

## T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: Revelation 12:1-12.

## Sonship in Representative Fullness

Here we have, I believe, the whole matter of sonship gathered into representative fullness. This son, this man child, is sonship in representative fullness: that in which all the principles and elements of Christ have been brought to utterness.

The conception of Christ takes place in the believer by the revelation of Christ in the heart. Paul said: "It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal his Son in me" (Gal. 1:15,16). Again he said: "God... shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The man child—sonship—is conceived by the revelation within of Jesus Christ. Something takes place in us, the beginning of something new and wonderful, when we are able to say, in these or other words, "By an act of the Holy Spirit, a conceiving act of the Holy Spirit, God has revealed His Son in me: in my heart I have seen the Lord Jesus." The principle of Christ is that He was "conceived of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1:20), and that is true in the case of every believer. The conception of Christ in our hearts is by the Holy Ghost, and the method is the revelation of Christ. We have to date everything, all this wonderful new beginning and prospect, to the time when we could say, "I have seen the Lord Jesus", which marked the conception of sonship.

## Sonship Not Possible to the Flesh

But again, the principle of conception is that which we find stressed throughout the Scriptures, Old and New: namely, that it is something which is not possible to the flesh, not even to the religious flesh. It is not possible to the church. You know the Old Testament instances in which this very principle is revealed. Isaac is impossible to the flesh, even to the flesh of a separated and consecrated Abraham, a man who is walking with God. He cannot of himself, by the will of the flesh, produce sonship. This is of God, wholly, utterly of God. The Isaac man child, with all its tremendous significance, is something that the religious flesh cannot produce. Samuel is another case. How impossible Samuel was without a divine intervention, a real act of God. Again and again we find the situation under the sovereignty of God related to the bringing forth of something to serve God's purpose in a very particular and special way.

This is an abiding principle brought out spiritually in the New Testament. It is something which cannot be unless the Lord does it. Sonship is an impossible thing apart from God. This that is to come forth as the full expression of God's mind concerning His Son is beyond us. It is outside of any ability of our will or mind—it is of the Lord. Christ said: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Here, in the "man child", this principle is brought to utterness: "...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). There is a good deal of mixture in Christians. There is much of being Christians by our decisions and willings and efforts and activities. Many people are in a false position as to the beginning of their Christian life. It is not a thing utterly of God. It is something they have done and decided upon. Many who are children of God are mixing things up, mixing their own strength and effort with what is of the Lord; and, in so far as it is like that, it is a contradiction of divine principle and cannot come to this ultimate full expression.

The principles of Christ are brought to utterness in the man child. Let there be no mistake about what it is that we have in view. It is not just being Christians. It is the principles of Christ brought to utterness. That is what is here set before us.

## The Full Formation of Christ

Paul said to the Galatians, and through them to us: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you..." (Gal. 4:19). The conception has taken place, there is something there, but there has to be a full formation of Christ within. Paul says, "I am in distress, in agony, in great pain, till Christ be fully formed in you." The "man child" is the full formation of Christ in the church.

And the formation, as we know so well, is in the first place by means of a ministry—a ministry which God provides to that end. If God's thought is full conformity to the image of His Son, the full formation of Christ or the full expression of Christ, He will provide a ministry sovereignly for that purpose. So we have in the New Testament not just ministry for the salvation of souls and for the care of spiritual babes—it is there—but

the importance of the New Testament bears down upon this other thing: the full formation of Christ. The real weight of the New Testament has to do with full formation, and God has marvellously provided ministry for that purpose.

The formation, too, is by means of discipline. By far the greater amount of the discipline (what the Word calls "chastening", literally "child training") in the life of a true, earnest believer, has to do with this full formation. There are phases of discipline concerned with our wrongdoing, our sins, our errors, where the Lord has to correct and has to chasten, but let it be understood that by far the greater amount of the chastening or the discipline of the people of God has to do with the full formation of Christ.

