

T. Austin-Sparks:

"The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1:11).

"The gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1:13).

"The mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19).

"The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favour" (Isa. 61:1-2).

"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.... And he began to say unto them, Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:17-19,21).

"And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled..." (Acts 2:1, R.V.M.)

The Year of the Grace of the Lord

"The year of Jehovah's favour," or "The acceptable year of the Lord." A better translation is "the year of the grace of the Lord." That is what comes in with the gospel, what lies behind it, what makes it to be the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. The gospel is founded upon the year of the Lord's favour. "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me... to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favour." What is that year? It is taken from the Old Testament, from the book of Leviticus - "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every man unto his own possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you" (Lev. 25:10,11). Here is the year in which liberty is proclaimed, and here we have in Isaiah 61: "liberty to the captives." It is the Jubilee year, the fiftieth year, and the fiftieth year becomes the year in which the good news goes out. "To proclaim liberty"; "the year of the Lord's favour." "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me" to proclaim that.

Then on the day of Pentecost, the fiftieth day - forty from the resurrection to the ascension and ten spent waiting in prayer - the Spirit came upon the Church, and the gospel, the good news, the proclamation of emancipation, was started out on its way to the ends of the earth. "Now when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled" - fifty, the year of the Lord's favour.

The Law of the Sabbath

Going back to Isaiah, we may remind ourselves that those prophecies, from Chapter 40 onwards, have to do immediately with Israel's return from the captivity. The people have been prisoners in captivity; now comes the proclamation of their liberty, the setting free of those that are bound, the acceptable year of the Lord for their return. But what lay behind it? You turn to the prophecies of Jeremiah, and you find him repeatedly referring to the reason for the captivity and saying that the land should have rest for seventy years to fulfil the Lord's Sabbaths. The people had broken the law of the Sabbath, not just the weekly Sabbath but the sevens of weeks and months and years. The land had not had its rest, the captives, the slaves, had not had their rest, their liberation. The people had been riding roughshod over the law of the Sabbath. You know what Isaiah 58 has to say about this - that they had turned His holy day into a holiday, doing their own pleasure therein. They broke the law of the Sabbath. That cannot be done with impunity because of what it signifies, and so they went into captivity, for seventy years - ten times seven. Ten is the number of responsibility; seven is the number of spiritual completeness. They were held responsible before God for this whole matter. Jeremiah reminded them of that again and again and, under the instruction and direction of the Lord, he declared that they should make good by seventy years of captivity. Then at the end of the books of the Chronicles, you have these words - "That the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king Persia, so that he made a proclamation..." The acceptable year of the Lord had come and they returned from captivity.

That is the history and that is the type, but you cannot say that obtains when you come to Luke 4 or to Acts 2.

You have got away now from the historical or from the Jewish. That has served its purpose as a great illustration of how jealous God is for His testimonies, His ordinances, His Sabbaths. Israel is a great example of God's jealousy as well as of His grace.

Now we come to Christ, Who takes up that very Scripture and appropriates it, applying it to Himself, and says, 'Whatever was fulfilled in the case of Israel in their return from captivity when judgment was accomplished, here today you have a transcendent fulfilment of that in your very ears, for I am the Anointed One above all others, and the very purpose of My anointing is to proclaim, on the basis of judgment fulfilled, liberty to the captives.' He has just been to Jordan - this is the fourth chapter of Luke; the judgment in type has been put upon Him and He has gone down into death under the overwhelming billows of God's wrath: judgment is complete. Then He comes forth and declares, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim liberty... the year of the Lord's grace"; the gospel of the glory of the satisfied God, the blessed God.

Now we can understand the meaning of the day of Pentecost and of the day in which we are living, for it has turned out to be not a day of twelve or twenty-four hours but a dispensation. We often speak of this as the day of grace, the gospel day. It is a day that broke when the Lord Jesus rose from the grave and ascended to His Father and sent forth the Spirit, and that day will close when He returns finally from heaven. It is a long day, but this is the day of the Lord's favour in which this gospel of the glory of the blessed God is to be preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

But let us come again to this matter of the Sabbath lying behind it, for it is just there that the whole point of the satisfied God is found. When was the first Sabbath? - when the Lord looked on all that He had made and saw that it was very good, and He rested from His works. "God... hallowed it; because that in it he rested from all his work" (Gen. 2:3). "Ye shall keep my sabbaths: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations" (Ex. 31:13). He appointed the Sabbath as an ordinance forever throughout all their generations, and made a Sabbath of days, and a Sabbath of weeks in the seventh week, and a Sabbath of months in the seventh month, and then a Sabbath of years in the seventh year, and then a Sabbath of multiples of seven years - forty-nine; the fiftieth, the completion of seven sevens. They all speak of this - God is satisfied, and because of that, you can go free. It is as though a prisoner is interrogated at the bar and an altogether satisfactory case is made out and answer is given, and the judge says, 'I am satisfied, you are acquitted.' Why are you acquitted? This of course, brings us to the letter to the Romans: you are acquitted because God is satisfied.

