

We Beheld His Glory - Volume 1

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores the profound themes of grace, truth, and the Testimony of Jesus as central to the Gospel of John and the Church's mission.

Scripture: John 1:12, John 1:14, Ephesians 1:22

Topics: "Union with Christ", "The Person of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of the Gospel of John, highlighting that it uniquely presents Christ as the Son of God and the importance of union with Him. He explains that the manifestation of Christ is characterized by grace and truth, which the Church is called to embody. Sparks points out that the Gospel addresses the religious intellectualism of Judea, where the true testimony of Jesus is often obscured by tradition. He stresses that the essence of the Testimony of Jesus is not merely in teachings but in a living union with Him, which should reflect life, light, and love. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper personal relationship with Christ, urging believers to manifest His grace and truth in their lives.

Transcript

READ: John 1:1-18.

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us... full of grace and truth." "The Word tabernacled among us full of grace and truth." The inside of the verse, as you notice, is a parenthesis: "... (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father)" That truly is the heart of the verse, but the other parts before and after that parenthesis, being in the continuity of the text, are what I have more truly on my mind for a key to our meditation at this time. "The Word... dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

"John," Peculiarly for the Church

We have often said, in connection with the Gospel of John, that it is in a peculiar sense the Gospel for the Church. That does not mean that the other three Gospels are not for the Church, but they have their own specific line of emphasis, as you know. When we come to this Gospel, however, we move away from anything that is in any sense particular, as to its application amongst men on the earth, and we immediately find ourselves in what the Apostle Paul would call, "the heavenlies." It is not the note of Matthew, which was peculiarly a note to the Jews in the first instance; and it is not the note of Mark nor of

Luke, which have their sectional application in the first instance; but with "John" it is the note of what is not in time but in eternity, not on earth but in the whole universe. Every kind of local limit and application is transcended when we come to "John," and we find ourselves very quickly in the realm of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. The atmosphere of "John" is that atmosphere, the range of "John" is that range, and the accent of "John" is that. If you listen to the tones of John you find there is something wonderfully and strangely akin to the tones of the Apostle Paul, especially in those two letters which I have mentioned. And it is in that sense that we see that this Gospel by John is peculiarly and particularly the Gospel for the Church.

Two Main Features

1. The Person of Christ

There are two main things through this Gospel. The one is the Son of God, Christ Himself in person. That is the first note and that runs all the way through. It is struck as the key-note in the very first sentence of the Gospel. To that key-note the whole of the Gospel is brought into harmony, it takes its harmony from that key-note, and with the closing notes of the Gospel we know that the key-note once again is heard distinctly, and in a sense exclusively: "...these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." That is where he commenced; he finishes there, and the whole of his Gospel is tuned to that key-note, Christ the Son of God. That fixes the object of the Gospel.

2. Union with Christ

The second thing running throughout this Gospel is union with Christ. That comes up very early in the Gospel. In the first chapter you have not got past the introduction before it is brought in concerning those who received Him, and, receiving Him, were given the right to become children of God. Then the nature of that relationship is manifested, showing that it is an organic union, on the basis of birth from above. On from those early verses, all the way through right up to the close, you have the thought and truth of union with Christ. These are the two dominating notes or emphases of John's Gospel.

Two Features of Christ in Manifestation

And then there are two main features of Christ as the Son of God in manifestation, and they are grace, and truth. "He tabernacled among us full of grace and truth." I take the word "tabernacled" as it is used there as being a better word in a sense than the word in our translation, "dwelt." It is to enter into a tent, and a tent is always the symbol of transience, the opposite of permanence; and the implication here clearly is that He came for a time, not to abide forever. He came for a time as in a tent, in a transient way, and yet in His transient sojourn among us there was a manifestation of God in Him, and that manifestation of God was along the line of grace and truth. The two main features of Christ in manifestation are grace and truth.