### The Travail

After the conception and the formation, we come to the travail. To begin with, the travail starts, not with ourselves, but with the Holy Spirit Himself. It is the Spirit of God who is in the first place travailling to this end for the full formation of Christ. You have only to read the letter to the Galatians to recognise that. See the place of the Holy Spirit. We must understand that this travail in the apostle Paul is not Paul's working of himself up to a state of trouble and anguish, but something in him by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes up this matter of travail, and wherever He expresses Himself He will cause this sense of pain concerning spiritual life. When you and I have a bad time over our spiritual life, it is a mark of the Holy Spirit's work. It is indeed a sign of His working when we have a bad time over other people's spiritual life — provided we are having a bad time about our own as well! You understand what I mean. There is the possibility of always being troubled about other people's spiritual life, and not looking after our own; but, provided we know what it is to have the work of the Spirit in us, it is a mark of the Spirit's moving in us that we are deeply pained about spiritual conditions in the Lord's people. The travail begins with Him.

Women, in the Bible, are types of spiritual principles, and Hannah, being a woman in the Bible, represents a spiritual principle. It was Hannah who, in the presence of God, in the House of the Lord, was found breaking her heart over this matter of the man child, in travail for a man child. Hannah, in type, indicates that a principle by which God is going to reach His end, His full expression, is the travail of our spirits brought about by the Holy Spirit.

### Travail at the End-time

Now, this picture of the woman in travail, in Revelation 12, belongs to the end-time. There is no doubt about that, because Satan here is still in the heavenlies, where Paul showed him to be in his letter to the Ephesians. John has outlived Paul by thirty years, so that, sixty years after the ascension of Christ, Satan is still in the heavenlies, operating and making war. John is being shown the things that shall come to pass afterwards, so that this travail belongs to the end-time. It is the church in suffering in order to produce something.

Do not let us be led astray, do not let us be deceived and become mistaken, if the Lord should for a time do a work of what is called "revival" and many saints are gathered in, and there seems to be some tremendous thing going on; do not let us be deceived. That is one aspect of end-time need, that there shall be an ingathering, but — let there be no mistake about it — the actual end-time is going to be marked by suffering on the part of the church. How that will come about I do not propose to discuss now. The possibilities for the church, with the irresistible spread of one great power over the earth, are pretty clear. It will not be put back, it will go on; it is anti-God, anti-Christ, and wherever it holds sway it will begin to limit the activities of the Lord's people, and presently it will break out. But whether that be it or not, there is coming, and it may be in our lifetime, a time of real suffering to Christianity, and out of that suffering there will come that which goes right out to the Lord. Many will fall away, many will give up, many will drop out of the race, paralysed by the situation, but there will be those who see that the only thing is utterness for the Lord — to go right on.

Is not that the question which confronts us, in a small way, a particular and personal way, in every bit of suffering? Something comes upon us — the Devil makes an onslaught — and there are alternatives for us. One is to sit down in hopelessness and give it up, say that you cannot go on, to turn with bitterness against the Lord, to become full of questions and almost cynical. The other alternative is to say: "There is nothing for it but just to go on!" We are all brought to that situation in simple ways. "Am I going to succumb, to yield to despair, to give up? Or am I going right on, and all the more because of this activity of the enemy?" The Spirit of God would bring us to that. You notice that that is the thing upon which Paul put his finger in his word to the Galatians. Because of certain things, they had stopped in the race; they were Christians, but they had stopped, come to a standstill. "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you?" (3:1). "I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (4:19). "You have to go on. The only thing for you is to go on; not to stop, to give up, but to

go on.Â”

### The Birth of the Man Child a Crisis

And it is those who go on who reach that which is here represented by the man child Â— full sonship. But it is the product of suffering, the effect of suffering. It is going to be made corporate at the end, and Â— there is no doubt about it Â— the birth of the man child is the crisis. Thank God, it is going to be a definite crisis, an act. It is going to be a rapture. The word here is quite clear. It is not a word that has been coined to express some theory. Â“Caught upÂ” to the throne is just the word Â“rapturedÂ”, and it is used in the New Testament in other connections. When we read that Philip the evangelist was Â“caught awayÂ” by the Spirit and found at Azotus (Acts 8:39,40) the same word is used; he was raptured, he was caught away. When Paul said: Â“I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heavenÂ” (2 Cor. 12:2), it is the same word Â— raptured.