So the Lord Jesus gathers this all up into Himself and He becomes the personal Sabbath of the Lord, the beloved One in Whom God is well-pleased. When He is at God's right hand, God is satisfied, and the great amnesty is proclaimed - the gospel of the satisfied God - and we are given our liberty. You know all that happened in the Jubilee year. All slaves were liberated, all properties in bond had to be returned to their owners; freedom from every kind of tie and bondage was proclaimed, it was a time of joyful release. Well, there ought to be nothing more joyful than our gospel, and there ought to be no more joyful people than those who have such a gospel as we have. It is the gospel of the glory of a satisfied God.

Christ God's Sabbath Rest

Let me stay one moment to touch further upon that matter of God's satisfaction giving character to the gospel, making it a glorious gospel. We said in a previous meditation that the word 'glory' in the Bible is almost invariably associated with the nature of God. That is quite understandable if you look at it like this. Usually, when you meet people off their guard, you can tell pretty much what kind of people they are. I mean this. If you meet a person with a guilty conscience, somehow or other that guilty conscience comes out at you, and though you may not know why, you have a sense that things are not right. You meet somebody who has something in the background of their life which is evil and there is a shadow over the face; you are conscious of the shadow. The more sensitive and alive to people you are, the more quickly do you know, in their presence and without a word, the state of their inner life. You register something that is inside - 'this person is not transparent, he is shifty, he must not be trusted.' You do not know why, you do not know their history, but you know that. By what comes to you from their presence you know what their life is. The registration may come in a variety of ways, leaving you with an impression, and when you get that impression you know your person.

God's nature is all righteousness, and therefore when you meet God, you do not meet any clouds, shadows, darkness, doubt, question, suspicion, uncertainty. All is crystal clear. It is a terrible thing to come really into the presence of God. You do not have to tell Him anything, you know that He knows; He reads you through and through, and absolutely truly. When the Lord Jesus was here, anything dark that came into His presence was immediately exposed. He did not have to say anything: He came into the place and the demons cried out, "Let us alone! What have we to do with thee?" (Luke 4:34). He might have said, 'I have done and said nothing to you;

what is the matter with you?' Ah, He needed not to speak: He knew all men and knew what was in man (John 2:24-25), and men knew that He knew. The trouble all the time was that they could not bear His presence, they had to do something about it. The only thing to do for their own comfort was to kill this Man. He brings our sins to remembrance! He reminds us of our sin! Get into the presence of God, and it is like that. The glory of God is what comes out from God - the registration, the impact, the influence, that comes out from Him. He is all righteousness, and His glory is just that. God is all righteous, and He makes a demand upon all men that they too shall be righteous in order to have fellowship with Him, to stand in His presence, to abide the eternal burnings. Think of standing in the presence of such a God without flinching! That is the gospel of the blessed God - it is possible! We can kneel here and in perfect simplicity, without any question or hesitation, speak to that God and say, Father! We can commune with that God without fear, and abide in His presence in the glory which would destroy anyone who was not in Christ. This, I know, is quite simple and elementary, but it is the gospel of the glory of the satisfied God. It is not the message of the terror of a dissatisfied God, it is not the news of the awfulness of a holy God Whom we must fear and dread, from Whom we must stand back. No: the gospel is the good news of the satisfied God - of the year of Jubilee, the year of acceptance, the year of grace. He has found His Sabbath rest, His satisfaction, His good pleasure, the answer to all His desires, the perfection of all His work, in His Son, the Lord Jesus, and He has put that to the account of simple faith; and we, accepted in the Beloved, are proclaimed free and are given a proclamation of that same freedom to make to all captives. That is where you begin.

God's Righteousness in the Church

Now you notice that this is transferred to the Church. When you look at the Old Testament you find that so often the glory is linked with a dwelling place. "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8); and when the tabernacle was made, the glory filled it. The temple was the same - a place for a dwelling. Now pass from the Old Testament to the New. The statements about the Lord Jesus are well-known. He is the effulgence of that glory (Heb. 1:3). He is "crowned with glory" (Heb. 2:9). He is, to use the words of the psalmist, "the King of glory" (Ps. 24:7); or in Paul's words to the Corinthians; "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). But then He goes to the Father, and the Spirit of glory (as Peter calls the Holy Spirit) is sent forth and comes and takes up residence in the Church. The Church now becomes the dwelling place of the glory, that is - remembering all the time the meaning of the glory - the dwelling place of God's satisfaction because the dwelling place of God's nature. Righteousness is there "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22) - it is there in the Church, and the Church is glorified or glorious because God's righteousness is there by faith, and God is satisfied.

