all, is that all there is to it? That is that! Is it? In the deepest consciousness of others, whether they will admit it or not, whether they try to explain it or not, whether they can define it or not, deep in their consciousness they know somewhere remotely at the back of their mind - 'I did not meet everything when I met them, there is something more there than I am wholly aware of, there is something more, and it is that something more that is the thing in their life, that accounts for them, and that something more is something not of this world. You do not get that sort of thing here, you do not get that sort of thing in the ordinary run

of men and women and there is something different about them'. That is the testimony of the incorruptible. That is the first challenge to us. Let us ask the Lord very much about that and about everything. It must be like that. In our teaching, in our meetings, our whole Christian procedure, there is something extra and something different, the incorruptible, that has been brought to light through the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Who annulled death, and brought life and incorruption to light.

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