And here this man child is caught up, raptured. It is an act. Philip was raptured in an act, not over a lifetime; it was something sudden, quick, precise. And so this man child is caught up to God and to His throne. It is the consummation of a work of the Holy Spirit of bringing children of God to a place of full and utter expression of spiritual principles, the principles of Christ. A principle is not an outward form, but an underlying law, and there are these underlying laws of Christ which are going to be made utter in us. Christ is heavenly: that is a law. It will have its utmost expression in the man child Â— born out from Heaven and at last caught up to God and to the throne. It is the principle made perfect.

### The Wrath of Satan Against the Man Child

Â“To rule all the nations with a rod of ironÂ” (Rev. 12:5). That word was spoken also in promise to the overcomers of the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:27). If this is GodÂ’s thought and intention, what may we expect? Well, there is a great red dragon not far away, whose one concentrated interest is in this man child. The woman, with the rest of her seed, the whole of the church, will come second. They will be a secondary, though by no means unimportant, interest and concern. But the primary concern of the great adversary Â— here called the Â“great red dragonÂ”, later called Satan, the Devil, Â“the deceiver of the whole inhabited earthÂ”, Â“the accuser of the brethrenÂ” (12:9,10) Â— the dominant object of his hatred is this expression of Christ in fullness, in utterance. He is against that; he is out to devour this Â“childÂ”. His hatred and malice are concentrated in a determination if possible to destroy those who are seeking to go right on with the Lord, and those who are seeking to fulfil any ministry in that connection, to destroy them, to swallow them up and put them out altogether, to make it impossible for them to come to their divinely intended place and destiny.

Just look for a moment at this in the Bible Â— the wrath of Satan against the man child or against sonship in full expression. The book of Exodus is just this. Exodus is sonship and victory over the world. The very first verse strikes this note: Â“Now these are the names of the sons of IsraelÂ” Â— sons of a prince with God! Here is sonship right in the first verse of the book. When you come to verse 16 of that first chapter, you find Pharaoh issuing his order for the destruction of all male children, and the word is: Â“If it be a son, then ye shall kill him.Â” How much of spiritual history lies behind that! We see Herod coming in, centuries later, and killing all the male children to get one particular Son (Matt. 2:16). And again, in chapter 4 of Exodus, we read: Â“Israel is my son, my firstborn: and I have said... Let my son goÂ” (vv. 22,23). It is sonship, and the exodus, the emergence of Israel, is sonship triumphing over the world and its principles. There is much more in the Old Testament concerning the wrath of the enemy against the man child Â— against sonship in fullness.

### Satan Cast Down

So there will be a climax. God will get what He is after; it will be found in the throne Â— it will be established in its position for its glorious purpose and function. And it is quite obvious that when that man child, that full expression, is found in the throne, Satan is put out of his heavenly position. He and his angels were cast down to the earth (Rev. 12:9). They have only been there until the right and proper instrument of the heavenlies has come to its place. There is no room in the heavenlies for the man child and for Satan together. One or the other has to go. When the Lord finds among His children those who satisfy Him in the matter of a full expression of these divine principles of sonship, the ground of SatanÂ’s power in the heavenlies is undercut, and he is cast down. What a time that is, according to all that is said here! Â“Rejoice, O heavens...Â” (verse 12). This is indeed the climax of the ages. It is an immense thing, and therefore it involves with us very great matters in spiritual experience.

I close with something that I want you to take particular note of. We are not occupied with a special object

called “the man child”, and we must not be. We are occupied with Christ. But we must recognise that there is a fullness of Christ to be reached which carries with it very, very big issues indeed. There are tremendous issues bound up with this chapter that we have read — divine interests, eternal issues, factors of supreme account. It is the matter of government in the heavenlies. It is no small thing to be caught up to God and His throne; no small thing for Satan and his angels to be deposed. That is bound up with a “man child” — a company of which it will be said: “And THEY overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death” (vs. 11): their soul-life — a big thing. But do not go around talking about the “man child”. This is only a representation of Christ in fullness. Talk about Christ. It is not the representation that we are after — it is Christ in fullness we are after: so let us keep our eyes on Him. Let us allow a message like this to move us, not towards some THING, under whatever designation, but towards Christ — towards a position of utterness in Christ.