God's Rest in the Church

And the point is this, that if we are the place of the dwelling of the glory we ought to be people who know heart rest. God has come into His rest, He is satisfied, and the Church ought to be the place in which the rest of God is found. Now, if these things seem simple, do remember that the whole testimony which is deposited in this vessel depends for its effectiveness upon these factors. You begin with God's satisfaction or God's rest, and the testimony must be that the people of God are in the enjoyment of God's rest. So that the enemy's first activity against the testimony of Jesus, against the Church, is to bring strain, unrest, into the Lord's people. All who are weary and heavy-laden ought to find rest when they come amongst the Lord's people, and we contradict the very conception of the Church when we lose our heart rest. It is most important; it is a part of our gospel, a part of our proclamation. Believe me, if we were really, in our experience, proclaiming this rest - that is, if it were not merely heard but seen, recognized - it would be a tremendously effective thing, for what we are is a much stronger proclamation than what we say; and if the Lord can have people here and there on this earth who are perfectly satisfied with Him and enjoying His rest, who have found rest unto their souls, He will have a tremendous witness in the earth, because one thing which is the mark of Satanic working in this universe is the seething, restless dissatisfaction, the longing, the craving, that is never being met. The gospel of the glory begins here in the place where the glory is; and the glory is that God is satisfied, God has come to His rest and we have entered into that rest. It is something that dwells in the Church. The gospel has to dwell in the Church. It is the gospel of the glory of the satisfied God.

The Lord Jesus A Priest-King

Now that again in turn lies at the heart of the fact that the house, the dwelling place, the Church, is a priestly dwelling. You remember that it was said that the robes of the high priest should be "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. 28:2). Well, in the eyes of God, of course, the mere dressing up in gorgeous garments had no value; the garments can only be typical of something very much greater. There is nothing you can do in the way of elaborate and gorgeous pageantry that can impress God - though it may impress men. And yet God said these

priestly robes should be "for glory and for beauty." (The word 'beauty' could equally well be translated 'honour.') John 17 is the high priestly prayer. The Lord Jesus is going to the altar, the Cross, and then He is going to pass through the heavens and up to the throne, and the Apostle is going to say "We behold Jesus crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9). Peter used exactly the same words when, looking back to the Transfiguration Mount, he said, "He received from God the Father honour and glory" (2 Pet. 1:17). When was that? "And behold, there talked with him two men, who were Moses and Elijah; who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease (or, exodus) which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:30,31). It is the priest in view. We cannot go back and talk about the priestly features of the exodus from Egypt - the blood shed, the blood sprinkled, the testimony against death. That is all priestly function. The point is, this is all gathered up in the Lord Jesus as High Priest.

The glory and the honour reside upon priestly work. What is the priestly work? It is again this whole question of satisfying God in the matter of righteousness, of destroying the ground of death and judgment as a spiritual thing.

"He shall be," says Zechariah, "a priest upon his throne" (Zech. 6:13). That is a combination of things that you do not very often find in the Bible, but it comes out that Jesus unites both king and priest in His own person. He is King because He is Priest. Because He has fulfilled all the priestly work of dealing with sin and unrighteousness and satisfying God. He is enthroned as Priest upon His throne; He is King.

Now, you have only got to look at the book of the Acts, and you find that it is all there. The second psalm is more than once quoted in that book. What is the connection? "God... raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Acts 13:33) - indicating that in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus a specific meaning is given to His Sonship. He is in full Sonship in a special way by reason of resurrection from the dead. If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, would God have owned Him as His Son? I am not ruling out the fact that He was always the Son of God, but now that He has gone into death, that Sonship can only be ratified and established as a living, full thing in heaven, if God raises Him from the dead. That is the thing the enemy was after all the time. When He came from Jordan the Voice had said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), and Satan wants to nullify that and ensnare Him into death somehow. 'Throw yourself down from the pinnacle, bring yourself somehow under the judgment hand of God.' That is what the enemy is after. Every temptation is to try to get the Lord Jesus out of the way of that good pleasure of the Father, and to bring Him into condemnation and death. But He was never side-tracked; He went into death voluntarily, not enticed there by Satan. "I lay down my life... no one taketh it away from me" - no one, either man or devil. "I have power (authority) to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father" (John 10:17-18). "God... raised up Jesus: as also it is written in the second psalm. Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee!" That is in "Acts."

