

**Articles and Sermons :: Reality Through the Cross ~ Sparks****Reality Through the Cross ~ Sparks - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2008/9/20 13:39**

by T. Austin-Sparks

Chapter 1 - Reality Through the Cross

(<http://downloads2.sermonindex.us/0/SID0070.mp3>) (click here to listen along while you read-Mp3)

I have often said to friends, when we get to glory at last, we shall look at one another and just say, "Well, we're here". We often thought it would not be, we wondered, but at last, here we are. So our being here this evening in this place is a very small representation of that great truth and reality; it's been battle all the way. We were ready and started out early yesterday morning, frustration upon frustration found us at six o'clock or half past six in the evening back again in our home after being in airports and other places all day long. We got away this morning and just as we were going through to the plane the loudspeaker called "Will Mr Austin-Sparks please call at the TWA desk and see the representative" and I said "Oh no, what's this one?" Well, we got away and as our brothers will tell you, we took the wrong turning this evening on our way from Washington and went I suppose twenty miles out of our way, and I said here's another one! But here we are and that's how it will be and it has often been; many frustrations, many problems, many difficulties along the way... sometimes "shall we ever get there?" that is, to glory. But we shall.

I was early this morning reading the Word before setting out again and I read this: "Jesus Christ, He is Lord of all" and that came as you see right in the midst of all this yesterday and today. I just had to lay hold of that; He is Lord of all. Now, that by way of introduction and we spend no more time on personal matters and for this little while you will not expect too much I am sure, for my time, my time in London time is twenty minutes to one in the morning! Well, the Lord will help us.

So now I do not think that I shall get really into that which is on my heart for ministry this week just now, but I think I can move toward it in this way: by reminding you that there is one fear that ought to be characteristic of every true Christian. I know there's much that forbids fear and tells us to fear not. There's very much about that and that's the kind of fear that we must not indulge in. But there is one fear that ought to characterize every true Christian and child of God and that is the fear of unreality: the fear of having divine truth without divine power, of having divine light without divine character, of having knowledge of things without the formation of Christ in our lives. That is, having a great deal of teaching without it becoming effective in our lives. That is what I mean by "unreality". There's a vast amount of that - teaching, truth, mental knowledge - given to us in a spoken ministry and in book form and yet... no corresponding measure of Life, Power, and Christ-likeness. Reality. That is the ultimate test of everything that we have or think that we have. That's the test.

The test will never be how much we know of what is in the Bible, how much truth we have received, the test will be ever and always: what does that amount to in our case, in a practical way? Now that is the burden with which I have come here. I don't know whether the devil has been trying to play upon my fear and my reservation, for in a very real sense I have not wanted to come to Wabanna this year. Not a second guess but in a very real sense I'm afraid, afraid of more talking, more addresses, more unfolding of biblical content and truth. I've been doing it, you see, for so many years; sixty years I've been preaching and I at this time have to look out and say: what has it amounted to? What does it amount to? I know it is not all without blessing, help, usefulness to the Lord, but... seeing the mountains of teaching over these years, dare I add to that? Have I the assurance that if I go and do more, it's going to lead somewhere? That's my fear, my question. So I want, right at the beginning (I don't know what has been said to you already last night and today) but this is what I want to say is I come amongst you that we must have this fear this week, a right kind of fear, I believe a divine fear, that we do not fill our notebooks or our minds with more teaching, truth, substance, but that every time as far as there is something that can really affect us, result in something in us, so far as we are concerned we are going to apply our hearts to that. Then day by day and when the days are past, we are different people. That's the only justification of our coming, friends, we are different people. We certainly are not the same in spiritual life at the end as when we came.

