

T. Austin-Sparks:

We have said much in these evenings about the Kingdom, but, of course, as is always the case in these conferences, we have twelve basketfuls over and we have more at the end than we had at the beginning. Someone said to me this evening: 'We had better stay for another week!' Well, you may have different views about that, but there is so much more to say about the Kingdom.

We have also said something about the power and the same is true about the power as about the Kingdom. There is far more to be said than we could say in a week.

Now for the last word in these evenings we shall say something about the glory.

ALL GOD'S WORKS AND WAYS ARE WITH GLORY IN VIEW

Glory is the supreme and all-governing thing in all God's works and ways. The order of words here is quite correct: not 'the glory, the kingdom and the power', nor 'the glory, and the power and the kingdom', but 'the kingdom, and the power, and the glory'. We have said that the Kingdom is the sovereign rule of God, and the sovereign rule of God and the power of God are all directed toward the glory of God. It is not the rule alone. It is true that God rules, but He rules with a purpose. It is true that the power belongs to God, but He does not just use His power to no purpose. His rule and His power are for His glory.

GOD'S NEW BEGINNINGS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We have said that glory governs all the ways and works of God. Glory governed God in the creation. He made all things for His glory, and when He surveyed His creative work He said: "It is very good". I have said before that if God looked upon us and said: 'It is very good!' that would be glory for us. Some of us hope that at the end He may be able to say: 'Well done, good and faithful servant!', and that is only another way of saying: 'It is very good'. If He could say that to us it would indeed be glory for us! Glory, then, was the governing thing in the creation.

Then you will see that all through history every new beginning of God was with glory. It was indeed a great and wonderful new movement of God when He visited Abram in Ur of the Chaldees. Stephen tells us that "the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2), which means that God had glory in view when He took hold of Abraham.

Everything was not good in the days of Noah, but when God made a new beginning after the flood Noah built an altar upon the new earth, and in so doing he said: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof". In other words, he meant that the earth was for the glory of God, and after judgment God comes back to claim the earth for His glory.

We move on to the great movement of God with Israel as a nation. God visits the nation in Egypt to bring out that people to be a people for His glory. I think that one of the most beautiful phrases in the Old Testament is that one which came through the lips of God when He said: "Israel my glory" (Isaiah 46:13). His new movement with Israel in Egypt was in order to have a people for His glory, and having got them out of Egypt into the wilderness, He took the next step. He gave Moses the pattern of the tabernacle, and when 'all things were made according to the pattern shown in the mount' (Hebrews 8:5), the glory descended and rested upon the tabernacle and it became the tabernacle of glory.

We move on hundreds of years. God gave the pattern of the temple to David, and when all things were made according to the mind of God we read that "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:11).

We move on still many years and come to the time of the prophets. When we have summed up all the voices of the prophets they are resolved into one thing - the cry for the recovery of the glory amongst the people of God.

GOD'S NEW BEGINNINGS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Over we go to the New Testament, and to the little town of Bethlehem. He who is called 'the Prince of Glory' is born there, and that night the angel choir sings: "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). This is indeed a new movement of God, and He breaks into this world in glory. The birth of Jesus was with glory, and all the works of Jesus while He was here had one object in view - they were all for the glory of God. In John's Gospel we have

the seven 'signs' that He performed and then an eighth and the last one gathers up all the others into itself - and, of course, it had to be the eighth, for, as you know, the symbolic meaning of eight is resurrection. In it Jesus said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God" (John 11:4). All His works were unto glory.

What shall we say about His resurrection? Yes, His own resurrection is the crown of everything, but it was a new movement of God. God is going on in the power of resurrection, and there is no one who will question that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was a glorious thing.

Then what about His exaltation? He was received up into GLORY. John said at one time: "The Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified," so that the supreme thing about Pentecost is that Jesus is glorified. Pentecost is not something in itself - it is what it means.

And on we go still. What about that coming glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ? Indeed it will be glory when He comes!

GLORY IN THE CHURCH

That all has to do with Himself, but we step back a bit and think of the Church. The Apostle Paul said that in the end Christ would "present the church to himself a GLORIOUS church" (Ephesians 5:27). The Church came in with glory on the Day of Pentecost. It commenced its pilgrimage here with glory, and those early chapters of its history are chapters of the Church's progress in glory. Born in glory, PROGRESSING in glory, and to be CONSUMMATED in glory: "not having a spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:27).

THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER

Let us get closer still and come to the individual believer. The birth of the new believer is with glory, and if there was no glory about the beginning of your Christian life, you had better ask the question as to whether you are a Christian! Every true Christian looks back upon his or her beginning with praise to God, for it was such a glorious thing. BORN in glory.

Are you going to agree with me when I say 'PROGRESSING in glory'? Have you some question about that? How long have you been a Christian? One year - five years - ten years - twenty years - fifty years? Whether it has been one year or fifty years, has it all been very easy? Have you had NO times when you feared that your faith would fail? Have there been no times when you wondered whether you would be able to go on at all? Has it all been so very easy? Have you not had many difficulties? Why are you here tonight? It is all to the glory of God that you are here, not because YOU were so strong, nor because you had such a wonderful faith but "kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5, A.V.). "Thine is the POWER and thine is the GLORY." Our very going on in the Christian life is all to the glory of God. BORN in glory, KEPT by glory, to be CROWNED with glory.

Well, have I said enough to prove that ALL God's works and ways are with glory? Christianity is a system of glory. It begins with glory and the last picture in the Bible is that symbol of the people of God in the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, "having the glory of God" (Revelation 21:11).

THE GLORY OF GRACE

But we have to stop and think again. What is the glory of God in this dispensation? It is the glory of grace. Have you noticed how often 'grace' and 'glory' are put together? Even in the Old Testament it says: "The Lord will give grace and glory" (Psalm 84:11), and in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians grace and glory are brought together in a wonderful way. Grace is always the basis of God's glory. He shows His glory and the riches of His glory by the way of grace. That relates to our salvation, for God saves us for His glory, not first of all for our glory, but for His own glory, and in order that He may get the glory it has to be by His grace. It is not by works of ours that we are saved, but solely by the grace of God. Why is it that so many people have such a bad time in order to be saved? Because they have been trying to save themselves. They have been struggling with their own sin. They have been trying by all manner and means to find salvation in themselves, and if they could do that in the smallest way they would take the glory. So, whether it is an unsaved person or a saved person, God lets them get on with it as long as they wish to try, and when, sooner or later, they come to the place when they say: 'I can do nothing about it. If I am going to be saved at all it can only be by the grace of God', it is then that God steps in, because now He is going to get the glory.

Some of you Christians think that is very elementary, and yet, you know that it is not elementary. You know that

all through the Christian life that principle is at work. Again and again we come to the place where we say: 'Well, but for the grace of God I will never get through.' We may not think so, but that is the most helpful position to come to. We sang when we started this meeting:

"'Tis the Church triumphant singing

Worthy the Lamb!"

and it will never be 'Worthy me', or 'Worthy you', or 'Worthy this preacher and that teacher'. God takes great pains to steal the glory from us, and it is "Worthy the Lamb!" In our salvation all the glory will come to God.

And what is true of our salvation is also true of our service. All true service to the Lord is governed by this one law - God being glorified. God has given us a great example of that in history. I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say that the Apostle Paul was the greatest servant that the Lord ever had - of course, we except the Lord Jesus. That man Paul had great natural gifts and qualifications. He had tremendous natural resources, but there has never been a man who more readily acknowledged that all his work was by the grace of God, and God took great pains to keep that man on the basis of grace. He emptied him of physical strength - Paul spoke often of his physical infirmities. He emptied him of all intellectual strength, and Paul often did not know what to do or which way to turn. He had to get all his direction from the Lord. I think I need not work this out in detail, for it is so evident. Paul summed it all up with one statement: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Human weakness, Divine strength and Divine glory. The Lord keeps the power and the glory to Himself.

Well, we could spend a lot of time on ministry to the glory of God, but we just touch it and pass on, and we come on to something which is perhaps still more helpful.

The same Apostle spoke very much about his sufferings, and the attitude of the Apostle Paul toward his sufferings was just wonderful. I wish that I were more like Paul in this matter! He gives us some long catalogues of his sufferings - sufferings in his own body, sufferings in his circumstances, sufferings in the world, sufferings on land and sufferings on sea, sufferings from enemies without and sufferings from false brothers within. It is a long list of sufferings, but how did he look at them? Oh may the Lord help us in this matter! Paul gathers them all together and then he says: "Our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). That must have meant this: 'Oh, here is another bit of suffering. This is very hard for the flesh to bear, but there is something of the glory of God to be realized in this. I cannot see it for the moment, but it is going to work out for the glory of God...' "As always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death" (Philippians 1:20).

