

T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: Rev. 14:1-5; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:4-11.

“These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Rev. 14:4).

In our previous meditation our time was occupied with identifying the one hundred and forty-four thousand followers of the Lamb. Without going over the ground then covered, by way of retrospect it does seem perfectly clear that that particular company represents something distinct and different from other companies of the Lord’s people mentioned in the book of the Revelation. They are marked out by this characterization, that they “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”, and have consequently come to a place of peculiar value and service to the Lord in glory.

Christ the Eternal Lamb

Now we pursue that matter in order to try to see what it means, or at least something of what it means, to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”, that is, in unreserved utterness. So we allow the very designation to lead us — “the Lamb”. And when we look into the Scriptures to find where the first glimpse of the Lamb is given — I do not mean of lambs but the Lamb — we find it here in Rev. 13:8 — “And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain”. You will see that there is an alternative rendering — “written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world”, and I think that is the more correct order. “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”. That is really the first glimpse that we have of Christ as the Lamb. A remarkable statement — “slain from the foundation of the world”. Probably you know that the word “foundation” there could be more literally translated “the laying down of the world”, that is, the setting out of the whole scheme of creation. We speak of laying down a plan, a scheme, a project, and when God laid down the plan, the scheme, the project of the creation, at that time the Lamb was, in intention, slain, which, of course, in the very first instance means that the Cross is no afterthought. The Cross is not something brought in as an afterthought because of certain emergencies. The Cross was in the foreknowledge of God, as we have read in Acts 2:23 — “being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”: “delivered up... by the foreknowledge of God”: “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”.

That takes us back to God’s counsels from eternity. A purpose, a purpose framed, a purpose projected, initiated. There we find ourselves once more in the presence of those counsels of the Godhead to which Paul so much refers; wonderful, great, glorious counsels. How full, far-reaching, and glorious were those counsels before times eternal. It is a matter about which we can truly be in contemplation and meditation and consideration all our days and never exhaust it. How many times have we come back to those parts of the Word which speak so much about God’s eternal counsels, God’s foreknowledge, God’s predestinating purpose, and still we feel we have not touched the fringe. There is always something more. Yes, it was all there before, and when God, so to speak, drafted His great, universal, eternal plan and purpose, He at the same time anticipated its disruption. He foresaw what would happen as a mighty spiritual reaction against His intentions. He took the whole situation in, knowing that the very nature of the purpose must leave the door open for voluntary obedience and committal and acceptance. The very essence of it all, which is love, must leave the place for option, and He foresaw the side on which man’s option would move, He foreknew the tremendous activity of spiritual forces against His purpose. He foresaw all that has happened since man gave way to the great spiritual foe of God’s intentions concerning His Son Jesus Christ. Having projected, and having foreseen, He provided, and redemption was forthwith established.

The Work of the Lamb

It is eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). That is the name of it. It is the timeless Cross because the purpose is eternal. We are brought, then, right into the presence of the timeless Cross and the eternal purpose. This introductory designation, the Lamb, is tremendously impressive when you see that already, before anything has happened, Christ is called the Lamb. Christ is the Lamb; and His being called the Lamb before all that terrible tragedy and havoc had taken place, itself indicates the full nature of the work to be done. The LAMB — the title is an implication. It implies just what will have to be done. We are in the presence of a tremendous thing, if only it would break upon us. There is that vast purpose of God which, in its realization, is to obtain throughout all the ages of ages to come and to give character to His universe. Then there is this terrible, terrible sin, which is so utterly contrary, the disruption of everything through these present ages: And then you say that

it is a Lamb that is going to put all that right — what do you mean? Why, you want something more than a Lamb for that! You must have a very limited grasp of the situation if you say a lamb can put it all right! But that is just what the Bible does say, with a significance beyond our comprehension. Because, you see, as we have said just now, it indicates the nature of the work to be done, which is this — an entire and utter reversing of the nature and constitution of things as they are now.

Will anybody look at the world today and man's ideas of running it, and say that it is just like a lamb? You see how absurd that sounds, how ridiculous. Anything and everything but the Lamb is in the present constitution of things. Everything that is a complete antithesis of the Lamb pervades this order of things, in its very constitution. You see the point. The whole constitution has got to be changed. Another constitution needs to be given to this universe and it must be the constitution of the Lamb. Yes, this universe has got to be reconstituted upon the basis of the Lamb-nature, and the wonderful thing is that all these tremendous forces — these simply terrific forces, in this universe, of iniquity, evil, wickedness, sin, hatred and malice — all these forces are gathered up, and the Bible tells how a Lamb can deal with the whole thing. There is something here which is a mystery.