And it does not require a very large or deep knowledge of the Lord Jesus - His Life, His movement amongst people, His teaching - it does not require profound knowledge to recognize that this was a characteristic of Himself. The one thing that He hated... with all the beautiful things that He said, the kind things, the gracious things He said and did; He said some terrible things - words of wrath, anger, came out of His mouth like fiery swords. Some of his denunciations are really te

rible! Really terrible. There was this element about Him... it was about his forerunner John the Baptist. John the Baptist said some pretty terrible things if you get the literal meaning and statement of what he said. He turned to these people who came out from Jerusalem to see him, hear him, he said: "You generation of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" You get the picture? There's a bush fire, it's spreading and as it spreads the vipers leap out and make for the river to escape the flames. John says, "That's what some of you people are doing coming down here to the river where I'm baptizing. You're a generation of vipers just seeking to escape the wrath to come." That's a pretty terrible thing to say to people isn't it? But the Lord Jesus said equally strong things, "Ye hypocrites! Ye hypocrites! You whited sepulchers!" and much more like that. His words... all because His soul was consumed with this passion for reality. One thing he could not tolerate was hypocrisy, falsehood, unreality, pretense, make-believe, play-acting. No!

Reality

Not even a Nicodemus, a great teacher in Israel, stalwart upholder of the best traditions... he's not going to escape, he will be told very frankly that it counts for nothing in the kingdom of God. If this is the effect of the Lord's words, if there is not reality (and what Christ meant by reality is the heavenliness of nature; not even the best nature amongst men, but another, by another) well, I need say little more. It's perfectly clear that the one thing that Jesus was set upon with all His heart was that there should be no gap whatever between truth as truth, teaching as teaching, doctrine as doctrine, Bible knowledge as Bible knowledge, and life and heavenly character and Christ-likeness. No gap between the two! One may be very good, but if it stops short of this, it counts for nothing after all. The Lord Jesus was so definitely set upon this reality and He is now. And I want you to remember and to note that both the Bible in its teaching and history as it unfolds and is moving now so swiftly toward its consummation, both of the scriptures and history and especially the end of this dispensation, are marked by this: that as we go on with God, if we are, let me put it this way. If we are going on with God and as we go on with God, we shall have a deepening, deepening concern about reality. That is, that the very essence of things will become more and more our concern.

You see, the parables of the Lord Jesus were along that line. What about the wheat and the so-called tares? Well, the suggestion of it was "Let's pluck up the tares". The Lord said in so doing you may destroy the wheat as well; let a process ensue, give it time and, sure, sure as can be, in time that process of intensification will reveal without any doubt or possibility of making a mistake, what is what and which is which. And other parables are on the same principle. You see the sower... itself such a simple parable it seems, but what is it? One sowing, two sowing, three sowing, four sowing... failure. Failure. Next, reality in two degrees: sixty, less or more? The measure of reality.

The issue is this: in the end after all the giving of the Word, all the broadcasting of the Truth, all the preaching of the Gospel, in the end, what is the criterion? Not how much has been given, or how much has been in a general way received, but how much of the real thing comes out at last? At last, what have you got? Now, of course I could spend much time on the Word showing that, both in the teaching of the Lord Himself and later in the New Testament but history is bearing this out that it is a true law, a true principle. And who is so blind today amongst Christians as to fail to see this process of intensification going on? It's spreading; it's spreading. It has tested everything in China to the last degree; what is going to be found after all the years of missionary enterprise and expense and cost and what-not? What is going to be found in the end that is the thing which stands eternally?

It's spreading all over the world isn't it? Oh, ask some of these dear Christians in Africa, in Egypt today, in Israel today, it's coming on you know, it's coming on here. The Sovereignty of God is going to press it over more and more this issue: "After all that I have given to the nations of this world, after all that has come to people from heaven during these centuries, what will there be that is essential reality?" Am I wrong? Isn't it obvious? It's patent that is what's happening, and even if there are not the outward persecutions in our part of the world, the western hemisphere, that there are in the East, my mail, dear friends, brings continually letters from everywhere; people, dear people of God saying: I never in my life knew so much pressure as I'm knowing today, spiritual pressure, spiritual trials, sometimes I just do not know where I am, which way to turn or to look, the conflict is so intense. Well, some of you here perhaps know something about that.