Don't you wish you were more like that? I wish that every time some trouble came I said: 'This is for the glory of God!' Whether we take that attitude or not, God means it for His glory.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Now, the glory of God is always over against a background of what is contrary to the glory of God, and that is where grace comes in. "That I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn (or stake) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul said that it was something driven right through his flesh to keep his pride down, and he says: "Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee..." and then Paul said: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses." Suffering... grace... glory.

OUR CHRISTIAN VOCATION

Now I have a lot more that I wanted to say about this, but I want to close with one thing. All that I have said leads us to one thing: it shows us what is our Christian vocation. What is the Christian vocation? That means your vocation and my vocation. The Christian vocation is the vindication of Jesus Christ. We are here to vindicate Jesus, and first of all to vindicate the present livingness of the Lord Jesus.

"He lives! He lives!..."

You ask me how I know He lives -"

'Oh, the New Testament says that He died and rose again two thousand years ago.' No, that is not an up-to-date vindication of the living Lord Jesus!

"He lives within my heart!"

It is "Christ IN you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

We are here for the vindication of the livingness of the Person of Jesus Christ and for the vindication of the reality of His work in men and women. It is quite true, according to the record, that He did some wonderful things in men and women when He was here, and that is a wonderful story of long ago, but the vindication of Jesus Christ is that He does just as great a work in us today as He did then. He has opened very much more important blind eyes than the eyes of the body. When we were singing that chorus yesterday - "Turn your eyes upon Jesus" - our brother told us why it was so precious to him, but I can carry his story a little further.

When I was once in Los Angeles, Mrs. Helen Lemmel, who wrote that hymn, sent a message to me to ask if I would go and pray with her. I went to her home and there was the dear old lady sitting in her blindness. She had a writing pad on her knee and was writing choruses. She said: 'Mr. Sparks, I have a problem, and I want you to pray about it. The surgeon has told me that if I will have an operation on my eyes, he thinks that possibly I may recover my sight. My problem is this: If I were to recover my natural sight would I lose my spiritual sight? I have learned so much of the Lord in my blindness, and I would far sooner remain blind naturally and keep my spiritual sight. Will you pray for me that I may know what to do?' Before I prayed I said to Mrs. Lemmel: 'Mrs. Lemmel, what does your heart tell you to do?' She answered: 'I think I have already decided. I am not going to have an operation.' Well, I did pray, but I had no faith for asking for her sight.

Now, if you want to argue about that, you can go and argue, but what I am saying right up to date is that Christ opens more important eyes than the physical ones, and in that way, among many others, we are here to vindicate the works of the Lord Jesus.

And we are here to vindicate His grace in suffering. Paul said: "The sufferings of Christ abound unto us" (1 Corinthians 1:5). Now I hesitate to speak in this way because I know the weakness of my own heart, but it is true, is it not, that Christians have a lot of sufferings that other people don't have? Have you not often said: 'Why should this come to me? It does not come to these other people. Why is it like this?' Because it is through grace that we are to come to glory by way of suffering. God is glorified by grace in our sufferings. Paul spoke of the time when he was 'pressed beyond measure', and had "the sentence of death within ourselves" (2 Corinthians 1:9). Now here is a word that you did not expect to hear from the lips of the Apostle Paul. This man of great faith, of great spiritual strength, said: "We DESPAIRED even of life." Paul in despair? Well, he said it, but then he added: "In order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead." 'We were brought right down as low as that in order that the God who raises the dead might get the glory.' It is not the strong people who bring glory to God, nor the clever people, nor the important people, but "God chose the foolish things of the world... the weak things of the world... the base things of the world," and if that is not enough, "the things that are not" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). You know that that is what Paul said. Why? "That no flesh should glory before God."

So, dear friends, everything in the ways and works of God is for His glory. Let us bind that to our hearts. As we go back down into the world of conflict and into experiences of suffering, let us hide this word in our hearts and ask for grace to say: 'This is unto glory.'

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever." Do you say "Amen"?