Now these are the two features which, by reason of its union with Him, the Church is elected to represent. If this Gospel is peculiarly the Gospel for the Church, if Christ manifested as the Son of God and union with Him are the two main things of this Gospel, then we want to know what is the object of the manifestation and of the union, for they both go together; they are held together all the way through. These are two things which God has joined together; the manifestation of Himself in Christ, with a view to bringing a company into union with Him in that manifestation: two parts of one eternal thought. Then, what is the object of that two-fold revelation - Christ in Person as the Son of God manifested, and union with

Christ revealed? The answer is that what He came to show forth of God in Himself is to be shown forth in and through those who come into that union with Him, and that is grace and truth. The Church is eternally elected to be unto Him, by reason of its union with Him, the means of the universal manifestation of grace and truth. Carry that into Ephesians: "...the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Then it is to be to Him the vehicle for making known the manifold grace of God. There is your "grace," but the other thing is running parallel all the time. "...As truth is in Jesus." The Church is called for the display of grace and truth as it is in Jesus. (This is only working toward the object of our meditation. I trust it is a helpful foundation for our coming into our place in the eternal purpose of God.)

A Living Testimony Amidst Religious Death

I want us to remember - for it will help us toward our object if we do so - that John in his Gospel and its content especially relates to Judea. In this Gospel what is being said and done is, in the main, within the compass of Judaism. The other three Gospels mainly have to do with Galilee, but here the Lord is moving and working and speaking mainly in relation to Judea. That carries with it this significance, that it is the religious world in the midst of which the main part of that which is in John's Gospel is being enacted. Judea especially represents the religious world; and as it was in the time of this Gospel. There was a state of religious intellectual antagonism to Christ. To say the least of it Judea was out of sympathy with Christ. And you see John's tremendous emphasis was upon Who He was, and that emphasis has its own implication; that the religious mind was not recognizing and accepting the ultimate fact of the Person of Christ as the Son of God; that the religious intellectual world was estranged from that basic fact of Who Christ was; and the emphasis here was in that realm; firstly, Whom Christ is, and secondly, what the Church's business is.

I see in that this for ourselves: that it is, at any rate, not nearly so difficult to establish the fact of the Person of Christ amongst those who have never heard and never known, as it is to establish the whole Testimony of the Lord Jesus amongst those who are full of religious history. It is in the realm of religious tradition, religious history, religious intellectualism, much knowledge of religious things, that the greatest difficulty arises in establishing the Testimony of Jesus. And if you read through this Gospel with that thought in mind you will be tremendously impressed. When you get on to chapters eleven and twelve you get into an atmosphere of tremendous spiritual antagonism to Him, coming from the religious people. They sought to stone Him; He went away beyond Jordan, and then the news of Lazarus came to Him. He tarried, then He said: "Let us go," and the disciples said: "Lord, will You go back there into Judea where they sought to stone You?" You remember His reply, and then poor Thomas' - "Well, let us go that we may die with Him. It is certain death if He goes back to Judea; perhaps there is nothing better for us than to go and die with Him." Perhaps Thomas thought it better to die with the Lord Jesus than to live without Him. He saw that to go back to Judea was certain death, as it proved to be in the end. You see it is there, in the realm of religious tradition, of religious intellectualism, that you find the lack of sympathy.

It arises early in the Gospel. You have, in Nicodemus, the intellectual class represented, and it is made clear within that realm that religion - as such - may be rather a hindrance than a help. It is true what the Lord said to the prophet: "Son of man... thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; not to many peoples of a strange speech... if I sent thee to them, they would hearken unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee." And our hardest work, and yet the thing which is being put upon us by the Lord, is the recovery and establishment in finality and fullness of the Testimony of Jesus amongst those who have all the traditions. The whole Gospel of John gives us a comprehensive presentation of the Testimony of Jesus. I want you to remember that Judea

represented the religious intellectual realm, out of sympathy with Who Jesus was, and therefore out of sympathy with those who are out for the Testimony of Jesus, that is, to establish the fullness of meaning of Christ having come to reveal the Father.