It is increasingly difficult to go on in the utter way with God. The enemy is going to stop that if he can by any means. And so, we here will be receiving one and another much, I trust, from the Lord. That must not be the end of it. We've heard it, we know it, but let us step back and say but do I? Do I?

Now, dear friends, I am not standing before you to preach, that's not the idea, I want to say to you that after these many years of seeking to walk with the Lord, and know the Lord, and to serve the Lord, minister to the Lord and to His people

e... with a very wide and, I think, deep experience spiritually, I say to you that the year between now and when we were here before has been the most terrible year of my life from a spiritual standpoint. The conflict, the pressure! The intense determination of the devil that if it is possible he will get us out before we reach the end. Does that sound too serious, heavy? No, I want to say to you that you are bound sooner or later to come up against this issue: has all that I have heard, and received and know, become Life to me? My very life? A part of my being? Or is it here, just stored here. That's the thing which must govern us and the fear of it being otherwise must be with us continually.

I expect somebody will say to me afterward: well you have put a heavy load on, you have brought heaviness on the whole thing. No, no, this has got to be a time of fortification, of knowing the Lord in an inward way, of an increase of Christ to go through triumphantly to the end and stand at last - having stood and withstood - stand at last, triumphant here.

Now that just brings me to the point where I can only indicate what it is that I feel the Lord is going to have me say to you this week. All that I have been saying and the much more that I could say on this matter of reality, is focused, in the Word of God, is focused and concentrated and summed up in one thing. Apart from the person of the Lord Jesus (we take that for granted) but after the recognition of the place, the immense place of the Lord Jesus, the next thing in the Bible which is central, which is supreme, which is all-governing and which is persistent, is the Cross of the Lord Jesus. He is the supreme reality but after himself, the, the predominant reality of the Bible is the Cross. It is!

No one can truly contemplate the cross of our Lord Jesus without being overwhelmed with the sense of what a real thing it was, there's no fiction about that, there's no imagination about that, there's no pretense about that. Terribly, terribly real was that cross... to Him, to His first disciples. The Cross. And the Cross is not only a reality in history, the New Testament makes it perfectly clear that the Cross is as real in experience for the child of God as ever it was in history. Today it is just as real in the spiritual experience and history of the child of God as it was when it was enacted those centuries ago at that spot called Calvary. Why it is so real is for us to see in what little time we shall have this week, but I want to draw your attention to this, focus it upon this as the central reality in God's universe, in creation, in human history.

The Cross... as the apostle Paul calls it -

The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ

In every book of the New Testament the Cross is either explicit or implicit. That is, it is either definitely referred to, mentioned, brought clearly into view, or it is implied. It is in the very heart of things as you read through the New Testament.

In the gospels, the four gospels, they vary in their content, what one writer leaves out another puts in. You find only a little of John in the others. They all have their own different points of teaching, of the work of the Lord, but they are on common ground over this one thing. Not one of them fails to head everything up to the Cross, they crown all they have said in that. And John said what he had written was a mere modicum of what he could have written, he said if everything were to be put down the world couldn't contain the books! Well, was he exaggerating? Well we've learned through 2000 years that the world is full of the books and they're still pouring out but whatever it was, the lesser or the greater measure, not one of them failed to make this perfectly clear: that the Cross is the crown. The Cross is the great and consummate point of everything, which gives meaning to everything else, both the person, the work, and the teaching; the Cross it is that gives power to everything else. Yes, they're on common ground there, whatever they've had to say, they all find themselves being led up to that one thing as the end. But in the gospels it is the historic facts of the Cross, something enacted in history at a certain time, in a certain place, because of certain things; took place in history. It had to be like that.

When you move over from the gospels to the book of the Acts you find that out of the history has come a gospel, a preaching, and those who are found in that book are heralds of the Cross. Note the place that they give to the Cross and how they hold everything to that centre.