The Way of the Enemy's Defeat

Then the second psalm again. "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Jesus is raised, glorified and enthroned, set upon God's holy hill of Zion, crowned with glory and honour, a Priest upon His throne. What is the outworking of that? Well, the point that I have wanted to arrive at is this, that when that reality is in the Church, as it came to be on the day of Pentecost - Christ risen and enthroned in virtue of God's absolute satisfaction - then the devil's power is undercut. That is what comes out in Acts. If you go back upon that you reinstate the devil in power. I want to press this point seriously because one of the major end-time activities of the devil is to seek to bring the Church into a place where it cannot function, where it is neutralised in its power, its witness, its influence, because the mighty reality of God's absolute satisfaction has been weakened: or - to put that in the more positive way - where believers are challenged as to their assurance of salvation. Many of you probably have no questions or shadows on that matter, but I doubt whether you will get through to the end of your course without a vicious assault from the enemy to undermine your assurance. It may not come directly on the point of assurance of salvation; it may come in some other way to undermine your confidence in God, or even to becloud your certainty of God. That is, at heart, the nature of the battle of faith. We are not going to get out of the battle of faith till the end of the journey. Indeed, it will doubtless become more and more severe and acute. Faith is going to be tested more and more, and when it does survive and triumph there will be victory indeed.

And on what ground is faith tested? It is on the ground of our very relationship with God and God's attitude toward us. The concentration of the enemy's forces is upon that point - to interfere with our link with God.

What is our link with God? It is this - the Lord Jesus Christ, as the answer to God and to Satan for us. It will never be what we are in ourselves. If you are expecting a day to come when in virtue of what you are in yourself

you can satisfy God, you are destined to an awful disillusionment and disappointment. The day will never come when we can satisfy God in ourselves, not even more or less. The strength of the Church is its faith in the Lord Jesus. The link with God is the Lord Jesus as God's satisfaction, and as God's answer to Satan, the Accuser.

How then can we really dislodge the enemy, undercut his power, destroy him in effect? That is a very big question. We are not going to defeat the enemy by big organisations and movements; he will soon get inside of those and turn them to his own account. We are not going to do it along any one of many lines which might easily be mentioned here. We are going to destroy the enemy in effect, and establish the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in the kingdom of the enemy, only by a full apprehension of what the Lord Jesus is. Now when I use that word full, I underscore it several times because I feel that is the point to which we must come in these meditations. It is the measure of our inward apprehension of the Lord Jesus - of what He is - that is going to answer this whole situation. Therefore for disposing of the whole hierarchy of Satan and emptying the heavens of those evil principalities and powers, the Lord needs above all things, as His instrument and vessel, a people corresponding to Zion, that is, a people who are the embodiment of His fuller thought about the Lord Jesus to a degree that is beyond the average. Some people have gone further into what the Lord Jesus is, and in them something very much more of God's knowledge of His Son is found. It all amounts to this - the measure of Christ. It is one thing to believe on the Lord Jesus, to be converted, to be saved. That is a glorious thing as a beginning, but it alone will not take you right through all that you have to meet; and if you are really in the Lord's hands He will see to it that by virtue of need you are pressed into knowing more and more of His Son. It is the normal course of a true, Holy Spirit-governed Christian life that, in order to get through, a constant increase of Christ, a growing discovery of Christ, is necessary. In the end, the vanguard of the Church, the spearhead of the spiritual Israel, by whom the way will finally be made for the Church into the heavenly dominion and government with Christ, will be a people who have been wrought into Christ very deeply and into whom Christ has been wrought very deeply. They are a necessity to the Lord.

That principle is seen through the Scriptures in many ways. It is one to which the Lord will work - the raising up of a people who have come to some larger measure of what Christ is than is common among His people; and those who have only the lesser measure will need a people like that to get them through. Why does the Lord take one and another through such deep and trying experiences? Why is it that He does not allow some of His children to have an easy way and to be satisfied and gratified with elementary things? Why does He keep them on the move, never let them settle down? Why does He take them through these unusual and extraordinary spiritual experiences and cause them such exercise as multitudes of Christians do not have? Why is it? The need of the others - that is all. We know quite well that if any have been able really to help others, it is because they have gone through deep experience, they have pioneered this way, they have paid a great price for this freedom. It has been costly - but worth while if others can be really helped. It is just the outworking of the Lord's way. So He takes a people by strange ways, very deep and very high and very much outside of the realm of the ordinary, in order to fit them to be a peculiar people of value and usefulness to His Church.