The Triumph of the Lamb

And so you find this whole set of paradoxes and seeming contradictions. In the book of the Revelation there is the book sealed, and the apostle says, "And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:4-6). Always remember that in the twenty-nine occurrences of the word "Lamb" in the book of the Revelation, it is always the diminutive, "a little Lamb". "Behold, A LITTLE LAMB hath prevailed". Strange contradiction! The Lion, the Lamb — identical! The Lamb is the Lion in strength in prevailing; yet a lamb is the very symbol of weakness. Nothing would speak more of weakness than a little lamb; you would not want to put much weight upon a little lamb.

But look at what it says in this book about the little Lamb. These terrific forces make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them (Rev. 17:14). You could believe that, perhaps, of the Lion; but the LAMB shall overcome them — weakness and might in one object. Yieldedness as a lamb to the slaughter, no resistance; and authority. They flee before the face of the Lamb. Strange contradiction: subjection, submission, and dominion, dominion given to the Lamb — to the LAMB.

Meekness: what do you mean by meekness? No standing up for personal rights, no seeking of self-vindication. But what about this wrath of the Lamb? It is terrible. There is a mystic infinite power in the Lamb which is not to be accounted for on any natural ground at all. Take the natural aspect, and you have everything that speaks of weakness and helplessness, submission and meekness. But there is a mystic something about this Lamb that is not natural, it is divine. All the mighty forces of God's heavenly universe are bound up with, centred in and expressed through this yieldedness, this weakness, this meekness, this submission.

That is not just a statement. That is a fact, a thing that can be put to the test by any Christian, and many of you know quite well that it is a working principle. When you have sought the grace of the Lord Jesus to suffer wrong rather than do wrong, to accept joyfully the spoiling of your goods, to restrain natural heat and wrath and reaction and to hand things over to the Lord, you have seen the Lord do things that none of your wrath and none of your strength could have done. You have known the Lord to come in then, when you have let go and have got out of the way. That is the way. That is not natural. No, our constitution is not the Lamb constitution at all. We know that quite well. But when God reconstitutes according to the Lamb, the ground is prepared and the way is opened for the exercise of infinite power; for something that is not natural, something that can only be said to be the Lord. See this Lamb, led to the slaughter, opening not His mouth. Behold Him in His yieldedness to the will of God and see whether God has vindicated that nature. Has He? God has indeed vindicated that.

The Cross the Way of the Lamb

Now let us go back a little. What we mean by the Lamb is the Cross. The Cross is the way of the Lamb, and the Cross, or the Lamb, links the eternities. One arm, so to speak, of that Cross reaches right back over all the ages and beyond the garden into the eternal counsels, and there takes up all the immensity of those counsels of God, the eternal purpose. The other arm of the Cross touches the ages to come; and by way of that Cross, that from the beginning, which has in the meantime been challenged and upset, is realized: so that the way of the Lamb is the way of the realization of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less than that. That is why I have

taken pains to stress the immensity of that purpose. Our conception of the Cross is so small. Our hymns about the Cross have such a limited view of that Cross. Oh, yes, “the burden of my heart rolled away” at the Cross—quite true and good, blessed; but the Cross is infinitely, transcendently more than our conversion. The Cross has come in not just to get people saved from their sin and secured unto heaven and have the blessings of forgiveness and access to God. No, the Cross has come in to lay right hold of that vast scheme of the divine intention and purpose and to realize it, and nothing less than it. We ought to see that the Cross is a very much bigger thing than we have ever imagined.

When the Lord begins to work subjectively by His Cross in a life, He does a very utter thing beyond conversion. In many lives it often comes to this: that a fuller apprehension of the meaning of identification with Christ in death and burial and resurrection is a far bigger thing than conversion, and that is significant. You cannot make too much of the Cross, for this very reason—that there is nothing greater and vaster than God’s eternal purpose in the creation of this universe, and the Cross has to do with every bit of it, touches it at every point. The things in the heavens are purged by the Blood of that Cross (Heb. 9:23). The Cross is an immense thing because of the immensity of that with which it has to do. So the Cross is retrospective—but not merely to the fall, not merely to the entrance of sin. The Cross is retrospective to before the world was, from the laying down of the foundation. It is retrospective to the very purpose of God in having a world at all. If you can understand and grasp why God created this universe, what His thoughts were, what His intentions; if you can really comprehend all the immensity of His purpose in making this a heritage for Himself, worthy of Himself and satisfying to Him, then, and only then, will you be able to see the greatness of the Cross, the magnitude of the Cross. Yes, the Cross reaches right back to that.

A Company in the Good of the Eternal Purpose

What are we to say about these people, these one hundred and forty-four thousand? If what I have said is right and true, surely they must mean this: they are a company standing in the good of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less. They have “followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth”, not a bit of the way, not more or less, not with reservations, not just so far as forgiveness of sins and no further. Not just that, on such-and-such a day in such-and-such a year so long ago, “I gave my heart to Jesus”. These have come into an apprehension of the greatness of God’s purpose concerning His Son, and have gone right on with it and are standing in it. Surely that is what it means.