John's Favorite Word for Miracle

There is another thing in John's Gospel to be noted in this connection. It is, that of the various words translated into the one English word "miracle" or connected therewith, John has one favorite. The six words are: Terata=portent, or omen; Dunameis=powers; Thaumata=wonder; Paradoza=contrary to expectation; Erga=deeds; Semeia=signs. This last word is John's particular word. In Judea - the world of religious and intellectual antagonism - Christ is not out to capture by wonders, or impress by powers, or hold by the unexpected, etc. No, it is something with a deeper implication, a profounder significance. He is teaching something by what He does. There is a great truth hidden in His act, and only a heart of faith and sympathy will come to see that truth.

The first miracle in Cana of Galilee: "This beginning of his signs did Jesus." You want to get the significance of the turning of water into wine at the marriage. And the miracle of the loaves and fishes, a sign. (You have the significance given almost immediately after: "I am the bread of life.") The Lord is seeking to get to His own people the knowledge of Who He is, and what He is, and He is bringing into fellowship with Him, into union with Him, a company who know Him in that sense. The effort of John is in that direction, to get a company who know Him, to be the continuous instrument and vessel of a manifestation of Who the Lord Jesus is. John is not dealing specifically with sinners, he is dealing in principle with the religious. You have not got "repentance" in John; the word does not occur. You have not got that realm at all. This is all in keeping with the thought that this Gospel is to bring the Church into a place of union with the Lord in order to be for Him the instrument of His manifestation.

John's Theme - The Testimony of Jesus

Now the theme of John throughout, not only his Gospel but his Epistles and the book of the Revelation, is the Testimony of Jesus: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." The letters of John are all upon that note; and then we know the Apocalypse contains that very sentence repeatedly used - "The testimony of Jesus." John's theme is the Testimony of Jesus.

What is the Testimony of Jesus? Well, what does John say the Testimony of Jesus is? Jesus Himself! He is Himself the Testimony. There are things said, and there are things done, there are great facts presented, but you never get anything in "John" as something apart from the Person. I do want you to notice how everything is related to the Person in "John." He introduces the Person, and keeps to the Person all the way through.

Take one or two illustrations. Chapter four. The question of the water; the incident of the woman at the Sychar well. The water there is vitally and inseparably linked with the Person of the Lord Jesus. Take the bread of chapter six. It is not something that He gives, it is giving Himself: "I AM the bread"; giving Himself. Take the raising of Lazarus. He says: "I AM the resurrection." It is not that He performs an act of raising the dead. The Testimony of Jesus is not that He gives you life, but that HE IS the Life. It is not that He gives you bread, HE IS the Bread. It is like that all the way through. The Testimony of Jesus is what He is Himself. And when we have said that we have got right up close to the whole matter. "Full of grace and truth." The Testimony, beloved, is carried on not by teaching, it is carried on by living union. Oh, that is where the breakdown has come about. The Lord has had in some life, or lives, such a union and such a

fellowship with Him as to be able to make Himself known there in a very rich, wonderful and blessed way with some tremendous spiritual results in that life, or those lives, which has meant that there has gone out from them a revelation of Him, a living revelation of Him; and in that day many have been brought into a living revelation of Him, have come into that living touch with the Lord and rejoiced, not in a doctrine, not in a teaching, but in some real, new experience of the Lord. The next generation has taken it up in its teaching and sought to carry that thing on in the terms of its doctrine; and generation has succeeded generation with the doctrine of that thing, and they have called it "carrying on the Testimony." You cannot enter into that original thing by accepting its teaching. You have to enter in the way those first entered into it. It is not only full of truth, it is full of grace as well as truth. Truth may be light; grace is love.

