

T. Austin-Sparks:

"In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, whereon was as it were the frame of a city on the south. And he brought me thither, and, behold, there was a man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed, and he stood in the gate. And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thy heart upon all that I shall show thee, for, to the intent that I may show them unto thee, art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel" (Eze 40:2-4).

"Thou, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known unto them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the egresses thereof, and the entrances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof; and write it in their sight; that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them" (Eze 43:10-11).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4).

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

"And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51).

GOD'S ANSWER TO A STATE OF DECLENSION

We have observed that, when the Divine thought as represented by the temple and Jerusalem was forsaken and lost and the glory had departed, Ezekiel was given and caused to write the vision of a new heavenly house, a house in every detail measured and defined from above. In the same way, when the Church of New Testament times had lost its purity and truth and power, and its heavenly character and order, and the primal glory of those early New Testament days was departing, then John was caused by the Spirit to bring into view the new, wonderful, heavenly, spiritual presentation, the person of the Lord Jesus; that new heavenly presentation of Christ which we have in John's Gospel, his letters, and the Revelation: and we must remember that the Gospel written by John is, in point of time, practically the last writing of the New Testament. Perhaps the real significance of this has not fallen upon us with due power and impressiveness. We take up the Gospels as we have them in the New Testament arrangement of books, and immediately we are put by them back into the days of our Lord's life on the earth, and from the standpoint of time that is where we are when reading the Gospels. For us, all the rest of the New Testament has yet to be when we are in the Gospels, both as to the writings and the history which followed, all is in prospect. That of course is almost inevitable, perhaps almost unavoidable; but we must try to extricate ourselves from that position.

Why was the Gospel of John written? Was it written just as a record of the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth to go alongside of two or three other records, that there might be a history of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus preserved? Is that it? That is practically the sole result for a great many. The Gospels are read with a view to studying the life of Jesus while He was on the earth. That may be very good, but I do want to emphasize very strongly that this is not the Holy Spirit's primary intention in inspiring the writing of those Gospels. And this is particularly seen in the case of John's Gospel, written so long after everything else, right at the end of everything; for when John wrote his final writings, the other apostles were in glory. John's Gospel was written when the New Testament Church, as we have said, had lost its original form and power and spiritual life, its heavenly character and Divine order; written in the midst of such conditions as are outlined in the messages to the churches in Asia at the beginning of the Apocalypse, and that can be so clearly inferred from his letters.

What was the object in view? Well, just this: as John writes, things are not as they were, not as God meant them to be; they no longer represent God's thought in and for His people. The order, the heavenly order, has broken down and is breaking down yet more. The heavenly nature has been forfeited and an earthly thing is taking shape in Christianity; the true life is being lost and the glory is departing. To that situation God reacts with a new presentation of His Son in a heavenly and spiritual way; for the features or characteristics of John are heavenliness and spirituality. Is that not true? Oh yes, here is a new bringing into view of His Son. But what a bringing into view! Not just and only as Jesus of Nazareth, but as the Son of Man, Son of God; God revealed

and manifested in man, out from eternity with all the fullness of Divine essence, that His people might see.

So we must get to the Holy Spirit's standpoint in the Gospel by John, and in his other writings, and just see this, that God's way of recovery, when His full and original thought has been lost and that heavenly revelation has departed, and the heavenly glory has been withdrawn, is to bring His Son anew into view; not to bring you back to the technique of the Church or the Gospel or the doctrine, but to bring His Son into view, to bring Christ again in the tremendousness of His heavenly and spiritual meaning before the heart-eyes of His people. That is the answer that is found in John to these conditions that we meet with in the New Testament, which so plainly shows that the Church was losing its heavenly position, and all sorts of things were coming in, and the whole thing was becoming earthly. What will God do? In what way will He save His purpose which seems to be so dangerously near being lost? He will bring His Son into view again. Remember God's answer is always in His Son to every movement. Whether that movement be in the world as it heads up to Antichrist (God's answer to Antichrist will be Christ in the full blaze of His Divine glory), or whether it be in the Church in declension and apostasy, God's answer will be in His Son.

That is the meaning of the opening words of the book of the Revelation. The Church has lost her place, the glory has departed, but God breaks in with a presentation of His Son.

"I am . . . the Living one, and I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

Christ is presented, and then everything is measured and judged in the light of that heavenly Man with the measuring reed in His hand. That is enough really, if we only saw that, and grasped it. Everything for God and for us is bound up with a heart-revelation of the Lord Jesus. Oh, it will not be, as I have said, in trying to recover the New Testament technique. It will not be in a restoration of New Testament order. It will not even be in the re-affirmation of New Testament truth and doctrine. These are things, and they can be used to form a framework, but they can never guarantee the life, the power, the glory. There are plenty here in this earth who have the New Testament doctrine and technique and order, but it is a cold, dead framework. The life, the glory, is not there; the rapture is not there. No, God's way of the glory is in His Son: God's way of the life is in His Son: God's way of the power is in His Son: God's way of the heavenly nature is in His Son. And that is John's Gospel in a few words, what God is there saying. It is all in the Son, and the need, the only need, is to see the Son, and if you see the Son by God's act of opening the eyes, then the rest will follow. That is John's Gospel again.