I am not saying that these are an elect of the elect. I am not saying that this is not for all, this is only for a few—not at all. But anyone who has eyes to see knows quite well that very few Christians actually do go this way, comparatively few really do go all the way with God’s purpose. Look at Christianity today and tell me if what you see represents all the thought of God; and then enquire into it, investigate it, and see how many are willing to go farther, and you will be surprised. How many care about anything more? It is comparatively few who answer to God in His fuller thought as to His eternal purpose. Indeed, I fear that there are multitudes of Christians who do not know what you mean when you talk about the eternal purpose of God. And so God has to find His satisfaction as to this in a representative company.

Here is the position. Who will accept the fuller meaning of the Cross in order to satisfy God as to the fuller expression of His purpose? That is the issue. And this company has said Yes to the Lord. Not just that I am going to be saved and live a happy Christian life and do a lot of Christian work; no. But I am going to allow God to entirely reconstitute me, from centre to circumference, according to His own Son, conformably to the image of His Son; and that takes a profound work of the Cross, a tremendous operation of the Cross to do that. That is following the Lamb. The figures used may seem strange, but that is what it means, the way of the Lamb—He was made perfect through sufferings. That is, He was brought to completeness through sufferings. We shall come there in no other way. That we should be before Him without blemish, before Him in love. That is what reconstituting us means.

I think the whole matter is clearly before us. Here is a company. (It is clear that, in the book of the Revelation, there are companies of saved people, various and different companies, larger and smaller companies, and here amongst the companies is this one marked out and clearly defined.) It is called the one hundred and forty-four thousand, with symbolic, not literal, meaning, and they stand in a special relationship to the throne, and, as we said in our previous meditation, they are in the good of a special secret that no one else knows or can learn. They have come into something by their walk with the Lamb, by their sufferings together with Him. What do they mean?

Once again, the Lamb takes us back to God’s purpose in fullness before the world was. He does not just say that He by His Blood will deal with the sin that has come in—that is a part of the whole—or with the

conditions that have resulted from man's disobedience: they are all included. What the Lamb does is right at the point where God lays down His whole ultimate plan for eternity: namely, to sum up all things in Christ, to fill all things with Christ and to make His people the fullness of Him that filleth all things. It is in order to secure that against the invasion of the disruptive forces — to secure that and nothing less than that. So the Lamb relates to the fullness of God's purpose from eternity, and to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" likewise relates to the fullness of that purpose, bringing those who so follow not only to heaven but into that particular position that answers to God's thought in fullness from eternity.

Now you are able to see why it is necessary, before you can come to the Church, to have the Cross. You never can have the Church without the Cross. The Church is that in which God's eternal counsels are to be fulfilled, and the Church is based upon the Cross. All that that means just comes back to one thing. Will we "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth"? In other words, will we accept the Cross in all its meaning for the reversing of everything that is contrary to God's purpose, the reversing of the very constitution that is contrary to God's mind? And the reversing is a very practical thing. It is so practical, it is so terribly practical, that it is most unacceptable to any part of our being. The Lord tells you and me that in opposition and affliction and suffering heaped upon us by other people we are to be perfectly meek, not rising up and reacting in the heat of our own temper and hurt feelings and pride, but in meekness we are to accept it, allow it, commit the whole thing to the Lord and suffer.

That is not our constitution. We have to be reconstituted to do that. But when the Spirit of Jesus Christ, God's Lamb, really does prevail in our hearts and get a victory there, when the Lamb overcomes in us, the ground is provided for God, in His own time and in His own way, to exercise His infinite power in that very situation. It might very well be that these people would come back and say, "Look here, if you had shown resentment, any bad spirit, I should not have thought much of you as a Christian; but because of the way you took it, somehow or other I have had a miserable time ever since!" God has had His opportunity. How many are won that way! Yes, the Lamb WINS.

The Unity of the Company

But let us not get some objective mentality about following the Lamb. It is coming right home to us in a new way, any day that we live it is going to find us out all along. Nevertheless at the end there is this company right in touch with the throne, singing their song in such a oneness that the apostle said he only heard one voice. "I heard a voice... and the voice which I heard..." — singular. One hundred and forty-four thousand singing in unison so that it was like one sound or voice. God has done something. How has He done that? How does God bring about an utter unity and oneness, identity, in a disrupted creation? How is God going to deal with all the divisions that the enemy has brought about in this world and even amongst the Lord's people? Only by the way of the Lamb — and He will do it that way, that is His way.

It is a mighty thing. You may try every other means conceivable to the human mind to bring about absolute oneness between two people, and you find there is always some kind of breaking out. It cannot be done. You think you have nicely patched up some matter, but somehow or other it breaks out again; you can never be sure of it. Yet here is something done where a great company is only heard as one voice, only identified as one person. That has undone the work of the devil; that has destroyed his works.

How is it done? THE LAMB, THE WAY OF THE LAMB. The Lord make us followers of the Lamb.