Some Great Words of "John"

Take John's three great words: life, light, love. These are the great words of John, all as in the Lord Jesus, bound up in His own Person. They are the great strong notes that run through this Gospel. Now you can have light, but if you have not got love and life you are unbalanced and you have not got the Testimony. You cannot have the life without the light. The Lord Jesus combining all three means that in spiritual fellowship with Him, and possessing of Him, you should have these things in equal measure, in balance; life, light, love. The Testimony of Jesus is not only carrying on the light, it is just as much carrying on the life and the love. It is possible to take up a system of truth that is undoubtedly New Testament doctrine to the full, but being without the life and the love you have not the Testimony of Jesus. The Testimony of Jesus is Himself. Life, Light, Love, that is the Testimony of Jesus.

To bring that all back to one application, the answer to everything is our possessing of the Lord, or in other words, our vital union with Him. We can explain everything of failure and breakdown by the absence of that, whether in ourselves or in others. We may have the tradition, and we may have the doctrine; we may have the truth, and yet there may be the most appalling inconsistencies, contradictions and breakdown because we have not got the life and the love in the same proportions. What we need is not more light, it is life commensurate with the light, and love in equal proportion to the light. So many who have a lot of light are so loveless, as it is true that many have a lot of light without much life. "FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH." He was manifested thus; the Church is elected eternally to be in union with Him for the purpose of carrying on His Testimony, and the Testimony the Church has to carry on is not something about Christ, but to carry Christ on. Our business in this world as the Lord's people is to carry on Christ, full of grace and truth.

All that has to be seen through this Gospel in its own respective connection. That is a basic statement for our thought. Our need is more of the Lord Jesus. That is a very simple statement, but it goes to the root of everything. You say: "I want more light." No, you need more of the Lord. You say: "I want more love." You need more of the Lord. It is not things, it is Himself; that is the Testimony with which we are entrusted.

This, of course, will smite our hearts if we are at all sensitive spiritually. It will at once set up a standard by which to judge everything. It will mean we have to go to the secret place with the Lord and say: "Now, Lord, life and love must be commensurate with the light." It is this that the Apostle means when he uses that particular phrase: "as truth is in Jesus." It means truth is not something to be had intellectually. You need the Person and then you get the truth. This carries with it its own challenge, and it is intended to be an introductory word for these meditations.

We are not seeking to get a great deal more light as such; we are seeking to get more of the Lord, to see the Lord, to know the Lord, and unless the issue of these meditations is that our union with the Lord is deeper and stronger and fuller, then we have spoken in vain, our work is all to no purpose. Oh that all our messages might have that issue, more of Himself! We want to meet the Lord, and when it comes to a personal matter the result of the study ought to be that more of the Lord in the fullness of grace and truth should be met in us by others.

You notice what the Apostle here says: "For of his fulness we all received, and grace for grace [or, grace upon grace]." That must be the result of our meditation together, even of this introductory word. The only justifying reason for our consideration is that in us others should meet more of the Lord in grace and truth. We should not be a people known as having a good deal of light alone, but that it might be said always that with the light there is life, and with the life there is love; that it is not the light that scorches and blazes and is intolerable; that it is the light of those tender tones which are seen in Christ incarnate.

That is the meaning of the Incarnation. God, to be seen nakedly, would mean destruction; but God manifest in Christ means that something has come between the blazing light to break it up in its components and give us the effect of a prism, so that the blazing white ray is now seen in all its manifold hues. The body of Christ was like a prism, breaking up for us the rays of infinite holiness, and we are able to see what God is, in Christ. That is what we are to be in turn, as members of the Church; a prism that others shall see God.

The all terrible God, the intolerable God? No, God full of grace and truth. God Who is life, God Who is light, God Who is love. Let us pray that there may be more of Him in Christ seen and known in us. We must make that a real quest before Him; Christ more to us; Christ more to others through us. If you want the solution to all your problems it is there. You want to know more? Do not think of knowing more in the matter of truth, as truth. It is a personal knowledge of our union with the Lord Jesus that goes to the root of everything, answers every question, and solves every problem.

"That I may know Him," not this and that and something else. Having Him we have everything. It will be a blessed thing if we can say after these hours together: "Of his fulness we all received, and grace upon grace."

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