"How opened he thine eyes?" Who did this? How did He do it? The man's response or reaction to the interrogation was this, in effect, You are asking me for the technique of things; I am not able to give you the technique, I am not able to explain this thing, but I have the reality, and that is the thing that matters. "One thing I know that, whereas I was blind, now I see." It is the light by the life. "In him was life and the life was the light . . ."

We do not want to be able just to give the technique of truth, and expound and define it all. That is not the first thing. The first thing is, the life produces the light and that is in the revelation of the Son: and if I must bring everything to a condensation it is this—firstly, God has shut up everything of Himself within His Son, and it is not possible now to know or have anything of God outside of the Lord Jesus, His Son. God has made this a settled thing; it is final, it is conclusive.

CHRIST KNOWN ONLY BY REVELATION

Secondly, it is not possible to have or know anything of all the fullness which God has shut up in His Son without the Holy Spirit's revelation of that in an inward way. It has to be a miracle wrought by the Holy Spirit within every man and woman if they are to know anything of what God has shut up in Christ. That again summarizes John's Gospel, for there at the centre is a man born blind. He never has seen. It is not a case of restoration with him, it is a giving of sight. It is the first thing. It is going to be an absolutely new world for that man. Whatever he may have surmised or guessed or imagined, or had described to him, actual seeing is going to be something with a new beginning. It is going to be an absolute miracle, producing an absolutely new world, and all his guesses of what that world contained and was like will prove to have been very inadequate when he actually sees. Nothing is going to be seen save by the miracle wrought within.

(1) God has shut up everything of Himself in His Son.

(2) No one can know anything of that save as it is revealed. "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father, neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (Matt 11:27).

Revelation can only come by choice of the Son.

REVELATION BOUND UP WITH PRACTICAL SITUATIONS

The third thing is this. God always keeps the revelation of Himself in Christ bound up with practical situations. I want you to get that. God always keeps the revelation of Himself in Christ bound up with practical situations. You and I can never get revelation other than in connection with some necessity. We cannot get it simply as a matter of information. That is information, that is not revelation. We cannot get it by studying. When the Lord gave the manna in the wilderness (type of Christ as the bread from heaven) He stipulated very strongly that not one fragment more than the day's need was to be gathered, and that if they went beyond the measure of immediate need, disease and death would break out and overtake them. The principle, the law, of the manna, is that God keeps revelation of Himself in Christ bound up with practical situations of necessity, and we are not going to have revelation as mere teaching, doctrine, interpretation, theory, or anything as a thing, which means that God is going to put you and me into situations where only the revelation of Christ can help us and save us.

You notice that the Apostles got their revelation for the Church in practical situations. They never met around a table to have a Round-Table Conference, to draw up a scheme of doctrine and practice for the churches. They went out into the business and came right up against the desperate situation, and in the situation which pressed them, oft-times to desperation, they had to get before God and get revelation. The New Testament is the most practical book, because it was born out of pressing situations. The Lord gave light for a situation. The revelation of Christ, we might say, in emergencies is the way to keep Christ alive, and the only way in which Christ really does live to His own. You understand what I mean.

Now then, that is why the Lord would keep us in situations which are acute, real. The Lord is against our getting out on theoretical lines with truth, out on technical lines. Oh, let us shun technique as a thing in itself and recognize this, that, although the New Testament has in it a technique, we cannot merely extract the technique and apply it. We have to come into New Testament situations to get a revelation of Christ to meet that situation. So that the Holy Spirit's way with us is to bring us into living, actual conditions and situations, and needs, in which only some fresh knowledge of the Lord Jesus can be our deliverance, our salvation, our life, and then to give us, not a revelation of truth, but a revelation of the Person, new knowledge of the Person, that we come to see Christ in some way that just meets our need. We are not drawing upon an 'it', but upon a 'Him'.

He is the Word. "In the beginning was the Word", and the meaning of that designation is just this, that God has made Himself intelligible to us in a Person, not in a book. God has not first of all written a book, although we have the Bible. God has written a Person. In one of his little booklets, Dr. A. B. Simpson has this illustration, or illustrates this thing in this way. He says that on one occasion he saw the Constitution of the United States written, and it was written on a parchment. He was near to it, and could read all the details of the Constitution of the United States. But as he stood back from that parchment, some yards off, all he could see was the head of George Washington there on the parchment. Then he drew near again and saw the Constitution was so written in light and shadow as to take the shape of the head of George Washington. That is it. God has written the revelation of Himself, but it is in the Person of His Son, the Headship of the Lord Jesus, and you cannot have the constitution of heaven, except in the Person, and the constitution of heaven is the Person in the shape of God's Son.

This is only an affirmation of things. I do trust you will take hold of the fact stated and go to the Lord with this. Do not ask for light as some thing; ask for a fuller knowledge of the Lord Jesus. That is the way, for that is the only living way to know Him: and remember God always keeps the knowledge of Himself in Christ bound up with practical situations. That cuts both ways. We have to be in the situation. The Holy Spirit will bring us, if we are in His hand, into the situation which will make necessary a new knowledge of the Lord. That is one side. The other side is that, if we are in a situation which is a very hard and a very difficult one, we are in the very position to ask for a revelation of the Lord.