The day of Pentecost... Peter has come to see now what he didn't see at the time that he denied his Lord. He can see now and now he is telling the people very frankly and very strongly that the Cross is the key to everything that's happening, "Whom ye crucified, God raised". Out of that everything proceeds and the whole book of the Acts is based upon the Cross. The heralds of the Cross are going forth to the ends of the earth.

You move on to the letters, they're called the epistles, you will find as I have said, the Cross is either explicit or implicit in every one! That is what we are going to see, I trust, as far as we can get, but in every one of these, some particular aspect and application of the Cross is brought to light and applied. Is the Cross being applied on this situation or that situation, because of this and because of that? Every letter has in it in some way the law, the principle of the Cross to touch a

particular need, or condition, or state and situation. There's the many sided Cross running right through all these letters

This, with this, I perhaps will close for the present. This surely is enough to impress us that there's something here that we've got to know and understand, more than we do, about this... about this, what we call the Cross, "the message of the Cross". I told you last year how tired I am of that phrase... people write and people speak and seem to think that I'm a kind of either a crank or an expert on this matter of what they call "the message of the Cross". Oh no, may the Lord save us from "the message of the cross" as that, as such, and show us the tremendous, the eternal significance of this central theme in Christianity. Not only as basic to becoming a Christian, the Cross as "the Cross where I first saw the light and the burden of my heart rolled away". That's good; never get away from that blessedness, but dear friends, that's not all that the Cross has got to say and to do. It is going to follow us through, follow us through all our years if we are going to move with God. And at the end, at the end we shall not have got away from the Cross. We will need it as much at the end as at any time beginning or subsequently.

I think what I'll call them to you, an American audience, may sound strange but perhaps you know the phrase: what are called the Victorians, the Victorian era. Does that convey anything to you? Well, if you don't know about the phrase you'll find it in your hymnbooks. The Victorians, I think, had the more ready apprehension of the place of the Cross for the end of the Christian life. They may have been a bit morbid, I think they were a bit! Well, so many of those hymns you know, you take up Moody and Sankey's hymnbooks, you know how many hymns you will find closing with the last gasp of breath when I pass, you know it sounds a bit morbid doesn't it?

I did hear, I think it was Miss Carmichael of Dohnavur, who said that she was a child and taken to church and so wearied with the church service and not least with the preacher, that she opened her hymnbook and made a study of all that people were going to say when they died; a collection of all their last words in the hymns when the last breath comes and so on. Well, that may be a bit morbid, depressing. We don't sing those hymns so much today, we do sing some of them, but I think those people had a more ready apprehension of the place of the deliverance, the victory, the triumph of the Cross at the end than perhaps is common.

We put so much emphasis upon the beginning of the Christian life and the place of the Cross there, forgiveness and so on. Thank God, thank God for it, never lose our appreciation of that but, we're going to need all that mighty work of the Cross more and more as we go on with God and at the end. Yes, we are going to need to know the reality of what Christ has done by His Cross and what that Cross stands for, for us, for time, and our eternal destiny.

Well, that's my introduction. I do feel I want right at this point to come in on this: dear friends, get adjusted in mind and heart over this week if you have not already done so. It may have already had the appeal, I don't know; but get adjusted to this: I am not here just to get my notebook full of what the preachers are saying, either to have it for myself or to use it for some other people. I'm not here to accumulate fresh stores of truth, I am here to come under the hand of God that He may effect in me what yet remains to be effected and can be at this time. Would you adjust to that? Say to the Lord at the close of this day and every day and in the morning, "Lord, now, not just teaching today, but power, power effecting something. If it's going to be the Word like a sharp two edged sword piercing to dividing asunder, alright Lord, better that than that I should be whole in unreality." Will you do that?

The Lord help you, I trust that although what I have said may seem to make the Cross rather terrible, rather dreadful, I trust we shall see the other side and be really with the apostles, "God forbid that I should glory, glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". May the glory of the Cross come to us as well as its challenge in a new way in these days.